

## **INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE**

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## **New South Wales Parliament Standing Committee on Social Issues**

### **Inquiry into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in New South Wales**

30 November 2007

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Barnardos Australia wishes to comment on two aspects (B and E) of the Committee's terms of reference. Our contribution is drawn from our experience as a welfare agency which provides family support to families with children 0–18 years of age. Our services are located across rural and urban areas in Orana Far West, Redfern-Waterloo, South Coast, Eden-Monaro, South East Sydney, Auburn, Penrith and Canterbury-Belmore. The numbers of Aboriginal families we service is outlined in Appendix 1. Please note that Barnardos was not involved with policies related to the Stolen Generation.

#### **Terms of reference**

##### **B vi) Other infrastructure—The importance of addressing Aboriginal child welfare**

We note that the terms of reference of this Inquiry do not specifically include Aboriginal child abuse and neglect, however, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect are central to issues of consideration of life expectancy. Children in this State die from fatal assaults even when they are well known to welfare authorities (New South Wales Government 2005). Neglect also kills and incapacitates children (Caton 1999). Lesser forms of abuse and neglect can have life-long consequences leading to behaviour that can result in earlier death than would be expected. Abuse and neglect have life-long consequences for communities leading to the inability to promote resilience in individuals, families and communities (Betchman et al 1991, Browne & Winkelman 2007).

We believe that it is essential for the success of this Inquiry that the New South Wales Government implement, with appropriate new funding, the recommendations of the “Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future” report (New South Wales Government Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce 2006). Barnardos believes that the infrastructure suggested by the Breaking the Silence report is essential to addressing indigenous disadvantage and that such work is unlikely to proceed within existing departmental budgets.

We wish to draw the Committee’s attention to the ongoing numbers of Aboriginal children entering the foster care system because of abuse and neglect, which is currently at six times the rate of other children in Australia (CAFWAA 2007). Although the Aboriginal Placement Principle is now enshrined in legislation, it appears to be poorly adhered to in New South Wales child welfare. We note research in Queensland which indicates that there are more children than at the height of the Stolen Generation entering white placements (Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Partnership 2007).

Barnardos believes that central issues in examining life expectancy for Aboriginal people in this State is the provision of:

1. Significant enhancement for community infrastructure such as housing, health facilities, education facilities including education for below 5s, family support services and recreation facilities and that these services be provided with the involvement and support of Aboriginal people.
2. Greater support for kinship carers—currently Aboriginal families who take on the care of children from their families or communities do not receive adequate funding, respite care

or case work support. There is currently limited Government support for specialised services for kinship care in this State.

3. Funding at the same or greater level to that of mainstream agencies, and, service development support to Aboriginal Out of Home Care agencies. We are aware that Aboriginal Out of Home Care services receive a lower level of unit costing than non-Aboriginal agencies.
4. Greater provision of Aboriginal family support, including childcare. Barnardos' experience is that family support can be delivered from a non-Aboriginal agency prepared to train and incorporate Aboriginal staff. Ideally the majority of these services should be delivered by Aboriginal agencies, but mainstream agencies also have a vital role to play.

**E) Strengthening cultural resilience focusing on cultural identity, economic development and self determination**

Barnardos has attempted to address the issue of our services developing resilience in our Aboriginal staff and clients and we would like to make a suggestion on this based on our experience.

In 2005 Barnardos radically altered its approach to working for Aboriginal children. We have utilised five strategies:

1. **Staff quotas—10%**—Now 26 staff members with 4 managers. Barnardos attempts to improve welfare practice with indigenous children and management, in consultation with all employees. We developed a preferential recruitment in all staff positions for

Aboriginal staff. We quickly met our 10% objective, taking two of the three years allocated to do so. This system has meant that we have had to address issues of supporting staff and changing our own internal “culture”.

Barnardos has attempted to use the Federal Government traineeship system to develop skills amongst new Aboriginal workers. We are currently learning how best to incorporate this into our welfare centres.

2. **Formalising learning from and supporting indigenous workers**—Barnardos has formed a group of indigenous workers that meets twice a year. Its role is working on support strategies for individual workers and identifying ways in which Barnardos can better serve Aboriginal families. Barnardos Indigenous Group (BIG) is open to all indigenous members of staff who are funded by us to attend. An important issue is the adequate support of this group to function and it receives senior manager support.
3. **Developing policy to retain Aboriginal workers**—For Barnardos this has, so far, meant changes in our bereavement leave and other policies. It proved particularly important to allow workers to fulfil their cultural responsibilities around the death of a community member. Barnardos modelled this policy on experience in New Zealand.
4. **Partnerships with Aboriginal agencies**—Barnardos has attempted to develop working partnerships where we can support indigenous agencies. This has led to Aboriginal agencies taking the lead on tenders for Government contracts but using our agency experience to support the tender. Barnardos has also given Aboriginal agencies our case management systems, Looking After Children and its electronic version LACES, and

provided customised support. These are systems used by Barnardos to improve the quality of work with children. Aboriginal agencies have taken up this opportunity.

5. **Research and development with Aboriginal agencies**—Barnardos has entered into a partnership with the National Secretariat for Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to further research and develop case management systems to make them more culturally appropriate.

These measures are only a small beginning however, we believe that they demonstrate some important success and we are sure other non-government agencies would have other valuable experience to contribute. We believe that the New South Wales Government should adopt the Looking after Children (LAC) case management system. The Department of Community Services is currently examining the use of LAC and its application to Aboriginal children and they will support indigenous agencies to adopt this system.

**Further information:**

For terms of reference D. Please note the CAFWAA submission on “Little Children are Sacred” report. Should you want us to appear we would invite Members to be addressed by the Barnardos Indigenous Group (BIG) to speak about the work of this group inside Barnardos.

Betchman J, Zucher K, Hood J, Costa GD, Akman D. 1991. A review of the short-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 15: 537-56

Browne C, Winkelman C. 2007. The effects of childhood trauma on later psychological adjustment. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22

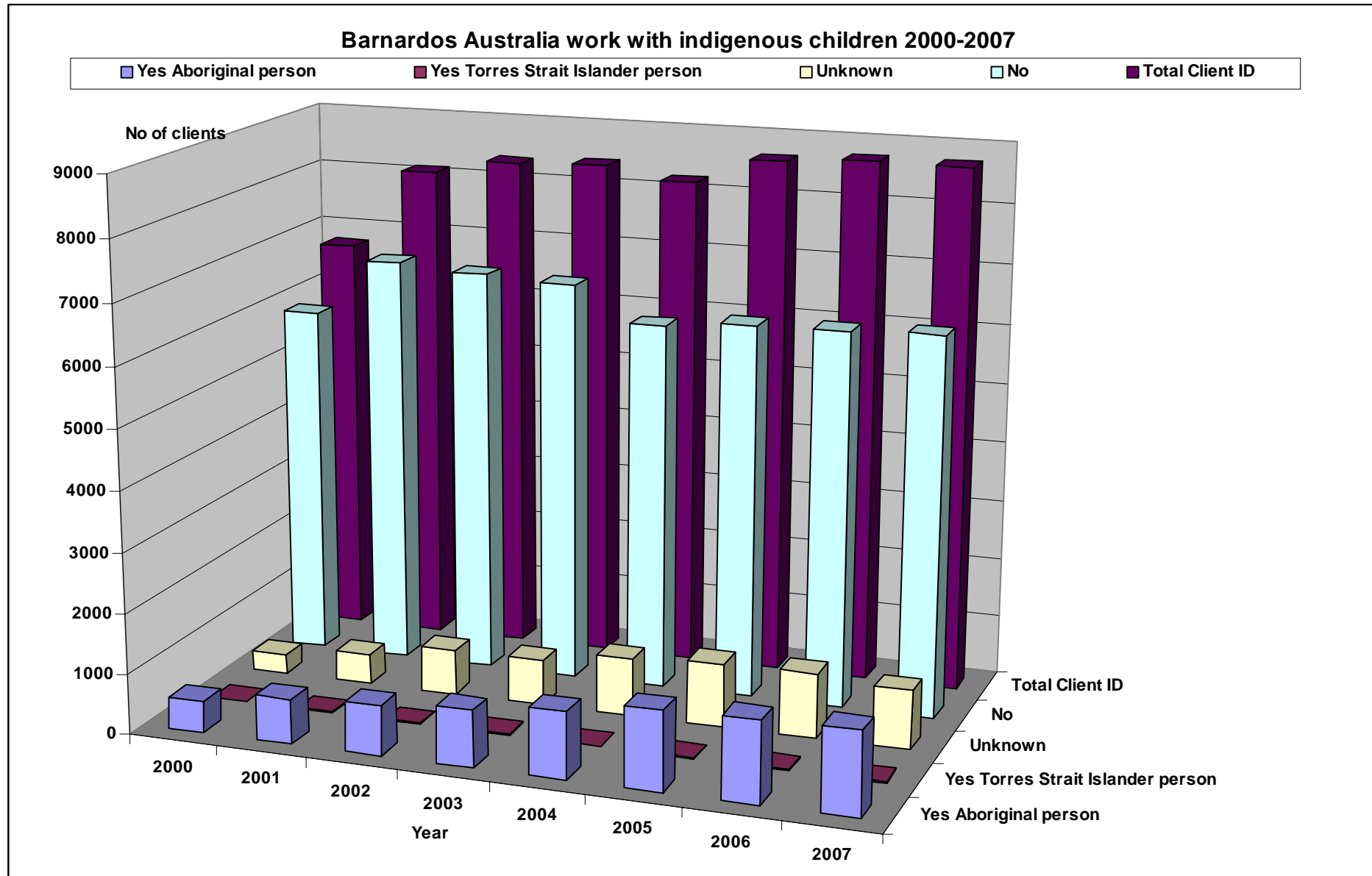
CAFWAA. 2007. *Call to Action For Australian Children*, Sydney

Caton A. 1999. Paying attention to neglect. *Social Work Now* 13: 11-8

New South Wales Government. (2005) *Child Death Review*, [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au), 17th May: 2007

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Partnership. 2007. *Pathway to achieving adherence to the Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in Queensland*, Brisbane

## Appendix 1





| <b>Year</b> | <b>Yes<br/>Aboriginal<br/>person</b> | <b>Yes Torres<br/>Strait Islander<br/>person</b> | <b>Unknown</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>Total Client ID</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 2000        | 524                                  | 17   | 323            | 5874      | 6738                   |
| 2001        | 741                                  | 16   | 504            | 6842      | 8103                   |
| 2002        | 822                                  | 15   | 756            | 6755      | 8348                   |
| 2003        | 937                                  | 16   | 756            | 6692      | 8401                   |
| 2004        | 1113                                 | 17   | 952            | 6127      | 8209                   |
| 2005        | 1325                                 | 19   | 1058           | 6244      | 8646                   |
| 2006        | 1360                                 | 27   | 1074           | 6274      | 8735                   |
| 2007        | 1391                                 | 24   | 981            | 6331      | 8727                   |