



ABORIGINAL CHILD, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CARE STATE SECRETARIAT

LOOKING AFTER
OUR KIDS



AbSec News

Issue 18 November 2014

Firstly I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the wonderful carers and acknowledge the great role they have in caring for our Aboriginal children and young people. I hope you had an opportunity to celebrate National Child Protection Week and Foster Care Week.

A lot has happened since our last newsletter. The Child Protection Amendment Act 2014 (Amendment Act) was proclaimed on Wednesday 29 October 2014. This means changes in the way Child Protection services are undertaken. In the new year AbSec will be undertaking a roadshow to educate and inform Aboriginal Communities on the reforms and what this means for them. Stay tuned for the dates and locations.

I would like to congratulate our Transition team on receiving the ACWA Innovation Award for the work they do in the out-of-home care sector. Your commitment to supporting Aboriginal children and young people to be cared for in a safe, secure environment, strong in culture. I thank the past and present staff for their contribution.

At the recent AbSec Annual General Meeting a new board was appointed. I would like to thank AbSec board members for their guidance and support and welcome the new board as well as those who were reappointed.

As this is the last newsletter for 2014, I would like to wish our families, members and colleagues a Merry Christmas and look forward to catching up with you in the new year. I hope everyone has a safe break over the holiday season.



Regards

Angela Webb

Chief Executive Officer



*Wishing everyone a very happy
and safe festive season*



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AbSec Board Appointed

Thursday 23 October AbSec held its Annual General Meeting in which board members were voted. AbSec are pleased to announce the following appointments/re-appointments:



Chairperson -Dana Clarke
Burrin Dalai Aboriginal Corporation



Vice-Chair -Kathy McKenzie
Guardian Youth Care



Treasurer- Garry Matthews
Abcare



Secretary -Tina McGhie
Myimbarr/Illawarra Aboriginal Corp.



Board Member -Denis Jackson
Wandiyali



Board Member-Ernest Lovelock
Wundarra Services



Board Member– Petrice Manton
Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation



Board Member-Cecily Lyons
Riverina Medical & Dental Aboriginal Corp.

AbSec welcomes board members and looks forward to working with them in the future. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those board members who were not re-appointed, your leadership and guidance has been greatly appreciated.

AbSec are pleased to confirm our Annual Report 2013/14 will be distributed to members in the coming weeks with a copy available on the website.





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AbSec presented the Innovation Award

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) 2014 Sector Achievement Awards recently presented the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) with the Innovation award, which was announced during the Awards dinner at Parliament House last night.

The Innovation award acknowledges new and creative responses to emerging needs or entrenched sector challenges.

Ms Angela Webb, CEO said "Its great recognition of the hard work and effort by our Transition team and their passion for ensuring a better future for Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC."

AbSec is honoured that our hard work, commitment and dedication in supporting Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) by building a sustainable Aboriginal OOHC sector focused on ensuring our children are linked to culture, identity and community has been recognised in the sector.

"AbSec shares this award with our Aboriginal OOHC member agencies as it's their hard work, dedication and contribution to the sector that goes to the heart of self-determination for Aboriginal communities and to the wellbeing of our children in care" said Ms Webb





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Event Celebrations

AbSec attended the **National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day** event at Redfern Park on 4 August 2014 and provided information on AbSec services and handed out promotional bags made up for children and their families. It was great to see the community turnout for this event, celebrating our children.

Foster Care Week Picnic Day was a huge success!

The Annual Foster Care Week Picnic Day was held in the Western Sydney Parklands on Sunday 14th September. There were over 900 people who attended the annual picnic, which was the launch of foster care week. The picnic day is also a way of saying 'thank you' to Foster Carers and their families who support vulnerable children and young people in the out of home care system.

We were pleased to have Chris Tobin, a Darug man from Western Sydney Welcome everyone to Country. The Minister for Family and Community Services, The Hon. Gabrielle Upton MP opened the event.

Children and young people were able to enjoy the activities on the day, which included a petting zoo, pony rides, activities with the University of Western Sydney, African Drumming Workshops, the Bubble Man and many more. Everyone could also enjoy lunch which included hamburgers, drinks, snow cones and more. The whole day was a free event for carers and their families to enjoy.



It was especially good to see Carers of Aboriginal children and young people, as well as meet new Carers who came up to the AbSec Stall and said hi. The day was a great success and we received lots of positive feedback about the venue and how much Carers and their families enjoyed the picnic day. If you weren't able to make this year's picnic day, keep this event in mind for next year, as it's a great way to connect and enjoy with your family.





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Update from Fostering NSW



By Sharon Broady

Foster Care Week Highlights Need for Aboriginal Foster Carers

Now in its 24th year, Foster Care Week 2014 ran from 14-20 September, with foster care agencies holding celebrations right across the state to mark this special week with the theme of Caring for Carers.

Around 900 people gathered at Lizard Log Amphitheatre in Western Sydney Parklands for the Sydney Picnic Day, and similar interagency events were hosted around regional NSW, supported by grants awarded by ACWA through its Fostering NSW project.

Aboriginal agency, Walanbaa Gaayili, hosted a BBQ in Inverell to honour its carers, while Biripi Aboriginal Children's Service, Burrun Dalai, Wanggaay Koori OOH Service, South Coast Aboriginal Medical Services, Myimbarr IAC, Wandiyali, and Muloobinba all participated in interagency picnic days, fun days and other events around the state.

In Lismore, Ngunya Jarjum agency foster carer, Georgina Cohen, was profiled in the Northern Rivers Echo and also interviewed on ABC Radio's 'Bush Telegraph', along with Dr. Wendy Foote of ACWA.

Foster Care Week concluded with the second annual 'Kids in Care Cup' Aboriginal footy knockout in Wollongong, which attracted over 3000 people. In a fiercely contested final game, the Dalai Dreamers, under the captaincy of veteran local Kempsey man, Bert Gray, were ultimately victorious against the Newcastle All Blacks 12 – 6.

AbSec CEO Angela Webb said, "A great day was had by all, it showed the community pulling together for a great cause, Foster Care Week; which is aiming to raise awareness of what fostering is all about and the need for more Aboriginal carers across NSW. Thank you to the hosts the Illawarra Titans Aboriginal Rugby Football Club for all of their hard work and commitment to the day, it was just amazing."

In addition to sponsoring the event, Fostering NSW, in conjunction with AbSec, was successful in securing around 25 media promotions for the Kids in Care Cup across television, print and radio: WIN Television, Koori Mail, National Indigenous Times, Wollongong Advertiser, Illawarra Mercury, Vox FM, Wave FM, and Macleay Argus to name a few.



Foster Care Week Picnic Day 2014





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INFORMATION FOR CARERS

Grandparent Advisor

Grandparents who are caring for a child can access support and information through Centrelink's Grandparent Adviser. The Grandparent Adviser can provide information and assistance in accessing payments and services through Centrelink.

For further information phone 1800 245 965 or visit the website www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/grandparent-advisers

Relocation Scholarship

Are you caring for a young person who is in state care or under a formal court order, or ceased to be because of their age? Have they enrolled in University and applied for AbStudy or Youth Allowance? They may be eligible for a relocation scholarship so contact Centrelink to find out more www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/relocation-scholarship

ParentLine NSW **1300 1300 52**

This is an important service. Parents are people too. Now that I have found you I feel the road will be easier. Thank you.

Without your help I would have no hope and the time.

I've been receiving support from Parent Line over the last couple of months. I've listened to what the counsellors said and things have worked out. You guys have turned a bad situation into an amazing opportunity.

My heartfelt thanks for the ongoing support from the counsellors; the help and advice is greatly appreciated and respected. I hope that the service doesn't disappear – at least until my children turn 18!

www.ParentLine.org.au

Free Professional Help for Parents and Carers 24/7



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DISABILITY CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

Aboriginal Disability Network Conference

On the 1 and 2 of October 2014, AbSec attended the “*Living My Way: Being Prepared Conference*” hosted by the Aboriginal Disability Network in Newcastle. There were approx. 120 people registered to attend the conference.

The conference was opened with a keynote address by the Hon. John Ajaka MLC, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services. Minister Ajaka spoke of the NSW Governments commitment to people with disability and the eventual transfer of disability services to non-government sector with the upcoming NDIS in NSW to happen by 2018.

Along with a number of other agencies, AbSec were a major sponsor of the conference . Over the 2 days there was a range of presentations from service providers and people with a disability.

Conference participants heard of inspirational presentations by the Living Life My Way Ambassadors, who spoke about their experiences and how they have had to make necessary changes in their lives to participate in community. AbSec's own, Mr Brian Edwards, Project Support Officer spoke of his personal journey with a vision impairment.

AbSec presented at the conference on our Disability Capacity Building Project which sees AbSec working with NGOs and ACCOs across the state to become an accredited disability service provider.

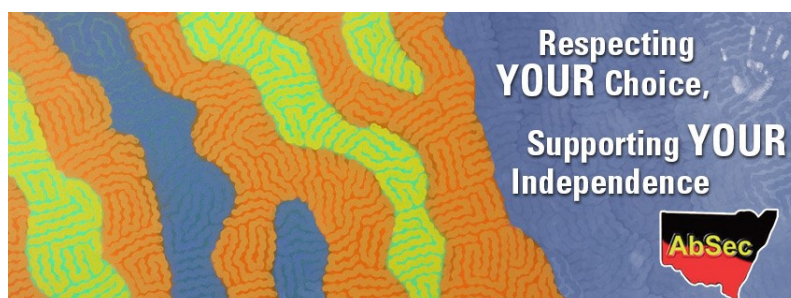
Overall the conference was very well received by conference participants and presenters.

Disability Inclusion legislation

The Disability Inclusion Bill 2014 was passed by the NSW Parliament on 14 August 2014 and is now the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (the Act).

The Act is available on the NSW legislation website at www.legislation.nsw.gov.au. The Act aims to better recognise the human rights of people with disability and to help people move to the new funding arrangements under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Before the Act can commence, the Disability Inclusion Regulation 2014 needs to be finalised to ensure the Act operates effectively. A draft Regulation was issued for public consultation in October 2014 with the deadline for comments now closed.





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Disability Capacity Building Project cont...

Draft Disability Inclusion Regulation 2014

The draft Regulation provided the necessary detail for the Act to work properly. This included dates by which the State Disability Inclusion Plan and other disability inclusion action plans are required ([NSW Disability Inclusion Plan](#))

- details about how the chairperson and deputy chairperson of Disability Council NSW are to be appointed and the length of their terms
- confirmation that the disability service standards referred to in the Act will be the NSW Disability Service Standards or similar standards approved by the Secretary of FACS
- details about the definition of "supported group accommodation" in the Act
- details about employment screening of new and existing workers and board members who work with people with disability, including when screening needs to take place and when statutory declarations need to be used.
- same human rights as other people
- promote the inclusion of people with disability by requiring government departments and local councils to engage in disability inclusion action planning
- support people with disability to exercise choice and control through individualised funding wherever possible provide safeguards for people accessing NSW funded disability supports and services, including new employment screening requirements and the need for disability accommodation providers to report abuse or neglect of people with disability to the Ombudsman.

It is planned that the new Act and Regulation will start on 3 December 2014, International Day of People with Disability.

Disability Inclusion Act 2014

The *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* was passed by the NSW Parliament in August 2014. The Act aims to:

- make it clear that people with disability have the same human rights as other people
- promote the inclusion of people with disability by requiring government departments and local councils to engage in disability inclusion action planning
- support people with disability to exercise choice and control through individualised funding wherever possible provide safeguards for people accessing NSW funded disability supports and services, including new employment screening requirements and the need for disability accommodation providers to report abuse or neglect of people with disability to the Ombudsman.

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International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD)

Monday 3 December 2014 is **International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD)** is a United Nations sanctioned day that aims to promote an understanding of people with disability and encourage support for their dignity, rights and well-being.



This years theme is Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology.

IDPwD is a opportunity for disability organisations, businesses, government and the community to come together at events across the state to celebrate the achievements of people with disability and to raise awareness in Aboriginal communities that people with disability have the right to access supports, services and be included in community.

For details of IDPwD events visit www.idpwd.com.au



ABORIGINAL CARERS NEEDED

Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC need Aboriginal foster/kinship carers

Aboriginal foster carers play a vital role in the lives of Aboriginal kids.
By giving these children safe,
caring homes, you'll help ensure their wellbeing and change their lives for
the better.

An Aboriginal child's cultural identity is an important part of who they
are. Children who are strong in their culture have higher self-esteem,
confidence and expectations of what they can achieve.

If you know of someone that you think would make a great foster carer,
please let them know and encourage them to contact us for further
information **AbSec on 1800 888 698**





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FUTURE OF HOME CARE SERVICE NSW

On 22 September 2014, Minister for Ageing and Minister for Disability Services the Hon. John Ajaka MLC announced the next phase in NSW's implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

"We're about to start the process of transitioning the Home Care Service of NSW into the non-government sector, ensuring the sustainability of these vital services provided to some of our community's most vulnerable," Mr Ajaka said.

"As NSW moves towards the full rollout of the NDIS, services provided by government, including Home Care are being transitioned to the non-government sector.

"The Home Care Service needs to be able to continue to provide quality supports to older people and people with disability across NSW as changes to the aged care and disability support systems occur.

"The NSW Government is getting on with the job of delivering the NDIS, and supporting aged care reforms, according to the needs and wishes of people with disability and older people needing support.

"The NDIS is a once in a generation social reform. The bipartisan Scheme will improve disability services in Australia forever, giving people with disability choice and control in their supports.

"When the NDIS is fully implemented in 2018, funding for disability services in NSW will more than double and will support over 140,000 people with disability.

"It is critical through the transition process that we make every effort to ensure that Home Care is preserved and that it is able to continue to deliver the reliable and quality services that it has for more than 70 years.

"After the transition to the non-government sector, Home Care will be well placed to deliver a range of supports that will help people with disability to live in their own homes.

"Current Home Care Service workers will be supported through this change so they will continue to provide the dedicated quality services they deliver each and every day to their clients.

"The NSW Government will continue to work with staff and key unions on the best way to support workers and clients throughout this transition.

"We have put in place the NDIS NSW Enabling Act to protect the entitlements of workers and their conditions. The Government will provide for the continuity of employment terms and conditions while strengthening the protections for employees under the Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009."

The full-transition of Home Care is expected to be completed by mid-next year.

For more information on the changes to the Home Care Service of NSW, please read the [Frequently Asked Questions \(PDF\)](#) on the [Home Care Service page](#) of the ADHC website.



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Changes to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, under the 'Safe Home for Life' Reforms.

On Wednesday 29 October 2014, the *Child Protection Amendment Act 2014 (Amendment Act)* was proclaimed, resulting in changes to the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (Care Act)* under the 'Safe Home for Life' reforms.

The reforms are aimed at creating better outcomes for children, young people and their families by improving stability and wellbeing for children and young people in care.

One of the most significant reforms to be aware of is the creation of a new placement hierarchy, *Section 10A (3), Permanent placement principles*, that sets out a new order for long-term placement of a child or young person, if they are removed from their parents and placed in care:

- a. **Restoration** to the care of parent/s is the first preference.
- b. Then if restoration is not practicable or in the child or young person's best interest, **guardianship** with a relative, kin or other suitable person.
- c. Then **adoption**, if (a) and also (b) are not practicable or in the child or young person's best interests (*except for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children or young people*).
- d. **Parental responsibility to the Minister** (PRM) is the next preference. It is the last preference for placement for *non-Aboriginal* children and young people.

AbSec does not support Adoption for *Aboriginal* children and young people.

AbSec and our member agencies work to ensure the rights of Aboriginal children and young people in the care and protection system are looked after in safe Aboriginal families and communities, raised strong in spirit and identity with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing.

AbSec continues now, as we did throughout the consultation and planning stages around the reforms, to urge the Department of Family and Community Services to ensure that the focus and resources directed towards permanency, matches that of early intervention and prevention programs. This will offer us the best chance of working together, to give our kids the best chance of remaining safe and supported at home in the care of their own families, in their own communities and culture with access to child centered, culturally sound early intervention, prevention and restoration services, that prioritise their safety and wellbeing.

For more information on the *Safe Home for Life* reforms, visit: www.facs.nsw.gov.au/reforms/safe_home_for_life





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Kids in Care Cup 2014

Twenty-three Aboriginal rugby league teams competed in the **Kids in Care Cup** on Saturday 20 September, representing their region in the state-wide knockout competition to highlight the need for Aboriginal foster carers during Foster Care Week.

Teams competed at Sid Parrish Park, Figtree in Wollongong with the **Dalai Dreamers** (from Kempsey and Armidale) winning the fiercely contested **Kids in Care Cup** beating the **Newcastle All Blacks** 12 – 6.

Warren Ahoy, Dalai Dreamers said, "It was an honour to achieve winning the Kids in Cup for our community, especially for the children. It was great to be able to do something positive for the children, we know they will be wrapt knowing we played in their honour."

Ms Angela Webb, CEO AbSec said, "A great day was had by all, it showed the community pulling together for a great cause, Foster Care Week; which is aiming to raise awareness of what fostering is all about and the need for more Aboriginal carers across NSW. Thank you to the hosts the Illawarra Titans Aboriginal Rugby Football Club for all of their hard work and commitment to the day, it was just amazing. A big congratulations to the winners the **Dalai Dreams** and runners up the **Newcastle All Blacks** and repechage winner the **Baryulgil Descendants** from the Far North Coast. Thank you to the sponsors ACWA, Fostering NSW, Community Services, Link Up NSW and AbSec for their support on the day."

Around 3,000 people turned up to watch the ten specially formed adult Aboriginal men's rugby league teams from regions around NSW battle it out for the **Kids in Care Cup** title. This included, three women's teams, the **Illawarra Titans**, **Campbelltown Ghosts** and the **Narooma Sharks** as well as ten local kids' teams made up from the **Coal League All Stars** and the **Illawarra Titans Juniors** who also competed in specialty games including running competitions.



Illawarra, South Coast, Port Stephens, Hunter, Northern NSW, Kempsey, Shoalhaven, La Perouse & Marrickville.



Dalai Dreamers



Newcastle All Blacks



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Family Documentary

History and Cultural Knowledge Gathering Road trip

Cousins Marj Treweek and Narelle Holden had the opportunity to travel throughout NSW over a period of two weeks to gather information for a family cultural history project, of real importance. They gathered stories that would otherwise be lost, with the passing of Elders and knowledge bearers. This year, one such Elder did pass away, who was also part of the stolen generations. It was a significant loss to their family, KBH Inc and the community.

The women travelled to Gunnedah, Coonabarabran, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Brewarrina, Goodooga, Moree, Armidale, Walcha and Newcastle documenting and collecting stories of historical and cultural significance. They travelled with a young film producer Kristin Stephensen, who has given her time to work with the family and create a documentary that will be for their family, friends and community.

As Narelle commented *'this experience took us back to the memories of our childhood and teenage years through to adulthood. Standing there in Gunnedah cemetery, it was overwhelming, so I went and walked the rows in search of other family members. I could see the hurt and pain in Marj's eyes and all I could do was be there in silence. As we continued on with our journey, the more we learnt. I hope this documentary will capture what happy, knowledgeable and down-to-earth people our Elders were, who gave love to their children, nieces and nephews wholeheartedly'*.

Marj and Narelle said highlights for them including seeing old photos for the first time of their ancestors, photos that they didn't know existed. Travelling to the old mission in Brewarrina, visiting the fish traps and cultural museum.

Visiting the old Burra Bee Dee mission and Aboriginal cemetery, and learning that their great grandfather made all the old sandstone headstones for the families on the mission. The atmosphere, scenery, being on country and the generosity of Elders, family and friends in sharing their stories, photos, documentation and hospitality.

The aim is to complete the documentary by end January 2015 and launch it in Gunnedah around March/April 2015. Everyone who was interviewed, provided information and support to the project will be invited. The documentary will be of broadcast quality and will be approximately one hour long.

Marj and Narelle and their family would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their wonderful support: Kinchella Boys Home Inc, Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec), Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service and Bradford Welsh.



(in red top/on left) and Narelle (in black/in the middle) with their Elders from ale.



Above: Marj with cousin Brett Cochrane in Brewarrina.

Stolen Generations Council

NSW/ACT Inc.

Members of the Stolen Generations Council NSW/ACT Incorporated attended the Kinchella Boys Home 90th Commemoration Anniversary from 24-26 October at Kempsey.

The group attended the first gathering which was a meet and greet which was aimed at bringing everyone together to discuss the various activities for the 3 days. Relationships Australia was introduced as the counselling support workers for the stolen generation members and their families for the duration of the Commemoration.

Members attended the Commemoration exhibition held at Dunghutti-Ngaku Aboriginal Art Gallery, followed by the South West Rocks School Site Recognition Ceremony.

On the Saturday, the official 90th Commemoration event was held at the old Kinchella Boys Home site. A full day of activities included.

- a photo exhibition (portraits of the KBH men)
- VIP speeches (including Victor Dominello)
- Stories from the KBH men themselves
- KBH man Ian Lowe's 'Our Pain' CD launch
- local Aboriginal entertainment
- Cultural ceremonies, including welcome to country, traditional dance, and a KBH men's ceremony
- Important family and community gatherings, including the children and grandchildren of the KBH men.
- Cootamundra women speeches (Aunty Elaine) and also the Cootamundra Inc.

The day finished at 4pm, everyone returned to Kempsey. Then at 6pm, the official KBH 90th Commemoration Dinner Dance was held at the Dunghutti Elders Council. It was a deadly night.

On the Sunday, there was the KBH 90th Commemoration Touch Football Knockout played.

Overall, the ladies enjoyed being there to support the KBH men. It was very much a healing process for them, as Cootamundra girls as well. Sharing their stories and talking about the connections they have with the KBH men as many of them were in the Bomaderry Children's Home together. They talked about their brothers, cousins and husbands etc. that were in KBH. They share a strong bond; it's obvious they are family to each other.

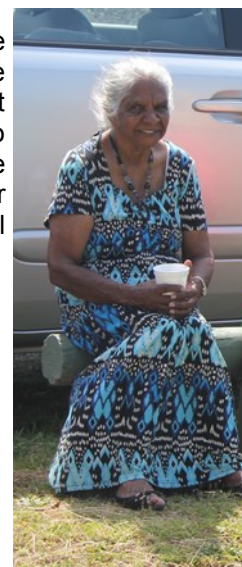


Above: KBH men at the old Kinchella site.

For June Christian and Julie Welsh (AbSec staff), it was humbling to listen to the stories and seeing the connections between the stolen generations men and women who share very similar experiences growing up in the homes.

It was wonderful to see the support given to the KBH men, they were overwhelmed by the attendance of family, friends and community. It was very special.

Without the support of AbSec, the ladies would not have had the opportunity to attend this significant event. We would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the men and staff of KBH Inc for making it such a successful weekend.



Above :Aunty Nancy





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NEW CARER AWARD

On 20 October 2014, Life Without Barriers in consultation with Carers Australia and Families Australia, announced the NSW state winners for the inaugural National Carer Awards 2014.

The national awards recognise and celebrate Carers for the extraordinary contribution they make to the community.

Among the state winners for NSW is Ms Glenda Norris. Ms Norris, a carer of Aboriginal heritage is primary full-time carer for a young girl who she has dedicated her life to over the past eight years.

There are more than 2.7 million carers in Australia, of which 770,000 are primary Carers¹, who often provide 24-hour support to someone in need.

"The National Carer Awards spotlight the extraordinary contribution that Carers make to our society," said the Hon John Ajaka, Minister for Ageing and Disability Services. "These awards are a way for Australians to say thank you for the significant contribution Carers have made not just to the lives of those they care for but the nation as a whole."

"The state and territory winners of the National Carer Awards have been recognised for the extraordinary support they provide to people within our community, who without a Carer, would often be unable to achieve the level of independence and quality of life they enjoy on their own," said Life Without Barriers Chief Executive Claire Robbs.

"Anyone, any time can become a Carer. The chances are you personally *are* a Carer, *need* a Carer or *know* a Carer. Carers are an integral part of Australia's health system and are the foundation of our aged, disability, palliative and community care systems." said Carers Australia CEO Ara Creswell. "The National Carer Awards are an important way of celebrating and acknowledging the significant contribution that Carers make to the Australian community," said Families Australia CEO Brian Babington.

State/territory winners will now enter the running to receive a national carer award across four categories (one winner per category): foster and kinship Carer; Carer of a person who is frail due to age; Carer of a person with a disability; and young Carer aged 25 years and under. Carers eligible for these awards are full-time carers in an unpaid capacity (but may be receiving carer-related government payment or a reimbursement), looking after a person who requires long-term support in one of the categories.

Four national award winners (one per category) will be announced 16 November 2014. To learn more about the National Carer Awards 2014 visit the website at www.carerawards.com.au



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Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

By Giuseppe Stramandinoli

Family Matters forum to be held in NSW

AbSec and SNAICC — the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families — will hold a forum and a community meeting in NSW in February under a national initiative to reduce the dramatic number of Indigenous children in out-of-home care.

The forum and community meeting in NSW are part of the *Family Matters — Kids Safe in Culture, Not in Care* initiative that has already held successful forums in Northern Territory (November 2013), Western Australia (June 2014) and South Australia (August 2014).



Family Matters — Kids Safe in Culture, Not in Care aims to break the traumatic cycle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child removal and halve the number of children in out-of-home care by 2018.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprise just 4.6 per cent of the child population across Australia but represent a staggering 34 per cent of all children in out-of-home care. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 10.6 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than other children.

In NSW, there were 6,203 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2013 — representing 35.6 per cent of all children in care in the state. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost 12 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children which is higher than the national average.

Other peak/national agencies in the child welfare sector partnering SNAICC and AbSec in the Family Matters initiative are:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and
Families Australia.

The forums and community meetings are bringing together experts on out-of-home care issues, including Aboriginal leaders and community members, practitioners and service providers, state-territory government ministers and senior public servants.

The forums and meetings are generating action plans and practical recommendations for governments, as well as creating local networks of people committed to seeing the recommendations progressed.



An update from Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care continued..

Raising public awareness and supporting the capacity of states and territories to implement strategies on the ground is a key priority of SNAICC and partner agencies following these forums and community meetings.

SNAICC and AbSec will promote details of the upcoming NSW forum (in Sydney) and community meeting (in a regional centre) as they become available.

The NSW model of delegated responsibility to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations attracted a great deal of attention at both the Western Australian and South Australian forums, with recommendations made that this model should be adopted in other states and territories.

Other themes to emerge from the forums and community meetings held so far include:

Cultural competence

Many participants at the forums and community meetings recognised that a lack of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and kinship systems often leads to misinterpretation about child rearing practices and the safety and wellbeing of children. Cultural competence must be improved across the child protection system, including child protection and family support workers, government agencies, judiciary and police.

Carers and that kinship carers required the same level of support and financial remuneration as foster carers.

Prevention/early intervention

Attendees all expressed that better investment in prevention and early intervention strategies was crucial, particularly in addressing the systemic social economic disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Participation and decision-making

There has been widespread consensus throughout the forums that fostering greater inclusion and involvement of Aboriginal people in child protection decision making leads to better outcomes for children.



Check the AbSec website or AbSec Facebook page as date to be announced.

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AbSec is now on facebook so follow us to stay informed of events, news and community information or if you want to contact us feel free!



ABORIGINAL CHILD, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CARE STATE SECRETARIAT

LOOKING AFTER
OUR KIDS

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Update – Royal Commission extended for two years

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has continued throughout 2014, examining institutional responses to sexual abuse in private, public or non-government organisations. No organisation is exempt from investigation, whether it is a church, school, children's home, out-of-home care (OOHC) agency, recreational clubs or other institution. The aim of the Commission is to create a safer future for children, to "bear witness" and seek out a "just response".

Evidence gathered by the Commissioners so far has helped to identify where systems have failed to protect children; they will make further recommendations on improving laws, practice and policies as the Commission progresses.

The Royal Commission was initially scheduled to be completed by 2015, however an extension of two years has been provided, until the end of 2017. As at 29 October 2014, there have been:

- 16,768 calls handled
- 7,431 letters and emails received
- 2,491 - Private sessions held
- 936 Notices to produce (i.e. specified documents and data)
- An interim report released

The Royal Commission recently held two public hearings regarding children's homes where Aboriginal children resided: Retta Dixon Home in Darwin, Northern Territory and Bethcar Children's Home in Brewarrina, New South Wales.

The Retta Dixon hearing looked at how the missionaries ran the home, and how the NT Government and Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions handled reports and allegations of severe physical and sexual abuse. The Bethcar hearing examined the responses of the State to complaints made and to legal action brought by former Bethcar residents. There have also been private hearings held, along with community meetings in a number of Aboriginal communities nationally.

AbSec member agencies with questions or suggestions to put forward to the Commission in relation to its work with NSW Aboriginal communities can do so directly, through contacting Royal Commission Aboriginal Engagement team members. Agencies can also table issues or queries about the Commission through AbSec, which is part of a NSW peak Aboriginal agency reference group working together with the Commission in the hope of getting the word out about the Commission.

Around ten percent of people who have taken part in private sessions are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However the Commission and AbSec encourage community members who experienced childhood sexual abuse through an institution to come forward and find out more information, or to tell their own story if that is what is right for them. This includes though who were removed from their families through past policies and practices of forced removal and placed in children's homes, or living on missions, reserves and outstations.

For more information on the Royal Commission:

Website: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-people>

Phone: 1800 099 340 (8am – 8pm); or email: contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

AbSec members can also contact to Wendy Hermeston, Senior Policy Officer - 02 9559 5299; email: research@absec.org.au

Stolen Generations Council NSW/ACT Inc members can contact June Christian on 1800 263 881





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As this is the last newsletter for 2014, AbSec would like to wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday season and looking forward to 2015 and what it brings!

Contact AbSec

Phone: 02 9559 5299

Email: admin@absec.org.au