

**Submission
No 62**

SUPPORT FOR NEW PARENTS AND BABIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre
Name: Mr Wayne Griffiths
Position: Centre Manager
Date Received: 18 December 2017



17 June 2016

Committee on Community Services
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

RE: Support for new parents and babies in New South Wales

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre are pleased to provide the following submission to the Committee on Community Services inquiry into and report on support for new parents and babies in New South Wales.

Winanga-li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Incorporated is a not-for-profit, self-managed, Aboriginal community organisation that delivers or supports a range of services for Aboriginal and other vulnerable, disadvantaged members of the communities throughout the New England North West region.

Our submission focusses on the services available in the areas where we provide services to children, families and communities. This is reflective of the experience of our staff and their engagement with service users during the provision of programs, groups and services that we deliver.

We trust that our contribution to the inquiry will provide further insight to the difficulties faced by Aboriginal families and their communities through the eyes of our dedicated team.

We look forward to continuing to support our communities and achieve continued positive outcomes new parents and babies in our region.

Yours sincerely

Wayne Griffiths
Centre Manager

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre [ACFC] is a physically and culturally inclusive, accessible and safe place for our Kamilaroi children and their families to belong, connect, grow and learn. It is a focal point for our people and therefore provides an opportunity to reflect and strengthen our Aboriginal identity within the wider Gunnedah community.

The centre has been established under the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership as part of the Australian government's commitment to closing the gap on disadvantaged within our Indigenous communities and to providing a better future for Indigenous children.

Our programs and services demonstrate:

- A holistic, integrated, collaborative approach to meeting the needs of our community and must take into account the physical, cultural, emotional and social wellbeing, and individual capacity of each of our service users
- The need to work together with government, non-government and private organisations within the health, education, justice, family support and early learning and care sectors – both mainstream and Indigenous, to facilitate improved outcomes for our community and ensure local services and programs are accessible, welcoming and culturally sensitive for our Indigenous community

This is evident in the services we currently provide to over 800 families and 1000 children who accessed services at or through the Centre since we have opened.

We believe that quality outcomes are best achieved when services and programs are provided in the context of the broader kinship family and in consultation with and by local community members.

Vision, Purpose and Objectives

Vision

The Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre will be a place of belonging for all children, families and the local community. By creating long-term opportunities for our children and their families we will build:

- strong children
- strong families, and a
- strong community

Values

Cultural Sensitivity – we recognise wherever possible and practicable compliance with Indigenous protocols, cultural practice and ceremony is integral in helping us to achieve successful outcomes.

Equity and Inclusion – we recognise, respect and accept difference in people. We embrace and value diversity of cultures, backgrounds, disabilities and family structures.

Respect and Courtesy – we uphold the value and dignity of all people.

Justice and Fairness – We act with integrity and honesty.

Excellence in Service Delivery – we strive to pursue excellence in our work.

Accountability and Transparency – we accept responsibility for our actions and strive to be open in all our communication, transactions and operations.

Privacy and Confidentiality – We are committed to respecting and maintaining the privacy of personal information and confidentiality as it relates to the community, service users and each other.

Responsiveness – Wherever possible and appropriate we will seek the views of our service users, attempt to address their needs and take action based on them where appropriate. If a service user is not satisfied with any aspect of our service, programs or initiatives, we encourage them to tell us so we can continue to improve.

Empowerment – we use a strength based, person-centred approach in our service provision, and support our service users to make choices for their future.

Advocacy – we will always endeavour to advocate on behalf of our children and families and the Indigenous community where appropriate and possible. Our advocacy will ensure that Indigenous views and concerns are heard and acknowledged.

Purpose

Winanga-Li exists to reduce disadvantage and to have a positive impact on the communities in which we operate, by being a dynamic and innovative organisation that:

- Champions the rights of children and families
- Protects children at risk
- Guides families as they build strength, skills and confidence to create a more positive future for themselves
- Advocates inclusion and social justice for all children, young people and adults with a disability

Winanga-Li advocates for local Aboriginal and vulnerable children and families to:

- Improve access to services that are culturally safe and appropriate (offering tailored and flexible support)
- Break the cycle of intergenerational trauma
- Maintain the family and prevent the removal of children

Objectives

We are committed to:

- Providing a welcoming, safe and culturally sensitive service environment
- Treating you with dignity, integrity, fairness and without discrimination
- Respecting your rights and your cultural heritage
- Being accountable – that is, we will be open and transparent in the way we work with you
- Supporting you to make informed choices and to make your own decisions
- Facilitating access to all support services and resources that may meet your needs
- Protecting your privacy when collecting, using and managing your personal information
- Listening to your views on how we can improve our service to better meet your needs and the needs of the community.

Our Services

Our centre operates under an integrated, collaborative service delivery model. This model aims to:

- simplify access by our families and their children to a range of appropriate and responsive support service
- improve family engagement
- streamline service delivery and, where required:
 - facilitate earlier diagnosis of our children's health and development problems and
 - prevent family issues escalating to crisis levels wherever possible.

The centre brings together a range of complementary community service providers and resources for children from birth to eight years of age and their families including, but not limited to:

- early learning and care services
- family support services
- family and children's health services
- early childhood intervention services
- disability services
- crisis support services
- parent and carer groups and/or programs
- connecting to culture programs.

Early Learning and Care

Winanga-Li Early Learning and Care Service is Licenced for 35 place long day care service for children aged from birth to 6 years of age. The service operates 50 weeks of the year, Monday to Friday from 7.00am – 6.00pm.

The service provides an environment where:

- children can:
 - have the best possible start in life
 - follow their own interests, become enthusiastic and confident learners and achieve their potential
 - develop a strong sense of identity and well being
- the program:
 - is inclusive, positive, responsive, flexible, nurturing and caring
 - is committed to providing high quality, child centered, play based care that meets each individual child's needs and interests
 - is underpinned by the National Quality Framework which includes the Children [Education and Care Services] National Law and Regulations [NSW], the National Quality Standard [NQS] and the Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF]
- children and their families can feel safe, to belong, to connect, and to grow and learn together
- collaborative, respectful partnerships with families are fostered and where open communication and family involvement is encouraged
- families can see how important they are to their children's lives and learning
- our educators and teachers are valued.

Family Support

Winanga-Li ACFC Family Support Program is primarily responsible for working with Aboriginal and other vulnerable, disadvantaged families, children, young people and other community members to:

- provide culturally sensitive, practical support that:
- is tailored to meet their needs
- promotes social and emotional wellbeing; and
- helps to build long term lifestyle change
- increase their awareness of support services, recreational and/or social groups, and other relevant resources available in the wider community
- Building the capacity of community groups and/or service providers and other support organisations to become more culturally competent and accessible for Aboriginal and other vulnerable, disadvantaged families, children, young people and other community members.

Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Service - ACYFS

The Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy (ACYFS) (is part of NSW Government funded programs that provided services to children and Families. As outlined in the program guidelines

"The ACYFS is a prevention and early intervention strategy that aims to provide Aboriginal families and children with the best start in life".

The Winanga-Li program is specifically tasked to focus on Community Capacity Building of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander fathers and grandfathers caring for children under 5 years of age and their communities.

The area includes Narrabri, Gunnedah, Boggabri, Wee Waa, Pilliga, Gwabegar, Walhallow & Caroon.

Ability Links

The Ability Links Program is an initiative of the NSW government's Department of Family and Community Services, Aging, Disability and Home Care. The Ability Links Program is a support service that has been established to link people with a disability to their local community. Ability Links employees 'Linkers' provide short term service to assist people with a disability, their families and carers to achieve their goals and to access support and services in their local community.

The program is aimed at:

- people aged 9-64 years with a disability who are not accessing the traditional disability service system
- carers and family of people with disability
- Communities and mainstream services looking for strategies to become more welcoming and inclusive.

Winanga-Li has 5 Linkers and provides support to Service Users in Gunnedah, Narrabri, Moree, and Armidale.

Early Links

Early Links is an extension of the Ability Links program providing the same type of support to children from 0-8 years and their carers and families.

Supported Playgroups

Winanga-Li ACFC received funding to operate supported Playgroups in Gunnedah, Narrabri, and Wee Waa. The aim of the program is to create a warm, engaging environment for parents and carers to bring their babies and connect with other parents/carers in their area to share experiences and to make connections with the wider community. This is also a great avenue to provide early childhood support and connect the parents with service providers in the community

Transition to School

Winanga-Li ACFC received a grant under the Children and Schooling Program to establish a Transition to School Program in five regional areas. Gunnedah, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Moree, Quirindi. The following is the description of the program and the required deliverables as outlined in the Grant Contract 2015.

The program area included Gunnedah, Narrabri, Quirindi, Moree and Wee Waa. We engage with all Early Childhood and Care service providers in the specified regions, to target Indigenous children aged between 4 and 5 years and their families, and implement a range of culturally appropriate transition to school programs. The project will support the education, wellbeing and care of Indigenous children during the transitional period into primary school

1. The adequacy of current services and structures for new parents, especially those who need extra support to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their babies.

New parents and babies in our region have a number of issues when accessing services. They include but are not limited to the following:

- Current services are not adequate to meet the needs of expecting new parents. In some areas there has not been an Aboriginal community nurse for up to 12 months.
- Current services are not adequate to meet the needs of mothers in crisis and new parents with social, emotional, mental health and addiction issues.
- Many young, first time parents struggle to manage as they lack life skills to manage the demands of parenting and supporting a family. This can also be exacerbated by a lack of family and community support for young mums (15-25 years old).
- There is no central information booklet or website/app available to young mums about the programs provided by various service providers in the region. Individual organisations will only provide information about their own programs and not share information about another organisation who may provide a more suitable program.
- Pre-natal health clinics only provide minimal health checks and do not offer support or referrals to new parents who may benefit from additional pre-natal support. Some young expecting parents would benefit from referrals to services to additional support programs like quit smoking and mental health.
- Services located in major regional centres (eg. Tamworth & Armidale) are not available in smaller towns. Distance and lack of access to transport makes these services out of reach of most new parents in our region.
- Cultural sensitives are not considered when providing services in remote communities. Time is not invested in understanding the process to provide service in these areas.

2. Changes to current services and structures that could improve physical health, mental health and child protection outcomes.

- Soft entry programs need to be established to build safe and trusting relationships with the community.
- Pre-natal health services to address maternal health issues beyond minimum standards of health care. Provide referrals to local Providers and NGO services to assist with the additional needs of the expecting and new parents.
- Changes to program funding to include shared outcomes and encourage referrals to organisations who can provide additional services beyond their scope. This should be seen as a great opportunity for NGO's share in the positive outcomes for parents and babies.
- Transparent referral and support process that requires accountability from all service providers engaged in delivery of programs. This should include the requirement to provide feedback to referring agency or service.
- Minimum services need to be provided in ALL outreach communities – Community Childhood Nurse etc, ensuring that providers are known to the community to achieve the best outcomes.
- Aboriginal Maternal Infant Health Service programs should be extended beyond the current 6 week post-natal check. When a baby is 6 weeks old a parent usually has more questions about their baby and require more support especially with social, emotional and mental health concerns.
- Change or adapt Playgroup programs to a Play & Stay. These sessions are designed as a soft entry approach to engage a large cross-section of the community to come together to have a yarn and

raise concerns and issues with access to services, support them with referrals and program opportunities in their area.

- NGO's who are funded to provide a program or service in a remote community should be run by a local person who is known and trusted. This is especially important when working in Aboriginal communities.
- Introduce programs to provide life and parenting skills. These could include Triple P type groups, health and hygiene talks, nutrition and cooking classes, family budgeting support, and mental health and well-being programs. These types of programs should be mandatory for new parents who are identified as being 'at risk', with additional programs to include home visits and support.

3. Specific areas of disadvantage or challenge in relation to health outcomes for babies.

Many Aboriginal women come from families that have struggled with generations of poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and family dislocation. There are no resources to help them with the challenging and difficult work of raising children and when they seek out help, then they are at risk of a ROSH report being into FACs and the loss of their child weighs heavily on this decision.

There needs to be a therapeutic space where Aboriginal women and teenagers have the opportunity to talk about and understand what has happened in their lives, to be understood and to begin to develop pride and confidence in themselves as women and as mothers. By focusing on and actively supporting the vital healthy links between mother and child, we aim to reduce the impact of intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal families.

- Remote locations / isolation – lack of access to services. If we need extra support for our babies the only outcome is to go to be travel to a major centre because we do not have the facilities or services available in our area.
- Costs associated with accessing services – accommodation, meals, transport. In regional communities the only way to access urgent medical treatment is by ambulance transfer. Families often refuse treatment due to the cost of ambulance service.
- Limited programs funded to address outcomes for babies especially those being born into to high risk families.
- Early intervention – young parents do not understand how trauma can affect them and their babies. Living in low socio-economic environments where healthy food may not available, parental mental health difficulties, drug or alcohol dependency can lead to difficulties and trauma for all the family
- No support for pre-natal diagnosed health issues in regional areas.
- Restricted access to housing and services especially for babies with needs.
- Long distance to access services for babies with additional needs. Travel to Armidale or Newcastle to access a Paediatrician.
- Lack of inter-generational knowledge and support to new parents.

4. Models of support provided in other jurisdictions to support new parents and promote the health of babies

- Kari programs - Brighter Futures, Advice and Referral, Financial Counselling and Parenting Programs
- Home visits with local aboriginal liaison with midwife. Visits from 20 weeks until baby is six weeks. Currently provided in Quirindi (Liverpool Plains) run by HNEAH
- AMIHS (Aboriginal Maternal Infant Health Service) is for Aboriginal families to provide regular antenatal Health checks, bookings into Hospitals, Referral support, health promotion and community development activities and Information on infant feeding and nutrition.

- We need these programs to go from the time they are pregnant up until when bub is 12 months old not until 6 weeks old.
- Some more programs could be the “well mum well bubs” which focuses on Understanding the transition to parenthood, deals with mother’s guilt and creates awareness around how family relationships change when baby arrives. “Mater Mothers” is about education programs to prepare you for pregnancy, birth and early parenthood with confidence. They also offer fathers to be and grandparent’s classes as well.
- Gunawirra (YAMP Program) - YAMP – Young Aboriginal Mums program - Many Aboriginal women come from families that have struggled with generations of poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and family dislocation. They have few resources to call on in helping them with the challenging and difficult work of raising children. The Project engages with, supports and holds the mothers through the first five years of their child’s life. We provide a therapeutic space where Aboriginal women and teenagers have the opportunity to talk about and understand what has happened in their lives, to be understood and to begin to develop pride and confidence in themselves as women and as mothers. By focusing on and actively supporting the vital healthy links between mother and child, we aim to reduce the impact of intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal families. (I think that this is a program that we can change and develop within our service because we have access to these parents through many programs)
- Tree Of Life 4 Week Program - The “Tree of Life” is an exercise based on the idea of using the tree as a metaphor to tell stories about one’s life. Participants are invited to think of a tree, its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc, and imagine that each part of the Tree represents something about their life (Ncube, 2006). The basic idea about the Tree of Life is outlined here, while the whole workshop will be described later on. Workshop participants are invited to draw a tree with attention paid to the following themes:

Roots: the roots of the tree are a prompt for participants to think about and write on their tree where they come from (village, town, country), their family history (origins, family name, ancestry, extended family), names of people who have taught them the most in life, their favourite place at home, a treasured song or dance.

Ground: the ground is the place for participants to write where they live now and activities they are engaged with in their daily life.

Trunk: the trunk of the tree is an opportunity for participants to write their skills and abilities (i.e. skills of caring, loving, kindness) and what they are good at.

Branches: the branches of the tree are where participants write their hopes, dreams and wishes for the directions of their life.

Leaves: the leaves of the tree represent significant people in their lives, who may be alive or may have passed on.

Fruits: the fruits of the tree represent gifts participants have been given, not necessarily material gifts; gifts of being cared for, of being loved, acts of kindness.

5. Opportunities for new and emerging technology to enhance support for new parents and babies.

- Central information booklet or website/app available to young mums about the programs provided by various service providers in the region.
- Using apps to support parent engagement in pregnancy and developmental milestones
- Most parents have smart phones so identify appropriate apps to support parenting skills
- Facebook groups to support parents
- First aid apps
- Deadly tots

- New blue book is now a app

6. Any other related matters

Many Aboriginal women come from families that have struggles with substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and family dislocation. They have limited resources to call on to help them with the challenging and difficult work of raising a baby.

We need to change the way the current services engage in our communities. It is vital to create a safe, nurturing and trusting relationship to meet the individual needs of our regional and remote communities. Programs need to have flexibility in the way they deliver the programs and move away from a 'One size fits all' approach and work with the local community to understand how to best deliver services and programs to meet the needs of their community and achieve the greatest outcomes for families and communities.

Programs

New parents and babies program for the Aboriginal community should be a program that supports them for the first 5 years of the child's life to provide opportunity, understanding and begin to develop pride and confidence in them as parents.