



Guardian
for Children and
Young People



**COMMISSIONER FOR
ABORIGINAL CHILDREN
& YOUNG PEOPLE**

Media Release

15 February 2023

Inaugural meeting of First Nations children's commissioners and guardians identifies key advocacy priorities

Last month, First Nations Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates throughout Australia came together as a group for the very first time in Brisbane, on Yuggera and Turrbul country.

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, April Lawrie, and Guardian for Children and Young People, Shona Reid, joined five other members of the First Nations Caucus, to represent the voices and interests of First Nations children in South Australia.

The discussions have come at a time when Commissioner Lawrie is part way through her formal Inquiry into the application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle with the removals and placement of Aboriginal children in South Australia.

"All members of the First Nations Caucus have immediate common concerns regarding the alarming rate at which Aboriginal children are entering care and growing up disconnected from family, community and culture," said Commissioner Lawrie.

"Having this inaugural gathering of First Nations Commissioners and Guardians is hugely significant," Ms Reid said. "As a group of passionate First Nations leaders in children's rights we are working together, using our influence to garner appropriate attention to the needs and rights of First Nations children and young people. That is our focus, and we are unrelenting."

Commissioner Lawrie noted that "by coming together and centering the rights and needs of Aboriginal children and young people at the heart of our priorities, we amplify their voices at a greater level than ever before".

"Never in this country, have we seen this number of Aboriginal people holding independent positions with statutory responsibilities and functions to create systemic change specifically for Aboriginal children and young people. This network of First Nations leadership is a defining moment in this country's history for Aboriginal children and young people. We are invested in our Aboriginal children and young people like no other," Commissioner Lawrie said.

Over the course of two days, the group made a firm commitment to **show up** for First Nations children and reached agreement on a set of national priorities for joint advocacy efforts to promote the rights, safety and wellbeing of First Nations children and their families.

Areas where the group intends to target and combine advocacy efforts for the next year includes to:

- **Influence** the Closing the Gap agenda, both in South Australia and nationally, to make meaningful change in First Nations children's lives
- **Promote** the centrality of children's voices, experiences and futures in the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- **Strengthen** the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector, through the resources and powers to design and lead child protection and youth justice responses for First Nations children and families
- **Monitor** the application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle on an ongoing basis, placing primacy on the preservation and reunification of families

- **End** harmful and inhumane practices that violate the human rights of children and young people detained, including the incarceration of children under 14 years old
- **Support** vulnerable and impoverished families and intervene in the removal cycle.

“The issues we have raised are not new. Our children have been missing and overlooked for far too long. But it is time to change the narrative and tackle the uphill challenges that First Nations children face living in care and navigating youth justice. It is time to really look forward,” Ms Reid added.

“I am honoured to join my First Nations peers to work together to address the endemic issues our children face, in challenging the complacencies government have and tackling the barriers that exist for First Nations children entering care.”

“We are clear about our commitments to reverse the rates of child removal and support their rights so they stay connected to family, culture and community,” Ms Reid said

“South Australia is headed towards the formation of its First Nations Voice to Parliament, spearheaded by Commissioner Dale Agius, and as statutory officers, we seek to understand and harness the Voice to advance the rights of Aboriginal children and young people,” said Commissioner Lawrie.

Australia’s First Nations caucus of Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates will meet quarterly and collaboratively advocate through joint submissions on these key priority areas. Their next meeting will focus on strategies to implement these key priorities.

The 11 priorities can be viewed in full at the [Guardian’s website](#) and [CACYP’s website](#).

First Nations caucus members include:

- **April Lawrie**, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, South Australia
- **Shona Reid**, Guardian for Children and Young People, South Australia
- **Meena Singh**, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Victoria
- **Nicole Hucks**, Assistant Children’s Commissioner, Northern Territory
- **Jacqueline McGowan-Jones**, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia
- **Barbara Causon**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Advocate, Australian Capital Territory
- **Natalie Lewis**, Commissioner Queensland Family and Child Commission, Queensland

Media contact:

Bianca Turner, Senior Communications and Liaison Officer, OGCYP P: 8226 8570, E: bianca.turner2@sa.gov.au

Leah Manuel, Manuel Communications, CACYP, P: 0422 006 647, E: leah@manuelcommunications.com.au