



# AbSec News

DECEMBER 2015 ISSUE 21

## CEO MESSAGE

We are nearing the end of a big year, one filled with many pieces of work undertaken by AbSec in strong collaboration with our Aboriginal sector and communities. We have made clear our vision for the future through our collaborative effort to think about an Aboriginal child and family sector, working to increase the number of Aboriginal services for Aboriginal people with disability, and being clear and reasoned in our views on the best supports for Aboriginal children and young people involved in the child welfare sector in NSW.

AbSec, along with our members and communities, are on a strong path for the future to ensure our children, young people and families are better supported in times of need and vulnerability. We will continue on this path as 2016 rapidly approaches, working even more closely with our non-Aboriginal partners to realize our vision for ensuring the best possible outcomes for our Aboriginal children and young people across NSW.

Thank you to all of you who attended our *Vibrant Sector, Capable Workers, Stronger Kids - Supporting Aboriginal children and young people to have the best possible future* conference, held at Opal Cove Resort in Coffs Harbour towards the end of November. It was a great opportunity to network and attend forums that informed us about current and future thinking, so we are better able to meet the needs of our children, young people, families and communities.

I'd particularly like to acknowledge Dr Leland Ruwhiu and Dr Moana Eruera from New Zealand for giving an emotional cultural journey that provided conference participants an opportunity to walk away feeling moved and inspired. I would also like to thank all our presenters who so generously gave their time to share their own journeys with us. Importantly, I'd like to acknowledge AbSec's Board for their leadership throughout the year and the strong input from our collective Aboriginal sector to ensure the best interests of our children, young people and families are at our core. Equally, I'd like to thank AbSec's staff for their commitment, passion and drive in the work that we do everyday.

On that note, I take this opportunity to wish our children, young people, communities, members and stakeholders a very happy and safe holiday season. We look forward to working together in 2016 to maximize opportunities and overcome those challenges that are presented before us.

**Tim Ireland**  
Chief Executive Officer





## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**9 November 2015**

### **Position Paper released on NSW Guardianship and other permanent care orders**

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) today released its position paper regarding guardianship and other permanent care orders for Aboriginal children and young people.

While acknowledging the importance of stability for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, this paper outlines concerns around guardianship orders more broadly, and offers an alternate view to promote better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

"Aboriginal families and communities remain opposed to any form of permanent care order imposed on Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal systems" said Mr Tim Ireland, CEO AbSec.

In addition to the need for greater empowerment of Aboriginal families and communities in decision making about Aboriginal children, the position paper identifies how such orders deny Aboriginal children, and their families, critical ongoing supports that aim to provide safe, secure and nurturing environments, enriched by our culture.

"The current system is under-resourced to provide meaningful supports and solutions for Aboriginal children and young people and those that care for them in a way that is appropriate to their needs. It is worrying to see guardianship and adoption orders being put in place without Aboriginal community oversight, leading to further reductions in the supports provided to our most vulnerable children."

"We as an Aboriginal sector are working to ensure the safety, stability and cultural rights of Aboriginal children and young people. We see a system that supports a community around vulnerable children as the best approach to keeping them safe and achieving better outcomes, not one that seeks to legally sever them from their family, community and culture and deny them critical ongoing supports," Mr Ireland said.

AbSec is committed to working with FACS to ensure there is a comprehensive model, designed by Aboriginal people, to provide holistic Aboriginal child and family services, recognising the views expressed in today's position paper and aiming to ensure Aboriginal children are safe and strong in culture with local solutions to meet their needs.





9 November 2015

### **Guiding Principles for strengthening Aboriginal participation**

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) was pleased to witness the signing of the Guiding Principles that aim to facilitate self-determination and work toward ensuring proper consultation and involvement of Aboriginal people and communities in child protection matters involving their children and young people.

AbSec acknowledges the efforts by the Grandmothers Against Removals (GMAR) in such a landmark agreement with the NSW Department of Family and Community Service (FACS).

"We recognise there is a high rate of Aboriginal children and young people taken into care in NSW" said Mr Tim Ireland, CEO AbSec "however what the Government and their departments need to do is work with and under the leadership of Aboriginal communities to reduce the number of Aboriginal children being placed in care. An agreement such as this is a positive starting point, but there is still more to do."

AbSec would like to commend those involved in these negotiations; especially the Aboriginal elders who persisted and pursued the Department to ensure Aboriginal children and young people are raised with family and community and are able to confidently express these views to the Department.

"AbSec would like to see the Government particularly FACS working more closely with Aboriginal communities and investing in quality Aboriginal community controlled supports so that our children and young people are able to remain with family and their community" said Mr Ireland.

AbSec, along with GMAR, local Aboriginal communities and FACS, is delighted to be a key stakeholder in overseeing the Guiding Principles as they are implemented across NSW.

For further information, visit [www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au).





16 November 2015

## NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) congratulates the Office of the Children's Guardian on the launch of the *NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care*.

AbSec supports the need for standards to guide the accreditation of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in caring for Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection and out-of-home care sector, especially in light of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

AbSec stresses Guardianship Orders or Adoption as permanent orders for Aboriginal children and young people are not culturally appropriate and where possible restoration should be actively considered. It is critical that Aboriginal families and communities are empowered to make decisions regarding the care and protection of Aboriginal children, as per the Aboriginal Child and Young Person Placement Principles, to ensure that Aboriginal children are safe and remain connected to their family, community and culture.

"Our children and young people will thrive strong in culture and identity by maintaining connection to family and community in a safe and secure environment" said Mr Tim Ireland, Chief Executive Officer, AbSec.

As the peak Aboriginal organisation in NSW supporting an Aboriginal community controlled sector for Aboriginal children, young people and families, AbSec remains committed to working with the Office of the Children's Guardian to ensure the Aboriginal sector is prepared and able to meet the new standards.





## Targeted Earlier Intervention Programs

In October, FACS called for submissions regarding their targeted earlier intervention program reforms as part of their sector consultations. AbSec was pleased to present the views of our members in this important area, reflecting our strongly-held view that greater focus on supporting our families and communities is needed to address the ongoing, unacceptable over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, while also ensuring quality supports for children in care.

In general, our recommendations emphasised the need for a comprehensive state-wide safety-net of Aboriginal child and family services that are properly resourced to provide universal community-based and targeted family supports to Aboriginal children and their families, helping to keep our kids safe and well in their families, communities and culture.

We asked that the government fund the Aboriginal sector commensurate with the need identified in the child protection system, with the focus not on delivering specific programs, but on empowering communities to identify their priorities and implement their own solutions focused on a high-level outcomes framework developed by and for Aboriginal people and communities. Importantly, we feel it is critical that services for Aboriginal children and families are designed, developed and delivered in a way that respects the fundamental principle of self-determination, acknowledging the expertise and knowledge in our communities and building the capacity of our organisations to serve children and families in their communities.



AbSec is on Facebook and *now* Twitter so follow us to stay informed of events, news and community information.

## Adoption / Guardianship Orders

In November, AbSec released our position paper on Guardianship and other permanent care orders for Aboriginal children and young people in NSW. This is a critical issue for the sector and goes directly to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of Aboriginal children in the out-of-home care. As part of the Safe Home for Life reforms, a set of Permanent Placement Principles were introduced with the stated aim of improving the placement stability of children and young people in out-of-home care. Reflecting the strong advocacy of AbSec, our members, and Aboriginal communities, adoption was placed as the least appropriate placement option for Aboriginal children and young people. However, these changes introduced guardianship orders into the NSW out-of-home care system, and AbSec and our members remain concerned about the preference of these types of orders for Aboriginal children and young people.

As a starting point, AbSec remains concerned about legal permanent care orders such as guardianship and adoption administered by non-Aboriginal systems. In the context of ongoing concerns regarding the implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles, including the participation of Aboriginal people in decision making about the care and protection of our children, the development, application and monitoring of meaningful cultural support plans and challenges regarding the timely and accurate identification of Aboriginal children by the child protection system, AbSec remains concerned that such orders could serve to sever an Aboriginal child's connection to their families, communities and culture.

AbSec recognises that the absence of ongoing practical supports for children and young people in out-of-home care and those that care for them raises concerns that such orders may not be in the best interests of children and young people. We want to see a system that ensures that our children and young people in out-of-home care and their carers, be they kin or foster carers, have access to the culturally appropriate supports they need, when they need them, including therapeutic supports, ongoing supports around family contact and cultural support planning and assistance in navigating other related systems such as education.

We feel that the system has an obligation to provide children and their families with these supports to make sure that children and young people in out-of-home care have the same outcomes and opportunities as their peers, rather than abandoning carers who need them.

We understand the important role that stability plays in the wellbeing of children and young people in out-of-home care, and we remain committed to promoting stability as best practice. However, we feel that stability is best promoted through active, ongoing support of children and young people and those that care for them. We want to see a system that empowers and supports children and their families, rather than one that is designed to withdraw key supports and involves the very real risk that Aboriginal children will again be disconnected from their families, community and culture. State and Federal apologies for past practices seem hollow and insincere in the presence of new reforms that may have similar implications for our children, families and communities, and suggests that the system has yet to learn these key lessons of the past.



## AbSec Aboriginal Agency Forum

Accredited Aboriginal Agencies once again came together in October, this time on Gadigal country in Sydney, to discuss common issues, share knowledge and continue our shared commitment to supporting Aboriginal children and families. Building on from July's forum on Gumbaynggirr country, AbSec and our member agencies came together and finalised our vision for the future of the Aboriginal child and family welfare sector in NSW (as captured in the "Plan on a Page"). In expressing their support for this plan, attendees at the Forum were clear that this plan be viewed as a comprehensive strategy rather than a list of preferences and priorities to be adopted in a piecemeal fashion. Members discussed the need for a coordinated approach to advocating for the plan and gain the support of government and other stakeholders in the sector to realise this vision.

There was also a robust discussion with FACS about guardianship orders for Aboriginal children and young people. Our members were able to raise and discuss their concerns about permanent care orders such as guardianship and adoption for Aboriginal children and clearly communicate these views to the Department of Family and Community Services. AbSec formalised this position in our published Position Paper *Guardianship orders for Aboriginal children and young people*, available on our website.

This forum also offered the opportunity to discuss the proposed Targeted Earlier Intervention Program reforms and sector consultation (see Page 4), hearing directly from the Family and Community Services on the progress of these reforms. Our members were clear and unified in their call for greater investment in universal and targeted supports for Aboriginal children, families and communities as part of a comprehensive safety-net of holistic Aboriginal child and family services aimed at reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and families in the child protection system. Our members were clear in calling for an approach that empowered communities to design, develop and deliver the services and supports they need, with flexible, outcomes-focused funding that promotes innovative service delivery tailored to the needs of families and communities in their social and cultural contexts.

AbSec takes this opportunity to thank all participants for their time and commitment in attending this forum and others throughout the year.

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AbSec encourages feedback from families, carers,  
members and stakeholders.

To provide feedback please contact AbSec on

**Phone:** (02) 9559 5299

**Email:** [reception@absec.org.au](mailto:reception@absec.org.au)

**Website:** [www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au)



## Plan on a Page

AbSec was pleased to present its “Plan on a page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021”, endorsed by members at the October Aboriginal Agencies Forum in Sydney. This plan outlines our strategic vision for the Aboriginal child and family welfare sector, our plan to reduce the contact between Aboriginal families and the child protection system as well as ensuring that all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care get the supports they need to grow up as strong Aboriginal people, connected to their family, community and culture.

The development of this Plan follows an extensive co-design process with FACS and other sector stakeholders to identify those factors that are critical to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and families in the child protection and out-of-home care systems.

The Plan outlines our vision of a strong state-wide safety-net of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that are able to deliver holistic, individually tailored Aboriginal child and family services. These services are best placed to support Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, promoting better outcomes for our children, but also in supporting families and communities to address the underlying issues that increase their contact with the child protection system in the first place. It is our belief that only through this two-pronged approach, driven by and for Aboriginal people, will there be a sustained reduction in the over-representation of Aboriginal families in these systems.

Our member agencies are keen to see the plan endorsed in full by the government and a commitment that the Aboriginal sector, led by AbSec, will be supported to implement this plan for our families and communities. It is clear that a new approach is needed, one that empowers Aboriginal communities to design, develop and deliver the services they need. This plan presents a clear strategy to achieve our goals of reduced entries into out-of-home care and better outcomes for those in out-of-home care – in short, better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

For more, visit [www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au)



# YABUN

## 26 January 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/YabunFestival/>

<http://yabun.org.au/>





# Connecting Voices

## *Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making*

AbSec's **Connecting Voices** – Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making program is in response to ensuring the right supports are put in place for an Aboriginal child or young person at risk or in a vulnerable circumstance – this may be support with gaining meaningful access to school, housing, community inclusion, child protection and family support services and the like.

**Connecting Voices** provides Aboriginal families with an opportunity to discuss what needs to be done to achieve improved wellbeing, welfare and safety of their children and young people.

The purpose of **Connecting Voices** is to encourage relevant family members and others to meet and work toward an agreed way forward in order to address any child-related concerns.

**Connecting Voices** is about involving appropriate family members in the development of a 'Family Plan' which is agreed to by the family, the referring agency and other support providers. A Family Conference is organised to assist in the development of this Family Plan.

All Family Conferences involve an independent Aboriginal Facilitator who is employed by AbSec.

The Facilitator works throughout the entire process including the Conference itself and involves working with the family in developing the strategies to be included in the Family Plan.

**Connecting Voices** is available to families from all over NSW. Interstate referrals will be considered upon application.

If you would like more information about the program including promotion to your organisation please contact the team at [referrals@absec.org.au](mailto:referrals@absec.org.au) or phone 02 9559 5299.



## Shining a Light on good practice

Friday 20 November was the launch of Shining a Light on Good Practice in NSW 2015. Held at the State Library of New South Wales it was opened by the Minister for Family and Community Services the Hon. Brad Hazzard MP.

The Office of the Senior Practitioner from Family and Community Services invited AbSec to play an important role in this year's Shining a Light on Good Practice report, by reflecting on a particular story, called **Yarning** (located on page 60). Ms Bev Sales from AbSec gave an insightful view into the valuable work being undertaken to support Aboriginal children and families appropriately.

The report can be read at <http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/reforms/children,-young-people-and-families/shining-a-light-on-good-practice-2015>

*"When I first met Betty's family, I introduced myself as an Aboriginal women and shared my story. This allowed them to understand my connections within their community. The first meeting was an introduction – 'Here I am and this is what I look like. I explained the Aboriginal Family Group Conferencing program and my role as a facilitator – that I was independent from FACS. Going to see each of the family members gave them a chance to "eye me and hear me". Aboriginal people know if you're genuine. I told them I wanted to hear their stories. That's the heart of a Family Group Conferencing – to make sure every person is heard."*

*Yarning, Shining a Light on Good Practice in NSW 2015*



## AbSec 2015 Conference

AbSec held it's ***Vibrant Sector, Capable Workers, Stronger Kids – Supporting Aboriginal Children and Young People to have the Best Possible Future*** Conference at Opal Cove Resort in Coffs Harbour NSW from 24 – 26 November 2015.

The first two days, Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25 was the 'Workers Conference'. Tuesday opened with a Welcome to Country by local Elder Auntie Sue Hoskins, followed by a performance by local school - Kulai Preschool. It was beautiful to hear the students from Kulai Preschool which brought the conference to focus on Aboriginal children and young people.

Keynote speaker, Ms Kerryn Boland, Children's Guardian kicked off the conference with an opening address on *Building a Child Safe Organisation*, then for the rest of the day delegates heard from guest speakers in workshops covering *Early Intervention Good Practice*, *Out of Home Care Good Practice* and *Reforms in Practice*, with Prof. Fiona Arney from the University of South Australia closing day one.

The Conference Dinner saw a full dancefloor with returning performers regional NSW band *Terra Firma*. A 3-course dinner in the ballroom with refreshments and great entertainment was a great way to finish off the day. We also celebrated the success of the students who undertook the Diploma Child, Youth and Family Intervention earlier this year.

Day two of the conference and we were honoured to have our international keynote speakers, Dr Leland Ruwhiu and Dr Moana Eruera, Principal Advisors Maori for Child, Youth & Family Services of New Zealand. A powerful and engaging session which was followed by their workshop '*Significant Patterns of Working With Our Indigenous Young in Statutory Spaces of Engagement*'. This was a very popular workshop and well received by conference delegates.

During the day, workshops on *Reforms in Practice*,

*Casework Practice*, the *Aboriginal Aftercare State-wide Service*, and a follow up presentation on *Reportable Conduct and Critical Incidents* by the NSW Ombudsman's office were held. The day closed with Ms Haylene Grogan, the Director of Policy and reform from Aboriginal Affairs NSW to discuss OCHRE.

Wednesday's Dinner was a hit also with comedian Andy Saunders taking the mic to entertain guests with non-stop hilarity. Guests also made use of our fun photo booth both nights! The Kids in Care Cup Video, introduced by AbSec was also launched on the night.

Thursday 26 – Day 3 was the 'Sector Conference.' The morning began with a Welcome to Country by Auntie Sue Hoskins and was followed by an opening address from Mrs Kirsten Gray who spoke about her experience as a child in care and overcoming and breaking the cycle.

Local Traditional Dance Group *Wajaar Ngaarlu* from Orara High School performed for conference participants before breaking away to sessions on *The Voice of Aboriginal Children and Young People* and *Cultural Support in Practice*.

The Secretary for Department of Family and Community Service NSW, Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter gave a keynote speech in the afternoon before delegates again moved to workshops on *Innovative Practices*.

The conference provided delegates an opportunity to strengthen their skills and knowledge in supporting Aboriginal children and young people in the out-of-home care and child protection sectors. AbSec was excited about the opportunity to host such a conference and hopes that it benefits the supports and services provided in Aboriginal communities.

AbSec welcomes feedback from conference participants, so please visit the website to complete an evaluation form. Our website also has photos from over the 3 days.



Picture left: Day one Opening Ceremony

Picture right: Guest Speakers Dr Leland Ruwhiu and Dr Moana Eruera from New Zealand





## EVENTS

### IFCO Conference 2015

The International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO), in collaboration with NSW Karitane / Connecting Carers hosted the 2015 World Conference on Fostering 'Tell Someone Who Cares 2015' from 8 - 11 November at The Star in Darling Harbour. The World Conference provided an opportunity to showcase Foster, Kinship and Relative Care in a national Australian context.

Approximately 1,000 delegates attended the conference, coming from across all parts of Australia and the world. AbSec was able to provide accommodation support to a number of carers from Western Region to attend the conference.

AbSec facilitated an Exhibitors Stall during the conference, where it was a great opportunity to meet Carers attending the conference, as well as catch up with familiar faces. AbSec provided information around current projects, the Carer Support Line as well as providing promotional items such as plastic boomerangs which were a hit with delegates!

AbSec also had the pleasure of chairing the session focused on Diversity in Care, which included presentations titled Indigenous Care and Education; Aboriginal Kinship Care: Culturally safe care for children or a cheap alternative to foster; Engaging CALD Foster and Kinship Carers; Transition, Connection and Collaboration and Ensuring inclusion of Children from Marginalised Communities in India.

AbSec's presentation on the Voices of Aboriginal Kids in Care, which focused the importance of Aboriginal children and young people having their voices heard and responded to. The presentation also gave an update on AbSec's Youth Ambassador Program and the work these young leaders have been busy with.

Overall it was a great conference, with lots of information and inspiring speakers. Information about the conference and some presentations can be found at [www.ifco2015.com](http://www.ifco2015.com).

The announcement for the next conference was made, which will be held in Malta in 2017!

Pictured right: AbSec's Julie Welsh



### Building Kinnections for Aboriginal Services – DIG Forum, Dubbo NSW

AbSec attended the "Building Kinnections for Aboriginal Service delivery" Forum in Dubbo on 2nd December 2015.

The Forum - arranged by the Western Disability Information Group (DIG), National Disability Services (NDS), and the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) - attracted over 200 participants to gather and to provide information to Aboriginal service providers, clients, family and carers who support Aboriginal people on the many facets of Aboriginal disability support, service provision, cultural awareness and other topical issues in preparation for the upcoming rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The forum included a range of guest speakers including Minister for Disability Services, the Hon John Ajaka MLC, Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Northcott and My Choice Matters and concluded with a Panel of Carers and Clients who shared stories of their journey on the NDIS.

The forum showcased for AbSec that there is a need to invest more in building and maintain an Aboriginal disability market, as the NDIS is implemented in NSW and across Australia.



## Donations for Christmas



AbSec collected donations of toys and non perishable items which would be donated to Aboriginal carers.

AbSec was lucky this year to receive support and contributions from **Yarnin Aboriginal Employment Services** who provided some gift vouchers, **Women in Prison Advocacy Network** and **St Michaels Primary School Lane Cove** also provided donations of food, toys and clothing.

**Thank you** to those who contributed to the hampers.

AbSec will be collecting again for 2016 hampers in the New Year, if you or your organisation would like to contribute please contact the office.



## Patchwork NSW

Patchwork is the free, secure and simple to use web-app that will improve your experience coordinating cross-agency support services for your client.

Join the Patchwork community today: [patchworknsw.net.au](http://patchworknsw.net.au)

Patchwork is like a 'super-charged phone directory' that helps you find and connect to other practitioners working with your clients.

Click here to watch a Patchwork [explainer video](#).

### How does Patchwork help?

**Saves time**– Patchwork can reduce the time taken to communicate with your client's other services from 1-3 hours to 1-3 mins.

**Prevents duplication**– You know multiple services can duplicate work with your clients. Patchwork will help you coordinate your efforts with your client's other practitioners.

**Creates success**– In the last 12 months Patchwork has already produced outcomes for clients who experience homelessness, mental health, domestic violence and child protection.

Patchwork is a FACS initiative and will become standard practice in community, health and correctional services across NSW. Join over 1,500 Patchwork users already in NSW, and [sign up today](#).

Patchwork NSW  
[patchworknsw.net.au](http://patchworknsw.net.au)





Wishing you and loved ones  
a safe and happy holiday season.  
Looking forward to catching you in the New Year

