



ABORIGINAL FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES Newsletter

September - October - 2025

AFSS staff attend the SNAICC'2025 Conference

AFSS was extremely proud and grateful to have our staff and Board members attend the SNAICC'25 Conference.

It was a wonderful opportunity to come together, connect, and be inspired by powerful keynotes, insightful sessions, and meaningful yarns.

We return filled with renewed energy and passion - continuing to amplify the voices of our communities and the incredible work being done to support our children and their families.

Some highlights from our staff members

"Attending the SNAICC 2025 National Conference gave me a deeper understanding of the importance of culture, connection and belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. I learnt so much about the strength of community and the power of listening to and respecting cultural knowledge. It's inspired me to continue learning and to help create more inclusive culturally respectful ways to support families and communities."

Dawn



"The recent conference was an incredible experience, exceptionally well organised and deeply enriching. Over three days, we were fully immersed in culture, connection, and learning, surrounded by passionate people doing extraordinary work in their communities.

The focus on the child's voice was a powerful reminder of why we do what we do. Every conversation, presentation, and story brought us back to the heart of our purpose ensuring that children are heard, valued, and supported through culturally responsive and community-led approaches.

It was particularly inspiring to hear from services that identified needs within their own communities, created solutions, and secured funding to bring their ideas to life often before any formal support was available. Their success in demonstrating impact and then attracting further government funding is a true example of self-determination in action.

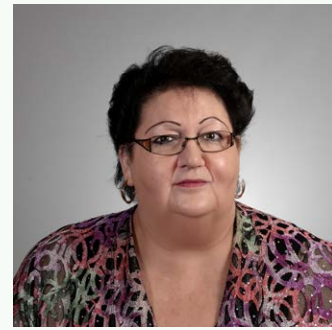
The conference reinforced that when communities are trusted to lead, the outcomes are stronger, more sustainable, and deeply connected to culture."

Ebony

Continued on page 3

A message from the Chief Executive

I would like to acknowledge the steady and committed work happening across all AFSS sites. The stories in this edition highlight the strength of our programs, the professionalism of our staff, and the positive impact we continue to have with children, young people, families, and carers.



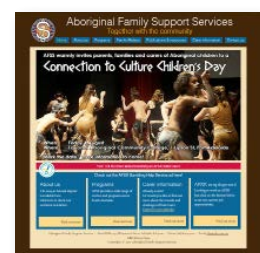
Our attendance at SNAICC'25 provided important insights into strengthening Aboriginal-led practice and the vital role young people's voices must play in shaping the child protection system. The reflections from staff who attended reinforce our ongoing focus on culturally responsive, community-led approaches across all areas of our work.

Across the state, our teams have delivered a wide range of programs - including Community Safety & Wellbeing workshops, cultural activities for young people, school holiday programs, carer events, and ongoing support through our Kinship, Foster Care, Stronger Families, and Youth Shed programs. These activities reflect the consistency and quality of the support we provide every day.

I would also like to acknowledge the staff milestones featured in this edition, and the strong partnerships highlighted - including our continued collaboration with community organisations, local services, and ACCOs.

Thank you to all staff for your continued professionalism and dedication. Your work ensures AFSS remains a trusted and respected organisation for Aboriginal families across South Australia.

*Sharron Williams
Chief Executive*



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Continued from page 1

"The highlight of the conference was a breakout session called Learning from the Experts – Aboriginal Young People as Child Protection Mentors, presented by the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People SA.

To hear from young people who had been in care - their journeys while in care and after leaving care - was truly amazing. Listening to them share what the care team could have done better and the support they did receive really hit home. One thing that still rings in my mind is: if only their LIFE STORY BOOK had been completed with them while they were in care.

Now, to see these same young people being part of interview panels for staff in child protection - people who can cut through the bull**** and see who genuinely has their heart in the right place for this work, and who's just there for the paycheck - was powerful. We all need to remember why we're doing this work: for the right reasons, for the young people.

Also inspiring was the work of Jack Beetson, Executive Director of the Literacy for Life Foundation. He's been working in Indigenous education for decades, teaching people to read - starting with the parents, so they can then teach their children - in remote towns. I must say, the whole conference was outstanding."

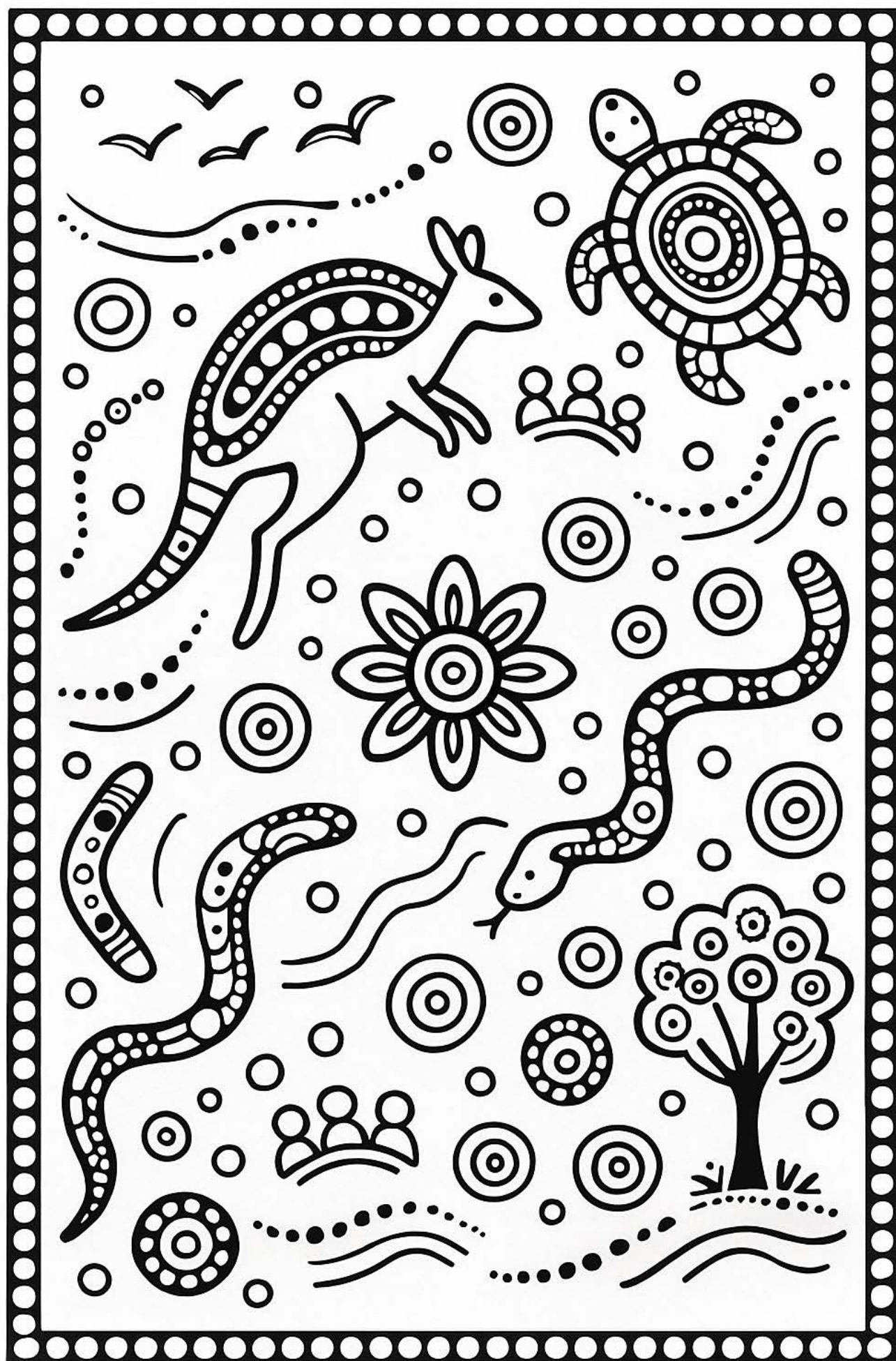
Glenn



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AFSS attend Kura Yerlo's Connected Beginnings Children's Day Event

AFSS Foster and Kinship team represented AFSS at Kura Yerlo's Connected Beginning's Children's Day Event on Tuesday the 21st of October. Seaton Rambler's Football Club transformed into a colourful children's sanctuary filled with rides, bungee trampolines, face painting, balloon artistry and a variety of passionate services connecting community to early childhood development initiatives. Leaving

the rainy weather as no contestant against the children's creativity and enthusiasm to explore and play throughout the day. The joy of childhood adventure!

AFSS Cultural Practitioner Michael Akselsen, Therapeutic Clinician Ciara Walsh and AFSS Foster and Kinship Team members Ruby Winnen and Kaniesha Brown, had yarns with community about our services, as well as engaging the kids with natural playdough made by Aboriginal business Ochre Dawn, and stamps with cultural symbols from Aboriginal business Songlines. This meant that the kids could practice their fine motor development skills whilst immersing themselves in culture! It was a pleasure to connect mob with SNAICC Children's day bags, as well as cultural resources with Kaurna language and Scar-Tree activity booklets! Connected Beginnings aims to improve access to existing early childhood, maternal and child health and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, to ensure they are safe, healthy and ready to thrive at school by the age of five. As always, we are privileged to walk alongside community and services that know our collective strength is nourished through connection. We are grateful to be inspired by the strength, wisdoms and joy that children gift the world, and will continue to channel their voices in our every day practice!



Community Safety & Wellbeing Term 3 - Metro

Partnership

AFSS Community Safety and Wellbeing Facilitator's Annette and Kayla have formed partnership with IncomPro Aboriginal Association Incorporated and Wardli-ana Towards Home Alliance. We are pleased to announce that CS&W have successfully delivered 4 Workshops. We continue to develop and promote Community Safety and Wellbeing workshops with InComPro participants aiming to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge that contribute to their overall wellbeing and safety.

Term 3 - Seasons for Healing

The Community Safety and Wellbeing team delivered a Seasons for Healing workshop at InComPro Aboriginal Association Incorporated with a group of ladies where they successfully completed the 4-week workshop. Participants gained awareness and education around the grief and loss process. Participants learned valuable tools to help manage overwhelming thoughts and emotions. A big congratulations to the women for their commitment in attending the workshop and actively engaging in achieving their goals in improving their overall wellbeing.

Participant feedback

"The Facilitator's helped me understand the cycles of grief and I needed that".

Racheal

"This workshop helped me learn healthier ways to help and manage my emotions".

Nirelle

"I enjoyed and learnt new information that will play a part in my future".

Teresa

Bringing up Great Kids

We had 6 participants engage in the Bringing up Great Kids workshop.

The workshop helped participants to

- Build positive and nurturing relationships between themselves and their children
- Review and enhance their pattern of communication
- Promote more respectful interaction
- Encourage the development of their child's positive identity
- Participants actively engaged in all the activities and said they really enjoyed the workshop.

Term 3 - Shark Cage

The Shark Cage is an 8 week workshop that teaches how to use our human rights as a way of setting up healthy boundaries. The workshop increases the knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships, it builds capacity to set boundaries and increases awareness.

The ladies that participated in the workshop learned some valuable information and supported each other every week. We are very proud of the women and thank them for their courage and dedication for participating in the workshop.





Community Safety & Wellbeing – Port Lincoln

This term in Port Lincoln, AFSS was proud to run two important programs that support our families and community.

Over 8 weeks, we delivered the **Shark Cage** program, which is all about keeping women safe, building confidence, and finding strength in each other's stories. One of our participants shared with us:

"Coming to this workshop has made me a stronger woman and I really enjoyed this group."

Hearing words like this shows the power of women coming together to learn, share, and support one another.

We also ran the **Circle of Security** program across 8 weeks, which focuses on strengthening the connection between parents and children. Families joined in to learn more about understanding children's needs, building trust, and creating safe and loving environments for our little ones to grow strong.

Both groups were full of courage, honesty, and laughter. We thank everyone who came along and walked this journey with us. Together, we continue to build strong families, strong culture, and strong communities here in Port Lincoln.

If you'd like to be part of our next program or know someone who might be interested, please get in touch with our Port Lincoln office. We'd love to welcome you. To Register your interest please contact Mel on 0417 255 724.



Elder Care Services

Are you receiving all the care and support services you need?

AFSS Elder Care Support program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 50 to understand the aged care system, including identifying the level of care and services required.

Contact our team to find out more

📍 1 Corner South & Grand Junction Road Wingfield SA 5013
 ✉ ElderCare@afss.com.au
 ☎ 8281 3440



This program is supported by:



Community Safety & Wellbeing – Program Update

New Dreams & Staying Safe

Community Safety and Wellbeing (CS&W) Case Management programs have moved into the second reporting period for 2025. Both programs are funded by National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

What is Staying Safe?

The Staying Safe program works alongside individuals and families to reduce family abuse and improve the safety of women and children. Its goal is to provide healing and support to address the impacts of transgenerational cycles of family abuse in the community.

What is New Dreams?

The New Dreams program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to enhance the safety, health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres women and children. New Dreams offers case management services aimed at reducing domestic and family abuse by collaborating with clients and essential services such as schools, Aboriginal health services, employment agencies, and other community resources. Families are encouraged to pursue opportunities for further education, training, or employment. Strong support will be provided to help improve their children's school attendance.



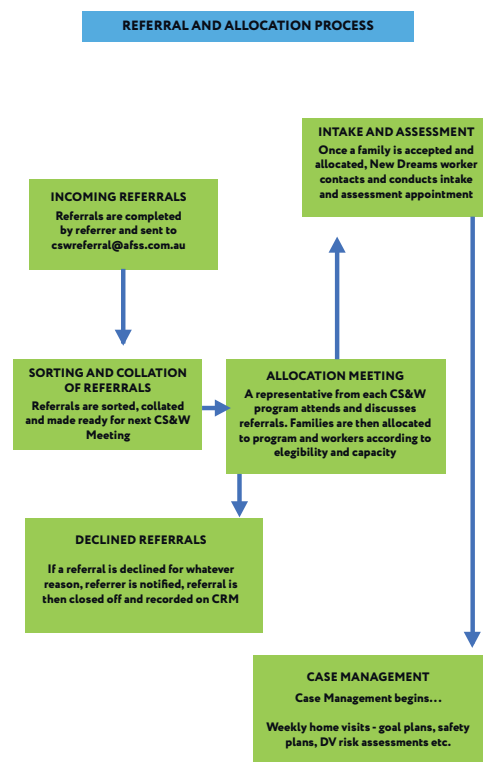
Caseworkers in both programs utilise strength-based theory to support clients when developing safety plans and goal setting. Individuals and families are encouraged to set other personal goals to enhance their sense of self-empowerment in the home and in the community. For instance, clients are encouraged to reflect on past experiences and local resources, that have assisted them to maintain their safety. This strength-based approach promotes resilience and self-efficacy, empowering clients to navigate challenges with a greater sense of urgency and confidence.

When working with Aboriginal families, where a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate approach is vital. Such practice recognises historical and intergenerational trauma, respects cultural identity, and aims to build trust

and safety while fostering strengths and resilience.

Incoming referrals have been steady throughout the period with 26 new referrals between the two programs. Each incoming referral is mentioned in the CS&W allocations meeting, where the referral is broken down, discussed and allocated to a program and worker. After the Allocation meeting takes place and the referral is accepted, the family is contacted for an Intake and Assessment appointment. Upon agreement to work with CS&W, the family then becomes active, and case management begins.

A critical component of the program's success lies in the strong partnerships and referral pathways developed by CS&W Programs Coordinator and Case Workers. These relationships ensure that families receive timely, culturally safe, and appropriate support to promote meaningful change and long-term safety.



How do I apply for the program?

Please contact CS&W team on 8281 3440 or send email to cswreferrals@afss.com.au, if you require further information.



Fee-Free Training First Nations People

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Courses Available

- CHC32015 Certificate III in Community Services
- CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
- FBP30121 Certificate III in Food Processing
- CHC33021 Certificate III in Individual Support Ageing +
CHCSS00130 Disability Skill Set
- CHC40421 Certificate IV in Youth Work

*Students will receive a statement of attainment for completed units



Eligibility

To be eligible for fee free vocational education, an individual must at the time the course commences:

- Identify as a First Nations person
- Live or work in South Australia
- Be an Australian or New Zealand citizen, permanent Australian resident, or an eligible visa holder
- Be aged 16 years or over and not enrolled at school.

Locations

- Elizabeth
- Mawson Lakes
- Gawler
- Christie Downs
- Port Lincoln

Contact Us

08 8423 6490

Melissa.barnett@strategix.edu.au

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Laura.garner@strategix.edu.au



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AFSS Recognised as Collaboration Partner in Award-Winning Program

AFSS is proud to be a collaboration partner in the First Nations Foster and Kinship Carer Career Development Program, which has been awarded the 2025 South Australian Training Awards – Industry Collaboration Award.



The program strengthens South Australia's First Nations Child Protection workforce by developing and delivering a culturally responsive Certificate IV in Community Services tailored specifically for First Nations foster and kinship carers. By supporting carers to gain formal vocational credentials and build on their natural cultural authority, this initiative is helping more First Nations workers move into decision-making roles across the sector.

AFSS acknowledges the dedication of all partners involved and is honoured to contribute to a program that places culture, knowledge, and community leadership at its core.

Congratulations to everyone who helped bring this important initiative to life – this recognition is well-deserved.



Good News Stories

Metro South – Stronger families

One family, in which the mother has seven children, had no access to services or support when AFSS first became involved. Six months later, the worker successfully supported two of the children to access NDIS Supports. School attendance for the children has improved, and the mother is now more confident in her parenting and engages positively with AFSS.

AFSS Stronger Families Supports a Single Father

Another family consisting of a single father caring for four children with special needs: A worker from the AFSS IFS program has been working with him for six months and has supported him in securing new housing. With the help of the IFS worker, the children have undergone medical assessments and have been enrolled in the NDIS. The children maintain good school attendance, and the AFSS worker has supported the father in accessing financial counselling services.

Thank You Whyalla RSPCA !

Whyalla AFSS want to thank Whyalla RSPCA for donating such a generous amount of dog and cat food (a whole carload full). Our clients will be very appreciative of your kindness. Local supporting local, such a beautiful thing.





AFSS Cultural Family Day - A Celebration of Identity & Connection



On October 9, AFSS hosted its Cultural Family Day at Mercury Cinema in Adelaide, bringing together over 60 families and children for a special celebration of culture, connection, and community.

Guests were treated to popcorn, drinks, and choc-top ice creams as they settled in to watch the feature film *Hidden Tiger* - a powerful story that explores themes of identity, belonging, and cultural connection. These values are central to Aboriginal family and community life, and the film beautifully reminds us that healing and strength come from knowing who we are and where we come from.

For many of the children in our care, reconnecting

with culture is a vital part of their journey. *Hidden Tiger* reflects this truth with grace and authenticity.

As we enjoyed this time together, we also took a moment to reflect on the shared journey of care, connection, and culture.

A heartfelt thank you to the staff at Mercury Cinema for providing such a welcoming space. Special thanks also go to the AFSS Kinship and Foster Care teams for their dedication in planning and bringing this event to life.

To the children and their families - thank you for being part of this day, and thank you for everything you do.

BECOME AN AFSS Foster Carer

Are you passionate about the future of Aboriginal children and young people?

Are you supportive and understanding?

Can you help keep young people safe in culture and community?

Contact an office in your area:

Adelaide - Assessment Team
✉ assessments@afss.com.au
☎ 8297 5708

Berri - Jamie Sutton
✉ jamie.sutton@afss.com.au
☎ 8582 3192

Ceduna - Michelle Naylon
✉ michelle.naylon@afss.com.au
☎ 8625 3466

Coober Pedy - Faye Johnson
✉ Faye.Johnson@afss.com.au
☎ 8672 3066

Murray Bridge - Josephine Breede
✉ Josephine.Breede@afss.com.au
☎ 8532 1790

Mount Gambier - Dawn Cardona
✉ dawn.cardona@afss.com.au
☎ 0499 889 729

Port Augusta - Deb Merchant
✉ deborah.merchant@afss.com.au
☎ 8641 0907

Port Lincoln - Mandy Drummond
✉ mandy.drummond@afss.com.au
☎ 8683 1909

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Aboriginal Family Support Services
Together with the community





October School Holiday Adventures in Residential Care

This October school holidays, we had the privilege of sharing some incredible adventures with our young people, deepening our connection to country and celebrating the rich heritage of the land.

Hiking at Morialta Falls

A small group of seven young people set off on an unforgettable hike at Morialta Falls, where we discussed what the land would have looked like when the Kaurna ancestors roamed the hills and valleys. As we hiked the 6km loop, we talked about the ancient practices of hunting and gathering that took place in the area, surrounded by spectacular lookouts overlooking the valley. Along the way, we encountered breathtaking views and wildlife, including koalas nestled in the trees.

Our journey culminated in a group photo at the Third Waterfall, our initial goal. However, the group decided to push on together, reaching "Deep View" Lookout, adding an extra 40 minutes to our hike. The day was filled with teamwork, learning, and a profound connection to the land that the ancestors once walked.



Cooking Roo Tail on Peramangk Country

Over two separate days, we ventured into the forests of Peramangk Country, surrounded by the pines, to cook kangaroo tail over the coals and also damper using traditional seasonings on both. Our staff guided the young people through the traditional process of preparing the tail, including removing the skin and preparing the meat, just as it has been done by elders for generations. It was heartwarming to witness the exchange of knowledge and stories between our young

people and staff about the different ways their families prepare kangaroo tail.

To ensure everyone could participate, we ran both a girls' day and a boys' day, fostering open and supportive conversations about future events and activities. For those who were nervous about joining the group, TRAX also offered one-on-one cookups in some of our houses, ensuring that no one missed out on this experience.



Kayaking on Ngarrindjeri Country

We then headed down to Ngarrindjeri Country, where a group of ten young people kayaked along the stunning waters of the Coorong. It was a deeply special experience to connect with the same waters and lands that their ancestors have cared for and fished in for thousands of years. Along the way, we learned about the local cultural knowledge, including how the ancestors are said to see through the eyes of the pelican, watching over their people.

The group worked together to navigate the strong winds, rafting up several times to ensure we moved safely downstream. We paddled past the mouth of the Murray River, where seals curiously observed us from the shore. It was a powerful day of connection, teamwork, and shared experience, and we were grateful to have so many young people join us in this remarkable adventure along the Coorong's breathtaking coastline.



Coober Pedy STAY Program & YOUTH SHED

Tiger Tennis - July School Holidays

We were excited to welcome Dane and Sophie from Tiger Tennis back to Coober Pedy for another great school holiday tennis program! Held indoors at the school gym due to bad weather, the kids showed amazing improvement each day and remembered plenty from last year's sessions.

By the final day, they were smashing rallies and learning new techniques - including the favourite game "Back of the Bus", which helped build confidence in serving and swinging. Everyone took home great goodies from Tiger Tennis, including hats, shirts, and racquets.

STAY Program Training

Our STAY clients joined a job-ready training day with CEG (Careers Employment Group) and AMY-NOMs at TAFE. Five young people took part, learning resume writing, interview skills, budgeting, and more. They received work clothes and boots to prepare for upcoming job opportunities on local mines - and even talked about starting their own businesses!

School Holiday Sports Day

Our popular School Holiday Sports Day is becoming a regular favourite! Activities included frisbee golf, golf, football, soccer, and kite flying - plus a pizza lunch with thanks to Louise from RSAS and Youth Workers Paul and Adam.

Space & Flight Workshop

Held at Umoona Gym, the Space and Flight Workshop was run by the Toongabbie Anglican Church (Sydney) and Coober Pedy Catacomb Church. Kids learned about flight by building planes, rockets, gliders, and kites - then tested them out with lots of smiles and "up, up and away!" moments.

Around the Youth Shed

We had some special visitors - baby emus rescued after being found alone around town. They've now been safely re homed. There was also cookie and cupcake decorating (thanks to Centacare) and even a pet bearded dragon showing off the latest "shed fashion"! Thank You.

A huge thank you to all our supporters and partners: Complete Personnel, RSAS, Catacomb Church, Centacare Catholic Country SA, NIAA, CP Youth Shed and STAY (DHS), Coober Pedy Area School, District Council of Coober Pedy, CEG, AMY-NOMs, BHP, Bikes SA, and Umoona Community Council.

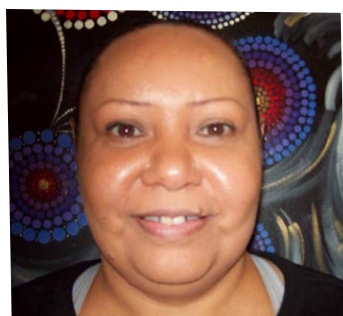




Samantha Wilkins Celebrates 10 years with AFSS

Samantha Wilkins has been employed with AFSS since July 2015. AFSS Ceduna recently celebrated her 10 year anniversary as a Youth Support Worker.

Congratulations to Sam who has brought her passion to work everyday and made a positive difference to so many children and young peoples lives.



Rebecca Wright - Site Location Manager Wingfield

Hi, My name is Rebecca, I am a proud Wanggatha and Wiradjuri woman living on beautiful Kaurna country for over 20 years. I previously served as the New Dreams Coordinator within the Community Safety and Wellbeing team located in Paralowie office. In June 2025, I humbly accepted the Site Location Manager position at the Wingfield office, in addition to coordinating programs within the Community Safety and Well Being team.

I am responsible for the day-to-day operations of the site, including workplace health and safety, site team management, site equipment and maintenance and general administration.

My role as CS&W Program Coordinator is to oversee the implementation and monitoring of CS&W Programs, providing cultural insights, and ensuring our clients are receiving quality therapeutic services. My role is to ensure there is continuous improvement in areas of service delivery across the New Dreams, Staying Safe and CS&W Education programs.

The dual roles have been challenging but tremendously rewarding at the same time. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their confidence in my ability and for your ongoing support in my new role. My aim is to work collaboratively with community and services to enrich the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families through education and support.



Darlene Allen, Manager Port Augusta Office Celebrates 7 years with AFSS

Congratulations also to Darlene Allen Manager of our Port Augusta Office who also celebrated her 7 years at AFSS. Darlene's leadership, commitment, and deep connection to community have been instrumental in strengthening our presence and impact across the region.

AFSS celebrates RU OK Day?

On September 11 AFSS proudly celebrated R U OK? Day with a focus on strengthening connection and supporting the wellbeing of our staff and community. This year, our team came together packing over 450 goodie bags and helpful mental health resources for staff across the organisation.

These resources serve as gentle reminders of the importance of checking in, starting conversations, and supporting one another through life's ups and downs.

R U OK? Day continues to highlight how powerful a simple question can be. At AFSS, we remain committed to fostering a workplace where people feel seen, valued, and supported - not just today, but every day.





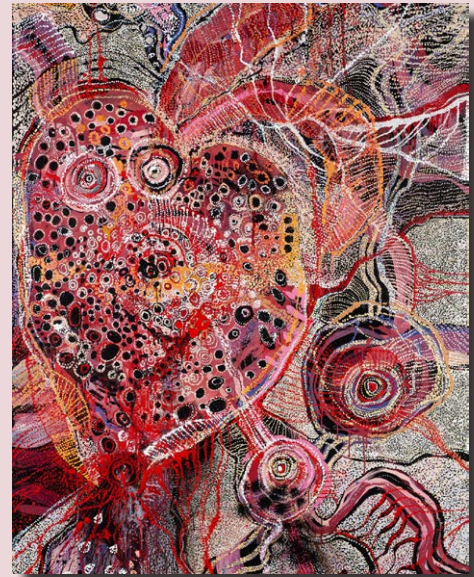
The 7 Sisters

Minyma Tjukupa (Women's Story) Kupa Piti (Coober Pedy) by Kinship Carer Lisa Khan

Lisa Khan is an AFSS Kinship Carer and has such a positive relationship and partnership with the Aboriginal Kinship program that she donated an art piece to celebrate our new office. The art piece is the 7 sisters and is awaiting framing for the office opening.

Lisa Khan

I don't consider myself an artist; I'm simply an Yankunytjatara/Antakirinja woman committed to preserving my culture and history. As a traditional owner, it is my responsibility to carry on these important narratives. Each day, I gain wisdom from the elders in my community. Their knowledge and experiences guide me in my journey. As a mother to children with special needs, art has provided me with a deeper understanding of navigating life amid the complexities of three cultures: Aboriginal, Pakistani, and the contemporary world.



Galinyala Cultural Tour

This month we all met at the Makybe Diva Statue on the Port Lincoln foreshore and travelled by tour bus to the Galinyala Spring's which is a fresh water spring at the Axel Stenross museum, Winter's Hill Lookout, North Shields Jetty, Poonindie church where we heard stories of the stolen generation and mission. We saw a well and some old ruins including an animal shelter. The church is still being used every Sunday for church services and is over 176 years old. We then travelled to Billy Light's Point where we were told stories of using fish traps and saw a stone wall in the water where the fish were trapped. We travelled to the marina and saw the prawn boats and made our way to Shelly Beach for a cleansing ceremony where we put our feet in the water and splashed water over our faces. We finished off with a beautiful lunch of chicken rolls, fruit, bushtucker green ant jam and quandong chocolate cake. Emma is a passionate Barngarla Woman, who taught us Barngarla language while travelling on the bus and shared her beautiful stories that have been handed down through her family.



FOSTER &

KINSHIP

CARERS LUNCH

SUNNYBRAE ESTATE FUNCTION CENTRE

Wednesday 10th September marked a special occasion for AFSS as we gathered at Sunnybrae Estate Function Centre to honour the extraordinary work of our foster and kinship carers across metropolitan and regional South Australia.

A Day of Culture, Connection, and Celebration

The day began with a Welcome to Country performed by Spirit in Unity, featuring beautiful singing and interactive dancing that invited all participants to join in. Spirit in Unity brings people together as one family to honour Mother Earth and celebrate connection to Country, community, and family with a focus on unity, healing, and shared experiences that empower families of diverse backgrounds.

Guests were also treated to a powerful dance performance by David Booth and his sons from Imbala, followed by live music from Warren Millera during lunch, adding to the vibrant and heartfelt atmosphere.

Honouring Our Carers

At AFSS, we proudly walk alongside carers who open their hearts and homes to Aboriginal children and young people who, for many reasons, cannot live with their families.

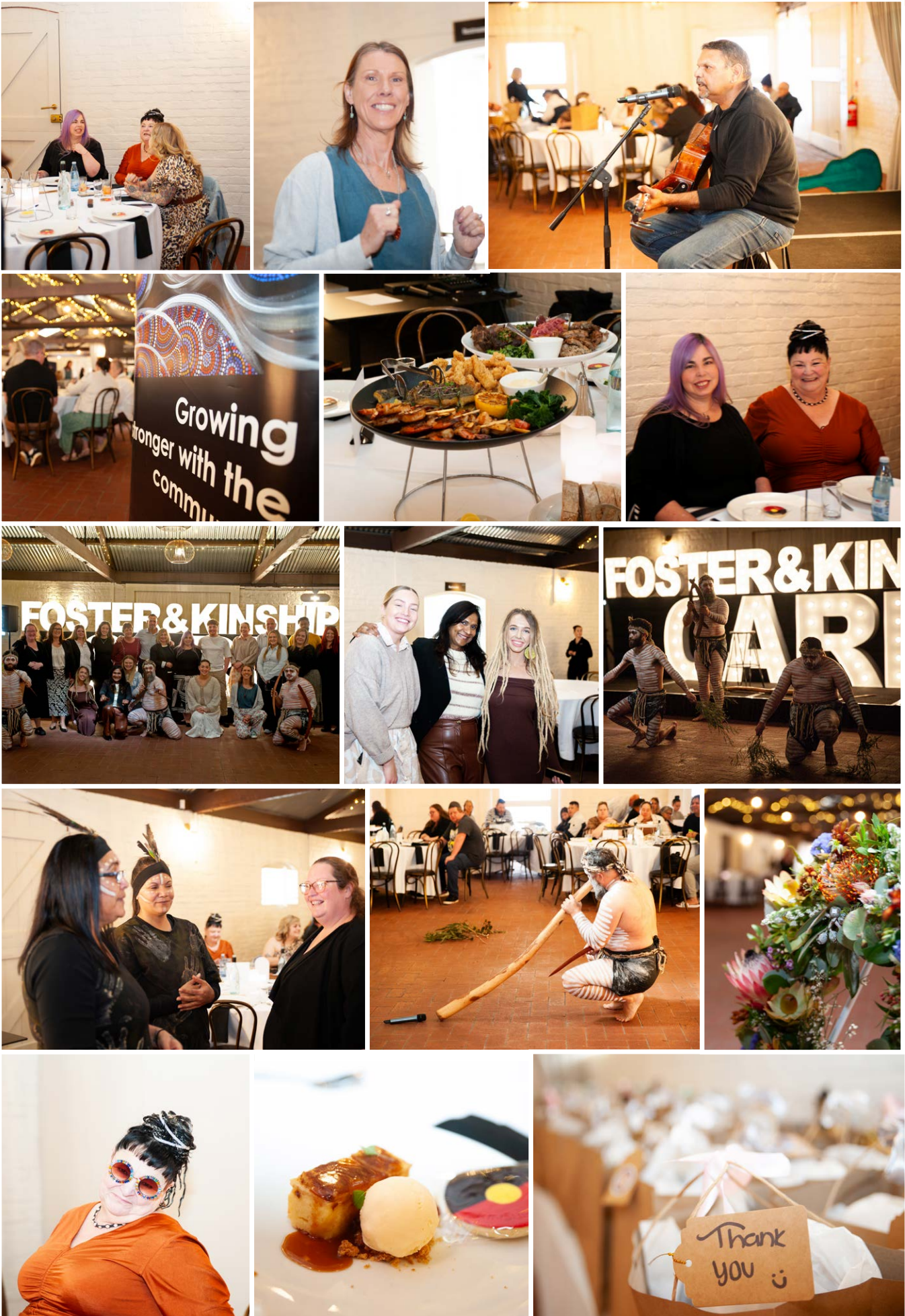
Our carers provide more than shelter, they offer love, stability, and a deep sense of belonging. They help children feel proud of who they are, stay connected to culture, and grow into strong young people with identity and hope. Whether it's emergency, short-term, respite, or long-term care, every role is vital. Each calls for patience, resilience, and above all, compassion.

Acknowledging Our Staff

A special thanks to our dedicated AFSS staff. Your work in training, supporting, and walking alongside carers ensures that children remain at the centre of every decision. Your commitment makes an enormous difference.

This day was about celebration, recognising the small wins and life-changing moments happening every day in homes across our communities. Moments like a child smiling again, a teenager reconnecting with culture, or a family gathering where a child knows they belong.





OUR JOURNEY AS A

FOSTER CARER

BY COURTNEE & LEE

My name is Courtnee, and I am a Noongar woman from the South-West of Perth, WA, with family connections to the Bibbulmun people. I currently live on Kaurna Country.

I began my carer's journey back in 2014, and my husband Lee joined our family and became a carer in 2020. Together, we have three beautiful children, and in our household, there's no step, half, or foster - we're simply family.

"Labels are for soup cans anyway!"

My journey began in 2014 when I was driving home from my full-time job in the city and heard an advertisement about becoming a foster carer on the radio. I found a safe place to pull over and submitted my expression of interest straight away.

At the time, I was living with my Nanna and couldn't wait to get home to share the idea with her. Foster care and kinship care weren't new to us - we have family in WA who are also carers, and their journey definitely inspired me.

Before I knew it, I was registered at 22 years old - excited, nervous, and grateful for the opportunity to help my community. I've always been a carer with AFSS, and I couldn't have chosen a more supportive agency.

The First Call

It was one afternoon not long after I was registered when the phone rang:

"We have a sibling pair that need respite two nights every fortnight. Do you think you could help?"

A couple of days later, they arrived. I'm not sure who was more nervous - me or the children! That respite arrangement continued for 12 months. I remember hosting a birthday party for one of them. It was overwhelming, exciting, but not quite the reaction I had expected. I later

realised this child had never had a birthday party before - a moment that has always stayed with me.

We are now registered for emergency, short-term, long-term, and respite care. Since becoming a family of five, life is busier than ever, so we've adjusted our age range to suit our family's lifestyle.

Over the years, we've had the privilege of caring for siblings, twins, premature babies, and children who've arrived in the middle of the night or even on Christmas morning. To date, we've cared for more than 50 children, and we hope to keep our home - and hearts - open for as long as possible.

We're very lucky to have the support of our family and friends, who accept and help where they can. I truly believe fostering takes a village, not just a household.

There's been a lot of self-growth, advocacy, and change throughout our caring journey. There's no such thing as an "easy placement" - every child deserves love, care, connection to culture, and a safe place to call home.

Some highlights for me have been participating in a Foster Care SA advertisement and attending the National Carer's Conference in 2024.

My Message to Future Carers

If you have the time, energy, and willingness to open your heart and home - it's possible! It's always a mix of emotions when the phone rings about a new child, but it brings me comfort knowing we can provide a culturally safe home and the care that every young person deserves.





Port Lincoln Foster & Kinship Carers lunch held at the Marina

On September 18 AFSS Foster and Kinship Carer's in Port Lincoln celebrated with lunch at the Marina.

Our carer's had a beautiful time and AFSS was well represented by both Kinship and Foster Carer's. Glenn made an amazing speech and everyone left full and happy.

Susan Bilney was presented with a 5 year certificate of caring by DCP and she assures me her tears were happy tears.

The AFSS carer's who also received certificates on the day were;

Kesby Turner-Wierbeck and Alan Dodd - 1 year service

Jayde Warren and Graham Johncock - 5 year service

Becky Miller - 5 year service

Jacqueline Townsend and Gary Cronin - 10 year service.

We are all very proud of our amazing carer's and what they do, where would we be without them!!



Foster & Kinship Carers Week in Coober Pedy

Foster and Kinship Carers Week in Coober Pedy provided a meaningful opportunity to recognise and celebrate the invaluable contribution of carers within the region. AFSS and the Department for Child Protection (DCP) partnered to host a luncheon in honour of Foster and Kinship Carers, acknowledging their ongoing dedication, compassion, and commitment to providing safe, nurturing, and culturally supportive homes for children and young people.

As a gesture of appreciation, carers were presented with gift vouchers in recognition of the selfless care they provide and the vital role they play in maintaining children's connection to family, community, and culture. The event also provided a relaxed environment for carers to connect with one another and strengthen relationships with AFSS and DCP staff.

The significance of the occasion was further highlighted by the attendance of DCP's media unit, who travelled to Coober Pedy to interview carers. Their stories will be featured in DCP's upcoming newsletter to showcase and celebrate the dedication of both AFSS and DCP carers who continue to make a profound difference in the lives of children and young people.



Where to find us

Adelaide

134 Waymouth Street
Adelaide SA 5000
☎ 8205 1500

Berri

23 Denny Street
Berri SA 5343
☎ 8582 3192

Ceduna

28 Poynton Street
Ceduna SA 5690
☎ 8625 3466

Coober Pedy

Lot 1991 Aylett Street
Coober Pedy SA 5723
☎ 8672 3066

Mount Gambier

20 Elizabeth Street
Mount Gambier SA 5290
☎ 8723 6110

Murray Bridge

67 Adelaide Road
Murray Bridge SA 5253
☎ 8532 1790

Noarlunga Centre

1A Hannah Road
Noarlunga Centre SA 5168
☎ 8186 4000

Paralowie

254 Kings Road
Paralowie SA 5108
☎ 8281 5440

Port Augusta

8-14 Victoria Parade
Port Augusta SA 5700
☎ 8641 0907

Port Lincoln

21 Washington Street
Port Lincoln SA 5606
☎ 8683 1909

Port Pirie

23 Norman Street
Port Pirie SA 5540
☎ 8632 2227

Salisbury

4 Ann Street
Salisbury SA 5108
☎ 8182 6567

Kilkenny

5/10-14 Regency Road
Kilkenny SA 5009
☎ 8297 5708

Whyalla

19B Darling Terrace
Whyalla SA 5600
☎ 8644 0116

Wingfield

1 Corner South & Grand
Junction Road
Wingfield SA 5013
☎ 8281 3440

AFSS Reconnect Program has two new education programs.

Love Bites and **Rock and Water** are educational programs that support young people to build respect, confidence and healthy relationships.

Love Bites engages youth aged 15–17 through interactive workshops on relationship violence, sex, and respect, encouraging open discussion and creative expression.



Rock and Water combines physical exercises with self-reflection to reduce bullying and depressive feelings while strengthening self-esteem, self-control, and emotional resilience. Together, these programs empower young people to make positive choices, build self-awareness, and foster respectful, connected relationships.



ROCK & WATER AUSTRALIA
GADAKU INSTITUTE

What is the Reconnect Program?

Empowering Young Aboriginal People

AFSS Reconnect is a community based early intervention initiative supporting Aboriginal youth aged 12 to 18 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The program works closely with young people and their families to rebuild relationships, enhance wellbeing, and strengthen connections to family, culture, and community.

What We Do

Reconnect Youth Workers offer tailored, early intervention case management that focuses on:

- Building strong peer, family, and community relationships
- Supporting engagement in school, training, or employment
- Fostering independence, resilience, and self-worth
- Promoting holistic wellbeing and cultural identity

How We Work

Our experienced Youth Workers Walk alongside young people to co-create personalised case plans with clear, achievable goals. Wherever possible and appropriate, families are actively involved in the journey, ensuring support is culturally safe, inclusive, and empowering.

For more information or to make a referral please contact

Nick Ward

Manager Reconnect

☎ 0409 993 444 Nicholas.Ward@afss.com.au

