Indigenous families
Cover
Robert Campbell Jnr
Woman Business, circa 1990
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 89.0 x 116.0 x 2.5cm
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We have moved!
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Melbourne VIC 3000

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This issue focuses on Indigenous children, families and communities. As such, it is consistent with the commitment to an increased focus on research with Indigenous families, as outlined in the Institute’s Research Plan (2006-2008). The contributions that make this an especially rich Family Matters include those by Ms Josephine Akre, an Indigenous Family Liaison Officer with the Family Court of Australia; Dr Sue Gordon, AM, a Magistrate with the Children’s Court of Western Australia and Chair of the National Indigenous Council; and Professor Mick Dodson, AM, a member of the Yawuru peoples who is Professor and Director of the Australian National University’s National Centre for Indigenous Studies, and Chairman of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. The topics addressed are highly relevant to research, policy and practice at this time of change, challenge and opportunity within and beyond the nation’s Indigenous communities. The genesis of this issue came from Dr Matthea Gray and I acknowledge with gratitude his great work as Executive Editor in bringing this important issue of Family Matters to fruition.

Web activity

Along with the pleasing expansion of our research program, the growth in the use of the Institute’s websites has been remarkable (see Box below). The Institute is currently responsible for seven websites. These are the Institute’s main site, four sites for clearinghouses (the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, and the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse), and two sites for our major longitudinal research projects (Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, and the Australian Temperament Project).

Clearinghouse developments

Just as the established websites are showing very strong growth in usage, the two new sites are developing well. The Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) and the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) websites were established in October 2005 and September 2006 and have already registered 42,578 and 18,106 downloads, respectively.

Each of the Clearinghouse websites is designed to respond to the information needs of particular stakeholders. For example, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse caters to the needs of researchers and professionals working in the field of child abuse prevention and child protection; the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault provides access to current information and resources to assist those working to prevent sexual assault; the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia primarily supports those involved in initiatives funded under the Australian Government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy; and the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse collects and delivers the latest relevant research and best practice to family relationship service providers and practitioners.

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse continues to extend its information and advisory service with presentations last year to a range of fora including community-based events, national workshops, research seminars and conferences. Dr Zoe Morrison, Manager of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) and her staff have also been very active in presenting the work of the Centre widely as well as providing expert commentary on issues such as the ‘Werribee assault DVD’ (www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/abuse-its-now-entertainment/2006/10/27/1161749313111.html).

Staff of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) continue to extend the website, with regular postings on the ‘evaluate’ discussion list, the establishment of a password protected extranet for local evaluators and the launch of the website for the Promising Practice Profiles. In December CAFCA co-hosted with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) a workshop that explored existing research and evaluation projects in Indigenous early childhood. The second Stronger Families and Communities Strategies (SFCS) Evaluator’s National Newsletter was published and distributed in July 2006.

New partnerships and collaborations

Disability Carers

The Caring for a Family Member with a Disability Project is being conducted in collaboration with staff from the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). Fieldwork is now complete, with 1,000 carers surveyed and analysis currently underway. In addition to the collaboration with the Disability and Carers Branch of FaCSIA, the interview schedule was developed in consultation with experts from the university sector, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the disability support sector.

Magellan Project

Another key collaboration that commenced in 2006 involves the Family Court of Australia. The Institute has been commissioned by the Court to examine the effectiveness of the ‘Magellan’ case management system for responding to residence and contact disputes involving serious allegations of violence. The Magellan system consists of a team of judges, registrars and mediators who handle the cases from start to finish, with significant resources directed to the case in the early stages (including uncapped legal aid for those who qualify) with the aim of resolving cases within 6 months. The evaluation seeks to compare cases subjected to the Magellan process with comparable cases from another jurisdiction without Magellan in place.

Staff Exchange

In addition to the productive collaboration between staff from the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and the Institute to work on the Disability and Carers Project, I am pleased to announce an
exchange of staff involving the secondment of one of the Institute’s General Managers (Human Resources and External Relations), Catherine Rosenbrock, to work with the FaCSIA Victorian State Office, for a period of 12 months. This will afford a valuable opportunity for Ms Rosenbrock to broaden her management and leadership experience in a larger policy and program setting. In her place, Boris Kaspiev will be seconded to the Institute from FaCSIA for a year. He brings substantial experience related to internal and external communications, human resources and strategic planning.

**Memorandum of Understanding**
A significant collaborative relationship was cemented in December with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This will enable both Institutes to share information and expertise and, in addition to undertaking collaborative research projects in areas such as family well-being and child protection, staff exchange possibilities will be actively pursued.

**Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children**
Wave 2 data collection took place last year, with a very pleasing response rate (around 90%). This rate of response is a credit to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, its teams of field data collectors, and of course, the 10,000 families at the heart of the study.

The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) has confirmed funding for the next ‘between waves’ mail-out (Wave 2.5). An important function of the between waves mail-out is to maintain contact with families in order to ensure that the high level of response is maintained. It also enables us to obtain further data on children’s development and other aspects of their life. Additional data will be gathered for children in both cohorts on Child Support patterns and the impact of the ‘Welfare to Work’ reform.

Finally, the development of content for Wave 3 of the study is well underway. Proposed content for Wave 3 has been reviewed in terms of the relevance to child outcomes and developmental stage.

**Recent work in the East Asia Region**
The Institute’s involvement with countries in the East Asia Region has intensified over the last two years. In addition to the hosting visits from several delegations in the region, staff at the Institute joined with members of FaCSIA to assist in the design of Vietnam’s first National Families Survey, undertaken last year by the Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPPC). The Institute will continue to support this important study by providing advice on statistical analysis and preparation of the report.

In August, Diana Smart provided a keynote paper on child, family, peer and school factors for adolescents’ antisocial behaviour at the Family Scholars Colloquium, “Protecting and Strengthening the Family: Challenges and Opportunities” in Kuala Lumpur. The colloquium was organised by the Department of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia and the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.

In September, Dr Matthew Gray presented a paper (co-authored with Lixia Qu and Ruth Weston) on fertility and family policy in Australia at the Policy Forum on Low Fertility and Ageing Society, held in Seoul, Korea. The paper was very well received and has already been published in the conference proceedings. (More detailed reports on each of these initiatives in the East Asia Region appear later in this issue).

**New Governance arrangements**
As previous reports have indicated, last year was a time of major change for the Institute and its governance. As part of those changes, a Risk Assessment and Audit Committee (RAAC) has now been established. Its first meeting took place late last year. The Charter outlines the operational requirements, policies and procedures for the Committee. To provide continuity, I was pleased that Ms Angela MacRae, the chair of the previous Audit, Finance and Administration Committee of the then Board of Management, agreed to chair the inaugural meeting of the Risk Assessment and Audit Committee.

**Final thoughts**
2007 brings another milestone for the Institute with our move to new premises. It will be a year of further expansion of our research program, particularly in the family relationships and family law areas. There is a crucial need for better information on the pathways Australian relationships take and the factors that make some vulnerable and others resilient. Given our extensive experience in longitudinal research, the Institute is well placed to contribute to such work. As such, in 2007 we extend our commitment to research and dissemination that benefits all Australian families.

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**The Institute on the move!**
After 20 years at our Queen Street location, the Institute will move in late February 2007 to new premises in La Trobe Street, Melbourne. These offer a slightly larger area and the capacity to house the Institute on two contiguous floors. They also offer better facilities in a building that meets our current needs and likely future growth.

The process of moving has involved a great deal of planning and effort by all staff. I would like to register my great appreciation of the spirit in which all have worked to prepare for this major relocation. I would also gratefully acknowledge the support in facilitating our relocation of the Australian Government and its Departments of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Finance and Administration; and Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Our new postal address is
Australian Institute of Family Studies
Level 20 485 La Trobe Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

The Institute’s telephone and facsimile numbers remain unchanged, as do our email and Internet addresses.
Developing policies that can assist in improving family, health, educational, and employment outcomes for the Indigenous population are a high priority at all levels of government in Australia (e.g. Brough, 2006; COAG, 2000; Intergovernmental Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities, 2006). The private sector, particularly those with operations in regional and remote areas of Australia, are also increasingly conscious of the opportunity that they have to assist in improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Family policy is increasingly taking a central role in Indigenous affairs. In a speech titled Blueprint for Action in Indigenous Affairs on 5 December 2006, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs, The Hon Mal Brough MP, listed focusing on individuals and families as one of the principles that underscores the Government’s approach to Indigenous affairs. The other principles outlined by the Minister are: respecting culture; setting high standards and expectations; improving access to services and opportunities based on need; and doing all this via effective partnerships.

The Secretary to the Treasury, Dr Ken Henry in an address to the 2006 Economic and Social Outlook Conference on 2 November 2006, said “Indigenous disadvantage diminishes all of Australia, not only the dysfunctional and disintegrating communities in which it is most apparent. Its persistence has not been for want of policy action. Yet it has to be admitted that decades of policy action have failed.”

Despite the overwhelming evidence that the Indigenous population has much worse outcomes on a wide range of measures than does the non-Indigenous population, surveys continue to show that the Australian population has varied views about Indigenous Australians, their living standards and the extent to which government policy should be directed at improving the outcomes of Indigenous Australians as compared to other Australians.

The importance of families is also emphasised by Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute.
for Policy and Leadership. In an address to the Australian Government Treasury on 25 September 2006, Pearson said “The current whole-of-government approach to Indigenous affairs assumes that the disparities in living-standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians may be addressed simply through implementing social interventions. This assumption ignores the fact that in functional mainstream Australian communities, there are a number of tasks for which families and/or individuals always take responsibility. Indeed the problem of governmental over-reach contributing to the Indigenous passive welfare paradigm is such that both State and Commonwealth governments in this country are routinely and structurally committed to indigenous passivity – not, as is needed, to re-building responsibility.”

This edition of Family Matters includes a number of articles that present research related to Indigenous Australians and families. Papers have been prepared by leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, along with public servants and advisors. The articles cover a very wide range of issues that are relevant to current policy debates and program development.

While the economic and social circumstances of Indigenous Australians and how those compare with non-Indigenous Australians are well known a brief summary of selected characteristics of the Indigenous population is included to provide a context for the edition.

**Socio-economic status**

**Indigenous families and households**

Indigenous families are, on average, larger than non-Indigenous families. In 2002, the average household size of Indigenous households was 3.5 people compared with 2.6 for all Australian households (ABS/AIHW, 2005). Indigenous Australians are more likely to live in multi-generational and multi-family households than are non-Indigenous Australians. An important feature of many Indigenous households is that there is a significant amount of mobility through the household, resulting in very complex and dynamic household structures (Morphy, 2004; Smith, 2000).

The total fertility rate for Indigenous women in 2003 was estimated to be 2.15 babies, higher than the rate of 1.76 babies for the total Australian population (ABS/AIHW, 2005). Indigenous mothers are younger on average than non-Indigenous. In 2002, 78 per cent of Indigenous mothers were aged under 30 years at the time of giving birth as compared to 49 per cent of other mothers (ABS/AIHW, 2005).

An important aspect of Indigenous families concerns ‘mixed families’ and ‘mixed households’. These are families or households in which not all members are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. According to the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), Indigenous people comprised 82 per cent of all residents in Indigenous households (that is households containing one or more Indigenous
The Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous and the difference in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous age structures is projected to increase in coming years. Figure 1 shows the age and sex structure of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In 2001, the median age of the Indigenous males was 19.6 years and for Indigenous females was 21.4 years. In contrast, the median age of the non-Indigenous males and females in 2001 was 35.3 and 36.8 years, respectively.

A challenge faced by researchers, policy makers and service providers is that the categories and terms generally used to describe kin relationships are those that apply to the standard Anglo-Celtic system. Although the standard Anglo-Celtic system will be clearly understood and relevant for much of the Indigenous population, as Morphy (2006) points out, many traditionally-oriented Aboriginal people have kinship systems that differ markedly in their structure from the Anglo-Celtic system. While the complex familial structures of Indigenous societies are most pronounced in ‘traditionally-oriented’ communities, Smith (2000) has shown that they persist in ‘settled’ Australia.

**Population**

At the time of the 2001 Census the number of Australians identifying as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin was 458,520. This was 2.4 per cent of the Australian population (ABS, 2003). This was an increase of 16 per cent since the 1996 Census and followed increases of 17 and 33 per cent between 1986 and 1991 and 1991 and 1996, respectively. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that demographic factors can explain 12 per cent of the increase between 1996 and 2001 with the remaining 4 per cent explained by factors such as improvements in Census collection method and an increased propensity to identify as Indigenous (ABS, 2003, p. 15).

It is likely that the numbers of Indigenous Australians will continue to increase “owing to a combination of high natural increase, improved enumeration, increased self-identification, and a growing pool of potential identifiers due to the expansionary effects of intermarriage” (Taylor, 2006, p. 1).

The Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous and the difference in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous age structures is projected to increase in coming years. Figure 1 shows the age and sex structure of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In 2001, the median age of the Indigenous males was 19.6 years and for Indigenous females was 21.4 years. In contrast, the median age of the non-Indigenous males and females in 2001 was 35.3 and 36.8 years, respectively.

An alternative way of illustrating the differences in the age structure of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations is by the differences in the proportion of the population aged less than 15 years and the proportion aged 65 years and older. For the Indigenous population in 2001, 39.0 per cent were aged less than 15 years and just 2.8 per cent were 65 years and older. For the non-Indigenous population, 20.1 per cent were less than 15 years and 12.8 per cent were 65 years and older.

**Geographic location**

The distribution of the Indigenous population across Australia is quite different to that of the non-Indigenous population (Table 1). Indigenous Australians are much less likely to be in major cities (30.2 per cent) than non-Indigenous Australians (67.2 per cent). Conversely Indigenous Australians are more likely to be in outer regional areas (23.1 versus 10.1 per cent), remote areas (8.8 versus 1.5 per cent) and very remote areas (17.7 versus 0.5 per cent). Although Indigenous Australians are much more likely to be in remote or very remote areas of Australia than the non-Indigenous population, only about 1 in 4 are in these areas compared to 1 in 50 non-Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous people comprise 45.4 per cent of the population in very remote areas, but only 1.1 per cent of the population in major cities. The distribution of the
Indigenous population across all areas of Australia and the great diversity in economic opportunities, physical environment, culture and lifestyle create challenges for policy.

Significantly, over the thirty years from 1971 to 2001 the proportion of the Indigenous population living in urban areas (defined as ‘major city’, ‘inner regional’ and ‘outer regional’) increased from 44 per cent to 74 per cent (census figures cited in Taylor (2006, p. 3)). This reflects a significant ‘urbanisation’ of the Indigenous population, although the numbers in remote and very remote areas have continued to increase. The population is likely to continue to grow in remote and very remote areas unless there is a very significant change in migration patterns.

**Labour market**

When analysing labour market outcomes for the Indigenous population it is important to take account of the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP), a unique institutional feature of the Indigenous labour market. Under the scheme, funding is allocated to CDEP organisations for wages for participants at a level similar to or a little higher than income support payments, enhanced with administrative and capital support. CDEP organisations provide employment, training, activity, enterprise support or income support to Indigenous participants.

The mainstream (non-CDEP) employment rate of Indigenous Australians is 35.5 per cent (Table 2). A further 12.7 per cent are employed in the CDEP scheme. The unemployment rate, treating CDEP as employed, is 23.0 per cent and the proportion in the labour force is 62.6 per cent. If CDEP is counted as unemployed, the unemployment rate increases to 43.3 per cent. There are very large differences across the regions of Australia. The mainstream employment rate varies from 14.9 per cent in very remote areas, 31.7 per cent in remote areas and 46.8 per cent in major cities. Employment in the CDEP scheme is 42.2 per cent in very remote areas, 16.9 per cent in remote areas and just 3.7 per cent in major cities.

Hunter (2005) has analysed Indigenous employment rates after adjusting for CDEP for the censuses since 1971. Based on slightly different data, his analysis shows that over the period 1971-2001 the employment to population ratio for the non-Indigenous population has been stable, varying between 55 per cent and 60 per cent. Over the same period the Indigenous employment rate has fallen from 42 per cent to 30 per cent. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates increased over this period. Hunter (2005) writes: “there appears to be no substantial trend for them [Indigenous Australians] to re-enter the workforce during a prolonged period of macroeconomic growth” (p.5).

**Income and financial stress**

The mean equivalised household income of Indigenous Australians in 2002 was $394 per week compared to $8665 for the non-Indigenous population (ABS/AIHW, 2005). Just over 2 in 5 Indigenous adults live in a household with an equivalised household income in the lowest income quintile compared to 19.3 per cent of non-Indigenous adults. Indigenous Australians are more likely to have government pensions and allowances (51.7 per cent) as their main source of income than are non-Indigenous Australians (27.1 per cent) (ABS, 2004).

A measure of financial stress is the ability to raise $2,000 within a week for something important. Just over half of Indigenous adults (54.3 per cent) were unable to raise $2,000 within a week. This compares to 13.6 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians who said they were unable to raise $2,000 within a week (ABS/AIHW, 2005).

**Removal from natural family**

Estimates from the NATSISS 2002 are that 8 per cent of the population aged 15 or more years had been removed from their natural family (ABS, 2004). However, even though a relatively small proportion of the Indigenous population were themselves removed from their natural family, about one-third of the Indigenous

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major cities</td>
<td>138,494</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>12,732,492</td>
<td>67.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inner regional</td>
<td>92,988</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>3,932,907</td>
<td>20.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outer regional</td>
<td>105,875</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>1,907,688</td>
<td>10.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>40,161</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>284,160</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very remote</td>
<td>81,002</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>97,473</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>458,520</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>18,954,720</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</table>


### Table 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Labour force status</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Major cities</th>
<th>Inner regional</th>
<th>Outer regional</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very remote</th>
<th>Total Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>CDEP employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (CDEP counted as unemployed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in the labour force</td>
<td></td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (No.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>83,300</td>
<td>52,900</td>
<td>60,100</td>
<td>23,100</td>
<td>49,850</td>
<td>269,250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Altman and Gray (2006: Table 1), derived from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2002. Note: Table population is Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years.
population had a relative removed. Indeed, 38 per cent indicated that they and/or at least one of their relatives had been taken from their family (see Weston and Gray (2006) for a discussion of the NATSISS 2002 data on the removal from natural family).

When interpreting the data from the question on removal of relatives from natural family it is important to note that the question had a high rate of ‘not known’ and ‘not stated’ responses (20 per cent) (ABS, 2004, p. 58). This high rate of non-response is not surprising given the sensitivity of this issue to some families. It is probable that the respondents who did not want to discuss this issue disproportionately had relatives removed, and so the figures from the NATSISS 2002 may be underestimates.

**Health**

According to estimates from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004-05 and the National Health Survey 2004, Indigenous Australians (aged 15 years plus) are much more likely to report having fair or poor health (29 per cent) than are non-Indigenous Australians (15 per cent). They are less likely to report having excellent or very good health (36 per cent) than non-Indigenous Australians (57 per cent) (Table 3).

The life expectancies of Indigenous Australians are much lower than for the Australian population as a whole. The life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians for the period 1996-2001 is estimated to be 59.4 years for males and 64.8 years for females. This compared to 76.6 years for all males and 82.0 years for all females.

Perhaps the most disturbing feature of trends in life expectancy is that there is no real evidence of progress being made in raising Indigenous life expectancies over a period when life expectancy of the rest of the Australian population has increased substantially. As Gray, Hunter and Taylor (2002) note, the level of mortality observed for Indigenous males at the end of the twentieth century is equivalent to that recorded for all Australian males at the beginning of the century. Among females, the comparison is similarly discouraging, with life expectancy for Indigenous females currently hovering around a level last recorded for females generally in 1920.

This lack of steady improvement in life expectancy, despite declines in infant mortality, is a different demographic phenomenon compared with that of indigenous peoples in New Zealand and North America, and it persists because of much higher rates of Indigenous Australian adult mortality (Gray, Hunter, & Taylor, 2002).

**Culture and language**

Differences between Indigenous people in remote and non-remote areas of Australia are starkly illustrated by measures of connection with traditional culture and language. The NATSISS 2002 reveals that in remote areas 85.8 per cent of the population recognises homelands/traditional country and 38.0 per cent are living on their homelands/traditional country (Table 4). In non-remote areas, 63.4 per cent recognise homelands/traditional country and 15.8 per cent live on their homelands/traditional country.

In remote areas, 54.2 per cent of the population speaks an Indigenous language and 17.3 per cent speak some Indigenous words with the remaining 28.5 per cent not speaking an Indigenous language at all. In non-remote areas just 8.6 per cent speak an Indigenous language, 23.8 per cent speak some Indigenous words only and 67.6 per cent do not speak an Indigenous language at all.

**Overcoming disadvantage**

There is a growing awareness that it will take many years for Indigenous Australians to have the same life opportunities as other Australians. On 25 July 2006, the Prime Minister said “… reconciliation will only be complete when Indigenous Australians enjoy the same opportunities as other Australians. And that it will be the work of generations. The gulf between the first Australians and other Australians on economic and social outcomes is a measure of the distance we still have to travel. These gaps can only be closed with practical action that delivers results.”

Recognition that overcoming Indigenous disadvantage is going to take many years is a significant shift. Australian governments have often set policy objectives of equality in outcomes for Indigenous Australians within what have subsequently proven to be wildly optimistic timeframes.

There is only limited data on which to assess how outcomes for Indigenous Australians have changed over time and how they have changed compared to those for non-Indigenous Australians. However, the available evidence suggests that while in some areas gains have been made,
in others they have not, at least according to the available statistics (ABS, 2004; Altman, Biddle, & Hunter, 2004).

The demographic trends described above have important implications for policy. It is clear that the Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous and that overall a much higher proportion of the Indigenous population are young children. Similarly, the projected increases in the numbers of Indigenous people in remote and very remote areas of Australia will make addressing the challenges faced by these communities increasingly important.

There are of course differences in opinion as to the appropriate policies for improving economic, social, health and other outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Areas of broad agreement include the need to improve education level outcomes, increases levels of employment, increase income, reduce rates of child maltreatment, improve housing and related infrastructure, access to health services, and reducing health risk behaviours.

There is less agreement in relation to issues such as land rights, the extent to which Indigenous communities in very remote areas are supported to continue to exist, and the emphasis that should be given to Indigenous specific programs compared to improving rates of usage of mainstream programs. Other differences relate to the extent that the emphasis of policy should be at the community or individual or family level.

This edition of Family Matters highlights a diverse body of research which takes a number of different approaches to understanding the issues affecting Indigenous families and the policies and programs that may be effective in improving outcomes for them.

It is easy to be pessimistic and focus on the problems. Much of the media coverage too often focuses only on the negatives. There are however, many positive stories. Understanding what makes a policy or program successful and the extent to which it can be replicated more widely is crucial information.

There is a need for much more research and evaluation in relation to Indigenous families, how they are changing, and the impact of policy and the programs that are most effective. In order to improve our understanding of issues affecting Indigenous families there is a need for much better data and a greater number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers focusing on Indigenous families. It is hoped that this edition of Family Matters will stimulate further work in this important area.

While the Institute has been gradually increasing the range of research it conducts that focuses on Indigenous Australians and their families, it is an area in which the Institute has done relatively little research in recent years. As flagged in the 2006-2008 Research Plan, the Institute will be giving a high priority to improving our understanding of the reasons for the continuing high levels of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians, and the policies that have the best chance of meeting their needs.

References

Dr Matthew Gray is Deputy Director (Research) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
The intergenerational effects of forced separation on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people

Sven R. Silburn, Stephen R. Zubrick, David M. Lawrence, Francis G. Mitrou, John A. De Maio, Eve Blair, Adele Cox, Robin B. Dalby, Judith A. Griffin, Glenn Pearson, and Colleen Hayward

It is now generally accepted that both forced separation and forced relocation have had devastating consequences in terms of social and cultural dislocation and have impacted on the health and wellbeing of subsequent generations. However, until recently there has been little or no empirical data to scientifically document the nature and extent of these intergenerational effects. In this paper, the authors seek to address this gap in the research.

The 1997 Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, Bringing them home (HREOC, 1997), has documented the past laws, practices and policies which resulted in the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families by “compulsion, duress or undue influence” (HREOC, 1997, p5). Separation took three general forms: putting children into government run institutions; the adoption of children by white families; and the fostering of children into white families. This occurred across the country from the late 1800s until well into the 1960s. Over this period, as many as 100,000 Aboriginal children are believed to have been forcibly separated, or ‘taken away’, from their families. Submissions to the Bringing them home Inquiry also described the immediate and subsequent effects on individuals who were forcibly removed, institutionalised, denied contact with their Aboriginality and in some cases traumatised and abused. The report also includes references to entire communities being forcibly relocated away from traditional lands of special cultural and spiritual significance.

It is now generally accepted that both forced separation and forced relocation have had devastating consequences in terms of social and cultural dislocation and have impacted on the health and wellbeing of subsequent generations. However, until recently there has been little or no empirical data to scientifically document the nature and extent of these intergenerational effects. The recent Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey...
(WAACHS), a large-scale epidemiological survey of the health and wellbeing of 5,289 Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, has enabled reliable population estimates to be made of the number of WA Aboriginal children and young people currently living in households where one or more parents/carers and/or grandparents were forcibly separated from family or forcibly relocated away from traditional lands (Zubrick et al., 2005a). More importantly, the survey methodology has allowed systematic comparisons to be made of the associated health and wellbeing outcomes for the survey children and their parents/carers in households affected by forced separation or forced relocation in contrast to outcomes observed in households not affected by experiences of forced separation or relocation.

The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey

The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) was undertaken from 2000 to 2002 by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, in Perth, Western Australia (Silburn et al., 2006; Zubrick et al., 2004; Zubrick et al., 2006; Zubrick et al., 2005b). The survey comprised a state-wide representative sample of around one in six families with Aboriginal children living in Western Australia and was designed to build an epidemiological knowledge base from which preventive strategies can be developed to promote and maintain healthy development and the social, emotional, academic, and vocational wellbeing of young people.
The assessment of the feasibility, design and scope of the Aboriginal Child Health Survey was undertaken between 1996 and 1999. Survey methodology and instrumentation were developed in consultation with Aboriginal leaders, key Aboriginal bodies and through extensive community consultations throughout the state. Efforts were made to ensure that the data collected were both scientifically relevant and pertinent to government information needs and policy initiatives. To do this, reference groups were convened during 1997–1998 with representation from various State and Australian Government departments and community agencies that had an interest in the outcome of the survey findings.

**Indigenous control.** The survey operated with approval of institutional ethics committees meeting the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. In addition, all phases of the survey and its development, design, and implementation were under the direction of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey Steering Committee. Established in 1997, the Steering Committee has the responsibility to control and maintain: cultural integrity of survey methods and processes; community engagement and consultation processes; employment opportunities for Aboriginal people; data access issues and communication of the findings to the Aboriginal and general community; appropriate and respectful relations within the study team, with participants and communities, with stakeholders and funding agencies and with the governments of the day.

**Area sampling and scope of survey.** Western Australia comprises over one third of the continental landmass of Australia. The northwest and centre of the state includes large tracts of desert and some of the most remote and sparsely populated areas in the world. The more populated southwest of the state includes extensive agricultural and forested areas with numerous small population centres. Over two thirds of the state’s total population and one third of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population resides in the metropolitan area of Perth. The survey was based on an area sample of dwellings.

Families in selected dwellings who reported that there were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children or teenagers living at this address who are aged between 0 and 18 years, were eligible to be in the survey. Children living within group homes, institutions and non-private dwellings were not in the scope of the survey. However, where a selected household had a child temporarily living away from home (e.g. in a boarding school or hostel), these children were included in the scope of the survey. Once the authority for the survey and the nature of the survey was explained to a responsible adult (usually the carer(s) or head of the household), and consent to participate was obtained, Indigenous status was determined for each person who was reported to ‘usually’ live in the dwelling by asking, ‘Does (the person) consider him/herself to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?’ Data were gathered on all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under the age of 18 in each of the participating households.

**Survey content.** The survey was designed to place as low a burden on respondents as possible while at the same time acknowledging that sufficient time must be spent in gaining access, understanding and a good level of rapport with respondents. The interviews took considerable time, and multiple visits were often necessary to ensure complete data and to minimise respondent fatigue. Interviews were budgeted for a three-hour time period per household in which no more than 90 minutes would be used in formal data collection. Questionnaire content covered child and youth development; health and wellbeing; functional impairment and disability; use and access to health, education and social services; and a selected number of questions about diet. These data were collected from interviews with the parents/carers in the household who were the most knowledgeable about the survey children. In addition to the information collected on children, separate interviews were undertaken with up to two parents/carers per child to gather information about the demographic and social characteristics of the household and family and to ask questions about the dwelling, neighbourhood and community. Consent was obtained from parents/carers and young people to collect separate health and wellbeing information from young people aged 12–17 years.

**Pilot, dress rehearsal and main survey.** Prior to the dress rehearsal and main survey, a pilot survey was carried out in September and October 1999 and a full dress rehearsal was undertaken in April 2000. These permitted extensive modifications to survey content and process prior to the main survey.

The main survey commenced in May 2000 and was completed in August 2002. Dwellings were selected for screening using an area-based clustered multi-stage sample design. Census collection districts (CDs) were selected with probabilities proportional to the number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children living in the CD. There were 761 CDs selected containing 166,290 dwellings. Of these, 139,000 dwellings were approached to determine if residents were eligible to participate in the survey. Using this method, a random sample of 2,386 families with 6,209 eligible children was identified throughout metropolitan, rural and remote regions of Western Australia. A total of 1,999 of these families (84 per cent) with 5,513 eligible children consented to participate in the survey. Interviewers gathered useable data on 5,289 (96 per cent) of these participating children. In addition to the data gathered on children, data were also gathered on families from: 2,113 (95 per cent) participating carers identified as...
the persons who knew the most about the individual survey child; 1,040 (83 per cent) other participating carers of the survey children wherever this was possible and wherever they were present in the household; 1,073 (73 per cent) participating young people aged 12 to 17 years and the school principal and teacher(s) of 2,379 surveyed children in 410 Western Australian schools.

13 years was selected in the survey. As a result of this selection hierarchy, the data for individual children in the survey sample violate one of the basic assumptions of traditional regression modelling: that the observations are independent. As a result, multi-level, or hierarchical, modelling was used to account for the hierarchical structure of the survey data. This entailed a modification of the method of Probability Weighted Iterative Generalized Least Squares (see Pfeffermann et al, 1998) for both continuous and binary response variables. This method allows children’s health and wellbeing to be described in terms of not only child level factors, but family and community level factors as well. Full details of the WAACHS statistical methods may be found elsewhere (Silburn et al., 2006; Zubrick et al., 2004; Zubrick et al., 2006; Zubrick et al., 2005b).

Experience of forced separation and forced relocation

Households affected by forced separation. The survey asked primary and secondary carers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin whether they had been ‘taken away’ from their natural family by ‘a mission, the government or welfare agency’. Respondents were not asked to identify which of these entities took them, where or when they were taken or under what circumstances this took place. The only information collected was whether they were taken away. Around 12.3 per cent of primary carers and 12.3 per cent of secondary carers reported they had been subject to such separation. Carers were given the option of not providing answers to questions relating to forced separations and relocations and 5.0 per cent of primary carers and 3.8 per cent of secondary carers chose not to answer these questions.

Non-response and refusal characteristics. Non-response characteristics and methods for their adjustment are described extensively elsewhere. With respect to the 387 families who refused participation in the survey, analyses showed that families with older children were more likely to refuse participation. In the Perth region, household size and socioeconomic status were also significant predictors, with families refusing to participate more likely to live in large households and live in more disadvantaged areas. Within the South West and the Midwest and Goldfields regions, the only significant association was with older age of child. In the Kimberley and Pilbara, household size was also a significant factor with non-respondents more likely to come from large families. Because of these findings, age, region and household size are factors that have been incorporated into the weighting design.

Analyses. Unlike data collected from a simple random sample, the survey children are clustered within families and communities. The sample was selected in three stages: census collection districts (CDs), families and children. CDs were selected with probabilities of inclusion in the survey proportional to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in the CD. A list of all eligible families in each selected CD was prepared, and families were selected at random from this list. Once families had been selected, each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child under the age of 18

It is now generally accepted that both forced separation and forced relocation have had devastating consequences in terms of social and cultural dislocation and have impacted on the health and wellbeing of subsequent generations.
Aboriginal carers were also asked whether either of their parents had been forcibly separated from their natural family by a mission, the government or welfare agency. Some 20.3 per cent of the mothers of primary carers (e.g. grandmothers of the survey children) had been forcibly separated. In contrast, 12.6 per cent of the fathers of primary carers (e.g. grandfathers of the survey children) had been forcibly separated. Some 16.1 per cent of secondary carers reported their mothers had been forcibly separated and 11.0 per cent reported their fathers were separated from their natural family.

Of the 29,800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people living in Western Australia, 35.3 per cent were found to be living in households where a carer or a carer’s parent (e.g. grandparent) was reported to have been forcibly separated from their natural family. While the proportion of households affected by forced separation did not vary significantly by level of relative isolation (LORI), some differences were observed between ATSIC regions. This variation is shown in Figure 1 below where it can be seen that the Broome ATSIC region had the highest proportion of children in families affected by forced separation (53.0 per cent) in contrast to other regions such as South Hedland (27.3 per cent) and Kununurra (26.1 per cent).

**Households affected by forced relocation.** Primary and secondary carers were also asked if either they or their parents had been forcibly relocated from an area that was their traditional country or homeland. Around 23.8 per cent of children were living in households that had been affected by such relocation. In figure 1 below, this percentage varied by ATSIC region, ranging from 41.8 per cent in the Broome ATSIC region to 14.0 per cent in the Geraldton ATSIC region.

**Figure 1** Aboriginal children aged 4-17 years – proportion living in households with experience of forced intergenerational separation or relocation*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>AISIC region</th>
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<th>Relocated from traditional homeland</th>
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<td>Broome</td>
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<td>Warburton</td>
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*Whisker bar shows the 95%ile Confidence Interval.

**Mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal parents/carers**

The impact that forced separations may have had on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal carers of Aboriginal children was investigated by examining the association between forced separations from natural family and carer reports of mental health and wellbeing. This was done by comparing the proportions of carers who reported the following items: a) problems caused by overuse of alcohol in the households; b) problems caused by gambling in the household; c) cigarette smoking, d) whether the primary carer has a partner; e) whether the primary carer was ever arrested or charged with an offence; f) were social support networks available to the primary carer; g) had any children of the primary care ever been placed in foster care; and h) levels of financial strain in the household.

**Survey indicators of health and wellbeing.** The association between forced separation and the above health and wellbeing indicators was analysed using logistic regression modelling to account for a range of likely confounding factors. Using this method it was found that after accounting for age, sex and level of relative geographic isolation, carers who had been forcibly separated from their natural families were:

- 1.95 times more likely to have been arrested or charged with an offence;
- 1.61 times more likely to report the overuse of alcohol caused problems in the household;
- 2.10 times more likely to report that betting or gambling caused problems in the household; and
- less than half as likely to have social support in the form of someone they can ‘yarn’ to about problems.

No significant associations were found between forced separation and smoking status or financial strain.

**Independent measures of mental health service use.** The WAACHS survey methodology included written consent for access to the survey participants' mental health service use. The WAACHS survey methodology included written consent for access to the survey participants' mental health service use.
hospital and health system records. This enabled an examination of children and carers’ use of WA Mental Health Services by linking survey responses with their administrative health records. Bivariate analysis of these data by forced separation found that a higher proportion of primary carers who were forcibly separated from their natural family had had contact with Western Australian Mental Health Services (29.5 per cent) in contrast to 21.3 per cent among primary carers who had not been forcibly separated. Further analysis by logistic regression modelling taking into account possible confounding factors confirmed that after adjusting for age, sex and level of relative geographic isolation, those carers who had been forcibly separated from their natural family were 1.50 times more likely to have had contact with Mental Health Services in Western Australia.

**Emotional and behavioural difficulties in children**

**Assessment of emotional and behavioural problems.** To assess Aboriginal children’s emotional and behavioural difficulties, a modified version of Goodman’s Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used. Details of the cultural adaptation, piloting and evaluation of its reliability and consistency by means of confirmatory factor analysis are available in the technical report accompanying Volume 2 of the WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey (De Maio et al., 2005). This measure of Aboriginal children’s emotional or behavioural difficulties was analysed by forced separation of their primary carer from their natural family. This revealed that of the children whose primary carer was forcibly separated from their natural family by a mission, the government or welfare agency, nearly one third (32.7 per cent) were at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties. This proportion is significantly higher than that found in children looked after by primary carers who had not been forcibly separated from their natural family (21.8 per cent) (See Figure 2). In comparison, 15.0 per cent of non-Aboriginal Western Australian children aged 4–17 years were found to be at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.

The relationship between forced separation of the primary carer from their natural family and SDQ scores of the children in their care was also examined by looking at the scores on a continuous scale. As shown in Figure 3, the proportion of children whose primary carer had been forcibly separated from their natural family increased steadily with the increasing total SDQ score of the child. The rate of increase was greatest for children whose SDQ scores were above 22.

Once again, logistic regression modelling was used to analyse the likelihood of Aboriginal children experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties after accounting for a number of factors. The model adjusted for: a) age group of child (4-7, 8-11, 12-14, 15-17 years); b) level of relative isolation; c) sex of child; and d) birth mother status of primary carer (i.e. natural mother/non-natural mother). This analysis showed that independently of these factors, children whose primary carer had been forcibly separated from their natural family by a mission, government or welfare agency were 2.34 times more likely to be at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties than children whose carers were not forcibly separated.

**Inter-generational effects of forced separation**

No significant findings were made with respect to risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties in children having a grandparent only (i.e. primary carer’s father or mother) who had been forcibly separated from their natural family by a mission, the government or welfare agency. However, although not statistically significant, the data were suggestive of an inter-generational impact on the child, particularly in cases where the primary carer’s mother was forcibly separated. Among children for whom the primary carer’s mother had been forcibly separated from her natural family, 27.2 per cent were at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties, compared with 22.3 per cent of children for whom the primary carer’s mother was not forcibly separated from her natural family.

Logistic regression modelling found that after accounting for age, sex and level of relative isolation,
those children for whom both their primary carer and their primary carer’s mother had been forcibly separated from their natural family were over two and a half times as likely (Odds Ratio = 2.62) to be at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties, while those children whose primary carer was forcibly separated but the primary carer’s mother was not separated were over twice as likely (Odds Ratio = 2.33) to be at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties. If only the primary carer’s mother was forcibly separated from her natural family, there was no significant difference in likelihood of being at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties (Odds Ratio 1.17). These results confirm the impact of the forced separation of the primary carer from their natural family on the risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties in his or her children, but show no evidence to suggest there is any further impact beyond two generations.

**Inter-generational effects of forced relocation**

With regard to risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties in children and the forced relocation of Aboriginal carers from traditional country or homeland, there were no findings of statistical significance. However, the data were suggestive of an inter-generational impact on the child in the case where the primary carer’s parents were forcibly relocated.

**Age of carer and reason for forced separation**

Since the original publication of these findings the question has been raised whether the parents/carers of the children surveyed in the WAACHS would have been old enough to have been subject to the past policies of forced removal. While our analysis did account for carer age as a possible confounder, this prompted us to re-examine the data to ascertain whether the findings would be modified in any way if the analysis were restricted to carers born prior to 1966, and who were thus at risk of being forcibly separated from their natural families as part of the government policies and practices of the day. While 43 per cent of all Aboriginal carers surveyed were born prior to 1966, these carers represent 63.8 per cent of Aboriginal carers who reported being forcibly separated. Any of these carers forcibly separated from their natural family, are thus likely to have been separated at a time when there was significant change in the practice of forced separation in Western Australia. It is thus of particular note that when we repeated the logistic regression analyses restricted to only carers born prior to 1966 and their children, no differences were found from our originally reported findings (Zubrick et al., 2005a).

**Discussion**

The interview question on forced separation used in the WAACHS survey was identical to that used in the 2002 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSIS) (ABS, 2004). While there are some differences in the methodology of these two surveys, the NATSIS and the WAACHS both demonstrate the links between adverse health and social outcomes and prior forced separation of Aboriginal people from their natural families. While the survey findings are confined to the effects of past child removal policies on the Western Australian Aboriginal population, they help to inform aspects of the national discussion which has followed the release of Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s *Bringing them home* report (HREOC, 1997).

Much of this discussion has centred on the report’s summary finding that “somewhere between one-in-three and one-in-ten Aboriginal children had been separated from their families between 1910 and 1970”. The “one-in-three” estimate has been widely criticised on the grounds that it over-generalised the finding from a number of local studies in Melbourne, the Kimberley region of Western Australia and the Bourke region of New South Wales (Mann, 2001). The lower estimate of ‘one-in-ten’ was based on the 1994 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey which reported that 10.1 per cent of those aged 25-44 years, and 10.6 per cent of those older than 44 years had been separated from their natural family by missions or government or welfare agency (ABS, 1995). The findings from the WAACHS are consistent with the NATSIS data in showing that a much higher proportion of child separation occurred within Western Australia than occurred nationally.

Given the differences in removal policies which existed between the States and the ways in which these changed in their application over time, it seems unlikely that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were separated will ever be precisely ascertained from historical sources. This suggests that the current lived experience of Aboriginal people as reported in representative cross-sectional population surveys such as the WAACHS, NATSIS (1994) and the NATSIS (2002) will have to be relied upon for the best estimate of the minimum number of people and families so affected. The logistic regression analysis in this study did take account of a range of possible confounding factors, such as the carer’s age, sex and the level of geographic isolation. Other potential confounders which were not considered include the age of those forcibly removed at the time of separation from their natural family, and the officially recorded reasons for the removal (i.e. whether for reasons of abuse or neglect, or through enforcement of the then policies of assimilation). While this is a limitation of the study, the historical evidence from official records reported in the *Bringing them home* report does suggest that most of the children who were forcibly removed were removed as young infants, and that that prior to 1969, the greater majority of forced removals occurred for reasons of assimilation rather than reasons of child protection (HREOC, 1997).
In conclusion, we believe the nature of the recent debate about the actual number of Aboriginal children and families where a parent or grandparent experienced forced separation has displaced and excluded from the national discussion the reality that these experiences occurred at all – and the extent to which these past experiences continue to impact on the lives of the current generation of Aboriginal families. It is our hope that the wider availability of the WAACHS findings will enable a more nuanced and compassionate discussion of the enduring impact of past forced separations and why these experiences remain of such deep concern for the affected individuals and families. A more open-hearted acknowledgement of the extent of the suffering and disadvantage which the past policies of separation inflicted on Aboriginal Australians, would in our view, significantly further the process through which these concerns are eventually resolved.

Endnotes
1 Odds Ratio (OR) is a statistical term which describes whether the probability of an event is the same for two different groups. For example, an Odds Ratio of 1 implies that the event is equally likely in both groups. Where the value of an Odds Ratio is greater than 1, this indicates how much more likely the event is in the first group. Similarly, where an Odds Ratio is less than 1, this indicates how much less likely the event is in the first group.
2 Not significant at the .05 level in the bivariate analysis.

References


Sven Silburn and Stephen Zubrick are clinical psychologists and co-directors of the Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University of Technology and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. David Lawrence is Senior Statistician, Centre for Developmental Health. Francis Mitrou, John De Maio, Eve Blair, Adele Cox, Robin Dalby and Judith Griffin are members of the WAACHS volume 2 analysis and writing team at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. Colleen Hayward heads the Kulunga Indigenous Research network at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. She and Glenn Pearson are responsible for the overall project management of the WAACHS, including the community communication and dissemination strategy.
Working with the Indigenous Community in the Pathways to Prevention Project

In this paper, the authors reflect on the work of the Pathways to Prevention Project, particularly as it involved local Indigenous families. Two case studies are used to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the issues and challenges that Indigenous families face.

The Pathways to Prevention project

Pathways to Prevention is a universal, ‘early intervention’, developmental prevention project in Inala/Carole Park. These suburbs are among the most socially disadvantaged urban areas in Queensland, yet Inala is a close-knit community with a high level of local pride (Peel, 2003). The diverse nature of its population provides a rich source of culture and heritage that is reflected in local cultural venues such as the Inala Community Art Gallery and Cultural Centre.

The project is based on the assumption that mobilising social resources to support children, families and their communities before problems emerge is more effective and cheaper than intervening when problems have become entrenched (Homel, 2005). This does not necessarily mean intervening early in life (Hayes, in press). The project is an ongoing partnership between Mission...
the chances that they will become involved in crime and related problems.

For the first five or six years of the project (1999-2004), the focus was on promoting a positive transition to school. In this period the project combined child-focused programs delivered through state preschools (the Preschool Intervention Program, or PIP) with services for families (the Family Independence Program, or FIP), within a community development framework. Details of the aims, methods and outcomes of this phase of our work are published in the report, *The Pathways to Prevention Project: The first five years, 1999-2004* (Homel et al., 2006) and in several papers (e.g., Frieberg et al., 2005). The project has evolved considerably in recent years to incorporate a range of programs and activities that are wider and deeper than in the early years, with a continued emphasis on family support and empowerment and on community development. However, work in the schools currently focuses not on preschool skills but on building connectedness between families, the primary schools, and local helping agencies.

A feature of the Inala community is its cultural and linguistic diversity, with nearly one in three households (32 per cent) having home languages other than English. The Indigenous community officially comprised 5.8 per cent of the 21,109 people living in the area at the 2001 Census, but we believe this to be an underestimate and consider that a more accurate estimate is at least 10 per cent. One person in five is aged less than 10 years, and within the Indigenous community half the population is less than 15 years old. Significantly, the rate of court appearances by young people in the district is much higher than the average for this indicator calculated across the greater Brisbane area, with Indigenous young people being the most ‘at risk’ population group.

The Family Independence Program includes a range of activities, some of which have a specific focus (such as improving child-rearing practices as a means of reducing the incidence of difficult behaviour that can reduce a child’s success at school), and others that are more broadly focused on supporting families and strengthening their capacity to deal with adversity. Because social and cultural background influences child-rearing attitudes and behaviours and cultural community membership provides a powerful potential source of social affiliation and support for families, there was a dedicated effort within the intervention design to address family issues within the cultural contexts within which they occur. This was enormously assisted by the employment of community workers from the Indigenous, Vietnamese and Pacific Islander communities.
Two stories

Johnny and his family

A few months ago one of us (Homel) attended the funeral of three young Indigenous boys whose families had had some association with Pathways. The oldest boy was 11. They were killed while walking on railway tracks in a suburb south west of Brisbane. More than one thousand people, mostly from the Indigenous community, shared their memories of the boys and offered their love and support to the families. The tragedy was intensified for one of the families because just eight weeks previously they had lost an older boy in a high-speed police pursuit. He had been a passenger in a stolen car that crashed when the young driver lost control.

The story of 10-year-old Johnny (not his real name) exemplifies the way problems in the domains of education, health, family life, economics, community, and criminal justice are all intertwined. The story also exemplifies the formidable barriers that parents and helping agencies such as Pathways face in working with many Indigenous young people.

Johnny spent his early years in an industrial suburb in the Pathways Project area that is exceptionally poorly served by public transport and other utilities (a report has been recently completed by Griffith University researchers (Johnson, 2005) on the transport needs of this area, which they have entitled Still waiting … !). In fact most people don’t even know the suburb is there, and get lost when they try to find it amidst the complex network of new roads that bestraddle a wilderness of warehouses, factories, truck depots, and storage facilities. The suburb, economically, is just about the poorest in Brisbane, and families in the area are frequently clients of a range of government and non-government agencies.

For all that, there is as noted earlier, a strong sense of community pride, and in the centre of the area is a primary school with staff who make strenuous efforts to reach out to and engage local families. Johnny had the benefit of attending a nearby Indigenous preschool, where his father was the bus driver. Johnny, so the eulogy goes, was always ready to talk and always wanted to play. At lunchtime he would sit in among the girls’ table and Talk! Talk! Talk! When he was six years old Johnny moved with his family to another part of Brisbane, but it seems that things didn’t go well at school from that time. By Grade 2 he was becoming a handful for teachers and staff, and his parents were called in on quite a few occasions when Johnny had been hauled into the principal’s office. Once he also ran out of class and hid in the school grounds, and it took three or four people quite some time to find him.

Given this emerging pattern of behaviour, it is not surprising that he soon became too much for his teachers and was transferred to a special school for children with learning difficulties. He used to love the free taxi ride to and from this school, which he considered a real treat. However he only lasted a couple of months at the special school, whereupon his long-suffering parents had to find another primary school. They eventually found one that seemed to fit Johnny’s needs, and he began to settle down. He even made and maintained a little garden all by himself. Johnny didn’t take long however to decide he’d had enough of this school and began playing up again.

By this time, late 2004 when he was nine years old, Johnny was excluded from school by Education Queensland and he became, in the words of the eulogy, “a Primary School Dropout”. His parents tried as hard as they could to get him back into school, but eventually were forced to try and educate their child at home as best they could.

It is striking how much love and affection Johnny received from his parents, and indeed from so many people “young and old”. He touched the lives of many young people who were in and out of the family home. Enjoying a good long chat was one of Johnny’s endearing characteristics. He had many loving, caring Auntsies whom he would visit often with his parents. He loved to “style up” in one of his Aunty’s air-conditioned rooms until he and another lad were ready to disappear, cruising around on their bikes exploring and always returning come nightfall with tales of their days’ journeys and adventures.

Johnny was a very mobile young lad. He often went back to the industrial suburb of his preschool years to visit an Aunty’s house, he moved often between the suburbs, South Brisbane and the city, and he also travelled to Cherbourg to visit family on many occasions. During the last year of his young life, Johnny wanted so much to be like his two older brothers. He always wanted to follow them, do all the things they did, hang out in the park, Southbank or the city. He could interact with all the teenagers, understand what they were doing or talking about. He would always say that one day he would be there joining in and all the kids would tell him otherwise, to always be a good boy and that it was no good doing the things they did.

Tragically, one aspect of the funeral was almost a parable illustrating this last point about the sometimes wild behaviour of his older peers. As the church bells tolled and the hearses began to pull out for the cemetery, five heavily armoured vans emerged from the rear, from the car park, setting out for their journeys back to the prisons and detention centres from which several older siblings and cousins had been released temporarily for the service. It is tempting — but wrong — to sink into depression and conclude that for children like Johnny there are two inevitable destinations, the prison or the cemetery. Risk is not destiny, despite the starkness of imagery that day.

In reality Indigenous children and their families and communities are amazingly resilient, and many Indigenous young people are now working their way through the education system and emerging as leaders in the trades, the professions and in politics. Homel and his colleagues have argued that we need to rethink the concepts of so-called risk factors, which are typically a catalogue of deficits like parental neglect, child impulsivity and lack of self control, learning difficulties, family violence, and the like (Homel et al., 1999; Homel, 2005). It is not that these statistical indicators don’t capture some of the crucial forces that heighten the risks of crime, mental illness,
substance abuse and related problems, it is that they fail to capture the history, culture and living reality of Indigenous and other marginalised groups. Similarly, so-called protective factors, important as they are, fail to really capture what it is about children, families and communities that make them capable of recovery from the most adverse circumstances.

In their analysis of Indigenous populations Homel et al. (1999) identified a range of social processes that transcend traditional risk factors. These included forced removals (the Stolen Generation and its intergenerational effects) and institutionalised racism. Strong cultural resilience and social bonds to family emerged as ongoing protective factors (the latter vividly illustrated in the story of Johnny’s life). Cultural resilience is evident in commonalities of exchange (a system of social relations where the emphasis of ownership is on social, not material, goods); negotiability (where social life is fluid and open to change or renegotiation); and mobility combined with a sense of place (where the groups or people are fluid but there is a generalised sense of belonging). All these features were also clearly evident in Johnny’s life story.

It is vitally important for the wellbeing of the Indigenous community and for the wellbeing of children and young people more generally that we learn the lessons embedded in the tragic stories of Johnny and the other boys – and also the lessons that are contained in the reactions of people in authority and of some social commentators to these particular tragedies.

One important lesson is that conflict at school, learning difficulties, truancy, and school exclusion are all warning bells (Farrington, 1991). Things might go seriously wrong, as they did for Johnny, if measures are not put into place as early as possible to change this particular negative pathway. In Johnny’s case, and in most similar cases, the problems persist despite strenuous efforts on the part of teachers, school guidance officers, behaviour management experts, principals and of course parents. The special school that Johnny was sent to is an institutionalised response to behaviour problems combined with a sense of place (where the groups or people are fluid but there is a generalised sense of belonging). All these features were also clearly evident in Johnny’s life story.

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Another lesson is that Johnny’s parents really loved him and really tried to do their best for him, but were overwhelmed in their attempts by the complex web of social disadvantage in which they were enmeshed. What they needed was substantial, meaningful, long-term support in their child rearing efforts, but what they got – at least after the funeral – was a lecture on television from the Premier about being more responsible parents, and commentary in the press that we could help kids who was school by cutting parents’ welfare. This last idea seems to surface regularly, promoted by both sides of politics. For example two or three years ago both prominent Liberal and Labor politicians argued that family welfare should be tied to the willingness of parents to undergo parent training like the Triple P program.

It’s not that the Premier and the others don’t mean well, but they don’t really seem to understand that the problem is not that parents don’t care and that they don’t do their best to keep an eye on their children, it’s that they are beset by such huge daily demands and challenges – economic, emotional, social – that they sometimes can’t give children the time, energy, skill and attention they need. These are the terms, we suggest, in which it is necessary to understand traditional risk and protective factors.

The Graham family

The story of the Graham family illustrates how the Pathways service translated the project philosophy into action through engagement with the Indigenous community at multiple levels. The story is taken from the project report, where it is presented with a number of other case studies and with detailed reflections on the lessons we have learned for theory and practice (Homel et al., 2006).

Katey is a non-Indigenous longstanding member of the local community married to an Indigenous man. Katey and Allan have five children (Douglas, 13; Jodie, 8; Toby, 5; Jamie, 3; and, Jordan, 2) who identify as Indigenous. Katey self referred to Pathways because she was afraid of having her children removed by the Department of Child Safety. It was a big step because both Katey, but more particularly, Allan were fearful of “outside interference”. Katey was ill at the time and felt that she wasn’t coping well with her eldest son who was beginning to be influenced by a peer group who were into petty crime. Her younger children were also exhibiting behavioural problems and the youngest ones were very “clingy”. Her daughter Jodie was having an identity crisis and experiencing racism and bullying at school.

Katey was initially given information about Pathways by Toby’s preschool teacher. Toby was described by his teacher as being very “angry and aggressive”. Katey reported that she had already attended Triple P at another local agency and was “put-off it” by a remark made by a counsellor there. The counsellor allegedly said that if she hit her children he would contact Family Services and have her children removed. Apparently, her partner responded that he would “handle his children the best way he could”. The Indigenous Family Support Worker (FSW) related that Katey had recently attended the funeral of a relative who had committed suicide because Family Services had removed her children and she was terrified of this happening to her family. Both Katey and Allan said that they would like to learn how to help their children to improve their behaviour and Katey subsequently attended a number of individual family support sessions at Pathways. However, after the FSW with whom she had engaged left the service, she ceased contact. Another Indigenous FSW was employed but was unable to re-engage Katey. A year later, Katey was recontacted by a third Indigenous FSW and accepted her invitation to join the newly formed Murri Family Support Group (“Murri” is the word for the local Indigenous population of Queensland).

When completing her pre-course needs analysis, Katey identified “parenting” as the issue that she required most assistance with. After some time Katey disclosed that she thought she might have to put her eldest son into care as she “wasn’t coping at all” with his behaviour. The Indigenous FSW offered to look after the boy for a few hours to give her a break and some time to think. Upon returning the child to his mother, the Indigenous FSW noted that Katey was also under significant pressure from other family members. She arranged additional childcare for her the following day and spoke to her about the benefits of talking to someone about her issues. Katey agreed to meet with a non-Indigenous Counsellor at Pathways. The Pathways Counsellor worked on an individual basis with Katey to develop positive parenting strategies to help her manage her son’s Figure 1  The Graham Family

The Graham family is depicted in Figure 1 with connections indicating the relationships between the family members.
behaviour. At the same time, the Indigenous FSW regularly “checked in” with her to reinforce the use of these strategies and discuss any issues that she was having in terms of implementing them. In addition, she supported her during meetings at her son’s school and actively liaised with the school on her behalf. The Indigenous FSW assisted Katey to access a medical specialist for health problems that Toby was experiencing and arranged for Katey’s children Douglas and Jodie to enter the Pathways school holiday program to give her a break from them while she was ill. Katey also started attending the Murri Playgroup with her three youngest children.

Katey reports that she is “coping well now”. Furthermore, she believes that the strategies that she learned in response to her eldest son’s behaviour have also helped her to overcome a number of “developmental hurdles” with her younger sons. She is now more accepting of being separated from her children. Katey stated that since being involved in Pathways she has begun socialising with other parents that she hadn’t known previously, learned about parenting, learned about communicating with schools, and had become “better at confronting teachers non-aggressively”. In addition, the Indigenous FSW states that her communication and self-expression skills have improved. Within the context of the Murri Family Support Group, participants are encouraged to express their feeling through art. Katey continues to practise this form of self-expression at home and has started to encourage her children to join her, imparting the skills that she learned in group sessions and at the same time promoting and engendering pride in their Aboriginal identity.

Jodie experienced a great deal of racism and bullying at school. On one occasion she came home from school and asked her mother if she could pretend to be white so that she could attend a friend’s birthday party. The friend’s father had explicitly forbidden his child from inviting Aboriginals and islanders. Rather than becoming angry, as she would have previously, Katey talked about the significance of her daughter’s ancestry and showed her examples of Indigenous art and culture that she had herself encountered as part of her involvement in the Murri Family Support Group. Katey encouraged her daughter to call on her creative ancestry and write down how she felt about the experience. Katey’s involvement in the Murri Support Group has enabled her to confront Jodie’s problems at school assertively and to teach her daughter how to handle bullying. The results of this have been very positive. These skills have also been reinforced by Jodie’s involvement in the Pathways recreational activities.

As a result of his mother changing her parenting style, Toby’s aggression has reduced and he has become more settled at school. He now looks out for his younger brother. In the first few months that Katey was involved in intensive individual counselling with Pathways workers, she successfully weaned Jordan and toilet trained him. He also began talking and he stopped crying when he was separated from her. The Indigenous FSW notes that many of these changes occurred in conjunction with the child’s introduction to the ‘Sing and Grow’ music therapy program that was intermittently offered during Playgroup time.

For Katey and her family, formal parenting programs were extremely frightening, but a great deal was gained from attending informal groups such as the Murri Family Support Program, Playgroup and ‘Sing and Grow’. Katey was able to generalise the strategies and techniques that she learned in these programs and to impart her artistic skills to her children to help them manage their anger and hurt. The Murri Playgroup was extremely valuable in assisting Katey to bond with her children and to understand their developmental needs. She learned to help them become independent of her. Individual support enabled her to relate more positively with her two older children and prevented her from putting her eldest son Douglas into care. Her husband Allan has also observed her new parenting strategies and has learned from them. One of the lessons for Pathways was in having a worker who was trustworthy, well respected in the community, and able to introduce a fearful family to other non-Indigenous workers and to other services who could provide more specialised assistance to the family.

Discussion

The story of the Graham family, and the other case studies in the full report, demonstrate that individual family support work, integrated with age-appropriate group programs are crucial to the wellbeing of children who have been assessed as having higher levels of risk due to multiple stressesors experienced by their families. The level of adversity experienced by a family, combined with the length of time that these adverse factors have persisted, are likely to act as a guide for the amount of time it might take to regain control of household routines and to build or rebuild caring relationships among family members.

The Graham family, and particularly Katey’s husband Allan, were very fearful of asking for assistance to deal with a family situation that was becoming overwhelming. The family was afraid of the repercussions that might have led to the removal of their children, given their Indigenous status and their unhappy history with the Department of Child Safety. Our experience suggests that the intervention that Katey received on an individual basis was only accepted because the primary caseworker was Aboriginal. When her trust in that worker was built she was then prepared to trust a non-Indigenous worker. The benefit of these two workers working in tandem was that one worker could impart the knowledge and skills while the other could follow up the session by modelling the skills and helping Katey on a practical level to integrate them into her routine at home, in a comfortable and culturally appropriate manner. This was achieved through a series of home visits. Katey’s husband could also be included in these sessions in the home in a non-stigmatising way. He did not have to risk being seen by his mates attending a support service or a parenting program. As the program was tailor made, both parents were able to learn and practise the skills suited to their particular circumstances within their own comfort zone.

The experiences with the Graham family vividly illustrate one of the main lessons of the Pathways Project, which is the benefit of culturally and linguistically appropriate support for families with young children. Comments from Pathways participants from the Indigenous, Vietnamese and Samoan communities indicate that they would not have chosen to access the service had it not been for a worker who shared their culture, history and language. This common bond encouraged them to trust in the service. Bilingual/bicultural workers have to be good listeners, good advisors and good counsellors to adults while often maintaining to their communities that their work is child-focused.

Notwithstanding the achievements of the Pathways model, and the achievements of many similar community service models, given the magnitude of the challenges that Indigenous communities face means that there are probably as many failures as successes. Despite all the love
with which Johnny and his mates were surrounded, and despite the efforts of the Pathways service and many other local helping agencies, it has to be recognised that on the fateful afternoon on which they died they were in a perilous situation and no responsible adult was there at the time to look out for them. Family and community supports sometimes fail even in the most privileged social settings. Where poverty and social exclusion are entrenched, failure of support systems is a more common phenomenon. That is why the state has a responsibility, and indeed why the whole community has a profound moral obligation to 'look out' for children like Johnny and for all children and young people who will from time to time encounter challenges beyond the normal capacities of families to overcome. Community service agencies cannot, on their own, fill every gap.

A further important lesson from our work with Pathways is that instead of a catalogue of statistical risk factors that mostly refer to deficiencies in children or in their families, we need to think in terms of the resources needed for parents and their communities to overcome the barriers or solve the problems that they face on a daily basis in their child rearing efforts, and contrast these with the resources actually available to them to do their job. In other words, the issue is a lack of fit between the resources needed and those available, rather than deficits in individual people or families. The challenge is to open new doors or force open half-shut doors for families and children doing it tough, not focus exclusively on the “problem child”.

We understand negative developmental pathways more in terms of system responses – and their deficiencies – than in terms of individual or family pathology. This way of thinking provides a positive and practical framework for devising effective prevention strategies, while allowing us to draw on all the scientific research on risk and protective factors as a guide to where to target resources.

A system perspective also draws us away from the local area to the larger society, where economic and social policies are developed and enacted that have profound consequences for children and families. It is abundantly clear that local strategies must be supported on a much wider scale by policies that make available the resources and opportunities that are routinely denied to children and families in disadvantaged areas. Such policies would have a major benefit for Indigenous communities if underpinned by a philosophy of genuine local empowerment.

References

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The economic value of harvesting wild resources to the Indigenous community of the Wallis Lake Catchment, NSW

MATTHEW GRAY AND JON ALTMAN

Despite the potential economic significance of the use of wild resources by Australian Indigenous peoples, there has been relatively little research into this issue. Using a new methodology, this article provides estimates of the economic benefits derived from the use of wild resources to the Indigenous community of the Wallis Lake catchment.

The harvesting of wild resources by Indigenous Australians usually occurs within the context of families and extended kin networks with the harvested resources being distributed throughout these networks. This can make a valuable contribution to the livelihoods of families in such networks, as well as producing a range of non-economic benefits including cultural maintenance.

Despite the potential economic significance of the use of wild resources by Australian Indigenous peoples, there has been relatively little research into this issue. The majority of research relates to subsistence production in very remote areas and has not generally estimated the economic or market replacement value.

A number of case studies clearly demonstrate that with access to land-based or coastal resources, Indigenous Australians can establish production systems which exploit wildlife both for customary (non market) and commercial purposes (e.g. Arthur 1990; Altman, 1987, 2003; Griffiths, Philips, & Godjuwa, 2003; Johannes & McFarlane, 1991; Meehan 1982; Vardon 2001). Studies that do provide estimates of the economic benefits derived from the use of wild resources for Indigenous people in remote regions include Altman (1987, 2003), Arthur (1990) and Vardon (2001).

As far as we are aware, there is no existing Australian research that attempts to quantify the economic benefits to Indigenous Australians living in more densely settled areas. However, there are good reasons for expecting that the use of wild resources will differ between coastal New South Wales (NSW) and that in remote areas given the very different economic, social, cultural and environmental contexts. The lack of research into the economic value of wild resources to Indigenous families and communities in more densely settled areas of Australia is an important gap in our knowledge base. This paper starts to fill this gap by providing estimates of the economic benefits derived from the use of wild resources by the Indigenous families of the Wallis Lake catchment in coastal New South Wales.

The study involved the early development and testing of a cost-effective methodology which can be used to estimate the economic value of wild resource harvesting. It is hoped that this method will be used by others interested in estimating the value of wild resources in more densely populated areas of Australia.

Throughout this paper wild resources are defined as the native flora and fauna of the Wallis Lake catchment. Both commercial and non-commercial uses are considered. Non-commercial use of wild resources by Indigenous people is sometimes termed the ‘customary’ economy, and comprises a range of productive activities that occur outside the market or non-market sector. Activities include hunting, gathering and fishing, as well as land and habitat management, species management and the maintenance of biodiversity. In this paper the terms customary and non-commercial use are employed interchangeably.
The Wallis Lake catchment

Topography and ecology

Wallis Lake is part of the Great Lakes region of the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales. The region is dominated by high summer rainfall. The catchment covers an area of 1,440 square kilometres, extending approximately 40 kilometres north to south adjacent to the coast, and up to 40 kilometres inland from the coast inland. It is drained by the Wallamba, Coolongolook, Wallingat and Wang Wauk Rivers.

The area can be broadly divided into the coastal plain and estuary, and ridges and valleys. The coastal plain consists of a series of sand barriers that run parallel to the coast and extends inland for about eight kilometres. Inland of the dune barrier system is a small coastal floodplain. West of Wallis Lake and the coastal plain, the land rises to form ridges and valleys.

Approximately 39 per cent of the catchment has been cleared for agriculture, mining and infrastructure, and 5% has been developed for urban and rural residential uses including industrial, commercial and infrastructure purposes. Population densities in the rural parts of the catchments are relatively low, being less than one person per hectare, and most of the cleared land is used for either cattle grazing or dairying.

The natural resources of the catchment form the basis of agriculture, aquaculture, fishing and tourism industries. While the oyster aquaculture industry is significant, by far the most important industry to the local economy is tourism (Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan SC, 2001).

About 9 per cent of the catchment is managed for nature conservation by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. There are several natural reserves...
and larger areas are managed as national parks. Areas of the catchment are listed on the Register of the National Estate. Wallis Lake and adjacent estuarine islands are also listed as a ‘Wetland of National Importance’. In comparison with many of the smaller coastal lagoons on the east coast of New South Wales, Wallis Lake is in reasonable ecological and environmental condition (Harris, 2001).

**The Indigenous population**

The original inhabitants of the Great Lakes region of coastal New South Wales were the Worimi people, made up of the Buraigal, Gamipingal and the Garawerrigal. The people of the Wallis Lake area are the Wallamba. Middens around the Wallis Lake area suggest that food from the lake and sea was harvested in abundance in precolonial times, as well as wallabies, kangaroos, echidnas, waterfowl and fruit bats. Nets were used for prawning, and women fished from bark canoes using hooks made of shell. Men caught mullet on the beach. They also hunted wallabies, kangaroos and echidnas with boomerangs and spears. Waterbirds provided meat and eggs. Yams, berries and fruit from pigface, plum pine, black apple and geebung were also utilised (Leon, n.d.).

At the time of the 2001 Census, the Indigenous population of the Wallis Lake catchment was estimated to be 821 (3.2 per cent of the total catchment population of 25,482) (Table 1). While the Indigenous population lives throughout the Wallis Lake Catchment, there is a concentration of people living on land in Forster which is owned and administered by the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council.

The Indigenous population in the Wallis Lake catchment is much younger than the non-Indigenous population. For example, 39.5 per cent of the Indigenous population was aged less than 15 years as compared to 16.5 of the total population (derived from 2001 Census data).

According to the 2001 Census, the employment rate of Indigenous people of working age living in the Wallis Lake catchment is 42.0 per cent, which is lower than the employment rate of 55.5 per cent for the non-Indigenous population. Excluding employment in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, a work-for-the dole scheme for Indigenous Australians, reduces the Indigenous employment to a population rate of 33.2 per cent. At the time of the 2001 Census, the average annual individual income (before tax) of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over living in the Wallis Lake catchment was $15,898 per annum.

**Existing information on use of wild resources by Indigenous Australians**

There is little reliable information at the national level about the use of wild resources by Indigenous Australians or their economic significance (see Altman, Buchanan, & Biddle, 2006 for a discussion of the available data). The only survey of Indigenous Australians that provides any information for a nationally representative sample is the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS). However, in that survey use of wild resources was canvassed as part of the question on voluntary work. It is probable that the framing of the question in terms of voluntary work led to a substantial understating of the prevalence of hunting, fishing and gathering.

A second ABS survey, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) was conducted in 2002. It did contain a question on hunting and fishing, but unfortunately it was only asked of people living in remote areas and so provides no information on these activities elsewhere. A further limitation of the NATSISS 2002 survey is that it only asks about hunting and fishing in the previous three months and hence does not take

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**Table 1**
Wallis Lake catchment population by Indigenous status, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
<th>Proportion of population Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15+</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>20,578</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>24,661</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The geographic population data released by the ABS does not exactly match the geographic area covered by the Wallis Lake catchment. Details of how the population for the catchment was estimated are provided in Gray, Altman and Halasz (2005: Table 1). Source: Derived from 2001 Census data and statistics in the Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan SC (2001).

**Table 2**
Survey instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>How many people do you go with?</th>
<th>How often?</th>
<th>Time spent?</th>
<th>Amount?</th>
<th>How collected or caught?</th>
<th>How used?</th>
<th>Impacts or pressures on your use of the resource (any?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. fish, bird, mammal, reptile, plant, mineral</td>
<td>e.g. every day, every week</td>
<td>e.g. Hours per day, per week</td>
<td>(number or size or weight)</td>
<td>e.g. rod, handline, net, gun, from shore, from boat</td>
<td>a. Personal consumption</td>
<td>b. Gif (to whom?)</td>
<td>c. Distribution (to family, friends?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
account of seasonal variation in the undertaking of these activities. Hunter (1996) provides a detailed discussion of the information on the use of wild resources in the NATSIS 1994 survey and Altman et al. (2006) provide a discussion of the NATSIS 1994 and NATSIS 2002 information on the use of wild resources.

**Regulation of the use of wild resources in New South Wales**

In New South Wales the use of wild resources is regulated by both State and Commonwealth Acts. While some of the legislation contains provisions relating specifically to Indigenous people, other Acts contain no special provisions. An overview of the legal right to terrestrial wild resources in NSW in provided by English (2002). In the Wallis Lake catchment, it is mainly aquatic resources that generate economic value and so in this section we focus on the regulation of fishing.

The taking of fish is primarily regulated by the *Fisheries Management Act 1994 (NSW)*. The fishing laws in NSW generally do not distinguish Indigenous fishing as being distinct from recreational or commercial fishing. Thus if an Indigenous person, or any other person, were to take fish beyond the bag limit allowed for a recreational fisher in waters protected from commercial fishing, they could be prosecuted under the act. The only exception is that the *Fisheries Management Act 1994 (NSW)* does not affect native title rights and interests (which are non-commercial or customary in nature).3

**Potential economic benefits of using wild resources**

**Valuing wild resources**

There is an extensive literature on how to value natural resources. In this literature it is conventional to separate the economic value of wild resources into use and non-use values. Non-use value refers to those current or future (potential) values associated with an environment resource that relates merely on its continued existence and are unrelated to use (Pearce & Warford 1993). Indirect uses are the flow of services such as flood control and external ecosystem support which the natural resource provides.

The economic benefits can also be classified as being either direct or indirect. The direct benefits may result from: consumption of wild resources harvested; the use of wild resources as an input into something which is sold (e.g., a work of art); or employment resulting from connection with wild resources and the consequent increased income and any intangible benefits from employment such as self-esteem. Indirect uses are the flow of services such as flood control and external ecosystem support which the natural resource provides.

In addition, there may be a broad range of ‘flow-on’ economic benefits that result from the direct use of wild resources. For example, a successful cultural tourism operation might draw into the region tourists who are interested in Aboriginal culture. Another example is that the harvesting of wild resources may improve the health of harvesters and their families (Lee, Bailey, Yarmirr, O’Dea, & Matthew, 1994; O’Dea 1984). There may also be health benefits to harvesters from a more physically active lifestyle. Harvesting of wild resources may also provide a sense of identity and pride in distinct Indigenous practices and increase social cohesion. To the extent to which this occurs, many of the social problems associated with inactivity are likely to be reduced, leading to substantial benefits for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the form of lower health expenditure, policing and criminal justice costs.

Direct use involves both commercial (i.e. sold in the market) and non-commercial (i.e. for personal consumption or consumption by family and friends) use of the resources. Fully accounting for the economic value of wild resources to the Indigenous population living in the Wallis Lake catchment requires estimating both use and non-use values.

While in principle it is possible to value both the flow-on economic benefits from the use of wild resources, in practice the information required to do this is very difficult to obtain. The fundamental problem is that while an association may be observed between harvesting of wild resources and a range of social outcomes, it is very difficult to determine whether it is the harvesting of wild resources that is improving wellbeing or whether people with a higher level of wellbeing are more likely to be harvesting wild resources.

Given the difficulties in estimating the potential benefits derived from the harvesting of wild resources, this paper focuses on estimating the direct economic benefits to the Indigenous population from the use of fisheries resources.

**The concept of economic benefit**

Conceptually, one way of measuring the economic value of a good or service is in terms of what consumers are willing to pay for the commodity, less the costs of supplying it. Thus, the economic value derived from the non-commercial harvesting of wild resources can be defined as the difference between the value of consumption and the costs of production.

If the person doing the harvesting is the sole consumer, then they personally receive the full economic surplus. Of course, people have a family and kin network with which they share harvested resources. This is a complex economic and social phenomenon which may involve reciprocity, barter and exchange. We make the assumption that the value of the use of the wild resources harvested by the Indigenous population as a whole can be calculated by aggregating the economic benefits obtained by all the people who consume the resources, minus the costs of obtaining the resources.

In general, information on the consumption benefits of wild resources that do not enter the market is not observable. One approach that has been widely used is to use market prices to calculate the replacement value of the wild resources harvested.4
If market prices are not available the prices of reasonably close substitutes can be used as proxies. It must be stressed that this does not necessarily equate to the economist's concept of economic value. This is because the market prices do not necessarily reflect an individual's willingness to pay. If wild resources were not harvested, then the same equivalent goods might not be purchased at market prices, but rather a cheaper substitute might be purchased. Many Indigenous families have relatively low incomes, and they might not accord the same relative values as the market does to particular resources. The clearest example of this is abalone meat, which retails at over $100 per kilogram. Indigenous people would rarely, if ever, purchase abalone, or indeed the more expensive fish species which they catch, at market prices.

### Data required and methods of obtaining data

The estimation of the economic value of wild resources that are harvested requires information about the:

- quantity (weight) of each species harvested;
- number of people harvesting each species;
- market price of each type of wild resource; and
- costs of harvesting the wild resources.

Accurate information on the number of people harvesting each species of a wild resource can be obtained from a representative random sample of the population of interest. The main drawback of such surveys is that they can be costly to run, particularly given the need to collect data for a twelve-month period to account for seasonal differences in harvesting. This issue is discussed further below.

Information on the harvesting of wild resources can be collected in two broad ways. The first is by direct observation and measurement of the amount, size and weight of wild resources harvested for a representative sample of the population. This information can be obtained either by a data collector measuring the wild resources harvested or by getting the fishers to record the amount, size and weight of each resource harvested (see Altman, 1987). The second way of obtaining this information is via a questionnaire which asks people to estimate the amounts of each species harvested over a previous period of time (e.g. one week, one month or 12 months).

While it is clearly desirable to obtain information on the size and weight of the resources harvested, if average sizes of species are available from other sources, then the economic value can be estimated from the numbers of each species harvested.

Given the seasonal nature of the use of most naturally-occurring wild resources, it is important to collect information for a twelve-month period. In the case of the direct measurement approaches, this means that data must be collected throughout a 12-month period. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. The direct observation and measurement of the wild resources harvested will produce more accurate information than a

### Table 3 Aquatic species included in the valuation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Average weight (kg)</th>
<th>Price ($/kg)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Salmon</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacklip Abalone</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Bass</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Drummer</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Mussel</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Swimmer Crab</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronze Whalers</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cockle</td>
<td>C &amp; B</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusky Flathead</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Rock Lobster</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gould’s Squid</td>
<td>C &amp; B</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairtail</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jew Fish (Mulloway)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>$55 per fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather Jacket</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luderick (Black fish)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud Crab</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullet (Bull)</td>
<td>C &amp; B</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octopus</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyster</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>$9 per dozen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periwinkles</td>
<td>C &amp; B</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prawns (King)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prawn (King)</td>
<td>C &amp; B</td>
<td>20.25</td>
<td>Average price of King &amp; School Prawn used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prawn (School)</td>
<td>C &amp; B</td>
<td>20.25</td>
<td>Average price of King &amp; School Prawn used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand Whiting</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevally</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin Tuna</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turban Snail</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrasse</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin Bream</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (a) C stands for consumption and B stands for bait.
(b) Weights are expressed for whole animals and are for common (average sizes) for each species. Most species sizes are from Yearsley, Last, and Ward (2001), although some sizes are from the Sydney fish markets species information sheets. In general, the ‘average’ weight has been derived by adding 40% of the difference between the lower common weight and the upper common weight to the lower common weight. This has been done to produce slightly conservative estimates. For some species, following discussions with local fishers, the average catch weight was lowered to more accurately represent average weights in the Wallis Lake catchment.
(c) The average prices are from seafood retailers in the Wallis Lake catchment. They are mid-range or average prices.
Information on the costs of harvesting resources needs to be obtained from the harvesters. Information should be gathered on costs associated with fishing, and may include: bait and/or berley; boat and possibly trailer; fishing gear; dive gear; and transport.

**Detailed description of methodology**

Given the limited resources available and the exploratory nature of this study, the data that could be collected were limited. The estimates provided in this paper have a high degree of uncertainty and are therefore indicative only. Nonetheless, they do allow us to assess whether the use of wild resources by the Indigenous population in this area is significant and to provide indicative estimates of their value. They also illustrate the value and broader applicability of the data collection method developed by the authors for this study.

The small sample size and non-random selection means that some caution is needed in interpreting the results. People reported that they tended to go fishing with a fairly constant group of people, although for certain species the group could be much larger. This was particularly the case for the gathering of shellfish which tended to be a day out for ten or more people. The interviews ranged in length from approximately 20 minutes to over two hours. Discussions were also held with other members of the Indigenous community. Some of the areas from which resources are harvested were visited.

The fieldwork and interviews were conducted over a period of five days in July 2004. It was undertaken in collaboration with a member of the local Aboriginal community who was also a field officer from the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation. Our research collaborator arranged the interviews and was present during all interviews; his contribution was crucial to collecting accurate data from informants.

**Although children do harvest wild resources, the amount is relatively small and hence contributes relatively little to livelihoods. However, it is very important as a social mechanism for the inter-generational transfer of harvesting skills and ecological knowledge.**

Data on wild resources used by informants over the previous 12 months were collected via face-to-face interviews using a survey instrument (see Table 2). For each resource identified, the informant was asked whether they collected the resource alone or with other people, and if they collected it with other people, how many. Information was also collected on how often in the last 12 months the respondent had collected the resource, how long they typically spent collecting the resource, the amount of the resource collected, whether the resource was used for personal consumption, distributed to friends or family, sold or used for other purposes. The respondents were also asked whether there were any pressures or limitations on their use of each resource. A species guide was used to help prompt respondents and to identify species. Finally, each informant was asked to estimate the number of Indigenous harvesters of wild resources in the Wallis Lake catchment.

Data were collected from ten informants from the Aboriginal community. Those interviewed represented both males and females and a range of age groups. All had harvested wild resources in the previous 12 months. The respondents provided information for the ‘group’ they went fishing with and so the interviews provide information on around 27 members of the Indigenous community.

Overall, the questionnaire appeared to produce usable data. Respondents were readily able to list the wild resources which they harvested and the times of year at which the resources were used. The people interviewed showed a high level of species familiarity. Providing average amounts harvested was more difficult for many respondents since the amount harvested varied from time to time and from season to season. Better quality information could be obtained by conducting the survey several times over a 12-month period and asking about resources harvested since the previous interview.

A detailed discussion of the method developed in this study to estimate the economic value resulting from the harvesting of wild resources and some suggestions around how to best implement the method are provided in Gray, Altman, and Halasz (2005).

In this study we only take account of wild resources that are harvested by adults (aged 15 years and over). Although children do harvest wild resources, the amount is relatively small and hence contributes relatively little to livelihoods. However, it is very important as a social mechanism for the inter-generational transfer of harvesting skills and ecological knowledge.
Wild resources used non-commercially

A wide range of wild resources are currently harvested on a non-commercial basis by Indigenous people in the Wallis Lake catchment. The aquatic-based resources used in the economic valuation are listed in Table 3. This Table also shows the average weights and prices used to estimate the market replacement value of the resources harvested.

While a number of terrestrial plant and wildlife species are also harvested, the vast majority of the wild resources harvested are aquatic. The use of the terrestrial plant and wildlife was primarily symbolic and cultural and while there was an element of domestic consumption involved, the harvest is relatively small and the direct economic value consequently low. This should not be interpreted as meaning that the harvesting of these resources is unimportant or not valuable. The indirect benefits of cultural maintenance may be significant. Aquatic based resources, flora and land-based fauna which were reported as being used, but which are not included in the economic valuation, are listed in Table 4.

Those interviewed did not see their harvesting of wild resources as a recreational activity but rather as a customary activity, part of being Indigenous and as a means of obtaining food. This is very different from the reasons for fishing reported by the Australian population as a whole. According to the National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey, among the general Australian population only 8% of respondents said that their primary reason for recreational fishing was fishing for food, 37 per cent said that it was to relax and unwind, 18 per cent for sport, 15 per cent said to be with friends and 13 per cent to be outdoors (Henry & Lyle, 2003).

In cases where respondents provided information on the amount of wild resources harvested by the group they went fishing or hunting with as a whole, the amounts have been converted into per person figures.

As discussed above, ideally the costs of catching and harvesting the fish should be subtracted from the value of the wild resources in order to estimate net economic benefits. However, the informants all said that the direct expenditures involved in obtaining the wild resources are minimal. With the exception of bread, bait is very rarely purchased. Expenditures on fishing equipment are also relatively low, with most fishers using hand-lines or rod and reel. We therefore have not adjusted for financial costs of fishing. Our calculations could thus overstate the economic value of fishing.

### Table 4 Wild resources that are used but not valued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plants</th>
<th>Aquatic resources and land-based fauna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appleberry (Billardiera scandens)</td>
<td>Beach Worm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Apple (Planchonella australis)</td>
<td>Cartrut Shell (Dog Winkle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood wood</td>
<td>Cobra Woodworm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunya pine</td>
<td>Conjevoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush lemon</td>
<td>Eel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Beard-heath (Leucopogon paradoxus)</td>
<td>Razor fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianella (Flax Lily)</td>
<td>Skip Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ink weed</td>
<td>Wirrah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilly Pilly, Blue Lilly Pilly, Weeping Lilly Pilly</td>
<td>Wildlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Grass (lamandra)</td>
<td>Little Lorikeet (Glossopsitta pusilla)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native bee honey</td>
<td>Native Rosella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow-leaved Palm Lily (Cordyline stricta)</td>
<td>Red-necked Wallaby (Macropus rufogriseus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper bark</td>
<td>Eastern Grey Kangaroo (Macropus giganteus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pig face</td>
<td>Plum Pine (Podocarpus elatus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracken</td>
<td>Witchetty Grubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Yam (Dioscorea transversa)</td>
<td>Lace Monitor (Varanus varius)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Plum (Diospyros australis)</td>
<td>Short-beaked Echidna (Tachyglossus aculeatus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wombat Berry (Eustrephus latifolius)</td>
<td>Australian Brush-turkey (Alectura lathami)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Rosella (Hibiscus heterophyllus)</td>
<td>Fluttinger Shearwater (Puffinus gavial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creek Sandpaper Fig (Ficus corona)</td>
<td>Australian Wood Duck (Chenonetta jubata)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silkpod vine</td>
<td>Pacific Black Duck (Anas superciliosa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Cherry (Exocarpos cupressiformis)</td>
<td>Wonga Pigeon (Leucosarca melanoleuca)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Gooseberry (Physalis peruviana)</td>
<td>Noisy Friarbird (Philenomon corniculatus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarsparilla (Smilia australis)</td>
<td>White-winged Chough (Corcorax melanorhamphos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Sarsparilla (Smilax glycyphylia)</td>
<td>Carpet or Diamond Python (Morelia spilota)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Guava (Rhodomyrtus psidiioides)</td>
<td>Red-bellied Black Snake (Pseudechis porphyriacus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diamond Python (Morelia spilota)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The economic value of the harvesting of wild resources

**Average value among those who harvest wild resources**

Fig. 1 shows the distribution of the estimated value of wild resources caught, hunted or gathered by the informants. There are large differences in the value of wild resources harvested. The minimum value is $155 and the maximum $14,391. The average (mean) value of wild resources caught is $5,600 and because the distribution is quite skewed the median is much lower at $2,035 per respondent.

Three of the respondents were well known for being exceptionally active fishers. Several of the respondents, independently, estimated that there would be 15 to 25 fishermen who were fishing four to six days per week and catching similar amounts to the three very active fishermen who were interviewed.
Economic value of wild resources to the Indigenous people in Wallis Lake

The information on fishing given by the respondents can be combined with estimates of the number of fishers in the Wallis Lake catchment to provide estimates of the value of the harvesting of wild resources to the Wallis Lake Indigenous community.

As discussed, there is no reliable data on the proportion of the Indigenous population that harvests wild resources. However, it is possible to use the existing data to place a lower and upper bound on the proportion who fish. As discussed above, the NATSIS 1994 questions underestimated, perhaps seriously, the incidence of hunting, fishing and gathering. According to the NATSIS 1994, in the former Coffs Harbour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) region (in which the Wallis Lake catchment lies), the proportion of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and over who hunt, fish or gather was 9 per cent. We use this as the lower bound.

The question about hunting, fishing and gathering was only asked of those who reported doing any voluntary work (35 per cent). Of those who did voluntary work, around one-quarter reported hunting, fishing or gathering. An upper bound estimate can therefore be obtained by assuming that everyone did some voluntary work and thus the upper-bound estimate is 25 per cent. The mid-point figure used is 16 per cent. Although these bounds are to some extent arbitrary, it is likely that the true proportion hunting, fishing or gathering on a regular basis lies between the lower and upper bound.

The second method of estimating the value of harvesting of wild resources to the Indigenous community makes use of the fact that there are 15 to 25 ‘high-catch’ fishers. We first estimate the value of the wild resources harvested by the high-catch fishers (the three highest value respondents—see Figure 1). The average value per fisher of wild resources harvested by the rest of the Indigenous community is estimated as the average for respondents excluding the high-catch fishers. The lower and upper bounds for the proportion of the population (excluding the high-catch fishers) described above are used.

Since the high-catch fishers contribute a substantial proportion of the wild resources harvested and the number of high-catch fishers is known with reasonable accuracy, estimates made using this method will be less to the estimate of the proportion of the population which is actively harvesting the wild resources than the first method.

Estimates of the value of wild resources harvested by the Wallis Lake Indigenous population are shown in Table 5. The top panel shows the estimates based on the average value of fishing (method 1) and the bottom panel those based on the value by high-catch fishers plus the value by the remainder of the community (method 2).

Focusing first on the estimates based on the average value of fishing, the average value for the 12 months to July 2004 per Indigenous person aged 15 years and over ranges from $468 for the lower bound estimate to $1,299 for the upper bound estimate. The mid-point estimate is $831. The value for the community as a whole ranges from $232,420 to $645,611 for the lower and upper bound estimates, respectively. The mid-point, or best, estimate is $413,191. The relative importance of this contribution to the living standards of the Indigenous population living in the Wallis Lake catchment can be gauged by expressing the value of wild resources harvested as a proportion of the average personal income for the Indigenous population ($15,898 pa). Our estimates suggest that the value of the wild resources harvested is between 2.9 per cent and 8.2 per cent of gross income. The mid-point estimate is 5.2 per cent.
The estimates based upon valuing the resources harvested by the high-catch fishermen and the rest of the community separately (method 2) show less variability according to the estimate of the proportion of the population who fish than those based on a simple average. The per capita value for those aged 15 years and over ranges from $868 to $975 per annum with a mid-point estimate of $810. The value for the community ranges from $833,298 to $848,427 per annum with a midpoint estimate of $842,792.

While the value of wild resources harvested is only a relatively small proportion of income, it is a significant contribution to the consumption levels of a relatively low income population. It also provides a means of increasing income for people who may have limited opportunity to increase income through the market sector. There are differences between families/households in the amount of wild resources consumed. For those households containing a very active harvester the value of wild resources consumed may constitute a much higher proportion of household income than is the case when averaged across the entire community.

**Concluding comments**

The value of wild resources harvested by Indigenous people in the Wallis Lake catchment is estimated to be between $468 and $1,200 per adult per annum. Expressed as a proportion of the gross income of the Indigenous population, the value of the wild resources harvested is between 3% and 8%. While the value of wild resources harvested appears to be only a relatively small proportion of total income, it is a significant contribution to the dietary intake of a relatively poor community. For those households with a very active and successful harvester, the value of wild resources consumed constitutes a far higher proportion of household income than is the case when total estimated return is averaged across the entire community. Virtually all of the resources are used for personal consumption (including own household) or distributed to family outside of the harvester’s own household. A useful reference point is provided by the proportion of their income that households spend on food. According to the 2003-04 Household Expenditure Survey, households in the lowest income quintile spent, on average, 19%, of their gross household income of food and non-alcoholic beverages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

As outlined in the paper, the “high-catch” Indigenous fishers distributed their catch among extended family members. Indigenous fishers said repeatedly that the existing bag limits restrict their ability to provide fish to their extended families. Therefore, there may be a case for increasing the bag limits of Indigenous fishers. However, given that fish are a renewable common-property resource it is necessary to regulate the total fish harvest to ensure that harvesting levels are sustainable and that the stocks of fish are not depleted. If there is scientific evidence that current levels of fishing are sustainable and socially optimal but that additional fishing by Indigenous people would make the fish harvest unsustainable, then it would be necessary to reduce the catch of recreational, or commercial fishing interests, or both.

In the native title era, where common law customary rights to species are increasingly legally recognised, it is likely that Indigenous customary fishing effort will expand. Our research suggests that effective natural resource management will be increasingly dependent on engagement with Indigenous stakeholders who represent people with a long-term interest in sustainability as the long-term residents of the region and as long-term harvesters of coastal resources.

Finally, we believe that the methodology developed for this study is more broadly applicable and variants of it can be used to estimate the economic benefits derived from the use of wild resources in other areas. As noted by Altman et al. (2006), the NATSISS 2002 was unfortunately limited in its coverage of wildlife harvesting to remote and very remote Australia. Our research shows that fishing for household consumption remains an important economic activity for Indigenous people in more settled parts of Australia and that future case studies like ours, or official collection of statistics, for example in NATSISS 2008, should be expanded to include Indigenous harvesting in non-remote regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5 Value of use of wild resources by the Wallis Lake Indigenous population, $ per annum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on average value of fishing (method 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per person aged 15+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per person (all ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 very active fishermen and rest at community average (method 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per person aged 15+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per person (all ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of average income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Estimates are for the 12 months to July 2004.
Endnotes

1 There are some introduced species such as rabbits and deer that are harvested occasionally by Indigenous people. Harvesting of these species is excluded from the estimates of the value of wild resources.

2 The primary source of information on the typology and ecology of the catchment area from which the description in this section is drawn is the Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan (Wallis Lake Catchment Management Plan Steering Committee (SC) 2001).

3 S.211 of the Native Title Act recognises the common law customary use rights of native title holders to fisheries. The High Court upheld this right in the case Yanner versus Eaton that recognised the right of an Aboriginal man, Marandoo Yanner to harvest crocodile for customary use. The significance of s.211 is contestable and legally complex as it most clearly applies to holders of native title.

4 An alternative approach to estimating the value of harvesting wild resources to the Indigenous community of the Wallis Lake catchment is to value them by the Indigenous labour force. The significance of S.211 is contestable and legally complex as it most clearly applies to holders of native title.

References


This paper is based on a research project by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at The Australian National University commissioned by the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation in 2004. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and cannot in anyway be taken to represent those of the New South Wales Department of Environment and Conservation.

Dr Matthew Gray is Deputy Director (Research) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies and Jon Altman is Professor and Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.

While the value of wild resources harvested is only a relatively small proportion of income, it is a significant contribution to the consumption levels of a relatively low income population. It also provides a means of increasing income for people who may have limited opportunity to increase income through the market sector.
Endnotes
1 There are some introduced species such as rabbits and deer that are harvested occasionally by Indigenous people. Harvesting of these species is excluded from the estimates of the value of wild resources.
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4 An alternative approach to estimating the value of harvesting wild resources to the Indigenous population would be to value the inputs to the harvesting. In the case of harvesting of wild resources by Indigenous people time is the primary input, and this could be valued using an imputed value of labour (and the value of other resources involved in harvesting). There however are conceptual difficulties in estimating the value of time for a group of people with few opportunities to participate in the labour market. Also with harvesting activity, owing to many factors, inputs may not generate outputs.

References

While the value of wild resources harvested is only a relatively small proportion of income, it is a significant contribution to the consumption levels of a relatively low income population. It also provides a means of increasing income for people who may have limited opportunity to increase income through the market sector.


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Selected crime and justice issues for Indigenous families

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Most previous analysis has been conducted using police and court data. However, insights into the socioeconomic forces underlying Indigenous interaction with the justice system can only be obtained by interrogating omnibus social surveys like the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) and the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) that include a reasonably comprehensive set of potential explanatory factors, including potentially important information on family background.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) recognised that “...too many Aboriginal people are in custody too often”, and recommended a strategy of imprisonment as the last resort to reduce the level of over-representation of Indigenous people in custody (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991). Baker (2001) concluded that reducing the rate of court appearances provides the greatest leverage for reducing Indigenous imprisonment rates. Obviously, one clear way of achieving lower court appearance rates and in diverting people away from court is to reduce the rate at which Indigenous people are arrested.

Most previous analysis has been conducted using police and court data. However, insights into the socioeconomic forces underlying Indigenous interaction with the justice system can only be obtained by interrogating omnibus social surveys like the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) and the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) that include a reasonably comprehensive set of potential explanatory factors, including potentially important information on family background.

While the 1994 NATSIS has provided some valuable insights into the processes underlying the disproportionate level of Indigenous arrest (see Box 1, and Carcach & Mukherjee, 1996a; Hunter, 1998; 2001; Hunter & Borland, 1999), several important research questions remain unanswered. Why do Indigenous people appear in court at a rate five times higher than the rest of the population? Why are Indigenous people more likely to appear for (and be convicted of) certain types of offences? (Baker, 2001). Clearly, factors such as the over-representation of Indigenous people in prisons and other stages of the criminal justice system, the nature of Indigenous offending and

Overview of existing literature on socioeconomic factors underlying Indigenous crime

Carcach and Mukherjee (1996b) show that most of the arrests in the NATSIS were for disorderly conduct and/or drink driving, and outstanding warrants and breach of orders. Data show that alcohol consumption might have been associated with the reason(s) for arrest; a result consistent with findings from the National Police Custody Survey (Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) 1996). The links between alcohol and crime (violence, disorder and acquisitive crime) are well documented (see Ramsey 1996). Previous research would suggest that alcohol might have been involved in incidents of violence both in and outside the family, and in cases where the arrest was due to property crimes (e.g., Tuck 1989).

Hunter (2001) analysed NATSIS and found that the major factors underlying the high rates of Indigenous arrest were sex, labour force status, alcohol consumption, whether a person had been physically attacked or verbally threatened, various age factors, and various education attainments (e.g., level of qualification and high school completion). The top six factors underlying the various categories of arrests (drinking-related, assaults, theft and outstanding warrants) are basically the same as those identified above. However, alcohol consumption and being a victim of physical attack or verbal threat are particularly important factors underlying arrests on drinking-related and assault charges. This would seem to confirm the suspicion that there is a cycle of violence and abuse in Indigenous communities and families which is probably related to alcohol consumption. The overall results were robust, with the basic findings not changing substantially when the analysis was conducted separately for minors (under 18-year-olds), for each sex, or after prisoners were included in the analysis.

Borland and Hunter (2000) argue that at least some of the correlation between Indigenous arrest and labour force status is driven by a causal relationship, with arrest driving many of the poor employment outcomes experienced by Indigenous youth. Given this interaction, understanding the unique nature of Indigenous arrest is likely to be a key dynamic underlying ongoing Indigenous disadvantage and poverty.

Hunter and Schwab (1998) argued that the interaction with the criminal justice system may also explain poor school participation rates among Indigenous children as young as 13. Hunter (1998) presented formal econometric tests that demonstrated that one cannot discount the hypothesis that the direction of causality is from arrest to educational participation. Given that the 2002 NATSISS is constrained to those aged 15 and over, it will not be possible to replicate this earlier research.
Crime and justice issues in recent Indigenous social surveys

Crime and justice issues were major components of both the 1994 NATSISS and the 2002 NATSISS. Indeed, the 2002 survey, like its 1994 counterpart, was designed to provide a broad range of information across key areas of social concern and is ideal for exploring inter-relationships between these socioeconomic factors and crime and justice issues. This section draws together the recently published data to provide a statistical overview for Indigenous Australia before focusing explicitly on issues facing Indigenous children. Most survey data are collected for individuals aged 15 and over, and hence there is an obvious need for more information to our understanding of developmental processes for Indigenous children aged less than 15 years. Consequently, the concluding sections also reflect on the possible roles underlying whether a person was charged or imprisoned include financial stress, unemployment, living in a crowded house and social disruption in the early family environment. While it is obviously important to redress the relevant broader economic and social factors, it is also essential to understand family environment if we are to devise constructive policies to address the high rates of Indigenous interactions with the justice system.

This paper revisits selected aspects of the literature and presents some new analysis of the relationship of crime and justice issues and the family environment to highlight the need for longitudinal data that explicitly examines the developmental processes facing Indigenous children. Most survey data are collected for individuals aged 15 and over, and hence there is an obvious need for more information to our understanding of developmental processes for Indigenous children aged less than 15 years. Consequently, the concluding sections also reflect on the possible roles for existing and proposed longitudinal surveys of Australian children: Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the proposed Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC).

The 2002 NATSISS has two major advantages over the earlier survey in that it collects information never attempted before in a social survey context—namely, whether respondents had been formally charged by police, the age they were first formally charged by police, and whether they had been incarcerated in the last five years. The ‘age first formally charged by police’ is potentially important, as it may be interpreted as introducing an implicitly longitudinal dimension to what would otherwise be a cross-sectional analysis.

While Table 1 illustrates relevant changes over time at a national level, another relevant issue is how crime and justice issues vary by remoteness. Dodson and Hunter (2006) show that arrest and incarceration rates are equally high in both remote and non-remote areas, but the usage of legal services in the last 12 months is slightly higher in non-remote areas (albeit not significantly higher). The only significant difference between remote and other areas among the law and justice issues is whether a person or relative was removed from their natural family. Weston and Gray (2006) show that people in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Indigenous people aged 15 years or over (a), selected law and justice issues in Australia, 1994 and 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law and justice</strong></td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrested once by police in last 5 years</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrested more than once by police in last 5 years</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total arrested in last 5 years</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of physical or threatened violence in last 12 months</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons removed from natural family</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The change between 1994 and 2002 is significant at the 5 per cent level. Source: Dodson and Hunter (2006: Table 19.1) and ABS (2004: Table 6).
Weston and Gray (2006) describe the main characteristics of respondents to 2002 NATSISS who had been removed from natural family. Given that questions on removal from family could be highly stressful for respondents, interviewers first asked respondents whether it was ‘alright’ to ask questions on this issue. All other respondents were asked, whether they had been taken away from their natural family by a mission, the government or welfare, and secondly, whether any of their relatives had had such an experience. Those who indicated that one or more relatives had been removed from their natural family were asked to indicate which relative(s) experienced this. Weston and Gray argue that resulting data must therefore be interpreted with caution as the terms used to indicate kin relationships were those applicable to the standard Anglo-Celtic kinship system (e.g. parents, aunts, uncles, brothers or sisters, children).

Perhaps the most significant finding from the Weston and Gray (2006) analysis is that, even though a relatively small proportion of the Indigenous population were themselves removed from their natural family, about one-third of the Indigenous population had a relative removed. Indeed, 38 per cent indicated that they and/or at least one of their relatives had been taken from their family (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2004, p. 6). However, it is important to note that the responses to the various questions on removal are themselves correlated within families. Just under one-fifth of individuals who had relative taken were themselves non-remote Australia where more likely to have been removed from their natural family than residents of remote areas. This pattern is consistent with the fact that many people were removed from remote communities and placed with families in cities or regional centres (Hunter, Arthur, & Morphy 2005).

Over half of adult males (50.4 per cent) have been charged at some time in their life, about 30 percentage points higher than the equivalent statistic for females (20.8 per cent). The higher incidence of charging among males is probably driven by a greater overall male involvement in the criminal justice system. Another possibility is that charges are also laid at an earlier age for Indigenous males compared to Indigenous females.

While social environment has been repeatedly shown to be important in predicting Indigenous interactions with the justice system (Hunter 2006a), Dodson and Hunter (2006) have also shown that many family and cultural factors have no significant correlation with the incidence of being charged, at least in the bi-variate analysis of cross-tabulations. Even if there was generally no direct discernible association between such factors for adults, this does not mean that they are not significant for developmental processes facing Indigenous children. We will return to this issue in the later sections of this paper. It should also be noted that selected family factors are significant in a multivariate context (Weatherburn, Snowball, & Hunter, 2006).

One family factor that does have important implications for Indigenous involvement with the justice system is the removal of people from their natural family. For example, Hunter (2006a) uses this variable to identify the separate effect of arrest, charging and incarceration on economic outcomes, especially involvement in mainstream employment.

**Figure 1** Completed year 12 by age first charged and sex, 2002

Notes: The whiskers refer to the 95 per cent confidence intervals that were calculated using the Statistical program STATA, a jackknife methodology, and the replicate weights provided by the ABS.

Source: NATSISS Confidentialised Unit Record File accessed by the ABS’s Remote Access Data Laboratory (RADLTM)
taken (18.2 per cent). In contrast, for those respondents who indicated that none of their relatives had been taken, only 3.3 per cent had been taken from their natural family.

When interpreting the data from the question on removal of relatives from natural family it is important to note that the question had a high rate of ‘don’t know’ and ‘didn’t want to say’ responses (15.3 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively) (ABS, 2004, p. 58). This high rate of non-response is not surprising given the sensitivity of this issue to some families. It is possible that the respondents who did not want to discuss this issue were more likely to have had relatives removed than other respondents, and hence the estimates may be under-estimates.

Revisiting the importance of the family background in Indigenous interactions with the justice system

The age at which a person was first charged is a retrospective variable that allows us to indirectly examine long-run historical factors that are usually difficult to assess in cross-sectional studies of Indigenous disadvantage. Figure 1 charts the rate of completion of Year 12 by this variable to illustrate the importance of interactions with the justice system in affecting future outcomes for Indigenous youth. The ‘whiskers’ indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the respective estimates (i.e. the range over which 95 per cent of estimates will lie in repeated samples).

Indigenous people who have never been charged with an offence are three times more likely to have completed education to Year 12 than those who were first charged before their 18th birthday (i.e. before their ‘majority’). There is less systematic variation for those who were charged after they reached their majority. While being charged at 35 years of age or older is also associated with relatively low rates of school completion (to Year 12), this is likely to reflect a cohort effect as it was relatively unusual for older Indigenous people (who by definition are aged over 35) to finish secondary school. Consequently, Figure 1 provides a clear indication that early involvement in the justice system is hindering the process of human capital accumulation (see Hunter & Schwab, 1998).

Given that the effect is manifest for the substantial numbers of Indigenous people who were charged as young as eight years old, there is obviously a need for a greater focus on the developmental environment within families.

One major set of factors that drive high Indigenous arrest rates are those that can be characterised as capturing the social disruptions within Indigenous families and households (Hunter, 2001). One such factor that is particularly important in the Indigenous context is whether an individual is a member of the ‘stolen generation’ (Borland & Hunter, 2000). The remainder of this section explores the relationship between an individual and their family involvement in the ‘stolen generation’ phenomenon in order to further tease out the relationship between important crime and justice issues.

Table 2 explores whether the characteristics of respondents who were first charged before or after their 18th birthday are different from respondents who were never charged (N.B., significant statistics are italicised). Having been charged before one’s majority is associated with significantly higher arrest and incarceration rates than for other Indigenous respondents to NATSISS who were charged. For example, respondents who were charged before 18 years of age are 15.0 percentage points more likely to have been arrested than other respondents who had been charged (50.5 per cent and 35.5 per cent respectively). Being charged before your majority is also associated with a significantly greater likelihood of being a victim of physical attack or threatened with violence in the last 12 months.

As indicated above, being taken from your family is an important factor underlying arrest. Hunter (2006b) shows that it is similarly important in driving other dimensions of Indigenous interaction with the justice system, namely being charged or incarcerated. To recapitulate the findings from Table 2, the 2002 NATSISS data on whether a respondent was ever charged and the age at which a person is first charged contains a lot of useful information that allow us to explore the likely factors underlying Indigenous engagement with the justice system and the effects of that engagement.5

### Table 2 Crime and justice characteristics by aged at which first charged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Charged as a minor</th>
<th>Charged after 18 years of age</th>
<th>Never Charged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrested in previous five years</td>
<td>50.5 (2.7)</td>
<td>35.5 (2.0)</td>
<td>2.2 (0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated in previous five years</td>
<td>25.6 (2.3)</td>
<td>13.4 (1.4)</td>
<td>0.6 (0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual was taken from family</td>
<td>13.7 (2.2)</td>
<td>10.2 (1.4)</td>
<td>6.5 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children were taken from family</td>
<td>2.0 (0.9)</td>
<td>2.2 (0.7)</td>
<td>1.2 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings were taken from family</td>
<td>8.8 (1.8)</td>
<td>7.0 (1.2)</td>
<td>4.2 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) taken from family</td>
<td>10.9 (1.9)</td>
<td>8.8 (1.9)</td>
<td>8.6 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents taken from family</td>
<td>19.7 (2.1)</td>
<td>13.0 (1.5)</td>
<td>14.7 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunties or Uncles taken from family</td>
<td>14.3 (1.7)</td>
<td>6.2 (0.9)</td>
<td>9.6 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins taken from family</td>
<td>7.3 (1.5)</td>
<td>6.2 (0.9)</td>
<td>4.6 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NATSISS RADL
Notes: The standard errors are reported in parentheses and are jacknife estimates based on replicate weights provided in the NATSISS provided on the ABS RADL. The jackknife technique entails a data dependent way of consistently estimating standard errors that take into account the complex sample design (see Lohr 1999 for details).

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Being involved in the stolen generations, either directly or indirectly through your family, is obviously correlated with an individual's interactions with the justice system. Table 3 shows that the direct experience of the stolen generation is strongly correlated with arrest, incarceration in the last five years and whether formally charged. For example, people who were neither taken themselves nor had a relative taken, were about half as likely to be arrested as those who were both taken themselves and had relatives taken from their natural family. The difference in incarceration rates between these two groups was even more pronounced.

The differences in arrest rates are clearly statistically significant, but the other comparable statistics in Table 3 are not necessarily significantly different. While the respondents who were either taken or had relatives taken were more likely than respondents without any direct experience of family disruption to have had an experience with the justice system, the experiences with the justice system did not depend significantly on who had been taken from the family. Therefore there is considerable information in knowing either indicator of social disruption within Indigenous families.

The broad similarity of the effect of having individuals and relatives taken from natural family probably indicates that many Indigenous children were taken as a group from particular families. Table 4 explores the association of the 'stolen generation' phenomenon within Indigenous families and illustrates the potential importance of longitudinal data. The table indicates the percentage of people with relatives taken from their natural family by whether they themselves were taken. The numbers in brackets are again standard errors. Note that the categories of removal are ordered by generation to illustrate inter-generational issues that are usually hard to get at in cross-sectional data.

The first column of Table 4 indicates the percentage with relatives taken among those who had not been taken themselves, there is a clear cohort effect with grandparents being more likely to have been taken than parents who were in turn more likely to have been taken than siblings and an individual's children. The evidence for intergenerational effect is more in the second column that indicates the percentage with relatives taken when a person was themselves taken. The cohort effect is large and broadly similar to that in the first column, but the proportion with relatives taken was generally higher for most generations and family groupings. For example, people who had been taken were up to 20 times more likely to have had a sibling also taken than people whose family life had not been disrupted. The most concerning statistic is the transmission of social disruption within families to the children's generation who were over three times more likely to have been taken if a parent had been taken. Other entries in Table 4 also show that there are stark correlations within family groups (e.g. aunts/uncles and cousins versus an individual's family group).

Table 5 develops the above themes further by exploring the correlations between the experiences of being taken from a natural family (either as an individual or having a relative taken). The results corroborate that the individual experience of being taken is most strongly correlated with experiences of siblings with a correlation coefficient of 0.45. There is also a reasonably strong correlation within the same generation (i.e., note the correlation between the experiences of individuals and cousins, and that of parents and aunts and uncles), but the association tends to drop away as one moves further away from an individual's generation. The association between the responses relating to cousins and aunts and uncles illustrate how the experience of this extreme form of social disruption is concentrated in particular families.

Clearly, we need to understand the developmental environment facing children within Indigenous families. While many Australian families experience disruptions to their social fabric, the experience of the stolen generation is unique to Indigenous Australians. The effects of such disruptions are demonstrably ongoing and long-lived and need to be understood.

The NATSISS data provides a good starting point for evaluating the evidence on Indigenous families, but is
only a first step. The NATSISS is an omnibus survey that focuses on the experiences of adults rather than children. The next steps are to foster a more coherent and rigorous debate about Indigenous policy that appreciates the importance of developmental factors, and to collect longitudinal data on Indigenous children and families. Given the unique circumstances facing Indigenous families and the culturally specific understandings of what constitutes a family and how that family operates (Morphy, 2006), it is almost certain that any such data will need to be collected using an Indigenous-specific survey instrument. The remainder of this paper reflects on these issues in some detail.

Understanding the pathways to disadvantage among Indigenous families: The importance of new longitudinal data

There is a substantial and growing body of criminological research that demonstrates that early childhood trauma increases the risk of juvenile involvement in crime (Greenwood et al. 1998; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; National Crime Prevention, 1999). A number of studies have also shown that children in sole parent families are at heightened risk of involvement in crime, particularly where the sole caregiver is poor and/or lacks a close friend, relative or neighbour (Weatherburn & Lind, 2001). The findings in this paper point to the urgent need to identify risk factors and possible protective mechanisms for Indigenous families and children.

One of the conundrums raised by Dodson and Hunter (2006) is the apparently relatively small association between many family factors and crime and justice issues within the 2002 NATSISS. One possible explanation is that surveys such as NATSISS only ask adult respondents about their current family circumstances rather than examine what happens in the family environment during critical developmental phases of children’s lives. Longitudinal surveys such as the LSAC and the proposed LSIC are obviously better suited for identifying the developmental pathways that children follow and the factors (both risk and resilience) that predict the course of these pathways. One question that arises is whether the LSAC data can provide useful information on the pathways facing Indigenous children?

LSAC surveys two age groups over time: approximately 5,000 babies born between March of 2003 and February of 2004 and a similar number of children born between March of 1999 and February of 2000. The main objectives of LSAC are to provide comprehensive, national longitudinal data that inform government policy in areas concerning young children, specifically child care, early childhood education and schooling, parenting and family relationships, and health; and identify opportunities for early intervention and prevention strategies. The underlying conceptual framework for LSAC was based upon the Bronfenbrenner model of ecological contexts shaping child’s pathways (Penman, 2005). That is, the implicit model underlying the survey depicts how the family, school and neighbourhood impact upon a child’s early years, which is situated within a wider social, economic, political and cultural setting.

The most concerning statistic is the transmission of social disruption within families to the children’s generation who were over three times more likely to have been taken if a parent had been taken.

### Table 5: Pairwise correlations in family disruptions over the generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual taken</th>
<th>Children taken</th>
<th>Siblings taken</th>
<th>Parent(s) taken</th>
<th>Grand-parents taken</th>
<th>Aunties or uncles taken</th>
<th>Cousins taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual taken</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children taken</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings taken</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) taken</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents taken</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunties or uncles taken</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins taken</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NATSISS RADL.
Note: These are unweighted correlations (because of the extant limitations on certain statistical programs within RADL).
LSAC questionnaire that are critical to understanding the unique situation and development of Indigenous children. Second, the LSAC survey instruments may not be entirely appropriate and hence may not maximise the information content about Indigenous children. This issue is important because the cultural sensitivity of the questionnaires and methodology is to be valued in its own right. However, having an appropriate survey instrument should also be valued by policy makers because it would maximise response rates and minimise non-sampling error which are an unavoidable part of all data collections (Biddle & Hunter, 2006). Non-sampling error includes problems in coverage, response, non-response, data processing, estimation and analysis.

While the concept of non-sampling errors may seem abstract, there are several practical reasons to be concerned about the Indigenous sub-sample of LSAC that are relatively easily understood. It is possible that the sampling frame of LSAC contains systematic biases in the way it samples Indigenous families. If this is the case, then analysts need to exercise caution in drawing inferences about the representativeness of the sample. The source of any such bias might arise from the way in which the sample was drawn or the geographic unit used for stratification of the sample. The last practical reason to be concerned is that the small number of Indigenous respondents is likely to lead to an unacceptably high level of sampling error. That is, the resulting estimates based on LSAC might be unreliable.

It is important that Indigenous people have some control over how family services are provided (e.g. the need for Indigenous carers for Indigenous clients is often identified as an issue).

The LSAC survey was designed on the basis of geographic information available from the Health Insurance Commission (HIC). This reflected the practical necessity of finding a reasonably accurate source of information on infants and four year olds that had more or less comprehensive coverage. The remainder of this section reflects on internal consistency of the LSAC sample design with respect to the Indigenous sub-sample. The main issues arise from HIC administrative data constraints and the assumptions used to operationalise the geographic dimensions of LSAC.

FaCSIA is well aware of the potential limitations of LSAC for drawing inferences about Indigenous children and other sub-samples. Indeed, in part, they have been designing the proposed LSIC to address such issues. The LSIC is currently piloting data collection processes in a number of sites. The proposed national data collection is planned to begin in 2008, but the resulting data would not be available for sometime. Hence it is worth reflecting upon what, if anything, existing (LSAC) data can tell us about Indigenous children.

One of the most important aspects of the LSAC sample design is that a substantial number of children in remote locations were excluded because they are in postcodes that have very few children. In addition, there were some very remote locations where the benefits of obtaining data were not sufficient to justify the expense of data collection.

These exclusions will, by definition, make the remote sample biased against particular groups of Indigenous children, and hence extreme caution would need to be used when examining such estimates. It is not sufficient that such groups are excluded from the population estimates, as a recent geographic analysis of census data points to the responses for LSAC's Indigenous sub-sample in remote areas as being likely to be selective. Hence one must question the value of including this remote sub-sample in LSAC analysis of Indigenous outcomes, irrespective of any caveats made about the ability to generalise the findings. Unmeasured regional characteristics will probably dominate the statistical analysis of remote areas, and hence it would be advisable to ignore LSAC's remote Indigenous sub-sample altogether.

Notwithstanding, the LSAC may provide some limited insights into the dynamics of Indigenous child development outside remote areas, especially in regional Australia. If one does attempt to examine the LSAC data in any detail, the limited number of Indigenous children in the first wave means that some policy questions cannot be addressed as this would require a 'cutting of the cake' into excessively small pieces. One such policy might be in relation to child-care which only affects a small fraction of the Indigenous sub-sample. The issue of small sample size will be exacerbated over time with the attrition of the sample, so that it will be increasingly difficult to identify any trends in such variables. Therefore, this reinforces the conclusion that the LSAC's Indigenous sub-sample does not provide an adequate substitute for a longitudinal survey that is specifically focused on Indigenous issues. If we are to gain a detailed understanding of the pathways facing Indigenous children and the dynamics of disadvantage within Indigenous families, then the proposed LSIC needs to be adequately funded.

Concluding remarks

Weston and Gray (2006) conclude that family and community life is multi-dimensional and complex. Overall, the NATSISS 2002 survey does a relatively good job of measuring a range of aspects of family and community life given that a general omnibus social survey of the Indigenous population needs, by definition, to cover many domains. However, they also highlight some of the issues which need to be taken into account when analysing the data generated by these questions. For example, many measures focus on the individual, with no information gathered on the quality of relationships, parenting behaviour, family functioning, and so on. A related issue is that the measures of household structure and composition are problematic for a proportion of the Indigenous population, given the complex and multi-generational nature of many households. Given the crucial importance of such issues for wellbeing, some measures on these issues should be considered for future surveys. The LSAC may provide a useful source of questions.
on some of these issues. The proposed LSIC survey also provides a unique opportunity to ask about Indigenous families in a culturally appropriate manner that maximises response rates.

Finally, family and social factors are not readily amenable to direct policy intervention (Weston & Gray, 2006). Indeed, the misconception policy interventions that led to the ‘stolen generation’ appear to be a major factor underlying Indigenous arrest rates. The negative effects of such policies are likely to be driven by the traumatic disruption to family life and the loss of culturally appropriate parenting skills (Hunter, 2001). Early intervention approaches to dealing with risk factors associated with anti-social and criminal behaviour appears to offer a promising avenue for policy action (Bushway & Reuter, 1997).

It is important that Indigenous people have some control over how family services are provided (e.g. the need for Indigenous carers for Indigenous children is often identified as an issue). The needs of children of Indigenous prisoners, especially those from country areas, should also be taken into account if the risk of delinquent behaviour is to be minimised.

Endnotes
2. The GSS, the equivalent data source for the general Australian population of information provided in the NATSISS, only surveys people aged 18 years and older.
3. This finding was robust to confining the analysis to being the same age cohort in the respective surveys. See ABS (2004: Table 6).
5. In terms of data quality, it is interesting to note that 2.2 per cent of respondents who were never charged to have been incarcerated. While changes in the law in response to the current terrorist threat mean that it is now easier to be arrested without being charged, we find it re-assuring that it is still relatively infrequent occurrence. Notwithstanding, there is probably still some minor measurement error in the NATSISS data on crime as 0.6 per cent of respondents who were never charged to claim to have been incarcerated in the last five years.

References
Borland, J. & Hunter, B. H. (2000). Does crime affect employment areas, should also be taken into account if the risk of delinquent behaviour is to be minimised.


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Despite the willingness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to care for children removed from their parents, the over-representation of Indigenous children in out-of-home care has meant there are more Indigenous children in care than there are available Indigenous carers. As a consequence, some children are placed in culturally inappropriate placements with non-Indigenous carers or Indigenous carers who are not from the same community, language or “skin” group (AIHW, 2006).

While Indigenous children continue to be over-represented in out-of-home care, maintaining the availability of viable, appropriate and well-supported placement options for Indigenous children is critical to the wellbeing of Indigenous children in care and the sustainability of the care system. However, there is limited Australian and international research on the recruitment, retention, assessment, training and support of carers in general – and almost no research on the needs of Indigenous children and young people in care, and their perspectives on what makes a good carer (Richardson et al., 2005).

In order to examine these issues, we consulted with current foster and kinship carers (both Indigenous and
non-Indigenous); service providers who are currently responsible for—or engaging in—the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children unable to live with their parents; representatives from all eight state and territory governments responsible for funding or providing out-of-home care services in Australia; and young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent in out-of-home care (Higgins, Bromfield, & Richardson, 2005). The focus of this paper is to describe the views and experiences of young people and carers.

**The Indigenous Out-of-Home Care Study**
(Commissioned by the Australian Council for Children and Parenting)

The study is based on focus groups with a total of nine Indigenous carers; 18 non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children; and 16 Indigenous young people currently in care (aged 7-16) – one boys-only, one girls-only, and one mixed group. Focus groups were conducted in two jurisdictions by the first author (DH), assisted by an Indigenous project worker.

**Focus groups with carers**
Carers were asked to talk about the barriers to the recruitment, assessment, training, and support of Indigenous and non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children. Carers were asked to identify strategies that might assist to overcome these barriers.

**Focus groups with young people in care**
As well as having a number of questions prepared for the young people (focusing on their family, their current living situation, what they felt was good about carers, what they would like to have changed), we gave them paper and pencils and invited them to draw a picture or write a story about themselves and what it is like to be in care. In order to build rapport, and deal with different developmental levels, we focused on the invitation to draw a picture or write down their stories, to which they responded more enthusiastically than group discussion of the topics we had prepared.

**Perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people**
Below we provide a description of the responses the young people provided in the three focus groups.

As well as talking about immediate concerns (e.g., to avoid school and homework!), the young people who participated in the focus groups described their experience of being in care. They emphasised the qualities of good carers, the importance of their connection to family and the local community. Finally, their perspectives highlight the value they place on opportunities to participate in activities that connect them to their culture and that reinforce a positive Indigenous identity.

**Views of being in care**
One boy wrote a story about his dad taking him, his siblings and his mum out fishing in a boat, illustrating it with an aerial representation of them in the boat, successfully hauling in fish. Using images of African-American rap singers, another boy wrote:

“I am a 13 year old I from [geographic region] My name is [his name]. That’s my brother behind me. I love my brother.”

Another boy wrote:

“Sometimes I miss my family. I wanna go back to them. Sometimes I don’t like staying with my carers.”

The girls tended to write longer stories than the boys. Some examples of their stories concerning what it is like to be in care are provided below:

**Girl, 16:** “Living in the Boarding house is sometime feels like I’m in a jail. I get homesick and worried about my mum and dad brothers and sisters. I don’t like being under the Child Safety. I don’t like staying at the people that are caring for me now.”

**Girl, 15:** “I hate foster care I don’t want to be in foster care cause it’s too strickted I mean it can be... But when I’m in school and for example for my weekend and someone willing to take me out for the weekend, it’s not fare cause I really wanted to go with my cousin at the time she was down here... Yeah I want to get out of it as soon as possible. The boarding school what I go to now, it’s best... the school is good. It’s really fun.”

**Girl, 15:** “I’m 15 years old and I have 4 brother’s and they live with some beautiful carers... I sometimes go up there and have weekend’s with them... they also speak to my mother over the phone and they also go home for a short, or long term Holiday... This term they are going home for a long term holiday... I always go home a lot... I’m in a care with my aunty she take good care of me... and she’s my mother smallest sister. My brother’s live with a indigenous lady... she is so nice... and when my brother’s go home we have fun every holiday they come home... Cause I love home.”

When quoting verbal responses or re-producing text from the stories and drawings they produced (with their permission), the spelling or grammatical structure they used has been retained.
The young people's responses focused almost exclusively on the importance they placed on connection to family, community and culture. Their stories about being in care also emphasised their relationships with their siblings. This was particularly evident in the girls' written responses, and some of the boys' verbal and pictorial responses. Their stories and reflections were indicative of a nurturing and caring bond with their siblings. It would appear that the cultural commitment to community and caring—often identified as a characteristic of Indigenous culture in Australia—was evident in the sense of responsibility to family already being experienced by some of the young people in care.

**Connection to family and community**

A consistent theme expressed by the young people was about wanting to be back in their home community, and wanting to be reunited with their parents. When asked about their experience of being in care, many of their answers focused on their biological families. When asked if there was one thing in their lives that they could change—what would it be, young people responded:

- "Get out of foster care."
- "To be with your family."
- "Go back to my mother."
- "We would be really really want to be with our parents."
- "Would rather be back in [local community]"
- "Get my dad back. ([His father had died])."
- "Dad come to my house."
- "Have family together – Dad and Mum."

These themes of re-connection to community and family re-unification are important messages from young people. They did not spontaneously suggest concepts such as "stop the abuse" or "stop the neglect", but instead re-affirmed the importance of connection to people and place, even if those situations were deemed by authorities to be inadequate or placing the young person at risk. This was despite the child protection system having swung into action to protect these young people from harm and to prevent them from future harm.

One girl (aged "10 3/4") had been in out-of-home care, but was currently living with her mum. Her two brothers (who also participated in the focus group) were living with a relative. The following quote from the story she wrote suggests an awareness of the reason why she has been removed from the care of her mother—as well as her love and commitment to her mum:

"Mum Never Hits us and Im not liying I Love My Mum."

In contrast, one young girl articulated that being back home was "boring":

"There's nothing to do. You feel bored when no one takes you anywhere. You just walk around. More things to do here."

However, she finished by saying:

"You're far away from family – you get homesick."

**Cultural activities**

There was considerable diversity in the access to—and experience of—Indigenous cultural activities among the young people with whom we talked. In one of the focus groups, most of the girls had taken part in a culturally oriented girls group coordinated by a departmental representative. Activities included swimming, music, craft, Indigenous painting, a rainforest trip, and camping. Some expressed the positive elements of being able to participate in these things:

"Cultural activities reminds you of back home. It's cool to do those things."

However, others do not get involved in Indigenous cultural events such as the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration or have other opportunities to participate in traditional Indigenous cultural events, crafts, dance, or other practices.

Although children's safety is of paramount importance, it is not the only issue to be considered in securing their best interests. It is not possible to generalise and say that the views expressed here are representative of the views of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in care. However, the young people's responses are an indication of some of the views that their peers may have. The importance placed on family and community by young people in this study is consistent with the views of young people from disadvantaged areas in Sydney's south west who participated in workshops conducted by NAPCAN; they viewed relationships as the highest priority for wellbeing (Blakester, 2006).

**Perspectives of carers**

Recruiting and retaining well-trained carers who are sensitive to the cultural needs of children and young people—and are able to assist them with maintaining their connection to family and community—is important for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Islander children in out-of-home care. Carers were asked about the barriers to recruitment, retention, assessment, training and support of Indigenous carers, and their perspectives on strategies that might overcome these barriers. However, carer responses predominantly clustered under the one theme: support. Specifically, when carers were asked what kind of support they needed, they most often responded that if the children in their care were adequately supported, they felt supported. For themselves, carers told us they needed adequate and timely financial, practical and emotional support to enable them to meet the needs of the child in their care; respectful relationships between departmental employees and carers; and adequate preparation for the role of carer (i.e., training).

**Services for children in care**

Participants in this study talked about a number of areas in which there was need for greater supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are in care. Because of the abuse, neglect and trauma that they have experienced, many experience emotional and behavioural difficulties and are disadvantaged at school, requiring
more intensive services than many other children and young people. Carers emphasised that the best way of supporting them in their role as carers was to provide adequate services and supports for the children and young people in their care – particularly those with high needs. The services they highlighted are described below:

**Specialist services**, including health, mental health, counselling, remedial education, language and speech services were seen as a priority. When asked about the availability of services such as counselling for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in their care, an Indigenous carer responded:

“Counselling? It’s a joke. When their mum passed away it took two and a half years! The guy that came, came once or twice … but said no, the kids don’t need counselling because the carers have dealt with this. He was good with the kids, but he recognised that he should have been called in straight away. It’s lip service.”

**Cultural mentoring** was another important issue. Participants highlighted that it was critical to make children aware of their Indigenous heritage and that such issues were even more important if placing a child with a non-Indigenous carer. One non-Indigenous carer said:

“It’s hard to say, ‘You should be proud of your heritage’ when their knowledge of their heritage is the negatives, the knowledge of what happens to families when there is alcohol involved. They’re not seeing positive role models.”

**School-based support services** were a particular area of frustration for carers who felt that they were caught in the middle of disagreements between government departments (education and child protection). A non-Indigenous carer reflected on what she saw as the lack of responsibility taken for providing funding for the educational needs of young people in care:

“Often carer gets caught like a ball in a ping-pong match between the Department of Education, and the [statutory child protection] Department. Who’s going to pay?”

**Informal supports** for children in care were seen as important by carers. Participants suggested the following programs and activities were needed: sporting involvement; peer-mentoring program (particularly for males who may lack a role model); camps; and a young men’s program.

**Planning for leaving care** is an important part of the duty of care that the state has for young people currently in its care. Participants identified this as a significant gap in the continuum of care that should be in place.

**Services for children’s biological families** were also seen as an important part of the necessary continuum of services that children and young people in care need. Children will remain connected to their biological family, and the importance therefore of working with the family, and providing support to improve their parenting skills, and deal with other issues they may be facing, such as drug or alcohol or domestic violence issues. One of the Indigenous carers reflected:

“You have to blame the parents for the abuse and neglect. A lot of people are not caring for the children. But when taking the children away, you can place them with an aunty or a relative. That relative might be the one to get the help for the mother. The help should be there for the parents as well as the children. They just look at taking the children away, but don’t think about what’s left. Later on, that child will go back to that root. So we need to not let that root die.”

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous carers expressed considerable emotion when describing their frustration with the lack of services available. They were adamant about the importance of having these supports in place for the young people in their care in order to assist them with overcoming the trauma they have experienced, and providing them with the best chance of succeeding educationally, socially, emotionally, and culturally.

**Financial support**

Professionals and carers told us that the most pressing need was sufficient financial support for carers, as current levels were seen to be inadequate to meet the costs of caring for a child in out-of-home care. This issue has been confirmed by previous research (McHugh, 2002). It is not unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers; however, it is exacerbated by the disproportionate levels of material disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians (ABS, 2003). In the focus groups with carers, the inadequacy of financial support was a consistent theme. Two Indigenous carers provide their views on the difficulties of getting material and financial help from the department:

“You shouldn’t feel like you’re begging.”

“We are only allowed one pair of sports shoes per year. Yet they should be treated as individuals.”
Australian and international research confirms that one of the main reasons that carers cease fostering is due to a perceived lack of support in a range of areas (Aldgate & Hawley, 1986; Denby, Rindfleisch, & Bean, 1999; Gilbertson & Barber, 2003; McHugh et al., 2004; Triseliotis, Borland, & Hill, 1999).

A survey by the Australian Foster Care Association (2001) of Australian foster carers found that the majority of carers (79 per cent) felt they get “just enough” or not enough support. The perceived level and quality of support received from government was significantly lower than that received from agencies. Yet the capacity of agencies to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers is an issue with which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies struggle. Focusing on building capacity within community agencies is likely to improve support for carers, and to ensure retention of current carers, but also increases the likelihood of new carers viewing the role of fostering positively (Higgins et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2005).

Interactions with the statutory child protection department

A major issue identified for nearly all carers was their relationship to—and the nature of their interactions with—the statutory child protection department. This was true for Indigenous carers as well as non-Indigenous carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Even when carers were receiving direct support from a non-government agency, they still felt the need for a more supportive relationship with the child’s caseworker in particular, and the department generally. The relationship was further strained between Indigenous agencies, carers and the departments due to carers feeling that the authorities mistrust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As one academic noted:

“The department has a culture that reinforces the mistrust of the [Indigenous] community.” (cited in Higgins et al., 2005, p. 43).

Partnership

Carers believed that greater interaction between departmental workers, carers and non-government placement support workers would increase the sense of partnership, and a sense of mutual respect. Carers see themselves as part of a team of people working towards the safety and best interests of the child. This includes non-Indigenous carers. One non-Indigenous carer said:

“Foster parents are part of the team and you have to respect that. Be respectful, friendly, negotiate, ring them when they need you, when they’re in crisis don’t leave them hanging.”

Relationships with caseworkers

Other associated issues that carers found frustrating in working with statutory child protection departments included caseworkers being inexperienced, and imposing anglo-centric values and expectations on carers. An Indigenous carer summed up this perspective:

“They should be using culturally appropriate workers: Blackfellas, not social workers fresh out of uni.”
This perspective was mirrored by representatives from Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, as the following quote illustrates:

“Young white middle class kids coming in and telling families what to do… They carry their own baggage, morals and standards” (cited in Higgins et al., 2005, p.42).

There was a strong feeling from almost all carers that caseworkers are too stretched to provide meaningful case management. Because of the heavy caseload, crisis work becomes the priority. Therapeutic interventions and regular visits to support stable or long-term placements often do not occur. Due to staff turnover, many carers experience a change of caseworker for the child in their care – but without any explanations for why the change occurred, or the provision for “hand-over” between workers, or opportunities to say “goodbye” to children, carers, or placement support workers from out-of-home care agencies. An Indigenous carer commented:

“Half the caseworkers wouldn’t know our kids if they walked past them on the street.”

Importantly, carers wanted to feel a sense of respect from caseworkers. They talked about being “blamed”, and caseworkers adopting an accusatory role. In the following example, an Indigenous carer describes a typical interaction she has had in relation to an injury or illness:

“They’ll say ‘Explain this bruise’ – ‘It’s a two-year-old!’ Sometimes kids make innocent remarks. You feel very vulnerable… It’s always having to defend yourself.”

Managing contact with the child’s birth family

Many carers found contact with birth families challenging, and felt that problems associated with managing contact stemmed from a lack of involvement by statutory child protection workers in organising the child’s contact with the birth family. An Indigenous carer reflected on a typical instance:

“We had to send it through the [Aboriginal] grapevine to organise contact with the family. The Department didn’t do anything about it.”

In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, carers often knew the birth parents of the child, and this compounded the difficulties that arose in trying to manage contact when there were antagonistic attitudes or parents were harassing carers. This Indigenous carer described her difficulties:

“We’ve had disagreements with the father of the children we look after. He wanted to be able to drop in any time and take them whenever he wanted. When we stood up to him, he’d ring up the department.”

Preparation for caring

Participants told us they wanted a greater understanding of how state and territory child protection departments work. They also wanted training that is timely and culturally relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers’ lives. In addition, non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children emphasised the need for cultural sensitivity training. Carers and service providers confirmed that training was generally a neglected area for carers, especially in traditional communities. Where it was provided, it was done on an ad hoc basis. Many carers reported having children placed with them prior to their undergoing even basic training, as explained by one Indigenous carer:

“I haven’t had training yet. I’ve been caring for the department for 12 months. Prior to that, I’d been doing it myself – caring for family.”

Training in understanding the department

A survey conducted by the Victorian Department of Human Services (2003) on carer retention found that 17 per cent of carers left due to frustration in dealing with the department, and 18 per cent left due to what they considered to be unreasonable demands by the system. This is particularly the case for Indigenous carers. Non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children need support in meeting the cultural needs of children in their care. One of the non-Indigenous carers stated:

“The one-day course put on by [the Indigenous unit in the statutory child protection department] was great. It explained a lot of things in the culture that we don’t understand. Like, there is no word for ‘please’ or ‘thank you’ in some Aboriginal languages. Finding this out gave us a good insight into the children. When they say ‘brother’, you can then ask: ‘Is that ‘cousin-brother’, or ‘brother-brother’?’ Understanding family connection is difficult. But there needs to be more, we’re learning from the children, for example, learning that someone whose father was deceased, she couldn’t say her father’s name.”

Another Indigenous carer said:

“If you’re going to recruit people in, you need to let them know something about the system and what to expect. The most important issue is to understand how the department thinks. Life experience is what makes me good at being carer. I need to understand their point of view, their legalities, their guidelines. I haven’t had anything that tells me what I can and can’t do. It’s a lack of information.”

Often being provided with information about the nature of the state or territory departments, how they work, and what the departments are required to do, was identified as a more important “training need” for carers than issues such as learning behaviour management skills, or understanding the nature and impact of abuse and trauma. Non-government service providers also identified this need. Training in understanding the department was being offered as part of carer training by many of the non-government carer support services (Higgins et al., 2005).

Cultural-sensitivity training

Non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children expressed their concerns that, without adequate training and support, they were not equipped for the task. During a focus group, these carers discussed their worry that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their care would not know their cultural roots. The following exchange between three carers illustrates their concerns, and the need for training:

One carer turned to the others and asked: “Do we worry about westernising the Aboriginal children?”

“At least she’ll get both sides of the world,” responded another carer.

“But she won’t if she stays with me,” asked the first carer. A third carer interjected:

“That’s why it’s vital to have cultural training.”
Carers emphasised the importance of the whole family—including the carers’ biological children—to receive cultural sensitivity training when Indigenous children are placed with non-Indigenous families. In one jurisdiction, cultural sensitivity training was being provided by the local Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous carers. This was seen as important, as some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers were members of the Stolen Generation and had been disconnected from their culture:

“Even Aboriginal foster carers need cultural sensitivity training because they can be a bit short about practices outside their connected community… Many foster parents have been foster children and lost their culture because they may have been fostered by non-Aboriginal foster parents, so we need to help them re-connect with their culture and give them that strength [that] makes them stronger in doing the role of a foster care” (cited in Higgins et al., 2005, p. 38).

**Discussion**

**Family, community and culture**

The perspectives of both carers and Indigenous young people in care highlight the importance of connection to family, community and culture. This needs to underlie policies and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is important for services to be culturally appropriate – and the service system to be structured in such a way that ensures that Indigenous young people in care (with low through to high needs) receive the services that they require. Adequate services for young people to address the impact of the problems that brought them into care (i.e., the impact of abuse and neglect on educational, health and emotional development), as well as training and support for carers, are vital for ensuring the wellbeing of Indigenous young people in care.

The views of young people presented here would seem to suggest that the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in out-of-home care could be enhanced by having more placements available within their local community and extended family. However, the views of carers suggest a number of barriers that carers face in being available to care for young people.

**Overcoming structural disadvantage**

Many of the responses provided by carers highlight broader structural issues that Indigenous communities face. The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care is a reflection of the wider problem of economic disadvantage, lower education and employment levels, poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancies experienced by Indigenous Australians (ABS, 2003). There is a complex history between Indigenous communities and governments, which places further strain on the out-of-home care system (Bromfield, Richardson, & Higgins, 2005). Material disadvantage and trauma associated with past welfare practices such as the removal of children from their parents (the “Stolen Generation”) may lead to an unwillingness to be associated with the formal out-of-home care service system. A tension between a cultural commitment to community and an aversion to formal child welfare among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples appears to be a fundamental barrier to enhancing culturally appropriate placements for Indigenous children.

A further structural issue related to the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers is the capacity of Indigenous agencies to provide services (see Higgins et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2005). Focusing on building capacity within community agencies is likely to improve support for carers, and to ensure retention of current carers, but also increases the likelihood of new carers viewing the role of fostering positively. In Australia, there are a number of agencies and philanthropic bodies—alongside government initiatives—committed to addressing disadvantage in Indigenous communities through a community development approach (Burchill & Higgins, 2005). Although it may not always be the primary aim, an indirect impact of many of these projects is to increase “the capacity of communities to care for and protect their children from harm, reducing the need for out-of-home care services.

**Promising practices**

A number of promising practices in Indigenous out-of-home care are currently being profiled (see Box 1). These practices are aimed at meeting the cultural needs of children and young people in care, and improving recruitment, retention of Indigenous carers, the quality of care provided to Indigenous young people and the services and supports they and their carers need. The carers, service providers and young people in care in this study were a non-representative sample. The sampling strategy was also biased in favour of more culturally aware participants, thus the sample was a relatively homogenous group and did not necessarily reflect the dominant attitudes and practices within the wider welfare sector. Despite the limitations of these findings, this research does represent the views of those at the front line: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who have been removed from the care of their parents – and the views of carers about what is needed to improve the wellbeing for this growing group of children in the out-of-home care system.

**References**


Participants described many challenges that need to be overcome in order to improve service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and to better support their carers. For almost every challenge presented, there was a promising solution (either currently in practice or that they suggested) to assist in alleviating the identified problem.

The carers and young people in care in this study approached the research with enthusiasm and a willingness to engage with the researchers because of assurances that the research would be solution-focused and culturally respectful, and that findings would be reported back to the communities. A culturally appropriate means of disseminating the research findings from this paper—and the broader study from which it was drawn (Higgins et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2005)—is a series of presentations and workshops. Findings are to be disseminated orally to key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups across Australia.

The Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has now commissioned the Institute to work in collaboration with the peak Indigenous body—the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)—to disseminate the research findings through a series of workshops in every state and territory in the coming months. As part of the dissemination process, the Institute—in collaboration with SNAICC—has been examining in greater detail some of the promising practices identified in the current research, and will be producing a resource-focused booklet highlighting some of the key initiatives around the country. The booklet will be published, along with summaries of key themes from the literature review and the consultations described here. This will be available both in print and online at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (www.aifs.gov.au) and the SNAICC Resource Service (www.snaicc.asn.au/srs/index.html).

**BOX 1 Next steps: Profiling promising practices**


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At 30 June 2004, there were 483,994 Indigenous people living in Australia. New South Wales was the state that had the largest Indigenous population with 141,533, followed by Queensland (134,013), Western Australia (69,665), and the Northern Territory (59,508). The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous people among its population (29.8 per cent); Victoria had the lowest (0.65 per cent) (ABS, 2003). At present, there are 120,000 Indigenous people (about 26 per cent of the total Indigenous population) living in 1,200 discrete communities in remote regions. There are key differences between metropolitan and remote communities, such as isolation, land ownership, customary and kinship practices, and access to services. Indigenous people living in remote areas fare much worse than both their Indigenous and non-Indigenous city counterparts on key economic and health measures (Gray & Altman, 2005).
The Indigenous population is considerably younger than the non-Indigenous population. In 2001, 40 per cent of Indigenous people were aged less than 15 years, compared with 21 per cent of non-Indigenous people. Only 2.6 per cent of the Indigenous population were aged 65 years or over compared with the 12 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous youths are more likely to be imprisoned than the general population, and the rate of suicides in police custody remains high. Rates of unemployment, health problems and poverty are likewise higher than the general population, and school retention rates and university attendance are much lower than the general population (ABS, 2003).

Many other factors affect Indigenous communities. Indigenous children are over-represented in the child protection system and in out-of-home care (see Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins, and Richardson, 2006). Indigenous children suffer from more prevalent illnesses, malnutrition, communicable diseases, mental health and substance abuse, and have poorer access to medical and mental health services than non-Indigenous children. Indigenous adults die up to 20 years younger than non-Indigenous Australians. Many Indigenous communities are characterised by poverty and substandard housing (overcrowding, inadequate water and washing facilities, poor sanitation, and limited food storage). Indigenous young people have lower levels of participation in and completion of formal education, and consequently poorer educational outcomes (ABS, 2003; AIHW, 2001; National Children’s and Youth Law Centre and Defence for Children International (Australia), 2005).

Noted Indigenous academic and commentator, Dr Lowitja O’Donoghue commented:

“What is significant is that no matter which factors are examined – be it poverty, nutrition, access to services, smoking... the list goes on – you will find that Indigenous people are over represented at the wrong end of the spectrum” (O’Donoghue, 2000, p. 723).

The current health status of Indigenous people can be viewed as a result of generations of isolation from the mainstream economy, extreme social disadvantage, poverty and powerlessness, and the breakdown of traditional tribal law and cultural practices. There have been improvements on some issues, but no improvement—or even decline—on others. Indigenous health has improved with the establishment of Indigenous medical centres; however, it remains significantly inferior to that of the general population. Often the diseases that confront Indigenous communities are those that reflect poor living conditions: infant mortality, eye and ear infections, diseases related to alcohol and drug abuse, malnutrition, asthma and sexually transmitted infections (Sam, 1992).

The impact of colonisation

In order to understand the current issues facing Indigenous communities, it is vital to understand the history of colonisation, argued Burchill (cited in Higgins, 2005):

“Those involved in supporting Indigenous communities today need to begin with the impact of colonisation and its devastating consequences on all aspects of lives, culture, mores and spirituality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Change will only occur when these needs are addressed within this context. Our original communities have been destroyed completely. We need assistance to develop communities that recognise heritage, but also, so that we can function positively and as equals in a modern contemporary Australia” (p. 6).

The past resonates into the present – intergenerational trauma resonates in every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person (Atkinson, 2002). This level of trauma is dependent on the individual circumstances and how individuals have coped and/or managed their lives within the context of racist and oppressive policies and practices over time. The consequences of separation from parents and community are evidenced across the country. Past policies of child removal have damaged culture, family ties, and modelling of parental and cultural roles (for example, see Zubrick et al., 2005 for evidence on the impact of forced separation and relocation on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in Western Australia).

Burchill (cited in Higgins, 2005) commented:

“As an Indigenous person growing up, I was taught about family and relationships. Historically, Indigenous families were groups or clans of people whose lives were organised according to the tribal affiliations. Traditionally groups were composed of Elders, mother, fathers, sisters, and brothers. Culture was steeped in mythology and dreamtime stories... A complex set of laws developed from within groups to govern every facet of life and relationships... Healing the community needs to happen before we can move forward and pass on a positive cultural heritage. We need to get back to the basics: nurturing; self-discipline; modelling; the drive to keep going under great difficulty” (pp. 5-6).

Aboriginal families who are not able to provide basic love and nurturing may not have had the opportunity themselves to grow up in a strong, healthy family and community where they could learn to look after children and understand safe and sustainable child rearing practices. The removal policies and other legislation were based on the assumption that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were incapable and not competent to raise their children, despite the fact that within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the simple practice of having many mothers, fathers and grandparents to care for kin is acceptable: ‘It takes a village to raise a child’.

The problems for Indigenous people have multiplied, particularly family violence and drug dependency. Poverty is also a crucial factor associated with family breakdown, child neglect and child removal: “Impoverished communities raise impoverished children” (Cadd, 2002, p. 1). The close cultural kinship ties that existed previously within Indigenous communities across Australia have been eroded. As a result, Indigenous communities today are made up of many different tribal groups sharing the same community. Communities need to take collective responsibility for ensuring the welfare of children. This does not just mean protecting them from harm. It goes further than this; it also means providing a positive sense of self, the world, and the future. It is important to not focus solely on individuals. In many
instances, it is necessary to start again: to firmly develop the bonds and trust for a stable foundation toward community development from an Indigenous perspective.

**Community development from an Indigenous perspective**

Community development implies an awareness of exploitation and oppression. It is based primarily on the notion that people are capable of finding solutions to their problems: Experts can best contribute by supporting initiatives decided collectively by people who have joined together to address their community’s needs.

According to Indigenous academic Juanita Sherwood (1999), community development refers to “working with communities to assist communities in finding plausible solutions to the problems they have identified” (p. 7). Indigenous people in Australia have participated in community development for thousands of years, yet they have been forced to adapt to a non-Indigenous community development model for several decades. Sherwood emphasised the importance of community development processes being “initiated by the community and not put upon the community” (p. 8).

The aim of community development activities is to achieve better community outcomes for Indigenous communities. However, mainstream models of community development—as well as other more intensive therapeutic practices such as counselling and medical interventions to support Indigenous people—in many respects draw heavily on western models of thinking rather than a combined effort to integrate western and Indigenous cultural practices. Dodson (2002) emphasised that for change to occur, it needs to be “a two way street, so far it’s only been one way” (p. 22). Well-meaning efforts that ultimately fail contribute to the suspicion and mistrust that does exist within Indigenous communities and individuals.

An Indigenous community development model requires understanding, commitment, collaboration, partnership and respect (Sherwood, 1999). This means working with communities to help them identify workable solutions to the problems they have identified. But it also means listening to and supporting the local people to progress these solutions to their own problems. There are many local Indigenous community members who possess expertise in many fields. Unfortunately there seems to be an assumption by external people that communities do not have local expertise and the skills pool is limited.

What is needed is another approach: to engage properly in communities, conduct skills and knowledge audits of community members and stakeholders, believe in the local people, and accord them authentic and proper respect. If external people demonstrated this approach, there would be a shift in the community dynamic and a new way of working together. To build capacity in communities should never imply that communities are starting from scratch – both parties have skills, energy and ideas to contribute to the process. This will enable communities to acquire skills that are necessary to develop culturally-appropriate programs and projects that will ultimate benefit their community (Sherwood, 1999).

Below, we outline four key themes to community development in Indigenous communities: facilitating local leadership and empowerment; ensuring the physical and cultural health and wellbeing of children; fostering youth participation; and finally, recognising the critical role that schools can play in a community development project.

**Leadership and empowerment**

A key to community development and community-generated change is leadership. Many commentators argue that Indigenous people need a bigger say and greater control over their affairs (including Indigenous leadership at all stages from the grassroots level up to policy development and implementation), allowing for their sense of shared value, time and place (Anderson, 2002; Chapman, 2002). When writing about leadership, Indigenous authors have emphasised the need for Indigenous people to take control of their own people (Perkins, 1990), the need for the shackles of welfare dependency to have been removed (Pearson, 2001) and to build the capacity of the local community (Dodson, 2002). Community development and change involves empowering individuals to maximise their potential, creating sustainable employment and lasting partnerships between communities, government and the corporate sector.

Solid partnerships are needed to create change and empower communities. Dodson argued: “No one individual will have everything needed to undertake community capacity building, but groups of individuals do” (p. 23). Collaboration is also important: “A positive Indigenous community development model must incorporate ‘yarning up not down’” (Burchill, 2004). Burchill (cited in Higgins, 2005) explains:

> “Yarning up relates to ‘yarning for outcomes’ rather than speaking down to Indigenous people. Yarning down is an indication that the outsider knows best or takes control of the outcomes for Indigenous people. Well-meaning people come to work with us but they do the work for us and we haven’t learnt how to do it” (p. 8).

**Fostering children’s health, culture and wellbeing**

One key focus of community development initiatives is children’s wellbeing. Nationally—and internationally—researchers and policy makers are focusing their attention on children’s early years. These are the formative years when children’s physical growth and development are
occurring. It is also paralleled by cognitive and emotional development. In order to successfully negotiate these developmental stages, children need a good start, with adequate antenatal and post-natal care, nutrition, and educational opportunities (Duffie & Rogers, 2002).

When thinking about health and wellbeing, it is important to consider children’s cultural needs: to learn about their identity, their people’s past, and to envisage a positive future. For Indigenous communities—many of which face significant health, economic and social disadvantage compared to other sections of Australian society—this is a difficult task. Individuals and communities face the challenge of ‘growing up’ Indigenous children who are physically healthy, engaged educationally, and connected to their family, their history, and their culture.

Youth participation

Another important principle of community development is building the capacity of local individuals, organisations and communities to identify problems, develop solutions, and engage in actions to implement these solutions—and this includes young people. This requires creativity, vision, and—most importantly—leadership. Leadership needs to be recognised and developed in local communities. In order to sustain changes, however, it is critical to look to the next generation—and to equip young people with training and experiences in order to foster leadership skills. This involves having vision—but also empowering young people to envisage their own future. For skills to be transferred to the next generation, they need to be modelled, and young people mentored by existing leaders. Building capacity for the next generation, therefore, means youth engagement and participation: creating opportunities for intergenerational skill transfer; developing self-determination; and fostering hope.

Schools: A sentinel site for change

Schools can be an important element in a community development strategy for a variety of reasons. They are a place where young people spend a large amount of time. The culture of a school—and the values that are transmitted to young people—can have an important influence on their lives. It is also a key way of engaging young people in the process of social change. Schools have the potential to assist with engaging Indigenous young people in culturally appropriate educational programs; providing opportunities for leadership; and giving hope for future employment.

Evaluation of 14 Telstra Foundation Indigenous Community Development Projects

The Australian Institute of Family Studies was contracted by the Telstra Foundation to evaluate 14 of the 69 Indigenous Community Development Projects they had funded up to 2005 (see Box 1). Two of the projects—Keeping kids healthy makes a better world and Strong & Smart—are described below, to demonstrate how positive Indigenous community development can be achieved (for the full report of the 14 projects, see Higgins, 2005).

“Keeping kids healthy makes a better world”

(UNICEF with Waltja Tjurtargku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association, Alice Springs, Northern Territory)

The first project we describe—Keeping kids healthy makes a better world—is an Indigenous child health and nutrition program in remote communities in the Northern Territory. The communities wanted to target the health of 0-5 year old children in their own communities in Central Australia through the development of a culturally appropriate and sustainable community-based nutrition program.

UNICEF is an international aid and community development organisation that has traditionally focused on promoting sustainable economic and social enhancement to improve the standard of living of people, particularly women and children, in developing countries. UNICEF, in partnership with Waltja Tjurtargku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association (Waltja), sought funding from the Telstra Foundation to extend child nutrition programs in remote communities.

Waltja was formerly known as the Central Australian Family Resource Centre. When funding for the Centre was withdrawn in 1997, the members decided to form the Waltja Tjurtargku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association. Tjurtargku

BOX 1 Indigenous Community Development Projects

From its establishment in 2002 until October 2005, the Community Development Fund of the Telstra Foundation provided support for 69 Indigenous projects to benefit Indigenous children and young people. In 2005, the Australian Institute of Family Studies was contracted to evaluate early learnings from 14 of these projects:

- Torres Strait Paediatric Asthma Education (Qld Institute of Medical Research & partners);
- Traditional Indigenous Games in central and far north Qld (Qld University of Technology);
- Keeping kids healthy makes a better world Indigenous child health & nutrition program in Central Australia (UNICEF & Waltja);
- Children’s Picture Dictionaries literacy resource for Central Australian communities (Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs);
- Aga Irititja Archive Project: Knowing the past to strengthen our future (Social History Unit, Pitjantjara Council, Anangu Lands in Central Australia);
- Jarjum Youth Group (Murri & Torres Strait Islander Network, Logan, Qld);
- Soaring Kururu Indigenous Youth Performing Arts (Port Adelaide, SA);
- Reconciliation through Education national workshop program (Reconciliation Australia);
- Cape York Youth Network (Cape York Trust, Cairns, Qld); and
- After-hours Youth Drop-in Centre in Alice Springs town centre (Tangentyere Council).
- Early Intervention Program for Indigenous Youth (Curtin University of Technology & Indigenous Psychological Services, Perth, WA);
- Jobs 4U2 Indigenous School-to-work Project (Gambina Koorie Economic Employment & Training Agency, Shepparton, Vic);
- Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program (Balga Senior High School & The Smith Family, Perth, WA); and
- Strong & Smart Digital Project (Queensland University of Technology with Cherbourg State School, Qld).

Mt Liebig (Amurrndurngu) is located 340 kilometres west of Alice Springs. Access to the community is by road, the majority of which is unsealed and often in a poor condition, and by a weekly mail plane flight. The community of 250 people is comprised mainly of Pintupi/Luritja language groups with very strong traditional roots. Mt Liebig is governed by a Community Government Council elected by local residents. The community has a Council office, a store, an aged-care service, a child-care service, a clinic and a church. Mt Liebig also has a primary school. Secondary students are required to stay in Alice Springs, Darwin or Adelaide to continue their studies. The Northern Territory Government operates the school and the clinic; all other local services are community owned and operated. The Mt Liebig community suffers from a number of family related issues including high instances of infant gastro-intestinal disease, alcohol and substance misuse, family violence and youth self-harm issues. The community has consistently approached Waltja over a number of years for assistance in developing programs to address these issues, as well as training and support for child care and aged care. Mt Liebig had a nutrition program funded by the Northern Territory Government; however, funding was insufficient, and the program only operates intermittently and is subject to the direct support of current clinic staff.

Titjikala is located 115 kilometres by road south of Alice Springs. Access to the community of approximately 200 people is via a dirt road, which is of poor standard for much of the year. The road is impassable with minimal amounts of rain. Although the community is situated within the Arrernte language zone, Luritja is the predominant language spoken. A council elected by local residents governs the community. Unlike Mt Liebig, Titjikala has a Commonwealth-funded Community Development and Employment Program with a wide range of work activities undertaken. The community has infrastructure, including a community-owned store, women's centre, men's centre, aged-care service, child-care service, clinic, primary school and a church. The Northern Territory Government runs both the clinic and the school. Titjikala suffers similar issues to the other target communities. Clinic staff note that infant gastro-intestinal disease and failure to thrive are common problems to be addressed. Although inhalant substance misuse is not an issue, alcohol and other drugs are. Waltja's members from Titjikala have sought assistance for some time in developing a community-based nutrition program.

Willowra is a remote community based approximately 350 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs. It has a population of approximately 300 people. The community has suffered from a lack of services since its council was de-funded in 2001 from poor administration over its financial affairs (now administered by the Yuendumu Council, which is 180 kilometres away). As a result of this, the community has suffered greatly from a lack of services. The current services in Willowra are a primary school, a community store and a community health service. Issues such as alcohol misuse, gambling and family problems are recent – a death due to petrol sniffing affect the community. Due to the lack of services for women or children, poor health is a major issue.

Nyirripi is located 450 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs. Access is by a mainly unsealed road (which is often in a poor condition), and by a once weekly mail plane flight. The community of 250 people is predominantly from the Warlpiri language group. Nyirripi is governed by a Community Government Council. Local services include a council office, clinic, primary school, community-owned store, church, and a limited aged-care service. The school and the clinic are both operated by the Northern Territory Government. The community also has a non-functional women's centre and are hoping to develop a child-care service in the near future. Instances of the social issues identified for Mt Liebig (with the exception of inhalant misuse) are also prominent in Nyirripi.

Palyapayi means “doing good work for families”. Waltja services remote communities across 700,000 square kilometres in Central Australia. The members of Waltja are all Aboriginal women who live in remote communities in Central Australia. All members actively participate in Waltja projects, workshops, training and community-based activities. Each of the participating communities is different, even though they may be geographically close to each other (see Box 2).

**Key processes**

The main focus was to identify and address risk factors for poor nutrition in 0-5 year olds associated with poverty, failure-to-thrive and poor health outcomes for Aboriginal children. From an organisational perspective, strategies included:

- forging the partnership between UNICEF and Waltja;
- establishing a Nutrition Steering Committee to oversee the project implementation, development, and evaluation;
- employing a coordinator and local Aboriginal nutrition workers in each of the four communities;
- training workers in the nutritional needs of children; and
- establishing a brokerage fund to support a range of purchases, such as gardening utensils.

The main early intervention strategies were:

- supporting communities to adopt activities to improve nutrition for youth and children, including provision of healthy lunches or dinners for children to prevent health crises (for example, needing to be hospitalised in Alice Springs);
- establishing community gardens;
- cooking demonstrations of health foods;
- information days and regional workshop to educate local Aboriginal community members (in particular, women); and
- lobbying for the availability of affordable and healthy foods.

It was important that the project included all children and families, not just high-risk children or families, so as to have wide impact, and avoid shame. The success of the intervention was due to the level of local community participation and input into healthy food choices for the children: both bush and store foods. The Project Coordinator (Waltja) explained:

“It was important that the local people were deciding on what was best for themselves rather than outsiders deciding on what was best for them.”

**Outcomes and achievements**

Some of the main community development strategies included providing the opportunity for Elders to educate young people through going on bush trips to source bush medicines and bush foods. Community members worked with the local community store manager to develop a health store policy towards the types of food that are stocked. Store training was provided for local Aboriginal community members. More broadly, local Aboriginal community members were trained to assist in improving the nutritional needs of women, young children and the wider community. A child-care centre was also established in Nyirripi and Titjikala won a National Heart Foundation Award for their vegetable garden.

The Project Coordinator from Waltja said:

“Promoting bush and healthy store foods helped to maintain a positive approach advocating traditional ways of looking after children.”
Although the project was initially focused on nutrition, it has broadened its focus to wellbeing of children. A nutrition worker (Nyirripi Clinic) explained:

“The nutrition program at the child-care centre works in partnership with the clinic. The staff share health information about kids, which helps in dealing with nutrition issues”.

Social outcomes included storytelling, photos and the production of a cookbook, and the employment of local nutrition workers in each of the communities.

Aboriginal Health Workers and Registered Nurses in Nyirripi, Watayawun (Mt Liebig), Willowra and Tjitjikala have observed an increase in the number of healthier children in the community and an increase in knowledge among community members participating in the project on nutrition and healthy eating. One nutrition worker from the Nyirripi Clinic stated:

“The nutrition program contributes to better health outcomes for the kids. Due to education around nutrition, women are buying more fruit and vegetables and the kids are eating healthier meals. The program has helped to decrease the amount of anaemia cases not just through meals but also through education around nutrition.”

The project has led to an increase in the nutrition awareness in communities, particularly among women. An Indigenous Project Officer from UNICEF commented:

“There has been proof that failure-to-thrive kids have actually decreased in communities. Families are more aware of the nutrition needs of kids, which has also had an influence on the stores with more fruit and vegetables, and different campaigns happening in the schools as well around food and healthy breakfast programs.”

Community members have an increased confidence in raising issues with the community store manager and ordering in more healthy snacks and fresh vegetables. Practical cooking demonstrations are conducted showing healthy and affordable ways to prepare fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as holding nutrition and health awareness days. Some families are making different choices about how they use their money, choosing to purchase nutritious food for their children, rather than, for example, using their money for gambling. Men are becoming more involved in the program in various ways, such as gardening, dropping the children off at childcare, sitting with them at lunchtime and cooking meals. Men have reported that they want to be more involved in family life as it makes them feel good and they are able to identify a role for themselves.

Community volunteers have become involved in nutrition activities. These volunteers have also attended training workshops in areas of nutrition, food preparation and healthy living. This has strengthened partnerships and coordination between community-based organisations in support of each community nutrition program. It has also provided an appropriate forum for young families to start talking about other pressing issues, such as domestic violence and alcohol and other drugs. This has resulted in a working relationship with local partners such as Alcohol and Other Drugs, The Heart Foundation, Sexual Health and Family Planning, and Family and Children’s Services.

Barriers and opportunities

Implementing a community development project—particularly in remote Indigenous communities—means being able to deal with obstacles that emerge during the implementation phase. A practical obstacle to running some of the program was the weather. Due to the remote location of the communities and poor road accessibility, rain often interferes with particular activities that have been planned. It was also difficult to achieve community ownership of all nutrition activities. A key element of this process was encouraging remote community clinics to support local nutrition workers.

One of the major challenges of the program has been getting specific data on the health and nutrition of the children who are supported through the program. The main issue has been the confidentiality of this information in small communities. Because of the small number of children, providing data on health status or participation rates in the program at a local level may risk identifying particular children or families—and there is a lot of shame surrounding poor nutrition of children.

The project members have observed the changes in attitude and behaviour of participants in each community. There has been no formal collection of quantitative data; however, UNICEF is exploring options with Waltja and government counterparts regarding how to improve the monitoring and data collection systems in each community, which will assist with future evaluation of health outcomes associated with the project. An Indigenous Project Officer from UNICEF noted:

“The project has had a strong focus on capacity building of local partners such as Waltja. In 2004, after two years of Telstra Foundation funding UNICEF to implement the nutrition program with Waltja, there was a shift in funding and the support was provided directly to Waltja. UNICEF Australia continues to support Waltja with capacity building, reporting writing, monitoring and evaluation.”

There are also opportunities for community nutrition programs to be independently managed and operated by the local community. In the future, a project such as this would be best conducted in fewer communities at a time, as the amount of time the project coordinator spent in the various communities—as well as the time on administration, travel,
and follow-up—was limited. Participants identified some improvements that could be implemented for monitoring the project, as well as increasing opportunities for local Aboriginal community members to have access to accredited training courses, for example, ‘train the trainer’ programs and training in food and nutrition, as well as budgeting and administration.

**Strong and Smart digital project**

*(Queensland University of Technology with Cherbourg State School, Queensland)*

The second project we profile here—the *Strong and Smart* digital project—was developed to tackle technological illiteracy among rural Indigenous children and their communities by providing training in current communication media and digital technology. The additional goal was to use multimedia training as means of improving school engagement and retention, while fostering cultural identity and pride.

In 2002, members of the Queensland University of Technology’s department of Film and Television partnered with the Cherbourg State School to produce a film called ‘Strong and Smart’. It tells the story of the rise of the Cherbourg State School from a situation of aimless despair to an institution with a sense of purpose, direction and unity (see Box 3). The ‘Strong and Smart’ theme reflected in the film is embedded in the school’s curriculum, activities and teaching methods. These are centred on motivating Indigenous children and young people to be strong and smart Australians.

The Cherbourg community experienced considerable economic and social disadvantage, including domestic violence, alcohol and substance misuse, and child abuse. The school community recognised that an intervention was needed to address these issues. These social problems are not the result of Aboriginal culture, but are the legacies of the other historical and sociological processes. However, a program was needed to reinforce positive Indigenous culture, to promote literacy, technological skills, and a sense of pride and achievement for community members.

**Key processes**

Funds from the Telstra Foundation were used to purchase a digital camera and to fund components of the salaries of the Project Manager, Coordinator and three tutors in editing, camera and sound. Combined with other funding, the principal activity for the project as a whole was to engage with 250 school children, 46 staff and 3,000 community members in supporting and developing further a range of digital resources to build information/communication capabilities at a local level. The former Principal of the Cherbourg State School explained:

“It’s one thing to get the kids to school and to sit in classrooms, but you’ve got to do more. You’ve got to change what’s happening inside the school and I think the digital project has made the school a more exciting place to be, where kids can engage in those activities. They’re going to be excited about coming to school whether that attendance incentive is there or not.”

Community members, children and young people were consulted and engaged in developing appropriate resources that reflected their knowledge needs of their own community. Through this process, high participation and ownership was created and sustained. As noted by Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003), “if learning is contextualised, culturally relevant, and authentic, students will become more engaged in their education” (p. 88). The project strategy consisted of five elements: materials production, staff and student training, development of a digital domain, positioning the school in the broader community, and finally, distribution and promotion of the DVD. The goal was to produce a broad spectrum of interactive digital program content—ranging from inserts from the original ‘Strong and Smart’ DVD film (full length interviews) to newly created content like historical archives of Aboriginal studies and social issues such as domestic violence and truancy.

The development of literacy skills is a central priority and the school aims to generate educational outcomes comparable to other schools in Queensland, while at the same time nurturing a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in today’s society. The *Strong and Smart* digital project has helped address an important aspect of literacy—digital literacy and computer skills—that will equip the young people who have participated with life skills in communication and media technologies. The former Principal emphasised:

“The pursuit of information and communication technology excellence is something that we’ve always insisted on. I’ve always described it to our kids and our staff as the ‘new literacy’. And as I say to them: ‘We’ve got left behind in the old literacy and we’re not going to be left behind in this one’.”

**Outcomes and achievements**

The project successfully engaged all target groups, in particular students from Grades 5, 6, and 7. The students acquired the skills to produce a DVD of short films—which was positively received by community members and revitalised cultural pride. The School Liaison Officer noted:

“It’s bringing back the history, you know, making it accessible to people again. By using the DVD we can tell the truth about our history.”

Many families viewed the DVDs in their own home environment with all family members. This created stronger ties among each other and validated cultural and family histories from their own Indigenous perspectives. A community member stated:

“The kids like being in front of the camera. Oh yes, they love it. I think the older kids got a lot out of it. One of the children that did it is my niece and she’s been
helping me learn to use the camera. And another thing too, a lot of our children and people in the community - they’re not afraid now to be filmed.”

The project motivated the students and enabled improved relationships between students and the teaching staff. It also significantly improved students’ attendance and participation rates. The project facilitated an introduction to new technological concepts through alignment and adding value to existing educational strategic priorities within the Cherbourg State School.

In a formal, independent evaluation of Cherbourg’s digital project published in 2005, Dr Martin Hirst documented the achievements of the project against each of the stated aims. All the stakeholders and participants he interviewed for the evaluation were positive about the DVD and the ‘Strong and Smart’ vision for the Cherbourg community:

“Connection and overlap between different ‘Western’ compartmentalised disciplines, with unstructured and informal opportunities for learning that relate to where students are at. The project has shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do have the solutions to building capacity in their own communities as long as cultural values and perspectives underpin the approaches. Planning needs to be done from the onset with the local community. Creative partnering within the community and external environments need to be forged. Most importantly, Aboriginal people need to be in control of the process.

Barriers and opportunities

The creation of a ‘digital domain’ for the Cherbourg community is a long-term goal. At present the State Library of Queensland is establishing an Indigenous Knowledge Centre at the school. This centre will ultimately strengthen and facilitate and/or partner on existing and future information and communication technology project initiatives in Cherbourg. The model of a Knowledge Centre is based on three main functions:

- a community library model;
- a cultural heritage museum; and
- a research and business unit.

Close cooperation between different community groups in these developments will ensure strategic directions relating to cultural knowledge are consistent with the aims and aspirations of the Elders and community members of Cherbourg. The Strong and Smart project included opportunities for Cherbourg to initiate training groups in other Queensland communities. Because of the wider exposure the Strong and Smart digital project has created for the Cherbourg community, the positive impacts of the project can be seen as influencing the process of reconciliation. One of the ‘Strong & Smart’ team members said:

“Cherbourg has entered the consciousness of Queensland... I think we’ve made a significant contribution to reconciliation because [through the DVD] we’ve moved the Indigenous community of Cherbourg from being the despised ‘Other’ to a different kind of ‘Other’, one that’s more positive.”

The development of literacy skills is a central priority and the school aims to generate educational outcomes comparable to other schools in Queensland, while at the same time nurturing a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in today’s society.
The development and implementation of the Strong and Smart digital project in Cherbourg is delivering a sustainable educational, cultural and economic resource. The skills the students learn empower them to reclaim the positive aspects of their cultural and artistic heritage and create independent knowledge workers, skilled for survival in both rural and urban economies.

Key learnings

The key learnings that emerged from evaluation of the 14 projects – including the two projects we profiled here – are summarised below under four broad themes: trust; flexibility and leverage; Indigenous leadership; and building sustainability.

Trust

It takes time to build relationships. Project workers who come in from outside the community need to spend time in the community to get to know the local people and how their community operates. This is important not only in building trust, but also in being able to tailor a program to meet the specific needs of the community. A critical aspect of building trust is to identify community brokers – key people in the community who are aware of the importance of the project, perhaps know of the project worker’s credentials elsewhere, and who can ‘vouch’ for the program and the individuals involved.

But trust goes both ways: it is not only about trying to foster the trust of Indigenous communities, but about funding bodies and project workers also trusting the local community. This means having good relationships with Elders and other key players, taking the time to communicate, explain, allay fears, and then to trust that communities not only understand best their problems, but also are the ones who can be empowered to identify and work with solutions. This involves listening to—and respecting—the vision of local Indigenous communities, but also having patience. Lasting change doesn’t happen overnight.

Flexibility and leverage

Using established community networks as a platform to establish new services means that you enjoy the benefits of economies of scale, as long as you understand that programs often become intertwined. Funding bodies need to build in flexibility to their objectives and the deliverables they require, and value the type of integration between services that naturally occurs when services organically develop within the context of a local organisation working in the community and responding to its needs.

If project funding can add value to existing projects—and this leads to tangible outcomes for the community—then it has met the overall objectives of the funding scheme. Sometimes funds for a specific community development project can be used to leverage further investment in the community. This can be literally leveraging additional funds, or utilising the changes brought about by a small program to introduce systemic change in communities. A prime example of this is working with schools. Small changes in curriculum or support programs not only can make life changes for individuals; they build a sustainable base for ongoing changes in the community, as each new cohort of students move through the school system. These can be crucial early steps towards the broader goal of reconciliation.

Indigenous leadership

The need for Indigenous young people to connect with their culture was a key element in most of the projects. This involves identifying potential leaders in the young people who can take on the role of learning, fostering, respecting and communicating their culture to their own generation—and into the future.

Leadership is a two-edged sword: it is important to identify and use community leaders to bring about change; however, too many demands can easily be placed on key individuals. There is much truth to the old adage: “If you want a job done, give it to someone who is busy”. Many projects were being supported by—or implemented by—key leaders in their local communities.

The good practices, significant developments and opportunities for leverage described in the projects we evaluated were in no small part due to the key Indigenous leaders involved. In particular, there was evidence that many of the needs would not have been identified—nor the projects developed—without the leadership of inspiring, hard working, and skilled Indigenous people. This is true not only for those key people responsible for developing the projects, or liaising with communities, but also for the many Indigenous workers and members of the local communities who assisted with implementation at each stage of the project. By relying on leadership from within local Indigenous communities, many of the issues we identified as critical success factors were incorporated: trust, flexibility, leverage, and sustainability.

Community development activities need to build leadership in the next generation. Intergenerational communication and skill-transfer is crucial for sharing the load, and for ensuring sustainability: exposing young people to the ideas and experiences of Elders, project coordinators and other leaders.

But leadership is not just something demonstrated at the community level. It is also something that needs to be fostered within individuals. Each person can be encouraged to show initiative, and to take leadership of their own life, their family, and the areas within their community where they can have influence. Important mechanisms for this are building cultural pride, self-esteem, and self-determination. This is done through projects that focus on youth engagement and youth participation: fostering different models of leadership and different styles of communication.

These community development projects show the importance of engaging young people in positive activities, and providing opportunities for cultural exchange between non-Indigenous and Indigenous young people. Positive activities ranged from learning about their language, culture and history, sports and arts participation, educational workshops and forums, mentoring, training and skill-development. The opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people to work together on arts projects—or to share their stories and experiences—promotes a greater understanding of the level of oppression, poverty and disempowerment experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Building sustainability

The final crosscutting theme was the importance of sustainability. “Sustainability is a key issue for Indigenous communities” (Dodson, 2002, p. 25). Many Indigenous communities are hurting from having their hopes raised that good things will happen, only to have funding dry up,
programs peter out, and changes come to a standstill. In working with the communities, one of the goals of the evaluation team was to assist communities in reflecting on – and documenting – how their projects were able to build in elements of sustainability. Building sustainability is important if we are to turn around the poor social indicators highlighted earlier.

One critical mechanism for ensuring sustained community change was to target schools: either to locate the program in the school, or to work cooperatively with schools to support the program. Educational resources, curriculum enhancements, economically self-sustaining youth groups, worker education kits, teacher guides, networks, archives and relationships are all critical outcomes that ensure the sustainability of the excellent work that we witnessed in the communities across the country.

The most critical mechanism for ensuring sustainability is whole-of-community involvement, utilisation of local knowledge, local resources and local personnel, and adopting a holistic approach to planning and development of projects in order to guarantee ownership. Dodson (2002) argued:

“If together we can build the capacity of Indigenous people to move from a position of impoverishment to one of prosperity; if together we can help Indigenous people to participate fully in the social, political and economic activities of our nation; and if, together, we can do all of this without compromising Indigenous cultures and identities – that will be cause for celebration” (p. 25)

Some of the important lessons learned by the organisations involved included the importance – and benefit – of collaborating with other organisations. It takes time to get to know communities when working with them. Project activities were most effective when they were able to enhance the capacity of local indigenous grass-roots organisations and community groups, building local knowledge and confidence.

An important learning was the need for flexibility in designing and implementing programs. Finally, these projects highlight the importance of enhancing opportunities to transmit language and culture from one generation to the next, as well as respecting and linking activities to Indigenous cultures.

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Indigenous employment in the Australian Public Service

LYNELLE BRIGGS

In August 2005, a new Strategy was launched to assist the APS to stabilise Indigenous employment rates and to implement measures to consolidate and increase the levels of Indigenous expertise in the APS. Several resultant programs are operating to provide targeted support to Indigenous job seekers, employees and public sector employers, and a recent study has revealed for the first time Indigenous employees’ own perceptions of life and work in the APS. While there is still a way to go, the APS is rising to the challenge of tapping into the skills and experiences of a growing sector of the Australian workforce. The APS is well-placed to provide sound and valuable employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians and positive economic outcomes for Indigenous families.

Indigenous employment levels

The Australian Public Service (APS) has a good record on employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. These employees now make up 2 per cent of the APS, which is much better than the proportional representation of Indigenous people in the Australian workforce, which stands at 1.4 per cent (Australian Public Service Commission [APSC], 2006f; Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2002).

However, our employment record has deteriorated in recent years from a high point in 1999. There are several reasons for this, including major restructuring of the public service, which saw the removal of many entry level positions; the increasing complexity of modern work in the public sector and lower average levels of qualifications of Indigenous applicants; and the opportunities now available to Indigenous people in other sectors. Nonetheless, we believe that there is also significant under-reporting of Indigenous employment, and that actual numbers and proportional representation may be higher.

The trends for middle and senior manager levels are encouraging. Proportional representation at project officer and middle management level has risen from 2.3 per cent to 2.7 per cent since 1997 (APSC, 2006f). As these are the groups which will ultimately provide the majority of our future senior managers, it is important that Indigenous representation is growing.

Equity, diversity and the public service values

As a key national employer, the APS is uniquely positioned to provide all its employees with the skills, experiences and expertise that they can use and enhance throughout their careers, both in the public and non-public sectors. The APS has a proud reputation of being at the forefront of workplace reform and organisational renewal, and remains committed to leading the way in supportive and productive workplaces (Shergold, 2006).

The Public Service Act 1999 includes a set of Values and a Code of Conduct to guide public servants’ behaviour and actions. Even though there is a legislative requirement for the APS to recognise and utilise the diversity of the Australian population (s10(c)), the moral obligation to provide a supportive working environment for Indigenous Australians goes further.

The APS provides policy development and/or service delivery in almost every sphere of life to all Australians. Recent considerations at both Commonwealth and state/territory level have led to an increased focus on the need for a ‘connected government’ approach: a need to ensure that policy development and service delivery is integrated across portfolios and jurisdictions to facilitate access by the people for whom they are designed (see www.connected.gov.au). The best way to ensure that the APS is fully equipped to provide services to a diverse Australian public, is to ensure that we have a diverse workforce. Indigenous staff identify strongly with a desire to support Indigenous program delivery.

The APS also has a moral obligation to provide a supportive environment for its employees: a place where people are encouraged to take risks and strive to reach their personal and professional potential, and to develop key, transferable skills which can be used outside the APS for the benefit of state, territory or local government agencies, the community sector or private enterprise. The APS has an important role to play in supporting people when they first enter the workforce, or when they are re-entering after periods of carer or other responsibilities.

APS employment can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to develop a range of marketable skills, both on-the-job and through nationally accredited training. Some of the programs that have resulted in recent successes include graduate recruitment, the provision of cadetships to support tertiary students while they are studying and provide them with ongoing employment when they graduate, and traineeships to...
provide an alternative pathway into the APS for those who do not have tertiary (or even secondary) education qualifications. In this way the APS can play an important role in supporting positive economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians and their families, helping to break the poverty cycle and build stronger families.

**Workforce demographics: The business case for Indigenous employment**

There is also a strong business case for APS agencies to re-examine policies and practices around Indigenous employment in the public sector. The main policy imperative is how agencies will address the changing workforce demographics over the next five to fifteen years. The APS workforce, like the Australian workforce population in general, is aging (Costello, 2002). There is also greater movement into and out of the service at all levels, and a significant reduction in the number of entry-level positions (Management Advisory Committee [MAC], 2005). It is therefore expected that the APS will be competing for younger workers in what is increasingly becoming an employees’ marketplace. Against this background, are the trends among Indigenous Australians of higher birth rates and a generally younger population (ABS, 2001b).

**Workforce capacity building**

Linked closely to the issue of workforce demographic change is the concept of capacity building or organizational renewal: the means by which an agency (or group of agencies) determines the likely changes in their organisational profile over the medium to longer term and takes strategic steps to address any capability or skill gaps that they might identify. This requires agencies to look critically at their current staffing profiles, skill sets and operational imperatives, and to carefully analyse expected changes so that the capability gap assessment is realistic. This may encompass considerations such as the impact of changing technologies, the number of people currently studying a particular discipline at tertiary level, or the changing demographics of the client base, including expectations of service levels in non-traditional or non-profitable locations.

For APS agencies, young Indigenous people may provide a pool of potential employees which has, to date, not been greatly utilised. This requires individual agencies to invest in their future by identifying high-potential employees and providing assistance to them to enable them to make a successful transition into the workforce.

**Educational attainment and skills recognition**

The increasingly graduate nature of the APS means that many graduates come into the public service not only through targeted graduate programs, but through general entry and lateral recruitment. However, the tightening labour market and an expansion of non-university post-secondary educational options necessitate an equal consideration of the non-graduate labour pool. Studies by the Australian Bureau of Statistics have found that Indigenous students are more likely to attend colleges of technical and further education and less likely to attend university than non-Indigenous students, with around 5 per cent of young Indigenous people attending university, compared with 23 per cent of non-Indigenous young people (ABS, 2001a). The 2001 Census figures also suggest that many (82 per cent) of Indigenous students are at risk of not completing year 12 (ABS, 2001a). School retention rates is a policy imperative for the Australian Government, but in terms of Indigenous employment in APS agencies, the key consideration hinges on the link between employment and education.
All employers need to know that their employees have the skills, or the potential, to do the job for which they are employed, and the completion of secondary schooling goes some way to providing employers with a degree of certainty regarding their potential employees’ abilities. The reasons for high Indigenous non-completion rates are many and varied, and initiatives to redress the situation cannot afford to take a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Options that have been implemented in the APS since 2004 include the provision of entry-level traineeships to enable less-qualified applicants to gain experience and competencies in ongoing work, and the availability of sponsorships to facilitate school retention and school-to-work transition. The programs provide financial and personal support to potential employees by giving them the tools to help themselves to gain skills, knowledge and experience which can be translated into the workplace.

It is incumbent upon APS agencies to determine critically the level and type of educational attainment that they require from their employees. While the graduate versus non-graduate debate is one that is yet to be had, there is a need for an attitudinal shift among many managers in the public sector away from the perception that a university degree necessarily means that a person will be better suited for public sector employment. While there are certainly some jobs and some agencies which require specific and specialised skill sets, there is a need for greater recognition of life skills and experience when assessing an applicant’s likely capabilities.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a concerted effort to help women translate their life skills as wives, mothers and household managers into skills that could successfully be marketed into public sector employment positions. This engendered a range of personal development and career planning seminars specifically targeted at women, and saw a move away from the terminology of ‘discrimination’ to that of ‘affirmative action’ (Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986). It may be time that similar consideration now be given to other job seekers, including Indigenous people.

There is an opportunity for the public sector to reshape its approach to youth recruitment, particularly the necessity for graduate qualifications, and the ways in which Indigenous employees can be given alternative pathways into the workplace. A willingness to support new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, particularly school leavers, in the attainment of vocational or university qualifications, or the use of traineeships and cadetships which link to the employee’s work, may be ways of attracting and retaining motivated employees.

Challenges for Indigenous employment: Adapting policies for outcomes

A census survey was undertaken of all known Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS employees towards the end of 2005. The 2006 report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees Census Survey identified four critical challenges for the APS in supporting the employment of Indigenous Australians:

- increasing capability;
- encouraging a greater diversity of roles for Indigenous employees in the APS;
- higher retention in the APS; and
- improving the quality of work place support (APSC, 2006a, 2006b).

The outcomes from the survey have provided a unique compilation of Indigenous employees’ own perspectives on life and work in the APS. In developing responses to these observations and experiences, it is fundamental to remember that employment outcomes are only part of a very complex socio/economic interaction. One factor that works against some Indigenous people when seeking public sector employment is any involvement that they may have had with the justice system. The arrest and incarceration rates for Indigenous people are considerably higher than for non-Indigenous Australians (Hunter, 2001), and the requirements by some public sector agencies for police, security and character clearances may mean that some Indigenous people are excluded from public sector employment due their arrest and/or incarceration history.

While it is acknowledged that this is part of the complexity of Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage endemic in parts of Australia, decisions taken by APS agencies to employ Indigenous people, and to provide guidance and support to young Indigenous employees will help to redress the current imbalance and may help to prevent some of the behaviours and choices that may lead to arrest, incarceration, lowered employment prospects, and continued family and community disadvantage.

The workplace experience

Around half of the respondents to the census survey (APSC, 2006c) believe that their agency actively supports the employment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people, although 80 per cent feel that agencies should do more to support their Indigenous employees and only 30 per cent believe that their agency’s Indigenous employment strategy had been effective in improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Most respondents agreed that their colleagues and supervisors work effectively and sensitively with Indigenous Australians, with 82 per cent satisfied that their supervisor would support the use of flexible work practices. This is a very positive result, considering that 53 per cent of respondents had carer responsibilities - much higher than the general APS result of 39 per cent. Of those with carer responsibilities, 19 per cent used more than 10 days leave to provide care at short notice, compared with 10 per cent for the general APS (APSC, 2006f).

A third of respondents indicated that they had cultural and community obligations that take them out of the workplace, with over half indicating that they had taken between one and five days out of the workplace to meet those obligations in the past year. Almost three quarters of these employees were satisfied with the support provided to meet these obligations. This suggests that support for flexible working arrangements to balance work and family responsibilities is widespread, and that Indigenous employees are encouraged and supported in their work environments, albeit not necessarily through the formal mechanism of a corporate plan or strategy.

Worryingly, however, 18 per cent of Indigenous employees indicated that they have been subjected to discrimination in the workplace in the last 12 months, with 68 per cent of
those incidents being race-based discrimination. Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that they had been subjected to bullying or harassment.

There is an obligation on all APS employees to uphold to APS Values and Code of Conduct as set out in Sections 10 and 13 respectively of the Public Service Act 1999, and there is an additional responsibility for senior managers to model those behaviours, as set out in the Public Service Commissioner’s Directions 1999. The most effective way to do this is to ensure visible commitment at the agency level to support for Indigenous employees.

In many ways, this will be the catalyst for attitudinal or behavioural change, and can often also be the determinant for retention and career progression. Many of the focus group and survey suggestions regarding bullying, discrimination and harassment refer to cross-cultural awareness training as the solution. The Commission is encouraging cross-cultural awareness training providers to register with the Commission’s panel of experts, so that possible providers can be more readily sourced by agencies, and course quality monitored.

Paradoxically, when the Commission surveyed agencies more generally, of the retention strategies identified in the State of the service report 2005-06, the provision of cross-cultural awareness training for all employees ranked sixth, behind such initiatives as the provision of special leave entitlements, access to internal and external networks, study awards, access to mentoring and coaching, and the availability of targeted leadership development opportunities. This could be seen to indicate a preference towards providing individual assistance through general terms and conditions, rather than a more holistic focus on the work environment. A similar rationale may also be suggested by the number of agencies (26 per cent) that did not consider it necessary to run cross-cultural awareness training because they do not have any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees. It may be that the purpose of the training is seen as more targeted to the presence of certain Indigenous employees than to a more general cultural shift to make it more inviting to potential employees.

Notwithstanding this, the identification of quality cross-cultural awareness training is crucial to embedding a positive cultural environment. This could include the development of a better practice guide (or guides), inclusion of cultural awareness in leadership development programs, and developing a sense of ‘cultural competence’ among APS managers and other employees. This might be coupled with consideration of the need for a broader focus on management capabilities across the APS, including mechanisms to assess individual managers’ abilities to ensure that people who are recruited or promoted into management positions have the requisite personal and professional skills, specifically people management capabilities including diversity awareness.

**Capability development**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are concentrated (86.8 per cent) at the lower (non-managerial) classifications of the APS. Around one quarter of Indigenous employees have bachelor degrees or higher, compared with around half of all APS employees. The Census report shows that 78 per cent of respondents feel that they have the same opportunity to access learning and development as non-Indigenous staff in their agency, but only 52 per cent of respondents are satisfied with their access to learning and development within their agency.

Of the self-identified learning and development priorities that were reported in the census survey, the three highest recurring needs were communication skills (including presentation and negotiation skills and cultural sensitivities), leadership skills (both general leadership development and specifically skills to lead in the whole-of-government environment and when dealing with the Indigenous community), and management skills including project, financial, time, contract and people management.

It is incumbent upon agencies to develop and monitor workforce planning strategies to meet their emerging skill needs. Ideally, these workforce plans should include an assessment of skills gaps, succession planning strategies, and targeted recruitment, retention, and learning and development plans. In this context, agencies need to reconsider their Indigenous recruitment and retention strategies to correlate individual development goals with operational and business needs.

**Separation and retention**

The census results (APSC, 2006c) also shows that almost half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees indicated that they were thinking of leaving the APS within the next three years or were unsure if they would stay. Four of the five main reasons given for intending to leave were lack of job satisfaction, feeling under-valued, lack of workplace support, and poor management. These are all areas in which more can and should be done by agencies to provide real and tangible support to their employees.

The high rate of Indigenous separations (that is, the rate of departure from the APS) has been identified as a key concern for the APS for some time. Even though
this is an important issue that needs to be tackled, it should be seen in the wider context. There remains a dearth of information about where Indigenous employees go when they leave the APS, and whether their APS experience provides valuable skills transfer into the state/territory public service, local government, or community organisations, or the private sector. We expect, however, that the APS provides an important stepping stone for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the rest of the labour market or further education and training.

Consideration of measures to address retention (separation) issues tends to focus on either why people are leaving or what can be done to make them stay. Operationally, the latter is easier to implement, but without informed data, any initiatives risk having only limited impact. There is a distinct need for evidence-based policymaking in this context, but obtaining the evidence is notoriously difficult. Surveys of current employees can attempt to gauge intentions to stay or leave their agency and/or the public sector, but the timing and reasons for the final decision can only be gathered once the decision is made and the person has left. Moreover, the reason for, and manner of, their departure will necessarily colour any feedback that may be given following separation.

Types of jobs
There has been some debate, and some conflicting anecdotal evidence, around the types of jobs that Indigenous people are seeking, particularly between jobs that serve Indigenous communities or focus specifically on Indigenous issues, and ‘mainstream’ jobs in policy or service delivery.

The Census report (APSC, 2006b) shows that 78 per cent of Indigenous employees indicated that their work directly involves delivering services to the public, compared with 50 per cent for the APS overall. Forty-six percent of respondents indicated that the work they undertake is specifically related to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Over a third of Census respondents indicated that they would prefer to apply for jobs that were advertised as either open only to Indigenous applicants or which included Indigenous-related selection criteria. In contrast, 45 per cent indicated that they would prefer to compete in an open selection exercise. The divergent opinions would seem to suggest that there is little value in developing a policy or initiative that presupposes one or the other of these options; more value would accrue from acknowledging that this is an individual decision based on a range of personal circumstances, and focusing efforts on engaging agency commitment to Indigenous employment as part of their overall employment strategy.

Location and relocation
While 35 per cent of the APS is located in Canberra, the vast majority of non-Canberra based jobs are in the other capital cities, and only 9 per cent are at middle or senior management level (APSC, 2006g). This has a two-fold impact on Indigenous employment prospects. Firstly, potential employees will generally be required to relocate to one of the capital cities in order to take up an APS employment opportunity. With 99 per cent of the Indigenous population living outside the ACT (ABS, 2001c) and 27 per cent living in remote areas (Brough, 2006, 1.3), this may be a particularly big ‘ask’. Secondly, once people are employed in an agency’s regional or State office, there is often little prospect of career advancement, as more senior positions are significantly limited.

Service delivery agencies in particular may need to reconsider their current approach to the location of their agency offices, particularly with regard to non-capital city locations and the requirements of their client group(s). Many agencies that provide intensive, direct client services are aware of the need to continually re-evaluate the location of their offices vis-à-vis the clients that they service. These imperatives are also at times driven by broader government policy agenda, for example border protection (which may focus on illegal immigration, terrorism, organised crime and/or exotic pests). The location of an agency’s offices may dictate how appealing the agency is as a potential employer, or how long a person may stay with the agency if they have relocated some distance to take up a job opportunity.

In February 2006, a joint public and private sector working group presented a report to the Federal Government on the benefits to Australian business processes of adopting more broadly the principles of ‘teleworking’. The report of the Australian Telework Advisory Committee recommended that greater research and development be invested in the implementation of infrastructure and working practices that support an increased uptake of teleworking. In this context, ‘teleworking’ is defined as “work undertaken, either on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis, by an employee or self-employed person, which is performed away from the traditional office environment, including from home, and which is enabled by ICT such as mobile telephony or the Internet” (DoCITA & DEWR, 2006). Access to and use of teleworking may be a strategy that could make the APS more attractive to Indigenous employees, as it has the potential to enable employees to spend less time in the (metropolitan) office and to be more flexible around the geographical location of jobs.
The way forward

On 12 August 2005 the Prime Minister announced $6.45 million funding over three years for the implementation of the APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees (APSC, 2005a) (see www.apsc.gov.au). The Strategy was developed in response to the declining number of Indigenous APS employees and the identified business needs and obligations noted earlier. The strategy aims to stabilise numbers in the first instance, provide personal and professional development support to new and current employees, and increase the capability of the APS as a whole to utilise the unique skills and experiences of our workforce and harness them to provide more effective service delivery to Indigenous people and communities.

The Strategy has been developed around several key elements. The first element is to provide support to the emerging whole-of-government agenda by helping all employees to achieve their potential through support and development, and so making the public service better able to do Indigenous business. Key outcomes in this area have been the provision of targeted capability development programs focussing on how to make the whole-of-government idea a reality, and the negotiation of secondments for senior managers to gain broader experiences and perspectives.

The second element of the strategy focuses on developing and implementing alternative pathways to employment, by removing barriers and finding new and different ways to let people know about public service jobs and how to apply for them. Some of the programs under this element have been mentioned earlier, including the service-wide recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates and cadets. Entry-level traineeships provide accessible pathways into public service jobs, particularly for applicants who do not have tertiary or secondary educational qualifications, and a developing school-to-work program to provide personal and professional development support to eligible Indigenous students to finance secondary school (to the end of year 12) and then transition into employment, and includes appropriate work experience, training and qualifications. Two recent publications have also been launched to assist Indigenous job seekers to apply for APS jobs (Getting a Job in the APS (APSC, 2006d) and to enable Indigenous employees to tell their stories and show that APS employment is Not Just a Job (APSC, 2006e).

The next two elements of the Strategy are designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to do the best job that they can, and to support employees to integrate Indigenous employment into their broader workforce plans. To this end, the Commission supports a number of Indigenous employee networks around Australia, and has instituted several targeted development programs for employees across the range of classifications. A series of Indigenous Career Trek workshops provided opportunities for employees around the country to discuss their career goals and development needs, and the establishment of a capability fund enables agencies to support development opportunities for their Indigenous employees. The Indigenous Census Survey was a key milestone in the aggregation of baseline data from which to development future directions, and further research is planned into areas such as capacity development, separation rates, and effective recruitment and retention strategies. The Commission is also developing a range of better practice guides to help the public service become an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We have an opportunity to harness the first-hand experiences and perspectives of our Indigenous employees and implement policies and practices that will support individuals and, through them, Indigenous families and communities.

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Lynelle Briggs is the Australian Public Service Commissioner.
Prevention and early intervention defined

Prevention and early intervention offer the potential to address and overcome a wide range of problems in development, health, learning, behaviour and wellbeing. As such, both have a capacity to reduce the factors that may have negative short- and longer-term impacts on development, while enhancing strengths and enriching positive factors. They can have multiple impacts on multifaceted problems. Problems do, after all, tend to cluster, or as Loeber puts it, “cascade” (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1998).

Prevention involves planned and organised efforts to reduce the likelihood of potential problems (Little, 1999). As such, prevention aims to reduce the overall incidence and prevalence of risk. It seeks to reduce negative pathways while maintaining or increasing positive pathways.

In contrast, early intervention starts with evidence of risk, either in terms of the individual’s characteristics and/or circumstances or, more typically, as a result of membership of a group that is seen to be at risk. Early intervention is a subset of prevention. Gordon (1983) developed a classification comprising universal prevention efforts focused on the whole population, selectee prevention targeting population subgroups identified as at risk, and indicated prevention, aimed at those with an identified problem, or high risk of its future development. In this scheme, early intervention is an example of either indicated and/or selective prevention (Johnson, 2002) that involves planned and organised attempts to alter the behaviour or development of individuals who show the early signs of an identified problem and/or who are considered at high risk of developing that problem.

Prevention and early intervention efforts are not only focused on vulnerability and risk. They also aim to enhance strengths, amplify protective factors and enrich the available pathways (France & Utting, 2005; Masten, 2004). Typically this will involve access to experiences that compensate for disadvantage, vulnerability and adverse life circumstances. Often, the focus will be both on reducing negative and enhancing positive factors. Parenting programs, for example, may focus on reducing negative behaviours such as harsh, coercive or inconsistent parenting as well as enhancing the parent’s sense of competence by the development of positive parenting skills (Sanders, Markie-Dadds & Turner, 2003).
Sustainability: The key issue in prevention and early intervention

In considering prevention and early intervention initiatives the key issue is “are the gains maintained, and if so how?” Currently, too little is known about the processes that operate to sustain the benefits of prevention and early intervention. What is not clear is what is sustained, as opposed to lost, from experiences in prevention and early intervention programs. The “Fifteen Thousand Hours” (Rutter, Maugham, Mortimer, & Ouston, 1979) that children and young people spend in school, for example, may have limited traces, in the long-term. Despite all that time, not everything experienced is retained! As Sameroff (2004) observes: “Developmental achievements are rarely sole consequences of immediate causes and more rarely sole consequences of earlier events” (p. 9). The longer term outcomes are also influenced by the interpretations of events, and these in turn change over life (Sameroff, 2004). The factors that determine the outcomes of development, including of our efforts to alter developmental pathways through prevention and early intervention, are complex (Sanson, Hemphill, & Smart, 2004, p. 160).

Evaluate evaluations of prevention and early intervention initiatives show significant short- and medium-term effects but limited long-term outcomes (Wise, da Silva, Webster & Sanson, 2005). Wise et al. (2005) conclude that “the measured effects of early childhood interventions were mostly limited to the immediate and short-term” (p. 66).

The importance of longitudinal approaches

Longitudinal studies will be needed if we are to tease out the factors that sustain outcomes, particularly in the longer term. Studies that follow individuals beyond the period when they are participating in prevention or early intervention efforts can provide valuable insights into what has sustained the processes that maintain or minimise gains (Masten, 2004). Appropriately designed longitudinal evaluations will also provide evidence of the extent to which gains differ across groups and whether higher levels of participation lead to larger effects that are of greater duration (Hill, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2003; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

At present, there are quite divergent views of the scale of gains across groups. Zigler (2003) for example, argues that the gains from targeted early intervention with the disadvantaged are less than those for more advantaged groups in the community. Similarly, Rutter (2006) concludes that the recent evaluation of Sure Start, in the UK, shows that “there is modest evidence that well planned interventions for young children in disadvantaged families can make a worthwhile difference” (p. 135). In contrast, Reynolds and Ou (2003) used longitudinal follow-up data from the Chicago Child-Parent Centers Program for young children from disadvantaged predominantly African-American neighbourhoods, to conclude that the effects are greater for those in greater disadvantage. Well-designed longitudinal evaluations are needed to resolve these different views.

Such evaluations need to focus specifically on the factors that sustain the effects of prevention and early intervention initiatives. The work of Sampson and Laub (2005; Laub & Sampson, 2003) highlights the scope for change and the influence of what I would call sustaining systems that alter negative pathways and maintain positive ones. They cite the evidence for the positive effect of two such systems – the world of work, with its regularities and routines, and close personal relationships. They make a persuasive case for the changing nature of these influences, focusing particularly on the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Sustaining systems

So what are some examples of such sustaining systems? The Head Start follow-up studies and the work of Reynolds (Reynolds & Ou, 2003; Reynolds, Ou, & Topitzes, 2004; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001; Smokowski, Mann, Reynolds, & Fraser, 2003) and Currie and Thomas (2000 a & b), among others, show the importance of high quality schooling in sustaining the effects of interventions, that occurred early in life. Using data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, Reynolds and Ou demonstrate that the combination of school quality and parent participation were powerful determinants of longer term outcomes, with the benefits of participation in the intervention evident into early adulthood. Quality of schooling especially differentiated the longer-term
outcomes for African American “graduates” of Head Start when compared with their Anglo counterparts (Currie & Thomas, 2000b). Stability of schooling is another dimension that influences later developmental outcomes for interventions aimed at reducing the effects of socio-economic disadvantage (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004).

The available evidence suggests that social systems such as families and schools will play a considerable role in sustaining the effects of initiatives in early life. As Reynolds, Ou and Topitzes (2004) conclude in considering the findings of the analyses of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers: “Although the mechanisms are complex, factors influencing the long-term effects of intervention can be modified by educators, parents, and policy-makers” (p. 1322).

A rich insight into the transition from adolescence to adulthood is provided by the work of Sampson and Laub (2005). They re-analysed the Glueck’s longitudinal follow-up study of 500 male delinquents, and 500 matched male non-delinquents, aged 10-17 years. The analyses explored the pathways that these males took across the period of the life from 14 to 32 years. Sampson and Laub’s analyses highlight the scope for divergence in the pathways of delinquents, despite their “shared beginnings”. They conclude that the scope for prediction is limited and that “there is stability and change in behaviour over the life course … linked to the institutions of work and family relations in adulthood” (p. 8). The presence or absence of connections to important sustaining systems, in this case work and close personal relationships, explain the patterns of desistance or persistence they observed in the life courses of the juvenile offenders.

In reflecting on the Kauai Longitudinal Study, (arguably the ground-breaking study of resilience), Werner (2005) extends the lists of factors that build and sustain resilience:

Among the most potent forces for positive changes for high-risk youth who had a record of delinquency and/or mental health problems in adolescence, and for teenage mothers, were continuing education at community colleges; educational and vocational skills acquired during voluntary service in the Armed Forces; marriage to a stable partner; conversion to a religion that required active participation in a ‘community of faith’; recovery from a life threatening illness or accident that required a lengthy hospitalisation; and occasionally psychotherapy (p. 7).

Homel (2005) reached a similar conclusion. It is the social institutions which underpin a child-friendly society that will be crucial in ensuring that investments are sustained, be they early in life or early in the pathway. For early in life, availability of quality preschool education, followed by quality schooling, and the presence of social systems that work to ameliorate the effects of poverty are significant sustaining systems. In reflecting on the Chicago Longitudinal Study data on academic, social and mental health outcomes in adolescence, the importance of preschool intervention, as highlighted in the Pathways to Prevention Project (Freiberg, Homel, Batchelor, Carr, Lamb, Elias, & Teague, 2005), especially on the boys participating in the project, underscores the value of “broad-spectrum” universal services, such as preschool, in addressing a range of potential developmental problems evident early in life. Similarly, writing in the context of Canadian prevention and early intervention initiatives, Hodinott, Lethbridge and Phipps (2002) pointed to the large cumulative effects of bundles of household characteristics which often occur together” (p. i) which again suggests the need for broadly based prevention and intervention approaches.

Preschool education increasingly is seen as a foundational support for young children that has established short-, medium- and long-term benefits (Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, 2002) and offers a base for intervention across a number of developmental domains. The dura-
schooling, employment and close personal relationships. The sustaining social systems – families; child care provisions; preschools; schools; peer groups; vocation, further and higher education; community organisations; and the world of work – are vital both as the loci for prevention and intervention, as well as for maintaining their benefits.

In conclusion...

The material reviewed in this article highlights the need for thinking systemically about prevention, early intervention and the factors that sustain their benefits. It suggests the need for a comprehensive, integrated policy focus, if sustainability is to be achieved. As Appleyard, Egeland, van Dulmen and Stroouf (2005) recently observed with regard to child behavioural outcomes: “given the significant impact of multiple risks from varying family domains, interventions should be designed as comprehensive programs that enhance as many aspects of family life as possible” (p. 243).

Sustainability is the key issue in considering prevention and early intervention. As Clarke and Clarke (1976) observed: “...what one does for a child at any age, provided it is maintained, plays a part in shaping his development within the limits imposed by genetic and constitutional factors” (p. 273). Reflecting on the long history of early intervention for children, I am reminded of Farran’s (2000) conclusion: “ Somehow, our nation has to move beyond thinking of the problems of young children as being something someone else fixes at an earlier age or in a different place so that other systems do not have to change. A developmental focus that covers the first 12 to 15 years of life would be a good start” (p. 542).

There is a need to move beyond a focus on individuals to the individual in social context. In reviewing the research from the Montreal Longitudinal and Experimental Study, Tremblay and his colleagues have concluded that a focus on offenders needs to be replaced by “a lifespan, intergenerational approach to the problem” (Tremblay, Vitaro, Nagin, Pagani, & Séguin, 2003, p. 244). Such a life course, comprehensive approach focused on the key sustaining systems, and supported by integrated policy and practice, would be a good start in addressing the issue of sustainability of the effects of prevention and early intervention.

References

**Mothers’ accounts of work and family decision-making in couple families**

*An analysis of the Family and Work Decisions Study*

**KELLY HAND**

This paper explores mothers’ accounts about how decisions concerning parenting and paid work were made in their families. Mothers’ perceptions about the extent to which their partners contributed to these decisions, and how their beliefs about the role of fathers in the lives of children and families influenced their decisions about these arrangements, are also explored.

While the work and family arrangements of Australian families continue to be a matter of great interest to researchers and policymakers, the decision-making process involved in formulating these arrangements within couple families has received little attention. Further, while women’s beliefs about motherhood have often been explored as a driving factor in how women choose to combine caring for children and employment, how women in couple relationships take into account the preferences of their partners and their beliefs about the role of fathering is generally not well understood.

This paper uses in-depth interview data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies’ *Family and Work Decisions Study* to explore the way partnered mothers talk about how decisions concerning parenting and paid work were made in their families. In addition, mothers’ perceptions about the extent to which their partners contributed to these decisions and how their beliefs about the role of fathers in the lives of children and families influenced their decisions about these arrangements are explored.

**Background**

While attitudes to female employment have changed significantly in Australia over the past 50 years, community attitudes to the employment of mothers of preschool aged children have shown less significant change over this period (de Vaus, 2004). Mothers in couple families tend to decrease their participation in, or withdraw from the labour market upon the birth of their first child, while most fathers continue in full-time employment (ABS, 2006; Baxter, 2005; de Vaus, 2004). In addition, within couple families, women still do most of the household work and caring work involved with children regardless of their labour force status (Craig & Bittman 2005; HREOC 2005; Smyth, Rawsthorne & Siminski, 2005). Hence it seems that patterns of paid and unpaid work within couple families with dependent children, although slowly shifting, continue to be highly gendered. Less clear is how these patterns are established within families in the lead up to having children and when the first child is born.

The question of how couples decide to combine parenting and paid work compared to the ways in which they share these responsibilities has received relatively little attention in the broader work and family literature. However, from the research that does exist some key themes have emerged. Firstly, that an underlying belief about gender and the roles of men and women within relationships influence both the types of decisions and the ways these are made, as do the dominant gender ideologies within their wider social contexts such as their extended families, friendship networks and the communities in which they live (Himmelweit, 2002; Walzer,
or no negotiation took place and often partners were reported as simply wanting to agree with the arrangements mothers made to care for their children (Duncan, 2003)

In addition, mothers’ experiences of the labour market and their capacity to earn compared to their partner’s capacity have also been found to influence decisions within couple families (Smyth et al., 2005; Walzer, 1997).

Findings from the wider body of research about mothers’ employment decisions also suggest that they are closely tied to attitudes, values and preferences (Duncan, 2003; Duncan & Edwards, 1999; Hakim, 2000, 2003; Himmelweit, 2002). In addition, research in Australia and overseas about mothers’ employment decisions suggests that women have mixed feelings about the importance of mothers compared to fathers as primary caregivers, with the idea that mothers are the best caregivers for small children tending to remain the normative belief (Lupton, 2000; Probert, 2002; Smyth et al., 2005). For example, interviews with Australian mothers in the late 1990s found that the majority of those interviewed thought that young children should be with their mother, with only one third feeling that a father or grandparent could provide care to a standard equal to the care provided by mothers (Probert, 2002). As Probert argues, while attitudes to women and employment seem to have changed significantly over recent decades, the social norms about the essential meaning of motherhood and what mothering involves appear to have undergone very little change, if any.

Beliefs about the role of fathers compared to the role of mothers in the care of young children may also be important in influencing the decisions made by couples about how they will share paid and unpaid work within their own household. Australian research has suggested that first-time mothers’ ideas of what a good mother is take a child centred perspective and include the idea that “a good mother should have patience, remain calm and be able to cope and be able to deal attentively with the demands of infants and small children” (Lupton, 2000, p. 54). Many mothers saw breastfeeding as key to being a good mother during infancy and hence, at least in the first few months of their child’s life, staying at home was seen as important for facilitating breastfeeding – as well as being something that their partners could not do.

In contrast, for the women interviewed by Lupton, their image of a good father was conceptualised quite differently from their ideas about what constituted a good mother. Fathers were seen as taking a more supportive role in helping with the care of
the baby, giving mothers a break or offering emotional support to mothers tired out by the demands of caring for young children. For these mothers, fathers were seen to have a less important role in actively caring for children compared to themselves and instead believed that fathers had to “divide their attentions between paid work and home” (p. 55). Lupton concludes that despite popular notions of a new style of father who is highly involved in the care and lives of their children, “motherhood is still charged with far more responsibility than fatherhood” (p. 55).

Other research has also suggested that women do not view fathers as being as capable of taking the primary care-giving role of children and give this belief as the reason why they, as mothers, need to take on a greater responsibility for childrearing (Hays, 1996). While a small number of mothers viewed leaving children in the care of fathers as “dangerous to the physical health and emotional wellbeing of the child”, most mothers have an impact on this decision-making process. Before these findings are presented, however, a brief description of the study is given below.

The Family and Work Decisions Study

The data presented in this paper are drawn from the second stage of the Australian Institute of Family Studies’ Family and Work Decisions (FAWD) Study. The first stage of the study involved a telephone survey of 2,405 mothers, half of whom were lone mothers and half of whom were partnered. The survey was conducted in December 2002. Participants were recruited from the population of mothers with dependent children aged less than 15 years, or with dependent students aged 16-24 years, who were receiving the Family Tax Benefit (FTB) from Centrelink.

The second stage involved in-depth interviews with 29 of the lone mothers and 32 of the partnered mothers who were purposively sampled to provide a diverse range of circumstances and experiences. The interviews were conducted late 2003 and early 2004. The mothers had children ranging in age from infancy to mid teens, diverse work circumstances and diverse employment histories. Interviews were conducted in metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Victoria and South Australia and where possible across the socio-economic spectrum. However, the use of FTB recipients as our sampling framework, this meant that couple mothers in dual income families, from higher income brackets tend to be under-represented in the current paper.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured in nature and took a life history approach, covering the different ways mothers and their partners had combined paid work with having and caring for children, the ways they had made decisions about this, the events and circumstances that influenced this process, and how they changed over time and in relation to other circumstances and events (Hand & Hughes 2004).

Specifically, mothers were asked questions about how they had decided with their partner aboutcombining work and family once they had children – what (if any) discussions had taken place and whether they had considered a range of options such as both working part-time or their partner staying home with the children while they returned to paid work. In addition many mothers discussed their perceptions of the role of fathers in the lives of children in the context of these decisions being made. These beliefs are also considered.

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The second stage involved in-depth interviews with 29 of the lone mothers and 32 of the partnered mothers who were purposively sampled to provide a
This analysis focuses on the 32 couple mothers interviewed as part of the FAWD qualitative study, although some of the themes discussed were echoed by lone mothers who reflected on these experiences when in couple relationships. Lone mothers are excluded from this analysis as they tended to take a more negative view of their former partners’ abilities to parent and to contribute to family life. This perspective could be influenced by the relationship breakdown – or this may have been an issue that created difficulties in the relationship.

As it is difficult to distinguish the reasons behind these views they have not been considered for the current paper.

**How do couples decide on work and family arrangements?**

In almost all couple families involved in the FAWD qualitative interview, mothers reported that when they first had children, the arrangement was that they would stay home with the child and be the primary carer, perhaps returning to work on a part-time basis when the children were seen to be old enough to be left in the care of others. In a small number of families, both parents continued to work or the mother continued working while the father was at home (see Hand, 2005 and Hand and Hughes, 2005 for a more detailed discussion of these arrangements).

When asked about how these decisions were made the most common response was that it was not a conscious process of decision-making or negotiation about the degree to which each parent would engage in paid work and care for children. It simply wasn’t discussed. Rather it was always assumed or “agreed”, to use the term most often used by the mothers interviewed, that the mother would take the primary caring role and the father the breadwinning role. Further, in families where the possibility of mothers’ working was considered, this was usually seen as her choice, even when financially having only one income was seen as being a source of financial hardship or strain.

> “I wanted to be there and be the mother, not palm them off to someone else and go off and work. I mean some people have got to do that to survive, but we were lucky enough – my husband’s always been a really hard worker, worked 2 jobs and we’ve been able to manage without me working… I think he was happy to go along with me. He’s never pushed me to go back out to work, never wanted me to go to work, he was quite happy to be the provider and go out to work. He saw that as his role, to go off to work and provide for the family, its always been like that, I suppose you could call us a bit old-fashioned in that way – that’s how we’ve always been, we’ve been happy to do that.” (Couple mother, 4 kids aged 10 to 17, studying)

> “Oh he hasn’t got a view – he likes me working…, he never told me don’t work. Never said work less or anything. Never told me to work, it was my own decision whether I wanted to work or not. But he helped a lot at home, did a lot of cleaning and he cooked, he did everything [when she returned to work shortly after the birth of her first child]. And then when I stopped work he stopped doing all of that [laughs].” (Couple mother, 2 children aged 3 and 5 years, neither in paid work)

As discussed in previous work on the FAWD qualitative study (Hand & Hughes, 2004; Hand & Hughes, 2005; Hand, 2005), the rationale behind mothers’ staying at home with their children is linked with their beliefs about mothering, particularly the belief that children need their mothers during infancy and early childhood. While some mothers linked the need to breastfeed as a primary reason for their role as caregiver, others argued that children had an intrinsic need for their mothers at a young age – and some spoke of their own need to be around their children at this time.

> “I’m actually quite against it. I just think it’s a dreadful thing for a child and a mother to be separated at a very, very early stage. It’s dreadful. I’ve only had 2 children so I still find babies to be extremely precious and I wouldn’t trust anybody with my little babies. Also, I’m a breastfeeding mom. I mean, you know, you kind of have to be really organised and it’s not my style, you know. Breastfeeding on demand is kind of like the path of least resistance. I’ve got nothing against other women who feel that they have to. But I just think little babies should be with you, still part of your body. I’d feel terrible when I didn’t have my little baby with me. Even just going shopping and leaving him with [partner], I’d feel wrong. It would be like wearing your shoes backwards, back to front, on the wrong foot.” (Couple mother, 2 children aged 3 years and 20 years, works part-time)

In the context of these discussions, fathers are rarely mentioned as potential primary care providers for their children. In many cases it seems that fathers are simply not considered – their role for many mothers is seen to be primarily as a good provider and mothers who were able to stay home often talked about how lucky they were to have a husband who achieved this. It is important to note – at least from the reports/perceptions of the mothers interviewed – that this was a shared notion of the appropriate roles for men and women within the context of their family. Even if not explicitly discussed within the context of their relationships, most of the mothers interviewed who had a more traditional division of child care and employment along the lines of a male breadwinner model within their own households, believed this was based on shared rather than conflicting beliefs with their partners.

> “I was lucky cos I had a husband who was a hard worker and always found work. But if I had a husband who gave up, there’s no way I could’ve stayed home as well, I would’ve had to have pushed and found some work.” (Couple mother, 3 children aged 14 to 18, not in paid work)

> “It would kill him to have to stop work. The only time he would stop work is if he absolutely had to. He’s always been the main breadwinner, although when [he had a different job] there were times [before we had children] when I made more than him, he’s the main one, and he’s quite happy to do that, as long as gets his sleep and support and that, he’s happy to go out there and work like a Trojan.” (Couple mother, 1 child aged 26 months, not working)

In a few families there had been some discussion about partners staying home while mothers took on the breadwinning role but this option was usually ruled out based on who was capable of earning the most money.
“He was quite happy for me to stay at home…he has a full-time job, and it’s very hard up here to have one. It’s something that’s full-time, he gets paid holidays, sick days. He said that if I can beat his wage, I can go back to work.” (Couple mother, 2 children 2 years and 2 months, not working)

A small number of mothers mentioned that they felt pressured into staying at home and were not supported by their partners to maintain their attachment to paid work when they had children. Further some mothers said that their partners were simply not interested in moving beyond a traditional breadwinner role and were not comfortable with being at home even if their partner could earn more.

“It nearly happened that he stayed home with [child] and I went back to work but I don’t think he was real keen on the idea. He was having a few arguments with one of the guys at work, and he kept saying “I’m going to quit. I’m going to quit. You’ll have to get full-time work,” and I came home one day and I said “well I think I’m going to get it, I think I’m going to get the full-time work,” and he said “oh, but the guy’s left now. I don’t need to leave,” so I had to go back and tell my boss, “you know how I’ve been hassling you the last month that I want full-time… well forget about it cos [partner] isn’t going to quit his job after all.” So it was a bit of a nightmare, I think in an ideal world then [partner] would stay home, but when it finally came to the crunch – [when I said] “yeah you can,” he was like – “oh I don’t really think I want to, I don’t think I’d cope.” (Couple mother, 1 child aged 3 years, not working)

Not all of the women who took on the primary caregiving role did so by choice. Some women who had strong attachments to their work had had to leave or take on lower status work to enable them to provide care for their children. In these cases their partners were not willing to change their own work commitments or ambitions and seemed to just expect their partners, as mothers, to make the changes needed to accommodate raising children. These women talked about choices in somewhat contradictory terms – they were happy with their choice as the best choice among a very limited array available to them but expressed sadness and regret at having to give up what they loved – which was something they didn’t have a choice about.

“We were both chefs, and luckily [partner] was the head chef and I was the 2nd chef so on days where he worked, I had off, and so we, always someone was home looking after the kids and stuff, so it was good that way, we could sort of alternate that way, but then it got really hard because I became pregnant again, and he sacked me cos I wouldn’t leave, I was like nearly 9 months and I wouldn’t leave…” (Couple mother, 4 children aged 1 to 6 years, works part-time in partner’s business)

Ironically one mother also described her partner’s disappointment in her decision to take a lower status (and paid) job even though it was his own refusal to change his work arrangements to share the care of their child that had pushed her to do so.

“And I even did some work [in previous area of employment] when we moved to Melbourne but uh, it was too hard to keep up… I think [partner] was very disappointed that I opted to [change to new job]. I think he would’ve preferred me to stay working in [previous employment] and um, given the fact that we have a lot of support from [partners’ mother] and she’s very close by and quite prepared to have the input, but she is more cognisant than he is of how stressful it was on me…She’s been very supportive of me going to this full-time…9-5 type job, because its just kinda keeping me sane, yeah.” (Couple mother, works full-time, 1 child aged 6)

Mothers’ perceptions of the roles of fathers in childrearing

Some mothers explicitly stated that fathers were simply less important as primary caregivers than mothers. As mentioned in the above section, there was a sense that these mothers saw an intrinsic role for mothers as caregivers that does not apply to fathers. These women were not criticising their partners’ ability to parent as such, they simply believed that the role of primary caregiver for children was not a fathers’ domain.

“I always personally held the belief that a mother should always be there for her children, and a father obviously, but work commitments allow differences for fathers. I always believed that if I was going to ever be able to be at home with my children I would be at home for them. I would be home when they got home from school and so on and so forth.” (Couple, 4 children at home aged 6 to 16 years, not working)

“Be there for them. Simple things like hear their first words. See them walking for the first time. Helping with the first time they do homework, the spelling…yeah, simple things like that. I think it’s important that the mums are there. Not so much the dads.” (Couple mother, 3 children aged 6 to 9 years, not in paid work)

If pushed on the issue, however, some mothers also questioned the ability of their partners to parent adequately and to be as good a primary carer as they could be as mothers. This was particularly highlighted in the small number of cases where fathers were not employed – often as a result of illness or injury. While in these families the mother had the capacity to be employed and usually the extent of the fathers’ injury itself did not impact on their ability to care, they felt that their partners were not able to provide the level of care that they could as they lacked the patience and interest in children required. In a small number of cases mothers felt that the care offered by fathers negatively impacted on the wellbeing of children.

“...and my husband’s not really into that – like he won’t, he won’t sit down and play with them. He’ll take them somewhere, but he won’t sit down and kind of, colour in with them. I think that’s important and I try to do that, or read a book to them. He won’t do that... because ahm... I don’t know, he just won’t. But if I, I have to do everything, I have to read to them, I’ve got to play with them...” (Couple mother, 2 children aged 3 and 5 years, neither in paid work)

“Even though my husband’s home all the time he still hasn’t got that connection.” (Couple mother, 3 children aged 6 to 9 years, not in paid work)
“And they go, “Oh, he can watch the kids.” But, he’s got no patience for children. Like, fair enough the girls… but the boys, he just hasn’t got the patience to, give ‘em what they want, is what I’m saying. And I can’t go to work, and honestly, be settled at my job, knowing that they might be stressing out at home. You know what I mean? It’s sort of hard for me to explain. But yeah, I can’t go to work and relax, and that’s probably why I came undone last year. Because I tried going to work, and I found myself worrying myself stupid, and how everything was at home… A couple of times I came home and things were a bit of a mess… [Pause] I found it hard to deal with it.” (Couple, 4 children aged 17 to 7, both not working)

Other women also noted that their partners tended to see them as being more capable and hence left the primary care and decisions about childrearing to them.

“[My partner] tends to leave the main decision-making of children and school to me because he seems to think that I know a bit more about it or that I’m solemn enough to go and research it or go and think about it properly and he’s very rarely stepped in. I’ve gone to discuss things with him and he’s always said I’ll leave that up to you and whatever you think. So I’m the decision maker in regards to that but he is supportive…” (Couple mother, 2 children aged 3 years and 20 years, works part-time)

Returning to paid work

As noted above, mothers who did not return to paid work after having children tended to describe this as something that was agreed with their partners. However, in many cases the mothers interviewed felt that their partners saw the decision about whether or not to return to paid work as one that the mothers themselves should take and were “happy” to go along with her decisions. Eventually though many mothers reported that there is a point where the decision-making becomes more shared, with their partners beginning to talk to them about returning to work and the advantages of this additional income to the family budget. This shift most often took place in the lead up to their youngest child starting school.

For some mothers, this resulted in a return to employment – even if at times this seemed a bit daunting after an extended absence from the labour market.

“A big thing was the confidence curve. We sat down and talked about it and it was probably more my husband “Lily, you can do it, we need the money, come on!” It’s better to start, before we actually really critically needed it, to just start saving a little so that we can work out our financial concerns.” (Couple mother, 3 children aged 10 to 16, works part-time)

Others acknowledged that there was indeed a financial impetus to return to work but simply resisted this by not actively seeking work but agreed that they would do so if a job literally “fell into their laps”.

“Oh I would prefer not to work. I really would. I love being at home. I just enjoy it. I’m here when the girls go to school. I’m here when they come home. We’re pretty close… money’s been very tight now… and [partner’s] working all this overtime, that makes it a bit hard because he’s very tired and cranky … The tensions are there. Because there’s not enough money. So, I’ve sort of been thinking if something fell into my lap again, that I might be able to work. Yeah maybe, during the school hours and that…” (Couple mother, 2 children aged 13 and 15, not in paid work)

It is important to note that a focus on breadwinning rather than childrearing by fathers was not seen by mothers as a lack of participation in fatherhood but instead their key role as a good father.

Some women will resist this request explicitly stating that they did not believe their partners’ desire for an increased household income was an adequate reason to return to work, particularly if this was for what they believed to be materialistic purposes such as an overseas holiday or a bigger house rather than a contribution to the costs of childrearing.

“But, no I think everything’s an individual thing. You know like, whether you’ve got a supportive spouse or not, or whether it’s economic and you’re really forced to. I think you can still manage without but [partner] doesn’t. He’d like to go overseas because he saved up for four years to go overseas and he says he’d like to go over every year, well that’s not a good enough reason for me to work I’m sorry.” (Couple mother, 1 child aged 12 years at home, not in paid work)

Conclusion

Analyses of the FAWD qualitative data with couple mothers suggest that decisions about who works and who cares for children when couples become parents are not always based on explicit discussions about the division of labour around these roles. Rather, assumptions based on broader social expectations about the roles of men and women in both childrearing and the labour market appear to be more important. It seems in the contexts of the lives of mothers who participated in the FAWD study, that mothers are still more likely to take on the primary caregiving role while men take primary responsibility for providing the income on which the family lives. This finding is not unexpected and is consistent with other research.
conducted in Australia and overseas (see, for example, ABS, 2006; de Vaus, 2004).

However, it is important to note that a focus on breadwinning rather than childrearing by fathers was not seen by mothers as a lack of participation in fatherhood but instead their key role as a good father. In the eyes of mothers who strongly believed that small children needed their mothers to be at home with them all of the time, a partner (usually husband) who “worked hard” and was a “good provider” enabled them to stay at home and fulfill this crucial mothering role – and hence were fulfilling a most crucial aspect of fatherhood. However, for most mothers, beyond this role of provider the issue of fathers as caregivers was largely ignored. Few mothers considered their partners as equally able to take on the role of primary carer suggesting that men could not be trusted with the emotional aspects of parenting and running a household, lacking the patience and interest in small children required.

The mothers’ narratives hinted that their partners were supportive of this arrangement, and that in most cases each parent seems to comfortably fit into the their expected gender roles - at least while their children were of preschool age. It would of course be interesting in these families to hear what fathers have to say about these expectations.

Earlier Australian Institute of Family Studies research from the Family and Work: the Family's Perspective Study suggests that many fathers desire more time with their children and cherish the opportunity to care for and play with them. In addition some fathers reported their partners exclude them from parenting or taking on caring rather than breadwinning roles either explicitly or implicitly by taking the “default position” of being a mother at home. Further as its seen as her choice he can’t challenge her either way – with some fathers suggesting it was not socially acceptable to do so (Hand & Lewis, 2002). An example of one such father’s feelings about this is given in the quote below.

“I know [my wife] has changed jobs and careers and that’s fine, but she does it with not a lot of consultation. She seems to be able to do that. Whereas if I wanted to change, and up and do something else, it’s a family thing – so its very much still a ‘breadwinner’ role – although [my wife] would probably deny that.” (Father, works full-time, sourced from Hand & Lewis 2002)

Looking at the two studies together, it may be that while some men would prefer a different arrangement that allows them to take a greater role with childrearing and to share the responsibility of providing the family income with their partners, they feel unable to challenge the arrangements already in place in their families. It should also be considered, however, that the inability of men to challenge these expectations may not just be because their partners do not allow the option. For fathers, being the breadwinner may still fit in with his own gender expectations about the right way to live and to raise and support a family – even if it is a role that they find personally challenging.

References


Kelly Hand is a Senior Research Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
I’m delighted that *Family Matters* is dedicating the last of its 2006 issues to focusing on Indigenous families and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion, in my capacity as Chair of the National Indigenous Council (NIC). My perspectives on this issue, however, are shaped by many roles – as mother, mother-in-law and grandmother, as a Magistrate in the Children’s Court of Western Australia and, of course as NIC Chair, to name the more significant ones. I will be drawing on the perspectives offered me by all of these roles in the views and opinions outlined in this article.

At the heart of many Indigenous family groupings you will find children – and usually many more of them than you will find in non-Indigenous families. Children aged fifteen years and under accounted for 39 per cent of the Indigenous population of Australia in the 2001 census but only 20 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous population profile is youthful, and growing at almost double the national average. In contrast, the remaining Australian population is an ageing one (Daly & Smith, 2005). So children, and in particular, the importance of investing in early childhood, provide the key focus of this article. Indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of children in Australia. For these children the health, education and safety of their mothers are key influences, if not key pre-determinants, of their capacity to realise their potential in life.

I will share with you the NIC’s views on how to improve outcomes for Indigenous early childhood development; describe the context that shapes the experiences and outcomes for many Indigenous children; and outline the risks of not addressing the underlying factors. Finally I will touch briefly on research being undertaken to shed light on how positive pathways for Indigenous children can be better understood and replicated.

**NIC views on improving outcomes for Indigenous early childhood**

Healthy babies need healthy mothers and, as my colleagues on the NIC have pointed out many times, early childhood, while commonly understood to refer to age three onwards in the general population, must begin from conception (and I would argue pre-conception) in Indigenous communities - to positively affect the next generation. Drawing on the strong professional backgrounds in health, education, community and social work of several of its members, the NIC has given careful consideration to the issue of early childhood and how to get better outcomes for Indigenous children, most recently at our meeting in September 2006. The NIC also had a hand in shaping the priorities of the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs (MTF) chaired by the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Honourable Mal Brough, MP and comprising Ministers from all key agencies responsible for developing policies, administering programs and delivering services to Indigenous Australians. It is no coincidence that early childhood intervention is one of the MTF’s three priority areas for action.

NIC members are very conscious that early childhood is a vulnerable time when the mother and child are less visible. The child is not yet of school age and, if living in a remote community, may not enjoy access to pre-school and/or health clinics. And, irrespective of whether they are living in remote, regional or urban environments, the mother or the child’s carers may opt not to access these services for a range of reasons.
In addition to re-defining early childhood to begin from conception in Indigenous communities, members identified several other key considerations to bring about better outcomes for Indigenous children. Pre-eminent among these considerations are a whole of government approach including more “joined-up” approaches to education (commencing from early childhood), capacity-building for Indigenous parents and a focus on culturally inclusive service delivery.

**Whole of government**

The NIC regards a whole of government approach as vital to underpinning positive outcomes for Indigenous children and their families across the spectrum of education, health, housing and safe communities. In relation to education, members identified the critical need for clear linkages between kindergarten and early childhood education strategies and providers. Cognisant that responsibility for making these linkages rests largely with states and territories the NIC notes that jurisdictions should be encouraged to develop more coherent early childhood education strategies that focus on creating sustainable change. Culturally inclusive service delivery is another important area on which the NIC has advised government. Any interventions for children and families must recognise and build on cultural beliefs, traditions and practices to achieve optimal outcomes.

**Education**

The NIC strongly believes that all parties involved in the education of Indigenous children must meet their responsibilities if good educational outcomes are to be achieved. While parents play a key role in their children’s education, poor student outcomes are not the sole responsibility of the parents. Effective engagement is required from pre-school through to year 12, in terms of attendance, retention and outcomes to be achieved. We identified the need to address school curricula, including ensuring that Indigenous studies form a core element of curriculum for new teacher training and offering professional development to existing teachers that is relevant to local circumstances. Related workforce issues may also need to be considered, for example, careful selection of teachers for schools with high levels of Indigenous students. Such teachers should be properly informed about the community environment in which they will be working. Consideration should also be given to the benefits of having teachers in remote areas mentored by the local community.

**Parents**

From the NIC’s perspective, it is clear that help is needed, particularly with postnatal care, to build the capacity of parents. Preventative initiatives need to target parents and mothers specifically. Indigenous children are rarely just the concern of their mothers and fathers, but often the entire community. The NIC therefore believes that a community development approach to health promotion and prevention programs will yield the best results for Indigenous children and their families. As discussed below, the NIC’s position, based on members’ collective wisdom and experience, is borne out by the research on this topic.

**Raising Indigenous children: The context**

Research indicates that the health and wellbeing of the mother is one of the most important influences on a child’s wellbeing, as well as a range of social, cultural and historical factors affecting the ability of parents to adequately nurture their children. For Indigenous children such factors may include economic disadvantage; substance abuse; grief and trauma; incarceration; family violence; racism; young maternal age; unhealthy lifestyles including poor nutrition; inadequate antenatal and postnatal care and nutrition; poor general health; inadequate housing; and poor educational outcomes that are evident in many Indigenous households (Daly & Smith, 2005).

And, if a child happens to grow up in what I describe as the “toxic environment” of a dysfunctional Indigenous community, the odds will be stacked very heavily against them from the beginning. Even when that is not the case, we need to remember that for a whole range of reasons, Indigenous children face much tougher odds compared with non-Indigenous children, of growing up to be healthy, positive and strong. Even before they are born, Indigenous children are faced with significant impediments. Statistically, Indigenous children are more likely to experience ill-health from birth, be exposed to the intergenerational effects of disadvantage (e.g. their parents are more likely to be unhealthy, uneducated and unemployed), more likely to end up in the child protection system and the criminal justice system and to rely on welfare (AIHW, 2005).

In contrast, research shows that children who have optimal early childhood experiences in the first years of life have better outcomes throughout their lives. They have better school performance, fewer social and behavioural problems, fewer health problems and are less likely to be teenage parents, use drugs or be involved in crime. This in turn results in significant savings in the areas of remedial education, school drop-outs, welfare and crime.

The earlier that risks are identified and addressed (for example at birth and the years prior to school), the more likely it is to achieve positive child development and sustained outcomes over the life course.

Research also shows that it is more cost effective to prevent problems than it is to fund programs to intervene later in life. We know that Indigenous children
experience many problems that are preventable early in their lives. From a public policy perspective it seems abundantly clear that prevention offers a better return on investment than merely funding corrective programs into the future.

**Research on return on investment in early childhood**

A substantial body of overseas-based research (primarily from the US and UK) supports the economic benefits of intervening in the early years of children’s lives. While this research shows a range in the proportion of return on investment – what it suggests is that for every dollar spent – a minimum of two dollars of taxpayers money is saved.

Closer to home Queensland Health funded research in 2002 and 2003 to evaluate the efficacy and general acceptability of the ‘Triple P’ program (a multi-level system of parenting and family support available to all children from birth to 16 years) for Indigenous families presenting with concerns about their parenting, or their child’s behaviour or development. *Indigenous Triple P Groups* were conducted by Indigenous Health and Child Health workers in community settings.

The program was found to be effective in significantly lowering rates of problem child behaviour reported by parents participating in the program. Parents also reported significantly lower reliance on dysfunctional parenting practices. Additionally intervention gains were maintained at the six-month follow-up, with significant further improvement of parenting style. As noted by the researchers, “these results provide support for the efficacy of a culturally tailored approach to Group Triple P as a behavioural family intervention program for Indigenous families, and are some of the first outcomes from a randomised controlled trial of behavioural family intervention for Australian Indigenous families. Additionally these outcomes may be seen as a significant step in increasing appropriate service provision for Indigenous families and reducing barriers to accessing available services in the community”.

Another initiative, the *Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture Program* implemented in the Pilbara/Gascoyne Health region in Western Australia in 2003 has generated benefits in health for mother and child that can be expected to lead to improved health and wellbeing for mothers and their children over the medium to longer term. The success of this program is underpinned by the community development approach advocated by the NIC. The Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture Program relies on and supports senior women in participating communities to provide direct support to pregnant women and their families. The senior women encourage attendance at antenatal care clinics and provide advice on nutrition. Connections and support for involvement in cultural events is an important part of the program. It therefore has a long-term outlook with lasting benefits rather than treating only immediate health problems (Exten, 2003).

**The future**

So we know that prevention is more effective than waiting to tackle the pressing problems in the area of Indigenous early childhood. I have outlined some initiatives generating positive outcomes in Australian Indigenous communities, principally the *Group Triple P* and *Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture Programs*. There is scope for further work in distilling what helps Indigenous children stay on track (or get back on track) to become healthy, positive and strong and what is the influence of family, extended family and community in the early years of life and growing up?

Work commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) on a longitudinal study of Indigenous children entitled *Footprints in Time* will go some way towards providing an evidence base to cast light on the ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are influenced by earlier events in life. The study will concentrate on babies (0-12 months old) and 4-5 year olds. Importantly, unlike much current research that focuses on the children and communities that aren’t doing so well, one of the expected benefits of the *Footprints in Time* longitudinal research is that the pathways to positive outcomes and factors that promote resilience can be better understood. I sometimes despair about the lack of positive stories about Indigenous Australia – so I welcome the focus on children and communities that are doing well. It’s time we explored the reasons why so we can seek to replicate these factors to lift outcomes for Indigenous children and their families across the board.

**Endnotes**

1 A summary of the results can be accessed under “Indigenous Group Triple P” at http://www.pfsc.uq.edu.au/research/completed.html

2 For background on *Footprints in Time* visit the website at www.faicsia.gov.au

**References**


Dr Sue Gordon is Chair of the National Indigenous Council.
The role of Indigenous Family Liaison Officers in the Family Court of Australia

Josephine Akee

This viewpoint is an edited version of a speech given by Ms Josephine Akee at the International Forum on Family Relationships in Transition: Legislative, Practical Response, 1-2 December 2005.

The Aborigines of mainland Australia and the Torres Strait Islanders of the Torres Strait see ourselves as the two Indigenous peoples of this nation. As two peoples, we do have some things in common but we are two culturally different peoples, and there is diversity among each of our peoples. As first peoples of this nation, our ancestors and their way of life have been impacted on since colonisation. For instance some of you may not be aware that our peoples have gone through a time of having to live under the supposed protection of an Aborigines Act and a Torres Strait Islander Act. Our peoples’ lives were such that others (not our own people) thought, did, and made our own people do, what was supposed to be best for us - and we are talking about the “best interests” of the children. I’d just like to highlight the fact that best interests of the children according to what aspects? The right of thinking and doing for ourselves was significantly removed from our people.

Another important impact has been “the stolen generations” issue, which, no doubt, most of you are aware of, and which I won’t go into. So not only were our adults treated like children but their children were also taken away from them. This is very significant to how our people operate today. The purpose of my sharing this piece of information with you at the outset is so that it might help you gain some kind of an understanding as to the fact that we are different lots of people (the two Indigenous races of Australia) who operate differently and who, at times, need to be treated differently.

It is also not uncommon for our people to have a distrust in:

- the Australian system;
- the Government departments;
- the Courts;
- the non-Indigenous agencies and service providers; and
- programs and services.

More so, if there are none of our own people working in these particular places and services to:

- help us know about those service deliverers and their programs;
- show our people how to access these programs;
- enhance the possibility of our people coming to trust them

then this makes access difficult. Accessing services and programs without having any faith that we will be dealt with appropriately and with positive outcomes, as opposed to the negatives is hard.

I work in the family law courts (the Family Court of Australia) and I have been with the court for some seven or eight years. I am one of the six Indigenous Family Liaison Officers employed by the Court. There are two Liaison Officers placed in Darwin (a male and a female). They are both Aboriginal. Similarly another two are in Alice Springs. In Cairns there are also two of us: an Aboriginal brother and myself (the Torres Strait Islander Family Liaison Officer). These positions are very limited – six for the whole of Australia, (excluding W.A., which has its own family law system).
Our positions were established as a result of the Family Court consulting with Indigenous community members – first in the Northern Territory and then in North Queensland. Community people, as a result of those consultations, strongly recommended that if Indigenous people are to know about, access, and receive appropriately delivered services from the Family Court, then the Court needed to employ Indigenous people to enhance the possibility of that happening. To my understanding the Court has done that. While the Court has needed to extend its number of Indigenous Family Liaison officers, its hands have been tied.

I will now share with you some information about my work as an Indigenous Family Liaison Officer. I work in the mediation part of the Family Court, and basically see myself as a link between my fellow Indigenous Australians and the Family Law Courts. My job entails responding to Indigenous clients’ first contact with the Family Law Courts. I take details about Indigenous clients’ circumstances, their concerns, their issues. In doing so, I am then able to suggest to them which other service deliverers they might like to approach. For instance I would suggest that they get legal advice. I would need to stress “free” legal advice because, as most of you would know, Indigenous people often aren’t necessarily people who can afford the heavy costs of legal representation. So a significant part of my job is to make sure that my people are clear about the first instance of free legal advice about their status in a given situation, and also the difference between that and seeking legal representation.

Can I say here and now that I have had a good working relationship back home in Queensland with Legal Aid Queensland. It has recently seen fit to employ fellow Indigenous people in their ranks and who, like me, work as the link between Indigenous people out in the communities and Legal Aid. So it’s not uncommon for me to pick up the phone whilst I am talking with a client and say “Look, I have this sister in the Torres Strait” (or wherever she might be) and “May, can you help me?” (May is my counterpart in Legal Aid.) So those sorts of conversations, and the very fact that I can say to my fellow Indigenous person on the other end of the phone or in the room with me, that “I will now hand you over to another Indigenous person who will help you understand their system through Queensland Legal Aid”, are good things. It’s not good for people to say “Well look, they [Legal Aid] are down Spence Street, and you go down round the corner and four doors up”. That is not necessarily going to get our people there.

Originally when I first started in the Family Court I was not criticised but was asked: “Why are you hand feeding and namby-pambying Indigenous people?” I would respond: “Because our people need that at this stage. They need to be given and paid the courtesy of explaining where they have got to go, because our people might have English as a third language”. Even when I pick up the phone to take a client’s call, it’s interesting for me say in my nice English: “Hello Family Court here. Josephine, Family Liaison Officer speaking” and you can hear the person mumbling at the other end of the line. Then when I wouldn’t get a further response, I would then break into what we call Torres Strait Creole: “It’s only me – Josephine talking” and then you can almost feel the difference, and then they will open up. And I say: “You don’t have to speak good English when you speak to me, a fellow Islander”. We do things like that and it makes a difference.

As well as that, I refer people once I know what their issues are. It’s not uncommon if, for instance, once it’s known that there is an Indigenous person working in Family Court that they could say: “Can you help me? I don’t know where to turn to.” I would say: “Ok this is what Family Court can do for you but you need to go and seek help from the Women’s Shelter, and I will steer you over there. I will link you up with the Women’s Shelter. I will even take you to the Women’s Shelter, and you need to also talk to that mob down the road”. (I would say the “welfare mob down the road” because they are the people to talk to about child protection issues. Now it’s not uncommon for our people to back away and say, “No I don’t want to go there”, and I would say, “No, they have got a bad track record of taking our kids but they have got to smarten up their act. They don’t do that anymore - they are not supposed to.” These are the sorts of things that I have to encourage my people about.

I also have to explain the difference between “free legal advice at the first instance”, and “legal representation” – to the point where I say that “you need to get legal representation if you can’t come and use our mediation service, (which is the privileged mediation service at the first instance) then hopefully we might be able to help you and your family members get yourselves sorted out.

In the event that it doesn’t happen, then you might have to get legal representation, so you have to fill in this form. You go down to May (at Legal Aid) and she will help you fill out the form, ok?” Otherwise my people will say: “I don’t want to fill out any form”. That’s because we are not a writing people traditionally. After that, I would also explain the mediation process – the privileged mediation and the due full process – in both instances I can participate.

Therefore I can jointly mediate with one of the Court’s Family Consultants and that could be in the privileged family dispute resolution or the ones where the case goes ahead. I can also assist Family Consultants as well as “Reg 8s” (Psychologists or Social Workers from outside brought in by the Court to do family reports). I assist them with setting up interviews and I link them up with the other players in a case. This is because we are an extended family mob.
and you don’t just deal with the mother and the father. We do those sorts of things, and I, in fact, help with the interviews. I work with other registries, not just my registry in Cairns, because there are not enough of us (Indigenous Family Liaison Officers)

I assist and support Independent Children’s Lawyers and client legal representatives in a similar way - provide information about the structure of the family and the significant players in a given case. I link them to appropriate cultural advisors and elders. These elders must have the relevant knowledge and the relevant authority to be able to provide the required information regarding protocols etc.

One of the things that our people have been highly concerned about is that “wrong people” are being brought in to give special or expert (cultural) advice. It has been brought to my notice that anthropologists have been brought in to talk about and throw light on our Indigenous culture. Our people are saying, “These are white fellows that have got some good education at some university, but they are not us. “We have to have our own people.” It comes back again to the fact that people (Indigenous) might not have the formal qualifications – but I would argue any time that what’s important is the formal qualifications according to your culture and that’s something that definitely needs to be recognized.

I have also planned and delivered information sessions and workshops for Indigenous community members – be they in discrete Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders communities or in urban areas. I have also jointly facilitated (with other Court staff) cultural diversity training sessions for other staff within the Family Court. I have worked together with the other Indigenous Family Liaison Officers on a module for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture Awareness for various registries of the Family Court. There we have stressed the need for having participation by Indigenous people – be they elders or respected people who have the authority to throw light on the cultural traits of a given locality.

It is in these small and varied – yet important – ways that I try to make the family law system more accessible to my people. But there is still much more to be done.

Endnote

1 Initially in the Family Court the Indigenous Family Liaison Officers were known as Indigenous Family Consultants who worked closely with Court Counsellors/Mediators. However in 2006 changes within the Family Court resulted in the changing of titles for some positions, namely that Counsellors/Mediators became Family Consultants and Indigenous Family Consultants became Indigenous Family Liaison Officers.

Ms Josephine Akee is a Torres Strait Islander mother of five adult daughters and grandmother of seventeen grandchildren. She is a qualified primary school teacher. Her work background has mostly been in public-sector service delivery to Indigenous Australians, the last seven or so years of which have been in the Family Court of Australia. Indigenous community-level involvement has added to her awareness of issues that impact negatively on Indigenous people, but, she believes, none more so than the breakdown of how Indigenous families operate. Josephine has been a member of the Family Law Council, and is currently a member of the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council (NADRAC).
as “mainstream” agencies that have traditionally lacked a focus on services and programs for Indigenous people. A further question is the extent to which Indigenous Advisors will be adequately resourced to engage with Indigenous families living in remote and rural areas.

Efforts are also currently being made to develop dispute resolution services that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous families. Mediation training was recently provided by Regional Extended Families Services (in Melbourne) to Indigenous staff working for agencies that come under the umbrella of the Family Relationship Service Providers (FRSP) program. The training aims to develop the capacity of these services to provide family dispute resolution and counselling to Indigenous families.

There are several other initiatives that are also relevant when looking at Indigenous families’ access to the family law system. One important initiative impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is the expansion of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services across the country. Thirteen new FVPLS were established in remote and rural areas this year effectively doubling the number of these services in the community. These services provide vital assistance and support to Indigenous people who are victims of family violence or who are at immediate risk of family violence. The expansion of these services is to be commended as an important step forward in addressing the issue of family violence in Indigenous communities.

Recent amendments to the Family Law Act have also introduced significant changes to the way the court considers Indigenous cultural issues in children’s cases. The most prominent change is to be found in the new Section 60CC that covers how a court determines the child’s best interests. The new legislation has much clearer provisions relating to how the Court considers the best interests of Indigenous children. Section 60CC states that, among other things, the Court must consider:

(i) the child’s right to enjoy his or her Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture (including the right to enjoy that culture with other people who share that culture); and

(ii) the likely impact any proposed parenting order under this Part will have on that right

Section 60CC(6) provides further clarification of the above requirement stating that the Indigenous child’s right to enjoy his or her culture includes the right:

(a) to maintain a connection with that culture; and

(b) to have the support, opportunity and encouragement necessary:

(i) to explore the full extent of that culture, consistent with the child’s age and developmental level and the child’s views; and

(ii) to develop a positive appreciation of that culture.

This section provides clear direction to Judicial Officers in considering the importance of the Indigenous child’s right to a connection with their culture. It emphasises that in making a parenting order the Court will need to consider whether a parent displays the capacity and willingness to promote the child’s right to enjoyment of, and participation in Indigenous culture, as well as a capacity and willingness to assist the child to develop a positive appreciation of that culture. This is an important consideration in dealing with the many matters that involve parents of differing cultural backgrounds.

Section 61F of the Act also has highly significant implications for how the Court considers the best interests of Indigenous children. Section 61F states that in considering the issue of equal shared parental responsibility, or in identifying those who may have exercised, or who may exercise, parental responsibility for a child,

“the Court must have regard to any kinship obligations, and child-rearing practices, of the child’s Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture.”

This provision effectively removes a blind spot that existed in the old legislation in that under that legislation the Court was unable to effectively consider the role of extended family and kinship obligations impacting upon a child. Under the new legislation the Court must consider these important aspects of Indigenous culture.

In concluding, these initiatives aim to more positively engage Indigenous families in the family law system and as such are welcome developments. In particular, the changes to the Family Law Act that relate to Indigenous children and their families are to be commended. It is now vitally important that these initiatives and legislative changes be supported and appropriately resourced by government if they are to make a significant impact on the barriers that impede Indigenous people’s access to the family law system.

Endnote


Stephen Ralph is Manager of Child Dispute Services, and National Coordinator of Indigenous Programs at the Family Law Courts, Darwin.
**INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES**

**INSTITUTE IN ASIA**

![Image of Ruth Weston and colleagues in Singapore](image1)

*Left to right: Michalina Stawyskyj, Glenys Beauchamp, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, David Hazlehurst, and Ruth Weston at the East Asia Ministerial Forum.*

**In Singapore**

The second East Asian Ministerial Forum was held in Singapore 6-7 November 2006 and was hosted by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Singapore. As the Institute’s representative, Ruth Weston joined the delegation from the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). The delegation was led by Ms Glenys Beauchamp (Deputy Secretary, FaCSIA) and included Mr David Hazlehurst (Group Manager, Families Group, FaCSIA) and Ms Michalina Stawyskyj (Branch Manager, International Branch, FaCSIA).

The theme of the forum was Building Resilient Families – an issue that is clearly important in all countries given the many challenges that families are confronting in a world marked by increasing globalisation and modernisation. Other countries represented at the forum were: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (which, together with FaCSIA, co-hosted the first EAMFF held in Hanoi in 2004).

The first forum, which was co-hosted by the Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children and FaCSIA in 2004, culminated in the Hanoi Statement for Regional Cooperation on the Family. The statement embodied agreement that participating countries would work more closely with each other in conducting research on family wellbeing, and in formulating evidence-based policies and programs for families.

The second forum provided a platform for countries to: (a) outline cooperative endeavours that had been initiated in the two intervening years; (b) reflect on the challenges facing families in their countries and policy responses; and (c) develop a Singapore Statement on Building Family Relationships. This statement encapsulated agreement by participating countries to: develop appropriate indicators of family resilience; strengthen mechanisms to monitor family resilience; study factors affecting family resilience; establish policies and programs to promote family resilience and provide families with opportunities to realise and maximise their potential; evaluate the effectiveness of such policies and programs; and exchange information on such policies, programs, research, and researchers and other relevant experts.

Among other things, the Singapore Statement acknowledged the importance of cooperation and collaboration of countries in the region in achieving these endeavours.

**In Vietnam**

Over the past two years, the Institute has been working closely with the Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPFC) in the development of the Vietnam National Family Survey. This survey was conducted in early 2006. Recently, the Institute was invited to help scope the planning of a more extensive, longitudinal survey of families. Ruth Weston spent four days from 1-4 November 2006 in Hanoi working with members of the VCPFC and UNICEF, and presented a paper on longitudinal research methodology at a workshop hosted by VCPFC.

![Image of Ruth Weston and colleagues in Vietnam](image2)

*Ruth Weston is working with members of the Family Department, VCPFC and Program Officer, UNICEF. The meetings were held in the VCPFC offices in Hanoi. On her left are: Ms Ngo Thi Ngoc Anh, Deputy Director, Family Department, VCPFC; Mr Le Do Ngoc, Director, Family Department, VCPFC. To the right are: Ms Nguyen Thi Van Anh, Program Officer, UNICEF; Mr Tran Van Thao, Program Officer, Family Department; and Ms Hoang Thi Tay Ninh, Program Officer, Family Department.*

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Australian Institute of Family Studies
In Korea

Dr Matthew Gray, Deputy Director (Research) at the Institute attended the international conference Facing the Future: Policy Challenges in the Ageing Era: Policy Forum in Korea 13-14 September 2006. The forum was co-hosted by the Presidential Committee on Ageing Society Population Policy, the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Joint OECD/Korea Regional Centre on Health and Social Policy and the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs. Participants included Korea’s Prime Minister Han Myung Suk, Minister Rhyu Simin at Ministry of Health and Welfare, Civil Executive Coordinator Park Joo Hyun at Presidential Committee on Ageing Society and Population Policy, Chairman Kim Tae Hong at Health and Welfare Committee under the National Assembly, Former Prime Minister of New Zealand Jenny Shipley, and Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD, Richard Hecklinger.

The forum addressed a broad range of issues related to demographic changes, including pension, family, health care, and housing policies. The forum focused on the ramifications of population ageing, and possible policy responses to alleviate some of the potential adverse effects of population ageing.

Dr Gray presented a paper entitled ‘Fertility and family policy in Australia: Trends and challenges’. Laurent Caussat, Head of Synthesis, Economic Research and Evaluation Unit at the Directorate of Research, Studies and Evaluation and Statistics in France also presented a paper in this session which described the family policies in France and how they impact on fertility rates. Willem Adema, Head of Asian Social and Health Outreach in the OECD presented a paper on Family and Fertility Policies in OECD Countries: Effects and Limitations.

Other sessions at the forum included on the role of Public Pension Policy, Health Financing and Expenditure Policies, and Housing Policy.

In Malaysia

Research Fellow, Diana Smart, attended the Family Scholars Colloquium held in Kuala Lumpur on 7-8 August 2006. The Colloquium was sponsored by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia, and the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development. The colloquium’s theme was ‘Challenges and opportunities for protecting and strengthening the family’. Professor Richard Wilkins, Director of the Doha Institute, opened the colloquium, Professor Gavin Jones from the National University of Singapore gave a keynote address, and there were ten presentations by speakers from Australia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

Diana presented a paper on the child, family, peer and school factors associated with the development of adolescent antisocial behaviour, drawing on Australian Temperament Project data on this topic. Some common themes emerging from the colloquium were fertility rates, which are mostly decreasing across the region and are at critically low levels in some countries; the increasing proportion of older persons in many populations; and violence against women. Several explanations for the fall in fertility rates were proposed. It was also interesting to hear of attempts to develop family wellbeing indices that could be used to measure general population trends. The papers are to be published in a Colloquium Proceedings in 2007.
In Ireland
The Institute also received an invitation from Professor Sheila Greene, Director, Children’s Research Centre, Trinity College, Dublin, for Carol to meet with and provide advice to the project team for Growing Up in Ireland, a similar cohort study about to get underway in the Republic of Ireland. In addition to meetings, Carol also gave a presentation to a wide audience from research and government agencies about the key learnings, both operational and analytical, from the first wave of Growing Up in Australia.

GROWING UP IN AUSTRALIA GOES INTERNATIONAL

The Institute and Growing Up in Australia, The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, have been well represented in a number of overseas locations in recent months.

In Britain
At the inaugural International Conference for Child Cohort Studies, hosted by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) and held in Oxford, UK, during 12-14 September 2006, Growing Up in Australia prominently featured in a number of presentations. Of particular interest was a paper, co-authored by Institute researcher, Dr Jennifer Baxter, which utilised the first longitudinal data available from the study to compare the return to work patterns of mothers in Australia and Britain.

In Ireland
The Institute also received an invitation from Professor Sheila Greene, Director, Children’s Research Centre, Trinity College, Dublin, for Carol to meet with and provide advice to the project team for Growing Up in Ireland, a similar cohort study about to get underway in the Republic of Ireland. In addition to meetings, Carol also gave a presentation to a wide audience from research and government agencies about the key learnings, both operational and analytical, from the first wave of Growing Up in Australia.

In Hong Kong
On her return journey to Australia, Carol was invited to present to the Hong Kong Department of Health on the benefits of longitudinal studies. Carol is pictured with Dr Cynthia Leung (on the left) and Dr Shirley Leung, from the Department.

The Institute Activities

Institute Activities

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is moving!

The Institute will move in February 2007 to
Level 20  485 La Trobe Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Our phone and fax numbers remain the same.
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LAUNCH OF THE PARENTING ORDERS PROGRAM

On 23 August, the Institute’s Robyn Parker was present when the Attorney-General, the Honourable Mr Philip Ruddock officially launched the new Parenting Orders Program offered at Centacare in Footscray. The Parenting Orders Program is part of Centacare’s “Our Kids” program, which offers a range of services to parents and children who are experiencing high levels of conflict over their parenting arrangements following separation or divorce.

The services are designed to help families minimise conflict through the separation phase, and assist in negotiating post-separation parenting arrangements. The needs of the children are given close attention in the program, through child-focused and child-inclusive processes in which parents are helped to understand the effect their conflict has on their children. Family members, including children, can receive a range of services such as counselling, mediation, and parent and peer group support as part of this program.

RECENT FAMILY LAW CONFERENCE IN PERTH

The annual national family law conference hosted by the Family Law Section of the Law Council of Australia remains one of the most important events for family lawyers, judicial officers, family law researchers, and policy makers in Australia. The 12th National Family Law Conference, held in Perth 22-26 October this year, was attended by over 700 delegates from around Australia, and featured a number of highly-regarded international speakers, including Dr Joan Kelly (USA), the Right Honourable the Baroness Hale of Richmond (UK), Her Honour Judge Maureen Roddy (UK), His Honour Judge David Harris (UK), Principal Family Court Judge Peter Boshier (NZ), and Professor Mark Henaghan (NZ). The conference was preceded by the Family Court of Australia Judges’ Annual Conference which was held in Fremantle. Many of the international speakers also spoke at this conference.

Dr Bruce Smyth, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute, presented with Dr Joan Kelly at both conferences. Their joint sessions focused on parenting after separation and the importance of child-focused parenting arrangements. New Institute data on the stability of different patterns of care were also presented. Bruce also presented the After Dinner speech at the Judges’ conference, the topic of which was “Judges and Technology”.

Both conferences (and the largely humorous after-dinner speech) were extremely successful, with much of the discussion focusing on the introduction of the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 (Cth). Adelaide will host next year’s National Family Law Conference.
PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILES WORKSHOP

In September and October 2006, a series of half day workshops were held by the research staff from the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA). These workshops were held for staff from Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) programs interested in contributing information about their promising practices to a new national database. The Promising Practice Profiles (PPP) database will identify “what works” in the area of early childhood development and early intervention.

The workshops took place in venues kindly provided by the Benevolent Society in Sydney, Early Years Team at Seaton Park Primary School in Adelaide; Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors Inc (ASeTTS) in Perth, Australian Institute of Family Studies in Melbourne and Mission Australia in Brisbane.

The PPP database is part of the Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. One of the main objectives of this evaluation is to identify “what works” in early childhood development and early intervention and to disseminate the information widely. Policy makers, key stakeholders and service providers will find the PPP database to be a valuable resource. It will assist in the planning of appropriate programs, provide a vehicle for sharing information about “what works” in different settings and enhance the quality of services provided to families and communities.

The workshops were interactive and provided an overview of the submission process, a case study and an opportunity for participants to discuss their own practice. Feedback indicated that participants found the workshops helpful.


In the previous edition of Family Matters (No. 74), in the article by Jennifer Baxter and Matthew Gray titled ‘Paid work characteristics of mothers with infants’, two of the columns in table A (p. 36) were transposed.

Please go to the following website for the full text version of this article which contains the corrected Table A:

In 2006 the Australian Institute of Family Studies became a founding NAPCAN National Child Protection Week Partner. Under this agreement the Institute agreed to help support the promotion of the National Child Protection Week primarily through the National Child Protection Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse have helped to promote National Child Protection Week through the Clearinghouse website, Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter and Childprotect the email discussion list.

On 3 September the Minister for Families and Community Services, the Honourable Mal Brough launched National Child Protection Week 2006, saying that these issues were vitally important and could no longer be ignored. This year’s theme for National Child Protection Week was “Young Visions for a Child Friendly Australia”.


As part of National Child Protection Week the Clearinghouse seek to engage with community-based organisations. This year, Dr Leah Bromfield provided a presentation to a Rotary Club in regional Victoria titled Child abuse prevention: Everyone’s responsibility.

As a founding NAPCAN National Child Protection Week Partner, for the first time this year the Australian Institute of Family Studies held a public seminar during National Child Protection Week - Dr Paul Delfabbro presented a seminar titled, The multiple and complex needs of Australian children in out-of-home care and appropriate service responses (for more information see p. 90)
On 19 October 2006, Dr Jennifer McIntosh joined staff and guests of the Institute to discuss research she has recently conducted comparing the outcomes of child focused and child inclusive family dispute resolution interventions. Dr McIntosh is a clinical child psychologist, family therapist, and research and training consultant. Much of her work in Australia, the UK, and the USA has explored the experiences and needs of children and parents in the face of trauma and loss, and in particular, the effects of parental conflict after separation and divorce.

Dr McIntosh provided an overview of the "Child focused and child inclusive mediation: A Comparative study of outcomes" project, in which two groups of separating parents and their children followed distinct pathways through family law mediation in order to settle their parenting disputes. The first mediation intervention was a form of child focused mediation, and the second was a form of child inclusive mediation. Each intervention aimed to reduce parental conflict, and enhance parental awareness, in order to improve child well-being.

In child focused mediation (what is considered to be ‘mainstream’ mediation), child related issues are the central focus and parents are encouraged to be mindful of their children’s needs. In child inclusive mediation, parents are also encouraged to focus on their children’s needs, however, consultation is also undertaken with the children themselves and their words are fed back to their parents. Dr McIntosh explained that during this process the mediator is both an ally for the children and a facilitator and support person for the parents. For the purpose of Dr McIntosh’s research, three specially trained and supervised dispute resolution teams administered each intervention to both the child focused group and the child inclusive group.

Dr McIntosh summarised some of the study’s key findings to date, for example: on average, parents from both groups were found to have very poor parental alliance ratings at intake, while 50 per cent of children - regardless of age - felt that they were the cause of parental conflict. At one year following intake, both treatments were associated with lasting impacts on measures such as conflict, a child’s closeness to their parents, and a child’s mental health and perception of conflict. However, a number of differences were reported between the child focused and child inclusive interventions, for example: mothers and fathers in the child inclusive intervention reported similar outcomes, whereas mothers and fathers in the child focused intervention differed; fathers from the child focused group reported the least satisfaction and happiness of all parental groups; and children who had been through child inclusive mediation were more likely to possess fewer emotional symptoms than children who had been through child focused mediation. Overall, Dr McIntosh reported that couples with adequate parental alliances at intake performed equally as well in both child focused and child inclusive mediation. However, couples with poor alliances at intake benefited most from child inclusive mediation.

To conclude, Dr McIntosh discussed the need for greater dialogue between psychology and family law in order to more effectively work with parents (that is, to take the litigant out of parenting disputes and bring the parents in). Dr McIntosh argued that while a decade ago the legal and psychological disciplines did not speak, a changing culture offers promise in bridging this divide.

"The essentials of life and who is missing out on them: Dimensions of disadvantage among Australian families"

(Seminar held at the Institute on 16 November 2006)

Professor Peter Saunders has been Director of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales since 1987. Among other credentials, he has worked as a consultant for a range of national and international organisations, including the Economic Planning Advisory Council, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, the International Social Security Association, and the Royal Commission on Social Policy in New Zealand. He is currently an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow working on the concepts and measurement of poverty and inequality.

In this seminar (the final seminar at the current AIFS premises), Professor Saunders reported on the initial findings from a major new study of what Australians think are the essentials of life, and who is missing out on them. The centrepiece of the project is data collected from two surveys, one of the general population (n = 2,704), the other of welfare service users (clients, n = 673) asking about a range of attitudes to poverty, including views on what items are essential, whether or not people have them and, if not, whether this is because they cannot afford them. The study is funded by the Australian Research Council and is being conducted by a team at SPRC led by Peter Saunders in collaboration with the Australian Council of Social Services, Mission Australia, The Brotherhood of St Laurence and Anglicare, Sydney.
The research attempts to define and identify the essentials of life, and to establish which Australians are deprived of these identified essentials, and to what extent. One of the features of the research is that people were asked to identify the essentials, rather than these items being predetermined by the researchers. The top five identified essentials from the survey are: medical treatment; warm clothes and bedding; a substantial meal once per day; an ability to afford prescribed medicines; and access to a local doctor or hospital (each of these were perceived as essential by over 99 per cent of the respondents). There was overall agreement between the general population group and the welfare client group on what items were considered essential.

On these essential items, significant levels of deprivation were identified, particularly among the welfare (‘client’) group. For example, nearly 10 per cent of the general population and nearly 30 per cent of the client group do not have a decent and secure home, over 10 per cent of the client group can not afford one substantial meal per day. Other striking findings included that about 25 per cent of the client group and five per cent of the general population group could not afford prescribed medications; over 40 per cent (client) and 10 per cent (general) could not afford dental treatment for themselves; and nearly 30 per cent and 10 per cent could not afford dental check-ups for their children.

The measure of multiple deprivations revealed a stark picture of inequality in Australian society. Professor Saunders argued that once the ‘essentials’ had been identified, the number of these items that people do not have access to because they can’t afford them (are deprived of) were calculated for each group. Among the ‘client’ group, 55.5 per cent reported being deprived of four essential items or more, compared to 14 per cent of the general population. Looking at even more extreme levels of deprivation, 28.9 per cent of the client group are deprived of eight or more essential items, compared to 4.1 per cent of the general population. The survey also clearly indicates that people’s subjective wellbeing and happiness is, at least partly, dependent on their ability to afford the essentials. The greater people’s level of deprivation, the more likely they were to rate themselves as being of poor health and as unhappy.

Institute Seminars

In 2007 the Australian Institute of Family Studies is continuing its series of seminars presenting research on national and international issues related to family. The seminars, designed to promote a forum for discussion and debate, are free and open to the public.

Seminars are held at 11.30am (usually on the third Thursday of each month) and run from one to one-and-a-half-hours. Seminars are held in the Seminar Room at the Institute’s new premises, Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne VIC 3000.

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Some further analysis revealed more detailed patterns of which sections of the community are unable to afford the essentials. Levels of deprivation are higher among younger age groups, sole parents, and people with disabilities. The clearest difference, however (along with being the client of a welfare service), is Indigenous status. In the general population group, Aboriginal people experience approximately three to four times the level of deprivation of non-Indigenous people.

In conclusion, Saunders’s research has identified that there is widespread agreement in the community about what the essentials for living are. Saunders’s research suggests that significant numbers of Australians can not afford these necessities.
The following selection of books on family-related topics are recent additions to the Institute’s Library. They are available through Libraries, through the Institute’s Library via the Inter Library Loan system, or for purchase from good book shops. Prices are given as and when supplied.

**Beyond the foster care system**: The future for teens, by Betsy Krebs and Paul Pitcoff, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 2006.

In this exploration of the US foster care system, the authors argue that the existing system sets young people up to fail by not adequately preparing them for adult life. Chapters examine: how the foster care system operates; education for teenagers in foster care; policy advocacy for those in foster care; preparation for independent living; and teaching self-advocacy to young people in foster care. Using examples from their own work within the foster care system, and the stories of young people themselves, the authors advocate for alternatives to the way the system operates at the moment. Anyone who works within the foster care system would find this book invaluable, and thought provoking reading.


In recent years governments have placed an emphasis on improving child outcomes through parenting programs. This study examines factors that influence the effectiveness of parenting programs in disadvantaged areas. The program studied was aimed at parents of five and six year olds attending four primary schools in a disadvantaged area of London. The parents came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with nearly half being one-parent families. The authors looked at who enrolled in the program, how many parents dropped out (and why), the cost of the program and what parenting practices (and therefore child behaviour) changed because of the program. Attention was also given to how the cultural background of the parents impacted upon the effectiveness of the program. The authors conclude that parenting practices can be improved but that a number of factors need to be taken into consideration for parenting programs to have the desired impact. Those involved in delivering parenting programs would benefit from reading this detailed report.


The premise of this book is that evaluation should enhance the quality of interventions designed to solve or ameliorate problems.

Census report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees and Census Survey results: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees, Australian Public Service Commission, Canberra, 2006. (Available to download from http://www.apsc.gov.au or telephone 02 6295 4422)

To obtain information about the employment of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) in the Australian Public Service (APS), this Census was conducted by the Australian Public Service Commission in November 2005. Findings cover: employee profiles; where are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders working in the APS; recruitment; managing, sustaining and engaging ATSI employees; career progression; relationships and behaviour in the workplace; agency commitment to ATSI employees; and challenges facing the Australian Public Service. Comparisons were also made (where possible) between the results of the ATSI employee survey and that of non-indigenous employees from the results of the APS State of the Service Report. These two reports give valuable insight into not only the ‘facts and figures’ regarding Indigenous employment within the APS, but also the attitudes, issues and difficulties faced by ATSI employees.
Custodial grandparenting: Individual, cultural, and ethnic diversity, edited by Bert Hayslip and Julie Hicks Patrick, Springer, New York 2006. Approximately four million children in the US are living in grandparent headed families. Most of these grandparents did not anticipate they would ever be raising children again and for many it caused significant upheaval in their lives. The 19 chapters of this book focus on the diversity and variability of grandparent headed families. Individual chapters focus on: disruption to work hours and income of grandparents; role satisfaction of traditional compared to custodial grandparents; support needs of grandparents; the age and health of grandparents and the gender of grandparents. A number of chapters also focus on issues to do with race and ethnicity and cross-cultural variations in grandparenting. This book would be a valuable resource for anyone who works with grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.


This academic text examines the social, historical and legal background to Australia’s family law system. Individual chapters cover: law, society and family; the development of Australian family law; constitutional law and the family; formation of marriage; nullity of marriage and divorce; children and parents; financial support; property disputes; and violence and abuse. Recent changes to family law are also discussed, as are numerous examples of case law.


This collection of Australian papers examine the best practice models, frameworks and approaches available to social workers and human services practitioners. Chapters are arranged around the ten key issues of child protection; young offenders; adult offenders; mental health; disability; healthcare; ageing; rural and remote communities; Indigenous Australians and migrants and refugees. Each chapter includes a list of review questions, useful websites and a bibliography.

Carole Jean is the Reference Librarian at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
This short selection of forthcoming family-related conferences is taken from the Australian Institute of Family Studies website conference listing, which is updated regularly. For the complete, up-to-date list, refer to www.aifs.gov.au/institute/conf/confmenu

29-30 March 2007 National Intensive Family Support Symposium Caloundra, Qld

Anglicare Strengthening Families Service presents this symposium with the theme “Family Centred Practice: innovation, controversy and imagination.” Three streams will be the focus of the symposium: Practice, Leadership and Research. Practice workshops will also be held on 28th March.

Further information: Email: IFSS 2007@tracc.org. Phone: (07) 5495 8718.

1-3 May 2007 National Youth Conference - Are We There Yet? Melbourne, Vic

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria is hosting this national youth conference to look at past learnings, current realities and future directions for youth affairs in Australia. The conference is for young people, youth workers, educators, policy makers, academicians and researchers, community workers and anyone interested in youth affairs in Australia.

Further information: Web: www.yacvic.org.au. Email: conferences@yacvic.org.au. Phone: 1300 727 176.

20-22 May 2007 Borders and Bridges Melbourne, Vic

The second Australian College for Child and Family Protection Practitioners National Conference aims to provide a forum for discussing the issues that are shaping contemporary practice and career landscapes. The theme reflects the broad contexts of Australian child and family practice. The conference will be of interest to workers from government and non-government child and family support services sectors, professionals interested in the health and wellbeing of Australian children, and professionals interested in sharing information on the delivery of child and family protection services, workforce, research, policy development and service reviews.

Further information: Web: www.relatehumanservices.com.au/events.htm. Email: acctfp@bigpond.net.au. Phone: (07) 9957 5400.

23-25 May 2007 International Helplines Conference Surfers Paradise, Qld

Lifeline Australia is hosting this international event, which will focus on the process skills required for best practice operation in the area of community service helplines. The conference aims to promote: networking between organisations delivering helpline services; best practice service delivery and sharing knowledge; and the value of helplines to individuals in a changing world.


11-13 July 2007 Australian Social Policy Conference Sydney, NSW

“Social Policy through the Life Course: Building Community Capacity and Social Resilience” is the theme for this conference, which encapsulates two interrelated issues in social policy. The first concerns life-course transitions, including the diverse challenges and opportunities which people experience within their age, gender, social, economic and cultural contexts. The second focuses on identifying the interconnections between social investment policies, services and programs which build both community capacity and social resilience for individuals situated within their social networks.

Further information: Web: www.sprc.unsw.edu.au. Email: SPRC@unsw.edu.au. Phone: (02) 9385 7802.

12-13 July 2007 Beyond The Great Divide, Bringing Communities Together Echuca, Vic

The 8th National Rural and Remote Social Work/Welfare/Community/Health Conference will focus on “divides,” whether they be economic, cultural, geographic, gender related, political, health related, environmental, or any other divides relevant to rural practice. A sub theme is to challenge these divides to look at innovative and creative ways and methods of building bridges across such divides.


12-13 July 2007 Maintaining the Well Being of Newly Arrived Young People Melbourne, Vic

This statewide conference will explore the importance of well being and the impact it has on refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people’s settlement. It will provide the opportunity for participants to broaden their skill base and knowledge, learn best practice models, network, share information and note the refugee and life experiences of CALD young people. Young CALD people’s talents will be showcased at this event by presenting sessions, sitting on panels and sharing their contributions through performances.


19-20 July 2007 HILDA Survey Research Conference 2007 Parkville, Vic

This conference aims to provide a forum for the discussion of research based on the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. Attendance at the conference is open to all persons interested in the HILDA Survey and longitudinal survey research.


23-25 July 2007 Children and Young People are Key Stakeholders Perth, WA

This inaugural, international conference addresses the area of children and young people as key stakeholders in their world experience - now and in the future. It aims to contribute significantly to our understanding of children, young people and their families in the community, and factors that impact on their wellbeing as stakeholders in policy, programs and service delivery. It will also highlight issues and challenges facing vulnerable children and young people today and explore preventative and strengths-based strategies for improving positive outcomes for them at a local, national and international level.

Further information: Web: www.caypaks.com. Email: neil@caypaks.com. Phone: (08) 9339 0039.

1-3 August 2007 Migration, Economic Growth and Social Cohesion Melbourne, Vic

The 12th International Metropolis Conference will explore issues surrounding patterns of future migration and its economic and social effects will be explored in this international conference. Themes include: conditions for social cohesion in diverse societies; minorities in society and the relationship with racial profiling and anti-terrorist legislation; comparative policies to attract new settlers to regional locations; future research agendas for people movement; comparative skill migration programs; and gaining economic advantage through migration.


14-17 October 2007 World Summit on Exploitative Child Labour Cairns, Qld

The World Summit will evaluate the progress and achievements made in relation to the eradication of the worst forms of child labour and will explore the challenges ahead in securing rights for children in the 21st century and meeting the UN Millennium Goals by 2015. There will be four broad themes: economic, social, cultural and health issues; legal and political measures; commercial and corporate responses; and public awareness and education initiatives.

Further information: Web: www.childjustice.org/wsecl. Email: lawrights@capcon.com.au. Phone: (02) 9999 6577.

Bianca Dobson is a Web Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
Two new publications are available from the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault. ACSSA Wrap No. 3 (2006, 8 pages). This short paper looks at the major themes in the treatment literature. The authors suggest that the still-developing treatment models for this client group would benefit from the insights of feminist and gender analyses of sexual assault, which have so far been marginal in the treatment literature.

ACSSA Aware No. 13 (2006, 32 pages). In this issue, we provide a summary of the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ 2005 Personal Safety Survey, which updates the 1995 Women’s Safety Survey. The summary focuses on sexual assault experienced in Australia. We also review the Federal Government’s new policy on elder abuse, and its relevance in preventing sexual assault against older Australians in care facilities. In addition, we include an article on a new report released by the Victorian Law Reform Commission on legal responses to family violence, and discussed its recommendations for responding to sexual forms of family violence. We also provide overviews of recently released reports on preventing sexual assault and improving system responses, both in Australia and overseas as well as a profile of the Education and Training Unit of the Sexual Assault Resource Centre in WA which runs training programs for lawyers with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Also available online.

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Family Relationships Quarterly (Issue 1, 2006, 21 pages). This first edition of the newsletter of the AFRC contains a welcome message from Institute Director Professor Alan Hayes. Features of the newsletter include an overview of the current wave of Australian family law reform, with reflections on the reforms and key issues leading up to their implementation by Associate Professor Lawrie Moloney; Dianne Gibson’s article reporting on the new approach to child dispute services in the Family Court of Australia; a review of the recently published article ‘Life course social roles and women’s health in mid-life: Causation or Selection?; current and recent trends in couple formation; selected abstracts from the most recent Biennial HILDA Survey Research Conference; literature highlights focusing on the Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP); and forthcoming conferences and events.

Family Relationships Quarterly (Issue 2, 2006, 18 pages). This second edition of the newsletter of the AFRC features an article on guidelines for practitioners in providing services to clients who are having internet affairs. Cameron Boyd, Research Officer for ACSSA, examines the issue of family involvement in therapeutic treatment for young men with sexually abusive behaviours.

Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse

Five new publications from the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) are now available. AFRC publications are available in electronic formats only. Ruth Weston and Lixia Qu follow up their summary of trends in couple formation from the first issue of the Family Relationships Quarterly by examining patterns of couple dissolution. Regular newsletter sections focus on conferences and literature highlights from recent additions to the Institute’s library catalogue.

AFRC Briefing No. 1, (2006, 7 pages) is titled ‘Young people and their parents: Supporting families through changes that occur in adolescence’. Authored by AFRC Manager Elly Robinson, this paper explores the changes that young people and their families experience during the adolescent period, and ways that practitioners can help facilitate or strengthen bonds between the two. Strategies for encouraging parents to be effectively involved in their young person’s life, even in times of great difficulties such as when a young person is engaging in problematic behaviours, are discussed.

AFRC Briefing No. 2, (2006, 9 pages). Written by social researcher and former Institute staff member Gay Ochiltree, this edition looks at ‘The changing role of grandparents’. Grandparents have always played an important role in family life, but over the last twenty years, many have had increased responsibility for their grandchildren due to changes and issues in families and society. The first major change is the provision of child care. The second change for grandparents, and the one which is associated with more difficult issues in their own lives, is when they have to take over full responsibility for bringing up grandchildren because their parents are unable to do so, often because of drug or alcohol abuse. This paper discusses the issues involved in grandparent roles in the above circumstances and suggests ways in which service providers can support grandparents.

AFRC Briefing No. 3 (2007, 9 pages). Written by Robyn Parker, this paper titled ‘Recent progress in marriage and relationship education in Australia’ summarises recent developments in the provision of marriage and relationship services aimed at addressing some of the challenges and directions for the MRE field originally outlined by Halford (1999). The paper focuses on issues of accessibility, incorporating research into practice, tailoring program content to specific users, and evaluation of programs aimed specifically at couples preparing to marry or re-marry, or those wanting to enrich or adapt to changes in their marriage, relationship or life circumstances. Links to some relevant publications and resources are included.

National Child Protection Clearinghouse

A new publication is available from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 25 (Spring 2006, 23 pages) by Mel Irenyi, Leah Bromfield, Lorriane Beyer, and Daryl Higgins is titled ‘Child maltreatment in organisations: Risk factors and strategies for prevention’. It investigates recent literature on child maltreatment in organisational settings. The paper begins with a discussion of the history and current concerns of organisational maltreatment in Australian institutions as articulated through Senate inquiries. Next it explores some issues that arise in attempting to profile perpetrators of organisational child maltreatment in order to identify actual or potential high-risk individuals. The paper outlines some of the common myths and facts about perpetrators and then discusses organisational risk factors. The authors then outline positive strategies for managing organisational risks and give special attention to tips for developing effective policies for responding to disclosures about organisational child abuse. Also available online.

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