



## QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION WEEK – AWARD WINNER

**Award Category:** Addressing overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and young people in the child protection system

**Award Description:** Outstanding contribution to addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and young people through policy, programs or practice.

**Name:** Isabel Toby

### **BIO**

Isabel Toby is a proud Waanyi and Gunggulida woman from the remote Aboriginal community of Doomadgee, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Isabel is the mother of four children and grandmother of two. Having lived most of her life in Doomadgee, Isabel experienced the influence of the Christian Mission and Government administrative control of her small community. Isabel's mother and father spent their childhood in the dormitories where children were taught to be 'good role models' for their parents and cultural ceremonies were forbidden.

Growing up in Doomadgee, Isabel was confronted by the despair of intergenerational trauma. The community struggled to cope with the rapid deterioration and destruction of cultural practices that had safeguarded kinship systems for thousands of years. Endemic social problems prevailed with devastating consequences for the health and wellbeing of children. Overwhelmed by the legacy of forced separation, families were fearful of welfare departments and many children lived in environments where alcohol abuse, mental illness and violence were common. Child harm and neglect resulted in repeating the cycle of removing children from their parents.

Isabel is described as an intensely loyal and committed woman, seeking to support her community and the families to challenge the lifestyles that result in the removal of children. Passion to strengthen family and community capacity to nurture children is a lifetime investment.

Isabel's priorities include early year's health and development, positive parenting and cultural preservation through local action. She works by building trust between the community members and the many government and non-government service providers who visit Doomadgee each week.

In 2011 Isabel commenced her role with Save the Children as a Family Support Worker. She met families in their homes, in the park or on the riverbank to sit and 'yarn'. She offers advice or a shoulder to cry on. Most importantly, Isabel provides a safe place for families to share their stories and ask for help.

In 2013 Isabel became the Team Leader at the Dumaji Children and Family Centre, a community hub that delivers integrated child-centred programs and services for children aged 0 to 8 years and their families. Her work includes: organising regular workshops and family events to strengthen community relationships; facilitating Yarning Circles to bring the community and service providers together; and 'Ladies Nights' to create a culturally safe environment for women to enjoy the social interaction while participating in antenatal classes or parenting programs.

As a member of the Health Council and as a Community Leader, Isabel works in partnership with other local groups to coordinate a community response to address the various and debilitating social problems affecting children and young people, including volatile substance misuse.



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WEEK



In 2014 Isabel joined the Family Responsibilities Commission as a Community Commissioner, to support families at risk of statutory intervention. Isabel strongly advocates for children to attend school every day and provides transport and other practical support whenever possible to increase attendance levels. As a member of the School Reference Group, Isabel promotes education as a strong protective factor and critical determinant of optimising life opportunities for Indigenous children.

*Isabel demonstrates the strength and courage it takes to break the cycle and has the needs and well-being of children at the front of her mind every single day ... it needs a whole of community approach... but it takes a very special and well respected person to have influence in the way Isabel does with her community and fellow workers.*

**Location:** Doomadgee

**Contact:** Isabel Taylor

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