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Stories on ‘growing up’ from Indigenous people in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region

COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE TELETHON INSTITUTE FOR CHILD HEALTH RESEARCH AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

footprints in time
The Longitudinal Study of
Indigenous Children



Improving the lives of Australians

This report may contain information that may offend some readers.

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Administrative Arrangements Orders changes

In December 2007, Administrative Arrangements Orders were announced that created a new Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to replace the former Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). The former acronym (FaCSIA) has been used where appropriate to refer to activities of the previous department.

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The information for this paper is drawn from the report, *Growing up in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region: a collection of stories to inform the development of the proposed Footprints in Time study* (2006) prepared for FaHCSIA by the Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) in collaboration with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR).

We would like to acknowledge and express deep appreciation to the many individuals and organisations who participated in the *Footprints in Time* community engagement qualitative trial, especially:

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- ▶ the many individuals who shared their personal 'growing up' stories, for their generosity and spirit. Our respect goes to you and your families
- ▶ Nerelle Poroch and Yin Parides, who collected the data
- ▶ the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) in association with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR), for conducting an independent qualitative evaluation of the trials for FaHCSIA and developing the initial report.

The stories contained in this report belong to the residents and participants of ACT metro/Queanbeyan community. These stories should not be copied in any way or quoted without prior written approval.

For more information

Research Publications Unit

Research and Analysis Branch

Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Box 7788

Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2610

Phone: (02) 6244 5458

Fax: (02) 6244 6589

Email: publications.research@fahcsia.gov.au

Contents

Executive summary	v
1 Background and context	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The purpose of this paper	1
1.3 Location and rationale for site selection	1
1.4 More about <i>Footprints in Time</i> : the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children	2
1.5 Linkages with other programs, surveys or research projects	3
2 About the trial in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region	5
2.1 Purpose of the trial	5
2.2 Outcomes	5
2.3 Importance of community engagement	5
3 Method for the ACT metro/Queanbeyan trial	7
3.1 <i>Footprints in Time</i> collection and reporting methods	7
3.2 Data and information collection	7
3.3 Limitations	9
4 Overview of findings: what participants said were important contributors to Indigenous children growing up strong and resilient	11
4.1 Starting out (0–4 years)	11
4.2 Growing up (5–17 years)	13
4.3 Family role (0–17 years)	16
4.4 The role of services	20
4.5 Summary and conclusion	23
Appendix A: History and demography of the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region	25
Appendix B: Focus group—questions and prompts	27
Appendix C: In-depth interview—questions and prompts	31
Appendix D: Indigenous specific and mainstream services used by Indigenous ACT/Queanbeyan residents	33
List of shortened forms	35
Endnotes	37
References	39

Executive summary

Footprints in Time is the name given to the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), an Australian Government initiative announced in 2003. The study aims to improve the understanding of, and policy response to, the diverse circumstances faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families, and communities.

Footprints in Time will provide a data resource that can be drawn on by Australian governments, researchers, service providers, parents and communities. This resource will provide a better insight into how a child's early years affect the way they develop and mature. The design of the *Footprints in Time* study has been developed in consultation with Indigenous peoples, communities and organisations.

This paper presents a summary of the information collected during FaHCSIA's community engagement qualitative trial undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) metropolitan (metro) region and the Queanbeyan region. It is based on focus groups and in-depth interviews with key informants and community members including: Elders, parents, care givers, young people, prominent Indigenous organisations and government departments funding Indigenous programs. The trial was conducted between January and August 2005.

This paper provides extracts of 'growing up stories' from people who live in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region related to Indigenous children growing up healthy and strong and their perceptions of how their families, communities and environment affect their children's pathways throughout life. This qualitative research—the stories—has made an important contribution to the overall evaluation of preparatory work for the *Footprints in Time* national study. The analysis of these qualitative data provides a strong evidence base, endorsed by stakeholders, to guide the design and content of the study including strategies for: community engagement; promotion of the study and obtaining informed consent; qualitative data collection; and dissemination of information and data back to communities.

Key findings

Key findings are summarised under two headings: contributors to positive outcomes for Indigenous children; and contributors to poor outcomes for Indigenous children.

Key contributors to Indigenous children growing up strong and resilient

- The culturally inclusive position of the extended family caring for and supporting children is the best family environment for children growing up strong and is the centre of their wellbeing. Having positive role models, a good education, strong connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowing the positives and how to attain them, all contribute to a resilient life.
- Families and family values are central to learning and maintaining Indigenous culture. Exposure to Indigenous culture should also be an integral part of the school curriculum, and this is more likely if cross-cultural training for teachers is given priority.
- Community support networks, such as the 'Parents Groups' and the 'Uncles/Nephews Groups' assist in maintaining family values in a community where extended families often live elsewhere.
- Team sport, such as football, plays an important role in building support networks, self-esteem and respect.
- Access to a range of services such as health, education and cultural services provided by Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations also supports the development of resilient children. However, the Indigenous service organisations accessed by most community members are stretched to the limit. Lack of transport and economic circumstances are factors that hamper access to these services.

- Respondents in the 18–25 years age range tend to have a sense of empowerment. They believe they can give their children a 'good life' because their own experiences of growing up have taught them the life skills to raise strong children.

Key contributors to poor outcomes for children

- The absence of parental support and adequate preparation for transition from high school to college (Years 11–12 in the ACT school system) can cause children to drop out of school. Strengthening experiences of Indigenous children and families during preschool and primary school offer the best solution to long-term engagement with the education system. The role of Indigenous Education Officers in the schools was reported to help attendance rates and build better school experiences.
- The extended family is not always present in the urban ACT metro/Queanbeyan community because many have left behind families in other parts of Australia to find employment in the ACT.
- Historically, and in the present, Indigenous people experience racial discrimination in the community and in the school system. Stepping stones to improve the inclusiveness of schools for Indigenous children could include: cross-cultural training for teachers; increased numbers of Indigenous teachers; and cultural awareness programs in the school curriculum.
- The passing down of culture from the older generation to younger people is not complete. Grandparents and parents visiting their country with their children and grandchildren provide some teaching; however, there is concern that culture could disappear with the passing of these Elders. The younger generation experience confusion about identity and would benefit from Indigenous studies being introduced into the school system. The belief is that this would help to retain cultural knowledge and improve cross-cultural understanding.
- Drugs and alcohol are a problem and, in the absence of parenting and strong male leadership, can make increased demands on the extended family. Grandparents play a strong and positive listening role.

1 Background and context

1.1 Introduction

The Australian Government provided initial funding over four years for the development of a Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) in the 2003–04 Budget, with the aim of providing a strong evidence base to continually improve the design and delivery of interventions for Indigenous children in the early years.

Footprints in Time is the name the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) has given to LSIC. The study is working in partnership with a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities throughout Australia to collect information over time about the things that impact on Indigenous children's lives, and the things that help them to grow up strong with a better future.¹

The purpose of the *Footprints in Time* study is to collect data from across Australia to help understand the links between early childhood experiences and later life outcomes for Indigenous children living in remote, rural, regional and urban locations. The design of the *Footprints in Time* study is being developed in consultation with Indigenous peoples, communities and organisations.²

More information about *Footprints in Time* is provided in Section 1.4.

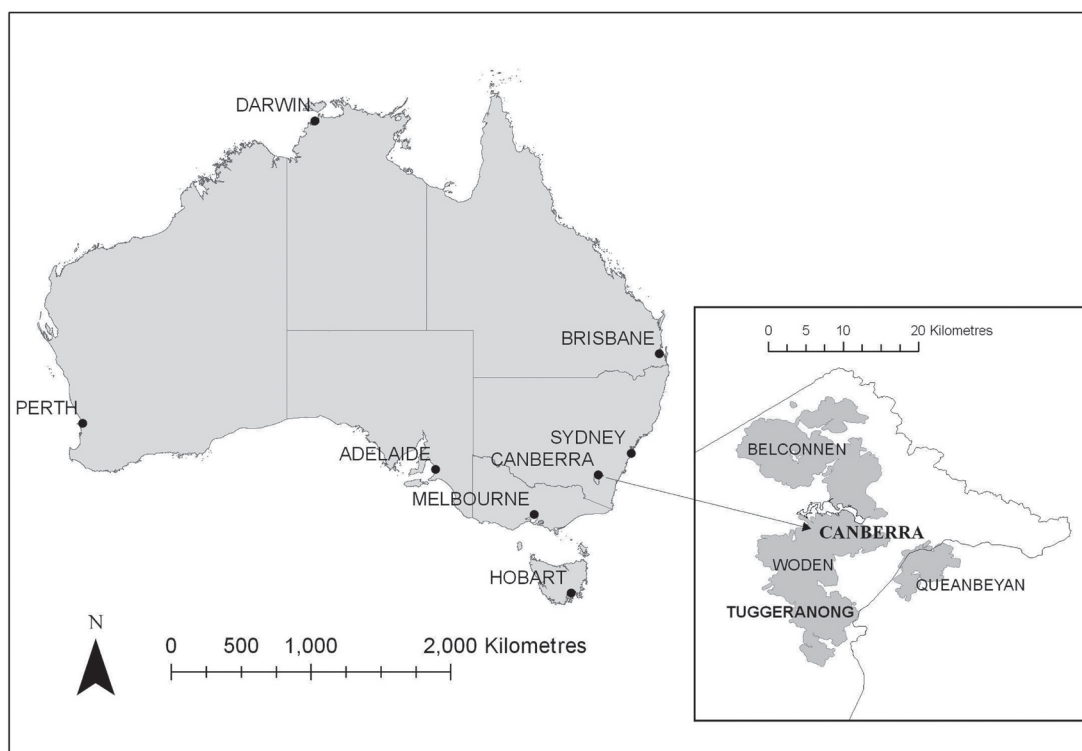
1.2 The purpose of this paper

This paper presents a summary of the information collected during one of FaHCSIA's community engagement qualitative trials. The trial was undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) metropolitan (metro) region and the Queanbeyan region, as part of preparation work to guide and inform the design, content and implementation of LSIC.

The paper provides a summary of the stories that participants wanted to share in relation to Indigenous children growing up healthy and strong in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan area³ and their perceptions of how their families, communities and the environment affected their children's pathways throughout life. Participants' personal 'growing up' stories provide glimpses of earlier generations growing up. Their stories appear as vignettes throughout the report.

1.3 Location and rationale for site selection

Canberra is the capital city of Australia and is located 300 kilometres south-west of Sydney, sited within the ACT. The town of Queanbeyan is located 10 kilometres from the Canberra CBD on the New South Wales/ACT border.



The ACT metro/Queanbeyan region represents a contemporary urban/regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander region with a diverse, highly transitional population. Indigenous residents identify personally as Ngunnawal, Walgalu or Wiradjuri and some people grew up elsewhere.

At the time of the trial, the population of the ACT was 319,317, including an estimated resident population of 3,909 Indigenous people.⁴ Queanbeyan's population of 38,000 for the same period had an estimated Indigenous population of 800.⁵

A more detailed demography and history of the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region is provided in Appendix A.

The ACT metro/Queanbeyan trial complemented a similar trial that was undertaken in a remote setting. The Torres Strait/Northern Peninsula Area⁶ trial was reported in Occasional Paper no. 17, *Growing up in the Torres Strait region: a report from the Footprints in Time trials* (Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health in collaboration with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research & FaCSIA 2006).

These two regions were selected for the trials on the basis that a 'one-size-fits-all' model would not work. It was assumed that each of the regions would require a different approach in terms of community engagement, with different processes required in a remote setting compared to an urban–regional setting.

1.4 More about *Footprints in Time*: the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children

Why is *Footprints in Time* needed?

Footprints in Time aims to show when and how governments, service providers and families themselves can intervene to improve outcomes for Indigenous children over the long term. While much is known about Indigenous disadvantage and how to begin to address it, less is known about what works over time. *Footprints in Time* is designed to play a significant and groundbreaking role in addressing some of the deficiencies in our current knowledge base about Indigenous children. It is important that there is a good evidence base to inform Indigenous policy and programs.

What is a longitudinal study and why the need?

The *Footprints in Time* study will track two age groups over time starting in April 2008: babies aged 6 to 18 months; and children aged between 3 years, 6 months and 4 years, 6 months. ‘Longitudinal’ means that the study will collect information from the same people over time. This will create a ‘story’ about how they change and grow, how their circumstances change, and how their families, communities and environment affect their pathways through life, including why some children are more resilient in stressful environments than other children.

The study will collect a broad range of information about:

- **the child:** health, how they learn and develop, their place in the family and community, and significant events in their life
- **the child’s family:** health, work, lifestyle, family and community relationships
- **the child’s community:** facilities, services, history, social issues and community issues
- **services:** the type of child care, education, health and other services used by the child’s family.

How will the information be used?

Information is expected to:

- inform the development of policies and programs in relation to health, education, community development, housing and child care
- provide a good data resource for Australian governments, researchers, service providers, families and communities to better target policies and program interventions and improve the life chances of Indigenous peoples.

It is also hoped that this study can show governments and service providers the unique differences in Indigenous cultures compared to other cultures, and how important it is to acknowledge and respect cultural diversity in their planning, policy and services.

1.5 Linkages with other programs, surveys or research projects

Studies involving Indigenous children have been undertaken in the past, but have generally been restricted to a particular region, state or territory, and have not been longitudinal. The lack of Indigenous longitudinal studies, particularly in relation to children, is a constant theme in the literature (ABS 2005; AIHW 2005; Productivity Commission 2005). The *Footprints in Time* study is groundbreaking research.

The study will support FaHCSIA’s strategic themes of focusing on early intervention for children and families, assisting those most disadvantaged, and achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Australians. FaHCSIA is committed to undertaking research that is community-based and involves building local research capacity, and also provides information back to Indigenous families and communities.

Footprints in Time complements a number of large cross-sectional surveys currently undertaken by other research organisations. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts the National and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), and state and territory agencies fund specific studies, such as the Study of Environment on Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health Program (SEARCH) and the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS).

FaHCSIA is also funding another study of young children, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), that includes a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in urban and regional communities. However, LSAC does not focus on children living in remote communities or cover the full range of issues important to Indigenous children’s developmental pathways (Hunter 2006).

2 About the trial in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region

2.1 Purpose of the trial

The purpose of the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region trial was to:

- collect information relating to Indigenous children growing up strong in the region, with a focus on the role of family, community and service providers in developing ways to encourage resilience in future generations
- identify key elements of successful community engagement, including strategies for qualitative data collection and ways to feed back information and data to participating communities.

2.2 Outcomes

Findings from this trial were expected to provide:

- FaHCSIA with valuable information, options and learning to inform the future design and content of the *Footprints in Time* national study and the pitfalls to be avoided
- ACT metro/Queanbeyan communities with a record of growing up in the region and the things that impact on: their children growing up strong; and their resilience pathways through life. Their personal ‘growing up’ stories will provide glimpses of earlier generations growing up and a picture of how childhood and parenting has changed over time. It is therefore a record to help communities remember the past while planning for the future.

Although not the focus of this report, the trial may also enable FaHCSIA to learn about the best options and strategies for:

- promoting of the *Footprints in Time* national study
- obtaining permission and community agreement to the study
- developing research agreements and protocols with the community with regard to:
 - obtaining informed consent to participation in interviews and focus groups
 - providing data access and ownership
- recruiting families with children to participate in the study
- developing and assessing publicity and promotional materials targeted to the community
- recruiting, training and supporting Indigenous Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and researchers
- developing and testing of training modules for researchers.

2.3 Importance of community engagement

Without a balanced strategy that incorporates significant community engagement and feedback, the *Footprints in Time* study cannot succeed. Consistent with FaHCSIA's approach to Indigenous issues, the prerequisite for a successful community engagement model is to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the design, planning, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of information.

Dissemination of findings or feedback of information to communities is also a critical part of the study. The system and processes for research findings to be transferred to the key stakeholders are integral to ethical research with Indigenous communities. That is why dissemination strategies for the *Footprints in Time* findings have been identified and incorporated into the project planning from an early stage, including the trials.

3 Method for the ACT metro/Queanbeyan trial

This section provides an overview of the aims and methods used in collecting and analysing data for the ACT metro/Queanbeyan trial.

3.1 *Footprints in Time* collection and reporting methods

The method used to collect information and report on the trial included five core components:

- data and information collection
- compilation and analysis of the information collected during consultation
- preparation of interim report
- preparation of this *Occasional Paper*
- dissemination of data to communities.

3.2 Data and information collection

Qualitative methods were the primary source of data collection and included the following components:

- in-depth community member interviews (semi-structured and structured), face to face with key informants
- focus group meetings with various community members, including Elders, parents and care givers, young people, service providers and other agencies directed by FaHCSIA (prominent Indigenous organisations and government departments with Indigenous programs).

In total, thirty-five Indigenous respondents participated in either the interviews or focus groups conducted over a two-week period commencing on 15 August 2005. The combination of these two methods provided the data to enable researchers to build up a comprehensive picture of what participants believed were important contributors to Indigenous children growing up healthy and strong.

Participants had the opportunity to reflect on what was working well now and what worked well in the past, how child rearing practices have changed over time, and the pathways to resilience in the future.

Why a qualitative approach?

The combined data collected from both the individual interviews and focus group sessions gave rise to the stories through which participants' described their world. The information was grounded on specific knowledge and experiences of participants.

Extracts of a number of the respondents' growing up stories are included in this report. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the report to protect the respondents' confidentiality.

Several researchers (Denzin 2000; Patton 1990) claim that qualitative methods, such as the narrative in-depth interview approach described above, are particularly useful in giving understanding and meaning to a particular problem, or a unique situation in great depth. Much can be learnt from just a few examples of the circumstances investigated (Patton 1990).

Focus group workshops to gather information

Five focus group workshops were conducted with the following community groups:

- grandparents (8 participants aged 55–65 years)
- working parents (4 participants aged 18–50 years)
- Uncles/Nephews⁷ (7 participants aged 30–65 years)
- service providers (representing 3 organisations)
- Community Development Employment Program participants (5 in total).

The focus groups looked at four predetermined themes and a sequenced set of questions designed to uncover insights relevant to the role of raising children in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region.

- **Theme 1—Starting out:** What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–4 years need to have the best start in life to grow up strong?
- **Theme 2—Growing up:** What are the things that influence the way children aged 5–17 grow up strong, including pathways for resilience in future generations?
- **Theme 3—Family role in 'growing up' strong children:** What is the role of family and extended family in the early years and when growing up?
- **Theme 4—The role of services:** How can services and other supporting community systems make a difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

Focus group questions were tested and modified following an initial pilot focus group session. Details of the focus group questions and prompts for each of the four themes is provided in Appendix B. Table 1 summarises the focus group session process.

Table 1: Focus group session themes, content and participating groups

Theme	Focus	Participating group/s
1 Starting out	Strength and resilience issues for children aged 0–4 years	Working parents groups
2 Growing up	Family and community influences that affect the way children aged 5–17 grow up strong including pathways for resilience in future generations	Uncles/Nephews program Service providers CDEP participants
3 The family role	Family role in 'growing up' healthy and strong children—aged 0–17 years	CDEP participants ACT Grandparents group
4 The role of services	Local Indigenous-specific and mainstream services used by Indigenous ACT/Queanbeyan residents that contribute to childhood strength and resilience	CDEP participants Grandparents group

In-depth interviews

In total, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with key community informants. Respondents were aged between 18–74 years. The individual in-depth interviews contained both unstructured and structured components, which allowed respondents to relate and reflect on their experiences of childhood and the challenges for families and communities in raising children. The interview also facilitated a more purposeful collection of information around similar themes to those explored in the focus group sessions.

The in-depth interviews explored three topics. The interviewer began by asking participants to share their own stories of growing up and some of the challenges they faced in life. They were then asked to comment on how things were different for kids growing up today. Finally, participants were invited to share their views on the family and community's role in 'growing up' strong and healthy children. Findings from this last question were incorporated, as appropriate, with those from the focus groups and analysed according to the four themes listed in Table 1.

Summaries of the findings of in-depth interviews and focus groups are presented in Section 4. Details of the in-depth interview process and question prompts are provided in Appendix C.

Compilation and analysis of the information collected during consultation

The role of researchers

The focus groups and in-depth interviews were facilitated by external researchers on behalf of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH). Researchers underwent a comprehensive training and induction process prior to data collection and received instruction in cultural awareness protocols and data collection and analysis procedures.

The role of Community Liaison Officers

FaHCSIA's Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) assisted with the initial community engagement process including:

- consultation and liaison with stakeholders in the promotion of the *Footprints in Time* national study
- overseeing the administrative and procedural tasks for:
 - obtaining informed consent prior to and following each in-depth interview and focus group session
 - setting up focus group workshops to enable CRAH to do individual interviews and focus groups workshops
 - ensuring that all information gathered, reported and finalised was made available to participating communities.

Analysis of data

A vast amount of qualitative data was collected for the purposes of data analysis. The in-depth face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions were recorded on audiotape and transcribed. The written data was analysed using a routine manual 'open coding' process, which involved reading the material and highlighting key points and issues raised (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Strauss & Corbin 1987). Following this process, correlations, regularities and emergent patterns across the different transcripts were noted. This process enabled researchers to identify themes and concepts related to the four predetermined focus topics: Starting out; Growing up; Family role; and The role of services.

3.3 Limitations

Time and resource constraints and the lack of scope in consultation limited the degree and depth of analysis that could be carried out. For example, with the exceptions of the young respondents from the Uncles/Nephews group, consultation excluded Indigenous youth's perspectives of resilience and coping in growing up. A comparison of the experiences of youth with the experiences and lessons learnt by the Elders and parents would have provided valuable data. Therefore information contained in this report is not truly representative of the whole ACT/Queanbeyan community and caution is needed in the interpretation of these results.

4 Overview of findings: what participants said were important contributors to Indigenous children growing up strong and resilient

4.1 Starting out (0–4 years)

Theme 1: ‘Starting out’ examined the life experiences of children aged 0–4 years from the perspective of the working parent respondents. Participants’ own ‘growing up stories’ provided additional insights.

Summary of **important contributors** to Indigenous children (babies and toddlers) having the **best start in life**:

- strong family support systems and role models
- quality child care
- knowing their child’s health status
- quality child care both within the family and outside the family
- feeling connected to the child during the pre and postnatal period
- opportunities for learning about culture and history.

Working parent respondents considered that growing up strong was linked to a child having a strong family support system and being the centre of parents’ attention from the start of life. This included: feeling connected to the child during the pre and postnatal period; having ongoing interaction with the baby within a happy and positive home atmosphere; and being attentive to the child’s health status and needs.

Parental child care and external child care both assist in socialising the young child. External child care can be a necessity for parents who are working or studying. However, it is important to choose a child care provider with a good reputation. Child minding undertaken by family or friends can have mixed results. As one participant observed, ‘it can be easier to accept and, if necessary, criticise an external provider’s style of care than that delivered by family members’.

Learning about their culture was seen as an important component in building resilience in young children. As they grow up, children can experience the influence of culture through being educated in the old ways by extended family, listening to Indigenous music, looking up to Indigenous sports stars and camping in the bush. For those who do not have extended family within the community, parents can use community activities such as NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week as cultural learning opportunities for their young children, as well as taking opportunities for them to interact with other Aboriginal people whenever possible.

One participant stressed the importance of retaining the Indigenous culture and was optimistic about the way her family encourages this:

Everything we are involved in these days—it is Westernised. Kids do not have the connection to the earth and the old times, which is sad. We get them involved in sports and education. My family goes camping ... but there are so many kids that don’t have that connection and would prefer to listen to rap music because they relate to it more. The family are important in giving balance and has a lot to do on influencing the kids. We still in the family listen to Indigenous singers. Our grandparents play it all the time so we have a connection to that. As Indigenous kids we are looking up to Indigenous sports stars as well. So it is still there.

(Cindy, focus group, 16 August 2005)

For other respondents, Western culture was seen as 'taking away' the Indigenous spiritual base—the connection with the earth and old times—and some people thought that there has been a loss of admiration for Indigenous leaders. There was also recognition that Indigenous history is a sad one to pass on to small children.

However, younger participants (those aged 18–25 years) in the working parents group expressed a sense of empowerment. They believe they can give their children a good life because their own experiences of growing up have taught them the life skills to raise strong children.

The young fathers' stories recorded during individual interviews (see Jack's and Peter's stories) reflected their growing up in difficult life circumstances but also showed a sense of empowerment and resilience in addressing challenges. Strong mothers and other family role models played a significant part in this, and so too, the realisation that 'family are your best friends' (see Peter's story).

Peter's story: the challenges I faced while growing up

Peter was born in Alice Springs in 1983 and lived there until he was 5 years old. The best thing about that time was the traditional food that his father, who was a surveyor, would bring back from the bush. He commented: 'That was the norm for me and my brother, and I realise now how good it was'. Peter's parents split up and he went travelling with his mother for about five years to different capital cities, living in each one for six months. They finally settled in Darwin. Reflecting on this time Peter commented: 'Basically [in] my childhood [I] was brought up on different foods. The travelling was a lot of my childhood and also the food'. Sport (AFL) was also an important part of his life as a child, but he hated school.

Peter's older brother and mother were the most significant people in his life during his childhood. His mother was then (and still is) a severe diabetic and he had to look after her. Peter also looked after his grandmother until she died. On this aspect of his life he commented: 'Family and death, and the threat of death, played a pretty big part in my maturing ... and knowing the feelings of other people'. Peter's grandmother was a member of the Stolen Generation and she taught him that 'family are your best friends', and this has stuck with him.

The challenges Peter faced included growing up in the Northern Territory known for high rates of misuse of alcohol and drugs by Indigenous people. He was in an environment of being regularly stoned, drinking alcohol, and having family fights. Although Peter experienced 'a lot of bad things', he also experienced good things such as his father teaching him to control his temper. Peter has now married into the local Indigenous community in Canberra and has an 11 month-old baby boy. Both he and his wife have worked in education for several years.

Thinking about how things are different for children today compared to when he was growing up, Peter considers that kids today get it easy. For example, they receive ABSTUDY and can access support networks for court appearances (which Peter is involved in), and they know how to 'work the system', such as having babies in order to receive the \$3,000 baby bonus money. He added: 'These days there are too many services for kids who can do whatever they want. Everything is a quick fix these days'. He also considers that kids have seen too much through movies and the media. They learn about sex and drugs when they are in Years 3 and 4. They know about the system and the people who are there to help them, and they use this knowledge as a power play and abuse the opportunities available to them.

Interview, 25 August 2005

For these young fathers, experiences of following traditional culture—for example, in caring for the family and eating traditional healthy food—have stayed in their memory. Experiencing the sense of achievement and strength from playing sport, as opposed to following the drug and alcohol trail, has determined the way one young father wants to live and bring up his children. Factors working against today's children growing up strong were said to include the relative lack of restriction placed on children and their easy access to a variety of services and activities, in comparison to the situation when the current generation of parents was growing up.

Jack's story: surviving and thriving 'the school of hard knocks'

Jack grew up in the ACT. The part Jack liked most about his childhood was having his brother around. His brother has always been his best mate. They have been through ups and downs but always stuck by one another. Jack also had a strong family around him. Jack's mother was the most significant person in his life. Jack commented, 'I learnt to have a kind heart from my mother, and [I learnt] that family comes first'. His mother had moved away from her family in Queensland to work in Canberra when she was 16, which was a brave move to make. She went through a lot for him and his brother and would give them her last cent if they needed it. Jack's parents split up when he was in his teens and he thinks that a father figure is really needed in one's teen years.

Another significant person in Jack's life was his mother's father, who passed away in 2000. Although Jack only saw him no more than 10 times in his whole life (because he lived in Queensland), he and Jack were 'best friends'. He taught Jack a lot over the phone and when they met. He taught Jack how to treat and pick up women, how to be strong, and how to treat his mother right. Just before he died he [Jack's grandfather] saw Jack achieve one of his goals of representing Australia in football, which meant a lot to Jack. Sport let him know in himself that he had the ability to make something of himself. He received a lot of encouragement to achieve in sport from his parents and family.

A challenge Jack faced when growing up was making sure he did not get involved in the wrong crowd. Thinking about his time at school in Canberra, Jack commented, 'We used to call our primary school the school of hard knocks'. Jack used to be a heavy drinker, which was a challenge that he has now overcome. He stuck to sport, which he said kept him going strong and still does today.

Thinking about how things are different for kids today, Jack observed:

I think kids have got it pretty tough these days with all the drugs out there. All it takes is to end up in the wrong crowd and if you're not strong enough to give up all that crap, you're stuffed for the rest of your life.

Jack has seen mates take that course. Except for his sport he could have been with them.

Interview, 25 August 2005

4.2 Growing up (5–17 years)

This theme focused on the community's contribution to children growing up strong and ways to encourage resilience in future generations. Three focus groups discussed the 'growing up' theme covering children aged 5–17 years including: CDEP participants, service providers and members of the Uncles/Nephews Program, an innovative program providing mentoring for young males in the community. The in-depth interview survey provided additional information.

Summary of what participants said were **important contributors** to Indigenous children in this age group **growing up strong**:

- the culturally inclusive position of extended family caring and support
- having strong, positive Indigenous role models in the family and community
- opportunities to gain cultural appreciation and knowledge
- availability of Indigenous program support networks (schools and community) particularly with a focus on sport
- access to cultural and social education within the family and school
- socialisation within the Indigenous and broader community
- access to good health care.

The role of family and community in children growing up strong

Positive male and female role models in the family and community have many benefits for this age group. Colin's story of growing up in a country town in the 1950s presents a picture of strong male family leadership from his father, uncles and grandfather, notwithstanding his parents' separation.

Colin's story: positive experiences of growing up in the 1950s

Colin grew up in the 1950s in a country town in New South Wales. His mother and father broke up when he was 10 years old and his grandmother then became the most significant person in his life because she parented him and his two brothers. Colin grew up with a strong work ethic, which came from his background where everyone in the house worked. He was always working alongside his uncles, father and grandfather; sowing wheat or working on the tractor and learning new skills. The important thing was that he and his brothers were with their family to see what they were doing.

However, Colin decided that he did not want to do this work for a living but wanted knowledge and power. He went to high school and was the second one to go to Intermediate year. But he still worked on holidays. He also enjoyed trying other things:

I did a lot of work and chipped weeds in large paddocks. You would start at 4 am. The cow cocky would give me two litres of milk and sandwiches and I would work 16 hours a day at two shillings an hour. This was when I went to school. You needed the money to go to school and support your family. I enjoyed learning other things. As a teenager I got an apprenticeship as a TV technician. On weekends we could deliver services to all the white people. I would fix TVs on Saturday and they would pay me in lettuces and oranges—like bartering—and my brother would fix up cars.

He also enjoyed playing sport, which became an essential part of his life, but looking out for his family was also important:

My grandmother had two other families and some became good boxers. Getting into the boxing ring and playing football and doing gym with them—everybody was good at something and you would learn from them.

The biggest challenge was making sure I did not get into trouble with the cops. I had two brothers and a sister to look after, and if I was not around, they would not get what they could if I wasn't there. They would have been missing out.

Interview, 19 August 2005

In contrast to Colin's experience, however, other participants spoke of an absence of male leadership for children growing up in modern society, with the Uncles/Nephews Program in the community set up as an attempt to improve this situation (see Cliff's story below).

Cliff's story: reinventing the cycle of male leadership

'What we are trying to do in the Uncles/Nephews Program is trying to reinvent the cycle. Because of all the different aspects of society, males tend to lose responsibility and leadership in the family. You need strong male leadership for families. I have grandchildren without a father and they treat me as a father. In the Aboriginal society uncles and grandfathers take over the role of the father. It is important to keep the nucleus of the family together; and if the wife leaves, or the husband leaves, you have uncles, aunts and grandparents.'

Interview, 22 August 2005

Mothers were also seen as strong figures in past times and were the ones who dealt out discipline to the children. Today, when parents are absent, the extended family is increasingly called on to do this, usually in a gentler fashion than in the past. Grandparents are particularly successful in their ability to listen without judgment.

The community plays a huge role in children growing up strong through sport, support groups and role models such as parents with good community and work ethics. These support systems provide opportunities for keeping children on the right track through learning self-esteem and respect for themselves and others. They also play an important role in keeping children from sitting in front of TV and computers most of the day, taking drugs and drinking alcohol to excess, and also discouraging children from life choices that lead to homelessness.

Cliff described the costs to the individual of not having these family and community support networks:

It is a sense of belonging to a group of people. If you don't belong to anybody you are like a ship without a sail or a ship without a rudder. You are at the will of the kids on the street, who have a culture of their own, to be intimidated by whatever force comes along if you don't have the support of a body or a group you can relate to. And if you don't have your mother, father, uncle, aunt, or grandparents you can go one way with the kids and the culture of the street, or your family culture.
(Cliff, focus group, 18 August 2005)

Indigenous programs and Indigenous parents' support groups in the schools were seen as very worthwhile in helping children grow up strong, as suggested in the following comment:

When you talk about parents, you talk about community. I think community is so important in relation to keeping kids in school. As a community you work together to make sure kids have access to things like NAIDOC Week and what that's all about. Parents' days, Aboriginal tutors in schools and working together as a community, not just as families. It is important for us to be able to identify and not just use the resources 'cause many of us mob don't know what is available.
(Graham, focus group, 26 August 2005)

The influence of Indigenous culture while growing up

The lack of opportunity for cultural education for local children was a major concern to respondents. There was a strong feeling that exposure to Indigenous culture should be provided in the school system through properly trained teachers.

The following was typical of the comments received:

There is no culture being taught. Kids are staying at home and playing games all day. We need to get things in order to give them culture. We have Gudan Gulwan [Aboriginal Youth Centre] and Winnunga Health Centre but we need more.
(Kell, focus group, 18 August 2005)

For some respondents, their culture had been lost to them in the era of the Stolen Generation, making it difficult for them to help with their children's and grandchildren's cultural education.

Cliff observed the sad legacy of the Stolen Generation in the loss of culture within a community:

With the Stolen Generation and separation of families there has been a deliberate push not to maintain culture. In the urban areas like the ACT there are very few who have relationships back to their communities. I have always been brought up to go back to my community, for many years, in the Northern Territory where they still carry out and survive by traditional culture. There is not a lot of people who can do that. You need some revitalization. People should come down here or go back to maintain cultural connection.
(Cliff, focus group, 18 August 2005)

Steve offered a similar account of loss of culture in the era of the Stolen Generation and ways he now tries to connect his children and grandchildren with culture:

I lost a lot of my culture because my grandfather lost three sisters in the Stolen Generation and would not let his mother or aunt say they were Aboriginal but to say they were Indian. And if anybody turned up in a suit I had to collect my brother and sister and bolt down the swamp because grandfather was frightened that someone was coming to take them.
(Steve, focus group, 18 August 2005)

As a result, Steve teaches his children and grandchildren about culture because he 'never had any'. Once a month at a barbecue, he tells stories to his grandchildren that his grandfather told him, and they play the 'didge' and throw the boomerang.

Other participants also talked about ways they pass on their culture to their children. One important way of doing this was to return to their country with their children and grandchildren whenever they could.

The following accounts indicate how parents try to connect their children with their culture:

I go back to my country in Western Australia regularly and have a very strong sense of belonging, but my kids don't have as strong a connection back there. They do have an understanding of it though, and I try and pass a sense of belonging to my children and grandchildren by telling them stories, telling them where we lived, the sort of games that we played, the sorts of bush tucker we collected, how we cooked them and ate them, how we hunted. Because I'm isolated from the language I don't speak it any more.
(Jim, focus group, 26 August 2005)

Another participant made a similar point:

I love to take my kids to where I come from. I find that if I go back and take my kids, they're a part of me. They still have cousins there and a connection to where I come from. You never forget where you come from, especially that cultural aspect of things.
(Graham, focus group, 26 August 2005)

One other person noted:

My family was religious and this sort of pushed aside cultural things. We kept more connectedness with family rather than place ... and that's something I will try and show my daughter. I think I've got to that age where I'm sort of searching for that cultural thing.
(June, focus group, 26 August 2005)

Encouraging resilience in future generations

Participants identified ways of encouraging resilience in future generations, particularly with regard to the strong influences of Western culture and the relative lack of Indigenous cultural education in schools. It was thought that schools should teach Indigenous culture, providing programs begin at an early age.

Aboriginal culture needs to be promoted through the school system from toddlers, because they learn then. Catch them when they are young, as well as non-Aboriginal kids and talk about Indigenous culture, and that it is different. [We] have to educate the teachers as they lack skills [in Aboriginal culture] and use their own value system to judge us. We should ask kids about what they think about teaching them. There are barriers to teaching Indigenous culture. In the Northern Territory they give Aboriginal people leave to go to ceremony.
(Cliff, focus group, 18 August 2005)

In terms of schooling more generally, having a good education with knowledge of modern technology at an early age, and the facilities to study at home, were also regarded as important contributors to children surviving and thriving in the wider world.

4.3 Family role (0–17 years)

The family's role in bringing up strong children was discussed by the CDEP participants and the ACT grandparents focus group. Again, in-depth interview responses confirmed the focus group data.

This discussion builds on the stories from Theme 1 'Starting out' and Theme 2 'Growing up' by specifically focusing on parenting in all of its parts including views on:

- their own parental experience in 'growing up' children and what their parents passed on to them
- what they enjoyed most about being a parent and what they wanted their children and grandchildren to have learnt from growing up in their family
- the difficulties parents faced in bringing up children and ways they coped as parents

- the importance of having strong, positive role models
- the importance of learning about culture in the family
- ways of encouraging resilience in future generations.

Family perspectives of growing up strong

The respondents' views about children growing up strong within the family were centred on the benefits of playing sport, having goals and receiving a good education. The role of parents and grandparents in listening, giving encouragement when children feel isolated, and reinforcing the message that children can potentially do anything they want, 'providing they keep on the right track', were also important.

One grandparent told the story of how sport had shaped his grandson's life:

My grandson is 17 years old and wants to be a professional footballer. He plays first grade with the Queanbeyan Blues and has a contract with the Raiders Football Club. He travels interstate with football and does lots of training (4 nights a week). He has a level head and purchased his own car out of savings at 15 years when he was too young to drive it. He started at the age of six and got the sporting interest from his mother because his father left him when he was 18 months old. He also has a good uncle, and his cousins play football and give direction. He does not see his father.
(Mike, focus group, 15 August 2005)

In Tony's experience as a grandfather, children need a goal:

They have to have a goal. Sport is a great thing. You cannot go anywhere without education. You have to try and think about keeping them in school. My granddaughter is going right through [school] but she is keen. Her mother and me have made her keen. I sit down with her. I can't read and write much, but I listen to her. That is the most important thing for kids; you have to listen to them. If you don't listen they don't come to you with problems.
(Tony, focus group, 15 August 2005)

Cultural inclusiveness, 'the Indigenous way' of the extended family caring for and supporting children, was also seen as the best family environment for producing strong children.

Jen also believed listening and providing support to children helps them grow up strong:

Listen to kids; respect their wishes, that is, what they want to do, and give encouragement and support about how to stay on the right track. Support is important to tell them that they are not alone, as a lot of kids feel isolated. They think that the problems they experience do not happen to anyone else. You also make them feel special because they are special and they can do anything they want.
(Jen, focus group, 15 August 2005)

Also commenting on the importance of the extended family in 'growing up', one participant spoke about his experience:

As when I was a kid, the whole extended family cares for kids. Uncles and aunts have a great deal of influence over the kids and in the extended family system [they] are treated just like mums and dads, and great-uncles and great-aunts act just as grandparents. Kids are loved and treated as family by all these people. There are never any orphans in Aboriginal society because of this extended family system. So there are all these people who nurture kids and show them the right way to live. With my own grandkids, I try to provide consistency in parenting by following what my son does in raising these kids.
(Cliff, focus group, 18 August 2005)

Like in the old days, parents and grandparents still expect children to work around the house and, in that way, gain skills to be able to look after themselves. Respondents saw a need for parents to also be involved in their children's leisure activities and stressed the importance of balancing their work commitments with their family's needs. Although children may lean towards role models who are the 'stars of society', it was agreed that the most influence stems from the people they have regular contact with, that is, the family and extended family.

Sharing the experience of parenting

Respondents' appreciation of the gift of having children was evident in their enjoyment of the parenting experience, which they had learnt from their parents. With one exception, respondents agreed that their parents had taught them respect; a quality not always displayed by modern youth. The consensus was that good parenting is all about:

- setting a good example
- teaching children respect and how to get on in life
- seeing children grow up and be really independent through not interfering in the choices they make.

Not all respondents were able to learn good parenting in the family environment. One participant talked about how she took a different approach to parenting from the one she had experienced herself, and she spoke about the difficulties she had to overcome because she was a single mother:

I did not get respect from my parents. I learnt the hard way; no one showed me. I was fostered when I was twelve months. I have six kids and three grandchildren. I love them very much. I was different with my kids. I learnt the hard way but had help from the community and I had good friends ... My foster parents abused me every day and they did not teach me much, and when I was 15, I left them and went back to the home. (Ellen, focus group, 15 August 2005)

Many respondents coped in difficult situations because they had to 'keep going' for their children's sake. Being able to rely on their parents, extended family, friends and support organisations and using 'blackfella' ways—having a 'cool head'—also helped. The difficulties through which they coped included: sickness, drugs, depression, lack of parental supervision, incarceration, lack of community support, urban society influences and racism.

Valerie shared her experience of 'growing up' children in an urban environment:

They are scattered for a start ... and no family. They come from different places and have no family and no support. They need a place where they feel secure. They need to talk to carers but a lot will not ask for help. People are depressed; today every one is searching; the young ones need your time and love. (Valerie, interview, 23 August 2005)

Similarly, Colin's story (below) painted a picture of how raising Indigenous children in a rural environment can run counter to Indigenous culture and beliefs.

Colin's story: 'same place, different worlds'

'One of the things with the ACT, it is a fairly open society. You have a whole range of different viewpoints coming across from the community at any one time. While it is the political capital of Australia, it is one of the most flexible and community minded communities in Australia. It is a city as well. It is a young population. There are lots of opportunities for kids to do a whole range of different things and that includes the wrong thing as well as good things. Here there is a lot of other cultural influences as well, and I think what is wrong today, the kids have picked up Americanisms and the other cultures. Things like the Greek and Italian cultures, which are strong in the community. While Greeks and Italians have a good sense of family they have this money sense, and our kids try to follow, and it has good and bad sides.

'The kids are losing out. There is not enough support and role models in Canberra. People have come from another place and brought kids with them while they were young and coming into a new culture.

'If kids are going to be accepted they have to be accepted through the youth community and not through our own community. I think the black kids are becoming integrated now. They are able to pick a whole range of things. When I grew up we only had a certain amount. You can still become a brick layer or whatever you want to do. But why would you want to be a labourer when you could go to university and sit behind a desk and give direction?'

Interview, 19 August 2005

Learning about Indigenous culture in the family and schools

Respondents expressed regret that the negative influence of technology and Western culture prevents the natural enjoyment of the old cultural ways of interacting within the family. Respondents aged 18–25 years considered that ‘children today do not know who they are’ because it is too difficult to teach culture within the family, and they suggested that it should be taught in the schools. Older respondents (those aged 45–65 years) had received only parts of their culture from family, but were endeavouring to pass on what they knew.

The following three respondents aged between 18 and 25 years presented their views and experiences of learning Indigenous culture. One participant considered that:

Kids today do not know who they are. They are interested in drugs and alcohol and running amuck. Probably 10 or 20 years ago kids would have been interested in who they are and where they come from. Nowadays its not there, it’s just getting lost. This might have happened because the family are not good role models or they might have been hanging around with the wrong crowd. When the Elders pass away there is nothing left. Who is there to teach you your culture? You don’t know who you are and it is a shame.
(Anne, focus group, 23 August 2005)

One other person reported that he did not know anything about his culture and his people. It was not taught when he went to school. He had always wanted to know and his grandfather knew, but he had left it too late to ask him.

It [cultural education] should be in every school. You have to get to them early. In families, you’re proud to be black and that’s where you stop. There’s not culture around, that is our culture to be proud of, as far as I can see.
(Jack, interview, 25 August 2005)

A third respondent also emphasised the importance of teaching cultural appreciation in schools:

This doesn’t happen in the schools here. Schools should teach the local Indigenous language and appreciation of Indigenous culture in the schools to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. Within families nothing is proactive, it’s all reactive. You can’t sit down with families for 2–3 hours a day, which is what you need to teach Indigenous culture in families. So it shouldn’t be up to families but rather Indigenous culture should be taught by institutions such as schools, and cultural centres.
(Peter, interview, 25 August 2005)

Ways of encouraging resilience in the future

Respondents also suggested various ways of encouraging resilience in future generations. The views of the older generation (those aged 55–65 years) are represented by Cliff in his story, which emphasises the following pathways to resilience:

- encouraging children to put priority on their Aboriginal identity and maintain this identity within the wider society
- maintaining the strong influence of family as children are growing up
- alerting children to the danger of drug addicts and paedophiles in the community.

Cliff's story: pathways to a better future for our kids

'We need to set standards and make sure we keep our individuality as Indigenous people in society. It takes courage to want something better for your kids and we have to make sure that our kids are able to emulate us and our jobs if they want to. We need family influence to maintain our culture. It is very difficult to be part of both worlds. The domination of Western culture can affect Indigenous people who make it to the top. They can still be black but then their Aboriginality takes second place to other concerns. We need to make sure that people place their Aboriginality first. We need to tell our kids about the dangers of society such as the danger of drug addicts and paedophiles in our local communities and stranger danger. We need to provide more service providers with training on how to be culturally appropriate and sensitive with Indigenous people, such as has been done with the police force through a booklet.'

Interview, 22 August 2005

The views of the younger generation (aged 18–25 years) are represented by Peter in his interview responses, and include the importance of:

- realising the truth that children are capable of reaching their own potential
- education as well as participation in work placement programs while in school
- showing children the positive aspects of life and how to attain them as well as the consequences of taking the wrong path such as the remand centre
- teaching children how to deal with racism in a mature way and the power in 'being alive and Aboriginal'.

Peter's story: learning to be strong from your journeys

'You can't just give kids all the responsibilities and no rights. Kids have to understand the power they possess just by being alive and Aboriginal. Kids need to understand that for every year you mess up it takes you four years to catch up. Kids need to understand that there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow called education. You have to understand how you're going to get to that place. You have to choose which colour of the rainbow to take in life. It's a hard decision but you have to make it yourself.'

Interview, 25 August 2005

4.4 The role of services

The fourth theme, 'the role of services' in supporting the development of resilient children, was discussed by the 'Uncles/Nephews' and service providers groups.⁸

Overall, respondents considered that the ACT/Queanbeyan community was reasonably well catered for in terms of health, education and other support services provided by Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations. At the time of this trial, Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service and Boomanulla Oval were the main services used by the local Indigenous community. However, there were some difficulties that reduced the effectiveness of these services in supporting children's development. These included: pressure on the resources of the youth corporation and health service; transport problems for families on low incomes in accessing these services; and difficulty paying for prescription medicines.

In regard to the role of education services, respondents considered that the mentoring which children received from Aboriginal Liaison and Education Officers positively supported school retention. However, this service was not adequately resourced to provide the necessary regular contact with the children, particularly where there was a lack of strong parental support (a negative aspect of modern-day life), which negatively affected school

attendance. Transition programs that prepared students to move from high school to college (Years 11 and 12 in the ACT school system) were also crucial in stopping children from dropping out of school at this transition point.

Participation in sport, which provided a sense of achievement, was also important in this process. The respondents concluded that there should be an increase in Indigenous teacher numbers and that Indigenous preschools could assist children to learn about their Indigenous identity and culture. It was hoped that the Indigenous Cultural Centre in Canberra would become a cultural base for the community to support cultural teaching in schools.

Marjorie, whose story appears at the end of this section, grew up in a time of strict government control and experienced poor education, work and living conditions. However, teaching by her Elders provided a cultural and spiritual education, which encouraged hope, dignity, good manners, self-respect and respect for others. Marjorie perceived that her generation was powerless in the wake of racial discrimination, and her experiences of growing up differed markedly from children's experiences today.

Other respondents reported that forms of racial discrimination continued to be experienced at school by children today and decreased the chances of Indigenous students obtaining an effective education and good employment. Respondents believed that more widespread knowledge about Indigenous culture could help to overcome racist behaviour towards Indigenous people. Cross-cultural training for teachers, teachers taking responsibility to actively assist and understand Indigenous students, and the introduction of student cultural awareness programs in schools were seen as starting points. It was also noted that cultural awareness programs had been introduced into the police force with success. Unfortunately, according to respondents, governments have not fared as well in exhibiting cross-cultural awareness in delivering services.

Marjorie's growing up story

Marjorie was born in 1931 in a country town near Canberra. Her father's parents were descendents of the Ngunnawal people and her mother's parents were descendents of the Wiradjuri people. As a child she lived in a gundgi; a build-it-yourself house made with stringy bark walls and tin roof. They had no electricity. A kerosene drum was used to collect drinking water from the roof and the family did their washing in the dam. Marjorie's father died when she was 8 years old.

Nevertheless, Marjorie has memories of a happy childhood. The children had a horse that they had to look after. They went fishing in the river and sometimes travelled for two days to another country town, camping overnight on the way. People were musical and there were birthdays and parties. The women would prepare the food.

The local mission school catered for children aged between 8 and 14 years of age, and Marjorie attended from first to third year. In addition, there was always the guidance of parents and grandparents, which meant learning about culture and learning to respect the Elders who taught them how to survive. However, the Elders stopped using their language fearing that welfare would take children away— Marjorie's mother and her aunt were the first two girls in Cootamundra Girls' Home. Although she was part of the Stolen Generation, her mother was positive about the future. She wanted to move on and said that policies would change. She lived to 93 years of age.

Like her childhood years, Marjorie's life as a teenager was also good. There were hard times, but there were more good than bad times. This was because of the help Marjorie received from her family and learning from their experience. Marjorie and her family lived by the rules of the times. Being with the family, working for the family, and having fun were some of the things Marjorie enjoyed most about that time. Her grandfather told stories and played the violin at non-Indigenous bush dances. The nuns on the mission and the police helped the Indigenous people slot in with the mainstream community. This was through sport, music, and work. The police were good when they connected with the Aboriginal community but before that point they had no respect for Aboriginal people.

Racial discrimination was prevalent when Marjorie was growing up and it was her biggest challenge. For example, she and her friends could not go into town unless they were with a selected Elder who had to report to the police. In the shops, the shopkeeper would take the money from Aboriginal people and then ask them to go around the back to collect the goods.

Marjorie was one of the first of three local Indigenous women allowed to give birth at the hospital. However, Indigenous patients were put in a ward at the back and had to use the back door. They could not talk to non-Indigenous people and could not move across a yellow line on the floor. In the movie theatre, they had to sit down the front and use the outside toilet. Indigenous people had to shower before using the swimming pool.

Despite these restrictions, they kept their dignity and followed the advice of Marjorie's grandmother who said, 'You never take the shack to town—meaning that you go out clean and tidy and well mannered'. Marjorie continues to live by this today. In Marjorie's words about these times, 'We lived reconciliation'. Under these circumstances they got through with parents' guidance and the Elders saying 'change is coming'.

Compared to children today, Marjorie feels she had a more cultural and spiritually-based upbringing. In her day, her parents and the welfare made her go to school, but children these days do not want to go to school, despite there being a lot of incentives in regard to education and employment, and children can go anywhere they want. There is also government support available now. She observed that in spite of all of these opportunities, children have different troubles today, because 'these are fast times, but materialism does not breed spirit'.

Interview, 15 August 2005

4.5 Summary and conclusion

The ACT metro/Queanbeyan region represents a contemporary urban/regional Aboriginal population in which people come from different places, experience various work circumstances, have diverse influences and many stories to tell.

A number of good news stories, recorded as part of the ‘growing up’ interviews and focus groups, highlighted examples of happy childhoods where strong family and extended family support systems, positive role models, and the learning of culture from Elders built resilience in young children. The importance of having goals and the need for a good education were also emphasised. Historical accounts provided descriptions of how certain activities, such as work or sport and music events, enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to build relationships and get to know one another, and to gain a sense of ‘lived reconciliation’ (see Marjorie’s story).

These stories surfaced in spite of the lived experiences of racism, premature death and a history of children being removed from their family. Access to a range of services that provided health, education and cultural supports through Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations was also vital in the development of resilient children.

This qualitative research—the stories—made an important contribution to the overall preparatory work for the future *Footprints in Time* study. These data enriched the evaluation and allowed the researchers to tell a comprehensive story about the important contributors to Indigenous children growing up strong and resilient in different contexts. The telling of these stories and their analysis were used to inform the design and content of the *Footprints in Time* study.

Appendix A: History and demography of the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region

History

Aboriginal families within the Canberra–Queanbeyan district were known by many different names in the early 19th century, but were referred to by the local Europeans as the Kamberri. Kamberra was the geographical heart of their country, which is the area now referred to as the Acton Peninsula in the ACT. While maintaining their association with the ACT and surrounds, members of Kamberra families also identified personally as Ngunnawal, Walagu or even Wiradjuri, through their family links to these other communities. Individuals in the 19th century Kamberri groups also had personal links to other groups and rights to country outside those of their main group due to their kinship connections. Aboriginal families living in the ACT and surrounds today have close links with Aboriginal families who witnessed the first Europeans arriving in their country (Jackson-Nakano 2001).

Demographics

At the time of this trial, the population of Canberra was 319,317 people, with approximately 3,909 Indigenous people (ABS 2001). Queanbeyan had a much smaller population of about 38,000 people, with approximately 800 Indigenous people (ABS 1999).

There were several services for Indigenous people in Canberra and Queanbeyan but the three most popular were Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, Boomanulla Oval (sporting and recreational activities) and Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation. A list of Indigenous-specific and mainstream services used by Indigenous ACT/Queanbeyan residents is provided in Appendix D.

Families

Of the 76,350 families counted in the ACT on Census night 1996, just over 1.0 per cent (779) were classified as Indigenous families. The average number of persons in each Indigenous family (3.4) was very similar to that for other families (3.2). However, Indigenous families tended to be slightly larger with 23.2 per cent of Indigenous families having three or more children under 15 years, compared to 18.4 per cent of other families in the same category (ABS 1996). A much higher proportion of Indigenous families were one-parent families compared with the number of one-parent families in the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2004).

The 2001 Census found that the average number of residents per household for the Indigenous population was 3.1 persons compared to 2.6 persons for non-Indigenous households (ABS 2001). Relationship breakdown had resulted in a significant number of young children not living with both parents. By the age of 14, about 40 per cent of Indigenous children still lived with both parents, nearly half the rate for the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2004).

Employment

A much higher proportion of Indigenous children (36 per cent) lived in households without any employed parents. This was three times higher than for the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2004). In 2001, the unemployment rate for the Indigenous population was 13 per cent compared with 5 per cent for the non-Indigenous population. The majority of employed Indigenous people worked in the government sector (48.9 per cent) and the private sector (46.3 per cent), while 0.5 per cent were employed in the CDEP (ABS 2001).

Indigenous people in Canberra had higher levels of participation in the workforce than nationally, but were still significantly lower than for the non-Indigenous population of Canberra (ABS 2004). For persons aged 15 years and over, the gross weekly individual income for the Indigenous population was \$405 per week, while for the non-Indigenous population it was \$547 per week (ABS 2001).

Education

In the period between the 1986 and the 1996 Census, the proportion of the Indigenous population attending an educational institution increased from 35.7 per cent to 40.8 per cent, while the total population remained stable at 32 per cent. The proportion of the Indigenous population attending a tertiary institution was 5.7 per cent in 1986, and increased to 8.5 per cent in 1996 (ABS 1996). Results from the 1996 Census indicated that a significantly lower proportion of the Indigenous population had post secondary school qualifications (26.9 per cent) compared to the 45.9 per cent of the total population of the ACT (ABS 1996).

In 1996, 39.3 per cent of the Indigenous population had left school at 15 or 16 years, down from the 49.0 per cent recorded in 1986. In comparison, 29.4 per cent of the total population in the ACT had left school at 15 or 16 years; a decrease from 36.3 per cent recorded in 1986. The proportion of Indigenous people leaving school at 17 years or over increased from 26.1 per cent in 1986 to 37.3 per cent in 1996. This change was consistent with the general trend in the total population for the ACT for the same period, although it represented a higher rate of change for the Indigenous population (ABS 1996).

Appendix B: Focus group—questions and prompts

Theme 1: Starting out (children 0–4 years)

Introduction

A lot of previous research on Indigenous children and families has focused on problems and what goes wrong for kids. This research is different because we are more interested in finding out about what is working well and knowing more about what can help kids grow up healthy and strong.

1. To begin with, let's get some agreement about what we mean by growing up, having strength and resilience, and being able to cope during hard times. What do you think this means?

Prompt: Good physical health; happy and able to cope with frustration; confident and feel good about themselves; can look after themselves; gets on well with others; shows respect.

2. When kids are just babies or toddlers what sort of things help them to become strong?

Prompt: Good food; health care; why is health care important for children; family relationships; stable environment; how kids are kept safe; opportunities for learning; stimulation and encouragement.

3. What do your kids usually do in a typical day?

Prompt: Play at home; play with family or friends; watch TV; do puzzles; organised playgroup; child care.

4. If they use child care services:

4a. How has it been for you in getting the type of care you wanted?

Prompt: What made it easy, difficult, frustrating, impossible?

4b. How has this arrangement worked out for your child?

4c. What support do you get from this service?

5. What are the benefits of using family, friends to look after your children?
6. What are the drawbacks of using family, friends to look after your children?
7. How do your children learn about their culture and history from an early age?

Prompt: Doing things as a family, cultural events, and activities.

8. How has Western culture affected the way you keep your family's tradition and culture?

Theme 2: Growing up (school age 5–17 years)

Introduction

A lot of previous research on Indigenous children and families has focused on problems and what goes wrong for kids. This research is different because we are more interested in finding out about what is working well and knowing how the community helps families bring up kids who are strong.

1. To begin let's get some agreement about what we mean by growing up healthy and strong. Can you think of what we might expect to see in kids who are growing up strong?

Prompt: Good physical health; are happy and able to cope with frustration; confident and feel good about themselves; can look after themselves and others; get on well with others; show respect; look after family.

2. What are some of the things that influence the way kids grow up in the Canberra community?

Prompt: Family (immediate and extended); neighbourhood; organisations; clubs; leisure activities; cultural groups and events (e.g. NAIDOC); school.

3. What is it that kids learn from the community and extended family that helps them grow up strong? What do they gain from taking part in sports, arts and other community activities?

4. What are some of the things in the Canberra community that make it hard for kids to grow up strong?

Prompt: Racism; feuding; not knowing about culture; not enough for kids to do.

5. What helps kids stay out of trouble and learn to do the right thing?

Prompt: Role models and people they identify with; hanging out with the right group; rules and expectations from family; being constructively occupied.

6. In your family or community who disciplines the kids when they do something wrong? How is this usually done?

7. How does culture influence the way children grow up during their school years?

7a. How do children learn about their culture?

7b. How has Western culture affected the way you bring up your kids?

8. How do we improve the situation for future generations?

Theme 3: Family role (0–17 years)

1. As parents, how do you help your children grow up the right way and be strong, healthy and happy?

Prompt: How do family members, community help?

2. Who taught you how to bring up kids?
3. What did they teach you?
4. Who do you as parents go to for support when things are bad?
5. Who do your children go to for support when things are bad?

6. What do you do together as a family?

Prompt: Children doing jobs/contributing to the family; how they spend free time?

7. How do these things help kids grow up strong?
8. Who are the role models your children look up to?

Prompt: Family/community members; music/TV stars.

9. What do they admire and learn from these people?
10. What cultural events or activities support you in raising your kids?
11. How has Western culture influenced your family and the way you bring up your kids?

Theme 4: Role of services

1. What services in the Canberra community help families bring up their children?
2. What services work well for you in supporting your family and children?
 - 2a. Which services (if any) are not so good?
 - 2b. How culturally appropriate are they?
3. What services for children and families do you need that are not here?—how do we improve things for future generations?
4. Why is it important to have these services?

Appendix C: In-depth interview— questions and prompts

Introduction

Your story will help to bring out examples of resilience and strength in growing up and will also highlight the challenges for families and communities in raising children.

The information from your story will be used to help in selecting questions and topics for the *Footprints in Time* study. This is a national study which will be carried out over a number of years. It will also provide insights into opportunities for community-based initiatives to improve the future health and life opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The interview has three parts:

1. Your own stories of growing up
2. Your thoughts on how things are different for today's children
3. Your views on how families and the community help children to grow up strong. This means they:
 - have good physical health
 - are happy and able to cope with frustration
 - are confident and feel good about themselves
 - can look after themselves
 - get on well with others and show respect.

Part 1 Growing up story

- 1.1 Thinking back on your life, what were some of the things you liked and enjoyed most about your childhood?
- 1.2 Who were the most significant people in your life then?
- 1.3 What were the most important things you learned from them?
- 1.4 How was life as a teenager for you?
- 1.5 What did you enjoy most about that time?
- 1.6 What were some of the challenges you faced?

Part 2: How things are different for kids today

- 2.1 What do kids have today that is different from what you had as a kid?
- 2.2 How is their experience of growing up different from the way it was for you?

Part 3 How family and community help kids to grow up strong

3.1 Role as a parent/grandparent/carer

What have you enjoyed most about being a parent?

In your family, who cares for kids (i.e. nurturing and supporting them)?

Who taught you how to bring up your kids?

3.2 Family activities and daily routine

What do you do as a family for leisure?

Prompt: on regularity and the benefit to parent and kids

What is the family routine e.g. on weekdays as opposed to the weekend?

Is there something your family does regularly together?

Prompt: Who organises this?

3.3 Coping with difficulties

What helped you get through a time when it was very hard for you as a parent?

Prompt: on other difficulties faced.

What other problems do parents face in the ACT community?

3.4 Parenting and discipline

In your family, who has responsibility to set rules and limits and correct them when they do the wrong thing?

Prompt: about methods of encouraging good behaviour.

Can you give an example of a recent unacceptable behaviour and your response?

3.5 Culture, tradition and religion

Who helps children in the ACT community learn about their culture, history and tradition?

Prompt: on whether parent also takes on this role.

How important is religion in helping families bring up their kids?

3.6 Community support and problems

How has the ACT community helped you in bringing up your children?

Prompt: on any difficulties experienced in the ACT community.

How adequate are the services in the ACT community to support you in bringing up your children?

Prompt: on whether they are appropriate to Indigenous families (i.e. health, child care, youth services).

3.7 Experiences of school

What are your experiences with schooling for your kids?

Prompt: on whether parents are encouraged to get involved in kids' learning.

Is school attendance a problem in the ACT community? If so, what can be done about it?

Is racism a problem for kids at school in the ACT? If so, how does the school handle it?

3.8 Hopes and expectation for children

How can we improve the situation for future generations?

What are the main things you would like your kids to have learned from growing up in your family?

Prompt: on the kind of person you would like them to be.

What would you like to see your kids do with their lives?

Appendix D: Indigenous specific and mainstream services used by Indigenous ACT/Queanbeyan residents

The Indigenous service providers familiar to the participants of the trial include:

- United Ngunnawal Elders Committee
- Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, Erindale, ACT
- Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, Narrabundah, ACT
- Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation, Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), Erindale, ACT
- Billabong Corporation ACT (Workshops, Training for Work, Housing Company)
- Jabal Centre, The Australian National University, ACT
- Ngunnawal Centre, University of Canberra, ACT
- Yurauna Centre, Canberra Institute of Technology, ACT
- Boomanulla Oval (Sporting and Recreational Activities), ACT
- Ngambra Circle Sentencing Court, ACT Magistrates Court
- Canberra NAIDOC Committee (NAIDOC Activities)
- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre, Yarramundi Reach.

The non-Indigenous service providers familiar to the participants of the trial include:

- Quamby Juvenile Justice Centre, ACT
- Canberra and Queanbeyan hospitals
- Youth refuges and youth centres
- General Practitioners and Medical Centres
- Sporting groups
- Centrelink
- Office for Children, Youth and Family Support
- ACT and NSW Government housing agencies
- NSW Department of Community Services
- ACT and NSW Police Force
- Schools, preschools, child care organisations.

List of shortened forms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CDEP	Community Development and Employment Program
CLO	Community Liaison Officers
CRCAH	Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health
FaHCSIA	The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
LSAC	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
LSIC	Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observation Committee
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NSW	New South Wales
SEARCH	Study of Environment on Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health Program
TICHR	Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
WAACHS	Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey

Endnotes

1. A Steering Committee and Design Sub-committee made up of Indigenous leaders and researchers have given FaHCSIA guidance in planning the *Footprints in Time* study.
2. Portfolio Budget Statement (PBS) 2003–04, p. 80.
3. The information for this paper is drawn from the report, *Growing up in the ACT metro/Queanbeyan region: a collection of stories to inform the development of the proposed 'Footprints in Time' study*. The report was prepared for FaHCSIA by the Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) in collaboration with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR).
4. ABS cat. no. 4713.0, 2001.
5. ABS cat. no. 1313.8, 1999.
6. The Northern Peninsula Area is situated at the top of Cape York Peninsula and consists of three Aboriginal communities—Injinoo, Umagico and New Mapoon—and two Torres Strait Islander communities—Bamaga and Seisia.
7. Uncles/Nephews program provides mentoring for young males in the community.
8. A list of Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers referred to by the focus group and in-depth interview participants is provided in Appendix D.

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Occasional Papers

1. *Income support and related statistics: a ten-year compendium, 1989–99*
Kim Bond and Jie Wang (January 2001)
2. *Low fertility: a discussion paper*
Alison Barnes (February 2001)
3. *The identification and analysis of indicators of community strength and outcomes*
Alan Black and Phillip Hughes (June 2001)
4. *Hardship in Australia: an analysis of financial stress indicators in the 1998–99 Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Expenditure Survey*
J Rob Bray (December 2001)
5. *Welfare Reform Pilots: characteristics and participation patterns of three disadvantaged groups*
Chris Carlile, Michael Fuery, Carole Heyworth, Mary Ivec, Kerry Marshall and Marie Newey (June 2002)
6. *The Australian system of social protection—an overview (second edition)*
Peter Whiteford and Gregory Angenent (June 2002)
7. *Income support customers: a statistical overview 2001*
Corporate Information and Mapping Services, Strategic Policy and Knowledge Branch, Family and Community Services (March 2003)
8. *Inquiry into long-term strategies to address the ageing of the Australian population over the next 40 years*
Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services submission to the 2003 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Ageing (October 2003)
9. *Inquiry into poverty and financial hardship*
Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee (October 2003)
10. *Families of prisoners: literature review on issues and difficulties*
Rosemary Woodward (September 2003)
11. *Inquiries into retirement and superannuation*
Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services submissions to the Senate Select Committee on Superannuation (December 2003)
12. *A compendium of legislative changes in social security 1908–1982*
(June 2006)
13. *A compendium of legislative changes in social security 1983–2000*
Part 1 1983–1993, Part 2 1994–2000
Bob Daprè (June 2006)
14. *Evaluation of Fixing Houses for Better Health Projects 2, 3 and 4*
SGS Economics & Planning in conjunction with Tallegalla Consultants Pty Ltd (August 2006)
15. *The ‘growing up’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: a literature review*
Professor Robyn Penman (November 2006)
16. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views on research in their communities*
Professor Robyn Penman (November 2006)
17. *Growing up in the Torres Strait Islands: a report from the Footprints in Time trials*
Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health in collaboration with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (November 2006)

18. *Costs of children: research commissioned by the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support*
Paul Henman; Richard Percival and Ann Harding; Matthew Gray (July 2007)
19. *Lessons learnt about strengthening Indigenous families and communities*
John Scougall (March 2008)