



AbSec

Annual Report

2019 | 2020

Acknowledgement

AbSec would like to acknowledge that our work is conducted on the traditional lands of the Aboriginal Nations of New South Wales.

Our head office is on the land of the Gadigal people, who like other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, never ceded sovereignty.

We pay our respects to Elders both past and present, and to those emerging leaders who will guide us into the future.

We also acknowledge members of the Stolen Generations whose connection to their Country was interrupted, and whose search for belonging and identity has been long and difficult.

We stand by them in their struggle.

We acknowledge the carers of Aboriginal children and young people, who provide a vital role in caring for our kids, ensuring that they remain connected to their culture.

We acknowledge our children and young people – they are our future.

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AbSec (ABN 98 639 482 769) 21 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone: (02) 9559 5299 | E-mail: admin@absec.org.au | Website: www.absec.org.au

Facebook: [@AbSecNSW](https://www.facebook.com/AbSecNSW) | Twitter: [@AbSecNSW](https://twitter.com/AbSecNSW)

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A Message from our Chairperson



AbSec has now established itself as a respected voice in the Aboriginal child and family sector in NSW. In a year as tough as it was, it is heartening to know that there is a peak organisation with such a clear focus on enabling self-determination for our people with community-led solutions to help our children and families thrive. This annual report highlights the many achievements of AbSec over 2019/20 and the impactful work this organisation has done.

As the Chairperson of AbSec, I am proud of the work this organisation has done over the past 12 months in fighting for our communities. This was the first year of implementing our new strategic plan for 2019-2022, and the core of this plan remains supporting our children and families and their best interests. We have also applied a renewed focus on providing support for the continual learning and growth of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and advancing Aboriginal workforce development to ensure there is a strong and capable workforce ready and equipped to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

In building on the strategic plan, AbSec has become a leading voice after our Best Care for Kids is Community campaign in 2018/19. Our voice was extended to the national stage after we became a member of the Coalition of Peaks, the representative body comprising of fifty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations that have come together to negotiate a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap with Australian Governments. Advocacy will always be a key focus as our communities' voices must be heard.

There have been considerable challenges such as the bushfires that spread throughout the state, including in Coffs Harbour during our biennial NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference, a once-in-a-century global pandemic and a reduction in AbSec's funding. It is a testament to the organisational culture that none of these have allowed us to lose focus of our goals.

Aboriginal children remain severely overrepresented in the child protection system making up 40% of those in out-of-home care despite only being 5% of children in the state, 10 times more likely to be taken from their families than non-Aboriginal children. It is these shocking statistics that drive much of the work that we do, with the need for whole-of-system reform in the child protection system and the implementation of the Family is Culture recommendations never having been more urgent. The disproportionate removal of our kids from culture, community and kin will be front of mind as we continue to work towards better outcomes for our children over the next year.

I must acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my fellow board members here at AbSec and our incredible staff that have driven this organisation through a year of unprecedented challenges with an unwavering commitment to our children, families and communities. It is the passion of everyone at this organisation that drives the work we do, and I strongly believe it will continue long into the future. Despite the recent challenges, I do believe that AbSec will hit the ground running next year, fighting for the change our kids deserve.

Ms Dana Clarke

CHAIRPERSON

A Year of Challenges

This year was a year like no other. A number of crises hit the people of NSW, including unprecedented bushfires, a once-in-a-century global pandemic and our first recession in three decades. Of course, many of these disproportionately impacted Aboriginal communities, from those dealing with the loss of Country from the bushfires, to our Elders in isolation due to the pandemic and our families living with increased economic stress.

AbSec was not immune to these challenges, and we also suffered setbacks predominantly in the form of a reduction in our funding. These forced us as an organisation to make some tough decisions and prioritise how we could remain best servicing the communities we represent. With this said, we have undergone a major restructure of our organisation and expect to move forward in a better position to answer the calls of, and provide a voice for, our communities.

The Black Lives Matter movement thrust racial injustice into the spotlight after shockingly visual revelations of police brutality in the United States started major protests around the world. Here in Australia, our countries own record on racial injustice was brought into focus, notably with Aboriginal people holding the regrettable record of being the most incarcerated people on a per capita basis in the world as well as our horrible history of black deaths in custody.

Of course, it is not lost on AbSec that the start children have in life is a major determinant in their life outcomes. The importance of ensuring that Aboriginal children grow up connected to culture, kin and community is crucial for not only avoiding the criminal justice system but also having every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing.

The impact that the child protection system is having impeding this for Aboriginal kids is significant and we believe that Australia is in the midst of an

escalating national crisis. This is one of continuing and growing removals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families as the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is set to double by 2029.

For too long reviews have been conducted with reports gathering dust and recommendations failing to be implemented. As the peak organisation in NSW for Aboriginal children and families, we must hold governments to account for not implementing the reforms that improve the lives of our children, as recommended by our communities, academics and those working within the sector.

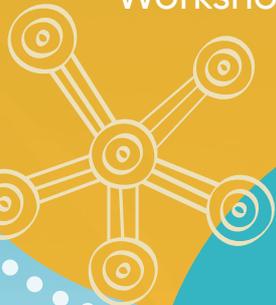
We are always looking at how we can better serve our children, families and communities. Moving forward and into the next year, we hope to finalise our new leadership team, including the position of Chief Executive Officer and with the support of AbSec's Board of Directors, progress this organisation into the best position possible to support our sector and our community.

Many do not want to return to the ways of the world before 2020 and increasingly we have heard the calls to use the rebuilding opportunity to build a better future. Whether this means implementing the reforms needed to protect our children with a NSW Aboriginal Children's Commissioner, proportionate and adequate investment in early intervention services, sufficient legislative protections for Aboriginal children or simply ensuring that our sector is properly resourced and funded to deliver our vital services for Aboriginal families and communities, we know what needs to be done.

Although we recognise that 2020 was for most an extremely tough year, AbSec, as an organisation, is committed to moving into the new year renewed, with a dedicated and passionate team making up a dynamic, focussed and outcomes-driven peak body.

AbSec 2019/2020 Highlights & Achievements

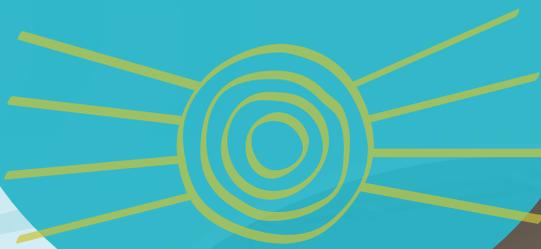
448 organisations
attended the
Cultural Connections
Workshops



208 people
supported through
the Aboriginal Carer
Support Service



Almost **400**
delegates attended
AbSec's Aboriginal Child
and Family Conference



Engaged **138** stakeholders
across **11** consultation locations
for the *What We Heard* reports,
informing the Aboriginal
Outcomes Framework and
Permanency Framework





Provided support for **15** Aboriginal initiatives, sporting teams and community cultural events across NSW

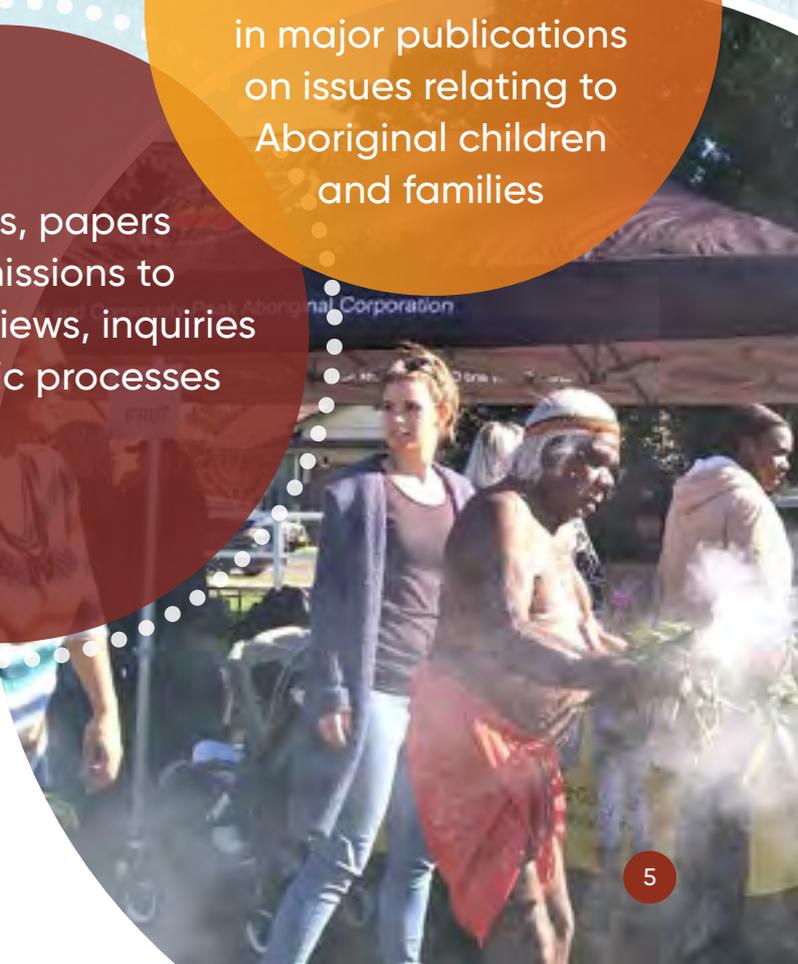
10 Aboriginal community-controlled organisations assisted with COVID-19 grants thanks to our philanthropic partners



CEO or Chairperson cited in **16** articles in major publications on issues relating to Aboriginal children and families

21 reports, papers and submissions to significant reviews, inquiries and strategic processes

Over **100** students enrolled at the Learning and Development Centre



Who We Are

AbSec (NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation) is the peak body representing Aboriginal children, families, communities and organisations across NSW. We provide policy advice and strategic initiatives to influence change and deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities across the state. AbSec was established in 1999 through a need to provide a voice for our children and families and bring together Aboriginal child and family organisations on a monthly basis to form a network of agencies. This group of agencies formed the Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Care State Secretariat committee.

Now, AbSec is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation representing Aboriginal child and family support services across the state, with our constitution making us an Aboriginal Corporation.

Our work aims to shape the Aboriginal sector into the future and deliver greater self-determination for our communities. We are committed to advocating not just on behalf of communities, but also carers of Aboriginal children and service providers that work in the sector, tying our work into an overall goal of building a holistic child protection system. The system must be one where Aboriginal children grow up safe, with a strong cultural identity and with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing.

Our Board of Governance

The AbSec Board determines our strategic direction, provides oversight across major objectives and ensures the good governance of the organisation. Our Board consists of representatives from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, many of whom are the Chief Executive Officers, with each organisation being a member of AbSec. Each member of the Board brings with them a wealth of knowledge and experience from the Aboriginal child and family sector and dedicates their time to assisting our staff and improving outcomes for Aboriginal children

in NSW. The Board aims to convene on a bi-monthly basis and eight face-to-face meetings were held during the 2019/2020 financial year.

Board members

Dana Clarke

Dana Clarke is a proud Biripi and Worimi woman. Dana has been an active member on the Board since 2005 and holds the position of Chairperson of AbSec.

Dana has contributed to our communities through a range of roles in Aboriginal health, child protection, sexual assault and mental health for over 25 years. Currently, Dana is the Chief Executive Officer of Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation. Burrun Dalai delivers early intervention, family preservation and out-of-home care services across the Nambucca, Macleay, Hastings and Manning Valleys as well as the Tamworth and Armidale Regions.

Dana's work reflects her deeply held belief that our kids and families are our future. Dana is committed to ensuring our communities are best supported to guarantee that our kids remain with their families, rich in their culture and belonging. To Dana, "family is everything; it is our past and our future".

Petrice Manton

Petrice Manton is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Gamipingal clan of the Worimi Nation. Petrice is the Deputy Chairperson at AbSec and is the current Chief Executive Officer of Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation in Newcastle.

Petrice is passionate about advocating for Aboriginal families and making sure our people get a fair go. Petrice is committed to establishing culturally embedded, holistic Aboriginal services to support Aboriginal children and families to flourish, delivered by Aboriginal organisations that are accountable to our communities.

Garry Matthews

Garry Matthews is a proud Gadigal man of the Eora Nation. Garry is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the AbCare, located in Coffs Harbour. Garry is currently AbSec's longest-serving Board Member, having been a founding member of AbSec in 1999/2000. In addition to this, Garry has served in a range of leadership positions in government and non-government organisations.

Garry stepped into the role of Treasurer of the Board in March 2019. He strives for equity of Aboriginal children, families and communities and wants to continue to be a voice for Aboriginal children and young people.

Tangerene Ingram

Tangerene Ingram is a proud Wiradjuri woman and has connections to Tumut and Brungle. Tangerene joined the AbSec board in 2016.

Tangerene is the Chief Executive Officer of Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation (RivMed) in Wagga Wagga. She previously managed the Family Services Unit and the Family Health Team at RivMed and has also coordinated the Wanggaay Koori Out-of-Home Care Services at Anglicare.

Tina McGhie

Tina McGhie is a proud Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal woman born and raised on Dharawal Country. Tina has been an active member of AbSec's board since 2008 and is currently a Director Consultant at Curijo Pty Ltd. Tina is dedicated to supporting Aboriginal children to remain safely at home with their family, connected to community and culture.

Wendy Knight

Wendy, a proud Barkindgi woman, is a strong advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people and is committed to promoting an Indigenous perspective on various issues that affect Aboriginal children and families. Wendy is an accomplished senior community services executive, currently serving as the Chief Executive Officer of Ngunya Jarjum. She has over 15 years of experience working on complex socioeconomic issues such as child protection, out-of-home care and service sector contract management in both government and non-government roles.

William Henry

William Henry is a Yuin man from the South Coast of NSW and the Chief Executive Officer of Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation. He has worked in the Aboriginal service sector for over 15 years in areas ranging from health and ageing to disability and governance. William was previously employed as an Aboriginal Community Development Officer with the Dental Health Service of Victoria and Chief Executive Officer of Illaroo Co-operative Aboriginal Corporation. He was Chairman of the Board of the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation for 10 years prior to his appointment as CEO and is the grandson of one of the founding members.

Our People

AbSec staff are a diverse group of people, all coming from a range of professional and cultural backgrounds. They are all united by their commitment to the goals and values of the organisation and come from the Bundjalung, Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi and other nations both in New South Wales and across Australia.



(L-R) Tangerene Ingram, Tina McGhie, Andrew Saunders (facilitator), Dana Clarke, Petrice Manton, Wendy Knight

Our Strategic Plan

We have now adopted the *Strategic Plan 2019–2022*. The plan lays out our priorities and direction for the upcoming period culminating in 2022. As in the previous strategic plan, a strong foundation has been built by placing Aboriginal children, families and communities at the centre and by providing the support that fosters Aboriginal-led solutions. Moreover, we are looking to work collaboratively with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations in a way that allows us to best represent our stakeholders.

Our Vision

Our vision is that all Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture, surrounded by holistic supports.

Goals and objectives

- ⦿ Work towards achieving self-determination for all Aboriginal people and communities, and build a safe, secure and caring environment for their children and young people, surrounded by culture
- ⦿ Support Aboriginal organisations to deliver quality, holistic supports for all Aboriginal children, young people, families and carers
- ⦿ Provide and support opportunities for continual learning, growth, improvement and change, for organisations delivering Aboriginal child and family supports
- ⦿ Represent the interests and inform government and key stakeholders of the issues facing Aboriginal children, young people, families, carers and communities
- ⦿ Advance Aboriginal workforce development to ensure a strong and capable workforce that is ready and equipped to meet the support needs of Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities

Principles that guide us

- ⦿ **Acknowledgement and respect** – we will acknowledge the diversity of all Aboriginal nations and respect traditional owners of the land, with our actions being informed by the voices of Elders and the cultural knowledge of communities
- ⦿ **Professionalism and integrity** – we will act with the highest of professionalism for our communities, ensuring our integrity will not be compromised in striving for the provision of quality, culturally-responsive and culturally accessible supports
- ⦿ **Self-determination** – we will ensure that our focus is underpinned by the rights of Aboriginal people to make decisions that impact their lives; recognising the interests of Aboriginal children, young people, families and carers, and communities in all that we do
- ⦿ **Independence and solutions-focus** – we will serve the interests of Aboriginal children, young people, families, communities and the organisations that support them to deliver holistic approaches to issues affecting them
- ⦿ **Transparency and commitment** – we will remain committed to our Aboriginal children, families and organisations in everything we do, ensuring their interests are promoted at every opportunity, and that our actions towards achieving this is always clear and transparent



STRATEGIC DIRECTION A:

Our Aboriginal children, families and communities are at the centre



STRATEGIC DIRECTION B:

Our Aboriginal organisations deliver quality supports for our children, families and communities



STRATEGIC DIRECTION C:

Our partnerships will benefit Aboriginal children and families



STRATEGIC DIRECTION D:

Our organisation is best placed to represent our stakeholders

Strategic Direction A:

Giving our children, families and communities a voice

We must place the perspective of our Aboriginal children, families and communities at the centre of everything we do. This will create a culturally rich and grounded focus for the priorities we establish as an Aboriginal child and family peak organisation. AbSec will seek to harness these perspectives and embed them into the vital work we undertake, to promote positive changes in the lives of Aboriginal children and families.

Family is Culture

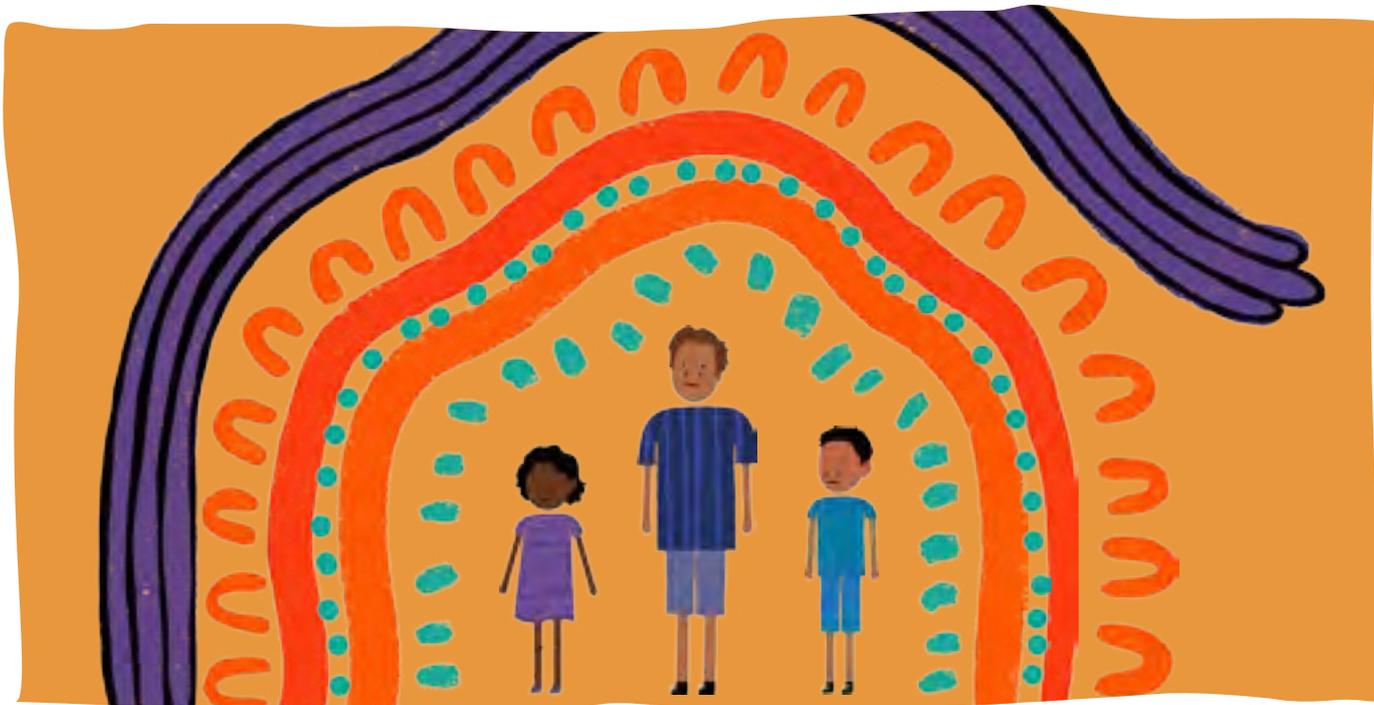
In November 2019, the *Family is Culture* report, an independent review into the high rates of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW was released. The review was commissioned by the NSW Government and chaired by UNSW Professor Megan Davis. It was the largest, most comprehensive independent review of the NSW child protection system in recent history. The report made 125 recommendations on how the NSW child protection system can be improved to better serve Aboriginal children, families and communities. The review found:

- ⦿ Widespread legislative and policy non-compliance among FACS caseworkers and managers
- ⦿ A lack of transparency and effective oversight within the child protection system
- ⦿ Multiple reports of poor and unethical newborn removal practices
- ⦿ Continued resonance of historical practices used against Aboriginal communities in the current child protection system

In addition to this, the review examined the circumstances of the 1,144 Aboriginal children who entered out-of-home care in NSW between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016. It was the first review to include a comprehensive evidence-base regarding casework practice. The case file review outlines the experiences and difficulties that Aboriginal children and families had in dealing with the NSW child protection system. The review also pointed to the fact that 40% of children in out-of-home care in NSW are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

In March 2020, AbSec led a collective of more than 20 community organisations and sent an open letter to the NSW Premier the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian calling for a commitment to be made in the upcoming budget to implement the recommendations made in the *Family is Culture* review. With COVID-19 delaying the NSW Government's budget announcements until later in the year, the response to this letter has not been forthcoming. As of the end of June 2020, there remains no response to the recommendations, however, we remain committed to campaigning for the reforms required of the NSW child protection system.





Aboriginal Case Management Policy

AbSec continues to advocate for Aboriginal-led solutions as being the most effective way for Aboriginal children and families to thrive. Building on our extensive work over the past two years, the Aboriginal Case Management Policy continues to be a key, ongoing project to enable the successful implementation of the Aboriginal-led strategy by the Department of Communities and Justice.

The team developed a number of key resources to operationalise the policy and incorporate all related rules and practice guidance. These resources ranged from fact sheets and case studies to the development of an informational video which included all the principles, core concepts and key elements of the policy. A comprehensive training resource has also

been developed for the Department of Communities and Justice to implement with non-Aboriginal funded service providers and to assist in the application of the policy. There has also been a shift to move some work online with a webinar created for Aboriginal communities, caseworkers and service providers.

All resources developed have been carefully designed to reflect the extensive consultations AbSec conducted with Aboriginal people throughout NSW in order to design the policy. We have delivered on all areas of the first stage of the implementation with the Department of Communities and Justice by 30 June 2020, and we look forward to continuing the implementation of the project moving into 2020/2021.

Better Outcomes for Aboriginal Families

It is AbSec's broad goal to establish an Aboriginal child and family sector that is focused on prevention and early intervention, one that is designed and administered by Aboriginal people and aligned with the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal communities. To influence government decision-making and provide a guide for stakeholders, AbSec is developing the Aboriginal Child and Family Outcomes Framework and Aboriginal Permanency Framework.

To develop these frameworks, AbSec has spent the first part of 2020 travelling across NSW to hold consultations with community members and key

stakeholders in the Aboriginal child and family sector to discuss the development of the Outcomes Framework. As a team, the responses were analysed and compiled in the *What We Heard* reports and another consolidated report. There were a total of 138 stakeholder participants across 11 consultations. The reports will guide the development of the Outcomes Framework and help improve the service system for the sector. AbSec will go through the same process for the Permanency Framework which will look at stability for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and how this impacts families.

COVID-19 Support

The COVID-19 pandemic that appeared in Australia at the start of 2020 had a number of ramifications that disproportionately impacted Aboriginal children and their families, with both social and economic repercussions that will likely be felt for years to come. In response, AbSec stepped in to communicate with and support communities. Some of our work included:

- ⦿ Setting up the COVID-19 Community Impact Log to help collate the issues that communities are struggling with and refer them to the appropriate agency
- ⦿ Fortnightly email communications to our members and supporter base to keep them updated on the situation in NSW and any other important news and initiatives
- ⦿ Collated important resources on our website relating to COVID-19 for the Aboriginal child and family sector including information relevant to changes in the child protection system
- ⦿ Provided personal support to Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to assist them through the period and helped adapt service models for their communities
- ⦿ Distributed masks, hand sanitiser and updated information to communities and service providers
- ⦿ Grants were distributed to Aboriginal organisations in partnership with our philanthropic partners the Australian Communities Foundation, CAGES Foundation and the Snow Foundation to assist with hardships during this period



Resources for Communities

AbSec continues to provide communities with resources that not only support their needs and place them at the centre of the decision-making process but also give them a voice to facilitate two-way communication. Some of this work includes:

- ⦿ Community engagement work is one of the core pillars which provide communities with a voice. AbSec is constantly involved in events throughout New South Wales, reaching locations like the North Coast, Hunter and New England Region, South Coast and West and Far West of the state. These types of activities can vary from engaging Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to facilitating interagency meetings. On other occasions, activities are more focused on the community with meet and greets at Elders' groups or family and kids community fun days.
- ⦿ Ensuring adequate support for carers is paramount for safeguarding Aboriginal children in care. AbSec's Aboriginal Carer Support Service provides free assistance across a range of issues in areas of advice, advocacy and support. Over the course of the year, the service has assisted a total of 208 individuals that have contacted the service for varying reasons.



CASE STUDY

Empowering youth

Leticia Quince is a 23-year old Aboriginal woman from Narrandera who is currently based in Dubbo. She works with Uniting as a Youth Development Coach in the Extended Care Program Pilot. Leticia was a participant in AbSec's Youth Ambassador Program which she credits in giving her the confidence to speak out, as well as a connection to Aboriginal culture at a crucial time in her journey into adulthood.

Leticia joined the Youth Ambassador Program when it started in 2015 and was provided with numerous face-to-face opportunities to develop professional skills in public speaking and networking. She has since represented young people at a round table meeting about Aboriginal children in the child protection system with the NSW Minister for Families and Community Services. The Youth Ambassadors also did media training with Andrew Johnson from the Advocate for Children and Young People and visited other organisations such as the Redfern Community Centre where Leticia co-hosted a Sorry Day event in 2016. She fondly remembers a cultural gathering at Jervis Bay, where she learned more about Aboriginal culture through activities such as fishing, camping and hearing Dreamtime stories. She was able to take her sister and two students she was tutoring.

For Leticia, seeing her fellow Ambassadors blossom into confident speakers and leaders of the future was one of the most satisfying parts of the program. She also gained comfort in connecting with other young Aboriginal people with similar experiences of the child protection system.

"The Youth Ambassador Program provides a vital platform for Aboriginal young people in out-of-home care to have their voices heard," she states. "AbSec has been a major part of my journey to reconnect with Aboriginal culture."

The skills and knowledge she gained as part of the program have enabled her to be an effective advocate for Aboriginal families in her chosen career. Leticia has not seen much improvement in the NSW child protection system for Aboriginal children and young people, and as a result, she will continue to campaign for change and challenge the status quo. She strongly believes AbSec's Youth Ambassador Program will continue to lift up the voices of young Aboriginal leaders.



Strategic Direction B:

Supporting the Aboriginal sector

Aboriginal organisations are critical to the success of Aboriginal-led, designed and delivered approaches which support Aboriginal children, families and communities. Our aim is to build and strengthen an Aboriginal-controlled child and family sector, providing tools to foster genuine Aboriginal-led solutions that are creative and forward-thinking, and that deliver better outcomes for our children and their families.



Cultural Connection Workshops

It is a requirement in NSW that all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care must have a Cultural Care Plan and a Cultural Support Plan. Therefore, AbSec's Cultural Connections Workshops provide practitioners and agencies the tools to create comprehensive and effective plans, resulting in healthier and happier children, raised strong in culture and identity.

Over the course of the year, 488 participants successfully completed the training and this included government organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs) and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. One example of the workshops successful application lies in the involvement of the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian out-of-home-care assessment team completing the training. Through this engagement, it was emphasised that cultural awareness training is critical to Aboriginal children's sense of identity and their connections to family, community and Country. Cultural Care Plans and Cultural Support Plans were acknowledged as the central focus for Aboriginal people to connect to culture and achieve self-determination.

Evaluation for the workshops was also further developed this year. This enabled the team to plan and progress the workshops and assisted in AbSec's data collection. These evaluations highlighted the success of the program, with over 90% of the evaluations noting the importance of the high-quality content used in the workshops.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 health crisis, AbSec was forced to suspend the delivery of all face-to-face Cultural Connections Workshops after March 2020, in order to protect our communities and comply with public health orders. Being committed to the ongoing learning needs of the sector, AbSec spent the latter part of 2019/2020 setting up online workshops that can be completed as remote learning modules.



Working with Service Providers

AbSec engages with service providers on a range of levels to make sure that Aboriginal children and families come first. We were contracted to provide support to the five NSW Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS) funded by the Department of Communities and Justice. These IFBS programs are modelled on the US-based Homebuilders Model. Extensive collaborative work has been undertaken within the IFBS programs to ensure that they can deliver these services in the most culturally appropriate way possible whilst maintaining adherence to the program model. The services have contributed significantly to positive changes in Aboriginal families whose children and young people were considered to be at imminent risk of entering out-of-home care.

AbSec developed the *Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration Model Guidelines* to address the risk of harm concerns for Aboriginal children and support families to have their children safely restored home. These culturally-safe guidelines are applicable across all the

preservation and restoration programs operating in the state, including the IFBS programs.

AbSec has also provided wide-ranging support for a number of out-of-home care agencies including assisting with establishing Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, facilitating cultural connections training workshops, cross-sectoral working groups and trauma working groups. Earlier in the year, a Business Continuity Plan template was developed and distributed to our sector partners, and AbSec has produced a broad range of printed materials for carers and service providers. These have included the Growing Stronger Futures booklet, carer pamphlets which were sent to Department of Communities and Justice staff and partners in Western NSW and resource packs containing stationary, water and other necessary equipment.

The challenges of COVID-19 also meant that AbSec assumed the role of being one of the key information sources for service providers that were seeking any COVID-19 related resources to help them through this difficult time.

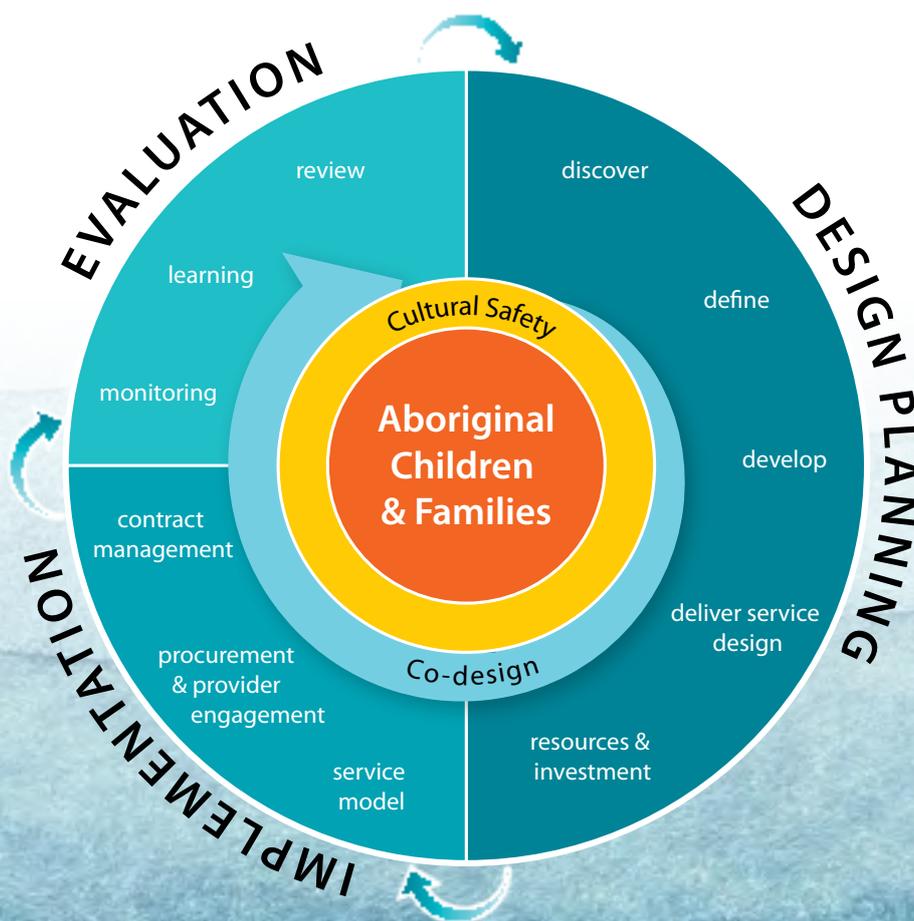
Commissioning Framework

This year, AbSec released the *Commissioning for better Aboriginal Child and Family Outcomes Framework* in preparation for investing in support activities with communities and stakeholders across NSW. Commissioning is a new and innovative approach to designing and delivering tailored child and family-centred, holistic supports that are developed with our communities.

AbSec's goal is to establish Aboriginal-led commissioning and a practical framework of support initiatives that are co-designed with end-service users and the NSW Aboriginal child and family sector. This approach will be used to deliver what is needed as a continuous support package, not just in response to a crisis.

AbSec's commissioning initiatives will be delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and intended to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the child protection system over time through the creation of more flexible programs and practice models.

The commissioning model has three phases of activity and processes. Firstly, there is the design planning phase. This is followed by implementation, including procurement and support of services. Finally, there is the evaluation and review of outcomes and processes. Community feedback and advice, co-design and collaboration are all core components of this model, as they assist in designing and implementing solutions that meet community needs.





Guardianship Support

In 2020, AbSec developed a new approach to address community concerns and issues arising from the shift to guardianship orders since 2015. We worked with guardians, carers and communities in two trial locations, the Hunter and South West Sydney, in establishing an Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model. This was to assist a large cohort of Aboriginal children and young people on guardianship orders who require additional supports that are not routinely made available to them.

The model of supports, services and resources will be delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to ensure that Aboriginal children on guardianship orders have access to all the necessary supports they need to live a better life and thrive.

Collective and collaborative planning for the Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model commenced in each of the trial areas. AbSec is involving the

community in the end-to-end commissioning process, a key component in designing the right services. The first stage of service planning has involved both a needs-based assessment and a co-design around supports. Information has also been gathered from the community including the lived experience of people affected by the shift to guardianship. These insights and advice will be combined with professional expertise to identify and create better outcomes and solutions.

Moving forward, AbSec will advance the design with investment from the NSW Government, tender for services, and engage Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver the model. Our overall goal is to build capacity for community-led commissioning and a practical framework for the NSW Aboriginal child and family sector from 2020/21 onwards. The approach and process will be reviewed and evaluated so we can learn from our experiences.



Developing the Aboriginal Workforce

As part of the Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy, AbSec was contracted by the Department of Communities and Justice to progress initiatives focused on enhancing the capacity and capability of the Aboriginal child and family sector workforce. AbSec listened to the sector about their workforce development needs, including current opportunities and barriers. Our findings were presented to the Department of Communities and Justice in November 2019 in our consolidated report, *Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy: Workforce Development Project*.

Two key issues were highlighted in the consolidated report as critical to achieving a strong and effective Aboriginal child and family system that can reverse the current over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people entering out-of-home care:

- ☉ A comprehensive and well-resourced Aboriginal workforce strategy that is driven by government and Aboriginal organisations
- ☉ An Aboriginal cultural framework established to deliver support services

The report included consultations through twelve workshops with close to one hundred participants who were involved in the Aboriginal child and family system from across NSW metropolitan and regional areas. The report was divided into two parts. The first section looked at reform impact on the workforce, and the second section focused on implementation mechanisms to address workforce planning and development.

Following the consolidated report, AbSec put together the *Aboriginal Workforce Development Statewide Strategy 2020–2025* as a continuing part of the NSW Government's Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy. It identifies ways to strengthen the Aboriginal workforce as part of the government's commitment to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Strengthening Aboriginal Organisations

As part of our work, AbSec sees a strong Aboriginal-led sector as vital to improving outcomes for communities and families. As has been the case with previous years, AbSec continues to support the sector with both face-to-face support and group guidance. This support is provided across a range of areas such as:

- ☉ Supporting agencies with the development of action plans to address organisational issues
- ☉ Governance, organisational capacity and growth
- ☉ Accreditation issues
- ☉ Stakeholder relations and district engagement
- ☉ Grants and funding opportunities

This work has supported a number of organisations and has been advanced through our Strengthening Support for Aboriginal Children in Western NSW project. The project has drawn in a wide range of stakeholders and led to healthy relationships and improved outcomes for children in regional centres such as Orange. In addition to this work, AbSec has also developed a proposal for a NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Centre of Excellence. This centre would act as a central research hub to develop evidence-based sector best practice and policy advice to improve the knowledge and service of Aboriginal organisations.



CASE STUDY

Putting the care of **Aboriginal kids** in Aboriginal hands

AbSec plays an important role in building the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations with this often involving managing the transition of Aboriginal family welfare services from non-Aboriginal NGOs to the Aboriginal sector.

One example is the Yiriyirimbang Koori out-of-home care service in Western NSW. Yiriyirimbang is currently a partnership between Anglicare and the Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (OAMS) that provides out-of-home care case management to Aboriginal children, young people and their carers. There are currently around 100 Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in the Orange region.

For the majority of 2020, AbSec has worked with both organisations to transfer the management and ownership of Yiriyirimbang's services to OAMS, which is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. A large portion of the workload has involved helping OAMS become a Permanency Support Program provider – developing their policies and procedures for their accreditation with the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian. Many of AbSec's staff have extensive experience working in the government and non-government sector, and this has enabled AbSec to nurture collaboration between all of the stakeholders as they work through a transition plan.

"Although it has had its challenges, bringing everyone together has been a rewarding experience," reveals the lead AbSec Project Officer. "Ultimately, the transition will mean that the welfare of Aboriginal kids will be in Aboriginal hands."

Karen Kim, Anglicare's General Manager – Cultural Safety and Training greatly values the expertise and leadership of AbSec in the development of the Yiriyirimbang program. "The lead Project Officer brings immense knowledge to the table – which is

vital to the transition process. I'm happy for AbSec to lead the way on this," she states. "Developing out-of-home care partnerships with Aboriginal organisations is complex, made more so when two of the partners are non-Aboriginal organisations. This includes the Department of Communities and Justice and Anglicare. Indeed, the expertise of AbSec is essential, in its ability to respond to the demands of these organisations, while ensuring the whole process is Aboriginal-led."

This work is part of AbSec's Strengthening Support for Aboriginal Children in Western NSW project. Under this project, the Department of Communities and Justice commissioned AbSec to support the development of three Aboriginal community-controlled organisations into Permanency Support Program services. This vital initiative is helping to achieve self-determination for Aboriginal people in relation to the welfare of their children, as well as effective and culturally sensitive support to Aboriginal families in need.



Strategic Direction C:

Safeguarding our partners and resources

Strategic and targeted partnerships are critical to ensuring our message as a peak body is widely communicated, shared and readily understood. As we work to improve the support provided to Aboriginal children and families by Aboriginal organisations, we must look at engaging new and innovative partners including service providers, philanthropists, the corporate sector as well as different government agencies.

Partnerships

Our relationships with partners, whether they are philanthropic supporters or one-off donors, remains as important as ever. We must thank the Australian Communities Foundation, CAGES Foundation and Snow Foundation for their support throughout 2019/20, especially over the difficult COVID period. With their backing, we were able to provide a voice for our communities and the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations working hard to improve outcomes on the ground.

When tough times kicked in our partners were there to help, and during the period from March to June, with the help of our philanthropic partners, we were able to distribute grants to Aboriginal organisations throughout the state. These organisations were mainly providers of targeted early intervention services but also included out-of-home care providers and an intensive service provider. These grants helped organisations serve our children and their families over what was a difficult period of isolation, and for that, we are extremely grateful.



Events and Relationships

Events are a great avenue for AbSec to engage both with communities and sector partners as well as providing an important role in the growth of the organisation. There were many small events throughout the year that AbSec either helped organise, or appeared at, such as the Keeping Kin Connected event, NAIDOC Deadly Kids Disco, Foster Care Week Picnic Day and more. However, some of our biggest and most memorable events for the year included:

☉ AbSec's **NAIDOC Family Fun Day** event was held on 9 July 2019 at Steel Park in Marrickville. The event was held in celebration of NAIDOC Week and is an opportunity to embrace the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The day is a celebration for not only Aboriginal communities but also for Australians from all walks of life. Our annual event brings local Aboriginal people together to celebrate in their community while giving others an opportunity to connect and learn about Aboriginal culture. The event was free of charge and open to all, providing both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal guests with the opportunity to enjoy cultural performances and traditions. As well as this, there was food and fun

activities such as cultural arts and crafts, cooking, jumping castles, face painting and animal displays, including a petting zoo and Australian wildlife displays. This event is the only NAIDOC event held in the local area by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation.

- ☉ The **NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Awards 2019** were held as part of our biennial NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference in November 2019. They celebrated the individuals and organisations that have made remarkable contributions and outstanding achievements in improving outcomes for our children and families. The winners for this year were:
- Walking Together Award - Barnardos Australia's Permanency Support Team (Wyong)
 - Young Person of the Year - Storme Burton
 - Carer of the Year - Natalie Bird
 - Community Member of the Year - Bettina Goolagong
 - Practitioner of the Year - Shiree Talbot
 - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation of the Year - Waminda
 - Excellence Award - Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation



Strategic Direction D:

Securing our organisational strength and sustainability

The success of the first three Strategic Directions and their associated priorities stand on the strength of AbSec as an organisation. Our organisational systems, processes and governance, must be sound and robust; our values, beliefs, behaviours and reputation must be above reproach; and our people well-equipped and mobilised. This will ensure we are well positioned and ready to truly represent, and deliver better outcomes for, Aboriginal children, families and communities.

Opportunities for Students

Throughout the year, AbSec hosted a number of students undertaking internships through the Aurora Internship Program. These types of opportunities are hugely beneficial for both AbSec, students and the broader Aboriginal sector, developing the understanding of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal entrants to the workforce. Students are provided with broad support and also given the opportunity to work independently with the aim of facilitating professional development by building career experiences and opportunities in the sector. In the past students have also gone on to be offered positions with AbSec at the culmination of their internship.

Students come to AbSec from a variety of backgrounds, involved in diverse fields of study. During their time interning with AbSec in 2019/20, students worked across numerous projects and teams and both added value to the work they completed and developed and extended their own knowledge. Much of the work involved contributing to the development of several important publications such as the *NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference Report 2019*, various policy briefs and assisting with other important research purposes. The opportunity immersed students in the day-to-day workings of an Aboriginal peak body and provided insight into AbSec's unique relationship with government.



NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference

From the 19th to the 21st of November 2019, AbSec hosted the biennial NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Conference. The theme was “Strong Communities, Strong Kids” and the conference put the focus firmly on strategies which involve Aboriginal youth, families and communities to develop services and policies that lead to systemic change. The conference was hosted on Gumbaynggirr Country and was the largest to date, with almost 400 delegates scheduled to come from across the state and country.

Although the bushfire emergency in NSW affected the attendance of some delegates and keynote speakers, the conference was still a great success. It provided a forum for exchanging knowledge and experiences between attendees and it generated great conversations for delegates to take back to their communities and organisations. We thank all the delegates, presenters and supporters for making the conference such a success under difficult circumstances. The guest speakers for the conference included:

- ☉ Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, Minister for Indigenous Australians
- ☉ June Oscar AO, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner
- ☉ Hon Linda Burney MP, Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services, Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians
- ☉ Ms Simone Czech on behalf of Michael Coutts-Trotter, Secretary, NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- ☉ Professor Ngiare Brown, Senior Aboriginal Clinician and Researcher, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Our 2019 conference also highlighted successful strategies in developing well-integrated, holistic and culturally responsive local service systems. Moreover, it showed how vital it is that services are available and accessible from the early intervention stage. The delivery of these individualised services will help strengthen Aboriginal children, families and communities’ connections to culture, as well as facilitate self-determination and improve outcomes.



Closing the Gap

In conjunction with a number of other Aboriginal organisations such as the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the NSW Coalition of Peak Organisations (CAPO), AbSec was involved in facilitating workshops for Closing the Gap consultations. Together, the workshops connected stakeholders with community leaders and Elders across the state. This brought many Aboriginal communities together to work through the issues that were specific to their regions so they could map out what positive solutions are required to achieve better outcomes for their communities.

The overall goal was to test the refreshed targets for Closing the Gap, to find new measures to improve the accountability of governments and to increase the genuine involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in finding ways to Close the Gap. As well as considering the current Closing the Gap targets, participants were also asked to consider three new priorities for action:

- ⦿ Formal partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Closing the Gap
- ⦿ Growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services
- ⦿ Improving mainstream service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Participants suggested a range of changes to the current targets to strengthen them. They also suggested a series of new areas for which targets should be developed, including business development, transport and ageing. Some of the other important issues raised by participants included the need for better communication, the importance of financial probity and transparency in the allocation of tenders and grants, the issue of Aboriginal identity and funding models for the allocation and delivery of resources and services.



AbSec Learning and Development Centre

Over the course of 2019/2020, the AbSec Learning and Development Centre has been able to continue its rapid expansion. Currently, there are over 100 students enrolled with another 300 expressions of interest from both individuals and employer groups wishing to upskill their existing Aboriginal workforce.

As the peak body for Aboriginal children and families, AbSec has extensive experience and the capability to deliver meaningful vocational education in areas that require ongoing community support and resources. There is a large gap in the market for the coursework that the Learning and Development Centre offers and for this reason, the Learning and Development Centre has a bright future in improving the education of people working in community services and improving the quality of care.

As the demand for courses continues to grow, AbSec has worked across a range of activities to develop service delivery and business growth. New platforms and coursework are being established to improve the learning experience for our students, and collaboration with third-party institutions is being explored to share resources and provide compliance and adherence to industry learning standards as the Learning and Development Centre applies for Smart and Skilled accreditation. Additionally, COVID-19 provided another challenge to the growth of the Centre. This was managed by staff with the transition to online learning platforms and the introduction of new educational content.

Current courses include:

- ⦿ Certificate IV in Disability
- ⦿ Certificate IV in Child Youth and Family Intervention
- ⦿ Diploma of Child Youth and Family Intervention
- ⦿ Diploma of Leadership and Management
- ⦿ Diploma of Business (Governance)



CASE STUDY

Supporting our staff

In order to help AbSec grow, staff are supported in endeavours that help them develop both their cultural and professional skills. In early 2020, one of AbSec's Project Managers, Karl Williamson, took some time off to travel to Geneva, Switzerland to act as an intern at the United Nations Human Rights Council. During his time in Geneva, Karl was able to hear from nations and NGO's on the international housing crisis, listen to a high-level panel discussion marking the halfway point of the decade for people of African descent as well as develop and deliver a statement on behalf of the Australian Government on the topic of Indigenous women as human rights defenders.

In delivering the statement, Karl said he "was privileged to speak about the women in my life who show endless courage and strength in the pursuit of a better life for all Indigenous Australians. It was a great experience to be away at the Human Rights Council and to be in Switzerland. I was also very grateful to get home and was happy to be back on deck with AbSec doing the work for our community."

Although Karl's experience was unfortunately cut short due to COVID-19, AbSec is glad to have him back, utilising the skills and experience he gained during his time in Geneva to work towards better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

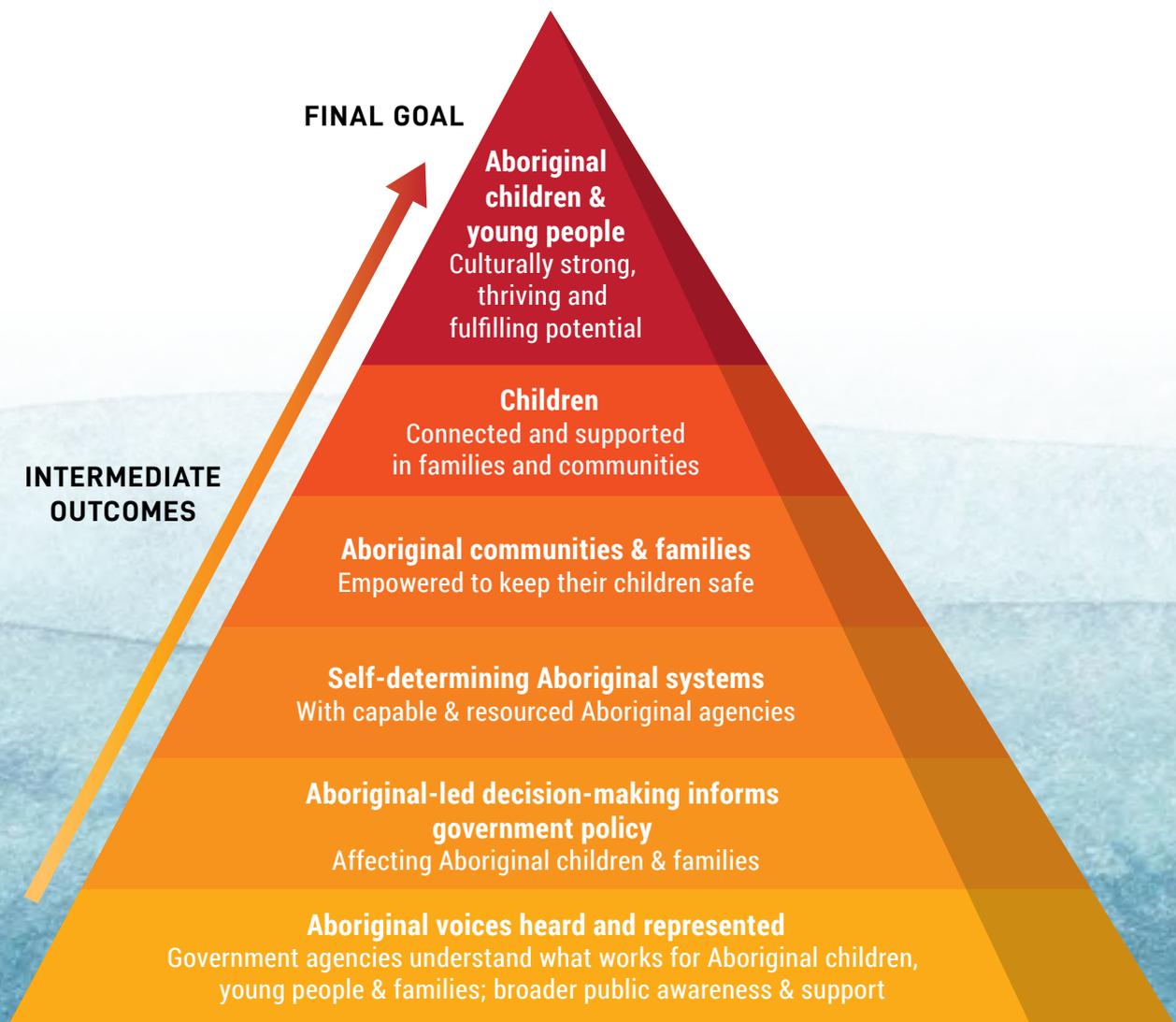


AbSec's Theory of Change

AbSec's Theory of Change has been established to present key focus areas and their outcomes, as we work towards the ultimate goal of seeing Aboriginal children and young people culturally strong, thriving and fulfilling their potential.

To reach the final goal, AbSec embodies a holistic approach to ensure Aboriginal children are raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture. For this to occur, evidence shows that Aboriginal children must be connected and supported in their families, kinship groups and communities and that families and communities must be empowered to keep their children safe.

Self-determination is at the base of fostering sustainable change. AbSec advocates for Aboriginal-led services and social systems, with Aboriginal agencies that are capable and appropriately resourced. To reach this, Aboriginal voices must be heard and represented in society, leading to a broader community understanding of the need for Aboriginal-led decision-making to ensure genuine improvements in the lives of our kids and families. Similarly, government policies must be informed by Aboriginal voices outlining what works best for Aboriginal children, young people and families.



AbSec's Pillars of Success

The following five pillars of success, which are informed by AbSec's Theory of Change, will indicate whether, and how well, we are achieving results.

- ⦿ **Aboriginal Children and Families** – feedback and continual engagement with Aboriginal children and families will tell us how successful we are in progressing and realising change.
- ⦿ **Aboriginal Organisations** – with such a significant task of influencing the growth and expansion of the Aboriginal-controlled sector in NSW, it is critical that we remain engaged and deliver upon the expectations of our Aboriginal organisations who support children and families. The level, number and quality of engagement with Aboriginal organisations will tell us how well we are meeting our goals.
- ⦿ **Other Non-Government Organisations** – our partners are critical to the success of our plans and strategies, helping us to achieve a genuine sense of self-determination and supporting our work to encourage Aboriginal-led approaches. How well these partnerships align with our strategic vision, and how many effective partnerships we have, will indicate the success of these partnerships.
- ⦿ **Philanthropic and Corporate Sector** – genuinely innovative approaches will require us to take risks as an organisation. For this to occur, AbSec must attract, engage with, and create opportunities for philanthropists to support our work. Our level of engagement and diversified income will indicate our success.
- ⦿ **Government Bodies** – change must be effectively embedded within government policy frameworks to realise genuine and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. Our active engagement and influence, and the quality and impact of our policy advice, will demonstrate our success in this regard, as well as the number of times where this has led to a positive result.



Financials

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30TH JUNE, 2020

	ECONOMIC ENTITY		CHIEF ENTITY	
	2020 \$	2019 \$	2020 \$	2019 \$
ASSETS				
CURRENT ASSETS				
Cash Assets	2,022,900	4,586,911	1,969,758	4,433,791
Receivables	12,213	71,912	19,634	90,872
Other Assets	12,000	11,430	12,000	11,430
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	2,047,144	4,670,253	2,001,393	4,536,093
NON-CURRENT ASSETS				
Property, Plant and Equipment	2,706,714	2,651,857	2,706,714	2,651,857
Investments	-	-	20,000	70,000
Intangibles	19,999	69,999	-	-
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	2,726,713	2,721,856	2,726,714	2,721,857
TOTAL ASSETS	4,773,826	7,392,109	4,728,106	7,257,950
LIABILITIES				
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Payables	114,126	299,191	111,126	292,990
Current Tax Liabilities	13,172	309,656	20,951	281,260
Provisions	176,086	161,416	176,086	161,416
Other Liabilities	57,420	2,631,904	30,052	2,604,536
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	360,803	3,402,167	338,215	3,340,202
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Provisions	74,270	42,585	74,270	42,585
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	74,270	42,585	74,270	42,585
TOTAL LIABILITIES	435,073	3,444,752	412,485	3,382,787
NET ASSETS	4,338,753	3,947,357	4,315,621	3,875,163
MEMBERS' EQUITY				
Reserve	1,293,305	1,293,305	1,293,305	1,293,305
Opening Balance-Retained Earnings	2,654,042	2,082,834	2,581,858	2,081,336
Current Year Surplus/(Deficit)	391,406	571,218	440,458	500,522
TOTAL MEMBERS' EQUITY	4,338,753	3,947,357	4,315,621	3,875,163

Our Audited Financial Statements (Report) for the year ended 30 June 2020 is available upon request. The Report provides an account of the management of the organisations and its subsidiary company, AbSec Learning and Development Centre. It also provides details in respect of the Financial Performance and Financial Position, among other things. The Report demonstrates that AbSec is in good financial health with a strong cash position to meet any of its obligations in the future.

Get Involved

There are many ways to support the important work being done by AbSec for Aboriginal children, families and communities. No matter who you are, or the size of your contribution, we appreciate all who bring us closer to achieving our goals.

JOIN OUR ONLINE COMMUNITY

Like and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to stay up-to-date and share your thoughts.

 @AbSecNSW

 @AbSecNSW

 @AbSec (NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation)

JOIN ABSEC AS A MEMBER

AbSec membership is for individuals, organisations and corporations that are supportive of our goals and dedicated to improving the lives of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

We offer a variety of membership categories to suit different types of organisations, as well as those in the community, such as carers and other interested parties, who want to join our mission.

Find out more at absec.org.au/membership or contact us on **(02) 9559 5299**.

PARTNER WITH US

Partnering with AbSec is a rewarding way to fulfil your business' corporate social responsibility goals while boosting team morale and engagement. We can work with you to design a partnership model that meets your needs and provides mutual benefits, or you can join our monthly giving program for a simple but powerful way to make a difference. AbSec values each and every partner. Please get in touch by calling **(02) 9559 5299** or emailing admin@absec.org.au.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

As a peak body, AbSec advocates for local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations across NSW, many of whom do impressive work for their communities with very little funding. Get in touch with Aboriginal organisations in your area to start a discussion about how you can provide meaningful support.



**AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation (ICN 8926)**

21 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone: (02) 9559 5299

E-mail: admin@absec.org.au

Website: www.absec.org.au

Facebook: [@AbSecNSW](https://www.facebook.com/AbSecNSW)

Twitter: [@AbSecNSW](https://twitter.com/AbSecNSW)