

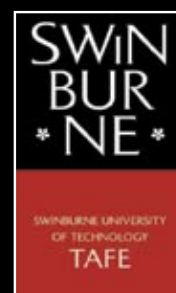
# Indigenous Parenting Project

July 2004

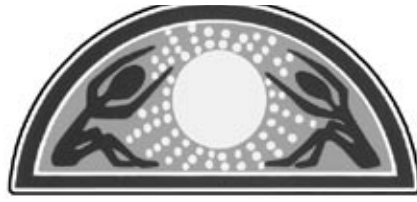


**SNAICC**

SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL ABORIGINAL  
AND ISLANDER CHILD CARE INC.







**S N A I C C**

SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL ABORIGINAL  
AND ISLANDER CHILD CARE INC.

# Indigenous Parenting Project

July 2004







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# Glossary

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## **Indigenous**

The term “Indigenous” in this document refers to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, communities and groups.

## **Parent/Parenting**

The terms “parent” and “parenting” in this document refers to parent and parenting within the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures where parenting is a community responsibility and will not necessarily be confined to biological parents within a family. It also refers to both male and female community members.

## **Elders**

The term “Elders” in this document refers to both male and female community members who have been identified as such by their community.

## **Indigenous Names**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names referred to in the document are listed by their well known acronyms. These are detailed as follows:

AICCA	Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
MACS	Multifunctional Aboriginal Childcare Service
RAATSICC	Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care
SNAICC	Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCH-	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.

## **Mainstream Organisations**

ACCAP	Australian Council for Children and Parenting
DHS	Department of Human Services – Victorian Government
FaCS	Department of Family and Community Services, Australian Government
NIFTeY	National Investment For The Early Years

# Executive Summary

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## 1.1 BACKGROUND

For at least 40,000 years Indigenous Australians lived as hunter-gathers within a spiritually rich environment. The family life of Indigenous Australians was structured around complex kinship systems, which located each person within a clan structure, with clear lines of rights and obligations to others within the family, the clan and ultimately the linguistic group. (Atkinson and Swain, 1999)

Children were highly valued by their family and clan (Bourke and Bourke, 1995) The education and socialization of young children took place within the rhythms of family life with an emphasis on observation, imitation and interaction with the extended family and the land.

‘The invasion and subsequent colonisation of Australia took a particularly heavy toll on Indigenous families, systematically separating children from their parents under the guise of welfare and assimilation and destroying intergenerational links’ Atkinson, S and Swain S 1999, p 219.

The intergenerational effects of removing Indigenous children from their families have been profound.

‘With several generations Indigenous people being denied normal childhood development, the opportunity to bond with parents and experience consistent love and acceptance, both the skills and the confidence to parent have been damaged, with the result that Indigenous children tend to be over represented in the child welfare system’ (Atkinson and Swain 1999, p 222).

Although Indigenous families are daily living with the legacy of dispossession and continuing oppression in terms of poor health, early deaths, poor housing, poor educational outcomes, high unemployment and high numbers of Indigenous people in custody, the Indigenous family continues to survive as a site of Indigenous culture and identity. This is highly significant in the light of sustained assaults on its existence and demonstrates the strengths of Indigenous communities in spite of the devastating impact of colonisation.

The information gathered from this part of the project aims to support the development of new parenting initiatives for Indigenous communities that help address the continuing effects of dispossession by identifying programs, information and resources that build on the strengths and voices of Indigenous communities. By Sue Atkinson, Yorta Yorta woman.

## REFERENCES

- Atkinson, S and Swain, S A Network of Support: mothering across the Koori community in Victoria, Australia in Women's History Review, Volume 8, No 2, 1999
- Bourke, E and Bourke, C Aboriginal families in Australia in Hartley, R (Edit) Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia. Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1995

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR PROJECT**

The Parenting Information Project has come about primarily as a result of the feedback gathered during consultations held under the National Agenda for Early Childhood. In May 2003, the Commonwealth Government announced a commitment of \$10 million from the Stronger Families and Community Strategy to early childhood prevention and intervention initiatives. \$3.2 million of this funding has been allocated to the Parenting Information Project which has two phases.

Family and Community Services (FaCS) engaged the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) to undertake Phase One of this project which consists of a literature review, program audit and substantial national consultations on parenting information and programs for Australian parents including those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Indigenous component of this was contracted to the Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to ensure an Indigenous specific perspective was provided. SNAICC undertook to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, foster carers, Indigenous people in transition to parenthood and other family or community members responsible for bringing up children in remote, rural and metropolitan areas to find out what additional parenting information and support governments should provide.

The Department of Child and Family Studies at Swinburne University of Technology was contracted by SNAICC and was responsible for the literature review and program audit component of the project.



## SECTION TWO: Project Aims and Final Products

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The information gathered from the project and the final report will be used by the Department of Family and Community Services to support the development of new parenting initiatives, policies and programs relating to parenting information and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers.

The project undertook to produce three related final products in relation to Phase One of the project, all of which are contained in this report.

The project will also inform the ongoing role and responsibilities of SNAICC (Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc) in supporting parents and communities with parenting and child rearing issues.

### 2.1 THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the project reviews the literature on Indigenous parenting and is linked to the program audit. The review highlights key findings about support needs of Indigenous communities. It also identifies what is required by Indigenous families to fulfill their parenting roles within a cultural context, in order for them to produce better outcomes for their infants and young children. Some of the underlying issues concerning parenting and family support for Indigenous communities are discussed in order to place the findings within the appropriate historical and cultural context.

### 2.2 THE PROGRAM AUDIT

The aim of the program audit is to identify the effectiveness of the range of intervention strategies that are utilized in the field of Indigenous parenting education. By identifying the characteristics of effective strategies used for Indigenous groups and in relevant contexts, some guidance on features to incorporate in future programs may be provided. The program audit involved the identification and documentation of the diverse range of current Australian and international Indigenous parenting programs. Each program is identified, described and summarises their positive features. Government and non-government programs are included.

The documentation of these programs and activities will help to identify gaps in information, programs and services, and thereby identify opportunities for the Australian Government to work with states and territories to meet the needs of Indigenous parents and communities.

### 2.3 THE STAKEHOLDER'S SURVEY

The Stakeholder survey (see Appendix 1) was a tool used to consult with a variety of identified key stakeholders specialising in Indigenous family issues in the areas of policy development, research and development, program planning and service delivery.

The survey was designed to complement information obtained at the National Workshop and the focus groups so that a more complete picture of the national remote, rural, urban and metropolitan Indigenous issues, programs and information/resources could be obtained.

### 2.4 CONSULTATIONS, FOCUS GROUPS AND NATIONAL WORKSHOP WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The aim of the national consultations, focus groups and National workshop with key stakeholders was to seek comment on current parenting programs and information, which is believed or proven to be effective, and to identify new initiatives, directions and priorities that could be introduced to assist in addressing the gaps. The aim of the National Workshop was to build on the findings from the literature review, program audit, consultations and focus groups and to identify directions and priorities for action.

The feedback received from consultations, focus groups and the National Workshop has been collated and summarised and results in Sections 7, 8 and 9.

## SECTION FOUR: Summary findings from the literature review

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The literature search has revealed some common threads about the provision of parenting support and capacity building in general for Indigenous communities and includes the need for consideration of social, cultural and historical factors underpinning the provision of any programs, services or information.

There seems ample evidence to suggest that there are differences within the Indigenous communities themselves to consider as well as the differences from the non-Indigenous population. There is also strong evidence about the issue of disempowerment of Aboriginal participants and lack of cultural understanding that results from the use of mainstream programs and staff. Many of the following points have also been made in other reviews and reports.

The numbers against each point can be matched to evidence in the main body of the literature review.

- Australian and international research has shown that positive interventions in the early years including parenting enhancement provide better outcomes for children in the long term.(L1)
- Research into Indigenous family issues reveal that there is a multiplicity of social, cultural and historical factors affecting the ability to parent effectively. These include dispossession of land and traditional culture; breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal lore; racism and vilification; economic exclusion and entrenched poverty; alcohol and drug abuse (substance misuse); the effects of institutionalism and child removal policies; inherited grief and trauma; the adaptation and change of gender roles – both male and female; society attitudes in general and stereotyping<sup>1</sup>; incarceration; family violence; young maternal age; unhealthy lifestyle factors including poor nutrition; inadequate antenatal and post natal care and nutrition; poor general health; inadequate housing and poor educational outcomes.(L6)
- The factors discussed above make it very difficult for Indigenous parents to fulfil expectations of the parenting role and build parenting capacity unless programs address some of these underlying issues.(L6)
- Risk factors for Indigenous children include a lack of parenting knowledge by parents and other carers. Enhancing parenting knowledge and skills needs to start before children are born.(L4)
- Protective factors for children include positive parental interactions and secure attachments to parents and other carers. Positive interactions and secure attachments begin from birth therefore early parenting help and support to form positive relationships with infants is essential.(L2)
- Present and future trends show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are having more children. 15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of five years compared to 7% in the general population. Greater access to early childhood services and parenting support is therefore imperative.
- The Indigenous perception of the parenting role is tied closely to the cultural norm of extended family, kin and community child rearing responsibility. The terms parent education and parent programs may be too narrow for the Indigenous context of family and community.(L5)
- Connection to their own Indigenous community is important for Indigenous families and programs that enhance parenting can foster this connection.
- Programs for Indigenous families including parenting support and enhancement programs should use a strengths based approach which builds on existing skills and strengths and acknowledges and respects Indigenous culture and values.(L3)
- The use of mainstream programs based solely on mainstream values and ideas is not considered appropriate and is not conducive to Indigenous community healing and ownership.(L7,9)
- Mainstream programs or parent programs adapted for Indigenous communities should only be used if based on wide Indigenous community consultation and Indigenous community support and involvement.(L7,9,10)
- There is a preference for Indigenous staff working with Indigenous families in order for families to feel safe and secure using services, including parenting support and enhancement services and programs.(L7,11)
- Training for Indigenous workers and non-Indigenous workers in providing parenting enhancement is needed. This should include a cultural component, inclusive practices, knowledge of children's development and behaviour, group facilitation skills and an

1 Report on the findings of the Koori About Better Communication About Drugs(ABCD) project, April 2004, Department of Human Services, Victoria

- understanding of the process of dealing with grief and encouraging healing.(L7)
- Training in cultural awareness and sensitivity is needed for non Indigenous staff across mainstream services including those delivering parenting support and capacity building programs.(L7,12)
  - Individual empowerment and capacity building should be part of programs for Indigenous parents to increase self-esteem and confidence that has been eroded by factors such as the Stolen Generation.(L3)
  - Parenting support and enhancement programs should deal with issues of grief and loss and emotional healing in order to help Indigenous parents develop personal strengths and resilience.(L19)
  - There are differences in the parenting and child rearing practices of Indigenous and non Indigenous families in the main areas of child rearing such as sleeping, feeding, learning, discipline, playing, care and mobility. These should be considered when delivering parenting programs or giving parenting information.(L13,14)
  - The connection to traditional child rearing and parenting practices depends on families' exposure to them. Yarns and stories about traditional methods of parenting and child rearing need to be gathered and shared with other Indigenous parents, especially those who have little or no knowledge of their cultural heritage.(L13,14)
  - Local community situations need responses to their particular needs when designing/delivering programs and services or giving information about parenting.
  - Selective targeting of families at risk can stigmatize and alienate those most needing help therefore criteria should be based on broader demographic factors in order to encourage their participation.
  - A holistic and community capacity building approach to providing programs is a preferred option for Indigenous communities.
  - Ways to engage Indigenous parents and carers includes more informal gatherings such as sharing a meal, venues where they feel safe and comfortable, bringing the children with them, providing transport, and involving extended family.
  - The Canadian experience with First Nation families reveal that early childhood services and schools used by Indigenous families are existing hubs where parenting knowledge and information can be obtained.(L15)
  - Health services and other places used by Indigenous families are also natural hubs where parenting enhancement can be delivered in an integrated way – for example ante natal and pre natal nutrition is a risk factor for Indigenous children. The health service is the natural environment to enhance parents knowledge and provide information in this area of parenting.(L15,17)
  - An integrated service on one site gives a whole of family approach and targets multiple factors (L17).
  - Sites for programs need to feel welcoming and be a comfortable gathering place.
  - Transportation to services is a factor in ability to access programs for Indigenous parents.
  - Parenting enhancement and support programs for fathers as well as mothers need to be provided including programs for incarcerated fathers and mothers to help them reunite with their children.(L16)
  - Young Indigenous parents are also a special target group who require parenting support.
  - Parenting support and programs need to include other family and community members (for example grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles) who may have responsibility for the children of absent parents.
  - Information about children comes mainly from other family and community members within the Indigenous community.(L18)
  - Community role models such as Elders and other strong and resilient parents can be used to model and discuss parenting issues.
  - Indigenous families identify Indigenous community groups, workers, posters or the “Murray grapevine” (word of mouth) as the preferred way of obtaining information.(L18)
  - Written information should be accompanied by oral information from an Indigenous community member or worker.(L18)
  - Extra parenting support and capacity building is needed at the following transition points and in the following circumstances:
    - the pre and post natal period
    - basic life skill development from a young age culminating in practical training for new parents in looking after the physical and emotional and attachment needs of infants
    - Lack of male role models as fathers
    - Young parents
  - Early childhood period – more programs and information to improve outcomes for children.

## SECTION FIVE: Summary findings of the Program Audit

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The most successful parenting capacity building programs for Indigenous families appear to be those where the following is considered.

- Strength based models looking at acknowledging strengths rather than deficits, looking at difficulties as setbacks rather than as failures, that build confidence and empower.
- Program models that are culturally sensitive and appropriate are community based, owned and controlled.
- Programs which address historical issues and current factors and which have ongoing impact on Indigenous parents ability to parent effectively.
- Indigenous community members input into the design and delivery of programs (ownership).
- Local community approaches – universal programs and services within Indigenous communities.
- Community consultation, collaboration and partnership delivery where mainstream staff or programs are used.
- Use of Indigenous staff as facilitators or as partners in facilitating programs. Facilitators who are trusted by the community and who maintain confidentiality.
- Trained facilitators who share stories, use role plays, recognise informal learning opportunities and use the skills of the group to help each other by problem solving.
- Targeting of specific groups who may need more tailored programs for parenting enhancement
  - fathers, new parents, teenage mothers, incarcerated parents, grandparents.
- Involvement of community mentors and role models with due care that Elders are not over utilised.
- Use of Aboriginal venues where participants feel safe and comfortable.
- Use of existing venues and services where parents already gather to enhance parenting eg supported playgroups, MACS centres, kindergartens, health services, schools.
- Outreach programs – home visiting to enhance parenting capacity on a one to one basis.
- The provision of transport and food to encourage participation.
- A whole of family approach. Many Indigenous communities will have the children with them. Grandparents and other family members may also want to be included.
- Programs which foster the relationship and attachment between parent and child eg. Programs before and after birth which foster the mother/father/child relationship as well as the more practical caring skills.
- Programs which are more holistic and ongoing eg. Antenatal, post natal, birth support, early attachment and relationship support, ongoing child development information and support at key transition points.

## SECTION SIX: Summary findings about information/ resources for Indigenous parents

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- Should be culturally relevant and respectful
- Visually appealing, culturally appropriate artwork
- Written in “language” appropriate to groups accessing the resources/information
- Posters displaying Indigenous families and children. Posters are preferred to pamphlets
- Videos showing Indigenous families and children used as a tool to assist Indigenous workers for discussion.
- Information is often passed on by word of mouth



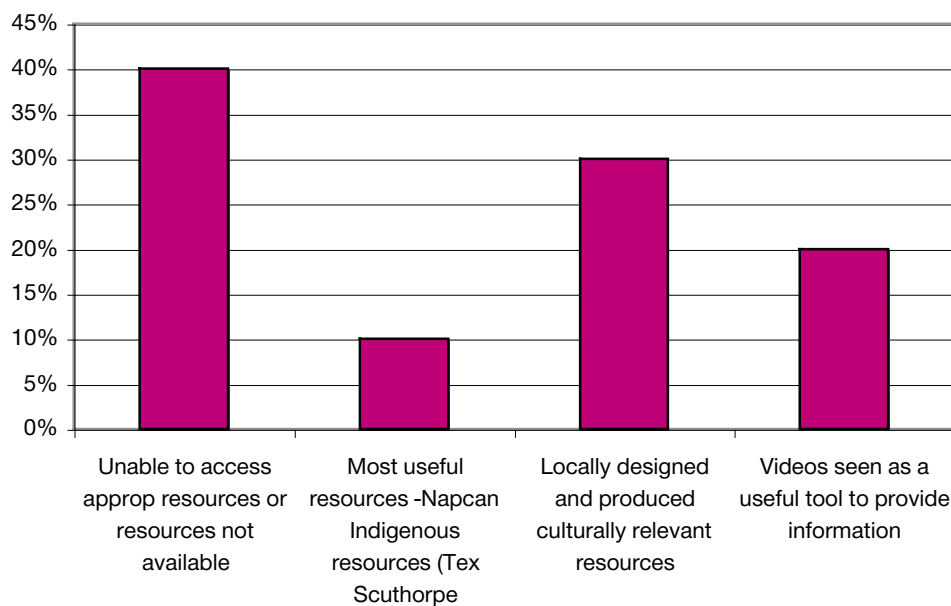
## SECTION SEVEN: Summary findings from survey of key stakeholders

### PARENTING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES - COMMENTS

Please comment on any current parenting information sets, brochures, videos and other materials you have used to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers and families in your community.

- Many commented that resources were neither useful or relevant for Indigenous families or limited or they were not always able to access appropriate resources - this was a common theme (40% of respondents stakeholder surveys)
- Most useful resources were:
  - Those developed by local communities for local communities
  - Napcan Indigenous resources (10% of respondents stakeholder surveys)
- Many commented that parenting courses were not always relevant for the Indigenous community
- Unable to access appropriate resources or resources not available (40%)

#### ACCESS TO RESOURCES



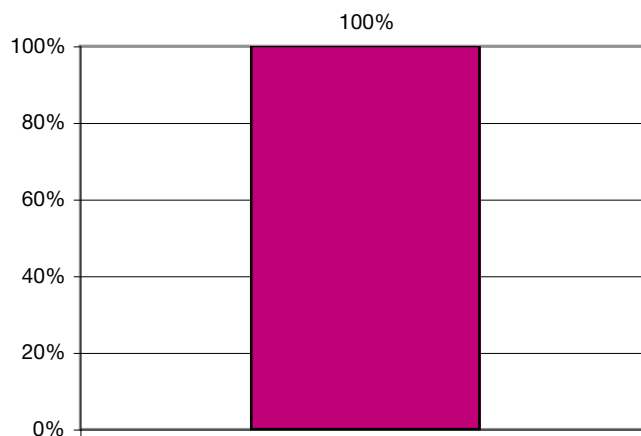
- Most useful resources – Napcan Indigenous resources (Tex Scuthorpe) (10%)
- Locally designed and produced culturally relevant resources (30%)
- Videos seen as a useful tool to provide information (20%)

## PARENTING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

### Do you think it is important to produce parenting information specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, and if so why?

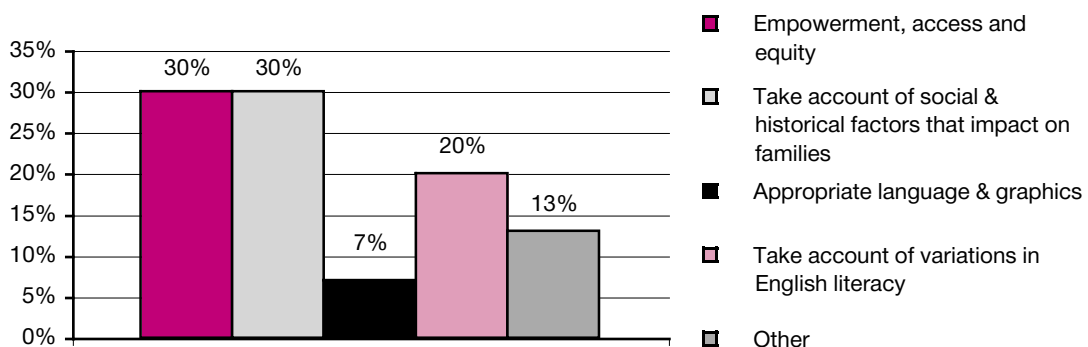
- Specific information for Indigenous communities is seen overwhelmingly as very important (100% of respondents stakeholder surveys)
- Needs to be culturally relevant
- Written in simple language
- Use to empower families/increase their chance of success

### THE IMPORTANCE OF AND NEED FOR CULTUALLY SPECIFIC RESOURCES



Info for Indigenous families and carers needs to be culturally specific, relevant, applicable and effective

### REASONS FOR CULTUALLY SPECIFIC RESOURCES

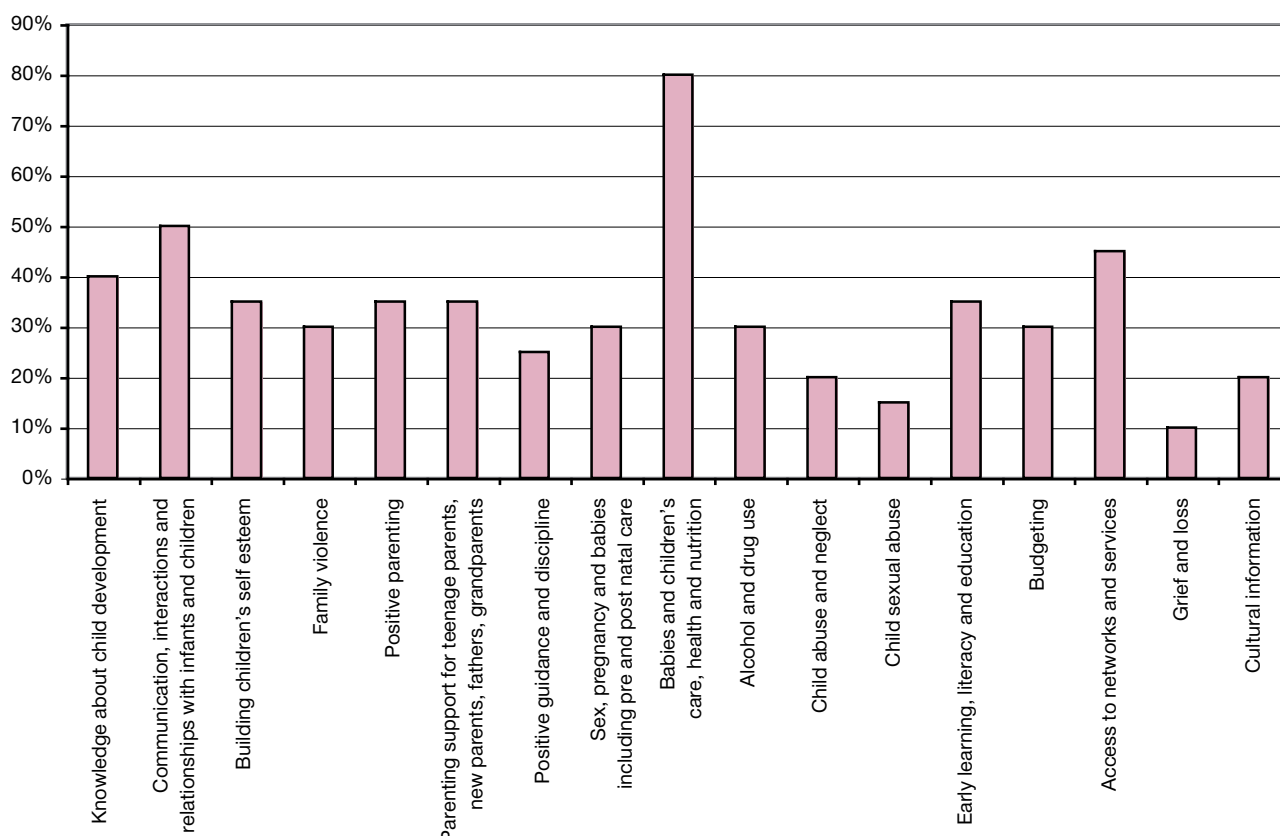


## MAIN PARENTING ISSUES THAT PARENTS NEED INFORMATION ABOUT

What issues do you think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers need information about to assist them to be the best parents possible?

- Knowledge about child development (40%)
- Communication, interactions and relationships with infants and children (50%)
- Building children's self esteem (35%)
- Family violence (30%)
- Positive parenting (35%)
- Parenting support for teenage parents, new parents, fathers, grandparents (35%)
- Positive guidance and discipline (25%)
- Sex, pregnancy and babies including pre and post natal care (30%)
- Babies and children's care, health and nutrition (80%)
- Alcohol and drug use (30%)
- Child abuse and neglect (20%)
- Child sexual abuse (15%)
- Early learning, literacy and education (35%)
- Budgeting (30%)
- Access to networks and services (45%)
- Grief and loss (10%)
- Cultural information (20%) previous responses indicated 100% respondents felt that cultural relevance was important in everything about parenting

## MAIN PARENTING ISSUES THAT PARENTS NEED INFORMATION ABOUT

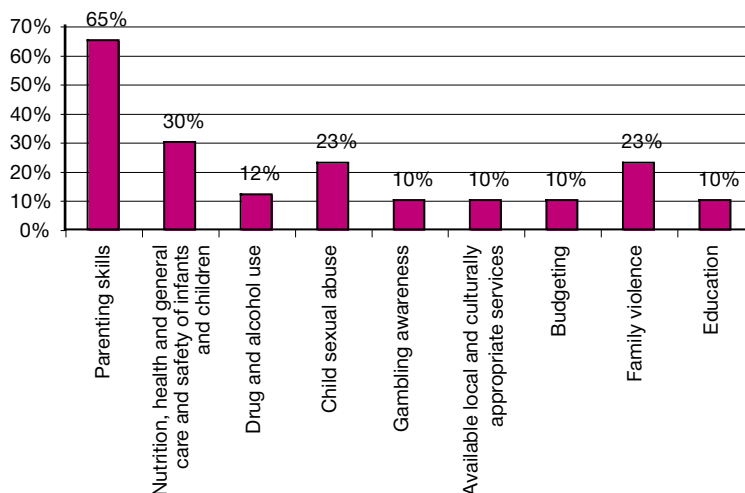


## MOST URGENT MAJOR ISSUES

Are there any major issues in your community which you think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents urgently need more information about?

- Parenting skills (65%)
- Nutrition, health and general care and safety of infants and children (30%)
- Drug and alcohol use (12%)
- Child sexual abuse (23%)
- Gambling awareness (10%)
- Available local and culturally appropriate services (10%)
- Budgeting (10%)
- Family violence (23%)
- Education (10%)

**MOST URGENT MAJOR ISSUES IDENTIFIED AT LOCAL COMMUNITY LEVEL**

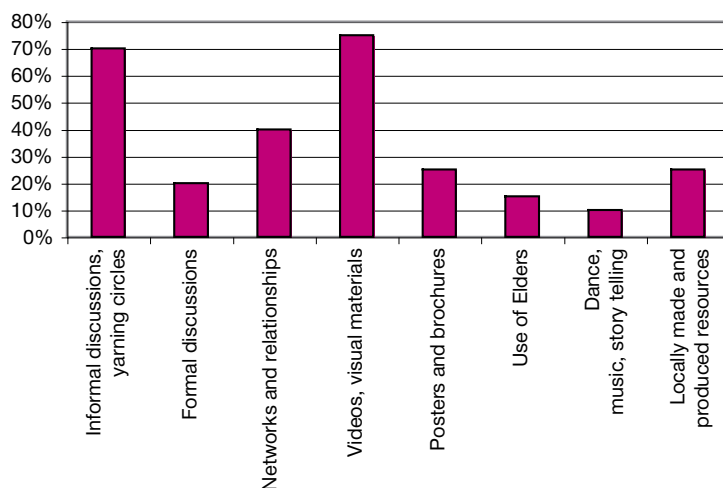


## MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO PARENTS

What format for providing information to parents do you think is the most effective? ie printed brochures/ leaflets, videos or other visual materials, spreading information through formal or informal discussion groups.

- Informal discussions, yarning circles (70%)
- Formal discussions (topic based) (20%)
- Through networks and relationships (40%)
- Videos and brochures, visual materials, culturally appropriate – people, images (75%)
- Posters and brochures only if culturally relevant, key messages, brief text (25%)
- Use of Elders, grandmothers, local Indigenous services and workers (15%)
- Dance, music, story telling (10%)
- Through locally made and produced resources – Indigenous ownership of resources (25%)

**MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO PARENTS**

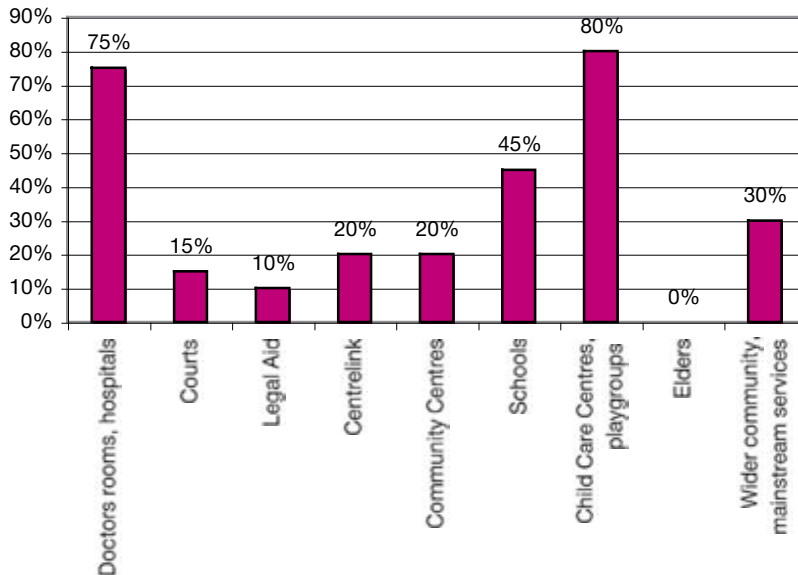




## BEST PLACES TO MAKE INFORMATION AVAILABLE

What are the most important places to make information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents available? What are the gaps in information dissemination? Are there any particular groups of parents/ carers who you think miss out on information, ie young fathers, grandparents, first time parents, foster carers, etc.

### BEST PLACES TO MAKE INFORMATION AVAILABLE



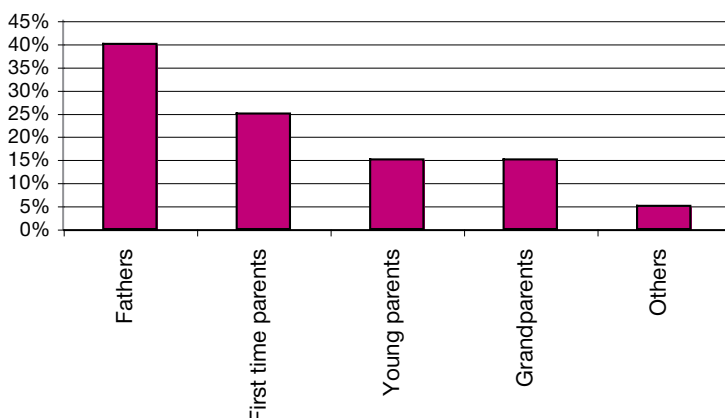
- Doctors rooms, hospitals, health services (75%)
- The courts (15%)
- Legal Aid (15%)
- Centrelink (10%)
- Indigenous local services eg Community centres (20%)
- Child care centres, playgroups, pre schools (80%)
- Elders
- Wider community mainstream services eg libraries, community centres, shopping centres (30%)

## PARENTING INFORMATION – OTHER COMMENTS

- Make programs accessible
- More face to face contact
- Consultation – ask parents what they want

## GAPS IDENTIFIED OF THOSE WHO MISS OUT ON INFORMATION

### GAPS IDENTIFIED OF THOSE WHO MISS OUT ON INFORMATION



- Fathers (40%)
- Young parents (15%)
- Grandparents (15%)
- Others (5%)

## **EFFECTIVE PARENTING SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

- Two thirds of responses not aware of any programs
- Many comments on mainstream programs not effective for Indigenous people
- Children in prison with mothers (up to 3 yrs)
- Family support programs at community centres
- Triple P program not effective
- Aboriginal mothers and babies service
- Strong babies, strong families, strong culture program(grandmothers training)

## **WHY ARE THE PROGRAMS EFFECTIVE**

- Some new mothers and grandmothers groups for Indigenous people very effective as they are run by Aboriginal people
- Strong babies, strong families, strong culture – grandmothers training mothers very effectively. They are using community consultation and involvement.
- Best Start programs – with focus on parent/child interactions

## **GAPS IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

- Programs not inclusive of Indigenous community in the development of content and delivery
- Needs to be more consultation with Indigenous people
- Have a follow up when parent programs are run
- Socially isolated families
- Prisoners and their children
- Fathers and grandparents support
- Lack of resources to provide continuity of care and one to one support
- Remote rural areas
- Transport and resources an issue

## SECTION EIGHT: Summary Findings from the Focus Groups

### ISSUES AFFECTING ABILITY TO PARENT

Participants were asked a number of questions in regards to issues or factors that impact on their ability to be the best parent they want to be. Responses from participants across the country were not that different despite the vastness of geographical locations. In remote areas, issues around fundamental basic needs were identified including the need for fresh food and other nutritional needs, however issues such as inadequate housing, low education participation and lack of employment opportunity and poverty was reported in all locations.

It is interesting to note, that despite the similarity of identified issues, responses in regard to how these issues should be addressed were more varied in terms of responses being specific to that location, and within a local context. Participants clearly stated that parenting information, support and programs should be locally produced and designed. Therefore, language, local customs and norms need to be considered when developing parenting information, support and programs.

A significant issue consistently raised around the country, was the need for healing of unresolved issues from childhood. Specifically, parents and professionals identified that significant acknowledgement and remedy of past Australian Governments removalist policies is required and that the implications of being stolen and institutionalised affect Indigenous parents today. Parents and professionals identified the following effects of removal and institutionalisation:

- Loss of traditional parenting methods
- Loss of culture
- Loss of extended family (and consequent support networks)
- Lack of appropriate parent role model due to being institutionalised
- Lack of opportunity in regard to accessing education and employment

Other issues participants identified as impacting on their ability to be the best parent they could be included:

- Addictions - drug, alcohol, petrol / glue / paint sniffing, gambling
- Impact of family violence & general issues around safety in the community. Safety in the community was not an issue a generation ago. Parents feel there is now more pressure on them

to provide recreation/play options for children because they feel it is no longer safe for children to play “on the streets”.

- Lack of recognition & support (particularly financial support and program support) for Grandparents and other Kinship Carers.
  - Isolation – this was reported in metropolitan and rural areas as a personal issue, and reported as a community issue in remote areas.
  - Lack of childcare – Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services and other Indigenous childcare services as well as non-Indigenous childcare.
  - Lack of access to education – particularly in rural and remote areas where some schools only provide classes until Year 10 and students need to travel / move to another town in order to complete their high school education.
  - People who are locally born & raised seem to be more aware of and connected to supports
  - Lack of access to income support – particularly for kinship carers
  - Demands on time - juggling work, home, play
  - Dealing with children’s behavioural issues e.g. ADHD
  - Shame factor – being able to admit there is a problem and seeking help without feeling shame. There seems to be a perception that you are a failure as a parent if you ask for help.
  - Lack of respect from children toward parents and grandparents and a loss of discipline methods. Some parents believed there was a connection between these two factors stating the Education system contributed to the lack of respect received from children. In quite a few locations, parents and professionals reported that the Education system was teaching their children about child abuse stating parents were “not allowed to smack their children”. Parents felt this was unfair and that the Education system should also teach children about their responsibilities, not just their rights. Parents also felt confused about how they were “allowed” to discipline their children, having not received any education themselves about what is appropriate or legal. Parents reported they wanted more information about the child protection system.
- Hence, parents felt a sense of loss over their right to discipline children in a way they feel is appropriate. Some parents recalled experiences from their own childhood which included traditional methods that were believed to

eliminate the inappropriate behaviour. Parents felt traditional methods worked well.

- Racism, covert and overt racism/discrimination e.g. being refused a service due to being Aboriginal. An example of this was given where a parent sought Emergency Relief from a mainstream service and was told to go to the local Aboriginal Health Service for Emergency Relief because they are Aboriginal.
- Lack of exposure to parenting methods during childhood and adolescence. Parents felt that their children and grandchildren were not being prepared well enough before becoming parents themselves. They felt the loss of traditional methods were again a contributing factor to this issue. For example, it was reported that traditionally women were prepared for motherhood at an early age by participating in or observing the delivery of a newborn and assisting to care for siblings and/or cousins.
- The education system does not do enough in terms of teaching children what it's like to be a parent. Parents and professionals alike reported of programs they had heard of that had been run at different high schools. For example, the program where a life-like doll is used a baby and students are required to care for the "baby". Parents felt this program should be extended throughout all schools as it gave young people a "reality check".
- There is not enough recognition or support for Men and their role as a parent. Women and men alike raised this as an issue reporting that traditionally men and women had specific roles in regards to rearing children and that these roles had either been eroded or become blurred. Single parent men stated it was particularly difficult for them to be a mother and a father at the same time and were concerned that there were little or no support groups for men.
- The influence of "Americanisms", media and technology were reported as having a negative impact on children's lives as they were often chosen as favoured activities. For instance violent movies and music, particularly rap music was seen to be a negative influence on young people's behaviour, parents feeling that young people were trying to imitate what they watched and listened to. In regards to technology, parents felt that video games and the like were also violent and that children preferred these games to more traditional recreation options.
- Single parents told of the difficulties and frustrations of dealing with their child's behaviour when returned to them by the other parent. Some people felt this was due to a difference in parenting styles.
- Indigenous parents with non-Indigenous partners

reported of the difficulty of raising a child with two cultures. Some said they felt pressure from the extended family of the non-Indigenous partner around parenting styles with relatives pushing their belief that "the white way is the right way".

## PARENTING SUPPORT

Professionals and parents / caregivers were asked questions in regards to reasons why parents seek support, whom they seek support from, and what is the best way to provide the support they seek. Here are some of the responses:

- Parents seek support in regards to a number of issues e.g. behaviour, nutrition, finances, family violence.
- Peer support groups are beneficial when they are informal and facilitated by a local Indigenous person. There are some excellent examples of support groups facilitated by Indigenous organisations that are producing positive outcomes for parents.
- Support groups that include the whole family are more appropriate than just mother's groups etc. People said it was good to have mothers groups, and fathers groups, but that the two should come together at different times to form "family" groups. People said it is important to remember that Indigenous people see parenting in a much broader spectrum than that of white people. They believe parenting is the responsibility of parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles and the community.
- Mentoring support programs that tap into existing support networks in communities are seen to be the ideal way to provide support to people who, for different reasons, may not ever approach agencies for help.

## PARENTING INFORMATION

Participants in the focus groups were asked who they went to for information about parenting, as well as what they thought of the information products they might access or provide, and how information products should be designed and distributed. Overwhelmingly, responses indicate that information products should be locally produced featuring people they know, as Indigenous parents stated they want to identify with the message as well as the messengers.

- Family and friends are the main sources for parenting information.
- Maternal Child Health Nurses, health workers, support workers are other "trusted" sources for information.

- GPs should be a source but usually are not.
- Parenting information should be visual with simple messages. Local people should be featured as the “messengers” utilising local artwork.
- Information should be presented informally along with a yarn about what it’s telling us.
- Information produced by Government Departments is not very useful or appropriate to Indigenous people.
- Locally produced information should be available from both Indigenous and Mainstream services.
- There are some excellent examples of locally produced information already in existence.
- Information should reinforce the importance of culture.
- Parents want more information about the difference between discipline and abuse as well as information about the child protection system.
- Parents and professionals reported having mixed feelings about the use of videos - if they’re locally made and presented well with lots of discussion, then they are useful.

## PARENTING PROGRAMS

Again, participants were asked about parenting programs available to them in their community (if any). Questions were posed around the content, delivery and design of programs as well as who the target group of the program(s) might be, and timelines of the program. Participants were asked to give feedback on the effectiveness of programs and any perceived gaps in program delivery.

- Parenting programs should focus on family strengths not weaknesses.
- Mainstream programs need to be adapted to be culturally appropriate otherwise they are not useful.
- Need to include more outreach services – parents state that mainstream don’t seem to do this as well as Indigenous services.
- Programs that include group work need to be informal and flexible, and be facilitated by a trusted (and preferably local) person.
- There are some excellent Indigenous programs already in existence that people report as being useful.
- There is not enough formal evaluation of programs.
- Pilot projects that work well should be funded longer term. People felt there was a loss to the community when programs were “ripped out” of

communities.

- Elders should be included in the development and delivery of programs wherever possible.
- There needs to be more recognition of the number of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Grandparents say there should be more programs for Grandparents.
- Need more programs based on Action Research models of community development. Throughout the focus groups, responses indicate that most Indigenous people and professionals feel that community development responses to family issues are far better responses than individualistic responses.
- Indigenous people want a choice between Indigenous and Mainstream services. But, when seeking assistance from mainstream services, Indigenous people still want to access culturally appropriate programs and information, and prefer to see Indigenous people working in mainstream.
- There is a perceived fear of a lack of confidentiality with Indigenous workers who live and work in the same community. This was reported by parents and caregivers as a problem, and was reported as a perceived problem by professionals.
- Parenting programs often seen to be “middle class”, particularly in metropolitan areas, but some Indigenous agencies are successfully running mainstream programs that have been adapted to be more culturally appropriate, and are delivered by Indigenous people.
- Programs need to be longer term rather than 4-8 weeks. People feel that it is especially important to acknowledge and discuss some of the historical factors that impact on today’s Indigenous people as parents, and that this should be incorporated into programs. People felt that long term programs would enable more time to discuss issues such as this and other issues that impact on Indigenous families, rather than just focussing on parenting.
- There is a need for basic parenting skills programs especially in remote communities. People living in remote communities said there should be programs that teach basic parenting skills to young parents, such as how to change a nappy, sleep routines, nutritional requirements etc.
- Both parents and professionals felt that parenting programs should not be called parenting programs as that would not reflect the holistic nature of an ideal Indigenous program and people just wouldn’t come due to the sense of shame that one “needs” or wants parenting help.

## SECTION NINE: Summary findings from National workshop

### FEEDBACK AND RESPONSES FROM SMALL GROUPS

SNAICC and Swinburne University Department of Child and Family Studies presented findings from the literature review, program audit, focus groups and stakeholder consultation stages of the project. Participants were asked to discuss the findings, key issues and priorities for action on Indigenous parenting information and support in Australia.

Delegates were asked to divide into 4 small groups. Each small group was asked to consider two questions:

1. What does what we have learnt from the Parenting Project so far mean for parenting information and support in Indigenous communities in Australia?
2. What are the priorities for action?
  - For providing information on parenting?
  - For providing parenting support?

The groups considered the two questions in relation to one of the following four areas:

- Group 1 Remote areas
- Group 2 Rural areas
- Group 3 Metropolitan areas
- Group 4 Mainstream or non-Indigenous agencies providing parenting information and support to Indigenous communities

#### GROUP 1: REMOTE AREAS

- Creole language information important. Language used in information and programs needs to be the same as the local language whether it be a form of broken English or otherwise.
- Travel to people and work in their space.
- Program delivery positions should be 'identified' with the right training and retention supports and career structure because:
  - The people who are participating need to be able to speak more freely (they will feel comfortable to do this if their language is used by the facilitator).
  - Respect needed on both sides
  - People are not comfortable dealing with

mainstream services unless Indigenous workers are delivering the programs. (Community members, including Elders could play a role in selection panels.)

- Mainstream organisations need to be culturally competent to support Indigenous workers and programs.
- Indigenous workers roles need to be more flexible than mainstream workers. We need to be more creative in delivery so we can meet community expectations.
- Remote staff need adequate travel money to visit communities frequently in order to build relationships. Visits need to be lengthy in time. An implication of this is that agencies will probably need to employ extra staff to cover home office duties while others travel.
- Written information needs to be accompanied by oral information.
- The first step is to build relationships, partnerships and capacity of communities to decide what is needed, to identify what is there already, and how best to provide it e.g. 'working parties' which exist around the Dubbo area, and 'negotiation tables' in Cape York. Strengthening the capacity of individual community members and organisations such as child care centres needs to be linked to existing programs and services.
- If submissions are called for, format needs to be a simple question and answer format.
- If we are able to deliver a parenting program with positive results in only one community, then this in itself would be a positive achievement.
- We would like to see the \$600,000 (referring to the Minister's financial commitment to Indigenous parenting information within the context of this project) built on e.g. we need to attract more funds such as training dollars.
- Simple, informal, local delivery is important e.g. camping, social groups etc.
- An implication of these issues which can be addressed by the SNAICC National Parenting Resource Centre would be to work with communities to attract other Government funding.
- We would like to see some of the \$600,000 set aside to do some development work with remote communities.



## GROUP 2: RURAL AREAS

- Communities need to 'own' projects and program, informing Government how the funds should be spent. The development of projects needs to be shared between Government and communities.
- There is currently limited community input in the developmental stages of programs. Shared development between Government, local services and community people should occur.
- Full consultation processes are required at all levels of the development of projects and programs.
- Government need to recognise and allow for the time that is required to engage and consult with people who are not existing clients (or within the service system 'loop').
- Documenting stories of Elders and other Indigenous peoples parenting experience is required in order to capture their experience and to ensure traditional methods do not continue to be lost.
- Government departments need to rethink parameters around funding and guidelines – communities need to understand these parameters too.
- Accountability needs to happen but should include accountability to the community as well as funding sources.
- Government needs to support communities to develop their own parenting information – maybe develop a resource kit that can be used as a template to be expanded on and adapted by communities.
- We need flexible timeframes in the delivery of programs. We also need flexible methods of distribution of information.
- We need to get the (culturally appropriate) information out to a broad cross section of community – including non-Indigenous and Government services.
- There is a need to provide training to community members and Indigenous employees of Indigenous services in regards to report writing skills, facilitation skills, and submission writing skills.
- A co-ordinated approach to problem-solving and service delivery is required in rural communities. This includes co-ordination between non-Government services, local government, and State and Federal government services.
- Government need to ensure mainstream services are community focussed and culturally appropriate.
- There is a need to employ more Indigenous people in senior positions in Government. These positions need to be supported so that Indigenous people can maintain their links and relationships in community.
- Definite career paths must be developed within bureaucracies with support to sustain individual career goals.
- Recruitment campaigns and training methods need to recognise prior learning and life experience as relevant skills.
- Provide more opportunities (such as this National Workshop) to share information at a national level.
- Regular documentation of best practice programs must occur and be accessible to Indigenous and non-Indigenous services.
- An 'information book' people can take from service to service with them would be a useful way for parents to keep record of the information they have been provided.
- We need to work more closely with Education departments. Schools have been consistently raised throughout the (SNAICC Parenting) Project as a place where parents should be able to access parenting information and support.
- Many Indigenous children have more than one culture. We need to find ways to nurture difference in culture in a caring and sharing way.
- Political factions within communities exist.
- Nobody can assume to be an expert in regards to Indigenous parenting practices.
- Mainstream services must be trained in cultural awareness. Government and mainstream need to recognise the diversity within Indigenous communities.
- Develop Indigenous inclusive practices to serve as a framework for non-Indigenous services. For example, we could develop a national document such as the Reconciliation Statement, which could be linked to funding and service agreements – an audit of non-Indigenous services could occur to ensure they are complying with the framework.
- Don't double up on programs in the same community. Enhance existing programs.
- Action Research models of community development should be the foundation for all the work we do in Indigenous communities.

### GROUP 3: METROPOLITAN AREAS

- Change requires leadership. What about leadership at the community level?
- What is the definition of community in metropolitan areas? “Community” is complex, dynamic, shifting. Key elements are family/kin.
- Effective work requires knowledge of community, families, and relationships. This takes time. Government and workers need to take the time to get to know people at the local level. Working in community is not just about what you know, but especially about who you know.
- In metropolitan areas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families can be very isolated and ‘lost’ in the mainstream e.g. schools not addressing individual need. This undermines their cultural identity and community links.
- Part of the response is inclusive practice and outreach from Indigenous specific agencies.
- Indigenous people living away from country can be isolated within another Indigenous community.
- People have connections back to their Indigenous family/kin/country but may also be part of other communities e.g. geographical/local and also to other family with a different racial or cultural origin.
- Each state or territory has its own history that has created the current web of Indigenous communities in metropolitan areas.
- Families may choose mainstream services because they are more available.
- Parenting support should be tailored to family needs and responsive to local circumstances.
- Programs often have very little profile in the community.
- Peer based strengths groups where there is not only learning but support and interaction in an informal setting is the way to go.
- Programs need the resources to respond to the immediate needs of people e.g. material aid.
- Reconnection with Elders needs to be actioned – it won’t just happen. In metropolitan areas Elders are not always identifiable or available.
- Actively building informal support networks and using extended family groups for advice, ideas, and support with raising children can be a successful way of reaching people who don’t seek support from services.
- There are foster care families that seem to do well. We need to identify the elements of support that create this success and make them available to other families.
- Talk with families where children are doing well and find out how these families have done it.
- We have to build the cultural capacity of families recognising that for metropolitan communities this means working over large networks.
- Recognise that at times people might have their own difficult issues to deal with, but they can still be good parents – communities taking responsibility for their children and supporting families when this occurs.
- We need to identify positive role models in metropolitan communities (but not perfect – don’t set people up to fail or create expectations that are inappropriate).
- Asking family to take your children for a while is an example of a good parenting choice. We shouldn’t shame people for this.
- Government and agencies have to encourage re-kindling of family networks.

#### Priorities for action:

- Give Elders the time, space and chance to tell stories and share their parenting journey.
- Informal support networks that engage ALL the family and give all family time together.
- Develop parenting information products that are interesting and culturally relevant.
- The challenge is to reach children who are not engaged with their community, school, work or anything. We need to go where they are and meet them in their space e.g. on the streets.
- Create ‘Family Engagement’ Workers (as recommended in the Gordon Enquiry).
- Education and support is needed to make sure additional parenting/family payment does not have negative outcomes.
- Start young in school / pre-school to teach children self-respect and cultural pride. Build on this base with parenting information in schools.
- Build on the existing community based services – don’t create new ones.
- Every service site should give people a starting point to access information and support.
- Need to build and extend the reach of the early childhood services.
- Always remember that parents want what is best for their children – never leave people behind, start with what works for that family – from the family’s perspective.
- Trust is essential between families and services. People will continue to be engaged with services if they do not have a sense of trust.

- Start with programs for children and use these to engage with families.
- Parenting is not about making better parents, but about making families well.
- AICCA type services are required in all areas because they work effectively with marginalised children and families.
- Families often do trust AICCA's and other community services.

#### **Priorities for SNAICC:**

- Advocating for intensive family support workers to work one on one with families.
- Address basic necessities such as housing, income, health etc.
- Work with peer support and mentor programs – evaluate and document.
- Build on the existing childcare services to provide other forms of support.
- Community driven and culturally appropriate information available in mainstream services.
- Encourage Government agencies to work smarter through development of partnerships with communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies.
- The ultimate aim is to develop a shared vision of the continuum of support for all Indigenous children.
- Advocate for equity of funding (ASSPA) for kindergartens and childcare services.
- Use the existing Indigenous early childhood services to implement and roll out the promised \$650,000.
- Deal with the hard issues that take away families quality of life (e.g. unemployment).
- Pay and support kinship carers according to the real cost of caring.
- Build on the type and coverage of early childhood services.
- SNAICC to monitor use of the old ATSI/ATSIC dollars now gone to mainstream.

#### **GROUP 4: NON-INDIGENOUS SERVICES**

- Not a lot has changed in 20 years and Government is still not listening.
- Non-Indigenous agencies need to employ Indigenous staff and retain them in their services.
- We need to be very sure that we have 'agreed' or understood definitions when we talk together. What is a 'parent program' for might feel or seem like I have to stop being black to be a 'good' or 'successful' parent = assimilation.
- Staffing of any programs needs to be a small core (say 3) workers rather than 1 person having (or expected to have) all the answers.
- We need to look in – rather than not look at all.
- Issues around time – mainstream approach around practices, process and flexibility.
- Parallels with “whitefella” issues in what the Indigenous literature and consultations have shown:
  - “whitefellas” also reject being told what to do by experts
  - Value of “Family Partnerships” training (Hilton Davis)
  - Concept of families, children and communities being “co-producers” of children’s outcomes with service providers.
  - Indigenous pain and despair experienced collectively rather than in isolation as in “whitefella” society.
- How about replacing “parenting programs” with “building survival skills across the life course for our people”.
- Issues for non-Indigenous multi-cultural groups are similar to Indigenous issues.
- Framework for ages and stages – based on community development principles, not just “parenting” information in isolation.
- What is stopping us from being able to work in partnership? Indigenous people don't have equal partnership.
- We need to re-story parenting. Too many public parenting stories are bad news stories that parents cannot identify with.
- We need to involve Indigenous people in program design and delivery.
- We need to develop Indigenous specific reporting and evaluation mechanisms. This would have major implications for non-Indigenous organisations in terms of program design and funding criteria.

- Flexibility in funding models is needed as is longer term funding to enable better evaluations to occur.
- Pilots mean we keep re-inventing the wheel.
- There is not a huge amount of money to do what we hope will be done. There will be a need for non-Indigenous agencies to be inclusive.
- Places / people / agencies we should be targeting to raise cultural awareness are: Out of Home Care Services; Early Childhood Services; Schools; Doctors; Judges; Family Law Court; Nurses; Not for Profit Organisations; Government; Hospitals. They would benefit from:
  - Cultural awareness training
  - Developed cultural guidelines
  - Learning about respecting Indigenous culture
  - An audit of cultural competency
- Mainstream getting Aboriginal advisory reference groups where they can't employ Aboriginal people.
- Protocols with mainstream about what the minimum requirements are to work with Aboriginal families (and practice guidelines).
- Indigenous people must have the intellectual rights to any resources that are developed. Mainstream agencies need to pay Indigenous agencies for their specialist advice.
- Family Law Court decisions acknowledge the need for Aboriginal children to maintain connections to community. Who will fund an agency to support this connection?
- Family Law Court – need to get information about rights for grandparents and other kinship carers.
- Liaison between all previously listed services needs to occur.
- Strengthening identity in children and young people.
- Develop value statements for children and Aboriginal families.
- Importance of Aboriginal culture.
- Elders – mainstream services need to understand the importance of their role in community and family.

#### **Priorities for action:**

- “Good news” story on parenting
- Using “successes” as examples
- Promote Indigenous child rearing practices
- Listen to the voices of children
- Push for a compact statement of values.

- Make tender documentation and processes for applying for funding simpler.
- Focus on strengthening “Indigenous” component of parenting. “Strength in Aboriginality”.
- Work with communities on strengthening the role of parents, in their language. Include songs and ceremony.
- Ensure consultation in Aboriginal communities when developing programs.
- Use networks to influence other agencies who are providing services to Aboriginal children.
- Develop a strategy to ensure mainstream agencies and government departments working with children and families have culturally appropriate policies, practices, service responses and approaches.

#### **General**

General issues raised throughout the day at the workshop by participants:

- No youth (as parents) representation at workshop
  - SNAICC explained that this was an oversight, however young parents did participate in the focus groups held around the country.
- No Torres Strait Islander representation at workshop
  - SNAICC explained we did invite TSI people to the workshop however we did not receive any acceptances.
- Torres Strait Islander traditional adoption
  - Presentation by project team did not include any reference to this issue. Traditional adoption is the practice of rearing child/ren of a relative and usually the child is not returned to the natural parent. Traditional adoption is recognised within the Family Law Act .
- “Parenting is for life” – the role of being a parent does not cease at any given point in time of the child's life. It may however, be transferred to another person.
- It is about a ‘collection’ of people who fulfil a number of roles to each other – a set of relationships. This is in reference to extended families and communities being active participants in the child rearing process.
- Need to infiltrate to get the messages & solutions to decision-makers (legal, social etc) including our own communities.
- Staffing needs to be a small core of people to carry out the jobs, meet the demands rather than 1 lone, solitary person. This is a resourcing decision.

## Plenary

A plenary was held to summarise discussions of the day, to capture key points raised, and to reiterate actions determined by participants to be of priority.

In summing up, the plenary panel (Muriel Cadd, David Hazelhurst and Julian Pocock) reflected the following points made by participants:

- The development of protocols or a framework for what is “culturally appropriate” practice – have the framework linked to funding, ensuring appropriate follow up occurs to ensure accountability, and an evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the framework. Agencies working to the framework could undertake a cultural audit attached to an accreditation type system.
- Support for local communities to be able to undertake the processes required when applying for Government funds or when developing Indigenous parenting information and support programs.
- Working with Registered Training Organisations delivering courses with child, family and parenting focuses to ensure cultural awareness is part of the curriculum.
- Strengthen cultural identity awareness – it is imperative that cultural identity is part of any Indigenous parenting initiative and that reflections and capturing of ancestry is included.
- Discussions need to occur with Education and Early Childhood Services to explore the demand for collaboration with services providing parenting support and information.
- Develop an opportunity to hear the voices of children and young people in regards to research projects and delivery of service.
- Don't forget about children with disabilities.

Finally, a workshop participant shares his thoughts on parenting.

## THOUGHTS ON PARENTING

*I'd like to bring up / raise our children our way.*

*But then the Department say, “You gotta do it this way”*

*As a result – our hands are tied.*

*And some of our children know this!*

*Some Departments forget that there are lots of different tribes and different ways.*

*Of course most of our cultural ways are gone but still, I'd like to raise / nurture my children “my way”, not the Government way.*

*Of what culture we've got today new cultures can be adopted in a positive form.*

**William Gulf  
Woorabinda Senior Health Worker  
SNAICC Parenting Project National Workshop  
Tuesday 8th June 2004**



## SECTION TEN: Overall Recommendations and Conclusions

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### RECOMMENDATIONS - PARENTING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

#### PREAMBLE

This project has identified overwhelming evidence that parenting information and resources should be culturally relevant, and designed and delivered by Indigenous people and communities to suit their local needs.

Information and resources should be aimed at families rather than parents and recognise the broader notion of family and shared responsibility for child rearing within Indigenous communities. It is also clear that parents and carers primarily use their own family networks and local Indigenous people and services with whom they already have an established relationship as their main source of parenting information.

Whilst the scope of the project focussed particularly on younger children, parents participating in focus groups highlighted the need for information and support in relation to older children and young people. Issues that families and communities want included within parenting information and support were typically broad, spanning the full range of health and developmental issues and issues from the pre-natal period through to adulthood.

The project identified utilising a strengths based approach and working to normalise activities which

support and strengthen families in their child rearing as essential to securing the engagement of families in parenting information and support activities.

Family stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities relating to child rearing were seen as an important source of parenting information. Developing parenting information was seen as involving documenting information from within a community or family group and complimenting this with information from outside the community, ie government information or technical information on child development. Family stories need to be gathered and developed as a culturally relevant resource to strengthen and restore child rearing practices and provide positive role models for Indigenous parents and carers.

It is also clear that there are some very good local, regional and state based information products and resources which could be of use to other communities but which are at present unknown to others.

The findings from all sources suggest the following recommendations.

If implemented, these recommendations would improve the dissemination, quality, cultural relevance and impact of information for Indigenous families and communities regarding parenting and child rearing.

#### RECOMMENDATION ONE

Parenting information for Indigenous communities should combine local content with more broadly applicable information drawn from the evidence base on child and adolescent development.

Localised content within parenting information for Indigenous communities might appropriately include:

- Reference to local role models, leaders and mentors
- Recognition of family and kinship networks
- Language and artwork
- Advice on access to and contacts for local services and supports
- Community background and history, and
- Important local cultural norms and traditions

Common content within parenting information for Indigenous communities might appropriately include:

- Information on pre-natal health and nutrition
- Common experiences and strategies in coping with infants and babies
- Child and adolescent developmental milestones, health and nutrition
- Strategies regarding child behaviour and discipline
- Parents and children's rights and responsibilities
- Child protection with emphasis on prevention of abuse and neglect



## RECOMMENDATION TWO

Parenting information (and support) needs to target parents prior to their child's birth and afterwards at key points throughout the early childhood and adolescent development periods as a priority, given the research on the importance of developmental periods for future outcomes for children.

Information should include cultural knowledge and deal with issues of healing and empowerment, care of self and relationships with partners. The key transition points are:

### Pre natal and post natal period

- Information on health, nutrition, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding
- Information on how to care for babies, including practical tasks and routines, babies health and nutrition, interactions and relationships with babies, including reading and telling stories.

### Parenting Toddlers

- Child development knowledge, characteristics of toddlers
- Dealing with toddler behaviour and providing appropriate limits and guidelines
- Toddler play and experiences

### Parenting Pre schoolers

- Child development knowledge, characteristics of pre schoolers
- Building children's strength and resilience
- Showing children how to solve problems and resolve conflict

### Transition to school

- Getting children ready for school
- Social and emotional readiness
- Early literacy

### Early Adolescence

- Adolescent development and transition to adulthood
- Harm minimisation, personal safety and risk taking
- Family relationships, discipline and boundary setting

## RECOMMENDATION THREE

Government funding priorities should support the gathering of family stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities relating to child rearing to value and acknowledge traditional and current parenting strengths and child rearing practices.

## RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Funding for parenting information and support should take account of the preference for Aboriginal and Islander communities to develop their own parenting information products including printed and audio-visual materials.

## RECOMMENDATION FIVE

A priority for funding Indigenous parenting information resources should be the production of highly visual materials designed for use in facilitated group settings. This should include materials utilising plain English and where possible local language. Resources should be available in a variety of formats including, AV materials, posters and leaflets and be provided to parents and families with conversation about what the information is covering.

## RECOMMENDATION SIX

Indigenous parenting information resources should be produced targeting local Indigenous mentors, leaders and workers to enable them to establish, facilitate and support a range of parenting and family support groups linked to existing local services.

## RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

SNAICC and FaCS should consider the establishment of a national clearinghouse function for the ongoing collection, promotion and sharing of Indigenous parenting information resources as part of the development of the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Centre.

## RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

Existing Indigenous parenting information such as the NAPCAN Indigenous resources, RAATSIC parenting information and the University of Newcastle, Family Action Centre Indigenous video and posters should be more widely promoted as examples of useful parenting information.

## RECOMMENDATION NINE

Where mainstream services, particularly those focussed on families and children, are funded for the production of parenting information and resources, funding requirements should ensure that mainstream agencies:

- assess the existing availability of Indigenous specific resources in their community
- engage in some dialogue with local Indigenous agencies in relation to the need for Indigenous specific information products, and
- develop appropriate strategies for the production of Indigenous information resources to compliment the activities of local Indigenous services

## RECOMMENDATIONS - PARENTING SUPPORT AND SKILLS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

### PREAMBLE

Messages from this project about the forms of parent support groups and services stress the need for cultural relevance and Indigenous ownership in program design and delivery. Families need to feel empowered, understood and strengthened through their contact with parenting support services rather than shamed, blamed and disempowered.

This project, as well as other research and government reports about Indigenous children and families, identifies an overwhelming need for underlying issues to be addressed in conjunction with programs and services. These underlying issues include the repercussions from past and present policies that have impacted hugely on the health, wellbeing, parenting and aspirations of Indigenous Australians.

Where mainstream services, supports and programs are used by Indigenous families, the messages from the project are that there has to be partnerships formed with Indigenous organisations, consultation with the local Indigenous community, training in cultural awareness and Indigenous staff employed so that Indigenous families feel safe accessing these services. Cultural awareness training has to be focussed on supporting mainstream agencies to know and appreciate in detail the local Indigenous culture and family networks rather than focus only on very broad aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

## RECOMMENDATION TEN

Develop a framework (linked to funding requirements), including guidelines and benchmarks for culturally appropriate practices for mainstream and Indigenous agencies seeking to deliver Indigenous parenting support programs.

## RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN

That funding criteria for mainstream or Indigenous agencies to facilitate parenting support groups recognise:

- the broad family responsibility for child rearing favoured by Indigenous communities
- that support groups should be facilitated by a known local Indigenous community member, or an Indigenous person who has established relationships within the community or by non Indigenous facilitator as a partner with a local Indigenous person
- that communities require the flexibility to develop groups that address the needs of and recognise the role of extended family in child rearing including mothers, fathers, uncles, aunties, grandparents, siblings and other kin, and
- the preference for parenting groups to be informal, flexible, holistic, long term, and culturally appropriate

## RECOMMENDATION TWELVE

Parenting support (and information) needs to target parents prior to their child's birth and afterwards at key points throughout the early childhood and adolescent development periods as a priority, given the research on the importance of developmental periods for future outcomes for children.

### Pre natal and post natal period

Programs and services which:

- Provide knowledge about pregnancy birth and breastfeeding
- Provide respite and Indigenous social networks and support for parents eg. mother/grandmother/baby program, supported playgroups, child care services
- Develop parent/baby relationships
- Provide skill development in basic care, routines, health(including immunization), nutrition of infants and child development

## **Parenting Toddlers**

Programs and services which:

- Provide respite and Indigenous social and learning networks and support for parents and stimulation for children eg supported playgroups, child care services
- Provide knowledge about what to expect in the development and behaviour of the toddler
- Provide skill development in appropriate guidance of toddler behaviour

## **Parenting Pre schoolers**

Programs and services which:

- Provide respite and Indigenous social and learning networks and support for parents and stimulation for children eg. pre schools, kindergartens, child care services
- Provide knowledge about child development and expectations of pre school children
- Provide knowledge about how to strengthen children's self esteem and build their resilience
- Provide knowledge about strategies to manage children's behaviour and how to help the children make decisions and solve problems

## **Transition to school**

Programs and services which:

- Provide parents with knowledge and skills to help their children prepare for and settle into school, Eg Parents as Teachers Program

## **Early Adolescence**

Programs and services which:

- Provide parents with knowledge and skills to help them understand adolescent development and the transition to adulthood including harm minimisation, personal safety and risk taking, family relationships, discipline and boundary setting with adolescents.

## **RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN**

Indigenous and non Indigenous facilitators of parent programs and support groups need appropriate training to be able to engage Indigenous parents and other family members in an approach that strengthens parenting and cultural knowledge and uses a group problem solving approach.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN**

SNAICC and FaCS should develop or document a range of different ways of evaluating Indigenous parenting programs and services which take a strengths based approach and are meaningful, manageable and acceptable to Indigenous communities and funding bodies. These should be documented and promoted through the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Centre.

## **RECOMMENDATION FIFTEEN**

Evaluation should be linked to funding criteria and FaCS should provide assistance, support and flexible ideas on evaluation processes at the time communities or agencies are preparing funding applications for parenting information and support programs

## **RECOMMENDATION SIXTEEN**

Evaluation outcomes from funded projects and activities should be documented and accessible through the FaCS and SNAICC websites to assist professionals and others working with Indigenous families to readily access documented descriptions and evaluations of effective parenting information and support programs.

## **RECOMMENDATION SEVENTEEN**

Existing services used by Indigenous parents and families such as children's services and health services should be prioritised as sites for the development and implementation of parenting information and support activities.

## **RECOMMENDATION EIGHTEEN**

That FaCS develop a multi faceted approach to parent support and parenting skills enhancement targeted to local communities and designed and developed by local communities or in consultation with local communities. An example of a local framework for this is attached as Appendix 15 in the Appendices document. (VACCA/Good Beginnings Parenting Project)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS - GENERAL**

### **PREAMBLE**

There are a number of issues which were raised, particularly during focus groups which require some consideration but are broader than the scope of the project. Some of these require consideration and action within the context of other Australian Government initiatives or at the State and Territory level.

## **Discipline Vs Physical Abuse**

Through the focus groups and stakeholder survey, issues relating to child discipline and child protection were raised. A commonly and strongly expressed view was that children from primary school age absorb messages from school and child protection agencies that physical discipline is a form of child abuse. Children, according to parents, threaten to report them to child protection if they use any form of physical discipline. Parents commented that this left them unable to control children.

More generally there were views expressed that parents felt uncertain about physical discipline, what constitutes physical child abuse and alternative strategies for setting boundaries for children and young people. Parents felt that the school systems have too much focus on children's rights undermining their role and ability as parents to control or guide children's behaviour. SNAICC believes that even if this is merely a perception amongst parents it still requires some response from State and Territory governments.

## **RECOMMENDATION NINETEEN**

That the Australian Government (and SNAICC) initiate discussions with relevant State and Territory authorities regarding the definitions of physical abuse, disciplining and physical punishment of children and appropriate messages to convey to children, young people and families through schools and other forums.

## **RECOMMENDATION TWENTY**

That State and Territory Governments be encouraged to register any parenting information materials and programs they fund directly or indirectly with a central clearinghouse or website, potentially the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Centre.

## **Family Income Support**

A significant issue raised in all focus groups was the family conflict and tension which arise following changes to family income support payments. In particular when payments previously paid to parents in respect of dependent children begin to be paid directly to the young people in a family. It was commonly reported that many young people lack the budgeting skills or inclination to use these funds appropriately. Many families reported that young people use these funds for the purchase of alcohol, cigarettes or illicit substances and for short term entertainment. Thus funds previously used for meeting the families basic needs are diverted to purposes that parents view as harmful.

## **RECOMMENDATION TWENTY ONE**

That as part of broader policy considerations in FaCS in relation to welfare reform and income support consideration be given to developing different models for phasing in or negotiating the transfer of payments from parents to young people.

## **Other FaCS reports and processes**

Through the literature review and other elements of the project it is clear that there have been previous reports written in relation to Indigenous parenting. Secondly there are currently reviews occurring within the FaCS portfolio including the AICCA program review and Indigenous Parenting and Family Well Being Program Review which are exploring similar themes.

## **RECOMMENDATION TWENTY TWO**

That FaCs consider this report within the context of the AICCA program review and Indigenous Parenting and Family Well Being Program Review as well as the ongoing development of the National Agenda for Early Childhood.

## **RECOMMENDATION TWENTY THREE**

That FaCs convene discussions with SNAICC and other relevant stakeholders to consider the implications of this report for the:

- allocation of existing resources for parenting information and support
- review of the AICCA and Indigenous Parenting & Family Well Being Programs
- ongoing development of the National Agenda for Early Childhood
- work in relation to the Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy by FaCs and SNAICC
- establishment of the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Centre, and
- other Indigenous programs with FaCS or other Australian Government departments.

## **RECOMMENDATION TWENTY FOUR**

That an executive summary of this report be developed by FaCS and SNAICC for publication and broad public distribution including to state, territory and local Governments.