

MEDIA RELEASE

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Breaking the Cycle of Child Abuse

Real Responsibility for the Safety of Indigenous and all Australian Children

Reacting to horrific cases of child abuse that have already occurred in Indigenous communities alone can not, and will not, break the cycle of child abuse.

Adam Blakester, Executive Officer of Australia's lead national child abuse prevention agency, NAPCAN Foundation, says "The appropriate and urgent response required today needs to address the underlying root causes of child abuse, or else the cycle of abuse will only continue. This would form the basis of a National Child Abuse Prevention Strategy, targeting all Australian children."

Indigenous children are over represented in child abuse and neglect statistics¹. Recognised causes include: the legacy of past policies of the forced removal of children from their families; intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture; poor socioeconomic status; and cultural differences in child-rearing practices.²

"We must also ensure the safety, justice and healing for victims and perpetrators of the abuse taking place right now" says Blakester. "The upcoming Australian Government Child Protection Conference provides an ideal opportunity to create a National Strategy as well as meaningful immediate action."

Child abuse is Australia's most serious social problem – rates have increased across the entire population, and the costs and consequences are life lasting and inter generational. Every indicator shows that child abuse and neglect has worsened every year for six years – child abuse notifications; substantiated abuse cases; children on care and protection orders; and the number of children in out-of-home care.¹

NAPCAN believes that a community development approach should be an intrinsic part of the Prevention Strategy – building partnerships between local and national leadership, networks and services. This approach enables solutions to be designed that build on what is already working, local strengths, assets, culture and knowledge.

It is this web of local people and services that ensures the wellbeing and safety of children and young people.

Tex Skuthorpe, a Noonghaburra man who has worked with NAPCAN for many years talks about Noonghaburra culture³, capturing a vision for working with Indigenous communities:

In fact, in traditional communities children were never afraid to be wrong because they knew they could trust their parents, teachers and the community to keep them safe. Under traditional law, the highest disrespect was brought upon a community, if a child was hurt. As such, children knew that their traditional law would protect them.

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¹ Child Protection Australia 2004-05 Report, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, January 2006

² Bringing Them Home (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families), Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997

³ Children are Sacred, Aboriginal Educational Booklet, www.napcan.org.au