

SAF,T Melbourne study tour Oct. 2011



SAF,T staff pay respects to Traditional Owners at the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Council and Cultural Heritage Council. L-R: Victoria Pollifrone (SAF,T Policy & Advocacy Manager), Margie Furber (SAF,T Chair), Josie Crawshaw (SAF,T CEO), Denella Detourbet (SAF,T Project Officer), and Wurundjeri artist Judy Nicholson.

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

Seeking the knowledge and experience from our interstate sister organisations and colleagues, SAF,T Chair Margie Furber, CEO Josie Crawshaw and staff Victoria Pollifrone and Denella Detourbet visited Melbourne on a five day information tour. We made many new friends, but most importantly, our learnings resulted in developing the clarity required to write our SAF,T Manifesto – our roadmap for our future progress.

SAF,T Chair and staff thank the Melbourne services and experts for their generous support for our learning journey, in particular to Muriel Bamblett of Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). We also thank Julie Sleight and Rosie Elliott from Black Wattle Consulting for organising our tour. Our itinerary and some snippet notes include the following:

- Overview of VACCA with VACCA staff Gwen Rogers and Julie Toohey, executive managers for placement and support, Heather Brooke from therapeutic residential care, Fran Baird and Chrissy Mayberry from kinship care, Liz Munt from extended care.
- Tour of VACCA residential care unit.
- Meeting with VACCA CEO Muriel Bamblett & Julian Pocock Berry Street.
- *Early Parenting Support for Vulnerable Families: Why, what and how?* Seminar by Jan Nicholson, Director of Research, Parenting Research Centre.
- Discussion with Daryl Higgins, Dep. Director

Research, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and Elly Robinson, Research Fellow, AIFS and manager National Child Protection Clearing House.

- Joint VACCA and Berry Street meeting. VACCA: Kerry Crawford, Early Intervention and Family Services; Suzanne Cleary and Ranessa Nelson (Lakidjeka). Berry Street: Craig Cowie, Director North West Region; Lisa McClung, Clinician Take Two Aboriginal Team; Les Corlett, Take Two Knowledge Team; Marcus Stewart Take Two Clinician Aboriginal Team; Anita Pell, Statewide Home Based Care; Pam Miranda, Learning and Development; Annette Jackson, Director Take Two.
- Meeting with Robyn Mildon, Director Knowledge Exchange, Parenting Research Centre.
- Visit to Wurundjeri Tribe Land Council and Cultural Heritage Council.
- Discussion with Dorothy Scott at the Abbotsford Convent Bakery
- Discussion with Marie Connolly, Head of Social Work and Berry Street board member.
- SNAICC visit.
- Discussion planning with Black Wattle Consulting
- VACCA CEO Muriel Bamblett and Connie Salamone debrief.

See companion SAF,T reports with agencies in WA, SA, NSW, Qld. on page 9

Days 1 – 2



L–R: Julian Pocock, Margie Furber, Muriel Bamblett, Josie Crawshaw

Meeting VACCA & Berry Street managers

‘Glad you have come, we are all old friends’ said Muriel Bamblett as she welcomed our delegation. ‘We do a lot of programs at VACCA and do a lot of different work.’

Muriel, CEO of VACCA and former member of the 2010 NT Board Of Inquiry into the Child Protection System, and Julian Pocock, from the independent child welfare agency Berry Street, both gave their own time and access to their senior staff and resources. The conversations covered service provision, governance and strategic development.



Lakidjeka and the ACPP

VACCA staff told us: The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP) is statutory under the Victorian *Child Protection Act 2000* which says it’s mandatory to consult with relevant Aboriginal organisation. So under the legislation the Department have a formal protocol with VACCA, though VACCA is not named in the Act. The protocol is good, it sets the standards, but it’s the implementation that’s the point.

The VACCA Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice Support Service (ACSASS) program provides specialist consultation and advice to Child Protection on all reports (notifications) relating to Aboriginal children and young people – the Department must involve Lakidjeka in key case decision making from the very beginning in the substantiation process until they are no longer part of child protection.

If the matter is not substantiated VACCA refer to Child First and that’s the end of their role. If it’s substantiated they make recommendations (eg. respite care). VACCA is now trying to get its own Child First program. VACCA wants to be notified of every report but wants to be

properly funded to do it. If a report is not substantiated we often go beyond the call of duty. Ensuring you are funded will prevent them coming back.

The Lakidjeka program is detailed in: Higgins, J.R. and Butler, N. (2007). ‘Indigenous responses to child protection issues.’ *Promising Practices in out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, Children and Young People* (booklet 4). AIFS

Training at VACCA

Chrissy Warren, VACCA Training Manager said: ‘VACCA is 34 years old. In 1996 we had eight programs, 34 staff, in 2010, 24 programs and 170 staff. This has put a huge burden on our infrastructure.

‘We have always been at the tertiary arm, but our current thinking is to swing the pendulum at resources to keep families together. Our infrastructure is behind mainstream and our Aboriginal staff haven’t had education opportunities, but VACCA proudly says our prime qualification is Aboriginality. We have an intensive study leave program and think you can’t start from mainstream documents. You have to start with a vision of cultural excellence – it’s in all our language and programs.



The VACCA therapeutic residential care facility

There are about 800 Aboriginal children in care in Victoria and about 200 in Aboriginal care. 'If you don't put out of home care in your model it can become amiss,' said Muriel Bamblett, VACCA CEO.



L-R: VACCA residential care team with the SAF,T delegates: Frank Palomares, Josie Crawshaw, Robert Faldon, Victoria Pollifrone, Margie Furber, Denella Detourbet, Gwen Rogers, Caitlin Gleeson, Heather Brooke



'The dream is that Aboriginal organisations will provide all the care for all the Aboriginal kids. Aboriginal people do it best,' said VACCA Executive Manager Gwen Rogers.

'VACCA has a permanent care program, for kids who can't return to their parents, a Koori cultural support program, as about half our carers are non Aboriginal, and a small residential care program. Culture is paramount, keeping the connections, and all our programs and resources are focused around culture. We developed *Nakara's Journey*, a *Life Book for Kids in Care*, our safety bears; *Dardee Boorai* – children's rights booklet. We want to become an RTO down the track.'

The SAF,T and VACCA delegates shared their views on the cultural suitability of the LAC (Looking After Children) framework and the VACCA Aboriginal kinship care model.

Gwen took SAF,T to visit their new therapeutic residential care unit. VACCA used to have family group homes with a couple living in, but the complexity of the kids has changed and staff recruitment is harder, so VACCA moved to a rostered staff model with a 0.5 therapeutic specialist to train and support them. They have six full time staff, two part time and four casuals. Our aim is to have familiar faces, not agency workers.

'It's about strengthening the staff so they can better do the response with the kids. It's about consistency, everyone being aware, including staff's own issues. The house seeks a planned exit for the children, who will move

to a better place (foster care or reunification).

SAF,T staff and VACCA staff discussed kinship care funding for children who are not on orders and the need for a transition time to support carers. They talked about VACCA's role in promoting the cultural support plans now required in the Victorian legislation, how the process has been set up well but not implemented. 'This cultural care though needs to be a living plan, not just something that is looked into once.'

The staff explained their operational expenses budget which allows discretionary expenditures. SAF,T staff walked through the house, noting the family photos of the current sibling group, the family look of the rooms, the garden plant boxes, the person who puts them into bed at night is there in the morning.

'There is a strong focus on keeping siblings together. We do what we can to support the parents, but we are there for the kids. Reunification is the plan.'

'It's a lot more supported now, people don't burn out too fast, they stay longer and the children feel safer.'

'This model is well structured and seems to work well.'

'It's not about underskilled staff and different faces.'

'It is a lovely set-up, keeping kids together in sibling groups, it's really good!'

'It's very user friendly, comfortable, airy, open, with good transparency and continuity of support.'



Womin-jeka, it means welcome from the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Council and Cultural Heritage Council. Liz Allen from the Council made SAF,T staff very welcome and showed staff the beautiful work in their art and craft room at the Abbotsford Convent site.



Making research friends at AIFS

Daryl Higgins, Deputy Director Research, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and Elly Robinson, AIFS Research Fellow and Manager, National Child Protection Clearing House.

They said AIFS is moving to recognise that peak bodies are in touch with services and having direct communication with them about services, rather than passive sign up. AIFS hosts five clearing houses and three have now amalgamated: the national child protection clearing house, communities and families. All three are about good practice.

AIFS aims to publish Information Exchange on 31 March 2012, transforming 17 years of reporting into a more interactive communications tool, building relationships using electronic communication. Darryl said 'Your peak, SAF,T, will have all the contacts for agencies and we want to partner with you, so we can fade into the background and you feed out what is useful.'

'There are a lot of constraints on what AIFS can do, most comes from direct contracts but if there are new opportunities for a tender we put in quotes, so we need advice about what research is wanted, and can partner with other organisations to get government money. It's also around the topics we might choose especially for the Information Exchange, what are the information gaps you recognise. So we are interested in hearing what you need and we can partner together for research.'

'The statutory systems were designed for physical or maybe sexual abuse, but the current work load is all about neglect, and the systems are not built to respond to neglect except really serious cases. But poverty and poor parenting are not the fundamental business of why they were set up. Stop seeing that as your business – it's our business, and is preventable through community. There is a lot of research we could synthesise about how child protection work has evolved. Maybe there is an opportunity to collaborate through this.'

Below: Elly Robinson & Daryl Higgins



Top left: Ranessa Nelson and Suzanne Cleary (VACCA Lakidjeka), Julian Pocock (Berry Street).

Bottom left: Berry Street: Annette Jackson, Director Take Two; Les Corlett, Take Two Knowledge Team; Craig Cowie, Director North West Region Berry Street; Kerry Crawford, VACCA Early Intervention and Family Services.



Berry Street and VACCA discussion of early intervention and secure care





Lunching with Dorothy Scott

The SAF,T team had an inspiring lunch with Children's Champion Dorothy Scott at the Abbotsford Convent.

Dorothy said SAF,T had the opportunity to make an amazing difference. She talked about a universal vision rather than consensus on the problems. She spoke at length about ensuring you draw in as partners the important people for vulnerable children, the key people on the ground, where the placement should be – the Aboriginal Health Workers, teachers' aids, the family violence workers, the Aboriginal police officers; the child care workers. *The Act* needs to reflect a model that brings the critical people together, a model for an ACCA that takes the community workers and engages them around child protection concerns. Start your work where you can succeed. Test an ACCA model in a single suitable site, a model performed in a community, by community, with ACCA as a go-between as a way for people to talk safely.

Vic Ombudsman OOH Report Oct 2010

Oct 2010 the Victorian Ombudsman tabled a review of the OOH sector, including NGO services. Some services were founding wanting eg. no formal carer supervision, inconsistent or inadequate screenings, inconsistent risk assessments of homes and residential care units, non compliance with the ACP.

The Victorian dept. both relies on NGOs and is responsible for reviewing them. The Ombudsman said this positions the department in the conflicting roles of customer, regulator and partner of community service organisations, however Vic govt. does not support the recommendation for a new independent registration body for community service NGOs. Louise Voight CEO of Bernados, interviewed on Life Matters, ABC RN, 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." The SAF,T review of NSW Aboriginal services in the sector found they agreed with this assesment

Listening to Jan Nicholson

The SAF,T delegates went to a seminar on Early Parenting Support for Vulnerable Families by Prof. Jan Nicholson, Director of Research at the Parenting Research Centre and Design Team Leader for parenting and family functioning with LSAC (Longitudinal Study of Australian Children).

Jan talked about early intervention and the limitations of traditional parenting programs from a population health perspective. She gave three examples of new directions in large-scale implementation trials:

1. Sing and Grow (a nation-wide program).
2. Early Home Learning Study (Victoria) employing joint parent-child groups to provide early parenting support and opportunities to foster children's developmental skills.
3. NOURISH (QLD and SA) promotes positive parenting skills for first time mothers with parenting advice around their infant's nutrition.

Each of these programs seeks to engaging parents of young children. Trial data suggest that universal service platforms (maternal child health and playgroups) can be effective in identifying and reaching parents, and when adequately resourced, it is possible to maintain program effectiveness across wide-spread implementation.

Parental engagement is challenging, with programs that are more experiential and fun-based appearing to have retention advantage.

She shared some interesting thoughts on David Olds programs, playgroups, Triple P and about how home visiting is implemented and funded.

L-R: Jan Nicholson & Robyn Mildon



Talking with Robyn Mildon at the PRC

The Parenting Research Centre is involved with the Intensive Family Support Service NT as part of the federal response to *Growing Them Strong, Together*.

Five communities in the NT will receive \$25M federal investment in new parenting support services in Darwin Town Camps, Palmerston Town Camps, Palmerston Township, Wadeye and Katherine/Mataranka. The PRC is also involved in building resources for the Department and for Families as First Teachers, so there was a lot to talk between Robyn Mildon and the SAF,T delegation.

'Start off small and do it right. Everyone will want you to do everything. They call it engaging, having your tick in the box. But be selective. If they require your response they have to fund you. Be the key people's friend and be prepared to say no.'



Prof. Marie Connolly
Head of Social Work
University of Melbourne
Berry Street board member

Marie Connolly is a former New Zealand Chief Social Worker, who was very involved in reform of the NZ child welfare system. She said:

The New Zealand *Children Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989* is seen as an innovative code for the care and protection of children. It gives the wider family a central decision making function and emphasises the principle of minimal intervention. The State Department is responsible for intervention in families in cases of abuse and neglect of children and has a key role in supporting families. The Family Court in turn manages the legal process through a range of orders and periodic reviews.

The law requires that for every child for whom the worker assesses there is a care protection concern, the family must go to family group conferencing (FGC). The coordinator works with the family, explaining the the law and in particular the philosophy of the legislation.

From 1989 people ran with the new legislation. It caught the imagination of people seeking something different. There was huge enthusiasm and commitment. But then we began to look at international practices, at the investigatory, forensic approaches and in many respects lost our way. It was the child welfare equivalent of the dark ages. There were two things running parallel - the family responsive legislation and the forensic gathering of evidence in the event of the worker needing to take the matter to court. These two things operated in tension. Notifications rocketed and investigative practices became one size fits all. The gateway to family group conferencing became skewed to the very serious cases. We lost faith in the family-engagement spirit of the legislation.

In terms of the running of family group conferences, early on the FGC coordinator was a senior person in the child protection system, though over time these positions changed. It's the job of the coordinator to find family-led solutions. The emphasis has been more family and fewer professionals. It is the family's meeting. There are restrictions on who is entitled to come. The coordinator is required to make sure that the family has all the information they need to make good decisions. Professionals may be brought in to provide specific information, but they are not necessarily entitled members of the FGC. The coordinator can exclude people who may not be constructive. There was no one way of running the meetings. The idea is to

make the family comfortable with the process. What does the family want? What cultural processes would help?

The better conferences are when you are able to harness strengths of culture and get results that perhaps save face for some and protect others.

Sexual abuse cases are often the most fraught, both in terms of who attends, and the process of the meeting. The young person may or may not want the perpetrator present. Families may want to protect family authority.

Family group conference dynamics are tricky and they need people with the right skills to manage them. Do you need a degree, can you be trained up to it? Over the years this has changed – originally social workers were engaged as coordinators. Then others were employed – people with mediation experience or qualifications. Qualifications don't necessarily give you the specialist skill needed to undertake the role, and there's no FGC training in most academic programs. Usually you need to train people in the work. The coordinator needs to manage all kinds of dynamics. Sometimes powerful family members dominate the discussion, some families may say 'this is adult business, not children's business'. Then you need to work out how you engage the voice, and the legal rights, of the child. Customary law may also operate, and you may need a really powerful interpreter to manage it. We know from research that we haven't always involved the children enough and that the process over time has become very adult focused. This is something that is looked at in training and through practice improvement strategies.

The coordinator does a lot of work to prepare for the conferences which has three phases:

1. information sharing when the coordinator makes sure the family has the information they need to make sound decisions. This is where the worker talks about their concerns and the family clarifies anything about the assessment and investigation
2. private family deliberation when all the professionals withdraw from the conference leaving the family to have the first chance to develop the plan – when first introduced this was one of the most controversial part as the law as previously it was the professionals who developed plans.
3. the agreement phase when the coordinator

seeks family and professional agreement to the plan – this happens in over 80% of the cases.

Although most conferences reach agreement, you can't always resolve long standing issues in one meeting. It is possible to reconvene the conference when people have had a chance to think things through. Even when the conference doesn't reach agreement it doesn't mean that it's been unsuccessful. Workers have talked about having conferences where there was no agreement – family members have been feuding for years – and yet at the end of the conference they exchanged phone numbers. That seems a successful outcome, even if the conference didn't reach agreement.

The conferences were introduced to divert families from the court system. But sometimes that is not possible and matters may be referred to the court for resolution. In these situations it is not uncommon for the judge to send the family and professionals back to try again with another family group conference.

Most conferences try to solve things without using significant statutory powers and there is strong support for this in the system. When the legislation came in there was a big drop in numbers of court cases, and the number of children coming into care.

In 2005 there was a major review of child protection following a number of high profile cases and the statutory system looked at its performance. We asked whether it was wrong in 1989 to give decision-making powers to families? There was a strong belief that the legislation was sound, but that the practice had shifted from the spirit of the legislation. Reconnecting with the principles of the Act, harnessing strengths of family, and putting effort into finding the solutions within the family became a practice reform priority.

In 2005 the organisation took a snapshot of 270 children and looked at how responsive it was. We found important practice challenges in responsiveness to the under twos – we needed to become more attuned to their safety, attachment and continuity of care. Major practice reform efforts began – keeping a good eye on the under twos, and working out ways to harness the strengths of families in the care of these babies. In 2010 we looked back over the five years at the babies who came into State care. Most had been to family conferences, and there was increased kinship care for those children who could not remain with their parents. Almost 90% of those children were in permanent care with parents or extended family, there were few placements during that time, and only a small percentage in permanent alternative care. Very few had a second notification there were indications that they had received safe care. The research was an important indicator that the major push in terms of practice reform had made some difference.

There are indicators family conferencing is keeping children safe, shortening the period in care, that children are more likely to be connected to kin, that kin provide more support for carers and children, but we need to be cautious about it being seen a golden panacea.

We need to be clear about what we can expect from it. Family group conferencing isn't an intervention, it's a meeting. It can do some very good things on the day, but it is the work afterwards that will make a difference in the longer term. There are indications that the conferences can have healing properties, but they are not therapeutic.

Families are often realistic about what's possible. The focus needs to be on increasing safety for the child. In NZ it is a requirement that family group conferences are reviewed not just to find out if things have gone wrong, but also to celebrate success.

Many reports of concern to child protection are situations of parental neglect. It seems to me that these concerns are very different from reports relating to physical or sexual abuse. In these cases you usually have time to work through problems. Neglectful parenting differs in important ways from physical and sexual violence towards children. While there are certainly times when a child will experience a combination of abuse types it is unhelpful to suggest that they have similar causes, characteristics, and professional response expectations. I think that only the most serious neglect cases should go to court. While neglect is not amenable to quick solutions, it's often chronic, it requires a different practice response, and we sometimes forget this. There is a good case for these to be worked differently. Then I think we might see better outcomes.

When you think about how to begin your work in the Northern Territory, it seems important to identify some key priorities and seek support to work on them specifically. The challenges are clearly significant and it is often helpful to identify ways in which you can take small steps and grow strong practices in partnership. There are opportunities to avoid the trap of developing dense procedures and documentation that no one will read. It is important to try and keep things simple, even though the work is complex. Identify your vision, to influence outcomes for Aboriginal children, and then work out how you will do it. Start off small and do it right, then you know you will add value.

It may be that one of the challenges you will face is that everyone will want every piece of your time. You will have important strengths and experiences that people will want to engage with. You will need to be selective and prioritise where you put your effort. Building your alliances and strategic partnerships will be important. Trying to establish high trust relationships with government that reduces bureaucratic effort will give you more time to do the work you want and need to do.

There is a growing body of evidence for family group conferencing - The American Humane Association is the strongest supporter of conferencing from an international perspective. They are also strong on differential response, and their website is a goldmine for professionals wanting to know more about family engagement practices.



L-R: Julian Pocock, Margie Furber

I was engaged by Danila Dilba Health Service to interview families and write the submission, *If Only They'd Listened* for the 2010 Board of Inquiry. That report noted that over six years Departmental child protection funding increased from \$8 million pa. to over \$34 million. Clearly more of the same has not worked, and over that time there has been little or no funding increase in family support services.

The Department cannot protect children without the equal involvement of families and community agencies. To date there has not been a way to facilitate this involvement. Now SAF,T has the chance to develop this system if it is properly supported by NTG with a long term vision.

SAF,T has a big job to do to both set up as a peak and set up service agencies for children and families affected by child protection concerns. It's important to be clear that as a peak the broad interests of children, youth and families are your primary interests, not the interests of the services. SAF,T needs a broad membership and good Board representation. If you lock yourself into the child protection work and don't focus more broadly on other portfolios that have a responsibility for children, (federal departments, education, health, early childhood and justice) you exclude yourself from the most influential areas of government that focus on prevention.

Having said that, you ask for some ideas about setting up ACCAs in the NT. It may be useful to think briefly about what happened to the two previous ACCA services in the NT. The Alice Springs ACCA closed around 2004 and Karu Aboriginal

Interview with Julian Pocock

Julian Pocock is Director of Policy, Practice and Innovation, Berry Street Victoria. In his previous role he was CEO SNAICC, and author of State of Denial – The Neglect And Abuse Of Indigenous Children in the Northern Territory 2003.

Family Support Service, the Darwin ACCA, closed in 2008. In the end they were unable to be sustained due to the inadequate funding and service agreement arrangements that those agencies operated under.

The Central Australia Aboriginal Child Care Agency (ACCA) was based at Arrente House. It was initially funded by the Commonwealth AICCA program and then had a second stream of funding through ATSIC to operate as night patrol and safe house for adolescents in crisis, but their funding was slowly squeezed as ATSIC's funding was cut. The service was left with its federally funded program to recruit and assess foster carers to be formally trained with the NT FACS. This foster care recruitment program did not succeed – there were no new recruits for the NT Department. Certainly the ACCA found interested families, but the families then would drop out, especially after the NT Department visited their homes and said that each child had to have their own room. This ongoing difficulty with recruitment also led to a high ACCA staff turn over. The former chair of Central Australian ACCA agrees with this story however says in their view staff personality conflicts were just as important in the demise of the ACCA, and good HR management was lacking.

Maybe the most useful role for the ACCA is as a child protection support and advocacy service for families and children modelled on the Lakidjeka service run by VACCA in Melbourne. The ACCA advocated strongly to the Department about the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, but they said you are not providing us the foster carers. NTG told the federal government they didn't want the ACCA to be funded, and the federal ACCA funding stopped around the same time as the ATSIC funding finished.

I think the lesson here is that the foster care recruitment and support should not be the first thing you do in the NT, it should be the second or third thing, because it is something that others can manage in the interim whereas the advocacy and support for Aboriginal families that have child protection involvement is not something a department or mainstream agency would be well placed to do. The NT Department is already doing foster care recruitment, so let them keep doing that for a while.

Karu in Darwin had the same problem, though they were NTG funded. Karu had an ATSIC contract for Link Up, and an NT FACS foster care program which did reasonably well. Families went to Karu when they needed support, advice and advocacy around child protection concerns, and this family support work took up most of Karu's energy. Link Up suffered, so Karu lost the contract to Stolen Generations.

So Karu was supporting families in crisis, explaining the process to families, organising legal representation, finding where removed kids were, settling family disputes about child placement.

The NT Department wanted Karu's advice on child protection as a recognised agency, and Karu liked being asked. The problem was they didn't get funding for that service. Karu was formally de-funded because it failed to meet applicable OOHK Standards. The recent coronial inquiry into a death in care noted that the Department did not meet its own standards yet (rightly) the Department was not de-funded, nor should Karu have been defunded.

All this is the work done under the Victorian Lakidjeka ACSASS program – the Victorian Department involves Lakidjeka in all decisions as soon as a notification goes to child protection intake. The conversation

then starts between the family and the agency – if they need a family group conference the ACCA does it, if they have to remove the child, they look at where the child should go. Lakidjeka brings to the table its knowledge of the local families, so that's what your agency has to bring, and there are a number of ways you could do that.

Certainly VACCA developed their Lakidjeka model last of all their programs, but it was in fact what they wanted from the start. Lakidjeka ACSASS became a formal program under VACCA for \$2M pa and the work is clearly separated from the foster carer program.

In the NT I would start by developing a detailed protocol between SAFT and the Department for an advisory and advocacy service for families with child protection issues. If SAFT decides to do both advocacy programs and foster carer support, then make sure to clearly separate and clearly fund the programs. If you set up a good advisory service first, it could act as broker with other family support

services, purchasing their services, not necessarily being the provider.

The long term development of SAFT and service development across the NT requires consideration about what area of government might fund it and how they will be mentored and supported during their establishment years (eg some of this work is a justice issue and should be funded as such – because the people they will be advocating against will often be NT FACS).

Support and mentoring for the peak and the services should be both through the Department and through agencies such as other NT Aboriginal agencies, non-Indigenous service providers and interstate and national Aboriginal peak bodies in the sector. There needs to be broad agreement on the Department and NGO functions with two sets of functions: 1. Department – core statutory functions 2. Community based Aboriginal agencies providing complimentary statutory support around:

- Family group conferencing and decision making

- Joint investigation of notifications to assess what can be managed through family group conference and family support
- Family support and independent court advocacy for families
- Prevention and early intervention
- Foster and kinship care recruitment, training and support
- Children's contact & access support
- Provision of different forms of OOHC (eg family group homes).

Over time some statutory functions may move over to community based agencies as has occurred in Vic, WA, SA and NSW. Non-Indigenous NGOs may also partner with SAFT for the delivery of complimentary statutory support functions, and non-Indigenous agencies could partner with Aboriginal agencies. They could formally agree to the *SNAICC Service Development, Service Access and Cultural Respect* policy. The SAFT Board could also look at the SNAICC Ideal AICCA service model with its five service areas and decide which area they wish to start their work with.

Companion SAFT reports with agencies in Vic, WA, SA, NSW, 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, 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
- Prof. Dorothy Scott
- Melbourne University – Marie Connolly

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
- 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

N.S.W. Mar 2012

- NSW Children's Guardian – Kerryn Boland, Maha Melhem, Wendy Lawson
- Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) – Tracey Keevers-Keller
- KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc – Paul Ralph
- Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child & Family Network Inc. – Lenore Marlowe, Lester Moran, John Herrington
- Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corp. – Dana Clarke
- Manning / Great Lakes Aboriginal Children Services – Amanda Bridge
- Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services Inc (HACS) – Terry Chennery
- University of Technology Sydney, Law Faculty – Terri Libesman

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 (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 Gebad
- Pormpur Paanth Aboriginal Corp – Kurt Noble, Samuel Bong, Bessie Holroyd,
- Coen Wellbeing Centre – Shaun Sellwood, Marilyn Keppele, 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

Building SAFT and the ACCAs

Muriel Bamblett, Connie Salamone and Julian Pocock – spoke at length with SAFT, here's some of what they said:

Who and what does the new peak represent? I think it should represent the children, and its membership should focus on where people are working with children. It's important to see them as part of the base. All these portfolios need to get it together to represent the children.

In Canada some Aboriginal child welfare organisations hold the money but don't actually run services. Maybe you could set up as agencies to run organisation, so if people are delivering OOHC you can monitor them.

You need to build relationship and slowly model how to support families and grow over time. So in the NT the concept of family support is that we have a child in this community, and the ACCA has authority to bring people together who have responsibility to look after the child. If there is anyone working in this community, what can they do, and what can we use there? We can't wait for the overcrowding to be fixed.

If you only have a small number of decisions to make, you need to get people together to develop a safety plan. Who will take responsibility? You can make up a different way of doing it. It becomes like a circuit court, who's in the room, who's doing it, who ensures it's happening, who can go into communities to develop the plans? You have to harness what the community can do, with an ACCA leading the decisions, with regard to placement and support.

The ACCAs in designated areas could have the oversight in that geographic area in relation to safety of Aboriginal children. It would be useful in *The Act* to have authority and oversight to ask questions about children in their areas. Or have a process where families can notify and go to the ACCA rather than the Department, so then the person fulfils their mandatory reporting requirement and the ACCA has an out-posted child protection worker and the authority to convene the family group conference. They can work out if they can keep the child safe and in community or if they need to get them out.

It starts to fall down where you can legally force people to do things and go to services, like if your child isn't going to school when your house is so overcrowded. No individual mum or dad can be responsible for all these things, and so much of the leadership has been disbanded.

The core argument is that we can do child welfare better and we can save the Department money. The answer isn't to keep taking the children away. If they keep taking them away it will cost more and more. As Aboriginal people we have more capacity to keep children safe.

What are the ACCAs going to do first? Plan to run a suite of services across the primary, secondary and



SAFT Chair Margie Furber and pennants made at the 2010 VACCA staff insert. Inset: Muriel Bamblett and Connie Salamone VACCA

tertiary areas, but don't leap straight into out of home care, no matter what the Department wants.

A family support platform is a good way to go, bring in family conferencing. Child FIRST is a structured, formal decision intake point. It's a nice fit. It's the intake point where child protection may get a notification but it's not serious enough to do child protection, so the child is referred to Child FIRST who send them on to practitioners.

I would not agree about restricting family conferencing to neglect cases. It's complex, so be careful, because if you are working with one sort of abuse and you may find another type there.

The VACCA Child FIRST program is not instead of the Lakidjeka ACSASS service. It's more along side. Ideally there should be just one intake, with child protection referring to ACSASS and then referred internally to Child FIRST, which is a differential response model.

Maybe you need a staged development, start with Child FIRST and move to ACSASS, the tertiary end. ACSASS will take you to the tertiary role, going to court with families. You also need to think about whatever data base you develop and ensure it is compatible with future developments.



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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.

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Credits

The SAFT tour and report of Victoria organised and prepared by Black Wattle Consulting
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