



AbSec Annual Report 2020/2021

Acknowledgment

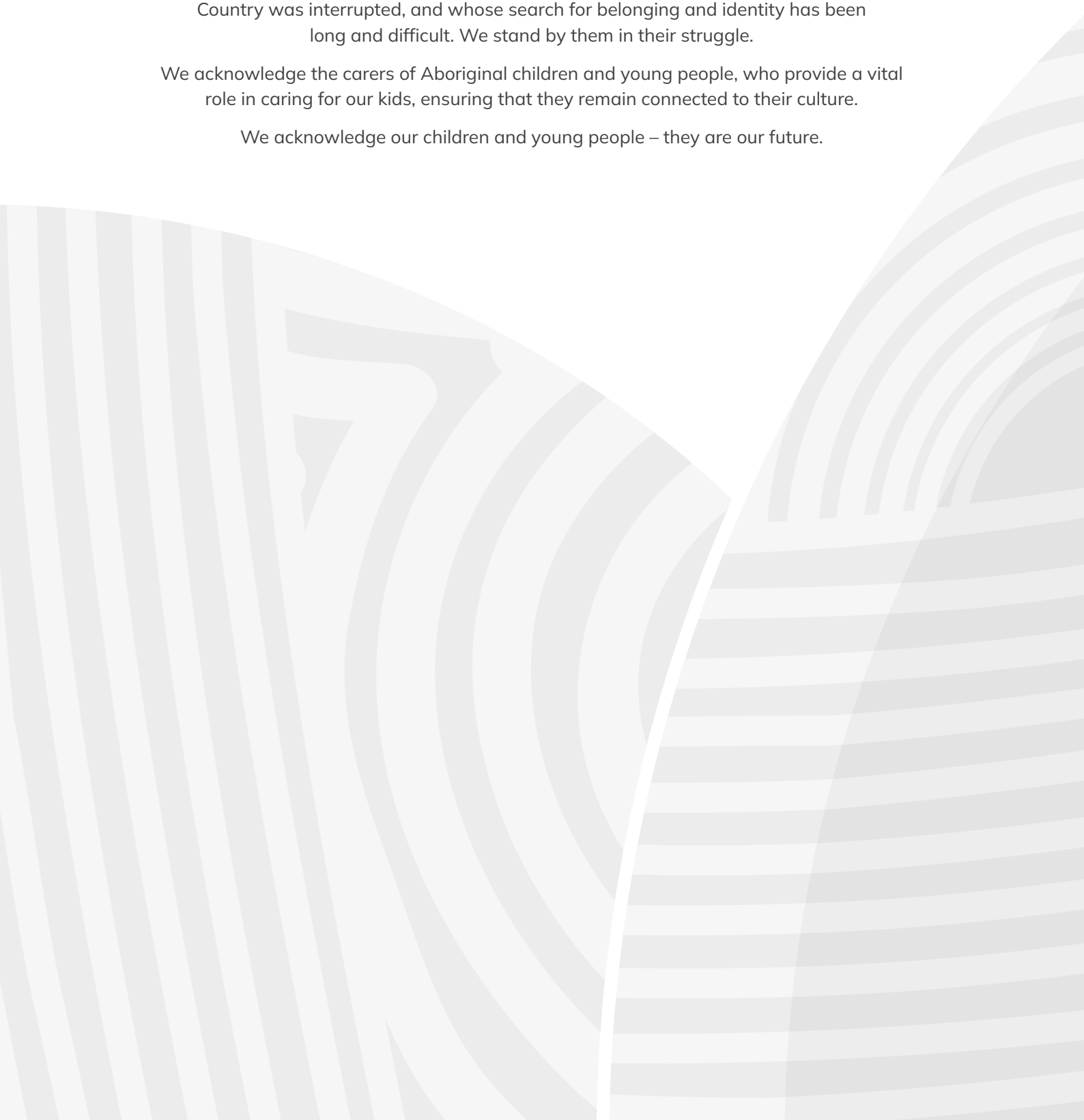
AbSec would like to acknowledge that our work is conducted on the traditional lands of the Aboriginal Nations of New South Wales. Our head office is on the land of the Gadigal people, who like other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, never ceded sovereignty.

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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A Message from our Chairperson

This past year has been an extremely challenging one globally, and as we know, many of our communities doing it tough have felt this acutely. It gives me immense hope for our children, families and communities that there is a peak organisation in AbSec representing their best interests and fighting for better outcomes. The ongoing work of AbSec, including the highlights and achievements, are underscored in this annual report.

I am constantly amazed at the strength and determination that AbSec, including everyone involved with the organisation, has shown over the past 12 months. All those who played a part in helping the organisation adapt to the many challenges that the year presented, as well as supporting our members, our sector and our communities along the way, should be incredibly proud.

AbSec is now at the mid-point of our current strategic plan, and while we continue to work towards the strategic directions set by our members and stakeholders, we also begin to assess and evaluate the last two years, looking at how we can evolve our work in the future. Of great importance, our involvement working on and implementing the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap has been central. We are resolute in meeting the new target of reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.

There has been considerable work done by AbSec at a community level over the year. Whether it is the continued development of the Aboriginal-led Commissioning Framework, our work with service providers to support

families, the implementation of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy or our engagement with research and policy, we continue to see small-scale successes. It is my view that this work indicates that Aboriginal-led solutions and a community-driven approach are key to reducing the disproportionate impact the child protection system has on our children, and AbSec will continue to advocate for this into the future.

Notwithstanding this work, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system continues to increase. 41.4% of children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal despite making up just 5% of children in NSW. This shocking statistic continues to worsen and highlights the urgent need for whole-of-system reform that sets our children up to thrive. We know that the impact of removing our children from their culture, community and kin can last a lifetime, and it is a constant motivator in the push to secure better outcomes for Aboriginal children.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my fellow board members for their dedication and expertise in guiding the work that AbSec does and continues to do. The staff of AbSec also deserve enormous recognition for their commitment to working hard day in day out to create a child and family system in NSW that puts our kids at the centre. Despite the many challenges that were faced this year, I believe AbSec has emerged stronger than before and feel extremely positive about the year ahead.



A Message from our CEO

This past year has been one of transformation at AbSec. I joined the organisation as Chief Executive Officer in March 2021 and I am determined to continue the incredible impact this organisation has in the community.

It was a year full of challenges as we began to adapt to a less certain environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Working from home, Zoom and COVID-safe procedures became the norm. This provided many additional challenges for the child and family sector in the state. Many of these will not disappear overnight, and we will continue to support our members and broader sector in adapting into the future, helping them continue their crucial work supporting Aboriginal children.

As an organisation, AbSec took the many challenges faced throughout this period in its stride and continued its core work of supporting Aboriginal children, families and communities. This was exemplified by AbSec's continued work in the sector, maintaining our strong history of supporting and growing Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The commitment to establishing an Aboriginal child and family sector that keeps prevention and early intervention front of mind is one that AbSec will continue to drive, with self-determination central to creating sustainable change for our families.

The work of AbSec evolved in line with AbSec's Strategic Plan 2019-2022. The Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model epitomised this growth, progressing from the community co-design stage to a project trial. We look forward to seeing the impact of the project in the Hunter and South West Sydney areas and a possible expansion to further areas in the future. This is just one of the many important projects at AbSec that demonstrates the significance of working with communities to develop and deliver the support and services they need to thrive.

Important initiatives progressed at a state and federal level, with the NSW Government's

response to the Family is Culture Review in NSW released in July 2020. It was another example of governments failing to listen to the community, and there were a number of inadequate, delayed or missing reforms. We will continue to campaign for the full implementation of all 126 recommendations together with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders as these system-wide reforms are sorely needed. On a national level, work continued on the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We are encouraged by the prospect of genuine partnership between governments and Aboriginal communities and believe it will drive real change for Aboriginal people.

AbSec remained a strong voice throughout the year on these initiatives and others, campaigning and advocating for Aboriginal-led solutions. It remains a repugnant fact that Aboriginal children are grossly overrepresented in the NSW child protection system. They are 10 times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Aboriginal children. These children are more than just statistics. They are our future.

I would like to give thanks and acknowledge the leadership and support of AbSec Chairperson Dana Clarke and the rest of the AbSec Board. Their commitment to supporting Aboriginal families and putting Aboriginal children at the heart of our work is valued by the whole organisation. I particularly acknowledge Garry Matthews, who stepped down from the Board early in the year, and welcome Aunty Dawn Bell. I also thank William Henry for stepping into the role of Treasurer.

I must also commend the profound dedication of all the staff here at AbSec. Without them, the incredible work that this organisation does in supporting our children, families and communities would not be possible. It is their passion and vigorous work that fills me with positivity about creating the change that our children need next year and long into the future.



2020/2021 Highlights and Achievements

328 people
attended the
Cultural Connections
Workshops

180 carers
supported through
the Aboriginal Carer
Support Service

2 new trauma
courses created
through the Learning
and Development
Centre



12 workshop sessions held during the Aboriginal Guardianship Support Service co-design, with **68** guardians, carers and community members engaged

13 workshops were held across the state for the Aboriginal Case Management Policy implementation

CEO and Chairperson cited in **13** articles in major publications relating to Aboriginal children and families

Over **165** registered attendees for the “One year on from Family Is Culture” webinar

24 sector representatives attended the Intensive Family Based Services Conference

Who We Are



AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec) 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 twenty face-to-face meetings were held during the 2020/2021 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 Vice-Chairperson of 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.

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 Knight, 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 Chief Executive Officer and is the grandson of one of the founding members.

Aunty Dawn Bell

Dawn Bell (nee Campbell) is a proud Aboriginal Dunghutti and Yuin woman with family connections from Kempsey to the Victorian border. Dawn is on the board of directors at the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation and has been an active member for over 35 years, including as the Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation's first president. Dawn has been involved in Aboriginal affairs for over 40 years. Dawn is a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and foster carer. Dawn also acts as a mother to her nieces, nephews and their children.

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 was AbSec's longest-serving Board Member before he stepped down from the Board in July 2020, 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. He strives for equity of Aboriginal children, families and communities and wants to continue to be a voice for Aboriginal children and young people.

Our Chief Executive Officer

John Leha has been AbSec's Chief Executive Officer since March 2021. He is a proud Birri Gubba, Wakka Wakka and Tongan man born raised on Gadigal land and reports to the AbSec Board. He is also a member of the Board of SNAICC, the national peak body for Aboriginal children and families.

John was previously the Director of Operations at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence and former Chairperson for Gadigal Information Service and a founding member and Chairperson of Blaq Aboriginal Corporation.

As an active member of the Sydney Aboriginal community, John has worked extensively in Indigenous health, education and employment programs across state and federal government. He is also a Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council member and is deeply involved and connected to community through his work with the Kingsford Community Legal Centre, the AIDS Council of New South Wales' Aboriginal Project and the Indigenous Marathon Foundation.

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.



Our Strategic Plan



We are now midway through 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

Our strategic directions

AbSec's Strategic Plan 2019–2022 outlines the steps taken to achieve our vision and objectives for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities. AbSec is committed to the pursuit of the following four core strategic directions:

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

On 7 July 2020, the NSW Government provided a formal, high-level response to the Family is Culture Independent Review of Aboriginal Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care, with the main initiatives being the appointment of an Aboriginal Deputy Children's Guardian and the establishment of the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle.

AbSec called the response 'unremarkable' due to the significant number of inadequate, delayed or missing reforms. The NSW Government provided a more detailed response to each of the recommendations in November 2020, but it failed to prioritise the foundational elements of self-determination and public accountability called for by the review or to develop the response in partnership with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders.

Throughout the year, AbSec remained committed to campaigning for the full implementation of all 126 recommendations in partnership with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders while working with the Department of Communities and Justice on the implementation of a number of recommendations they had accepted.

To support this work, a partnered webinar was co-facilitated by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT and AbSec on the key findings from the government's response and future directions for advocacy and reform. Moving into 2021/22, the Family is Culture Collective, a group of community organisations determined to see the full implementation of the recommendations, will be reengaged to provide input and advocate further.

Representing Aboriginal Children and Families

Announced in July 2020 by Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services Gareth Ward, the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle was established comprising of community leaders and sector experts. The group will provide advice to the Minister and the Secretary of the Department of Communities and Justice about how to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. As a member of the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle, AbSec has utilised the forum to provide input from our sector forums and help ensure voices in the community are heard.

As the peak organisation for Aboriginal children and families, AbSec was also tasked with running a competition to assist in designing the logo for the group. The competition looked for designs that would represent the Aboriginal children and families the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle would be advocating for across the state.

Two winners were announced in April, and their artworks were combined to create the logo. The logo will be present on all the work of the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle, featuring on all communications and promotional material.



AKC
ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE CIRCLE

Aboriginal Case Management Policy

The Aboriginal Case Management Policy continued through its implementation phase with AbSec meeting with the Department of Communities and Justice and other key stakeholders from across the state throughout the year to support the rollout.

A new online training program was created to assist with the implementation, helping caseworkers understand the importance of safety and wellbeing for vulnerable Aboriginal children by keeping them with their families and connected to their community, culture and Country.

The online program highlights the importance of concepts such as Aboriginal Family-led Decision Making, Aboriginal Family-led Assessments, Pro Active Efforts and Aboriginal Community Controlled Mechanisms.

AbSec successfully delivered the program to three of the largest non-Aboriginal organisations in NSW that work with a majority of the Aboriginal children in out-of-home care; Wesley Mission, Life Without Barriers and Challenge Community Services.

Due to the success of these workshops, AbSec is working closely with the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) and Fams to ensure all non-Aboriginal organisations in the out-of-home care sector gain a thorough understanding of and implement the Aboriginal Case Management Policy within their organisations.

Disability Support

AbSec supports First Nations people with disabilities in improving their livelihoods and maintaining strong, culturally proficient relationships with any necessary service providers.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability held a number of public hearings for Aboriginal people to give evidence about their experiences.

AbSec's Chairperson, Dana Clarke, provided a statement to the Royal Commission and appeared at a public hearing alongside representatives from other Aboriginal organisations. She highlighted the bias of the child protection system that results in Aboriginal parents being ten times more likely to have their child removed. These rates being significantly higher for families with an Aboriginal parent with a disability.

Dana emphasised the need for Aboriginal-led solutions, the implementation of culturally safe services and early intervention to identify the needs of Aboriginal parents with a disability as key to reducing the disproportionate impact of the child protection system on Aboriginal people with a disability.

COVID Support

We continued to face a global health crisis unlike anything we have seen, and AbSec remained there to support our children, families and communities in new ways.

To support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, AbSec established the Aboriginal Child and Family Sector Combined Community Response Grants program early in 2020 with the help of philanthropic partners, the Australian Communities Foundation, Snow Foundation and CAGES Foundation. The rollout of this program and support surrounding it continued into 2020/21 as the impacts of the pandemic remained. This grants program provided financial support to organisations that were forced to adapt while assisting families through tough and unprecedented times.

AbSec's Aboriginal Carer Support Service continued to provide free telephone advice in a way that ensured carers remained connected to community and necessary services while COVID stay at home orders remained in place and beyond. While some of the calls were consistent with themes that had been raised previously, there were also some new issues that arose.

Carers enquired about digital learning and seeking support for kids in out-of-home care who didn't have access to computers at home. Additionally, carers had concerns for children that had special needs and returning to school was a priority for them due to their learning requirements.

With the support of Optus, AbSec was also able to support Aboriginal children and young people stay connected with free Optus SIM cards, allowing for free data, as well as calls and texts so that they could stay connected with their families and communities during this difficult period.





CASE STUDY

A Brighter Christmas for Aboriginal Families

Over the period leading up to Christmas, our local state MP Jo Haylen kicked off her annual Christmas toy drive. In 2020 she chose to donate the contributions of new, unwrapped toys to AbSec, to go towards making sure the year ended on a high for every child.

AbSec was overwhelmed with the response, with hundreds of presents being generously donated by people around the local area. The toys were distributed to families throughout the Sydney region, and due to the sheer number of toys donated, we also sent some to AbSec staff in Dubbo to be handed out to children in the surrounding areas.

This type of support from our local member and the Summer Hill electorate means so much to AbSec and the communities we advocate for, and it is comforting to know that there are so many people out there that

share our vision and would like to help out Aboriginal families at this important time of year.

For many, these generous donations were more than just toys. They were gifts that helped struggling families make Christmas a special time for their kids. For this reason, AbSec was thankful to everyone that was involved in the toy drive.

Bill Pritchard, A/Executive Leader at AbSec, said, "We want to say a special thank you to Jo and her staff for helping put a smile on the faces of so many kids this holidays. The hard work done by her office and the generosity of everyone in the Summer Hill electorate is especially heart-warming after such a difficult year for many. We look forward to working together again in the future to improve the lives of Aboriginal children."

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.



Keeping Aboriginal Families Together

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 led by Aboriginal people and aligned with the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal communities.

Early in the year, thanks to work done by AbSec, other peaks and the ongoing commitment of service providers, the funding for Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS) was extended until 30 June 2021. This commitment provided the certainty that agencies needed to reassure staff

and clients that services would continue uninterrupted throughout the year.

IFBS programs acknowledge the strength of Aboriginal families and work alongside those at risk of having their children removed and also where families are aiming to have their children returned to their care by providing a range of services aimed at reducing, or eliminating, identified child welfare, wellbeing and safety concerns for Aboriginal children and young people. AbSec supports IFBS programs in achieving their primary goal of keeping families safe and together.

The IFBS approach was established at the highest early intervention level and aims to prevent the unnecessary out-of-home placement of children through intensive, in-home crisis intervention, and counselling and life skills education. AbSec continues to collaborate with service providers and the Department of Communities and Justice to ensure these services are delivered in the most culturally appropriate way.

AbSec hosted the IFBS Conference in 2020, which was attended by delegates representing the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that are IFBS providers based in Kempsey, Wagga Wagga, Moree, Clarence Valley, and Wyong.

The event included speakers from across the sector and other industries with a focus on practical skills that can be implemented by delegates in IFBS roles. The group was able to come together and reflect on the resilience of their network, the importance of the IFBS program and the strength that each of their communities has shown during a challenging and unprecedented year. We are looking forward to supporting the continued success of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations delivering IFBS programs.



Maintaining Cultural Connections

Maintaining Aboriginal children and young people's connection to culture is critical in raising youth that are strong in culture and identity. It is a requirement in NSW that all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care have a Cultural Care Plan and a Cultural Support Plan. To ensure these Culture Care Plans and Cultural Support Plans are safe and effective, AbSec curates Cultural Connections Workshops to build the competencies of practitioners and agencies who set these plans.

Throughout 2020/21, AbSec continued to deliver workshops in-person and introduced virtual sessions to adjust to the ongoing COVID restrictions. Due to the use of Virtual Instructor Lead Training (VILT), the number of workshops held throughout the year was able to remain constant despite various COVID-related changes to travel restrictions.

The adaption and use of VILT was a major focus of the work done by the team throughout the year as it now is the preferred mode of training delivery by out-of-home care service providers and the Department of Communities and Justice. The adaption helped more easily organise participant and IT resources while remaining cost-effective. It helped AbSec maintain a physically and culturally safe learning environment for all participants and empowered the views of all participants on course content and lived experiences.

During the course of the year, despite the challenge of COVID restrictions and adopting new learning modes, AbSec trained over 300 people, including over 80 carers. All of these participants are actively involved in the out-of-home care sector in NSW in roles ranging from caseworkers to counsellors and behavioural specialists.



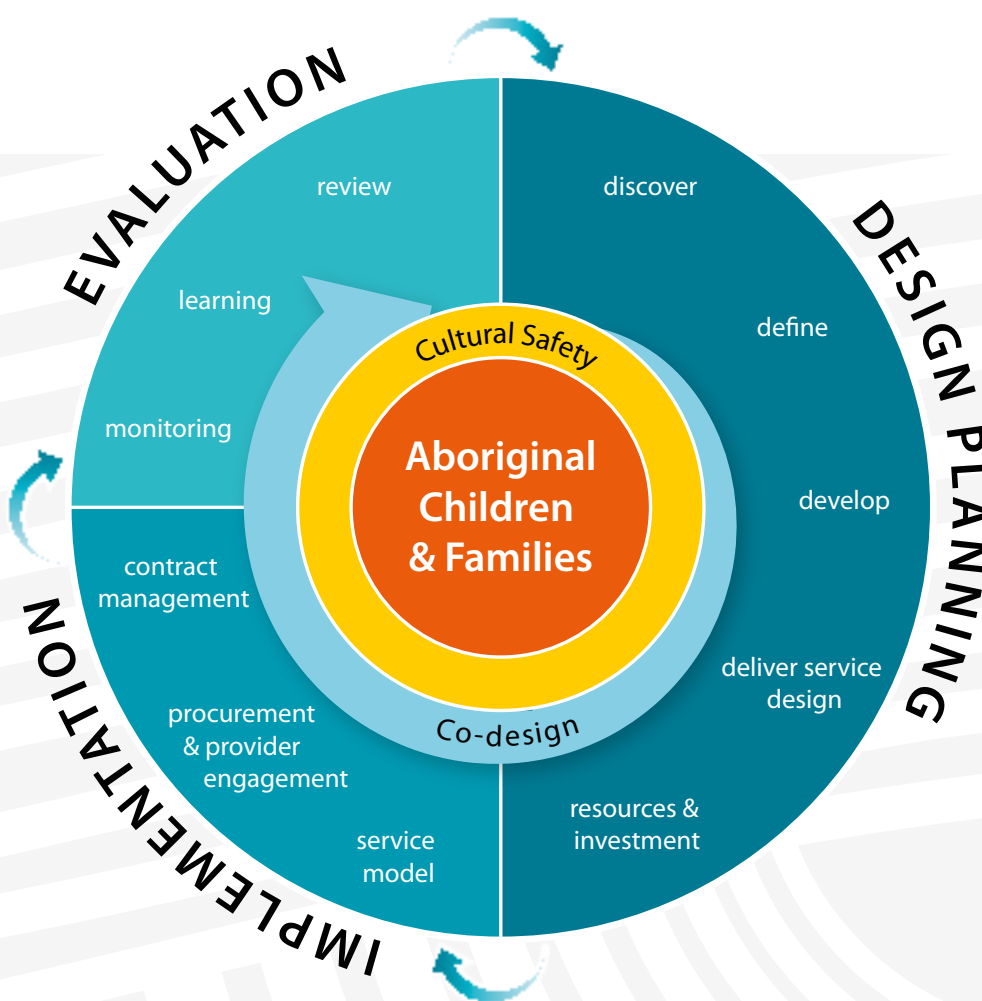
Aboriginal-led Commissioning

In 2021, AbSec began trialling the new *Commissioning Framework for Better Aboriginal Child and Family Outcomes*. The goal was 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 in mind. This unique approach places Aboriginal children and families at the centre of all decision making and creates initiatives that have been co-designed with end-users for greater impact.

In trialling the new Framework, AbSec will act as a commissioning organisation for Aboriginal-led and co-designed initiatives addressing community issues. AbSec's commissioning initiatives will be delivered by Aboriginal

community-controlled organisations and intended to achieve better outcomes over time for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the child protection system over time through the creation of more flexible, targeted and innovative programs and service models.

AbSec convened three new governance groups to collaborate on and oversee the development and implementation of co-designed initiatives. This included the AbSec Commissioning Steering Committee comprising of government project partners, the Department of Communities and Justice, Treasury, Premier and Cabinet and Aboriginal Affairs, an Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model Projects Reference Group and a Commissioning Evaluation Working Group.



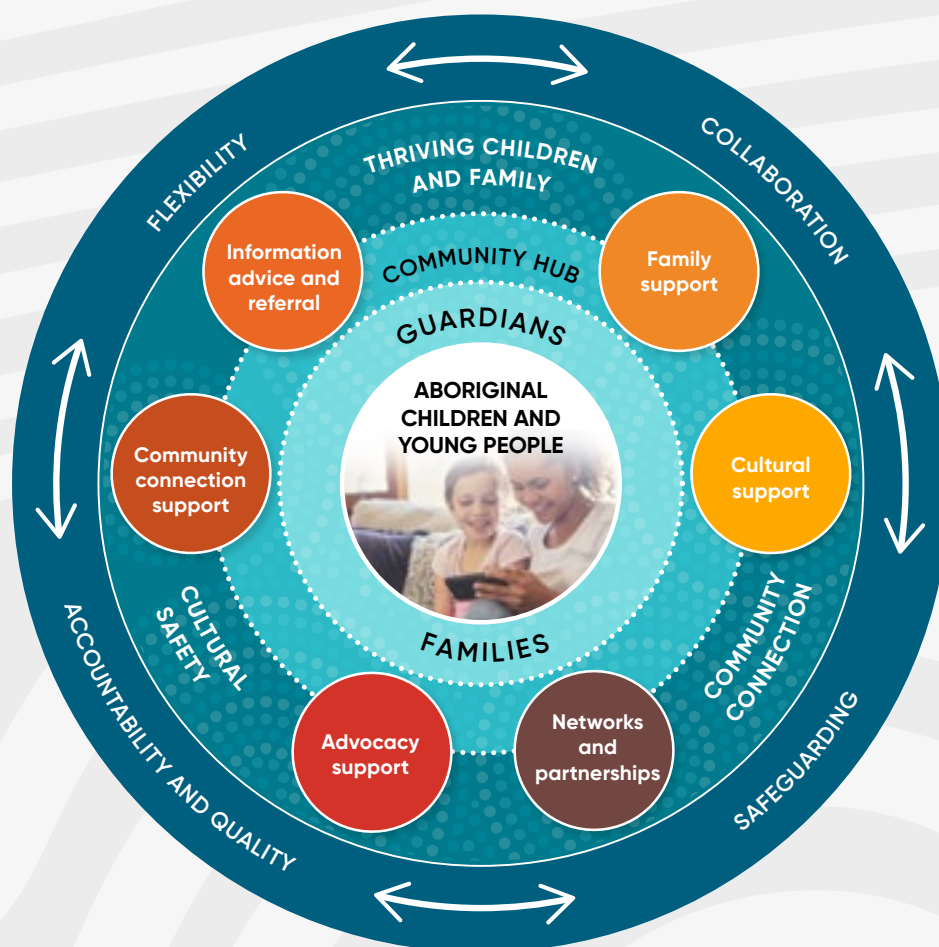
Guardianship Support

There are more than 940 Aboriginal children and young people on guardianship orders in NSW, most with no access to ongoing support from an out-of-home care agency, case management or financial plan to meet any of their pre-existing, immediate or emerging needs to help them thrive.

Continuing AbSec's previous work in addressing safety-net provisions for these children and their guardians, a new Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model was co-designed this year to trial in the Hunter and South Western Sydney regions. This support model, developed to address the identified needs, was designed with guardians of Aboriginal children and young people, carers, community, service practitioners and project partners working together to create a solution.

The support model is designed to assist Aboriginal children and young people on guardianship orders who require additional supports that are not routinely made available to them. The 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.

With funding approval from the Department of Communities and Justice, the trial of the service will occur in the Hunter and South Western Sydney regions from 2021 to 2023. Approximately 90 children in each district are eligible to access this new guardianship support service. The trial, including its approach and process, will be reviewed and evaluated, and the learnings shared. A further stage of this project would see this service expanded throughout NSW.





Strengthening Aboriginal Organisations

As part of our continuing commitment to developing a strong Aboriginal-led sector, AbSec supports Aboriginal organisations throughout the state that are improving and developing the way they work. This is vital for improving the outcomes for Aboriginal communities and the children and families that reside in them.

AbSec continued to provide both face-to-face support and group guidance across a range of areas, including:

- 🕒 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 will be further supported by the new Social Sector Transformation Fund project AbSec has been engaged to deliver. Through the project, AbSec will develop a one-stop-shop Advisory Service and Information Hub to support small to medium-sized Aboriginal NGOs and Aboriginal health services as well as non-Aboriginal NGOs who deliver a service to Aboriginal people, with a particular focus on the needs of rural and remote areas within NSW.

AbSec will work with targeted NGOs to identify their organisational needs and develop plans to support their growth to increase their capacity, effectiveness and sustainability to better support their communities. The project will also include information, resources, access to training, workforce development, and referrals to develop a more culturally appropriate and skilled workforce to enable better outcomes for Aboriginal people.

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.



Research and Advocacy

AbSec continued its work being a thought leader in the Aboriginal child and family sector through forging strong research partnerships that give a voice to Aboriginal communities and advocating for better outcomes with like-minded community organisations.

A research partnership was established with UNSW and UTS for the project *Bring Them Home, Keep Them Home: Charting the experiences, successful pathways and outcomes of Aboriginal families whose children have been restored from out-of-home care*. The project aims to advance knowledge, strategies and solutions regarding Aboriginal

child restoration by investigating the rates, outcomes and experiences of successful and sustained restoration for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

To highlight the experiences of Aboriginal children and families and their interactions with the child protection system, in late 2020, AbSec published the report *Hearing the voices of Aboriginal people in child welfare*. To complete the report, AbSec engaged with a number of Aboriginal families affected by the Department of Communities and Justice and invited them to share their experiences and perspectives.

Throughout these conversations, several common themes emerged. We heard that Aboriginal people and families continue to be subject to systems and frameworks which perpetuate child removals rather than work with families in the best interests of Aboriginal children. Overall, there was a sense that despite numerous attempts at reform, there had been little meaningful change for Aboriginal children and their families.

AbSec continued its role communicating the needs of Aboriginal communities to governments, and in early 2021 made a submission to the NSW Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People's Inquiry into the effectiveness of the NSW child protection and social services system in responding to vulnerable children and their families.

The submission notes the failure of the NSW Government to adequately engage and respond to the needs of Aboriginal families to prevent Aboriginal children from entering out-of-home care leading to a child protection system that is failing these same people.

AbSec made a number of recommendations for the improvement of the system, including establishing a statewide safety net of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver holistic services to children, their families and communities through an Aboriginal-led commissioning approach of service provision. Overseeing this system would be an independent Aboriginal Child Protection Commission to ensure accountability and transparency, as well as hold live data.





Partnerships

Every day AbSec works with Aboriginal children, families and communities to ensure care is delivered where it is needed most. As a peak body, we define best practices and develop policies that pave the way to a better future for our next generation. The life-changing work we do wouldn't be possible without the valued support of our partners.

The partnerships AbSec engages in take many forms. From our valued philanthropic partners, to the organisations we work side-by-side with and our one-off donors, we couldn't do it alone. The contributions our partners make and the work this allows us to do is as important as ever.

We must thank CAGES Foundation for their support. With their backing, we were able to advocate for the changes our communities need, while providing valued support to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations on the ground.

AbSec also continued to support organisations through the Aboriginal Child and Family Sector Combined Community Response Grants program, which was implemented thanks to the support of the Australian Communities Foundation, Snow Foundation and CAGES Foundation. A continuation of the program that started in 2019/20, these grants helped Aboriginal organisations adjust to the changes caused by COVID and continue supporting Aboriginal families during a tough time.



National Framework to Protect Australia's Children

As part of the consultations for the next National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, the National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds met with Aboriginal young people in May 2021 at the AbSec office. This ambitious National Framework sets a long-term approach to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children and aims to deliver substantial and sustained reductions in levels of child abuse and neglect over time.

Former members of AbSec's Youth Ambassador Program were joined by local young people from the Redfern and La Perouse communities and met with Commissioner Hollonds to speak about their views and provide advice on out-of-home care, safety issues, living independently and navigating adulthood.

The key priorities for the next National Framework include:

- ⦿ Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection systems
- ⦿ A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
- ⦿ Improved information sharing, data development and analysis
- ⦿ Strengthening child and family sector workforce capability

As a part of the development of the next National Framework, SNAICC also launched national public consultations as part of a co-design process. The new National Framework is expected to be launched in November 2021.

Supporting Members of the Stolen Generations

After a brief period at Uniting, AbSec welcomed back the Stolen Generations Council of NSW and ACT to our office. The Stolen Generations Council was formed in 2009 from an acknowledgement that there was no peak body in NSW and ACT to represent the interests of members of the Stolen Generations. It was formed by former residents of government and non-government Aboriginal training institutions (the Homes).

The Stolen Generations Council is made up of a Board of Directors, representing survivors of the Stolen Generations and a team of four to achieve the support objectives.

Members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants are supported by:

- Promoting self-determination goals
- Assisting Aboriginal organisations to provide quality services
- Offering information, advice, counselling and networking opportunities
- Informing government departments, organisations and agencies on key issues
- Lobbying for much-needed services
- Seeking reparations for damages done

AbSec looks forward to working hand in hand with the Stolen Generations Council, assisting them to help members of the Stolen Generations with access to support and referral pathways for their social and emotional wellbeing and ensuring that there is a strong voice to represent them.

Events

This was an exceptionally difficult year to host events and bring our community together. AbSec staff worked hard to adapt operations to online modes and host several competitions and giveaways to support Aboriginal children and families. This included a Children's Day competition, the Aboriginal Knowledge Circle logo competition and a number of giveaways for carers throughout the year. Unfortunately, due to COVID, AbSec was unable to host the annual AbSec NAIDOC Family Fun Day. Plans are underway to make the next event bigger and better than any before, a celebration for our communities when it is safe to do so.

NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Awards 2020

The NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Awards are held by AbSec to acknowledge those working to support Aboriginal families throughout the state, celebrating individuals and organisations that have made remarkable contributions and outstanding achievements to improving outcomes for our children.

2020 was a year like no other, and it made the contributions of all our award winners and nominees even more important. COVID had a significant impact, especially on Aboriginal communities, and it was heartening to see so many stories of people stepping up in the community.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we were unable to hold an event this year to announce our winners and celebrate their contributions in the way that we would have hoped. However, we have never been more appreciative of their work.

The winners for this year were:

- Walking Together Award - YWCA
- Young Person of the Year – Leticia Quince
- Carer of the Year – Helen Orcher
- Community Member of the Year – Monica Kerwin
- Practitioner of the Year – Barbara Cohen
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation of the Year – Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services





CASE STUDY

Supporting our Kids Through COVID

Kulai Preschool is an Aboriginal-run community preschool in Coffs Harbour. It has been educating and caring for Aboriginal children since 1962 and places culture at the forefront, creating a nurturing environment for kids to thrive.

Meaning echidna, Kulai takes a holistic approach to education and nurturing. The building they are based in prioritises Aboriginal values and culture, creating a generous echidna-shaped space to give a strong sense of shelter and security.

Kulai Preschool is one of the recipients of the Aboriginal Child and Family Sector Combined Community Response Grants and were able to support families that were feeling isolated and children disconnected from their regular education routines. Kulai put together and delivered wellbeing packages that included learning activities, grocery items and languages resources to keep the children connected to culture.

Alongside the wellbeing packages, Kulai were able to update their digital services internally to adapt to the new normal of working in a COVID safe and socially distanced environment.

The impact of the grant and the work it supported became clear through the positive feedback received from families in the community. Many families were extremely appreciative to be receiving assistance and reached out afterwards for similar resources. These kinds of programs make a huge difference for families that do not have the same access to resources, especially during a global health crisis.

Kulai Director Julie Carey said, "We want to send a really big thank you for the grant. We are extremely grateful for the support during such a traumatic time for vulnerable families and children. Being able to support them has been wonderful and helped build on the strong connection we have, making families feel more secure. All the families and staff involved were extremely grateful."

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.



Closing the Gap

In July 2020, the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap was agreed between National Cabinet, the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Peaks, of which AbSec is a member. The new National Agreement is a pledge from all governments to fundamentally change the way they work with Aboriginal communities and organisations through four Priority Reforms that were overwhelmingly supported during the community engagements led by the Coalition of Peaks in late 2019.

The National Agreement includes new socio-economic targets in areas including education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters and Aboriginal languages. The targets bring focus to new areas important to the lives of Aboriginal people and will help to monitor progress in improving their life outcomes. The targets include, relevant to AbSec's work, a 45% reduction in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 2031.

Community engagement continued throughout the year, with a number of engagement forums hosted by AbSec for the NSW Implementation Plan. They explored the views of Aboriginal people on the new National Agreement and helped create the practical actions to support Aboriginal communities and organisations in taking charge of their own lives and development. The NSW Implementation Plan was released in June 2021 and includes a NSW-specific fifth Priority Reform focusing on employment, business growth and economic

prosperity, as well as activities to achieve the priority reforms, funding, timeframes and accountability mechanisms.

AbSec has now expanded its Closing the Gap team to assist in driving the change for the new National Agreement and its implementation in NSW. The team works across the organisation, as well as closely with the NSW Coalition of Peak Organisations (CAPO), to establish the vision that places genuine partnership between government and Aboriginal communities at its core to drive real change for Aboriginal people.







AbSec Learning and Development Centre

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. The AbSec Learning and Development Centre, a registered training organisation owned and managed by Aboriginal people, is the first of its kind in NSW.

There is a large gap in the market for the coursework that the Learning and Development Centre offers, and for this reason, it 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. An online learning system is being developed to deliver all non-accredited programs, giving students greater flexibility to complete their studies in a COVID-safe way. The Diploma of Child, Youth and Family Intervention will join the online learning system in 2022, while a number of accredited and non-accredited short courses are being developed for online delivery to assist in developing the workforce.

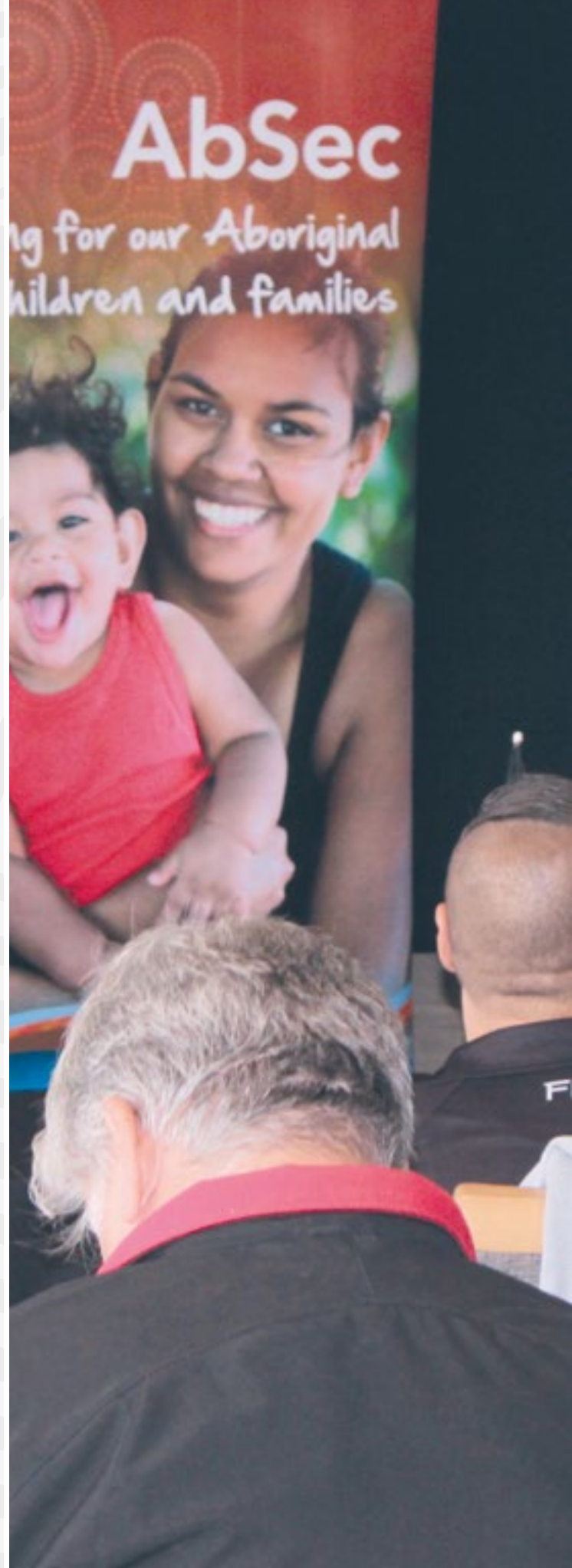
Representing NSW on the National Stage

AbSec is the lead organisation representing NSW in the Family Matters initiative, Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. The campaign is led by SNAICC and works to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care systems across each Australian state and territory.

On 16 November 2020, SNAICC released the Family Matters Report 2020, the fifth annual publication looking into the national crisis of continuing and growing removals of Aboriginal children from their families, the reasons behind it and the solutions at hand.

The report, with contribution from AbSec, revealed Aboriginal children continue to be separated from families at an alarming rate, disrupting their connection to community and culture. Without urgent action, the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is projected to double by 2029.

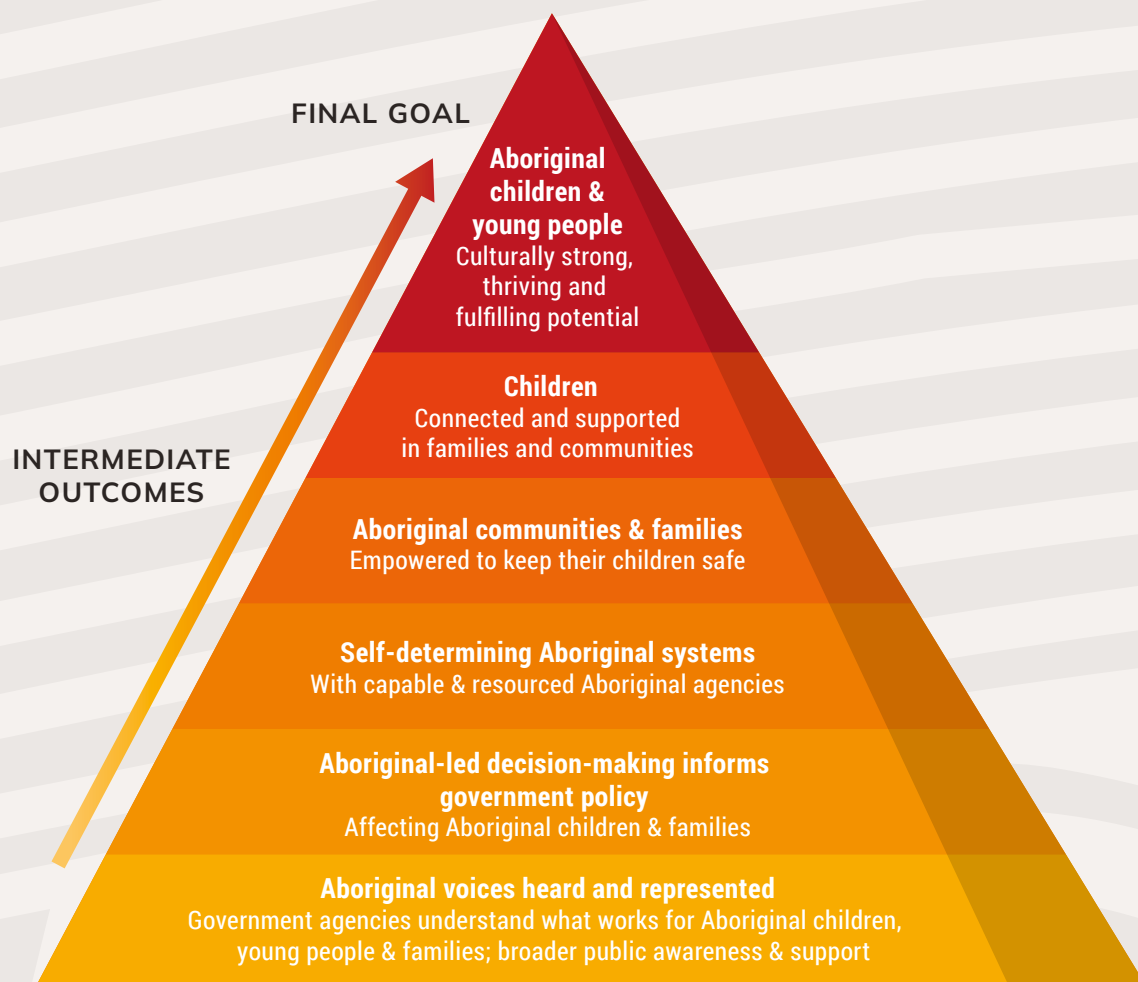
The launch was attended by 280 people, as well as Aboriginal leaders from the three major political parties, showing the importance of the campaign and its messaging.





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.

1

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.

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2

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.

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3

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.

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4

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.

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5

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 30 JUNE 2021

	ECONOMIC ENTITY		CHIEF ENTITY	
	2021 \$	2020 \$	2021 \$	2020 \$
ASSETS				
CURRENT ASSETS				
Cash Assets	4,215,014	2,022,900	4,145,729	1,969,758
Receivables	91,039	12,213	128,556	19,634
Other Assets	11,000	12,000	11,000	12,000
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	4,317,053	2,047,113	4,285,285	2,001,392
NON-CURRENT ASSETS				
Property, Plant and Equipment	2,503,853	2,706,714	2,503,853	2,706,714
Investments	-	-	20,000	20,000
Intangibles	19,999	19,999	-	-
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	2,523,852	2,726,713	2,523,853	2,726,714
TOTAL ASSETS	6,840,905	4,773,826	6,809,138	4,728,106
LIABILITIES				
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Payables	134,791	114,125	131,791	111,125
Current Tax Liabilities	281,011	13,172	280,690	20,952
Provisions	172,006	176,086	172,006	176,086
Other Liabilities	2,240,066	57,420	2,212,698	30,052
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	2,827,874	360,803	2,797,185	338,215
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Provisions	33,297	74,270	33,297	74,270
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	33,297	74,270	33,297	74,270
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,861,171	435,073	2,830,482	412,485
NET ASSETS	3,979,734	360,803	3,978,656	4,315,621
MEMBERS' EQUITY				
Reserve	1,293,305	1,293,305	1,293,305	1,293,305
Opening Balance-Retained Earnings	3,045,448	2,654,042	3,022,316	2,581,858
Current Year Surplus/(Deficit)	(359,019)	391,406	(336,965)	440,458
TOTAL MEMBERS' EQUITY	3,979,734	4,338,753	3,978,656	4,315,621

Our Audited Financial Statements (Report) for the year ended 30 June 2021 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

Join AbSec as a member

AbSec is a member-based organisation. We are grateful to all the people and organisations who support us as members and continue to represent you each and every day.

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 partnerships@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)**

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