

LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

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Media Release

Major National provider of out-of-home services amplifies calls for a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The safety and protection of Aboriginal children must be based on fact, not fiction.

Life Without Barriers, one of Australia's only national providers of out-of-home care services says commentary by the Opposition leader has the potential to mislead the Australian public about the true danger facing Aboriginal children – that danger is the continued assertion that Aboriginal people cannot care for their families.

Life Without Barriers provides out-of-home care services for over 1,000 Aboriginal children and has embarked on a national partnership with peak body SNAICC – National Voice for our Children to progressively step away from providing care to Aboriginal children. The partnership will enable Aboriginal children to be supported by Aboriginal Community controlled organisations and in community. This commitment is directly aimed at supporting Close the Gap targets.

For a number of years, Australia's peak body for Aboriginal children, SNAICC, have called for a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with independent powers to ensure the needs of Aboriginal children are understood, protected and met.

The systems in place continue to fail – rates of Aboriginal child removal are increasing to devastating effects and claims about growing rates of child abuse are not evidenced in the statistics. Yet political leaders relying on this narrative are ignoring the advice of Peak organisations like SNAICC.

Chief Executive of Life Without Barriers Claire Robbs said the continued suggestion that Aboriginal families are unable to care for their children is in direct conflict to the discussion needed to Close the Gap – especially in relation to the impacts on children.

“Aboriginal children have been successfully protected and loved for 65,000 years. This legacy cannot be misrepresented. We are bearing witness now to decades of missed opportunities because of funding cuts and ignoring Aboriginal leadership and advice on matters affecting Aboriginal children. Ms Robbs said.

“If Aboriginal children are to be safe and empowered out of care and disadvantage, then we must act on the counsel of SNAICC for a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. SNAICC have implored Governments for years to appoint this Commissioner.

“We are at an important juncture to make substantial and positive advancements - an enshrined Voice to Parliament will enable greater understanding of the policies and programs needed to support and empower Aboriginal people. Positive moves by states such as South Australia to lead with their own Voice to state Parliament will have a powerful and direct impact on the state-based care system and children. Ms Robbs said.

Life Without Barriers supports a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and the appointment of a dedicated National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with independent powers. Life Without Barriers is actively working across the out of home care sector to support transformational change by advocating for steps to reduce Aboriginal children entering care, supporting the direct investment of resources towards Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and has committed to step away from the provision of care so Aboriginal children can grow in culture.

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