

Safe and supportive Indigenous families and communities for children

A synopsis and critique of Australian research

Shaun Lohar

This paper reviews the research on building safe and supportive families and communities for Indigenous children in Australia. Based on assessments of 22 research and evaluation reports, it examines the evidence base in the areas of:

- building safe and supportive Indigenous communities for children and families;
- support for vulnerable and at-risk Indigenous families; and
- prevention of child abuse and neglect in Indigenous families and communities.

The paper synthesises the findings and discusses the implications for future research. The reports were identified in the research audit, *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit 1995–2010* (McDonald, Higgins, valentine, & Lamont, 2011).

KEY MESSAGES

- Longer time-frames than those currently provided are required for programs and services to:
 - build trusting relationships with Indigenous families and community partners;
 - identify client needs and to plan and implement appropriate responses;
 - devise and deliver effective engagement strategies;
 - foster Indigenous cultural understandings for service staff and for the broader community; and
 - develop evaluation strategies that identify longer-term outcomes for Indigenous families.
- Indigenous participation in the planning, delivery and measurement of programs is critical in fostering greater trust and connectivity and enhancing community awareness.
- Engagement strategies work best when Indigenous families are consulted about their needs, and services respond using holistic approaches that are delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.
- A collaborative approach to service delivery has resulted in a reduction of service duplication, more efficient use of resources and the promotion of shared goals. It is unclear whether these benefits will result in positive outcomes for Indigenous families in the longer-term.

KEY MESSAGES (continued)

- When Indigenous clients exit from programs there is little known about the impact that services have had on their families beyond their engagement with the program.
- Short funding periods and limited resources for programs have restricted the capacity of some services to provide appropriate support to Indigenous families.
- Indigenous perspectives about how child abuse prevention information is shared among the community can help to identify where, when and how child prevention interventions could be delivered.
- Program evaluation data are rarely linked to population-wide data to establish the longer-term impact of programs on Indigenous families and communities. Improved data linkage may help to establish a solid evidence base to inform child protection strategies for Indigenous families and communities.

Introduction

This paper provides a synopsis and critique of research relating to the theme of “Supporting Indigenous Families and Communities in Protecting their Children from Child Abuse and Neglect”, as identified through the Protecting Australia’s Children Research Audit 1995–2010 (“the Audit”; McDonald et al., 2011). This theme is reflected in “Supporting Outcome 5: Indigenous Children are Supported and Safe in Their Families and Communities”, outlined in Protecting Australia’s Children is Everyone’s Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–20 (“the National Framework”; Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009).

The Audit sought to identify, describe and disseminate information about Australian research and program evaluations during the period 1995–2010 on topics relating to the protection of children.¹ The scope of the topics reflected the six supporting outcomes outlined in the National Framework (see Appendix A).

The specific aims of the Audit were to identify:

- research projects (published and unpublished) undertaken in Australia between 1995–2010 on topics relevant to the National Framework (COAG, 2009);
- outcomes and progress since the Audit of Australian Out-of-Home Care Research (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004) and the National Audit of Australian Child Protection Research 1995–2004 (Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, Richardson, & Aldana, 2005);
- gaps, duplication and areas for development in relation to the outcomes and national priorities identified in the National Framework; and
- priorities for future research and data collection on the basis of the Audit results, outcomes of the Towards a National Agenda forum (October 2009) and priorities identified in the National Framework.

The Audit noted that only 1.3% of projects directly addressed topics relating to the protection of Indigenous children. For this reason, the scope of this review extends to programs that provide services to Indigenous people as part of a broader client base (such as homeless families).

¹ For further information about the Audit’s objectives, see <www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/audit/2011/audit2011a.html> and for the methodology, see <www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/audit/2011/audit2011b.html>.

This paper seeks to review all the available projects identified in the Audit that relate to preventative approaches to Indigenous child abuse and neglect in an effort to support the National Framework's focus on reducing the over-representation of Indigenous children in the Australian child protection system (see Box 1). Projects included in the Audit are analysed here in greater depth to identify key issues and research gaps that will help contribute to Indigenous children being supported and safe in their families and communities.

Box 1: Indigenous focus within the National Framework

One area of focus in the National Framework is to address Indigenous disadvantage and the factors that place Indigenous children at risk of abuse and neglect. In recognition of the intergenerational cycles of adversity and trauma that continue to afflict Indigenous communities, the National Framework proposed a collaborative approach that incorporates holistic and culturally sensitive responses that are informed by Indigenous-led and community-identified solutions. The goal is to build the capacity of families and communities to take part in reducing the over-representation of Indigenous children in Australian child protection systems. To achieve this, the National Framework proposes the following strategies:

- Expand access to Indigenous and non-Indigenous ("mainstream") services for families and children.
- Promote the development of safe and strong communities.
- Ensure that Indigenous children receive culturally appropriate protection services and care.

For further information, see Supporting Outcome 5 in *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (COAG, 2009, p. 28) <www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business>.

Methodology

The Audit included a total of 1,359 research and evaluation projects. These were grouped into eight categories.² Three were considered for this review on the basis of their preventative and/or early intervention focus:

- building safe and supportive communities for children and families;
- support for vulnerable and at-risk families; and
- prevention of child abuse and neglect—including primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

A number of steps were taken to filter out projects that were not considered relevant to supporting Indigenous families and communities in protecting their children from child abuse and neglect.³ Following this process, 22 projects remained for review (See Appendix B).

In order to identify research gaps and key issues within each Audit category, three key research questions were proposed:

1. How much research has been done?
2. What is the quality of the evidence base?
3. What do we know from the research?

A number of limitations were described in the Audit.⁴ The most relevant for this review was the Audit's reliance upon literature searches of abstracts as the main method for identifying projects

2 All items from the Audit are publicly available via the Protecting Australia's Children Research and Evaluation Register. The Audit categories are represented as "topics" in the register, and can be searched using the "advanced search" option <www.aifs.gov.au/nch/register/>.

3 From the three Audit categories, projects that did not address issues relating to Indigenous people were filtered out, leaving 105 projects to consider. Of the 105 projects, 33 had been allocated to more than one of the three Audit categories, so duplicates were removed, leaving 72 projects for consideration. Additional filtering (of projects that were inaccessible or where projects were yet to be completed) reduced the number of projects for review to 36. Another 14 projects were excluded from the analysis after screening for research quality and/or relevance to the chosen Audit categories. Twenty-two projects were reviewed.

4 For an overview of the limitations of the *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit (1995–2010)* see Section 4.5 of the Audit report.

that met the inclusion criteria. Where abstracts did not provide enough information to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria, they were not included in the Audit. In addition, the Audit was conducted in 2010 and projects and publications since that time are not included in this review. As a consequence, the extent of existing research into protecting Australia's Indigenous children may not be fully captured.

Quality of the evidence base

The quality of project evaluations for this review were assessed on the basis of whether the research method employed was appropriate to the research question proposed, and the degree to which limitations of the method were explained in the evaluations. Other considerations of quality include the provision of comprehensive literature reviews to offer sufficient context and the use of a wide range of data sources and analysis techniques to enable triangulation (i.e., “cross-checking”) of results.

Across the three Audit categories, most project evaluations employed a mixed methods approach, with an emphasis on qualitative techniques. These included focus groups, key informant interviews and analysis of secondary source data (including literature reviews and administrative and/or program data). The studies were mainly of high quality, with rigorous analyses of data that were collected from a variety of sources and perspectives. The better quality evaluations were supplemented with comprehensive literature reviews to provide a greater understanding of how programs compare with those in a national and international context.

In some cases, the research questions proposed were ambitious considering the limited resources and time under which the evaluations were conducted. In cases where queries were raised about longer-term outcomes for families, the questions remained unanswered. In the shorter-term, time constraints and limited resources reduced the capacity to identify whether some Indigenous families were benefiting from programs, although some short-term outcomes for families were identified. The main strength of the research was in the ability to measure the capacity of service systems and how they could be further strengthened.

Building safe and supportive Indigenous communities for children and families

Whole-of-community studies are difficult and resource intensive, and not possible in all community contexts (McDonald, 2011). This is reflected in the limited number of projects that appear in this Audit category. The projects included for this review provide valuable insights, yet due to their narrow focus, caution needs to be exercised in generalising the findings as a universal approach to building safe and supportive Indigenous communities for children and families.

How much research has been done in the area?

Two projects were considered in this category. The first project was a systematic review of parents' views toward child sexual abuse prevention education (Hunt & Walsh, 2011). The second was a local evaluation of two Communities for Children (CfC) initiatives in areas with high Indigenous populations: Raymond Terrace and Karuah in New South Wales (Sheather, 2009).

What is the quality of the evidence base?

The systematic review from Hunt and Walsh (2011) was a comprehensive analysis of Australian and international literature about parents' views towards child sexual abuse prevention education. Electronic databases were scanned and 429 projects were identified for screening. Following application of clearly defined inclusion criteria, 13 studies were selected for rigorous analysis. None of these studies was identified as being Indigenous-specific, yet some of the findings may be

applicable for Indigenous families for future evaluations. The low numbers of items selected for review in Hunt and Walsh's report reflected the narrow topic of focus and the authors' perceived lack of quality of empirically based research available in the area. The review warns about the potential for selection bias in the studies analysed, where only parents who were interested in, or comfortable with the topic volunteered to participate.

Sheather (2009) employed a mixed methods approach, using qualitative and quantitative data which included an assessment of both process and impact outcomes, in her local area evaluation of two CfC programs. Data were sourced widely from program planners, committee members and staff, and from participants of the program. The limitations of the evaluation were clearly outlined, including the lack of consistency across the local initiatives' activities and the reliance on the degree to which Community Partners⁵ engaged in the process of collecting data. The report also noted the limited capacity of the evaluation to measure the long-term impact of the initiative while programs and activities continued.

What do we know from research into building safe and supportive Indigenous communities for children and families?

Due to the narrow topics of focus of the two projects reviewed from this Audit category, conclusions are limited in regards to building safe and supportive Indigenous communities for children and families. Nonetheless, the following issues are worthy of consideration.

Little is known about how messages could be delivered in Australian Indigenous communities, or how comfortable Indigenous parents might be in sharing information about their experiences of child sexual abuse. For these reasons, Hunt and Walsh (2011) proposed that further research be conducted to elicit the views of Indigenous parents, particularly in light of the over-representation of Indigenous children in matters of child sexual abuse.

Sheather (2009) highlighted the importance of forming collaborative partnerships as a way to promote positive support and awareness at the community level:

There is little doubt that the multiple strategies employed in the CfC project have resulted in an increase in engagement and mobilisation of community members, family support agencies and local government to own and respond to local early childhood issues. The strategies of engaging children and families in the design of community projects, the capacity built within services to deliver good models of practice to families (i.e., outreach services), the success and popularity of events and excursions that were jointly conducted, as well as the changes to local Council's policies, plans and guidelines in regard to child-friendly principles and practices, are all evidence of a community that is more aware and more accessible to the different groups within it. (p. 27)

While acknowledging the strengthened relationships between CfC's Community Partners and other community stakeholders, Sheather (2009) suggested this could have been achieved to a greater degree, noting that differing philosophies (such as child-focused versus family-focused philosophies) among service providers were found to be an issue for collaborating services. A further tension existed between the formality of child care regulations and engaging families informally. Sheather also proposed that "working together" policies should address these tensions to allow for smoother partnership development in future collaborations, and to clarify roles and responsibilities of participating organisations.

⁵ Community Partners were appointed under the CfC program to enable flexibility in program design to respond to local need. For more information about Community Partners, see *Stronger Families in Australia Study: The Impact of Communities for Children* (Edwards et al., 2009) <www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/number-25-stronger-families-in-australia-study-the-impact-of-communities-for-children>

Support for vulnerable and at-risk Indigenous families

In comparison to “Building Safe and Supportive Indigenous Communities for Children and Families”, projects relating to “Support for Vulnerable and At-Risk Indigenous Families” are more widespread. This demonstrates a greater capacity for project evaluations to measure the impact of services on families in the immediate-term, and reflects the greater challenge of demonstrating community-wide outcomes in the long term.

How much research has been done in the area?

Eighteen projects relating to support for vulnerable and at-risk Indigenous families were included for this review. Of these, half ($n = 9$) employed a specific Indigenous focus and half were projects that related more broadly to child protection practices that include an Indigenous research component.

From the nine Indigenous specific projects, three were program evaluations. These included evaluations of an Indigenous community leadership training project (Scougall, 2008a); the Halls Creek Community Families Program (Munns, 2010); and a home visiting program for Indigenous families (Sivak, Arney, & Lewig, 2008).

The six remaining Indigenous-specific studies had a thematic approach,⁶ of which three focused on Indigenous family violence. These included supporting community solutions to family violence (Taylor, Cheers, Gentle, & Weetra, 2004); an inquiry into complaints of family violence and child abuse in Indigenous communities (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002); and a report from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Task Force on Violence (ATSIWTFV, 1999). The three other thematic projects explored lessons learnt about strengthening Indigenous families and communities (Scougall, 2008d); the coordination and provision of services for Indigenous families and children (Flaxman, Muir, & Oprea, 2009); and health and education partnerships for Indigenous children (MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education [MCEETYA], 2001).

For mainstream projects with an Indigenous research component, six were program evaluations and three others used a thematic approach. Program specific evaluations included the Stronger Families Safer Children initiative in South Australia (Department for Families and Communities [DFC], 2011); the Families First area review of Illawarra (Thomson, valentine, Fisher, & Aggett, 2004); and child and family sensitive practice within specialist homelessness services (Gibson & Morphett, 2010). Projects with a thematic focus included a population health approach to child abuse and neglect (O’Donnell, 2009); a literature review concerning drug use in the family and implications for children (Dawe et al., 2006); and a discussion paper about family inclusion in child protection practice (Thorpe, 2008).

What is the quality of the evidence base?

The discussion papers selected for this aspect of the review were chosen on the basis that they drew widely from the literature and were considered to add to the overall body of evidence that relates specifically to Indigenous populations (Dawe et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2002; MCEETYA, 2001; O’Donnell, 2009; Taylor et al., 2004; Thorpe, 2008).

Two evaluations used a thematic study approach. Both Scougall (2008d) and Flaxman et al. (2009) provided comprehensive reviews of academic and policy literature to supplement data collected from a wide range of sources. This enabled the discussions to be placed within an Australia wide and international context.

Scougall (2008d) reviewed data from 635 community-based initiatives across Australia to identify lessons learnt about Indigenous families and communities. The data was sourced from two project questionnaires ($n = 66$ & 55), three in-depth qualitative case studies, various consultations with

⁶ For the purpose of this review, a “thematic” approach relates to projects that examine a specific element/theme of a program or group of programs. For example, an evaluation of a program that provides homelessness services may focus on the way the agency collaborates with other agencies, without regard to factors relating specifically to homelessness.

departmental staff, nine site visits to Indigenous communities, and documentary records of 16 projects. Similarly, Flaxman (2008) drew from a wide range of sources in assessing the effectiveness of coordinating community-based services for Indigenous families and children. However, a major limitation was that the study did not incorporate the perspectives of Indigenous people and reported only on the views of service providers.

Scougall took a similarly comprehensive approach in three other initiatives (Scougall, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c), including an evaluation of an Indigenous community leadership training project that placed priority on the views of local Indigenous population (Scougall, 2008a). The views of Indigenous families were also emphasised in a mixed methods evaluation of a Family Home Visiting Program (Sivak et al., 2008). By contrast, Munns (2010) approach to a case study of the Yanan Ngurra-ngu Walalja Halls Creek Community Families Program was less empirically based, with a focus on non-systematic observational data. For program evaluations of mainstream services that incorporate Indigenous services, there was less emphasis placed on the perspectives of Indigenous clients (DFC, 2011; Gibson & Morphet, 2010; Thomson et al., 2004).

What do we know from research into support for vulnerable and at-risk Indigenous families?

Many of the themes that emerged about supporting vulnerable and at-risk Indigenous families are interrelated and should not be considered in isolation. The absence of any one theme may undermine the capacity of support measures to deliver positive outcomes for Indigenous families. From this review, the following themes emerge.

Capacity building

A primary aim of the National Framework is to enhance the capacity of families to reduce and/or prevent their children from being exposed to child abuse and family violence. Capacity building underpins all other themes and was generally considered across the program evaluations in two ways:

- family capacity: to build the capacity of families to prevent children from being exposed (or further exposed) to child abuse and neglect; and
- system capacity: to build the capacity of programs and collaborating support networks to provide appropriate services to Indigenous families.

Each of the following factors were identified as integral for projects that aim to build the capacity of Indigenous communities to support vulnerable and at-risk families.

Community development approaches to capacity building

The notion that strengthened system capacity facilitates an increased capacity of Indigenous families to protect their children is reflected across the evaluations. Community development approaches are recognised as an effective way to build both family and system capacity in Indigenous communities (Dawe et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2002; MCEETYA, 2001; Scougall, 2008d; Taylor et al., 2004). Scougall (2008d) found that Indigenous capacity building activities were more effective when they were undertaken in connection with a specific social purpose in association with a particular project activity. At a practical level, this means linking community development initiatives, such as celebratory cultural events (which may include NAIDOC week and school fundraisers), with program activities at the family level, such as camping excursions (Dawe et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004).

Engaging families

Engaging families in services is the first step to supporting families in protecting vulnerable children, which assists in avoiding entrenchment in the child protection system (DFC, 2011). Engagement strategies are more effective when services are accessible, enjoyable and tailored to Indigenous needs (Flaxman et al., 2009; Scougall, 2008d). This can serve to facilitate greater trust and confidence

for Indigenous participants towards program providers and can lead to greater family capacity to deal with issues (Gordon et al., 2002; Sivak et al., 2008). However, for Indigenous families with extensive child protection histories and complex issues, engagement is more difficult and services require more time and labour to deliver the support required (DFC, 2011; Sheather, 2009).

Indigenous involvement

An effective way to link Indigenous community development initiatives with family based service delivery is through partnerships and consultation with members of Indigenous communities (Flaxman et al., 2009; Dawe et al., 2006). MCEETYA (2001) recommended that Indigenous communities be enlisted as responsible partners in policy development and have the opportunity to contribute to decisions in the design, delivery and evaluation of services. This can lead to:

- a greater sense of ownership of programs among Indigenous families;
- communities having a greater understanding of project aims and supporting the project; and
- services responding to the specific needs of program participants (Sheather, 2009; Taylor et al., 2004).

When communities pose solutions to issues they must be able to access real support to implement those solutions (Taylor et al., 2004). One way to achieve this is to incorporate consultative mechanisms in program structures (Gordon et al., 2002). For example, the Families First initiative in Illawarra was designed to incorporate Indigenous involvement in planning, managing and implementing the program. This was reported as crucial to the program's success (Thomson et al., 2004).

Participatory action research is another method that can facilitate the capacity of participants to be active in the planning, delivery and implementation of programs—as part of a continual loop of program development.⁷ Box 2 shows how a local CfC program incorporated child-inclusive action research as a way to adapt the program to suit the needs of Indigenous children and their families (Sheather, 2009).

Box 2: Example of a participatory action research technique

A number of research instruments were used to gather data for the local area evaluation of the Raymond Terrace and Karuah CfC sites. Some of those instruments were designed as part of the participatory action research approach. For example, activity sheets were employed for use by children to enable their voices to be heard in the evaluation process. Children were required to indicate a photo that represented a favoured activity in which they had been involved and enjoyed. The activity sheets were adapted, with permission from their originator, and utilised in a variety of CfC programs. This method was particularly useful at playgroups and family event days.

Source: Sheather (2009, p. 19)

Incorporating Indigenous perspectives

Drawing on the perspectives of Indigenous families is prioritised in evaluations of programs that provide Indigenous-specific services. For example, the evaluation of an Indigenous family home visiting program focused on parents' perspectives to identify the program's achievements and opportunities for development. The authors linked qualitative data to project outcomes to measure both the immediate and long-term impacts of the program (Sivak et al., 2008).

In cases where resources to obtain participants' perspectives were limited, it was difficult to identify whether some program objectives were met. In the case of a CfC analysis of the coordination and

⁷ Participatory action research is an emerging technique in studies with and for Indigenous populations. For more detail of this approach see *Participatory Action Research in Indigenous Health* <www.racgp.org.au/afp/200806/24936>

provision of services for Indigenous families and children, the lack of capacity to draw data directly from Indigenous clients was noted as a major limitation of the study (Flaxman et al., 2009).

Cultural competence

Demonstrating an understanding of Indigenous culture is critical when planning and delivering services for Indigenous families (Taylor et al., 2004). The notion of “cultural competence” means providing services that are sensitive and appropriate to the culture of their clients (Flaxman et al., 2009). For Indigenous groups, this means recognising and supporting the right of Indigenous people to promote, develop and maintain Indigenous institutional structures, traditions, customs and practices (Dawe et al., 2006). Flaxman et al. (2009) showed how this could be achieved:

Broadly, culturally competent services consult with and involve family, extended kin, Elders and community members in service delivery, and include structures that are flexible, non-threatening, informal and low cost. These services also embrace strategies that are culturally tailored, incorporate Indigenous cultural artifacts, teach Indigenous language(s) and offer education and support to parents. (p. 23)

The cultural competence of staff was reported as instrumental in supporting Indigenous families (Flaxman et al., 2009; Munns, 2010; Scougall, 2008a, 2008c, 2008d; Sivak et al., 2008; Thomson et al., 2004). The inclusion of Indigenous mentors in program activities helped to reinforce feelings of cultural connectedness for some participants (Scougall, 2008c). Employing Indigenous staff helped some services to better understand client contexts and culture, and offered a different way to communicate with Indigenous families (Munns, 2010; Sivak et al., 2008). Sivak and colleagues (2008) found that it was important for families to be offered an Indigenous cultural consultant to facilitate greater understanding between services and their Indigenous clients.

In one evaluation, a lack of cultural competence among staff was found to undermine the program’s goal to deliver culturally informed services (Dawe et al., 2006). Dawe et al. (2006) recommended providing additional training for staff in order to respectfully challenge any cultural misconceptions.

As Scougall (2008a, 2008d) noted, strengthening Indigenous families (and communities) is as much about the healing effects of cultural trauma, attitudinal and behavioural change, as it is about the transfer of particular knowledge and skills. This is a long-term commitment that requires continued engagement and professional development over a sustained period of time (Scougall, 2008a; Sheather, 2009).

Holistic approaches to service provision

It has been argued that service providers need to work at the community level (as opposed to an individual or agency level) to solve problems through real and long-term structural change (Dawe et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). This is addressed through the provision of integrated holistic service approaches that enable services to draw from other community agencies to meet the diverse (physical, social, emotional, health and wellbeing) needs of Indigenous families (ATSIWTFV, 1999; Munns, 2010).

In practice, the provision of integrated holistic responses is highly challenging. For Indigenous families with multiple and complex needs, collaborative responses are often required from a range of services across numerous jurisdictions (MCEETYA, 2001; Scougall, 2008c; Taylor et al., 2004).

Service collaboration

Service collaboration is a complex issue and can be difficult to achieve.⁸ Strategic partnerships can require extensive time to build and maintain (Scougall, 2008d), particularly in the absence of

8 For an overview of the issues surrounding service integration and collaboration, see *Interagency Collaboration - Part A: What is it, What Does it Look Like, When is it Needed and What Supports it?* <www.aifs.gov.au/aifrc/pubs/briefing/b021/index.html>.

For Indigenous specific service collaboration issues, see *Effective Practices for Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities* <www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications/index.cfm>

pre-existing relationships (Flaxman et al. 2009) or for partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and organisations (Thomson et al., 2004).

Flaxman et al. (2009) noted that many CfC programs were considered too short for services to establish effective partnerships. Linking projects to potential sources of ongoing funding was recommended as one way to ensure projects could be sustained in the longer-term (Scougall, 2008c; MCEETYA, 2001).

There is sound evidence to show that a collaborative focus has led to the formation of beneficial strategic partnerships (Scougall, 2008b, 2008d). Flaxman et al. (2009) reported that program partnerships with Indigenous agencies and community members allowed some programs to more appropriately meet the needs of clients and to increase service access. Furthermore, informal services were considered beneficial by introducing Indigenous families to more formal, specialised services (Flaxman et al., 2009).

Gibson and Morphett (2010) found that making referrals to specialist services through the formation of linkages with other organisations were seen as a means of achieving positive outcomes for children. However, concerns about working relationships arose in the Stronger Families Safer Children strategy where inappropriate referrals were reported (DFC, 2011). This was seen to be due to a lack of training for staff in areas that required knowledge of specialised therapeutic services. Some workers suggested their service needed to be better integrated with therapeutic work to ensure a more holistic in-home service (DFC, 2011).

Integrating mainstream and Indigenous-specific services

The collaborative focus of the National Framework has, in the immediate term, provided greater capacity for services to work together to deliver holistic support services to Indigenous families (Scougall, 2008d; Sheather, 2009). In terms of service integration, where services merge to form one entity, there was little detail about the impact of embedding Indigenous-specific services into mainstream services. Considering the funding implications of such an arrangement,⁹ this issue requires greater attention from an evaluation perspective.

Summary

While capacity building can occur at the family level and at a system level, the two are inherently interconnected. Community development approaches offer a way to facilitate Indigenous capacity building for families and their communities. Engagement strategies that are underpinned by the specific needs of Indigenous families are more effective when Indigenous people are involved in the decision-making process. Services that are culturally competent understand the need to collaborate with other agencies to provide holistic services that can meet the diverse needs of Indigenous families. All of these elements were considered integral to building the capacity of vulnerable and at-risk Indigenous families.

Prevention of child abuse and neglect in Indigenous families and communities

How much research has been done in the area?

Seven studies about the prevention of child abuse and neglect were included in this review. These included a thematic exploration of out-of-home care services for young people (Moore, Bennett, & McArthur, 2007) and an analysis of a family violence partnership program (Wendt &

⁹ For information about funding arrangements for Indigenous-specific and mainstream services, see the Productivity Commission's *Indigenous Expenditure Report* (Indigenous Expenditure Report Steering Committee, 2010) <www.pc.gov.au/gsp/ier>

Baker, 2010). Another program evaluation examined a preventative program that provided home based parental support for Indigenous families (Munns, 2010). The Brighter Futures child abuse prevention program in NSW was included for review due to its high focus on Indigenous groups (Hilferty et al., 2010), while a systematic review of child sexual abuse prevention education was included on the basis of its relevance to primary prevention interventions more broadly (Hunt & Walsh, 2011). O'Donnell's (2009) methodological discussion about using data as a population-wide health approach to child abuse and neglect was included due to its discussion about Indigenous groups, as was Sheather's (2009) local area evaluation of a CfC initiative.

What is the quality of the evidence base?

Moore et al. (2007) employed participatory action research to assess a reform strategy for the care and protection of children and young people and their families in the ACT. Data were sourced from two youth forums to explore the issues that young people faced by incorporating multiple cycles of planning, observation, action and critical reflection. A limiting factor of the study was that due to the forum format the opportunity to explore the experiences of young people in depth was limited.

The report of the Halls Creek Community Families Program appeared to be primarily based on observational data. However, the program is modelled on a successful community mothers program that was informed by evidence-based research and practice (Munns, 2010). The value of the report stems from reflections about how evidenced based research and primary health care principles can be linked to activities and programs that may be adapted across various Indigenous settings.

The evaluation of the Brighter Futures program assessed eight program sites that consisted of a results evaluation, a process evaluation and an economic assessment. In this case, data were collected through surveys with both families and program staff, and included a review of administrative and observational data (Hilferty et al., 2010).

Wendt and Baker (2010) took a case study approach using mixed methods to evaluate the Sturt Street Family Violence Program. In this case, the sample size of Indigenous interviewees was small ($n = 13$, 40% of service users). However, a comprehensive literature review was also provided and semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data also provided meaningful data to draw from.

Sheather's (2009) local area evaluation of a CfC appears across all three Audit categories and has been discussed in the previous categories. However, Sheather's findings are discussed further here as they apply more broadly to the prevention of Indigenous child abuse and neglect.

Hunt and Walsh's (2011) systematic review of child sexual abuse prevention education also appeared in the discussion on "Building Safe and Supportive Communities" and O'Donnell's (2009) paper, *A Population Health Approach to Child Abuse and Neglect*, was considered in "Support for Vulnerable and At-risk Families". Both are discussed further below.

What do we know from research into Indigenous-specific child abuse and neglect prevention strategies?

The role of service practitioners and staff in preventing Indigenous child abuse and neglect

There is an implication across the project evaluations that service practitioners and staff working within the child protection sector have a substantial responsibility considering they are often the only point of contact between Indigenous families and the child protection system (Scougall, 2008d).

Service practitioners must identify the specific needs of Indigenous families and match them to the available resources within their communities. In doing so, practitioners must understand the broader policy framework and to identify where, when and how other support services might be enlisted to assist their clients. They must also use their expertise to provide appropriate referrals

and to report a range of data (including evaluation, administrative and/or program data) while delivering their own therapies to Indigenous families.

The views of service practitioners

The views of service practitioners and staff are presented in most program evaluations, reflecting an acknowledgement that these workers have a level of expertise and experience that is considered integral to future program and policy development. It is important to note that preventative approaches to child abuse and neglect may not be viewed by practitioners as being distinct from the support they provide to vulnerable or at-risk families. The example of the Sturt Street Family Violence Program (Box 3) illustrates how the notion of service support may also be viewed as part of a broader prevention strategy.

Box 3: The Sturt Street Family Violence Program

Practical and ongoing preventative support was provided to Indigenous women and their children who were experiencing family violence or homelessness. By providing immediate material support such as furniture, utensils, bus tickets and clothing, the Aboriginal women were able to focus on the longer-term goals of obtaining a house, rather than worrying about basic survival needs. By coupling this with ongoing emotional and educative support—through counselling and assistance with budgeting—the women were able to build self-esteem, coping abilities and parenting skills, and thereby prevented them from having to access other services.

Source: Wendt & Baker (2010)

In light of the apparent ambiguity of perceptions between “support” and “prevention” strategies, the themes presented in “Support for Vulnerable and At-risk Indigenous Families” could be considered as equally relevant to child abuse and neglect prevention strategies.

Support for services

The need for additional staff training was reported in some cases, particularly where cultural competence was seen to be lacking (Dawe et al., 2006). However, services were limited in their capacity to shape attitudes in other agencies or in the broader community (Wendt & Baker, 2010). Moore et al. (2007) reported concerns about the prevalence of racism and a lack of cultural understanding from workers in the broader care and protection system. To this end, community-wide education and marketing strategies that celebrate Indigenous cultural identity and diversity would reinforce the messages that culturally competent services aim to deliver (Moore et al., 2007).

Educating parents about family violence and child abuse and neglect

Educating Indigenous parents about family violence and child abuse and neglect were not included as a primary focus in the program evaluations reviewed. Rather, prevention strategies for Indigenous families were discussed within the context of parental support initiatives that focused on the antecedent factors that were seen to result in family violence and child abuse and neglect. For example, the Halls Creek Community Families Program provided parental support in the areas of language, social and emotional ability, cognitive ability, early educational skills, and nutrition and health. The aim was not explicitly to educate parents about family violence and child abuse and neglect, but to establish a home environment that enabled child functioning (Munns, 2010).

Hilferty et al. (2010) noted the provision of in-home parental support services as resource-intensive and highly complex, particularly in cases where parents are in distress or they have low levels of formal education. In these cases, more specialised services were needed to achieve positive outcomes before the program’s parenting courses could take effect. Other evaluations of parental

support services have noted some positive outcomes. The inclusion of culture and lore in a home-based, peer-led and collaborative parental program was effective in improving engagement with Indigenous families (Munns, 2010). Indigenous women increased their involvement in educational opportunities after accessing support to deal with family violence and homelessness issues (Wendt & Baker, 2010).

Parental education may provide opportunities to increase parenting capacity and family functioning (Sheather, 2009). However, the importance of supporting families early to help prevent children from entering the care and protection system in the first instance was emphasised. Young Indigenous people felt that financial assistance, support to find appropriate housing and help for their parents to develop parenting skills would have been helpful in keeping their families together (Moore et al., 2007).

Hunt and Walsh (2010) claimed that education programs were likely to have little impact unless parents are familiar and comfortable with the content and delivery approaches. The suggestion was to conduct further research about how Indigenous parents might react to highly sensitive messages about child sexual abuse. However, it is evident from the project evaluations that indirect approaches to Indigenous child abuse and neglect (such as minimising parental substance abuse) are favoured above more direct approaches to child abuse and neglect education.

Program measurement and data considerations

The value of existing program evaluations and research in identifying ways to prevent Indigenous child abuse and neglect cannot be overstated, although a more concerted effort is required to identify the impacts of programs on Indigenous families and communities in the long term (Hilferty et al., 2010; Sheather, 2009).

Hilferty et al. (2010) noted the difficulty of employing quantitative research techniques that may not be sensitive enough to demonstrate small changes over a short period of time. A population-wide approach to data collection and analysis is recommended to establish longer-term outcomes. By linking antecedent factors (which can include social, biological, historical, psychological and environmental factors)¹⁰ of Aboriginal child maltreatment to the broader health and social issues that underpin child abuse, appropriate primary level responses may be proposed. Ideally, these responses would be informed by the longer-term aspirations of Indigenous communities (O'Donnell, 2009).

Summary of findings

The preliminary evidence from the 22 projects reviewed in this paper suggested a number of programs have been effective in preventing child abuse and neglect from occurring in Indigenous families and communities. The three Audit categories reviewed (Building Safe and Supportive Indigenous Communities; Supporting Vulnerable and At-risk Indigenous Families; and Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect) are interrelated and, when taken together, they reveal a number of factors that have contributed to the efficacy of these programs.

The following factors have emerged from the evaluation literature:

- Longer timeframes are required in order for programs and services to:
 - build trusting relationships with Indigenous families and community partners;
 - establish effective and appropriate collaborative support networks and programs between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and organisations;
 - identify the specific needs of Indigenous families to devise appropriate engagement strategies;
 - build understandings of Indigenous culture and diversity for program staff and the broader community; and

¹⁰ For further information about multi-factorial models examining antecedent factors that contribute to child abuse and neglect, see O'Donnell (2009, p. 49)

- plan, design and implement evaluation strategies that are based on a long-term commitment to improve outcomes for Indigenous families.
- Building the capacity of families to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in Indigenous communities can be achieved by:
 - implementing engagement strategies that are needs based, and designed and delivered in collaboration with Indigenous participants;
 - enlisting Indigenous representation in program planning, implementation and evaluation—participatory action research was found to be an effective way to facilitate such involvement;
 - raising the levels of cultural competence among program staff through additional training, while simultaneously promoting community-wide understandings of Indigenous culture and diversity through celebratory events; and
 - promoting positive working relationships among service agencies to facilitate more effective holistic approaches to service provision for Indigenous families.
- Building the capacity of services to deliver long-term outcomes for Indigenous families can be achieved by:
 - implementing “post-program” research about Indigenous participants who exit from programs to identify the longer-term impacts of programs on families;
 - assisting services with limited funding periods to identify and access additional resources (such as extra staff or equipment), by identifying existing support networks and/or through the provision of additional financial support from funders; and
 - ensuring that program evaluations are ongoing and built into program designs.
- For Indigenous families and communities, further knowledge is required to:
 - understand how information is received, processed and shared among Indigenous groups in order to facilitate targeted ,community-wide, social education and marketing initiatives; and
 - identify which institutions and locations within communities continue to maintain negative social attitudes. This would enable specific targeting of social marketing strategies.

Building safe and supportive communities for Indigenous children and families as a preventative measure in protecting children from child abuse and neglect remains a difficult challenge. Through program evaluations and existing research about Indigenous child protection measures a number of promising strategies have been identified in this review. However, the longer-term impacts of these efforts are yet to be identified. There are opportunities to further explore a range of existing measures and data across a range of portfolios. Further exploration about how data can be accessed and linked with the day-to-day lived experience of Indigenous families is also warranted. Provided the objective of such research is clearly focused on the aspirations of Indigenous communities and is underpinned by a long-term commitment, creative and workable solutions to the prevention of Indigenous child abuse will be within greater reach.

Shaun Lohoar is a Senior Research Officer with the Child Family Community Australia information exchange at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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Related publication

Nair, L. (2011). *Safe and supportive families and communities for children: A synopsis and critique of Australian research* (CFCA Paper No. 1). Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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Appendix A: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020

The National Framework, endorsed by COAG in April 2009, is a long-term national approach to enhance the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children. It seeks to provide a foundation for national reform to reduce child abuse and neglect, and is underpinned by an assertion that children have the right to live in a safe family and community environment. Long-term strategies to achieve positive outcomes for children are focused on prevention and early intervention, and an integrated collaborative approach is acknowledged in the National Framework as being essential (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010; COAG, 2009).

The National Framework articulates the aim of achieving the high-level outcome that “Australia's children and young people are safe and well” (COAG, 2009, p. 11). To realise this, it proposes the following six supporting outcomes:

1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities.
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early.
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed.
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing.
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities.
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

The National Framework proposes a public health model of care and protection that articulates the following three levels of intervention (COAG, 2009):

- Primary interventions target the whole community with the aim of prevention through education, social marketing and systemic support for services.
- Secondary interventions target vulnerable families and children at risk.
- Tertiary interventions seek to reduce the impact and recurrence of child maltreatment where it has already occurred.

The National Framework acknowledges the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first instance. To this end, the National Framework seeks to promote strategies and implement actions that build capacity and strength in families and communities through a collaborative network of support.

For further information, see *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (COAG, 2009) <www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business>.

Appendix B: Project evaluations and research selected for this review

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Audit category 1: Building safe and supportive communities for children and/or families (n = 2)			
Hunt & Walsh (2011) (Also appears in Audit category 3)	Parents' views about child sexual abuse prevention education: A systematic review	Electronic database searches were conducted to identify relevant literature relating to child sexual abuse prevention programs and parents' views. The authors found total of 429 papers, of which 13 met the study's inclusion criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is considerable lack of research from within Australia. Consultation is required to elicit Australian parents' ideas about effective programs and to carefully connect this with research-based evidence. While there have been enduring calls to enlist parents as partners in prevention, the real potential of parent-focused child sexual abuse prevention has not yet been realised. In the absence of Australian research, the authors conclude that further study of Australian parents' views is clearly warranted.
Sheather (2009) (Also appears in Audit categories 2 and 3)	Communities for Children: Raymond Terrace & Karuah local evaluation report	<p>The local evaluation employed a mixed methods approach, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data. Action research was used to gather data from program participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys were used at event days, excursions and other activities. Activity sheets were devised to gather children's perspectives in the evaluation process. Questionnaires for project officers were employed to enable self reflection. Observational data from project officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project cessation was reported as the biggest challenge to the ongoing successes of the project, particularly for Indigenous clients. Indigenous families take much longer and require more resources to engage. Research is needed into the positive aspects of the model and whether it could be translated into programs targeted at non-Indigenous families.
Audit category 2: Support for vulnerable and at-risk families (n = 18)			
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence (1999)	The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The methodology chosen was based on "participatory action". Qualitative methodology allowed for the inclusion of people's stories about their own experiences of violence and the transgenerational effect of historical trauma. The method helped the target group (Indigenous people across Queensland) to engage in the process of investigation and thereby have total ownership of both the report and the recommended solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colonisation and dispossession are factors central to the current alcohol and drug abuse, violence and dysfunction witnessed in Indigenous communities. Issues affecting Indigenous people cannot be separated from a holistic response to health. Mental health services are urgently required to address the emotional trauma experienced by Indigenous people. The injustices of the justice system are causing Indigenous people the most grief. Crime prevention strategies are deficient, with little relevance to traditional lore which provides the most effective deterrent. Although alcohol and drug use were reported to be primary factors in the level of violence and abuse being witnessed, there were other factors arising from both historical and contemporary experiences that were also believed to be present.
Dawe et al. (2006)	Drug use in the family: Impacts and implications for children	<p>A comprehensive review of the literature on prevalence of substance misuse in families. Additional original analyses were then conducted on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Drug Strategy Household Survey; The National Health Survey; The Longitudinal Study on Women's Health; The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children; and various specialist population databases. 	<p>Indigenous programs need to address the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced capacity for Indigenous people, both individually and as a community. A range of interventions that address substance abuse from a holistic framework. Increased ownership and sustainable partnerships of research, monitoring and evaluation. Substance abuse interventions to focus on instilling Indigenous values, principles and procedures in all spheres of prevention with Indigenous people. Training in cultural competence, designed to respectfully challenge misconceptions. Recognition of the right of Indigenous people to promote, develop and maintain their own institutional structures, traditions, customs and practices—pathways to empowerment and self-determination is pivotal.

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Department for Families and Communities, South Australia (2011)	Stronger Families Safer Children Evaluation: First stage report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative data collected and analysed. Administrative data from child protection/alternative care datasets. Qualitative data of NGO and Families SA sector ($n = 31$) <p>Caution to be exercised in view of limitations regarding quality and quantity of data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some families have benefited from program support by providing a clear direction for future planning and the long term safety and stability for children. Families with more extensive child protection histories and complex issues were harder to engage. There are areas in which working relationships within and across collaborating agencies were poor. Concerns were reported about service quality and referral outcomes that were considered inappropriate.
Flaxman et al. (2009)	Indigenous families and children: Coordination and provision of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed relevant academic and policy literature, undertook case studies of 20 CFC sites. Conducted focus groups with remote service providers. Analysed program data and reports. Conducted telephone interviews with program staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs benefited greatly from consultations and partnerships with Indigenous organisations and community members. In most cases, programs were too short for services to establish effective partnerships in the absence of pre-existing relationships. Indigenous families did not necessarily engage with services unless they were accessible and tailored to their specific needs. Staff availability, skills, qualifications and enthusiasm are instrumental in supporting or hindering service delivery. Social problems within Indigenous communities need to be addressed before (or in association with) implementation of early intervention and prevention initiatives.
Gibson & Morphet (2010)	Think Child, Think Family: Child and Family Sensitive Practice within Specialist Homelessness Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of methods including observation, parental report, child report, and formal assessment were adopted using existing or new survey tools. Data was drawn from 107 specialist homelessness services (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)) across Australia Analysis of administrative SAAP data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Australians make up approximately 2.5% of the Australian population yet in 2007–08 they accounted for 18% of clients in SAAP services. Indigenous children were particularly overrepresented, being seven times more likely than a non-Indigenous child to attend a SAAP service. The direct provision of assistance to children, making referrals to specialist services and the formation of linkages with other organisations were all seen as means of achieving positive outcomes for children. There was a lack of consistency across services in the methods and tools that were used.
Gordon et al. (2002)	Putting the picture together: Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities	<p>The Inquiry was, in part, required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine a range of activities of government agencies in responding to family violence and child abuse. Consult widely, including with representatives of Aboriginal communities. Consider current research into the prevalence, causes and solutions to Aboriginal family violence. Conduct formal hearings. Receive and consider submissions from interested individuals or organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current service system is not able to adequately address the escalating rates of family violence and child abuse. A community focused systemic response is articulated, rather than focusing on individual agencies that deliver Indigenous services. There needs to be sensitivity in ways of engaging Aboriginal people, to build trusting relationships and to provide culturally appropriate services. Ensure that appropriate consultative mechanisms are built into departmental structures.
MCEETYA (2001)	Solid foundations: Health and education partnership for Indigenous children aged 0 to 8 years	<p>This discussion paper summarises advice on nine health issues of concern to the Taskforce that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from birth to 8 years.</p>	<p>Principles of effective capacity building practice (selected principles only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous cross-portfolio initiatives work best when Indigenous communities are responsible partners in policy development and the design, delivery and evaluation of services. Early intervention initiatives need to be balanced with diversion, rehabilitation and reactive programmes. Indigenous cross-portfolio initiatives work best when funding is long term to ensure maximum sustainability and is linked to community capacity building that supports the lifelong learning requirements of the community. At the local level, cross-portfolio community development and capacity building programs need to be inclusive and responsive and reflect a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultural heritage.

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Munns (2010) (Also appears in Audit category 3)	Yanan Ngurra-ngu Walalja Halls Creek Community Families Program	Case study approach. Evaluation methodology not stated.	Features of culturally safe programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employment of Indigenous staff. ■ Reflexive non-Indigenous practitioners. ■ Provision of transport to services. ■ Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. ■ History—acknowledging the past and learning together. ■ Holistic joined-up programs, which meet the diverse physical, social, emotional, health and wellbeing needs of children and their families.
O'Donnell (2009) (Also appears in Audit category 3)	Towards prevention. A population health approach to child abuse and neglect: Health indicators and the identification of antecedent causal pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Comprehensive literature review. ■ Longitudinal data from WA Department of Child Protection, Health and Disability Services—Child protection data (Health Indicators), with comparisons to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Administrative data including Hospital morbidity data. ■ Data comparisons were made using logistic and Cox regression statistical techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aboriginal children are more likely to have substantiated neglect than any other type of abuse. ■ Historical reasons contribute to heightened risk of Aboriginal families and communities entering the child protection system. ■ Prematurity and low birth weight are more likely to result in increased child morbidity and developmental delay which have been associated with increased risk of child maltreatment. ■ Parental characteristics, including cultural differences in the way children are raised, are arguably increasing child vulnerability to child protection involvement. ■ High morbidity and mortality of adults reduces the number of people to support and care for children resulting in a high parental burden and an increased risk to child maltreatment. ■ Poverty is a factor with a significant association to child maltreatment. ■ There is a lack of research on the combined antecedent factors that result in Aboriginal child maltreatment—which needs to be rectified if prevention and intervention programs are to be developed.
Scougall (2008a)	Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004: Hervey Bay Indigenous Community Leadership Training Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Data collection for this study included a site visit to the project, interviews with project participants and other stakeholders, and examination of documentary sources contained on relevant departmental files. ■ All interviews with project participants were undertaken by local Indigenous people so as to engender trust in the case study and minimise the risk of misinterpretation. ■ Local Indigenous perspectives have been given priority over other perspectives in the analysis of the data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The development of Indigenous leadership capacity is a long-term process requiring engagement and professional development over a sustained period of time. ■ Leadership development with Indigenous peoples is at least as much about attitudinal and behavioural change and the re-building of confidence and self-belief, as it is about the transfer of knowledge and skills. ■ The use of Indigenous role models is widely seen as an effective strategy. ■ Lack of social cohesion is a significant impediment to capacity building in Indigenous contexts. ■ Leadership is instrumental rather than an end in itself, so leadership development always needs to occur in the context of local activities intended to address identified priority local needs.
Scougall (2008b)	Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004: Mandurah targeted region	<p>Three data collection sources have been relied upon in this study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three focus group meetings. ■ Numerous project site visits. ■ Various departmental documents and research reports of the national evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Strategy made a valuable contribution to the process of strengthening some local families and communities in Mandurah. ■ There was some dissatisfaction with funding decision processes. ■ New strategic partnerships between community organisations and government agencies have been developed as a result of the Strategy. ■ Stakeholders were proud that Strategy-funded projects in Mandurah have been initiated as local solutions to local problems. ■ Strategy project development was found to be informed by a local “learning by doing” evidence base.

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Scougall (2008c)	Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004: Potential leaders in local Communities Initiative	<p>This paper has been informed by the following sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A review of project progress reports, project evaluation reports and project file documentation. ■ A detailed case study of the Hervey Bay Indigenous Community Leadership project previously undertaken as part of this National Evaluation. ■ Case examples of Potential Leaders in Local Communities projects. ■ Questionnaire data received from projects funded under the Potential Leaders in Local Communities Initiative. ■ An analysis of the achievements of each project funded under the Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiative 	<p>Some ways in which [mainstream] leadership projects might be better supported in the future include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the inclusion of a mentoring and a community service component in projects; ■ resourcing peak organisations to provide support to localised leadership projects; ■ greater assistance to link projects to potential sources of ongoing funding; ■ regular national leadership conferences and workshops where knowledge and experience can be shared amongst projects; and ■ the development of a national leadership development strategic plan. <p>The Indigenous projects funded through the Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiative have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ most often been delivered in Indigenous places and by Indigenous people who make the participants feel at ease; ■ recognised the link between leadership capacity and people's need for healing (perhaps for the first time); and ■ reinforced participants' feelings of cultural connectedness, especially for the emerging next generation of leaders.
Scougall (2008d)	Lessons learnt about strengthening Indigenous families and communities: Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review of research and policy literature. ■ Analysis of National Evaluation data. ■ Questionnaire responses from Indigenous projects. ■ Three in-depth qualitative case studies. ■ Site visits to nine other Indigenous projects. ■ Review of progress reports and final reports (where available) for these projects and a further 16 projects. ■ Consultations with departmental staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong Indigenous families and communities are outcomes that can only be attained through sustained, long-term intervention. ■ Indigenous capacity building activities are more effective when undertaken in connection with a specific practical social purpose in association with a particular project activity. ■ Strengthening Indigenous families and communities is as much about healing the effects of trauma, attitudinal and behavioural change, and the rebuilding of confidence and self-belief, as it is about the transfer of particular knowledge and skills. ■ Strategic partnership arrangements provide much-needed stocks of linking and bridging social capital for Indigenous projects, but they do require a lot of time and energy to build and maintain.
Sheather (2009) (Also appears in Audit categories 1 and 3)	Communities for Children: Raymond Terrace & Karuah local evaluation report	<p>The local evaluation employed a mixed methods approach, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data. Action research was used to gather data from program participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Surveys were used at event days, excursions and other activities. ■ Activity sheets were devised to gather children's perspectives in the evaluation process. ■ Questionnaires for project officers were employed to enable self reflection. ■ Observational data from project officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Project cessation was reported as the biggest challenge to the ongoing successes of the project, particularly for Indigenous clients. ■ Indigenous families take much longer and require more resources to engage. ■ Research is needed into the positive aspects of the model and whether it could be translated into programs targeted at non-Indigenous families.
Sivak et al. (2008)	A pilot exploration of a family home visiting program for families of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The study focused on the perspectives of parents of Indigenous children and program staff, using a case study approach of both service providers and parents. ■ The study used a cross-sectional qualitative design in two regions of metropolitan Adelaide. ■ The program involved 34 visits focusing on child health and development and maternal–child attachment. ■ A total of five focus groups with program staff and clients were conducted. ■ An additional 23 interviews were conducted with program staff and clients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participants were positive about the qualities of staff and the relationships they had built together. ■ It was important to offer families an Indigenous cultural consultant. ■ Aboriginal staff were seen as having an understanding of clients' contexts and culture and sometimes as having a different way of communicating with families. ■ The passion and dedication of non-Aboriginal staff working with families was highly valued. ■ It is important to link qualitative data to outcomes and process evaluations in order to measure both the immediate impacts and long-term outcomes of the Family Home Visiting program.

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Taylor et al. (2004)	Supporting community solutions to family violence	A discussion paper that drew widely from literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When communities pose solutions to family violence they must be able to access real support to implement their solutions. ■ Policy development and funding options must be generated from the holistic Indigenous perspective. ■ Holistic responses require existing responses to be integrated and a developmental approach is undertaken to enable the community to build on existing strengths to implement the initiatives it identifies.
Thomson et al. (2004)	Families First area review Illawarra: Final report	The area review methodology involved multiple data collection techniques including document reviews, surveys, interviews and focus groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aboriginal engagement in planning, management and implementation is acknowledged as crucial to the success of Families First throughout Illawarra. ■ The implementation of the program was enhanced by the continued involvement of key individuals such as local Elders in the management of the strategy. ■ Aboriginal engagement in Families First is achieved when time, energy and resources are invested in building and maintaining relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and organisations.
Thorpe (2008)	Family inclusion in child protection practice: Building bridges in working with (not against) families	A preliminary discussion paper with a case study approach using observational data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is important to endorse, unequivocally, the principle that the child's interests are paramount. ■ There are vital child centred reasons for working with parents, including issues of respect, power, trust, loss and grief and cultural competence.
Audit category 3: Prevention of child abuse and neglect category (n = 7)			
Hilferty et al. (2010)	The evaluation of Brighter Futures, NSW Community Services' Early Intervention Program: Final report	<p>Eight evaluation sites were reported in final report across three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Results evaluation using multiple methods, data sources, and outcome indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interviews and surveys with families. ■ Analysis of multiple sets of administrative program data. ■ Process evaluation using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Administrative data. ■ Observational data. ■ Interviews with program families. ■ Interviews with program staff. ■ Economic evaluation that aimed to establish if the program offered value for money for government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Many caseworkers felt it impossible to engage the local Indigenous community without Indigenous caseworkers. ■ Local knowledge of the Indigenous families in certain areas was seen as critical when attempting to engage families. ■ It took extra time to work with Indigenous families as it was important to develop relationships with the extended family.
Hunt & Walsh (2011) (Also appears in Audit category 1)	Parents' views about child sexual abuse prevention education: A systematic review	Electronic database searches were conducted to identify relevant literature relating to child sexual abuse prevention programs and parent's views. The authors found total of 429 papers, of which 13 met the study's inclusion criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is considerable lack of research from within Australia. ■ Consultation is required to elicit Australian parents' ideas about effective programs and to carefully connect this with research-based evidence. ■ While there have been enduring calls to enlist parents as partners in prevention, the real potential of parent-focused child sexual abuse prevention has not yet been realised. ■ In the absence of Australian research, the authors conclude that further study of Australian parents' views is clearly warranted.

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Moore et al. (2007)	They've gotta listen: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Young People in Out of Home Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participatory action learning process, which incorporated multiple cycles of planning, observation, action and critical reflection. ■ Two youth forums were held to explore the issues young people face. ■ Fifty-two Indigenous children and young people participated in this project. 	<p>Indigenous young people stressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The importance of supporting family early to prevent young people having to enter the care and protection system. ■ That culture represents the positive parts of community. ■ Care and protection workers needed to be given training on how to work appropriately with Aboriginal foster carers. ■ Racism is everywhere and young people are often treated differently because they were Aboriginal. ■ A lack of cultural sensitivity led workers to downplay their Aboriginality or to discard its importance, particularly when young people are fairer skinned. ■ The importance of providing information about what was happening to them and to involve them in decision making about their lives.
Munns (2010) (Also appears in Audit category 2)	Yanan Ngurra-ngu Walalja Halls Creek Community Families Program	Case study approach. Evaluation methodology not stated.	<p>Features of culturally safe programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Employment of Indigenous staff. ■ Reflexive non-Indigenous practitioners. ■ Provision of transport to services. ■ Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. ■ History—acknowledging the past and learning together. <p>Holistic joined-up programs, which meet the diverse physical, social, emotional, health and wellbeing needs of children and their families.</p>
O'Donnell (2009) (Also appears in Audit category 2)	Towards prevention. A population health approach to child abuse and neglect: Health indicators and the identification of antecedent causal pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Comprehensive literature review. ■ Longitudinal data from WA Department of Child Protection, Health and Disability Services—Child protection data (Health Indicators), with comparisons to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Administrative data including Hospital morbidity data. ■ Data comparisons were made using logistic and Cox regression statistical techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aboriginal children are more likely to have substantiated neglect than any other type of abuse. ■ Historical reasons contribute to heightened risk of Aboriginal families and communities entering the child protection system. ■ Prematurity and low birth weight are more likely to result in increased child morbidity and developmental delay which have been associated with increased risk of child maltreatment. ■ Parental characteristics, including cultural differences in the way children are raised, are arguably increasing child vulnerability to child protection involvement. ■ High morbidity and mortality of adults reduces the number of people to support and care for children resulting in a high parental burden and an increased risk to child maltreatment. ■ Poverty is a factor with a significant association to child maltreatment. ■ There is a lack of research on the combined antecedent factors that result in Aboriginal child maltreatment—which needs to be rectified if prevention and intervention programs are to be developed.
Sheather (2009) (Also appears in Audit categories 1 and 2)	Communities for Children: Raymond Terrace & Karuah local evaluation report	<p>The local evaluation employed a mixed methods approach, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data. Action research was used to gather data from program participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Surveys were used at event days, excursions and other activities. ■ Activity sheets were devised to gather children's perspectives in the evaluation process. ■ Questionnaires for project officers were employed to enable self reflection. ■ Observational data from project officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Project cessation was reported as the biggest challenge to the ongoing successes of the project, particularly for Indigenous clients. ■ Indigenous families take much longer and require more resources to engage. ■ Research is needed into the positive aspects of the model and whether it could be translated into programs targeted at non-Indigenous families.

Reference	Evaluation title	Notes on methodology	Relevant findings
Wendt & Baker (2010)	Evaluation of the Sturt Street Family Violence Partnership Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Literature review. ■ Qualitative focus—Semi-structured interviews of service providers ($n = 9$; 64% response rate; includes one Indigenous participant) and Indigenous women ($n = 13$; 40% of total number of service users). ■ Quantitative analysis—administrative data. ■ Thematic analysis of mission statements, funding agreements, and program reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Long-term investment produces sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families. ■ Practical/material support coupled together with emotional and educative support produces sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families. ■ Services must be culturally sensitive and aware when working with Aboriginal families. ■ Working in organic, flexible, and gentle ways is effective when working with Aboriginal women and their children. ■ Outreach support is important to help Aboriginal women keep and maintain their permanent public housing.



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Australian Institute of Family Studies
Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Phone: (03) 9214 7888 Fax: (03) 9214 7839
Internet: <www.aifs.gov.au>

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