

## News from our place...

### Latest news from AICCAS and MACS Australia-Wide:

In the first issue of *Children Australia* for this year, –the International Year for the World's Indigenous People – our focus was on Australia's Aboriginal communities. With Aboriginal children's needs clearly a part of our theme, we invited Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies nationwide to contribute articles and news about issues, needs and problems as well as notable achievements, ideas and dreams for the future in their areas. Some contributions were published in that issue.

Children Australia has followed up the invitation and information has come in from various AICCAs and MACs about dreams which may have been realised over 1993, as well as new ideas or struggles that need to be recognised in order to keep focus on Aboriginal needs well after 1993.

Unfortunately, time and resources have not made comment from every AICCA or MAC possible. However, we have received information from most States, which give some insight into local concerns and interests across Australia. We will always be interested to hear about ideas and events helpful to Aboriginal children and their families.

#### New South Wales

Betsy Coe from the Aboriginal Children's Service, spoke to us from Redfern about their hopes for funding for a permanent office. Their service is currently housed in a five bedroom house from which they manage a state-wide fostering and adoption program. Betsy points out that they have had the same staffing levels – four field workers, one administrator and one secretary – since 1980. She would like to see this change. Betsy said there is also a need for further resources to extend the services at their four branches, delivering services in urban and rural New South Wales

An Annual Christmas Appeal is one of the methods they utilise to gain funds and improve community awareness of their service. Money raised aids foster parents and children, helping to ensure that hopes are maintained for future improvements. Betsy stresses however, that services can not run on optimism alone.

#### Queensland

Norm Brown from the Brisbane AICCA, Woolloongabba, says that more funding would enable needed further development of Brisbane services also. More immediately however, he says that their attentions are focused on a review of the Child Protection Act, whereby family and children's services will be updated and made more relevant to issues of 1993 and future years. Norm says that their service is currently running under guidelines that have not been changed since 1965. He believes that under the new system, the legislative power will be put into the hands of Aboriginal people, instead of those less aware of Aboriginal needs and cultural solutions.

Norm points out that their service is the biggest AICCA in Australia. Some functions of this service include: an emergency 24 hour service; day care centre which currently caters for thirty-four children; a Youth Scheme and Youth Shelter – more specifically for young males; cultural integration education; contact and aid to young people in detention centres; contact and aid to families of young people in trouble. The Service works on prevention as well as solutions to some of the problems Aboriginal people face as a result of past attempts at assimilation and the colonisation of Aboriginal people by the non-Aboriginal. Norm also believes that the recent Mabo debates have counteracted positive changes that might have occurred in this field due to a resurgence of racist attitudes and ignorance on the part of mainstream society and media.

Jenny Prior from the Townsville AICCA reinforces Norm Brown's comments that people with decision-making power should draw more on the expertise of members of the Aboriginal community when dealing with things that affect Aboriginal people, and that it is up to government departments to hand over those responsibilities, legislative and otherwise, to Aboriginal people. Jenny describes the relationship between those with legislative power and those in her position, as one dependant on 'good will'. She says that this puts the Townsville AICCA in a position to be exploited by those with power. One example she offers to illustrate such a relationship is the lack of recognition her organisation received in the opening speeches when The new juvenile justice system was being introduced. This is clearly an area of vital concern to Aboriginal communities.

Some of the problems associated with funding for the Townsville AICCA are due to the struggle to hold onto the funds allocated to their service as other mainstream bodies bid for the same funds. This situation is not able to be reversed and Jenny believes that the agency is at a disadvantage as a result of poor social education of the wider community and stereotypes drawn by the media of Aboriginal affairs.

Even under these continual pressures, the Townsville AICCA has made some very positive advances recently. For instance, Jenny talks of the Aboriginal Youth Numeracy and Literacy courses opening up at the James Cook University in Townsville. She says that this has provided impetus for increased numbers of Aboriginal youth exploring further studies and tertiary education.

Another positive development over this year has been the increased popularity of a video created by Townsville AICCA titled *Us Kids Can Say No* that provides education about child sexual abuse. Jenny says that this video has reached a wide audience who will benefit greatly from this project.

Other hopes for the future also include further educational community work that will include an extension of their service to aid the families of clients. Jenny believes it is time to take a more holistic approach to solve problems in this area. She would like to see funds for a day care centre become available as an example of this. Jenny believes that if they could see through the many political barriers they face in order to gain a centre of this nature, they could help prevent some adult difficulties from even arising. She has great faith in the well used but little heeded truth: Our children are our future.

## Northern Territory



Merle Simpson from Karu ACCA says that one positive step for their service over 1993 was the opportunity to purchase a vehicle. She says that even though they will not receive increased funding for repairs, this vehicle will operate as a link between their service and those who need to utilise the ACCA facilities and skills. Karu deals with people aged up to seventeen, covering every area in the Northern Territory. Merle says that this is a huge area for one worker in a car to cover as they only have one link-up worker. She would like to see this change.

There is also work being done in the juvenile justice area to assist kids missing school and to improve health services in schools. Most of the aid that is possible however exists in the form of food vouchers and transport (for families of children in need also). Merle would like to see more support for kids in psychiatric wards and an extension of the number of people they can assist in this area.

Perhaps one of the biggest hopes for the future at Karu is the implementation of a five year plan for youth support in the juvenile justice area, including those trying to find family after adoption. Merle believes this would increase the long term effects of their service in the Northern Territory.

More immediately, Karu awaits response to their submission for a receptionist and director to run their service more efficiently and thus ease the burden on workers and youth in their care.

## Tasmania



Lisa Coulson from Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care says that they also dream of funding for a new building. She says that this is due to their position opposite a saw mill in a noisy industrial area. Lisa says she does not believe they are struggling any more than anyone else to gain additional funding for their service but would love to be able to increase equipment and services for those in need.

This service devotes much energy to maintaining and utilising cultural links with the Aboriginal community. Although Lisa would like to see an increase in cultural activities, she highly commends a program called the Aboriginal Language Retrieval Program recently adopted by her area. She says that this has been very successful in teaching preschool-aged Aboriginal children their own language. Through this system, young children and their families are encouraged to take pride in their language and cultural strengths. This has been very positive, says Lisa, and is something they hope to continue and develop. This optimism is something they promote as much as possible in their area and is the result of some very positive advances in the work they have undertaken.

## South Australia



Brian Butler from the South Australian ACCA says that the major push in South Australia has been an attempt to gain support to run their own programs for children and families. This ACCA, which has 32 members, including some from more traditional communities, has been working to organise housing, education and health programs to recognise children's special needs. He says that many of the problems they face in this area are due to the imbalance of funding allocation whereby much of the funding goes to the 'wrong end of the scale.' Brian believes that much is put into Post Graduate education for instance, and very little allocated to needy children in foster programs. He points out that many of these children are in dire need of special and immediate attention as they are often traumatised and unable to cope in their situations.

Resistance, Brian says, has come from bureaucratic and political circles and even local councils have offered little in the form of programs designed for these children and families. When it is considered that there are at least 160 foster parents and approximately 400–500 Aboriginal children in substitute care in South Australia, it is easy to understand how much support this ACCA requires.

The recent change in government has and, he believes, will create further setbacks for this ACCA. Brian says that adequate resources will be put on hold and may force his organisation back to square one with the new government. He hopes however that it will not take too long as the incoming work is always plentiful, constant and needing their immediate attention.

The many positive results and on-going projects tackled by the South Australian ACCA however are certainly obvious and commendable. Brian points out that his position as Chairman of SNAICC has allowed his agency to enjoy involvement in AICCA affairs on a national scale, which in turn allows a stronger local focus in many issues. South Australia has gained support, for instance, from ACOSS which enables this agency to access information and aid from the Youth Law Centre in Sydney. They also have some involvement in the ATSIC council which will give them greater understanding of funding opportunities.

Brian believes that his agency has made many notable achievements over the past few years and that Aboriginal organisations are on their way to having a good International Year of the family in 1994. For instance, this agency has made advances with the Adelaide Housing Commission enabling prospective foster parents to have greater chances in applications for adequate housing to meet developing family needs. They have also gained great praise and international recognition for their participation in the Sacred Run. This ACCA was the only organisation, says Brian, to resource this event using their own funding. Further positive steps have also been taken in youth work resulting in a reduction of the number of people facing the juvenile justice system.

Much praise has also been directed to South Australia for an ability to utilise resources to benefit all of Australia's AICCA's and MACCs. Brian says that one of their greatest achievements has been that they have taken the steps required to allow all of these agencies and supporting organisations around Australia to work together.

## Victoria



Darren Lovett of the Victorian ACCA says that they have made several notable and positive steps forward in their area recently.

In 1993, ATSIC Victoria endorsed VACCA's submission for all projected one-off and recurrent costs of a proposed new Koori Parenting Centre, and forwarded the submission to Canberra for funding. This proposed centre aims to redress some of the damage resulting from removal policies which operated from 1869 to 1969. As huge numbers of Koori children were relocated to institutions, problems arose from a lack of adequate parenting, including damaged bonding and attachment behaviour and damage to the capacity of removed children to parent themselves in later years.

The proposed centre will consist of five two bedroom houses – one for a live-in caretaker/maintenance worker/couple and four for Koori families. This housing and the aid of workers will be available for a mutually agreed period to nurture and facilitate parents' confidence in their abilities, provide relevant information and build family support networks. Culturally relevant programs, input by elders, outings, relevant videos and lots more are promised, as well as music and dance therapy and self-development programs for women. A library and recreation room will also be available.

VACCA's input towards the success of the nation-wide Link Up organisation – which assists Aboriginal people to relocate the natural parents and families from whom they had been removed when young – has also been great. With the Link Up service and the proposed Parenting Centre, it can easily be seen that VACCA's involvement in this area is highly commendable.

Other positive steps taken by VACCA over 1993 included a Child Sexual Abuse Workshop in May which provided recommendations concerning: community education regarding sexual abuse; the proposed allocation of a VACCA worker to be involved in sexual assault cases and many suggestions about funding and ways of dealing with this issue. Since the May workshop at least one Koori self-help group has begun and further workshops in areas such as Bairnsdale have occurred.

Also established is the Protocol between Community Services Victoria Child Protection Services and VACCA to facilitate more effective aid and response for maltreated children and their families. This protocol is aimed at establishing culturally relevant services for Koori children in areas of protective service intervention and surrounding issues. This is an extremely important advance from previous years and a step towards recognition of the importance of Koori participation in addressing issues concerning their community.

Darren seems understandably pleased with the service given and the achievements made by VACCA over 1993, but he stresses that there is huge potential for further work in many areas of Aboriginal child care.

## Western Australia



Irene Stainton from the Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation has provided information concerning her organisation's aims to ensure the successful placement of Aboriginal children into out-of-home care. Yorganop provides a range of welfare services to Aboriginal people including work in the youth services area and the Link Up service.

The objectives for 1993 were to maintain the high standard of service they provide to the Aboriginal community and family groups, to continue the recruitment of quality Aboriginal care-givers; to prevent family break-up and reduce the number of children having to enter care while reducing the levels of stress within families and homes; to expand and develop a Youth Service targeting young homeless at risk and to encourage family, individual and community groups to seek the service of the organisation. In the annual report provided at the end of December, it seems that most of these goals have been met.

The programs provided in 1993 (including a camel trek for several young boys!) were extensive and far reaching. The Koorlongka Kadadjiny program for instance, which is a personal development program providing assistance for juveniles who are required to complete Community Service Orders, has been successful over 1993. The School Education Program – a discussion group which aims, for instance, to dissuade children from assuming that street life is the only avenue out of unstable situations, has also been successful.

In addition, this organisation has been working on many other projects like the proposed Reciprocal Policy with the Department of Community Development, whereby Yorganop staff will have a clearly determined role in relation to the future placement of Aboriginal children.

Involvement with the TAFE Metropolitan College in the form of regular lectures by Irene and placement of students with Yorganop has also been successful.

Other highlights of 1993 include an invitation from the Foster Care Association to participate on a Special Education Committee which was set up to look at the specific problems facing children placed in care. Irene is also participating on a committee involved in the proposed development of an Aboriginal Counselling Service.

To conclude the report, Irene says that Yorganop still faces many difficulties in relation to providing placements for large sibling groups. She also stresses the need for an extra worker as current staff face increased work loads as

a result of increasing confidence in the Yorganop organisation by the community. Irene would like to see the provision of placements for the metropolitan area increase, and further opportunity to resource country centres.

## Australia



From responses we have received, it seems that finding the resources to meet needs and extend services is an ever present struggle. Ignorance, misunderstanding and prejudice is still too common in the wider community. Workers' impressions show that many myths and stereotypes have not been dispelled and may have been exaggerated in the portrayal of the debates in the media following the Mabo decision. Greater understanding is a need that must be addressed, in the effort to enable these services to jump over the hurdles they face in providing services to children, and to the whole Aboriginal community.

Nevertheless, the array of positive developments and aspirations to be found in AICCAs around Australia is impressive. We salute this success and recognise that these efforts are making a vital contribution to the Australian community as a whole.

*Reporter: Tania Owen*