

Message Sticks and Building Blocks

STATUS REPORT ON ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AND AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SEA ISLANDER ACCESS
TO CHILDCARE IN THE BRISBANE METROPOLITAN &
REDLANDS AREA



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1 BACKGROUND

In April 2000, a reference group was formed to develop a model of service delivery for SUPS services for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander families and their children in Brisbane and Redlands.

The reference group consisted of representatives of the cultural groups identified, ACCESS, PlayC.A.R.E, Indigenous Childcare Support Unit (ICSU), Dept Families and Community Services, along with other relevant members.

It was decided that to progress the development of the model/s. Consultations with Indigenous and Australian South Sea Islander communities in 3 geographic areas needed to occur. For example:

1. Stradbroke Island and Redlands(Indigenous)
2. Windsor and Nundah(Indigenous)
3. West End(Indigenous)
4. All of Brisbane (Australian South Sea Islanders).

The Reference group, using the resources of Reference Group Members, local community representatives and a project officer, would manage the consultation process. The project officer would be appointed for 8 weeks at 30 hours per week, and would be responsible for planning and implementing the consultations, and collating and analysing results.

The purpose of the consultations was to inform the development of the service provision model for SUPS services for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Families and their children in Brisbane and Redlands.

A Project Officer position was advertised which would report to a sub committee, presenting monthly reports and regular updates.

Applications and interviews were undertaken in May 2001 and Ms Nola Turner of Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy was the successful applicant.

1.1 Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy

Myself, Ms Nola Turner, the proprietor of Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy commenced in July 2001. I was contracted to:

Develop recommendations to increase the access and participation of children who are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander in Child Care Services in the Brisbane and Redlands region.

Consult with Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Australian South Sea Islander people to identify and document there issues and needs in relation to Child Care.

Within a short period of time, it became obvious that there is an extensive lack of information and knowledge data with regards to access to Child Care by Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander families in the Brisbane metropolitan and Redlands region.

There is a chronic shortage of culturally appropriate resources specific to Child Care.

The overwhelming perception I have gained from respondents in regards to Child Care Services in the Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands Shire. Is that, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander culture, history, families, knowledge and communities, are not being included within many of the Child Care Sector's service provision.

It is also fair to say that many Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people regard attendance of non-Indigenous child care services as going against culture. It has always been the role of the family and extended family to take care of the children.

However, those Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people surveyed who want to access to childcare, want to be able to send their children to a facility where the children will be more at ease in a familiar environment.

According to the participants the current Child Care system does not allow Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander children to maintain their culture, which is sadly being lost especially in our urbanised setting. Indigenous and Australian South Sea Islander children would be expected to benefit from any culturally appropriate education right from the start.

The participants believe that an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander child care service could help to successfully meet the needs of their children in terms of self esteem and confidence and create an interest in learning whilst socialising with non-Indigenous children.

The Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander people see that their own facility would create opportunities for their people to further their education, employment and training. Additionally it would provide role models to encourage a sense of opportunity in other people from their community. It will also encourage interaction between Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander and non-Indigenous communities, which would create a sense of reconciliation. The proposed child care centre would allow Indigenous & Australian South Sea Islander children to interact with other children from a non-Aboriginal background. This interaction would allow both groups of children to learn a great deal from one another. When the children enter the wider education system, they should settle in much quicker as they have already learned to interact with other children.

As it is far more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander families to mind their children. Family Day Care is seen as the more preferred child care service. However, when questioned on what is Family Day Care the participants could not describe it with much detail.

According to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce's Discussion Paper on Effective Learning Issues of Indigenous children aged 0-8 years. Well-established personal relationships and a climate which is 'culture-friendly' are likely to have a significant positive impact on the use of early childhood education centres by Indigenous parents/caregivers.

Cultural diversity and knowledge needs to be more acknowledged, valued and made explicit in early childhood education program.

If this acknowledgement occurs we have no doubt it would encourage Indigenous participation in Early Childhood Education and care, and greater involvement of Indigenous parents, caregivers and community members in the education of their children.

Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy acknowledges that there are ongoing concerns about the level of provision of Early Childhood programs, and the low levels of access and participation in them by Indigenous children and their parents and caregivers.

We propose that it may be useful for the early childhood and school sector representatives, parent groups and Indigenous communities to jointly identify and explore any relevant examples of effective Australian and international practice with a view to promoting this advice at the local level.

It was a recommendation by the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander Child Care Needs Analysis for Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands region to establish an Advisory body with representatives from all areas of the Child care sector. However, with undertaking of much research since that document's release, the above format of extending the body to also look at other effective program samples is much more appropriate.

2 POPULATION STATISTICS

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Indigenous population of Australia is younger and growing at a faster rate compared to other Australians. Accordingly, existing concerns about the educational outcomes of Indigenous children are likely to increase as the population expands in proportion to other Australian children.

The Australian population is about 18 million (1996 Census), with about 2.6 million children aged 0 to 9 years. The Australian Total Fertility rate has been declining from 3.6 children per woman (1948-1961) to its lowest recorded level of 1.74 in 1998. For example, the number of children in the 0 to 4 years age cohort dropped by about 13 500 from 1996 to 1998.

However, Australia's Indigenous population has grown from about 116 000 in 1971 to about 353 000 in 1996 and now comprises about 2.2% of the total population. The 1996 Census also showed that the Indigenous population is currently expanding at a rate more than twice that of the total population, with an average growth rate of around 2.3%. The population is projected to grow at over 20% to 469,000 by this year.

The age structure of the non-Indigenous Australian population is significantly different to that of the Indigenous Australian population. The Indigenous population is comparatively young, while the non-Indigenous population has an older profile with a large concentration in middle-age. 70% of Indigenous Australians are under 25 years of age, compared to about 45% of all Australians, according to the 1996 Census.

In 1996, there were about 98 000 Indigenous children aged 0 to 8 years, with projected estimates of about 147 000 Indigenous children aged 0 to 8 years in 2006, an increase of about 49 000 in a decade. The projected number of Indigenous births is likely to increase from 12 000 in the 1996 period to 17 000 by 2005-6.

What this translates to, and how it affects the child care industry, is that statistically more and more Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children will be attending some form of child care service.

According to a recent report from Secretariat of National Aboriginal Islander Child Care (SNAICC), whilst Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children comprise 4.25% of all children aged 0 – 12 years, yet, they make up only 1.5% of the children aged 0 – 12 in Commonwealth funded child care.

3 EDUCATION & PARTICIPATION STATISTICS

This renewed interest in the first eight years of life have highlighted a range of findings that show that low birth weight, recurrent illnesses, a lack of psychosocial stimulation, acute and/or chronic malnutrition and the stresses of poverty can lead to poor health and a general lowering of intellectual, behavioural and social abilities, often leading to poor school performance and dropping out.

Advice from early intervention studies has indicated that education and health interventions in the early years are likely to be more successful and less costly than remediation and rehabilitation in the later years of childhood and adolescence.

Much of this activity has been given impetus by new research findings that the great majority of physical brain development occurs by the age of three.

Indigenous children are much less likely to participate in formal early childhood education.

The number of Indigenous students attending pre-school increased from 1986 to 1996, both as a proportion of total students attending pre-school and in total numbers.

Yet the estimated Indigenous participation as a proportion of the cohort of Indigenous children aged 3-4 years decreased from 53% in 1991 to 41% in 1996.

The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey showed that approximately 70% of all students in year 3 surveyed met the identified performance standards in reading and writing.

Less than 20% of students in the Indigenous sample met the reading standards and less than 30% of students in the Indigenous sample met the writing standards.

In addition the lowest achieving year 3 Indigenous students make little or no progress over the following two years.

The MCEETYA Taskforce report on Effective Learning Issues of Indigenous Children 0-8 Years has identified the following:

- high quality early childhood education and parental enrichment programs can make a difference for children in the longer term. However there are continuing concerns about the level of provision of these programs, and the low levels of access and participation in them by Indigenous children and their parents and caregivers;

- there is a continuing tension between, and an uneven transition from, early childhood practices to the primary school curriculum which affects the development and educational outcomes of children in general and exacerbates transitional difficulties for Indigenous children in particular.

A great deal of the work which has been done in studying children's transition to school, focuses on children being made 'ready for school', rather than on the school being made 'ready for the children'. Early childhood services and schools need to take greater ownership of these transitional issues. In addition, more work needs to be undertaken to develop a holistic view of development and learning across transition points which shows how the mental, social, physical, spiritual and emotional development of children in general and Indigenous children in particular, interacts with their learning;

- children learn most effectively when there is a partnership between parents/caregivers and educators, when there is a sense of community between home and school environments. The general level of interaction between schools and the local Indigenous communities is often poor.

4 THE CHILDCARE INDUSTRY AS AN EMPLOYER

The child care industry is complex and interconnected. It includes a range of care and education services such as community and privately owned long day and occasional care centres; kindergartens and preschools; outside school hours care and home based care services. Each of these sectors has very diverse needs and issues confronting them.

While employing over 20,000 people directly in Queensland, child care services also make it possible for thousands of others to participate in work, seek employment, undertake study and voluntary activities or just take a break from caring for children.

In 1999, 149,500 children under 12 years of age attended formal child care services in Queensland.

Currently employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Commonwealth funded early and middle Child Care Services in the Brisbane and Redlands region is extremely low, as evidenced by the recent Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander employment survey of these services by Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy in July 2002. This survey found the current employment rate of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander people within the sampling region is 1.2%.

A consultation process needs to be established with key stake-holders across the childcare industry which will identify, document and establish employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander people.

Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy has identified and documented many employment and business opportunities whilst undertaking a Needs Analysis of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Australian South Sea Islander access to Commonwealth funded child care services in Brisbane and Redlands in 2001. This Needs Analysis also identified that 32% Of the Indigenous participants were interested in a career in the child care sector.

Child care and early education services are important to the social and economic development of Queensland. These services support families and employment. They are of critical importance to the social, emotional, physical and intellectual development of young children and they contribute to community well being.

Goal 2 of the NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION POLICY (AEP) 21 GOALS is:

To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages.

4.1 Strategic Planning and development

The development of a:

1. A set of industry specific strategies to establish culturally appropriate employment opportunities for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander people
2. Identified employment opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people particularly women who have identified with Child Care as a Career path.
3. Identified access pathways to vocational and pre-vocational pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who need Child Care and want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

Will lead to:

- ◆ Contribution to social harmony and reconciliation.
- ◆ Retention of culture for children in care
- ◆ Child care services supporting families and employment.
- ◆ Community well being.

Over two hundred (200) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people were interviewed in the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander Needs Analysis. Some of the key findings were:

- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, particularly women, identified strongly with the 'nurturing role' and Child Care as a career opportunity and would like to work in the industry..
- ◆ Over 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, stated they would be more likely to use Child care Services if there was more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Child Care industry.

TAFE Qld has identified that there are still some reasonable numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are graduating from childcare courses. However there are very few employed in the Child Care industry. The supply issues regarding the inability to enter a career path that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has trained for is a grave concern.

5 ADVOCATING CHANGE

5.1 Who do you call?

If you are a child care centre and you would like to include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander content within your centre, or your staff need Cross Cultural Awareness Training. – Whom do you call?

The Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander program for Brisbane & Redlands had been vacant for 3 years or more, before I started and still the current ratio of One Aboriginal Worker on 25 hours per week, to service over 600 centres is completely inappropriate.

Do you call the SUPS service in your region? Maybe, but there are not a high percentage of Sups services in Qld that have Indigenous workers within their service. And those that do include an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander worker have only a very limited budget and hours to allocate to Indigenous issues, as they also have to look after the inclusion of children with a disability and from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The perception of current allocation within the SUPS delivery and funding is inequitable in relation to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people.

There is specific service delivery for the inclusion of children with a disability and also children from linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, the inclusion of children who are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander seems to be a small component of most programming.

It is essentially not seen as the role of SUPS to advocate to government on behalf of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander people, it is not even the role of most SUPS services to work with families, only service to service. Some SUPS operate on as little as 12 hours per week.

Do you call the Indigenous Children's Support Unit (ICSU)? Maybe, but they are lowest funded Resource and Training Agency (RATA) in Qld and they have 3 staff to cover the entire state. They are extremely stretched just servicing the huge geographic area of North Queensland, and if you live in Brisbane or the Gold Coast, they can rarely come down and support you face to face.

The Sups service in Brisbane has not had this type of assistance for three years. ICSU are based in Townsville and what is appropriate for Townsville is not always appropriate for Brisbane.

ICSU are resource and Training, and have indicated they are not an advocacy service to change government policy or strategies, they are not resourced enough to assist all the needs and enquiries from Brisbane or even South East Qld on child care issues.

Do you call the Commonwealth Dept of Families? Maybe, but they will most likely refer you on to ICSU or SUPS, or send you out information on childcare or refer you to their website.

Do you call the state Dept of Families? Maybe, but they do not fund most of the childcare services in Qld, and they are yet to develop Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander specific resources in regards to Childcare information.

Do you call SNAICC (Secretariat for National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child Care)? Maybe, but they are based in Melbourne and have 2 part-time staff and no state affiliate bodies. They have 1 representative in relation to Indigenous childcare in Qld. They also cover the area of Children's services and are very stretched in that area alone. They are the national representative for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander child care and are very much under funded and under resourced.

This has been the most frustrating factor in regards to my research. The lack of a state Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander Peak body that is entirely for Child care. All of the child care sector.

Why is the service delivery in regards to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander people seemingly much less equitable, than the other 2 identified SUPS additional needs areas, of children with a disability or from a culturally & linguistically diverse background.

Input received from several SUPS Coordinators is that inclusion needs of children with a disability takes up most of the service delivery time. However, in the 2001 Qld Child Care Census clearly shows there were less children with a disability attending Child Care Services in this state than Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander children.

Currently in the Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands region SUPS Service there is an established Disability support service for child care and a multicultural support service for child care. However, the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and the Australian South Sea Islander child care support programs have to try to fit in to these established programs with no extra funding and certainly not a stand alone service.

There are 4 identified groups with additional needs in the SUPS Guidelines

1. Children with a disability
2. Children from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds
3. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children, and:
4. Australian South Sea Islander children

All four groups should be serviced equally.

To have the Indigenous Resource and Training service (ICSU) based in Townsville and not have a similar or expanded service in Brisbane is beyond comprehension and certainly curtails many strategies and projects that should be occurring in South East Queensland.

The Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Reference group for Brisbane and Redlands and Kurrajong Aboriginal Consultancy, believe that a service similar to ICSU should be located in Brisbane immediately. We also believe strongly that the service not only be a RATA, but incorporate an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander (and Australian South Sea Islander if they wish to be involved), state advisory body on child care. We believe that this should take precedence over all else.

The child care industry and Indigenous and Australian South Sea Islander people in southern Qld desperately needs an appropriately resourced and funded Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Lead agency that is focused on the childcare industry and its associated services.

6 I HEARD YOU WERE AN ABORIGINAL PERSON WORKING IN CHILDCARE.

The next line is normally, *and I was told you could help me.*

The amount of groups, organisations and individuals that have contacted me with issues relating to child care has been incredible and clearly shows the urgent need for a point of contact in regards to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander child care in the Brisbane area.

The Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000 – 2005 clearly states that Child Care supports the needs of families while providing high quality care and education for children. Child Care enables parents to work, study or seek employment, and to fulfill other community and family responsibilities. Access to appropriate, affordable child care is a major concern to parents, particularly low income families.

Yet, my research whilst undertaking the Needs Analysis, shows that most Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people do not understand the different types of child care available and were on an income of less than \$20,000 annually. A quarter of the participants had no knowledge of child care subsidies and nearly all of the participants felt that Non-Indigenous Child Care Centre's do not value Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander culture therefore, are not appropriate.

Child Care is important and vital to the economic growth in Qld, there is no doubt. However, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people are not accessing the child care services in appropriate numbers, and the current child care sector has a long way to go before Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander families can fit into the above statement from the Qld Strategic Plan.

Examples of the types of services & individuals that have asked for my assistance include:

An Indigenous Unit with a local University who have for many years watched Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students attend residential with their little ones in tow and nowhere to place them while they attended courses or the students would fail and give up altogether because it was just too hard. These are students who may live a good distance from the University and need occasional child care support.

Distance Education has contacted me to inquire about Child Care options because of several Indigenous students who will not complete their courses because they cannot access childcare.

Legal services and an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander organisation – rang to discuss the difficulties that families of prisoners are having in travelling long distances to visit, because the inmate has had to be removed from their community. They are finding visitation difficult, this is particular to the men's prison's, because they have to take all of their children to the prison and are not able to have an appropriate visit with their spouse or relative.

The women's prison have identified they would love to have an individual or group work with them to organise and run some activities with the mother's and the children on special days to make the visits entertaining and encourage positive Interaction with the mother and child.

A couple of Domestic Violence centres have contacted me inquiring about Child Care support or timeout child care for women who are already under enormous stresses and who do not want their children to go under care by the Dept of Families. They wanted to know options – but stressed the women would like their children to be cared for by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carer or person.

I have had another **university** contact me regarding Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander specific toys for play therapy sessions and cultural support for a non-Indigenous carer in their family Day Care Scheme who is temporarily caring for an Aboriginal infant.

Several SUPS services throughout QLD who wanted information regarding Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander employment and were at a loss who to contact and how to keep the staff they employ.

Several Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander child care workers have contacted me in regards to unfair treatment and what they perceive as ignorant racism that has occurred to them within the child care sector.

6.1 Case Study

A young Aboriginal girl of 18 years, who had a keen interest in working with children, is employed through an employment network agency, within a Long Day Care Centre on the Northside.

The girl is 17 years old, no experience straight from school.

The moment this girl commences she feels the service has very little knowledge or respect for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, evidenced by the way they talk about and run down the Aboriginal family of one of the children attending the centre. This is done with little regard for the girl listening.

The centre states that she will be a floater between rooms and the 2 centres in the area. The girl finds herself the primary carer for a little girl of 4 years who has autism and is sight & hearing impaired.

The girl had to take care of the child daily including changing her nappy and accompanying the child on the bus to pick up and deliver her home.

The girl is not offered and received no training at all and felt completely out of her league communicating with the child.

Whilst accompanying the child home one day on the bus, the driver and a mother of another child they were dropping off were chatting, the child managed to get out of the bus and climb onto the roof.

The driver and the girl managed to get her down without any harm to the child. However the incident was reported and 2 days later the regional manager of the service happened to be at the centre on the Friday, and the girl was directed to undertake a list of duties during the day.

These duties consisted of cleaning out all of the wheely bins, cleaning of the toilets and storage centre and sweeping the traffic areas of the centre.

At the conclusion of the day the Centre Director, Group Leader and the regional manager called her in to the office – told her she was not working out and to sign here on a document shoved in front of her, and not to come back.

To add to this disgraceful example, the service then put in a report to Centrelink stating the girl was incompetent and was a liability around the children, so Centrelink then reduced her payments whilst she was looking for another position.

The saddest example of unfair work practices and ignorance I have heard so far.

Needless to say the girl, her family and some friends will never look at child care as a career option.

7 OTITIS MEDIA

What is Otitis Media?

Otitis Media is a common childhood infection, which affects the middle ear. Because of the infection, the Eustachian tube gets blocked and stops the airflow that keeps the middle ear healthy. If infection persists, fluid builds up in the middle ear and can become thick like glue.

What causes it?

- Colds, flu and chest infections.
- Prematurity ie, being born too early.
- Smoking around children.
- Day Care attendance, which increases the risk of contracting "viral" colds;
- family history of ear infections;
- cranio-facial abnormalities such as cleft palate, Down's Syndrome etc;

Who is at risk?

Otitis Media is a big problem for Aboriginal children. Many children get Otitis Media but Aboriginal children are **ten times** more likely to get it than non-Aboriginal children.

How Common is OM?

Otitis Media is the most common reason for children under 5 years visiting a GP.

How does it affect learning?

The health status of children is a powerful influence on their ability to come to school and when at school, on their capacity to learn and fully participate in schooling & early childhood opportunities.

Children who are hungry or deficient in certain nutrients, particularly iron, have diminished concentration and cognitive function. Persistent or frequent illness not only

reduces the time a child spends at school and sets them back in learning progress but can also be indicative of problems in care and environment that are continuing from early childhood. Hearing and visual limitations must also be assessed and addressed for their impact on learning capacity and the general wellbeing of a child.

Moreover, in the absence of widespread early childhood or preschool programs, the start of primary school represents the first organised setting in which most children in a community are accessible for delivery of health programs and messages. Schools can thus be an efficient mechanism for targeting and delivering health services. Analyses done by the World Bank suggest that school-based health and nutrition programs rank amongst the most cost-effective public health strategies, second only to immunisation.

The build up of the sticky fluid makes it hard to hear. The sticky fluid in the ear can cause hearing loss. If a child cannot hear what is being said it makes it hard for them to listen. They can have trouble hearing in the classroom or at home. Because of hearing loss they can have real learning problems or behaviour problems.

A concern of mine is that the information above is not available within the child care centres. Where are the posters, the interactive education program to educate the 0-5 year olds, the training for the staff to identify this health problem and the relevant information within the Certificate 3 in child care for example?

Where are the information resources aimed specifically at child care centres and the children. The resources that inform child care staff of the high incidence of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children in relation to OM.

At present there are approximately 12 – 15 Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander specific places for children under 3 in the Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands region out of a possible 600 centres. Therefore, if one believes the current statistics that clearly show the increases in the 0-8 year Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander age groups and the increase in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people who are working. One must presume that these families are accessing mainstream child care centres – or soon will be.

8 RESOURCES, RESOURCES, RESOURCES

There is without a shadow of a doubt a severe lack of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander resources that have been written specifically for the 0 – 5 year age group, particularly from Queensland and rarely from South East Queensland.

Resources urgently needed include;

- * Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander books for the 0 – 5 age group
- * An easy to read Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander Information Kit aimed specifically at assisting childcare services to communicate and consult effectively with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander families.
- * A Qld Otitis Media package specifically aimed at childcare services.
- * Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander toys and games for the 0 – 5 age groups.
- * Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander activities for the 0 – 5 age groups.
- * Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander information resources for Indigenous families to gain a better understanding of the current childcare system and what it incorporates.

- ✿ A Cross Cultural Awareness Training program to deliver training to Non-Indigenous Child Care staff in relation to the inclusion of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander children into child care services.
- ✿ Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander module/s to incorporate into Certificate 3 and other child care courses, to ensure every new child care worker has received some training in regards to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, culture and/or learning styles.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 **It is the belief of this consultancy and the Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands region Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Child Care Reference group, that their urgently needs to be established an appropriately funded and resourced Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Child Care Support Service based in Brisbane for South East Qld.**

A service that can;

- ⌘ Coordinate current Supplementary services across South East Qld to become more equitable in their service delivery in regards to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander families.
- ⌘ Establish the service as an Information and Referral service to assist the child care sector with the inclusion of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander families.
- ⌘ Advocate change to government and community sectors.
- ⌘ Gain the service advice from a statewide Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Advisory Board.
- ⌘ Ensure the needs and issues of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander families in relation to child care are highlighted and documented to peak bodies and government.
- ⌘ Work in partnership with peak agencies to ensure the delivery of training, development of resources and programming include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture and activities.
- ⌘ Oversee the implementation of any Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Employment strategies within the child care sector.

There is little or no excuse for the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander RATA to be the lowest funded RATA in the state.

Most or all of the Peak Agencies in relation to Child Care are based in Brisbane, therefore, to ensure more partnerships and cooperative activities and projects can be achieved, it is vital to have an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander child care body in Brisbane as well.

Precedence has been set with CARATA having a branch office in the North of Qld.

9.2 Establish a statewide Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander child care advisory board

- ⌘ This board will advocate and provide expert advice in regards to service delivery in the child care sector.
- ⌘ They will also consult widely with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities within the various regions in regards to their needs and issues and highlight these to the relevant agencies.
- ⌘ Advise and support the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander child care support service.

9.3 Research the current training available for the child care sector in regards to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander culture and identify it's relevance and appropriateness.

The feed back thus far from training agencies delivering the child care training packages, is that there is very little content in regards to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander culture and information. Therefore, one can assume that the majority of non-Indigenous child care workers are not receiving any training in regards to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Australian South Sea Islander inclusion or culture.

The training agencies have also identified that they are unaware of many Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander trainers, or perhaps these trainers are just not interested in the positions advertised.

Also, they are unsure whom to contact in regards to recruiting Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people other than through the newspaper.

Low levels of Indigenous participation in formal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) are partly to do with limited physical access, but more often with the perceived 'cultural insensitivity' of provision.

As a general but not universal rule, Indigenous people value early childhood education for similar reasons non-Indigenous people do, ie. as providing children with a good start to schooling and social participation.

Well established personal relationships and a climate which is 'culture-friendly' are likely to have a significant positive impact on the use of early childhood education centres by Indigenous parents/carers.

The majority of current models of monitoring and reporting outcomes for early childhood education fail to acknowledge the cultural diversity and knowledge which Indigenous children bring to the pre-school setting, as well as their own individual identity. Cultural diversity and knowledge needs to be acknowledged, valued and made explicit in the early childhood education program. This would encourage Indigenous participation in ECEC and greater involvement of Indigenous parents, caregivers and community members in the education of their children.

9.4 Ascertain the viability of building an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander child care centre/s

The results of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Needs Analysis is an overwhelming need for more service provision in regards to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander specific places, especially for the 0 – 3 year age group.

As previously stated in this paper there is only one Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander centre in Brisbane which caters for the 0 – 3 group and that is Koolyngarra at West End, and they only have approximately 12 Child Care places available.

Therefore, out of approximately 600 child care centres in the Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands region there are only 12 places specifically for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children under 3years of age.

Currently Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children are the only group in Australia for whom participation in Pre School education is falling.

In Queensland at present there is only 3 Multifunctional Aboriginal Childcare services (MACS) and according to SNAICC there has been no increase in the number of MACS for over ten years.

SNAICC has identified as one of its key issues for attention at a national level, is:

For government to make a national commitment to early childhood development by expanding the number of Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), and other early childhood services to ensure all Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children have access to quality child care and preschool.

9.5 Undertake an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Employment strategy with the child care sector

This strategy should include:

A set of industry specific strategies to establish culturally appropriate employment opportunities for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander people

Identified employment opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people particularly women who have identified with Child Care as a Career path.

Identified access pathways to vocational and pre-vocational pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who need Child Care and want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

9.6 Develop regionally appropriate Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander resources specifically for the child care sector, and in particular the 0 – 5 years age group.

Currently there has been very few resources developed. Even fewer from Queensland. The Child Care Centre's have stated they are keen to have resources and would love to use them. Even the Indigenous centres have identified they are in desperate need of more resources.

We need to urgently develop the following:

1. An Otitis Media package aimed at the 0 – 5 age group and the Non-Indigenous child care sector.
2. An easy to read Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Cultural Information package aimed specifically at assisting childcare services to communicate effectively with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander families.
3. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander toys and games for the 0 – 5 age groups.
4. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander activities for the 0 – 5 age groups.
5. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander information resources for Indigenous families to gain a better understanding of the current childcare system and what it incorporates.
6. A Cross Cultural Awareness Training program to deliver training to Non-Indigenous Child Care staff in relation to the inclusion of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander children into child care services.

10 Conclusion

We are missing the boat on a golden opportunity to teach generations of children from as young as 1 year old, the fascinating and rich culture of our people.

We have the opportunity to incorporate into Child care programming the positive, accurate and appropriate information that will lead to extensive reconciliation processes between Non-Indigenous Indigenous people and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander's. It will lead to a more educated and open minded generation of young people in regards to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander culture, history and people.

We should be focusing on teaching, educating and sharing our knowledge with all children.

Why are Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander pre-school children the only group in Australia falling in numbers?

Where are the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander resources and training in relation to child care?

Why is the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander & Australian South Sea Islander RATA, the lowest funded RATA in Queensland?

Why are Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander families not receiving equal service provision compared to the other two groups with additional needs.

Why is there no Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander child care support service based in Brisbane?

Why are we allowing Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students to fail courses because they do not have access to childcare services or information?

Why is it that the current training packages for child care contain little Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander Cross Cultural Information.

Why is it that when undertaking my research I could only find one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Family Day Care Provider in the entire Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands area?

Why is there only 1.2 % employment rate of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people within the childcare sector in the Brisbane & Redlands areas?

Why has there been no new Multifunctional Aboriginal Childcare Services (MACS) built in the last decade?

Lots of questions and not many answers.

Childcare impinges on so many areas and people.

We need an organised and supported approach to incorporate Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander culture, people, activities and training within the child care sector.

This requires properly funded and resourced agencies and a statewide approach. Our children are our future, so lets take up the opportunity to start the reconciliation process as soon as we can.

Imagine child care centres across Queensland teaching Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander games to toddlers and pre-schoolers or a group of 4 year olds colouring in the

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags and understanding their meaning.
Maybe it's a group of kids from the local Child Care Centre attending NAIDOC activities or working with the local Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community to gain the appropriate information on the history of where they live.
Instead of adopt a cop, maybe primary or Child Care Centre's could adopt an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander Elder.
Imagine instead of 78% of current Child Care Centre staff in Brisbane Metropolitan and Redlands region having no Cross Cultural Awareness Training, maybe as little as 5 - 10% would be more acceptable.
Imagine if it was commonplace for a young indigenous or Australian South Sea Islander person to want and get a career in child care.

All this is very possible. It just takes a united effort.

A united effort to teach our culture to children in the very early learning years. To make Child Care Centre's a more familiar and appropriate place to send our children.
A place where our culture is respected and embraced.

We have to start saying very loudly.

“We are the first peoples of this land and we don't want to miss this boat anymore”.



11 REFERENCES

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