



ADDRESSING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DISADVANTAGE

With the historic apology of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to the Stolen Generation, and the government's commitment to closing the 17 years life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, CAFWAA committed to working with the government to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantages especially in the area of child protection. According to the 2007 AIHW report, the rates of Indigenous children and young people in child protection are 5 to 7 times higher than non-Indigenous children. CAFWAA commends the Commonwealth Government for seeking to develop and implement a holistic strategy that looks at addressing the underlying issues that lead to the removal of children, including over crowded living situations, disengagement with education, substance misuse and domestic violence. CAFWAA urges the Commonwealth Government to:

- **Develop a National Child Care Strategy for Aboriginal children and young people:**
We acknowledge that the Coalition is working with the federal government to develop a national framework for child protection. However, we believe that more needs to be done particularly to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people who are experiencing greater disadvantages. Such strategy needs to be holistic in its scope to encompass children's safety, health, education, and developmental issues. The strategy needs to adopt a community development approach that strengthens families and communities capacity to care for children. More needs to be done in the area of early intervention to support families before they reach crisis point.
- **Immediately address the shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services:** Adequate levels of funding and training are needed to address the shortage in child care services catering for ATSI children. There is also a need to resource and equip child care services to adequately respond to child protection matters. Building the capacity of the sector in general and of ATSI community agencies in particular is paramount to providing adequate care for ATSI children. Investing in providing adequate universal services to ATSI children and focusing on developmental and early intervention programs are likely to reduce the number of children who require removal from their families and increase the chances of restoration with family.
- **Take a leadership role with States and Territories on the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Development Plan,** building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community agencies and services and the creation of paid employment and support that allows communities to put training into action:
- **Financially assist indigenous agencies and Non-Government agencies to develop partnerships-** to assist in strengthening indigenous agency service provision i.e. funding mentoring from an agency when requested by the indigenous organisation.

CAFWAA also urges the States and Territories to:

- implement the recommendations of the report *Enhancing Out-of-home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People* (Australian institute of Family Studies, AIFS, October 2005); and
- ensure and provide adequate training and support to all kinship carers and Indigenous foster carers, to ensure the retention of current ATSI carers and to increase the likelihood of recruiting new carers. Further to this we must strengthen cultural training for non-Aboriginal carers caring for ATSI children,
- provide appropriate support and financial reimbursement to kinship carers. Carers should receive the same compensation for doing the same job of caring for children, regardless of whether the children are related to them or not. The costs associated with caring for a child remains unchanged whether the child is related to the carer or not. Hence, kinship carers should be compensated commensurately with general foster carers, this includes support and training. There is a need to recognise and acknowledge that it is better to build on the strengths of ATSI families, communities and kinship system and develop workforce and community capacity in order to achieve better outcomes for the children in care.
- increase the capacity of family support services and invest in family preservation and restoration models: Research has indicated that by providing family support services, and by focusing on family preservation and restoration, we have a better chance of reducing the number of removals of Indigenous children from their family and community.

References:

- Call To Action For Australian Children, CAFWAA, May 2007
- SNAICC's Ten Point National Action Plan
- Enhancing OOHC for ATSI YP, AIFS, Oct 05
- Australia Welfare, AIHW, 2007

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