

'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT



Authors

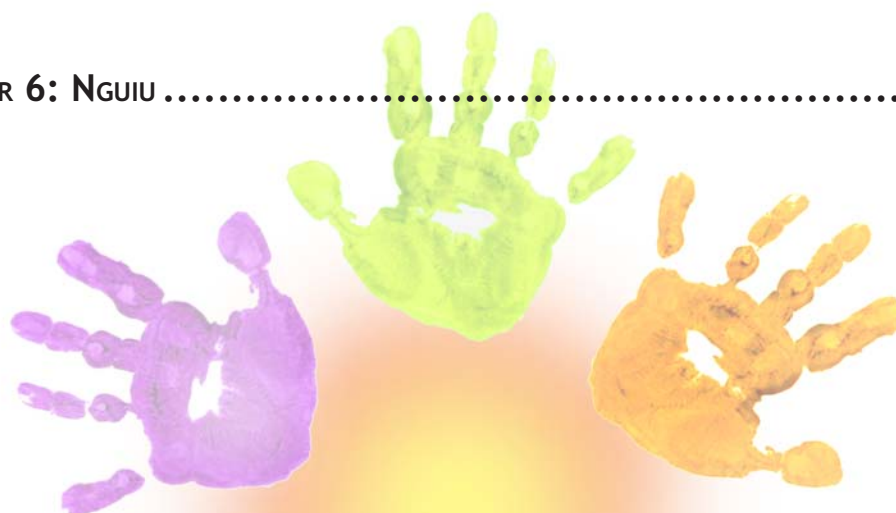
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Published by Batchelor Press, 2004



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was funded through a grant from the Bernard van Leer Foundation which supports research projects around the world involving young children (0-8 years old) who are growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage. We are sincerely grateful for their support and their recognition of the worth of this project. We also acknowledge our sponsoring institutions, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and Charles Darwin University, and our colleagues who provided encouragement, friendly advice and many critical questions that enriched our work.

This study stands on the firm foundation provided by the 'Talking Early Childhood' project (Willsher & Clarke, 1995), also funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The research team acknowledges with gratitude this fine work that involved many of the community-based participants who are, once again, participating in the current study.

Many people were called upon and gave generously of their time and knowledge. We are grateful to the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services for providing invaluable support and assistance regarding historical and current records of children's service developments, NT JET Coordinator, Christie Dickenson, for her early advice and valuable information on the development of JET crèches throughout the Territory, Margaret James for her editorial assistance, John Gaynor and Anne Brown for their knowledgeable insights into children's services development; Marie Brennan, Bonnie Moss and Ailsa Purdon for their thoughtful critiques and advice and Donna Williams for her cover design and layout of the report.

We would also like to acknowledge the work of the Both Ways Reference Group; Helen Crawford, Sarah Vaughn, Dorothy Morrison, and Mike Caraher and the Indigenous Reference Committee; Bev Liddy and Mary Liddy. Their contributions were essential and provided useful feedback at critical times.



Our families were a continuous source of support and encouragement and we thank them for putting up with the many times we had to be away from home and the masses of paper work they have learned to live with.

Finally, we give our sincere thanks to all of the children's services participants, community councils, traditional owners, chief executive officers, health clinic and staff, schools, and families in the six participating communities. It goes without saying that the study would not have occurred without their willingness to invest their time and energy to the project and maintain their interest over such an extended period. They are the communities of Ikuntji, Titjikala, Gurungu, Barunga, Nguju and Galiwin'ku.

The information contained in this report was correct to the best of our abilities at the time of going to press and we regret the use of any image or reference to someone who passed away since its publication.

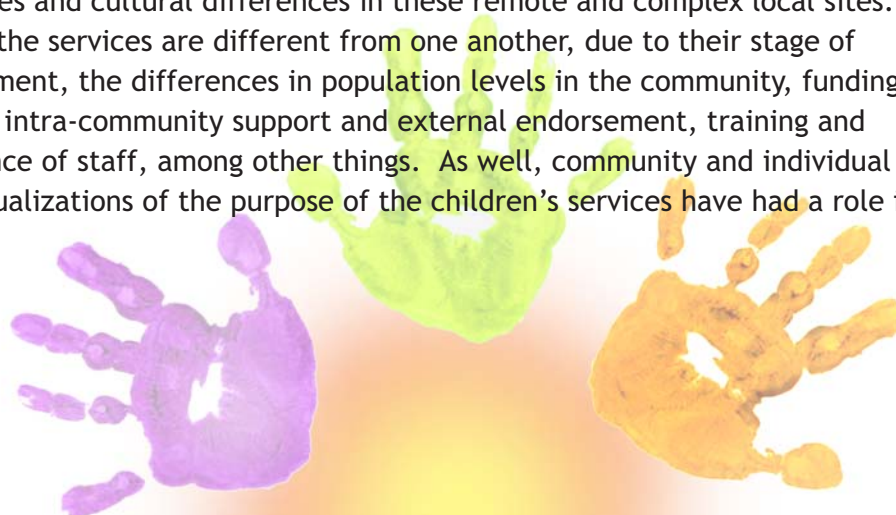


FOREWORD

The 'Both Ways Children's Services Project' provides a detailed description of children's service developments in six remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The 'Both Ways' concept is a contested idea. It has grown out of work in remote schools in the sixties and seventies (I have personal experience of engagement in such processes in my own childhood). In the eighties, the concept began to surface in Western literature, becoming increasingly complex in meaning over the years. At Batchelor Institute, staff and students use the concept to step outside the known, to question from different ways of viewing, sensing, feeling and engaging in the world, never a simplistic interpretation of 'Both Ways'. All are learners in this environment. The concept has been challenged, but more importantly, has had the capacity to challenge in return, to push thinking to new levels, to demand alternative interpretations of basic aspects of life and to accept a fundamental quality at one level and negotiate meaning at others. This concept has been a signpost to do things differently.

While being guided by the concept of 'Both Ways', the study describes and analyses six very different ways that services in remote Indigenous communities have developed. The very research methodology of this project, being underpinned as it is with a Participatory Action Research approach, has permitted many to be involved and to learn from the experience. To have discussions, to challenge the issues, to surface the unknown and to debate different positions taken is a true capacity strengthening endeavour. As well, the approach has modelled a method to give voice to the thoughts and concerns of those often silenced in our society. The team undertaking the research comes from a collaborative partnership amongst participants from Batchelor Institute, six remote Indigenous communities and Charles Darwin University.

These services have emerged under extremely complex circumstances and in response to diverse local aspirations and external demands. Notably, collaboration and negotiation surface and resurface as key to working through difficulties, challenges and cultural differences in these remote and complex local sites. Clearly, the services are different from one another, due to their stage of development, the differences in population levels in the community, funding sources, intra-community support and external endorsement, training and experience of staff, among other things. As well, community and individual conceptualizations of the purpose of the children's services have had a role in local



specification. These stories reveal community visions for creating pathways to school, for teaching the fundamentals of culture and language, for caring for the children of working parents, and for laying the foundations for an 'active leader one day' as one of the service directors has put it.

Each service confronted and dealt with critical issues and responsibilities at a local level. Sadly, the issues revealed in both local and national statistics in this country are very concerning. One wonders how vulnerable young children are to survive the severe crises indicated but one is heartened by the stories in this study which tell of the good things happening despite the difficulties. Knowledge and capacity to envision ones own future and to take control of that future are revealed on countless occasions. People spoke passionately of their desire to seek additional training, to gain new skills and of the need for trans-generational learning at a cultural level. While statistics for Indigenous communities may portray a grim picture, this study shows that many good things are happening and significant knowledge and capacity are being developed.

One of the most powerful visions argued in the study was that 'child development will shape the community'. This is an aspect that policy makers, advisers, service delivery agents and people within the communities must catch and work with, to support powerful approaches that affirm a child's cultural position - through language and values—while providing some of the basics necessities for entering a Western educational system. The study also reveals the complexity of operating in remote situations. A lens must be turned powerfully on this aspect in order to streamline and simplify processes and support developments in this area. Finally, the commitment and resilience of communities revealed in these stories must be acknowledged and fostered in order to 'grow' programs with local relevance from the ground up.

Veronica Arbon
Director
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
July 22, 2004



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES

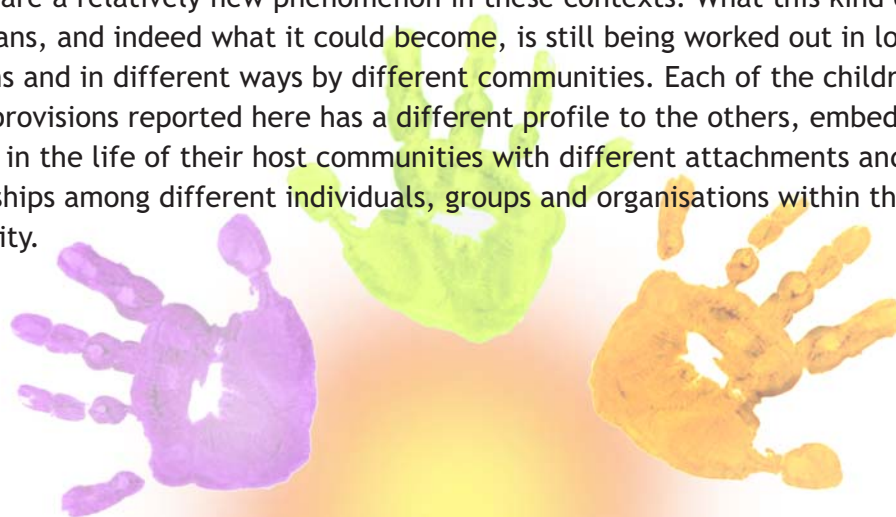
INTRODUCTION

This project reflects a 'Both Ways' approach used at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education which involves the ongoing negotiation and meditation of knowledge drawn from diverse cultural domains. This concept underpins the study reported here which investigates children's services development and sustainability in several remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Children's services can cover a broad range of experiences and a variety of settings in which children are cared for and nurtured but, for the purposes of this study, the focus is on formal group settings implemented under the auspices of government policy and legislation. The study is timely occurring as it does when the provision of such formal services for children in these settings is still relatively new. It builds on and extends the seminal work done through the 'Talking Early Childhood' study of remote Indigenous children's services in the NT (Willsher and Clarke, 1995), also conducted through Batchelor Institute. While access to external resources is widely acknowledged as critical in the development of any service located in remote communities, the key resources for children's services development are cultural, and, as such, are already in the community. These resources are in the staff who run the service, the people who use the service and the children who benefit from the service.

ABOUT THE 'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT

The 'Both Ways' project addresses the question ***What constitutes an effective and sustainable children's service in remote Northern Territory communities?***

In answer, the report documents and analyses factors contributing to the development and sustainability of services for children in six remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Formal, funded and regulated children's services are a relatively new phenomenon in these contexts. What this kind of child care means, and indeed what it could become, is still being worked out in local situations and in different ways by different communities. Each of the children's service provisions reported here has a different profile to the others, embedded as they are in the life of their host communities with different attachments and relationships among different individuals, groups and organisations within the community.



PREVIOUS LEARNINGS

Important issues identified from the existing research were:

- *Access and support for locally workable and meaningful training, resources and ongoing support for all aspects of service delivery,*
- *Local control in terms of Indigenous ownership and management of services for children and cultural maintenance within those services, and*
- *Targeted and purposeful resourcing of physical, human and social elements to enable effective management and administration of services and support to address barriers presented by fragmentation of service delivery, accountability and licensing.*

The 'Both Ways' project will provide much needed information and critical insights into how the issues above are developing, by whom, for whom, and for what present and future purposes.

HOW WE WENT ABOUT IT

The project team used a participative action research approach involving 74 community members across six remote Indigenous communities' services for young children in the Northern Territory and spanned approximately 18 months from February 2003 to June 2004. The research team included ten researchers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) (seven staff) and Charles Darwin University (CDU) (three staff). A critically important aspect of the methodology was the pre-existing relationships that members of the research team had with local participants and their services.

ORGANISATION OF THE REPORTS

The report begins with a brief summary of the research questions and findings. Chapter 1 provides information on the research methodology and literature that informed the project related to Indigenous children's service development in the NT.

The next six chapters in this report document and describe each of the six sites involved in the study. Each site report illustrates both the uniqueness of the site and its journey of development, pointing to factors seen as important in keeping the service going over time, and the problems and successes experienced on the journey. Following the six site reports, the concluding chapter, Chapter 8, brings together the findings and deliberations of the research team into a coherent whole.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS*

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What factors make these children's services functional, sustainable and appropriate to their communities?

- *the access of the sites and their communities to a wide range of resources,*
- *the diversity of the sites and their communities, and,*
- *the ways each community worked for a common purpose.*

FINDINGS

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Resource issues were found to be critically important to the development of sustainable, functional and locally appropriate services and there were significant differences in access to resources amongst the communities.

The size of the community

A community's population size is an important consideration for the development and sustainability of any service especially in terms of human resources.

The sheer number of people within a community who were interested, able and knowledgeable to take up some of the tasks associated with the development and sustainability of a service for children, varied widely. A critical mass of children and staff are necessary to maintain a service. Smaller communities had to work harder to find enough people.

To warrant the involvement of a training provider usually a minimum of 10 potential students is required, advantaging larger communities. While size was not the only factor, larger communities were the first to receive on-site training and to achieve fully trained status. They also were able to maintain within their communities a bank of trained child care workers to be called upon to fill in when unavoidable staff absences occurred, an option not available to smaller communities.

Distance from a major service centre or relative 'remoteness'

Remoteness from a major service centre created many barriers to accessing critical resources but affected each service in different ways.

Remoteness is more than distance. It is also costly, seasonal and involves time. In this sense, all of the communities were remote but some, primarily those more

**See pages 165-201 for a more detailed Summary of Findings.*

quickly accessed by air, tended to experience relatively less disadvantage. The Commonwealth government measures to address remoteness include the provision of a 'disadvantaged area subsidy' but only one of the services involved in this study has been a recipient. 'Remoteness' is relative. These services, located as they were within their own communities, country and culture, were not in any sense 'remote' from many of the most fundamental cultural resources needed for their effective, sustainable and culturally appropriate operation.

Funding access

The key funding access issue for children's service staff and their sponsoring bodies was access to training in financial management in order to better understand the complexities of funding arrangements.

Access to technology (e.g. computers, digital cameras, vehicles etc) and the ability to use it, allowed some services to network with other comparable children's services and agencies and, therefore, keep in touch with the world beyond their service, for example with new funding opportunities. Services needed sufficient time, support and clear guidelines to prepare funding submissions, and sufficient funding at planning stages to ensure that infrastructure could be fully developed.

Physical resources in the form of buildings

Although it hardly needs to be said, all of the children's services needed community support through the provision of a building in their early phase of development.

In remote communities, buildings in general are in short supply. All services were able to secure a building but finding a suitable building was difficult. In addition, service staff and the community needed to be able to influence significantly the design of the building and to continually adapt it in response to community needs.

Access to qualifications and training

Access to culturally appropriate and ongoing training is a critical issue for remote area children's services staff.

In the Northern Territory, licensing and regulation of services funded as 'Innovative' child care services require that a proportion of staff obtains children's services specific qualifications in order to operate. Two services in the study, and a further two by the time this report was finished, were 'Innovative' services. Jobs Education and Training (JET) crèches (two of the services in the study) do not have to meet these qualification requirements initially, but to develop further need training. Access to ongoing, formal child care training was needed by services where licensing was an issue. However, staff training needs also extended beyond child care skills and knowledge alone (e.g. four wheel drive license, environmental health, etc). There were minimal opportunities for staff to secure training beyond Certificate III level.

The nature of child care training, linked as it is to a nationally endorsed training package, privileges child care competencies designed for mainstream services and was, therefore, problematic in these remote Indigenous contexts. While access to nationally recognised training and 'portable' competencies was important, their use could, potentially, marginalise more culturally-valued and context relevant competencies. The continued use and strengthening of a critically reflective approach to training that is a part of the training processes at BIITE, therefore, is fundamentally important.

Community Wellbeing

Children's services are a microcosm of their community and they work well when they are supported by a strong community.

Children's services do not exist in isolation from what else goes on in their community. The devastating impact of substance abuse on children, families and communities is well known. Children's services were often one of the key services providing support for families experiencing these problems. Family involvement was also a fundamental and important feature of services.

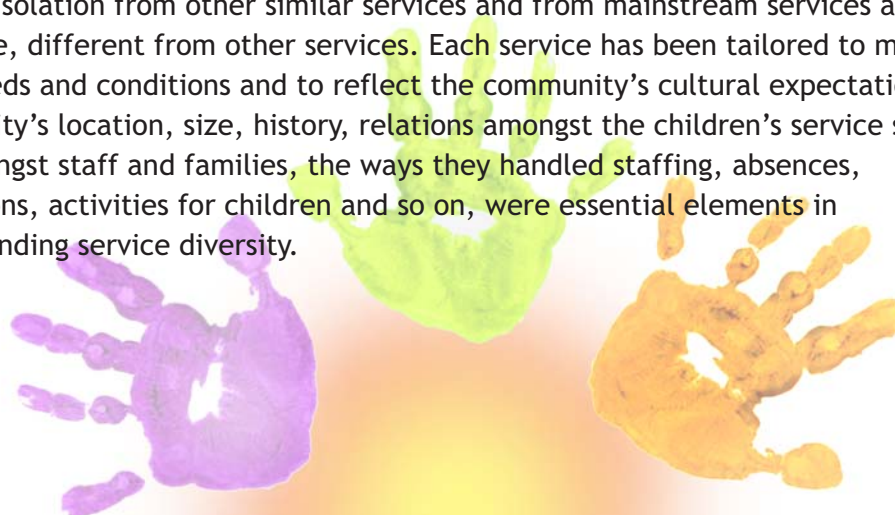
The ability of the children's service to access funding through the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) funds was important for service sustainability and growth. CDEP allowed for the employment of more community members and for ongoing maintenance tasks to be done.

As these services become more established they may develop to be different kinds of services and, therefore, need different kinds of support from their communities.

DIVERSITY OF SETTINGS

Diversity is about differences. Each of these services has followed a different pathway produced as a response to their communities' unique needs. Diversity also relates to differences between these services and mainstream child care services.

These services were local, grassroots and emergent. They have developed in relative isolation from other similar services and from mainstream services and are, therefore, different from other services. Each service has been tailored to meet local needs and conditions and to reflect the community's cultural expectations. A community's location, size, history, relations amongst the children's service staff and amongst staff and families, the ways they handled staffing, absences, regulations, activities for children and so on, were essential elements in understanding service diversity.



The challenge for many of the services has been to reach fully licensed status while, at the same time, learning about a new kind of service for children never before seen or employed in the community. Few communities received intensive internal and external support in their early development, but, where they did, this support was a critical driving force in how the service evolved.

Services are often fragile and need ongoing support from the families who use them, from their communities more generally and from outside agencies that provide funding, training and support. Their existence today should not be taken for granted as established and permanent.

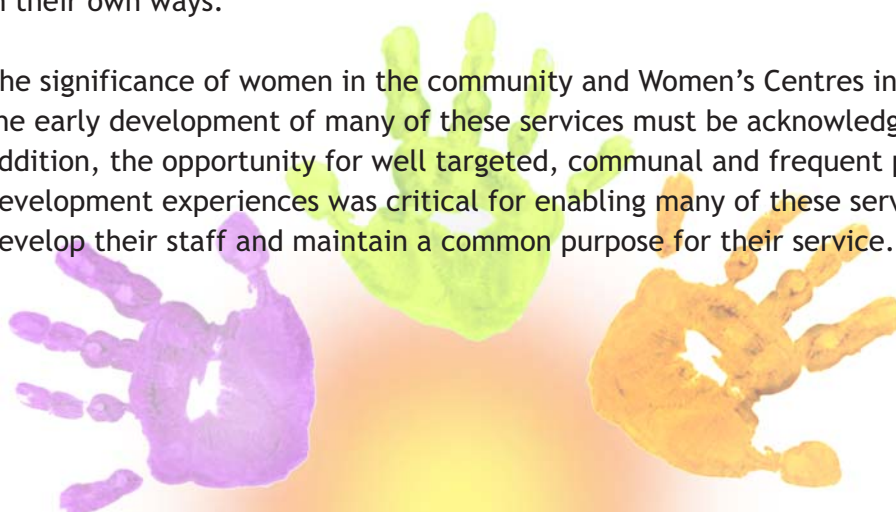
BUILDING A 'COMMON PURPOSE'

The ways that each community has developed a 'common purpose', or enough of a common purpose, was crucial in sustaining their service and allowing it to grow and develop.

None of these services was a simple replication of what child care means in mainstream services. Each was the result of a constant negotiation occurring amongst a range of people with an investment in what happens for children, families and communities. The ability of stakeholders in the service to find a common purpose seems to have been fundamental to overcoming many obstacles to service development and maintenance. Each of the services has had to handle complex interactions around what it was (and what it could become) involving negotiations with different clans, skin groups or family groups, other services in the community and outside agencies. This negotiation required significant staff time and energy. The provision of care for children was but one small feature of this complexity.

A whole of community concern that prioritised young children's health, safety, learning and overall wellbeing was crucial. All communities in this study identified these issues for priority. Nevertheless it was hard for a service to act fully on all 'fronts' simultaneously. The gradual development of services to address their most pressing needs first was the reality that services were with dealing with every day in their own ways.

The significance of women in the community and Women's Centres in supporting the early development of many of these services must be acknowledged. In addition, the opportunity for well targeted, communal and frequent professional development experiences was critical for enabling many of these services to develop their staff and maintain a common purpose for their service.



QUESTION 1A

What lessons can we learn about children's services development and provision from stories of practice of existing Indigenous children's services?

- *Staffing practices—Who works in the service?*
- *Practices for working with children—What are services doing with children?*
- *Practices for multiple in-house programs for children—How does such a service work?*
- *Practices around who the service is for—Who uses the service?*

Practices these services have worked out for themselves include some that are clearly 'borrowed' or adapted from mainstream child care and others that have evolved in response to unique community perspectives, realities, and challenges.

FINDINGS

STAFFING PRACTICES—WHO WORKS IN THE SERVICE?

Staffing practices in every community were challenging and each community found different solutions. Who should work with the 'little kids' was an important issue for each community to resolve.

Grandmothers and older aunties have been the traditional carers for young children and continue to be. There are children in remote communities who do not use the children's services and continue to be cared for in traditional ways. Yet the introduction of a centre-based approach to the care of children in remote communities is a significant change from this traditional practice. Therefore, involvement of older women in the service is an important issue for all services to consider.

Most services where staffing has been stable have evolved processes to include a mix of older and younger women and of family, clan or skin groups. When a family relation was working in a service, families with younger babies were more likely to use the service. In all cases, the people who work with young children must be seen to be trustworthy. Unless the community trusted the service they would not use it. Qualifications were less important than trust.

The employment of a non-Indigenous worker, particularly at the beginning, was important in the development in many of the services. It was important to the sustainability of the service that such a worker understood her role to be temporary and take the development of an Indigenous staff member to take over her role.

PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN—WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

Understanding what happens for children in these remote Indigenous contexts required a 'wide angle view' of what a children's service could be, often moving well beyond what a mainstream urban children's service might look like. Practices in these services were geared around local needs and activities seen as appropriate for children and, therefore, varied with the community priorities and values.

Meals were very important punctuation points in the day in most of the services. The range of kitchen equipment and types of food found in the service were often not available within people's homes making the children's service very attractive to both adults and children. Another very important practice was taking children 'out bush', to swim in water holes, to look for bush tucker, to share knowledge or simply to get away from the centre and spend some time in the bush. A vehicle devoted to the use of the children's service made this important activity much more sustainable.

The fact that all of the services were staffed primarily by Indigenous people meant that the nature of their work with children was always embedded in culture. Some services more than others drew on the potential of this staffing profile explicitly by adopting practices that prioritised language maintenance and cultural learning. These issues were not prioritised in all services, particularly in services where adults believed they could not pass on language to their children because they had lost too much of it themselves. In some cases, where local languages were still strong, there seemed to be a belief that children would learn and retain language incidentally, without the need to plan for or emphasise it.

As services have evolved, each has adopted practices affecting the nature of their program for children. They were all, to varying degrees, different kinds of places from local home environments where children tended not to be the main or only focus of activity for adults in the family. In services where the main purpose of adults' activity was teaching and looking after children, they may be seen as somewhat alien places by both children and staff. Services needed to reflect on how their practices fit with overall holistic purposes of the service.

There were a number of influences on practices in a service. Alliances built between the children's service and other services within their community had a strong influence on the service's program and orientation. For example, when a close link existed with the community health service, healthy practices were prioritised in the children's services program. The nature of the program also reflected the people who worked there. Each staff member brought with them unique skills, knowledge, experiences and training which produced some forms of activity instead of others. Finally, where they applied, licensing requirements had a strong affect on practices in centres.

PRACTICES FOR MANAGING MULTIPLE PROGRAMS

The ways that services have managed the complexity of multiple funding sources, for multiple programs and with multiple responsibilities, varies. In this complex environment, it may be easier to preserve holistic and community specific goals when they are made explicit.

As a service developed and added new programs and funding sources, the complexity of managing multiple programs increased. Appointing staff to specific programs, rather than relying on one person to oversee all of them, was a strategy that seemed to work for services delivering multiple programs. Accountability for different program funding sources must be made a priority or it can become a serious problem and, potentially, mean the loss of funding. Some of the larger communities may need to think about adding another service for children rather than relying on one service to do everything for children.

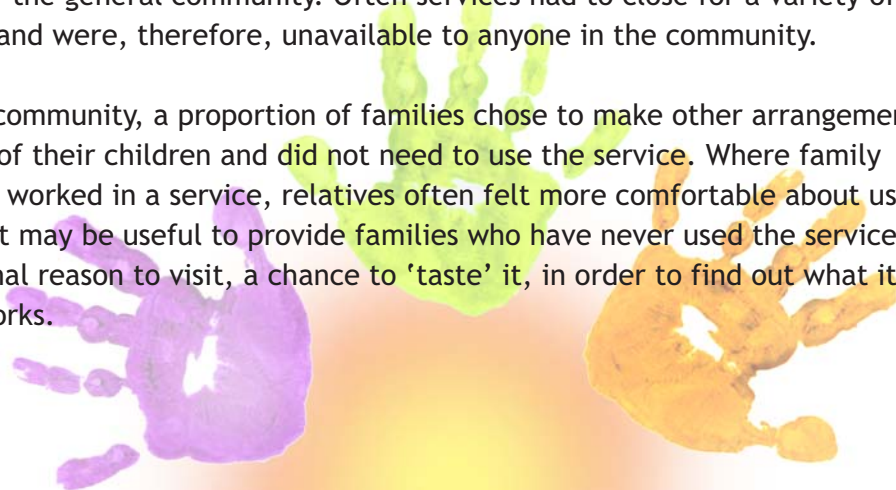
In making the transition from a JET funded to a licensed service, some services may feel the pressure to 'perform' as a 'town' child care service. What that means was often not entirely clear to services because of their isolation and lack of opportunity for training. Services that have actively developed rules or procedures and been given time to 'practice' licensing requirements, before being assessed for licensed status, were advantaged in this transition.

PRACTICES AROUND WHO THE SERVICE IS FOR: WHAT INFLUENCES THE USE OF THE SERVICE?

There were many differences in beliefs about ownership of the service, issues of 'belonging' in the service and which families should/could use the service in the different communities. Each service is working to develop local solutions that suit their context.

The location of the service influenced who used it. Whose traditional land the service was located on could contribute to a view that it was 'owned' by some families and not by others. Many communities located their service on neutral ground and near other communal facilities to ensure that it could be accessed widely by the general community. Often services had to close for a variety of reasons, and were, therefore, unavailable to anyone in the community.

In every community, a proportion of families chose to make other arrangements for the care of their children and did not need to use the service. Where family members worked in a service, relatives often felt more comfortable about using the service. It may be useful to provide families who have never used the service with an informal reason to visit, a chance to 'taste' it, in order to find out what it is and how it works.



QUESTION 1B

How can these stories of practice support the development of new community-based Indigenous children's services?

- *the importance of a locally felt need for the development of a service for young children,*
- *access to a range of funding options to meet local needs,*
- *issues surrounding local Indigenous and mainstream expectations for a children's service,*
- *recognition of learning opportunities—within the community, between communities, and from outside the community.*

The study provided some guidance for other remote Indigenous communities considering the introduction of a children's service.

FINDINGS

LOCALLY FELT NEED

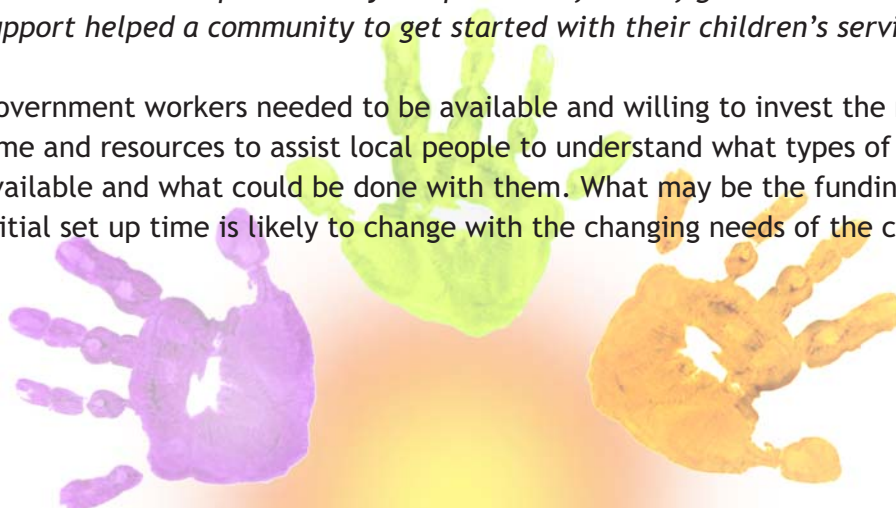
Local people had to have a trigger, a felt need, for the introduction of the children's service which formed the basis on which to build and gain wider support. No one person could carry the whole community.

Unless a number of local community members sees the worth of and can prioritise the development of a service, it is unlikely that one or two people can carry the community or the work involved. A critical level of support for a children's service was needed as a catalyst. Often the Women's Centre was the place where the need was 'felt' first and, from this base, was able to build a broader community commitment and investment for the development of the children's service.

FUNDING OPTIONS TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS

Access to funding information and support to assist local community members to understand and exploit the myriad potential forms of government assistance and support helped a community to get started with their children's service.

Government workers needed to be available and willing to invest the necessary time and resources to assist local people to understand what types of funding were available and what could be done with them. What may be the funding solution at initial set up time is likely to change with the changing needs of the community.



LOCAL INDIGENOUS AND MAINSTREAM EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The issue of the type of program to be provided for children always contains a set of tensions related to the local expectations of a program as these interact with prevailing mainstream ways of doing things.

What counted as a 'locally appropriate' children's service had to be justified when it did not reflect what counted as appropriate to external agencies. Each service prioritised different aspects of their service depending on what was needed by their community at the time.

LEARNING THROUGH CONNECTIONS

When remote children's services built connections to others from within and outside the community, they were able to tap into powerful opportunities for mutual learning.

Links among services supporting children within one community, such as those established between children's service, the school, the health clinic and/or the youth program, enabled staff to learn from each other to mutual benefit. In addition, when services for children in one community were able to link up with similar services in other remote communities, through visits by staff to other communities, workshops, conferences and occasionally via email or phone calls, these learning opportunities were highly productive and valued by both parties.

Visitors from outside the community, such as support agents, licensing officials or research teams, have a responsibility to reflect back to services the valuable and effective things they can see they are doing. Visitors, as outsiders, create the need for local people to become more 'self-conscious' and, therefore, more aware of the worth of what they are doing. Remote community children's services, in their isolation, often have little awareness of their own uniqueness or the creativity of their local practices, solutions and innovations.



QUESTION 1C

How can the research process support the research team to develop critical social research skills?

- *access to communities*
- *time*
- *ethical considerations*
- *becoming a research team*

This research project has highlighted some key issues and challenges associated with our work as researchers and with research in remote Indigenous communities more generally. We offer these to assist others who intend to undertake research in remote Indigenous contexts. Personal reflections of the 8 core researchers can be found in Appendix Two.

FINDINGS

ACCESS TO COMMUNITIES

In gaining access to do research in these communities, it was critically important that the members of our team had longstanding and close relationships with members of their respective communities.

Pre-existing relationships with community members assisted us many ways, but perhaps the most important was the awareness they provided that we must do nothing to breach the trust upon which those relationships were built. Although some of us were more familiar than others with the remote Indigenous communities involved in the study, none of us were of those contexts. In this regard, we are 'outsiders', including those of us from an Indigenous background.

TIME

Doing this kind of research required much more time than anticipated in our original plans.

People in communities were always busy and finding quiet and appropriate times to talk was an ongoing challenge. Weather, community priorities and cultural issues required many changes to our original schedule of research activities.



ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The problem of over-researching, raised over and over again in the literature regarding research in remote Indigenous communities, continues to be a key ethical issue.

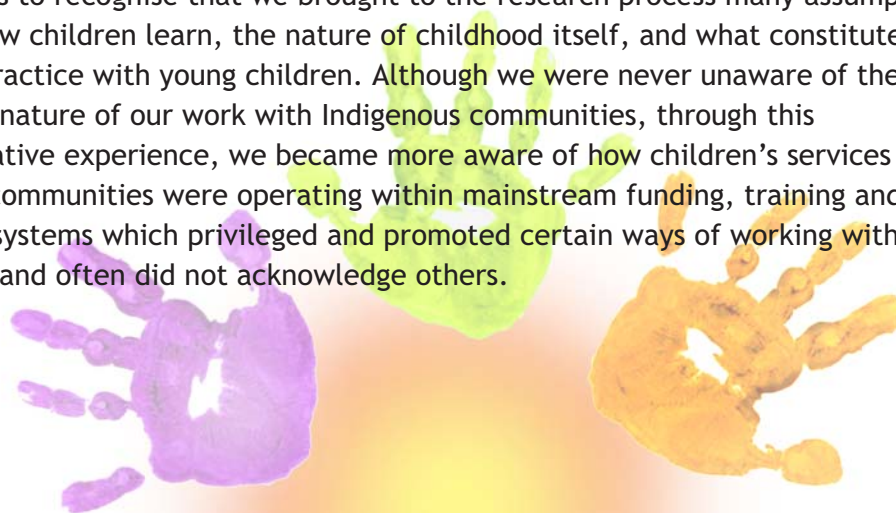
It was important and a primary ethical consideration that we provided something in return for the time people had taken to help us do the research. We wanted to ensure that participants understood and were able to respond to what we had 'found out' by doing the research. As an English text, written in an academic form, this report was not accessible to most of the children's services workers or traditional owners with whom we worked. Our intention to 'talk' the report through with participants was not fully achieved in all of the communities. A follow-up workshop has been planned to enable participating children's services staff to contribute to the development of a community specific version of this report, one that is more accessible to readers with low literacy and that may serve as a permanent resource for promoting their service.

BECOMING A RESEARCH TEAM

Our participation in the series of focussed research workshops was important in enabling us to become a collaborative research team that shared a common understanding of the research purpose and tasks.

Participation in these workshops and the months of working together has changed us, especially in the ways we came to think about our work as educators or supporters of students and others, whether they are from Indigenous and Non-Indigenous backgrounds. The importance of negotiation across difference became a primary activity from which we all learned.

At one point, the question arose, '*Should/did our research activity influence what we saw happening?*' As a participatory action research project we came to understand that our involvement was never outside the research frame. It was always implicated as a part of what was producing the ideas and practices that were the focus of the research. Taking a critical approach to our research practice helped us to recognise that we brought to the research process many assumptions about how children learn, the nature of childhood itself, and what constitutes 'good' practice with young children. Although we were never unaware of the political nature of our work with Indigenous communities, through this collaborative experience, we became more aware of how children's services staff in remote communities were operating within mainstream funding, training and support systems which privileged and promoted certain ways of working with children and often did not acknowledge others.



CHAPTER 1

'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT

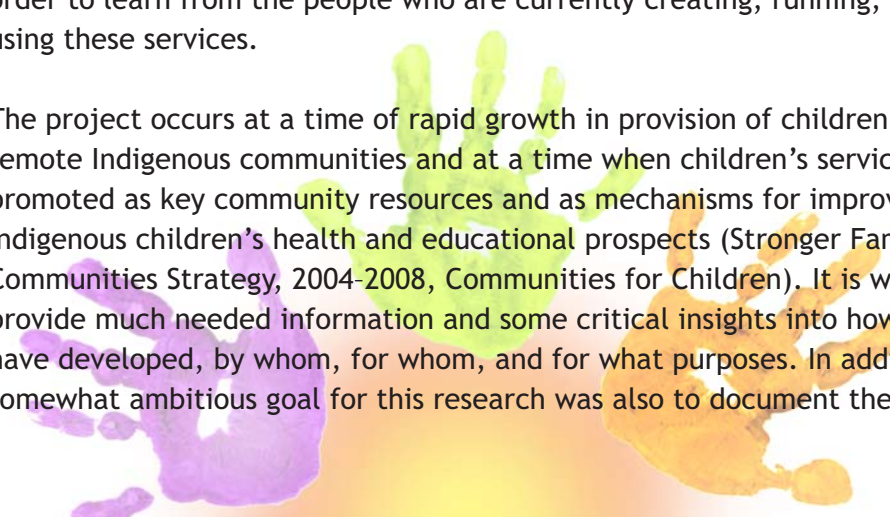
ABOUT THE 'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT

This project was funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to investigate and report on remote area children's services—what we can learn about setting up and operating children's services from the experiences of six remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

The development of formal, funded and regulated children's services, of the sort that have evolved for the care of children from mainstream families in urban centres across Australia, are a relatively new phenomenon in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (NT). These communities have had access to such services for less than 20 years. In the 1980s some community-based playgroups were supported through Remote Area Funding, a joint NT and Commonwealth program, but these were funded only minimally and in very few remote communities (Crawford, 2004 personal communication).

This does not imply that the care of young Indigenous children by people other than their parents is a new phenomenon. Caring effectively for young children has been going on for centuries within Indigenous cultures. However, the current model of child care, as a publicly funded institution, is brand new in remote Indigenous communities in the NT. It offers a regular service for looking after young children while their parents are otherwise occupied, provided by paid employees who may or may not be related to the children, for a range of purposes and in a specific location devoted entirely to the care of children. What this kind of child care means, and indeed what it could become, is still being worked out in these local situations, in different ways, by different communities. The project has set out to document stories of practice from children's services in remote area Indigenous communities in order to learn from the people who are currently creating, running, supporting and using these services.

The project occurs at a time of rapid growth in provision of children's services in remote Indigenous communities and at a time when children's services are being promoted as key community resources and as mechanisms for improving young Indigenous children's health and educational prospects (Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, 2004-2008, Communities for Children). It is well placed to provide much needed information and some critical insights into how these services have developed, by whom, for whom, and for what purposes. In addition, the somewhat ambitious goal for this research was also to document the perspectives of

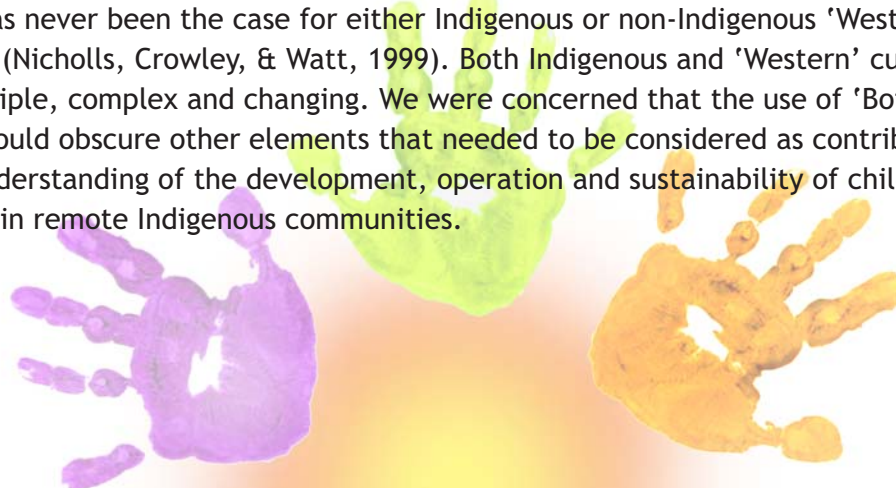


the people who are involved and have been involved for many years in these developments. This brings into discussion the context of broader social, policy and political change taking place in relation to Indigenous children's services.

Some have said that this topic has been over researched, that it is well known what needs to be done to support children's services in remote communities. However, this project was not simply an exercise in information gathering. It has also attempted to work with the participants to build their knowledge of the wider issues and their places within them.

One of the first things we learned was that the original title of this project, 'Both Ways', was misleading and confusing. There is no firm consensus on the term 'Both Ways' and it seems to be interpreted by people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in a variety of ways. For this reason, the report emphasises a complex mix of issues as contributing to the development, operation and sustainability of services for children in remote Indigenous communities and much more than the commonsense or simplistic meaning that the term 'Both Ways' seems to represent to some people. In other words, as each of the six communities involved in this project has developed its own version of a 'children's service' it has had to respond to its community's unique needs, expectations, supports and conditions and within the prevailing policy, funding, training and support environment operating at the time. Indigenous culture was one critically important element that helped us understand this complexity, but not the only one.

The name of the report, 'Both Ways' created a fundamental problem for us and needs to be discussed briefly here to clarify what we mean when we use it. We found out that 'Both Ways', to some people, suggests a dichotomous notion of 'Western' versus 'Indigenous' ways of doing things, of knowing and of being. Much of the work on Aboriginal pedagogy, particularly in the NT, has been referred to as 'two-ways' or 'Both Ways' (Harris, 1990). Indeed, it is sometimes simplistically portrayed and, as Purdon (2002) points out, interpreted as a duality between Aboriginal learning styles and western learning styles. 'Both Ways' as different 'learning styles' has been widely used and critiqued because it creates an unworkable opposition between two cultures as if they exist as monolithic entities, which has never been the case for either Indigenous or non-Indigenous 'Western' cultures (Nicholls, Crowley, & Watt, 1999). Both Indigenous and 'Western' cultures are multiple, complex and changing. We were concerned that the use of 'Both Ways' would obscure other elements that needed to be considered as contributing to an understanding of the development, operation and sustainability of children's services in remote Indigenous communities.



A simplistic interpretation of 'Both Ways' is not the one in use at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education where this research is being conducted and where concepts of 'Both Ways' have been evolving for at least 30 years. However, it remains a problematic and contested concept. It is undeniable that this project has been guided by 'Both Ways' concepts. We found that 'Both Ways' is still talked about by many Indigenous community participants in the study because so many of them have been students at Batchelor College, now Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), and also by the researchers who discuss and debate the meanings of 'Both Ways' on a daily basis in relation to their teaching roles. For the purposes of this report 'Both Ways' has been used to indicate a socio-cultural, contextual and critical approach to understanding service development. This understanding highlights the dynamic process of negotiating meaning across difference and goes beyond a simple dichotomising of Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As communities encounter and adopt more formal and funded services for children, they are both selecting practices that suit their needs, adapting them to their needs and having others imposed upon them. There is a continuous negotiation where the resulting meanings are multiple and there is no simple binary as is often implied and interpreted by the term 'Both Ways'.

A team of ten Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) (seven staff) and Charles Darwin University (CDU) (three staff) undertook to explore, analyse and synthesise the information from a participative action research project involving 74 community members across six remote Indigenous communities' services for young children in the Northern Territory. The project spanned approximately 18 months from February 2003 to June 2004. It was a participatory action research project in the sense that it aimed to support, as well as investigate, the services operating in each community. The 'action cycle' that is a characteristic of action research has occurred over three visits to each community. Community participants reflected again and again on their situation through discussions around questions about the origins of the service, its purposes, the problems and barriers to its operation, the practices that participants valued and the hopes and dreams they had for the future of their service. Over the period of the research all of the services changed significantly, and this may be attributed, at least in part, to participation in the project itself.

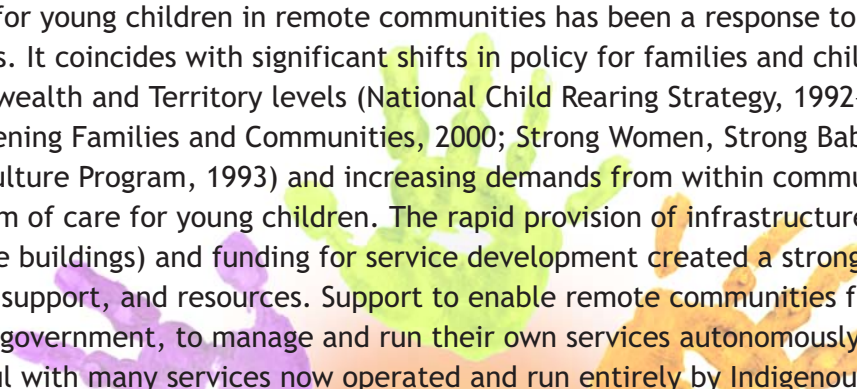
It needs to be pointed out in this beginning chapter that the researchers involved in this study were not residents or members of the communities in which the research took place. We are aware that this researcher profile brings to the research and to a report of this kind an outsider bias. However, this bias is mediated to a degree by the participation of two Indigenous researchers whose perspectives continually challenged and redirected our research journey. In addition, six of our team had had regular contact and long standing relationships with the children's services involved, through their teaching and support roles.

Finally, we have used the views of the Indigenous community participants, whenever possible in their own words, to tell their own stories about children's service development and change.

CHILDCARE IN REMOTE AREA INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

This section provides background information on issues identified as important in the development of children's services in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and which has guided the development of the 'Both Ways' Children's Services Project. Compared to any previous time period, the provision of formally funded and regulated services for young children in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory has increased dramatically in the last 10 years (Adams, 1999). There are approximately 50 services for children operating in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory as compared to 13 services in 1993 (Willsher & Clarke, 1993). This is a complex arena with a wide array of program types (see map page 25).

The Indigenous population is the fastest single growth sector of the NT population. One in four NT residents identify as being of Indigenous origin (Office of Children and Families, NT Government, September 2003), as compared to one in 50 nationally. Remote Aboriginal communities in the NT are experiencing unprecedented growth in the development of formalised services for young children. In the past, ad hoc and informal playgroups developed on the verandas of many Women's Centres or under the trees as needed. But these services were rarely recognised beyond the community or formally supported. The main service available to under-school-aged children in communities was the preschool attached to the school, but only where sufficient numbers of three and four year old children made that community eligible for a funded program. Throughout the 1990s, many communities began to develop long day care services, before and after school hours care services known as Out of School Hours Care (OSHC), Jobs Education and Training (JET) crèches, funded playgroups set up for various purposes and/or mobile and permanent preschool programs provided through Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET). The growth in services for young children in remote communities has been a response to a number of factors. It coincides with significant shifts in policy for families and children at Commonwealth and Territory levels (National Child Rearing Strategy, 1992–1996; Strengthening Families and Communities, 2000; Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture Program, 1993) and increasing demands from within communities for some form of care for young children. The rapid provision of infrastructure (i.e. child care buildings) and funding for service development created a strong need for training, support, and resources. Support to enable remote communities from both levels of government, to manage and run their own services autonomously has been successful with many services now operated and run entirely by Indigenous staff.



Two key Commonwealth policy and funding initiatives leading this growth in remote area children's services have been Jobs Education and Training (JET) funded crèches and the Innovative Child Care Scheme. JET was introduced to the Territory in 1989 through the Commonwealth government department now referred to as Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). JET has been instrumental in providing the means for many Indigenous remote area communities to secure initial funding to develop a service. The Territory government introduced 'Innovative' funding for Indigenous remote area child care services in the NT in the mid 1990s. The notion of an 'innovative' child care service, of which there are now 11 in the Northern Territory (see map, page 25) came about through the introduction of the 'Innovative Child Care Scheme', an initiative stemming from the 1992–1996 National Child Care Strategy. This initiative reflected an appreciation, at both Commonwealth and Territory levels, that a new approach to service development was required for remote area Aboriginal children's services, particularly with regard to funding, service development and appropriate licensing expectations. The Draft Information Kit for Territory Health Services Staff (1996, revised 1998), developed to support the 'Innovatives', described the rationale for implementing the new strategy. The stated aims were;

To provide Aboriginal people living in remote communities with more relevant approaches to meeting their child care needs, and greater flexibility in the method adopted for funding remote area services. The initiative recognises that previous service models and funding arrangements were not appropriate in small, remote Aboriginal communities, and often mitigated against the viable establishment of such services.

The primary focus within the innovative services approach is on developing a child care service of a minimum of 20 places which will assist families to participate in the workforce, training or work-related activities. In doing so, these services may also provide opportunities for particular child development and locally identified programs to be offered. The way in which this is achieved is able to be determined by the local community.

As innovative services, various administrative and operational aspects will be different from 'mainstream' arrangements. A number of agencies are involved, requiring coordination of respective roles and activities.

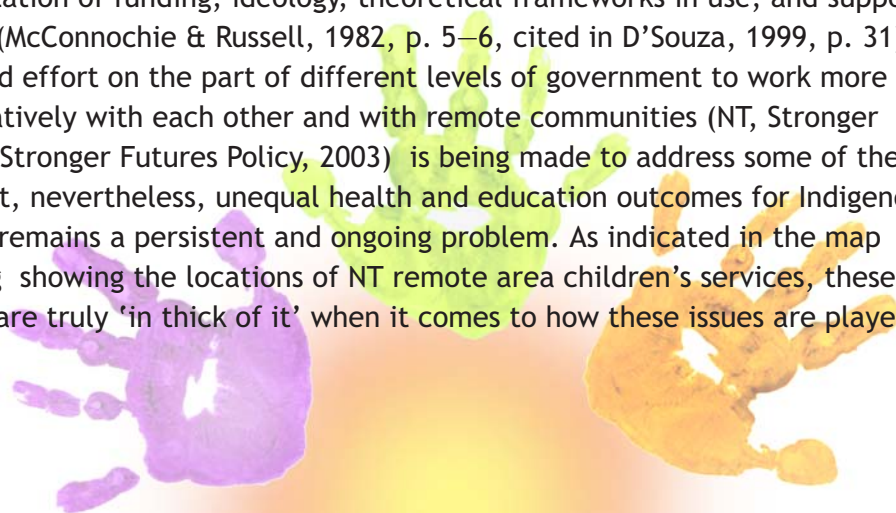
Draft Information Kit for Territory Health Services Staff
(Draft 1996, revised 1998, p.3)



Implementation of the new scheme provided for intensive and integrated departmental support for the Innovative services through a collaboration among different stakeholders; i.e. the NT Children's Services Resource and Advisory Program, Batchelor College (now BIITE), Territory Health Services (now Health and Community Services), and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. Numerous visits were made to the targeted services to provide formal training and support. These occurred on a weekly basis in some cases and lasted for over a year. This approach supported the first four Innovative services to reach fully operational and licensed status. The standard 'conditions of license' for child care services were adapted to enable these remote area services to develop in a more locally appropriate way. A key initiative that informed and supported this and approach to remote area children's services development in the NT was the 'Talking Early Childhood' (1995) series of consultations and projects, funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. During the early to mid 1990s many of the communities now operating children's services across the NT were involved. Conducted as a series of extensive consultations with a range of remote communities this research produced a wealth of information that has informed Territory government approaches to children's service development.

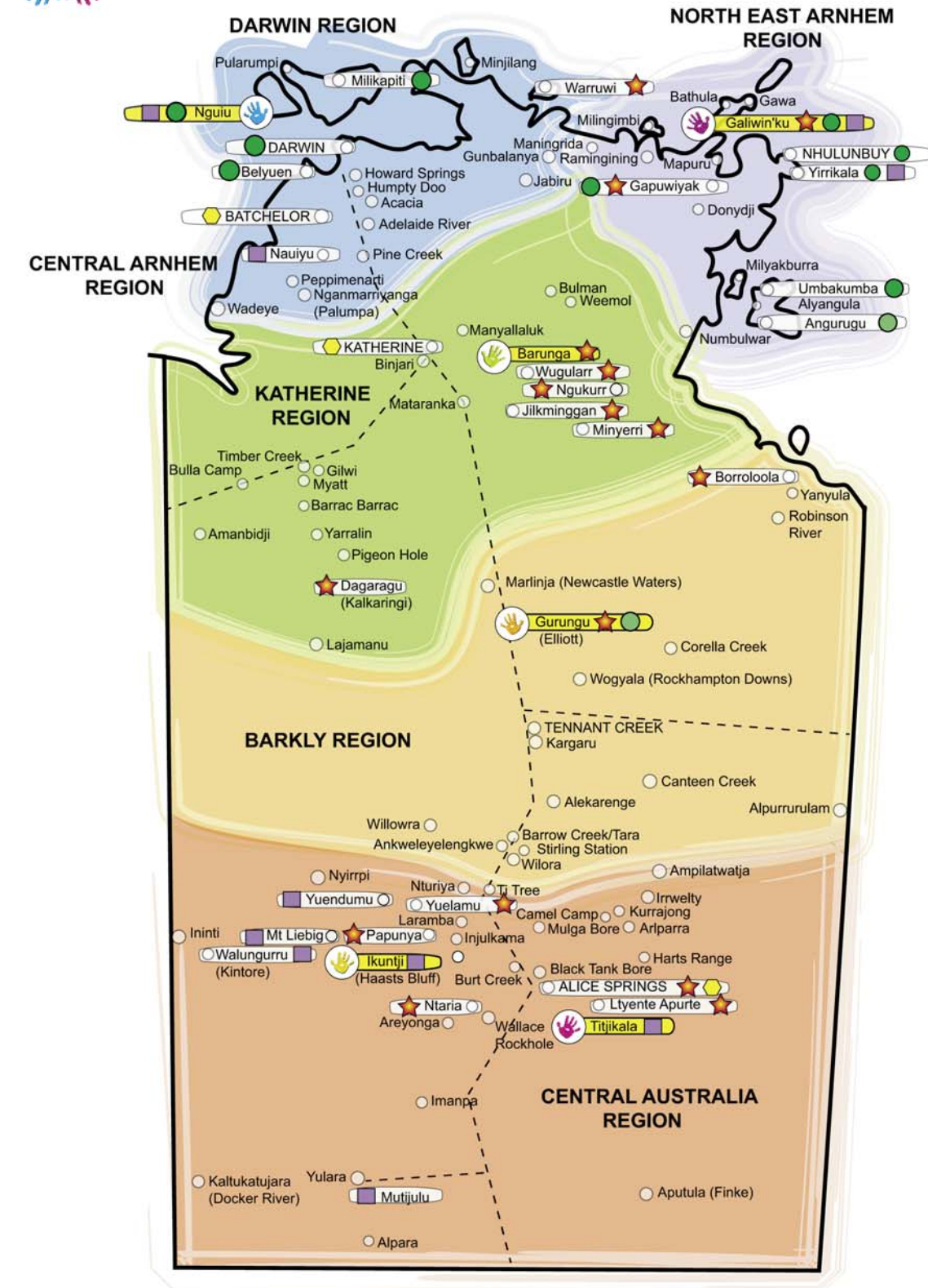
Important national policy initiatives, reflected in NT policy, have coincided with these children's services developments. Education policy has been firmly linked to employment in Australia for the last decade although more recently there has been a shift to emphasise a 'life long learning' agenda (OECD Country Report, 2001). The early years, including the pre-compulsory years of school, are being targeted increasingly as cost effective starting points for bridging 'gaps' in education, particularly for Indigenous children (DETYA, 2000) through the promotion of early literacy and numeracy skills.

D'Souza (1999) observed that many of the children's services models used in remote Australian Indigenous communities '...have more to do with the residual nature of the state's approach to community services than with Indigenous/ Aboriginal ideas about child-rearing and culture...' (p. 31) and these services experience the problems associated with a 'patchwork' approach, characterised by fragmentation of funding, ideology, theoretical frameworks in use, and support services (McConnochie & Russell, 1982, p. 5–6, cited in D'Souza, 1999, p. 31). A concerted effort on the part of different levels of government to work more collaboratively with each other and with remote communities (NT, Stronger Regions, Stronger Futures Policy, 2003) is being made to address some of these issues but, nevertheless, unequal health and education outcomes for Indigenous children remains a persistent and ongoing problem. As indicated in the map following showing the locations of NT remote area children's services, these services are truly 'in thick of it' when it comes to how these issues are played out.





EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES IN THE NT (2004)



KEY: ★ JET on-site Creches

■ Innovative Child Care Centres

● Outside School Hours Care

◆ Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

THE SIX COMMUNITIES IN THE STUDY

Barunga

Galiwin'ku

Gurungu

Ikuntji

Nguiu

Titjikala


OVERVIEW OF ISSUES STEMMING FROM REVIEW

The literature related to research about development, delivery and evaluation of formal child care services in remote Aboriginal communities in the NT is detailed in Appendix One. The common threads, recommendations and insights that emerge from a diverse range of reports and documents, are summarised below.

It is clear that children's service development and delivery in remote area Aboriginal communities has become a key issue of concern, interest and investment to different levels of government, as well as to the Indigenous communities involved. It is also evident that government policies and practices have begun to change over the last decade particularly in light of continuing disadvantage experienced by Australian and Northern Territorian Indigenous children (Northern Territory Department of Education, 'Learning lessons', 1999, D'Souza, 1999, DEST, 2001, Dodson, 1997, National Agenda for Early Childhood, 2001, Pocock, 2002, Press & Hayes, 2001).

The recently released joint Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services and Department of Employment, Education and Training policy framework, 'All Children Have the Best Possible Start' (2004) arose, at least in part, in recognition of the continuing inequities experienced by Indigenous children in the Northern Territory. According to Crawford (2002, p. 27) this initiative reflected NT government recognition that there was a '...growing and urgent need to focus on improvement in young Indigenous children's health and education status, with broader implications for all children and families'.

At a national level a significant philosophical shift in government policy has occurred, seen in children's services development through the 'Stronger Families and Communities Strategy' (2000–2004 and 2004–2008). Government policy for families has recently moved away from the primarily employment-oriented, workforce participation agenda which dominated the 1990s. In recent times a greater emphasis has been put on equity principles and the rights of children and families to access quality children's services, particularly families and children considered to be 'at risk' (Emerson, McKay, Delahunt & Gifford, 2000). An example of this shift can be seen in a Department of Family and Community Services (2001, p. 2) document entitled 'Flexible Child Care in Rural and Remote Australia' acknowledging that ...



...traditional types of child care are mainly designed to meet the needs of parents working standard hours and living in cities. In Australia, families living in rural and regional communities can have difficulty finding suitable child care because the usual child care models are either not available or not suited to local circumstances...

and, that there is a need to integrate services to provide...

...a mix of different types of child care tailored to meet local conditions. They can involve a mix of different service types from the same venue such as long day care, occasional care, school holiday care and preschool/kindergarten services and/or family day care...Some communities are also linking child health, nutrition and parenting programs to the child care service (p. 9).

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (2004-2008) provides significant funding for early childhood projects including those in 'disadvantaged' communities. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) will be funded to act as a resource network for Indigenous children's services across Australia. Nevertheless, the National Agenda for Early Childhood consultation that reported in 2003 identified a massive amount of work yet to be done to improve the experiences of Indigenous children in remote Australia. While most Australian children are doing well,

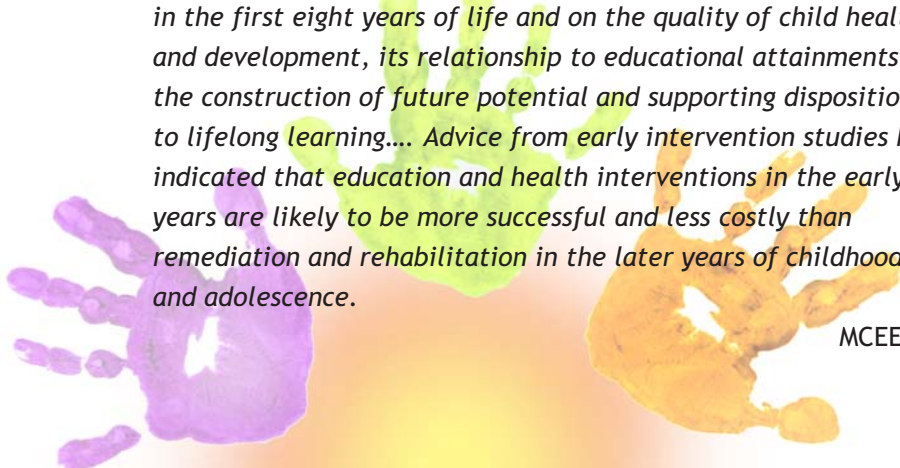
Indigenous children, in particular, have markedly poorer outcomes over their life course - in health, education, representation in foster care, contact with the criminal justice system, employment and expected lifespan.

Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development,
Health and Wellbeing, 2003, p. 3

Children's services in the mainstream as well as remote communities are seen to offer powerful opportunities for intervention leading to improvement of children's life chances and wellbeing. The early childhood years have resurfaced in government agendas across the 'Western' world as a critical period for influencing children's short and long term educational, health and social outcomes (MCEETYA, 2001; Ochiltree & Moore, 2001).

Internationally and in Australia there has been renewed interest in the first eight years of life and on the quality of child health and development, its relationship to educational attainments, the construction of future potential and supporting dispositions to lifelong learning.... Advice from early intervention studies has indicated that education and health interventions in the early years are likely to be more successful and less costly than remediation and rehabilitation in the later years of childhood and adolescence.

MCEETYA, 2001, p. 5



For Indigenous children, children's services can offer, potentially, avenues for maintaining cultural identity and language as well (SNAICC Strategic Plans, 2003-2006). The children's services in the NT appear to be generally well regarded and valued by their communities and are seen to build wider community capacities. However, there still appears to be a shortfall in services available in different communities as well as levels and types of support available to existing services (SNAICC, 2002). For at least a decade and up to the present, priority of access to child care services, as defined by government funding agencies, has focused primarily on funding care for the children of parents who are working or studying. Supporting employment outcomes are not necessarily the purposes for child care as seen by community members. Recent philosophical shifts to more broadly based equity oriented outcomes have yet to be realised in practice. As a senior policy officer in the NT government puts it, 'It can take a long time for the system to realign with new policy intent' (Crawford, personal communication, 2004). The development of services in the NT has shown that there are many different needs and interests in remote communities and there is no one ideal type or model of service development to suit the needs of such a diverse range of communities.

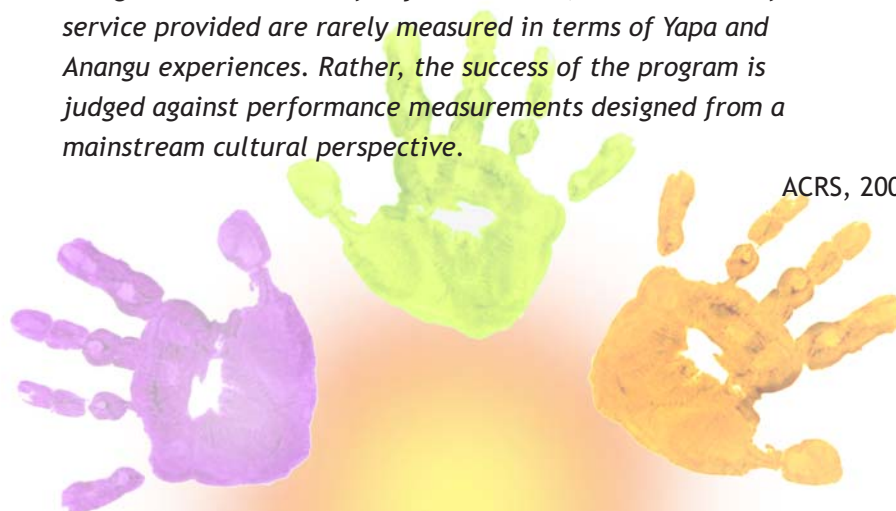
The Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy (ACRS)- projects (2002) were another series of powerful projects designed to support Aboriginal women to record their child rearing strategies, in this case focused on communities in the remote desert regions of central Australia. The ultimate aim of the strategy was to strengthen culture, build community capacity and support better health and education for young children.

The project results and literature review aimed to produce resources containing knowledge gained directly from Aboriginal people that could inform and improve child care policy.

The review stemmed from recognition that...

... existing early childhood models of services funding, design and delivery are usually not appropriate for Aboriginal families living semi-traditional lifestyles...Further, the outcomes of the service provided are rarely measured in terms of Yapa and Anangu experiences. Rather, the success of the program is judged against performance measurements designed from a mainstream cultural perspective.

ACRS, 2002, p. 29



For this project, the key themes that emerge from the documentation and analysis of children's services development in the NT over the last decade (see appendix 4) are issues of control, access and support; control in terms of Indigenous ownership and management of services for children and cultural maintenance within those services, access to appropriate training, resources and ongoing support for all aspects of service delivery but particularly aspects related to management and administration of services and support to address barriers to service delivery presented by continued fragmentation of resources, service funding, accountability and licensing requirements.

That is, for the 'Both Ways' project the key themes emerging from the review of research and literature are:

- Access and support for culturally meaningful training, resources and ongoing support for all aspects of service delivery,
- Local control whereby Indigenous ownership and management of services for children and cultural maintenance within those services,
- Targeted and purposeful resourcing of physical, human and social structures and strategies to enable effective management and administration of children's services and support to address barriers to service delivery presented by fragmentation and continuity of service delivery, accountability and licensing.

These three key themes will be revisited in light of the fresh information gathered through the 6 case studies. They have guided the project team to attend to culturally sensitive and locally appropriate issues when we report the case study and stories. The reason for the project's strong emphasis on adopting a narrative analysis approach to the data collection and analysis aims to make a strong distinction between simply 'telling a good yarn', and relating important stories with valid and culturally appropriate messages that can be reliably used to inform policy, strategy and service development.



QUESTIONS THAT GUIDED THE INVESTIGATION

In the original project brief we asked two main questions:

What does culturally appropriate childcare mean in remote Indigenous contexts?

What counts as culturally appropriate practice in childcare in each site?

As the project developed we rephrased the question, arriving at the new question below.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors make these children's services locally appropriate, functional and sustainable?

We posed three sub-questions:

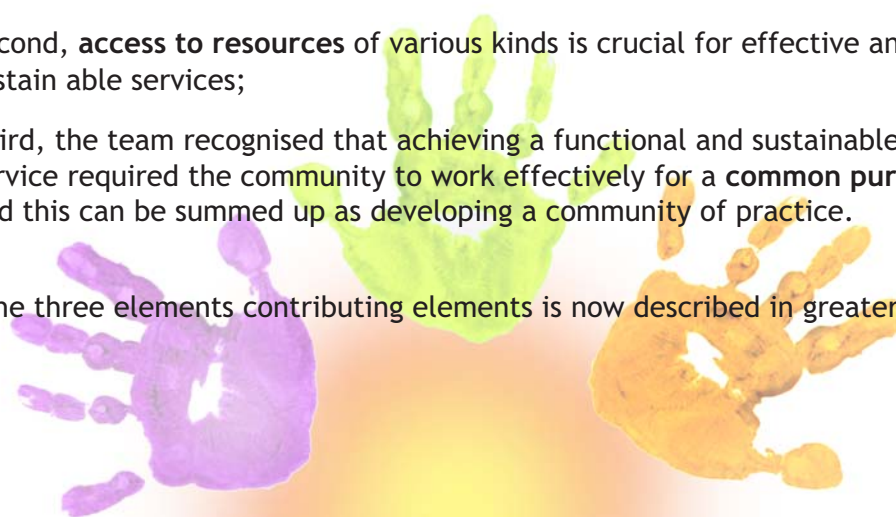
- A What lessons can we learn about children's service development and provision from stories of practice of existing Indigenous children's services?*
- B How can these stories of practice support the development of new community-based Indigenous children's services?*
- C How can the research process support the researchers to develop critical social research skills?*

Several considerations have guided the research team as it struggled to understand what it is that contributes to a locally appropriate, functional and sustainable services.

Three elements emerged as pivotal in these communities.

- First, the **diversity** of each setting and the local requirements of each service needed to be considered as fundamental to the development of each children's service;
- Second, **access to resources** of various kinds is crucial for effective and sustain able services;
- Third, the team recognised that achieving a functional and sustainable service required the community to work effectively for a **common purpose**, and this can be summed up as developing a community of practice.

Each of the three elements contributing elements is now described in greater details.



DIVERSITY OF SETTINGS

The first consideration for the research team was that different kinds of services for children existed in different locations, and were at different phases of development. The team became aware very quickly that there was not a clear 'one best way' of going about the complex business of establishing and maintaining an effective children's services facility in a remote community. What did become clear was that there were many pathways to a sustainable, effective and locally appropriate program, and that each of the services could be seen as being some way along a pathway. In fact, it also became clear that it was not a single pathway—rather a mosaic of paving stones that had occasional dead ends, and occasional unexpected beneficial outcomes. In many cases, of course, the mosaic led directly to an effective service for children.

We started with a cyclic developmental model that aimed to track the development of a children's service from Stage 1 through to Stage 4 in an ever repeating cycle (Falk, 2003). Effective resourcing was seen as being related to the requirements of the stage of development. The four stages of the cycle are described in outline here:

Stage 1: Trigger Stage

A fresh situational problem is identified (in our case, the need for a children's service) or a new one emerges from stage 4 monitoring for new problems and/or scanning for opportunities;

Stage 2: Initiating Stage

The effectiveness with which this stage is carried out depends on mainly collective but informal processes. The resulting enabling of the networked stakeholders facilitates the necessary transfer of leadership roles and other functions to other personnel, including community, agency and enterprise personnel;

Stage 3: Developmental Stage

This stage is characterized by more formal processes related to collectively building networks, trust and common purpose from internal bonding ties to external bridging ties; transfer of leadership and other roles continues from stage 2 enabling ownership of process and outcomes by non-children's service personnel; developing management processes; this enablement provides the bridging activities to the sustainable outcomes of stage 4;

Stage 4: Sustainability Stage

Stage 4 is concerned with re-affirming the common purpose and managing the activities while avoiding complacency by scanning for opportunities and monitoring for new problems, with one outcome being the possible generation of a new stage 1 trigger stage; this new trigger stage may either adjust the old process or establish a new cycle.

This model was our starting point. It helped us to talk about service development as a continuous cycle of change and alerted us to the critical importance of the different kinds of resources needed as a service became established and throughout its life. However, the staged nature of the model proved to be too linear and universalising for understanding the dynamic and unique nature of changes we were seeing in these programs. 'Stages of development' models in other areas of early childhood education and care literature are problematic for these same reasons (Dahlberg, Pence & Moss, 1999). The model was important, however, for calling our attention to a diverse range of resourcing issues that could contribute to the sustainability of a service and to the importance of continuous change throughout the development of a service.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Clearly, resources of various kinds are a central consideration in the development and establishment of any service. However, resourcing is often viewed quite narrowly as being primarily about buildings and funding. Resources also refer to the number and range of people, their networks, their skills and knowledge and how these can be put to good use in the development of an enterprise such as a service for children. What some people call 'social capital' is an important resource in a community. Often, resources are allocated based on policy information provided by influential people in the communities, and, moreover, often become available in response to anticipated election strategies. The six services we became familiar with in this project were the result of various policy initiatives, and involved the allocation of resources. However, what was to become clear to us, as a result of the research, was that resourcing issues were neither simple, nor could be seen as a 'one size fits all' model. The latter issue became the key guiding concern for the research team, in that it was clear that resources were crucial, but what kinds of resources were required? When would they be required to achieve maximum impact? How could they be described so as to ensure important (but often hidden) resource factors were accounted for?

The research team therefore needed a way of talking about various kinds of resources. The most encompassing way of viewing resources can be summarised as three types of resources: physical, human and social resources, which collectively comprise the elements of the capacity available to a community to instigate, develop and sustain any initiative in its midst.

Using this portrayal of different kinds of resources allows the research team to understand, then analyse, not only the different kinds of resources that might be brought to bear on a children's services development, but also reminds us that there is always likely to be an interplay and overlap between the types of resources. For example, we can easily see how the physical resource of a building might be important to the development of a children's service. We can also see that qualified and trained staff are vital human resources for effectiveness of services.

However, it may not be as obvious that social resources are equally important—the supporting networks, inter-relationships and trust that need to be developed among these relationships and groups for a sustainable and effective provision to develop and be sustained.

Establishing and maintaining a provision, such as the children's service initiatives that form the subject of this study, is a complex process. We would all hope, perhaps, that the outcomes of the process would be the enhanced health, wellbeing and education of the children and even some change in the parents' knowledge and skills in relation to these matters if this is something they identify as important for them. The research team could see that the issue of resources that were important to these outcomes was fundamental to the understanding of the development of the service for children.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Identifying *what* the issues and components are to a functional and sustainable children's service is only one aspect of the study's concern. As has been described in the previous sections, the other main aspect is *how does such a service develop and how is it sustained?* As individuals and communities are faced on a daily basis with a new initiative occurring in their midst, a process of adaptation occurs (and sometimes it doesn't!). This process of adapting to change is commonly understood to be a learning process.

The process can be conceptualised by reference to the idea of *communities of practice*—that is, how groups of people who share a common enterprise begin to learn together as they pursue one or more common goals. A recent version of the communities of practice that fits with our team's ideas about the role of

learning in achieving common goals is the notion of *learning communities*. Social capital, as one of the vital contributing resources, is one of the outcomes that arise when learning communities are successful.

HOW WE WENT ABOUT IT

The research was a participatory action research study focusing on Indigenous community views of their children's service relating to the development of their service, the practices of the service, involvement of children and families and the hopes and dreams for the future of the service. The participants were those members of the Indigenous community who were associated with the planning, development, management, use and/or implementation of the local children's services and included both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. Action research was chosen as a systematic process of inquiry that allowed a focus on service developments and changes seen as important to the participants involved. Its purpose is to enable participants to understand and improve their social situation (i.e. the participants' work in children's service) in order to learn how their actions affect their situation.

Researchers and community participants built on pre-existing relationships and formed new partnerships to investigate the development of the children's service in each community. The narrative approach was used so that practitioners' knowledge was privileged and valued. When undertaken in collaboration, this approach also assists in positioning all participants in more equal relationships.

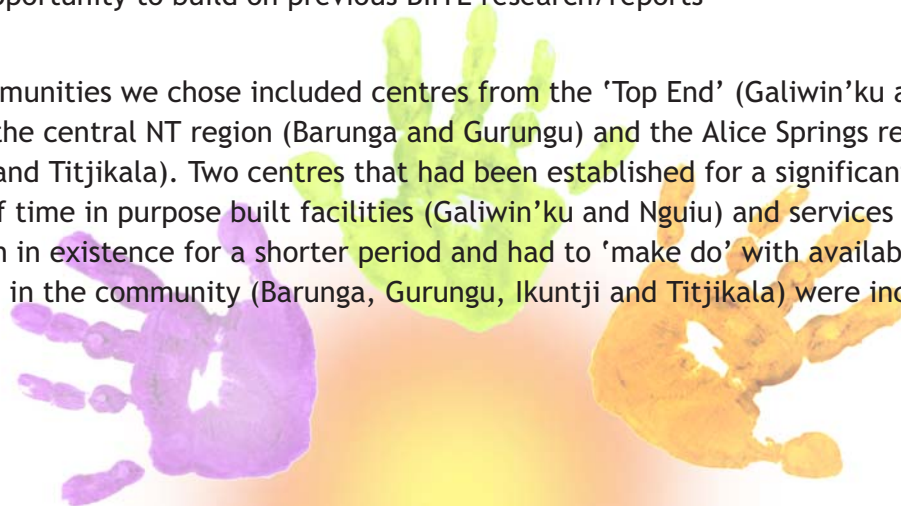
Narratives were elicited through conversations, meetings, informal taped interviews and through discussions of ongoing incidents and observations. The focus of the narratives was on generating stories of practices that allowed practitioners to identify issues of interest and challenge in their work to develop children's services within their communities.

The research team included 7 early childhood support workers and lecturers at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and 3 Charles Darwin University staff. BIITE staff had longstanding relationships with the participants in the children's services involved in the study, many of them having been involved in the development and support of these services from their inception. Participatory action research methods also involved an explicit professional development loop whereby the 7 BIITE staff engaged in learning more about formulating, carrying out and writing up a major research project.

The sites nominated for inclusion in the research were selected according to the following criteria;

- Established and viable centres
- Balance of newer and older centres
- Balance of smaller and larger communities
- Services seen to have generated some innovative practices
- Services representing geographic balance in the NT
- Service staff highly regarded in community
- Pragmatic concerns (time, distance, accessibility)
- Opportunity to build on previous BIITE research/reports

The communities we chose included centres from the 'Top End' (Galiwin'ku and Nguiu), the central NT region (Barunga and Gurungu) and the Alice Springs region (Ikuntji and Titjikala). Two centres that had been established for a significant period of time in purpose built facilities (Galiwin'ku and Nguiu) and services that had been in existence for a shorter period and had to 'make do' with available facilities in the community (Barunga, Gurungu, Ikuntji and Titjikala) were included.



Two of the services (Galiwin'ku and Nguu) were located in large communities (over 1000 people) and the rest were relatively small (Gurungu, Barunga, Titjikala), with one very small community included (Ikuntji). Nguu and Galiwin'ku could be considered 'high profile' children's services in that they were often held up as examples by government departments when visitors wanted to see how remote area Indigenous children's services operated. The other services had not received the same degree of attention. In every case the director or manager of the service was known to the research team as highly regarded by their respective communities and all were women. Those services chosen were all considered to be viable in that they were operating at the time of the research and had been operating for at least a year. In the experience of the research team who were familiar with all of the participating communities over a period of many months (and in some cases years) the services selected demonstrated innovative practices in the ways they dealt with the challenges in the early stages of their development.

Finally, the research budget, the time available to do the research and accessibility in relation to the weather, road conditions and flight schedules narrowed the field further. In the list of communities resulting from this selection process, one community had been involved in a previous BIITE evaluation study and therefore provided the opportunity to build on what had been learned in that process (Galiwin'ku).

The community participants included both the Indigenous practitioners from community-based children's services and a range of community members with an interest and/or involvement in the service at some point in its development. (See appendix 3 for list of participating community members from each community).

A reference group was formed to advise the project as it evolved with representatives from various stakeholders in the research:

- NT Department of Employment, Education and Training (Michael Caraher, Project Officer)
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (Sarah Vaughn, Senior Project Officer, Children and Families, Indigenous Policy and North Australia Office)
- NT Department of Health and Community Services and Health (Helen Crawford, Director, Office of Families and Children),
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (Dorothy Morrison, Head of School, Education & Humanities)
- Principal Researcher (Lyn Fasoli, Principal Researcher, Charles Darwin University)
- Project Manager (Carolyn Preece, Senior Lecturer, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education).

The research team was comprised of seven participants from Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, including;

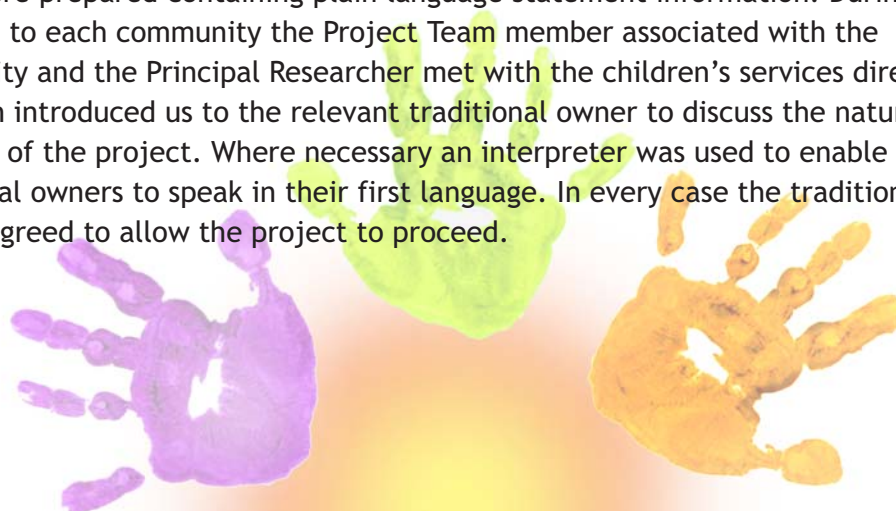
- Early childhood lecturers Robyn Benbow, Katrina Railton, Renata Harris
- Remote Area Children's Services Support Unit workers, Kathy Deveraux, Ranu James, Veronica Johns
- Project manager, Carolyn Preece

and from Charles Darwin University;

- Principal researcher, Dr. Lyn Fasoli
- Research advisor, Professor Ian Falk
- Early childhood lecturer, Mel (Helen) Hazard.

An Indigenous Reference group, Bev Liddy and Mary Liddy from the NT Department of Employment Education and Training and including Veronica Johns and Kathy Deveraux from the project team, was convened near the end of the project to act as a sounding board for some of the findings and to provide feedback on the draft report.

Access to the participating communities was negotiated by members of the BIITE Project Team through the children's services staff in each community. Each of the team members had had a significant role in working with and supporting the services involved, sometimes for many years, and had established close and trusting relationships with the staff of the services. The initial approach was made by the relevant team member to the Director (or equivalent) of each children's services for advice on how to go about informing her community of the project and the most appropriate traditional owner who should be contacted to secure permission to conduct the research in that community. Project information and plain language statements were sent to the Director and the Community Council ahead of the first visit to each community. Phone calls were made to follow up and determine the best time to visit. Posters announcing the intention to do the research project and flyers were prepared containing plain language statement information. During the first visit to each community the Project Team member associated with the community and the Principal Researcher met with the children's services director who then introduced us to the relevant traditional owner to discuss the nature and purposes of the project. Where necessary an interpreter was used to enable traditional owners to speak in their first language. In every case the traditional owners agreed to allow the project to proceed.



The next step was to seek advice from the children's services director on the best way to inform the community at large about our project and to find participants. Two main approaches were adopted. In most of the communities we were advised to put up the posters in prominent places as a way to advertise the project and our presence in the community and then to contact specific people in key positions around the community to ask for their involvement. In these communities we were told that there were so many outsiders arriving in the community each day asking to speak to people that a community-wide meeting would not be well attended. This was particularly relevant advice in the larger communities where an almost continuous stream of people like ourselves from outside the community come to consult with community members about various health, education, training and other issues, including other research projects. For example, in three of the communities we found that we followed a research team that had just been there to consult community members for the Secondary Review of Education in the Northern Territory. In two of the communities the Directors advised us to call a community meeting asking for interested people to attend. When this strategy was advised, we put up the posters in strategic places around the community announcing our intentions and were able to hold a short meeting to discuss the project and to ask for people who would like to participate to contact us while we were in the community. Whichever approach was used, we found a remarkable degree of good will, cooperation and interest considering how often such requests are made.

At a minimum, two research visits lasting from 3-5 days were made to each participating community and a third and final visit was made to provide feedback and discuss the outcomes of our research. For most of the communities, additional visits were made and on going contact occurred through telephone calls with the CEOs and/or the staff of the children's service. Finding suitable times to talk to people was always difficult because community people were always busy. The project time frame had to be extended beyond the original plan of one year. On many occasions the planned visits had to be cancelled because of funerals and other unexpected events in communities that would make our presence in the community unwelcome or inappropriate. To ensure that the information was accurate and responsive to cultural priorities and sensitivities we returned for a final visit to each community where the final report was reviewed and approved by at least one representative of each Community Council, children's services participants in the project and, when possible, an appropriate community traditional owner.



The research processes occurred in three overlapping phases.

Phase 1: Collaborative Literature-Artefact Review

A selected review of literature and information relevant to remote community Indigenous children's services programs and practices in Northern Territory was undertaken and discussed by the project team to identify important themes related to practices, programs and approaches seen as successful and as challenging to the development of children's services.

Phase 2: Generating stories of children's services development

Drawing on the themes identified in the review, the project team worked directly with Indigenous children's services practitioners to generate 'stories of development' about their children's service. The researchers spent the first day observing and participating in the program for children to see the normal routine and activities that took place. At a suitable time, individuals and groups of children's services practitioners in each community were asked to talk about their programs and the practices which they valued in their work, those that challenged them and some of their hopes and dreams for the future of their service through an open ended interview. Interviews were tape recorded in most cases but, when appropriate, notes were made instead of using the tape recorder. These interviews occurred in groups or individually depending on the wishes of participants. In response to some of our questions participants referred us to other community members. Other community members, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, were invited to talk about their interest and involvement in the service development. These narratives were also recorded via notes and tape recordings.

Photographs were taken of children's activities and written permission was sought from parents and staff to include these in the final report. Written artefacts, such as staff rosters, mission statements, newsletters, posters and so on were also collected when staff indicated their relevance to our inquiry.

Phase 3: Integrating stories of development

The tapes of interviews and notes from discussions were transcribed and became a subject of collaborative reflection by the research team and community participants. Discussions took place within the project team and among participants from the children's services involved when the project team returned for the second visit to the community. Over the period of the study, all participants had the opportunity to respond to the children's service 'development stories' for their own community and to contribute to new information or corrections.



An important part of this process was the time between community visits (from 6 to 9 months in most cases) that allowed all participants to reflect on their contributions and refine them over time. Each community was visited twice to collect and to check the information for accuracy and appropriateness. A third visit was conducted to discuss the final report. The Community Council, Director (or equivalent) of the children's service and traditional owner when available were asked to review the report and ensure that it was appropriate for publication. The intention was for all participants in the process (the project team, the practitioners and other local consultants) to have power over the knowledge which was generated as part of a collaborative research process. In the final products, all parties who wished to be acknowledged for the role that they played have been acknowledged. (See Appendix 3)



CHAPTER 2



BARUNGA

Pragmatism + Flexibility = Solutions to local needs

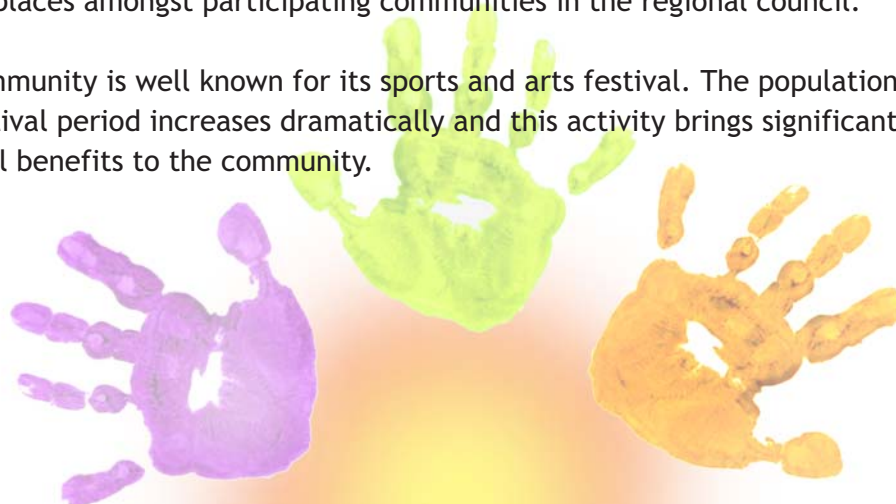
ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Barunga is a community of approximately 443 people (ABS 2001 Census). It is located in Central Arnhem Land, six hours drive from Darwin and one and a half hours drive on dirt road from Katherine. These roads close frequently in the wet season.

The major traditional language groups are Jawoyn, Dalabon, Mayali and Rembarrnga although most people speak English or Kriol in the community. There are 2 moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, which have to be equally represented on the Executive of the regional council. The new regional council, Nyirranggulung Mardruk Ngadberre, is divided into electorates, one of which is Barunga. Within the Regional Executive, Barunga provides 2 councillors from each Moity. Within the Barunga Council itself there are 4 councillors representing Jarowyn language group, 2 councillors representing Dalabon Language Group, 2 councillors representing the Maiyali Language Group, 2 councillors representing Mangarrai language group and 2 councillors representing electors who are not of the Language Groups listed (Nyirranggulung Regional Council documents from Veronica Birrell President of the Regional Executive).

The community has a Community Education Centre with approximately 71 primary school-aged children and 14 secondary students, a health clinic, a church, a shop, the Council offices. They share Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) places amongst participating communities in the regional council.

The community is well known for its sports and arts festival. The population during this festival period increases dramatically and this activity brings significant financial benefits to the community.



THE BARUNGA CHILDREN'S SERVICE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

It is important to understand that there are a number of factors accounting for the development of a children's service in a remote community including;

- the overall capacity of the council to conduct the business of the community,
- the size of the community,
- the amount of ongoing support and training provided by interested external agencies, and
- the length of time a specific service for children has been operating.

Given these factors, for this case study, the message we want to highlight is the (a) pragmatism of people involved in working with young children in this community and (b) their ability to be flexible and take advantage of the available resources to support their service which has enabled the service to (c) find solutions for the local needs of the community.

The journey for Barunga has been one of fairly continuous change for many years with some slipping and sliding. Key people in the organisation and management of the service came and went, funding sources altered, program purposes shifted and the location of the service changed. There had been a kind of occasional care—playgroup type of service provided since the mid 1980s, but a regular daily service with set hours did not start until 2000. A successful submission for Jobs Education and Training (JET) funding enabled a crèche to be established in a vacant house.



Old child care centre

The house was cleaned up and adapted by the Community Council for its new purpose. Local women were hired to work in the centre using CDEP and JET funds and a non-Indigenous coordinator living in the community at the time and who took a strong interest in supporting the childcare was employed. The small equipment grant from JET allowed the staff to purchase some toys, cleaning, eating and outdoor play equipment. The service began to provide child care services rather than playgroup activities only.

The centre was catering regularly for a group of young children. Staff provided good food and play activities for the children.

The child care workers began the Introduction to Child Care Course through the then Batchelor College (now Batchelor Institute). Three of the four Indigenous workers signed up for the course (JET Report, June, 2000).

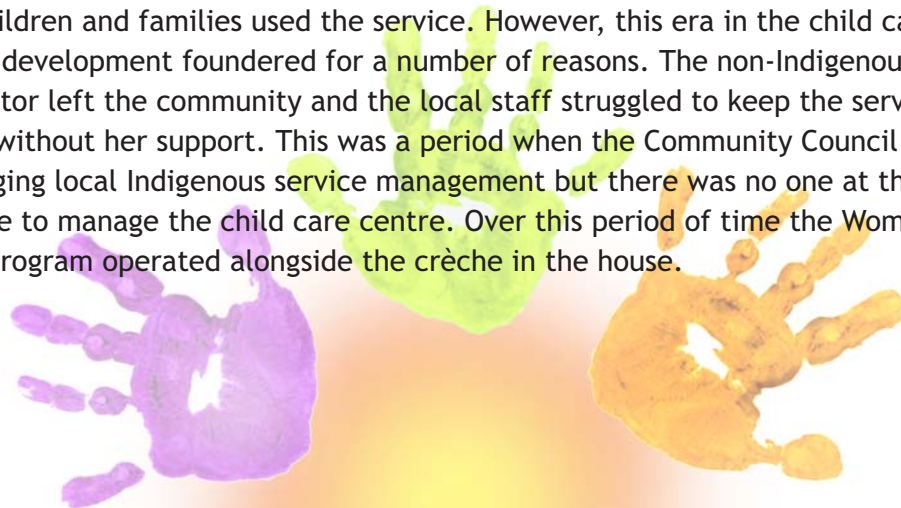
The focus of the program at this time was to support 'failure to thrive', or as they are referred to locally, 'skinny', children.

One of the aims of the crèche is to provide several small meals throughout the day for these children (breakfast, snack, lunch, snack) as well as providing a take-home evening meal for a specific few children. The mothers are encouraged to come and stay but will be asked to contribute \$10 weekly towards their meals...Hopefully this will limit the need for these children to be under the supervision/care of Family and Children's Services (Welfare) sometimes outside the community, i.e. being fostered elsewhere.

JET Report, 2000, no page

Other activities run at the crèche at this time included fundraising by selling second hand clothes donated by a church in Katherine '...and whatever else we can get our hands on' (JET Report, 2000, no page). Everything was for sale for \$2 and the funds were used to buy a bread-maker, new saucepans, large pots, utensils and a new kettle. As a consequence of having no access to dental care within the community, the crèche organised a minibus to take children to a primary school dental clinic in Katherine. The preschool program was organised at this time as a kind of mobile service in that it would go out to the community rather than only occur within the school. It was known as the 'roving preschool'. When the 'roving preschool' went to a local park opposite the crèche the children would attend and enjoyed the painting, singing, gluing and other preschool type activities, 'although they don't realise it also is a grounding in school procedures' (JET Report, 2000, no page). The Katherine Isolated Children's Services (K.I.C.S) also visited and brought new activities and ideas once a month.

There was a long period of time when the old child care centre worked well and many children and families used the service. However, this era in the child care centre's development foundered for a number of reasons. The non-Indigenous coordinator left the community and the local staff struggled to keep the service running without her support. This was a period when the Community Council was encouraging local Indigenous service management but there was no one at that time able to manage the child care centre. Over this period of time the Women's Centre program operated alongside the crèche in the house.



Some of the older women today remember when the child care program was in the house and that it was a good program. Some said they would like to have the old child care centre back again. One person asked 'We can still get that crèche back?'. We asked them if they would like to have a meeting to discuss it. Three women came to the meeting but this may not have been a true representation of community interest because there was another important community meeting about a proposed gas pipeline in the area going on at the time. These comments were made at the meeting.

That would be good to get that opened again.

Yeah, we should have (another) meeting. Have a meeting one day and get that building going. So all the ones that don't use that school...

Like some little ones don't. Their mothers don't want to take them there you know? (Maybe) they want to try and get this (old) crèche running so we can employ a couple of more ladies, you know, and work with young kids, young children, and young babies.

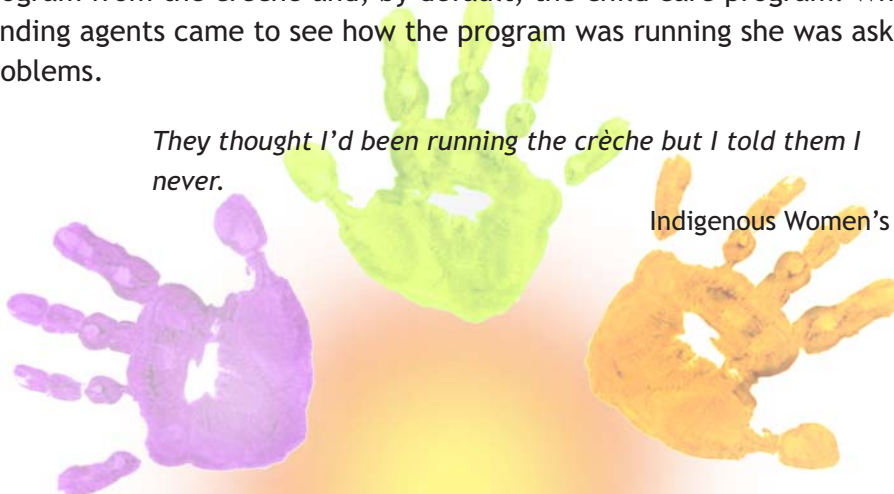
Comments from the Women's meeting

In addition to these views, some people recalled problems with the child care centre after the original centre director left. These included problems with staff not coming to work, a few people in the community taking advantage of the facilities and some families losing confidence in how well staff were looking after their children. Another issue was that the younger school aged children, transition and year one, were going to the child care centre instead of coming to school.

This seems to have been a period of confusion, particularly about who was responsible for the crèche and who was responsible for the women's centre activities in the centre. The Women's Centre Director felt that she had to be responsible for child care as well as the Women's Centre activities. She needed more support from the child care staff. At that time she was running the aged care program from the crèche and, by default, the child care program. When the funding agents came to see how the program was running she was asked about the problems.

They thought I'd been running the crèche but I told them I never.

Indigenous Women's Centre Director



The centre began to slip away. The principal of the school and a teacher began to discuss a new idea for working with the young children with some community members. Instead of a child care centre, the idea of a 'nursery school' was proposed.

But there was lot of young kids go over there at the crèche and don't go back to school...That's why then they said, 'Alright, we've got to stop that and we've got to have a nursery school'. So they stopped the crèche and then they had the nursery school.

Indigenous Women's Centre Director

An innovative approach to using JET funding was negotiated between the funding agency and the community to enable the funding to move from the child care centre to the school in late 2001. The school now administers these funds. The Nursery School began operation in the school in July 2002.

The Nursery School was set up in the preschool section of the school.

'The school was asked to take over the running of the community crèche. After much discussion with the community, school council and JET the school developed the concept of a Nursery School which could provide many of the services of the crèche...The Nursery School has significant differences from a crèche. Most significant is the fact that the children are not dropped off but must be accompanied by their mothers, grandmothers or significant family members. Our emphasis on the role of grandmothers is deliberate and is an acknowledgement of the place of grandmothers in traditional child rearing practices. Secondly, the nursery school organises and coordinates training and education options for the mothers.

JET Report, May 2003, p. 4-5

The program was staffed by two women, one Indigenous mother from the community and another non-Indigenous worker. Both of these workers had to leave the community because of family business so the nursery school had to close down briefly.

Initially the program was confined to a small room which had double doors leading into the larger Pre-school classroom. The Indigenous Pre-school teacher (who now works in the school) ran the pre-school program next door to the Nursery School and served as a role model and mentor to the entirely Indigenous staff of the Nursery School. The Nursery School and the Pre-school ran together for part of the day as an integrated program.

During this period the Nursery School operated on week days from 9:00am to 11:30am. This was the program we observed on our first visit to the community. Each day most of the children were picked up in the school's bus or troop carrier. The pre-school teacher or someone else from the school drove around the community to pick up the children. The director described their regular program.

We come back (from picking up the children) and we'll either, they have their (breakfast) and then we'll come in and we'll either have a dress up day or just a free play day where they can have free play in this room or the other room. We have like, we'll play, sometimes we'll play the music (a tape of children's songs sung by a local singer)... Yeah, they sit down and listen to it, because it's Kriol and they understand every word. And then about 10:30, when the whole school has recess, we'll have morning tea. After morning tea I'll sit them down and I'll read a book and from the book I would have photocopied photos, pictures that have something to do with a book, so they can either paint or do a collage or cut it out. And we usually hang them up; sometimes we will let them take them home, take the pictures home.

So then we come and we try and rest them, try to rest them, either by putting that music on or let them relax with a kid's video. Then when its home time, we will sit them down and give them a snack, a small snack to take home.

Indigenous Director



Child painting



NURSERY SCHOOL IS SCHOOL

From the beginning, the program focused strongly on getting the younger children to come along to the Nursery School.

A long term aim of the program for the school is to make young children feel comfortable about coming to school and so will start to come regularly in their early vital years.

JET Report, 2003, p.5

The location of the Nursery School within the school was seen as a good way to orient these children to coming to the school.

I think it's good for them to come here because when they go into Transition and Grade 1, they know what to expect and they'll be, it will help them.

Indigenous Director

The children who have not arrived at the Nursery School by 8:30 in the morning are picked up from their homes and taken home again in the afternoons.



Children playing



Getting a book

The pre-school classroom is well equipped and resourced for children's and staff's use. They have the toys and equipment that belonged to the old crèche as well as those in the pre-school. Staff can access all of the school's electronic facilities. There is a room where the staff can take a break. There are adult and child sized toilets, hand washing basins, and a washing machine. Children play with many of the typical pre-school toys such as dress ups, puzzles, dolls, dramatic play materials, musical instruments, books and construction materials. They have art and craft materials for drawing, painting and making collages. The outdoor play space is well set up with a climbing frame, large sand pit with digging equipment, a bike track and tricycles and a large shady veranda with tables and chairs.

The Nursery School is open five days a week from 8:30 to 2:30. The daily routine includes:

- Breakfast
- Visit the Health Clinic
- Indoor and/or outdoor Play time
- Snack
- Story, Songs, Games and Dancing
- Lunch
- Sleep time
- Outdoor play time
- Snack
- Home time



School-aged children playing
in the sandpit



Story time

Children's outdoor play time coincides with recess at the school so the younger school aged children can come and join the Nursery School children for outdoor play. The school-aged children enjoy returning to the pre-school play area to dig in the sand pit and use the bikes and other play materials.

A community member talked about the kinds of things that children were learning at Nursery School. All the people who spoke to us seemed very happy with the way the Nursery School was operating.

(They're...) drawing, painting, gluing things, being read to, singing, dancing, watch videos, learn to sit in a group and wash hands after toilet. Take care of themselves a little bit.

Indigenous Community Member

The service was, and still is, called the Nursery School to emphasise its role in helping children get used to school.

We talked to parents. It's not a babysitting place. School is school.

Indigenous preschool teacher

Sometimes, you know, you'll find some of the kids don't like to come to school. But if they come here and see that it's fun, they might be like, you know,... (I) encourage all the kids to come. Another one might go home, like some of the kids go home with their pictures and their paintings, and all their little brothers and sisters, they see it, and they want to do it too. Sometimes they come with them.

Indigenous Director

They learn from there to line up and all that...and sit down or lie down and have a rest, while they're watching TV, and lie down or sit down quietly when someone's reading a book to them.

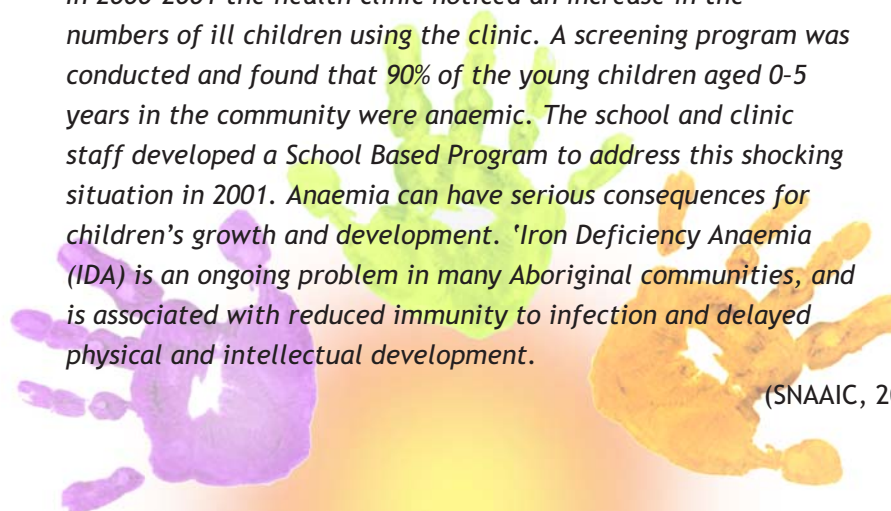
Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

The program also supports children's healthy development through the close relationship the school has with the Health Clinic. The Health professionals provide a daily health and nutrition program for all of the children from the school including those who attend the Nursery School. Anaemia was identified as a major problem for most of the children in the community. In 2001 a program began to provide all primary school aged children with daily vitamin and iron supplements, breakfast, a nutrition education program conducted by the teachers in the school and a general health check weekly.

This school-clinic initiative has recently been written up in the 2004 Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) Report.

In 2000-2001 the health clinic noticed an increase in the numbers of ill children using the clinic. A screening program was conducted and found that 90% of the young children aged 0-5 years in the community were anaemic. The school and clinic staff developed a School Based Program to address this shocking situation in 2001. Anaemia can have serious consequences for children's growth and development. 'Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA) is an ongoing problem in many Aboriginal communities, and is associated with reduced immunity to infection and delayed physical and intellectual development.

(SNAICC, 2004, p.4)



The Nursery School was included in the health program when it started at the school in 2002. The local health nurse reported on the benefits of the program for the children.

In the last term of 2002, the primary school developed a nursery school program in the mornings for children from birth to school entry age, and this group was also included in the health program. In the 3 and 4 year olds, there was a decrease in the prevalence of anaemia. Many children who had not been eating a lot started actively looking for food. Babies were brought to the nursery program for play and developmental activities, and social interaction with children of similar age. A parent/ caregiver was required to stay with the younger children and the nursery school organises training and education options for the carers, run by the supervisor and local health clinic.

(SNAACC 2004, p. 4)

The Health Clinic is located across the street from the school. This means the Nursery School staff can walk the children there every morning for their iron, vitamins and health checks. From the perspective of the staff and one of the health workers a significant side benefit of this arrangement is that children have become very familiar and comfortable with being at the clinic. They have learned that the clinic is a good place and not a fearful place.

The school-aged children have bottled water on their desks and the Nursery School children drink filtered water, readily available in the Nursery School. Children receive meals and snacks at the Nursery School each day. Each child is given a small snack to take home at the end of the day as well.



Snacks at home time



Washing hands after painting

The staff were clearly aware of the need to provide children with healthy food and the role that the Nursery School was playing in improving children's health.

That's why, um, yeah, they usually walk, walking around with junk food, the kids, and usually a can of Coke. But since, like when they, because they do the iron program their iron is pretty good.

Indigenous Director

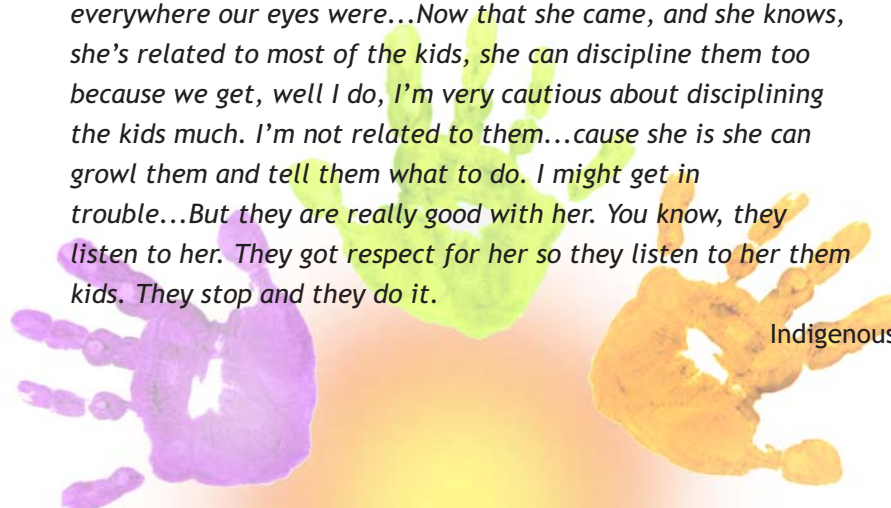
STAFF BRING THEIR SKILLS TO NURSERY SCHOOL

The Nursery School originally employed three staff members, one Indigenous coordinator who came from Darwin to live in the community with her partner and two local Indigenous women. They were employed with the JET funding and 'top up' funding from the CDEP. None of the staff have had the opportunity to take part in child care training. They work hard to think of new ideas for helping the children learn and asked us many questions about how they could improve their program.

We noticed the staff were working well as a team. All of the staff observe the children and help them while they are playing. They remind the children how to use the toilet and to wash their hands. They carry tissues with them and encourage children to blow their nose. The director takes a lead role in teaching children other skills they will need for school. She talked about how she was teaching them to sit and listen to stories, to enjoy group singing and dancing activities, to play with the toys in the ways they are designed to be used and to develop social skills for playing with each other without fighting. She emphasised that she often deferred to the local staff to discipline the children because she did not have the relationships with them that would allow her to do this.

With (the Nursery School staff) it's a good help because they are related to most of the kids, because I'm not from here. I've been here for three years but I'm from Darwin...But we are glad she (one of the Indigenous staff members) came along because we were getting about 15, 16 kids and we couldn't (be) everywhere our eyes were...Now that she came, and she knows, she's related to most of the kids, she can discipline them too because we get, well I do, I'm very cautious about disciplining the kids much. I'm not related to them...cause she is she can growl them and tell them what to do. I might get in trouble...But they are really good with her. You know, they listen to her. They got respect for her so they listen to her them kids. They stop and they do it.

Indigenous Director



This local staff member has since left the program to work in another service in the community. The other local staff member used to work at the previous child care centre. She talked about how she moved to the new program when it started in the school.

... I let that go, after when they closed it. I keep coming here every day watch my kids...Nearly every day I come here with my kids...They love it here.

Indigenous child care worker

This staff member and the director are keen to do formal child care training, and are interested in going to Katherine for training which is a one and a half hour drive away or doing the training in the community if that is possible. A Remote Area Children's Services Support Unit (RACSSU) staff member from BIITE has provided in-service training & support since 2001, involving three to four visits per year. However, until recently this training has not been linked to accredited training and child care competencies.

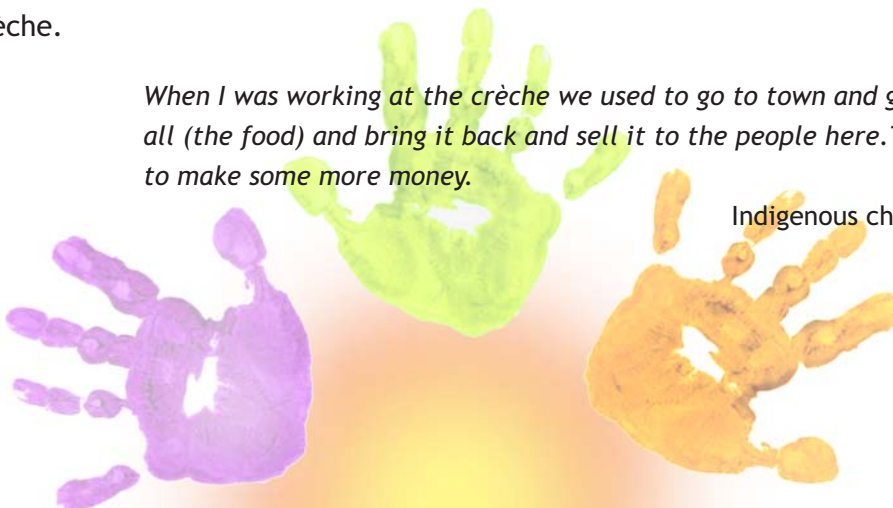
In 2004, the service extended its hours and the school aged children began to attend in the afternoons. The staff have begun to receive support from a non-Indigenous mentor who is an early childhood teacher at the school. The mentor provides support for approximately 4 hours per week.

The staff would like to get their driver's licences so that they can pick up and drive the younger children to and from home and Nursery School in the troop carrier. Until that happens they rely on someone from the school to drive the vehicle.

Staff prepare the food for children each day in a small kitchen next to the classroom but reported that the stove had not been working for some time. They talked about how difficult it is to organise healthy food under these circumstances. They also talked about how they had to buy food from the limited stocks of the local store. In order to get enough healthy food at an affordable price, staff are considering bulk ordering their food from a large supermarket in the town of Katherine. One of the staff members told us that this idea came from the old crèche.

When I was working at the crèche we used to go to town and get all (the food) and bring it back and sell it to the people here. Try to make some more money.

Indigenous child care worker



Although this caregiver told us that this food service worked well in the past, it required someone with a license and a car to drive into town and at the moment the Nursery School staff do not have that option.

In the meantime, staff must think of simple food to make for the children or else buy precooked food from the shop. They would like to get the stove fixed so they can cook healthy food for the children like stews and soups.

WORKING HARD TO INVOLVE PARENTS

As a JET Crèche, the program funding stipulates that parents participate in some form of work or training while their children are looked after. To ensure that these requirements were met, the school has offered a number of accredited and non-accredited training programs for young mothers and when these programs run they are well attended. The school, as a Community Education Centre, has organised training courses in hairdressing and catering and a nutrition and healthy cooking course run at the school by the local health clinic (Sunrise Health). While mothers attended the courses their children were looked after in the Nursery School.

In the February 2004 JET Report Barunga staff reported that they had run seven workshop sessions for mothers 'to help them with their babies health, cleaning, safety, hygiene and budgeting' (p.9). However having to continually find funding and suitable staff to deliver the training is an ongoing problem for the school. The BIITE Remote Area Children's Service Support worker also supports the centre and visited in 2004 to discuss training for staff in driver's education and first aid.

Few parents have paid work in the community. The school Principal explained that until recently Barunga had very few CDEP places to use for employment in the community.

Barunga lost CDEP about eight years ago and then, for the next couple of years, there was just nothing. Then the council started working a little bit in with Beswick council and some jobs, about 3, 4, 6 jobs would come from their CDEP and that has gradually grown a bit. Since the new Shire, Nyirranggulung, has come and they've got CDEP and they've allocated some positions to Barunga. So that is there now, I don't know how many positions there are but there's a fair few.

Non-Indigenous School Principal



The staff had made a strong effort to involve parents and family members not engaged in training in the Nursery School activities, so that they could learn about good activities for their children and their children would be able to participate in the program.

We are trying to make it work. We are trying to encourage the mothers to come so they can see all the different things they can do with their children, at home and that. And sometimes we get a few mothers...

Because (local staff member) is from the community she'll go around and sometimes encourage the mothers to come, like 'Oh you want to come? Your kids are doing really good work, and, you know, they're playing really good'. So she gives them a bit of a growling so they'll come.

Indigenous Director

Some of the mothers that aren't coming, you know, are just sit around with their kids but they don't bring the kids here.

Indigenous child care worker

One of the child care workers talked about how some parents tell her that they are embarrassed to send the children to school when they don't have clean clothes or food.

And we tell them we have breakfast here, we get them smoko and lunch for the kids.

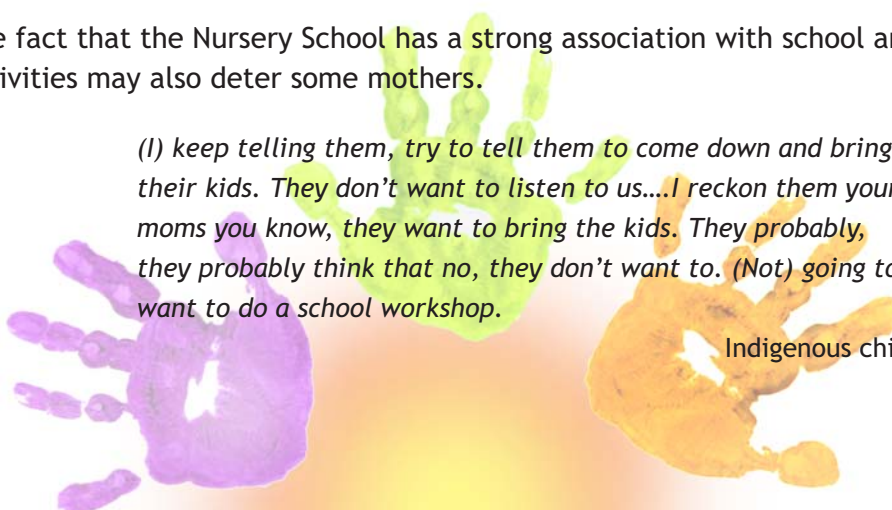
Indigenous child care worker

Not all mothers and children use the nursery school. This may be because they preferred to look after their own children at home. We saw mothers and babies walking around the community during our visits. One parent told us that '*No one wants someone who is outside their family looking after them*' (i.e., looking after their children).

The fact that the Nursery School has a strong association with school and training activities may also deter some mothers.

(I) keep telling them, try to tell them to come down and bring their kids. They don't want to listen to us....I reckon them young moms you know, they want to bring the kids. They probably, they probably think that no, they don't want to. (Not) going to want to do a school workshop.

Indigenous child care worker



Staff told us they tried to offer family activities to entice parents to attend with their children more often. For example, they had a puppet show for parents, open



Visitor watching child paint

days, special morning teas and other activities. When these kinds of activities occur parents come along but this interest has not translated to regular visits. They seem to come in large numbers only 'on a special day'.

A particularly successful event held during the 'old crèche' era is still remembered.

We had a open day and we had lots of mothers there on that day. That day we cook some sausage and gave them a train ride around the community...They made a little trailer...Some lady drove that thing around and took some of the kids around, take turns. We put in a waterslide, face painting, everything in the crèche

Indigenous child care worker

They are currently trying the direct approach.

After work you know, when I go out for a walk out there, talk to them mothers...the kids...you could bring a kid around more... sit there and drink tea...and go home whenever. You know they can just come here and relax.

Indigenous child care worker

One of the Indigenous child care workers said that there were many young mothers at home, bored, with nothing to do, just like she was until she discovered that working could be satisfying and rewarding. It was through attending the Nursery School with her children that she learned about work and about her preference for working with young children.

You don't see them come up from the houses...You see them sitting in the house all day doing nothing...I start to get interesting when I, after I...we have our boys. When I started bringing them school, that's when I started get interested in working...I keep coming here every day, watch my kids, bring them every morning, have to sit there with them right up to... after school, then I decided to come here to work...That's why I did get this job. I don't like sitting around at home. In the end I love working here. (Nothing to) do for me at home.

Indigenous child care worker

On average, one or two mothers or other family members do attend the Nursery School each day, especially those with younger babies. Staff feel strongly that their program is valuable for young mothers and they continue to try to think of ways to involve them.

GROWING AND CHANGING WITH NEW PROGRAMS

Over time the Nursery School program has expanded in its use of the school space and in the length of its day. This is a function of the number of children of preschool age, but also a demonstration of the flexibility and determination of the staff to do whatever it takes to make the service viable. The number of preschool aged children was not sufficient to enable the school to employ a preschool teacher. As the preschool was not being used, the Nursery School has expanded to occupy the whole preschool section of the school. In this community there are 34 under 5 year olds and 12-15 of them (2-4 year olds) attend the Nursery School regularly with occasional visits from some younger children who are usually accompanied by their parent or caretaker.

Recently a new initiative has been implemented. On three afternoons a week, the Transition children* (5 year olds) are separated out from their early childhood class (5-8 year olds) and the younger ones come to play at the Nursery School Centre, supervised by the Nursery School coordinator, her assistant and two teacher aides from the school. This arrangement allows the early childhood teacher to take the rest of the class, the grade 1, 2 and 3 children, to use computers and other activities running in the afternoon school program. The Nursery School now runs from 8.30-2.30pm, with children being driven home from 2.30pm. This is a major change for Nursery School staff and they are adjusting to their new responsibilities. Recently the school has developed a partnership with 'Allied Health' to develop a Perceptual Motor Program for the Nursery School (JET Report, February, 2004, p.10) as well.

The principal sees that the Nursery School program as essential in that it provides the main service for the under 5 year olds in the community.

We have to keep our pre-school program going but our numbers in the preschool don't justify a teacher. So this is the only way we can work out how to do it. ...We're now trying to, at least for three afternoons a week, have a more structured pre-school. And of course the little ones can come in.

Non-Indigenous School Principal



* Transition year is a non-compulsory year of school

Association with the school has provided the support this service needed to survive so in this sense it is a mutually beneficial arrangement.

I think what the school needs too, is for that community involvement and support as well, because it's the only way they're going to be able to continue the program.

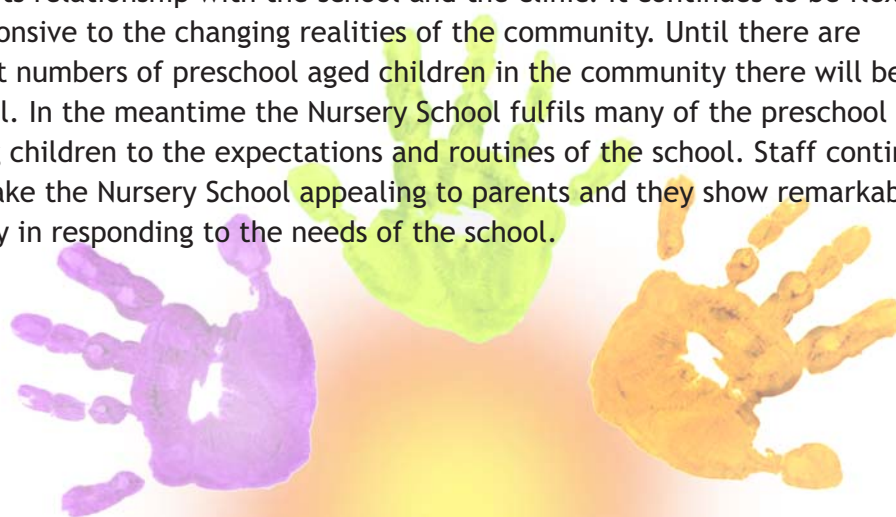
Acting Community CEO

Another new initiative is the 'Culture Centre' that began in 2003. Grandmothers' roles are recognized as very important in the community. We were told how important their roles were as children's main teachers of culture and discipline and some people think they should be teaching language at Nursery School. Their presence could also help settle children in. One idea for getting some of these older women more involved in the school has been to start a 'Culture Centre' in one of the school buildings next door to the Nursery School. While older school-aged children and other family members attend the culture program, younger children could be looked after in the Nursery School.

CONCLUSION

When asked where the staff think their service is at in the development cycle, they see themselves at the beginning again after having completed a cycle in that they are still working out how their program will run, especially now that it has extended hours. The fact that the staff are all Indigenous and that some are local helps the children learn how to behave in the Nursery School. The Nursery School gets good support from the school to keep their program running as it is in the best interests of both the school and the child care centre to work cooperatively with the limited resources available.

Some community members were disappointed when the old crèche stopped functioning but they adjusted to the change in the program for young children and accepted that the move to the school was what enabled their child care program to keep running. The Nursery School operates every school day and is supported through its relationship with the school and the clinic. It continues to be flexible and responsive to the changing realities of the community. Until there are sufficient numbers of preschool aged children in the community there will be no preschool. In the meantime the Nursery School fulfils many of the preschool roles in orienting children to the expectations and routines of the school. Staff continue to try to make the Nursery School appealing to parents and they show remarkable flexibility in responding to the needs of the school.



There was some lingering regret, expressed by a former child care worker as well as other community members that the Nursery School seemed to have evolved at the expense of the old child care centre.

They get little ones. When they turn two they go to nursery school. We should have still, get to use this crèche (the old crèche) for Grandma (teaching) young babies, you know? They're still, they're still one, and then they turn two they looking to that (Nursery School).

Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

This view was expressed during our first visit but not mentioned during our second visit. (This may have been because the house where the former crèche operated was now occupied by a family, in which case, community members may have seen it as unavailable). A message that did persist, however, was that many community members wanted a place for young mothers and their babies.

People in the community spoke very positively of the Nursery School program. In most aspects of the program staff and community members thought the service that the Nursery School offered was what the community needed and wanted. The Nursery School has proved to be a regular and reliable service to the community that is helping to keep the younger children healthy and providing them with some of the experiences they will need to be successful at school.



CHAPTER 3



GALIWIN'KU

Long-term Perspectives + Passionate Vision = Capacity For Renewal.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Galiwin'ku is the main community on Elcho Island, an island 50 by 6 kilometres, located in the East Arnhem Region of the Northern Territory. The Aboriginal name of the community is Gulmanngur (Djandilnga & Barlow, 1997, p.9). It lies close to the coast, approximately 550 kilometres northeast of Darwin, and is accessed by a 1 hour flight. There are 4 airlines that service the island, one of which is owned by the community. The population of the island fluctuates with the season.

The people of Northeast Arnhem Land have a long history of contact with Maccassans and Bugis people from Indonesia who made fishing trips to the region to hunt trepang for hundreds of years. Although the Australian government of the time stopped Maccassans coming to the Australian coast in 1906, there are still Maccassan words in the local language (Galiwin'ku Community Inc., 2003). In 1931 Arnhem Land was made an Aboriginal Reserve and because of this, Yolngu people suffered somewhat less dislocation and loss of traditional knowledge than other Aboriginal people in Australia whose land was invaded and taken over by non-Indigenous people (Djandilnga & Barlow, 1997). Harold Shepherdson and his wife established a Methodist Mission on Elcho Island in 1942 and remained there for 35 years. Methodist missionaries had been active in Arnhem Land from 1916. Christianity is still very strong in the community today (Djandilnga & Barlow, 1997). In the early days schooling was provided by the missionaries. The first government school was established in 1960. The Galiwin'ku town council was formed in 1973.

Approximately 1800 Indigenous and 75 non Indigenous people live in Galiwin'ku making it the largest community in Northeast Arnhem Land. There are close ties amongst the people from Galiwin'ku and mainland communities (Yirrkala and Maningrida). As many as 22 different dialects are spoken by the different tribal groups living on the island with the most common languages being Djambarrpuyngu and Gupapuyngu (Galiwin'ku Community Inc, 2003).



A large number of outstations have been established (25) and are serviced by the main community of Galiwin'ku. The people of Galiwin'ku call themselves Yolngu although this includes many different clans and dialects. At Galiwin'ku the word clan means 'closely related members of a family' (Djandilnga & Barlow, 1997, p.8). Through their clan affiliations, Galiwin'ku community members have cultural responsibilities for land, not only on the island, but also in mainland Northeast Arnhem Land. This responsibility necessitates trips to the mainland to take care of that country (Djandilnga & Barlow, 1997) so there is a lot of movement of people to and from the mainland. 'Balanda' is the term that Yolngu people use to refer to Non-Indigenous people on the island.

In 2003 the Galiwin'ku Employment and Training Advisory Board was created to coordinate and approve all vocational and higher education training on the island to ensure that all training is to the benefit of the community. An Indigenous Knowledge Centre was also opened in 2003.

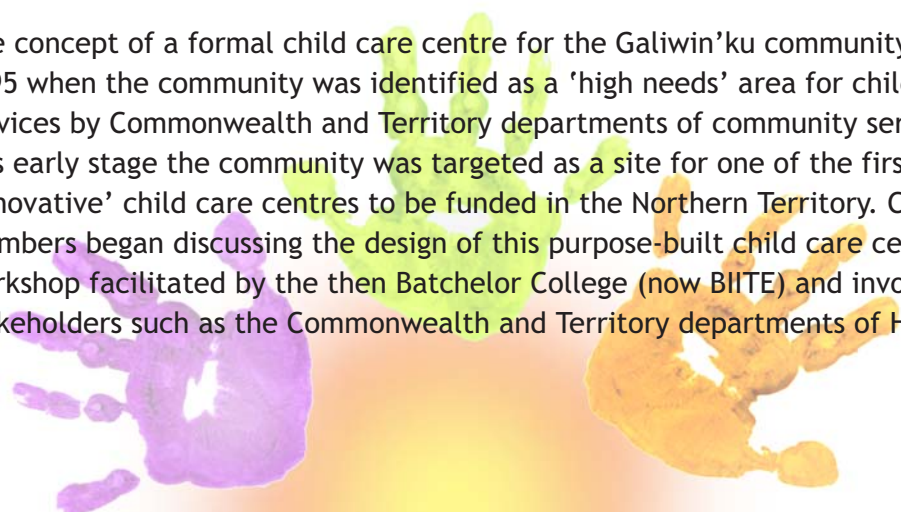
THE GALIWIN'KU CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

Once again we emphasise the importance of understanding that there are a number of factors accounting for the development of a children's service in a remote community including;

- the overall capacity of the council to conduct the business of the community,
- the size of the community,
- the amount of ongoing support and training provided by interested external agencies, and
- the length of time a specific service for children has been operating.

Given these factors, for this case study, the message we want to highlight for Galiwin'ku is that (a) the long-term community perspectives about what child care is and (b) a passionate vision of what child care could be has provided the service with (c) the capacity for renewal.

The concept of a formal child care centre for the Galiwin'ku community began in 1995 when the community was identified as a 'high needs' area for children's services by Commonwealth and Territory departments of community services. At this early stage the community was targeted as a site for one of the first 'Innovative' child care centres to be funded in the Northern Territory. Community members began discussing the design of this purpose-built child care centre at a workshop facilitated by the then Batchelor College (now BIITE) and involving other stakeholders such as the Commonwealth and Territory departments of Health and



Community services and NT Children's Services Resource and Advisory staff. Over a five year period many workshops and meetings were held.

This summary gives an overview of the process.

1995	July	Initial Community Council meeting re high need for a children's service
	October	Workshop on the establishment of a children's service
1996	August	2 day bush toy making workshop at Galiwin'ku involving 30 women from North East Arnhem Region
	October	Community members visit child care centres in Darwin and produce a video about child care designs
	November	3 day meeting to design the child care centre
1997	April	3 day workshop to discuss roles and responsibilities re licensing
	October	Tender process begins
1998	March	Workshop on play area design & landscaping
	September	Tenders close to build centre- anticipated 20 weeks construction time
	September	9 students enrol in accredited training (Certificate I)
1999	March	Meeting convened to introduce staff from THS, FACS, JET, RAP*
		THS engages RAP to run training on pre-operational issues
	June	Discussions about appointing a director, pre-license building inspection
	September	THS assists with purchase of toys and equipment
	November	Staff meeting with providers to decide on training for 2000. FACS field support officer appointed
2000	Feb-Nov	10 x 1 week long training sessions in Cert III in Children's Services
	April	Galiwin'ku centre officially opens
	November	Workshop at Yirrkala 'Good ideas, Happy kids' all Galiwin'ku staff attend
		6 staff complete Cert II training
2001	Jan-present	8 x 1 week long training in Cert II and III including combined training with IEW* students
	May	1 staff member attends Waltja's Central Australian Conference, Alice Springs
	June	2 staff attend NT Children's Services Conference, Darwin
	July	2 staff attend AECA National Conference, Sydney

The community's original vision was to provide care for young children (0-5 year olds) while their parents were at work. The idea of having a child care centre in the community first arose because of parent demand.

* THS = Territory Health Services

JET = Jobs Education & Training

IEW = Indigenous Education Worker

FACS = Family & Community Services

RAP = (NT) Resource & Advisory Program for Children's Services

'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT - 2004

The community had created a number of different work opportunities for its members, including women, as part of its five year plan. As more women began to find work, they encountered the problem of caring for their children.

I was in the group first planning and everything, the five-year plan...That's in our five-year plan, the childcare, and I was in that group and we did that and then after five year, people at the Council...started looking at closely because of the people coming in to complaint that we needed childcare to look after the kids whose parents are working. So the childcare could be run. So they did, because I was (working) at school, I was a member of the committee.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

It comes from the parents because most of the parents were working parents and they couldn't catch-up with what the working demand was because they had to have minders for the child all the time with them. Sometimes it was hard to do that with the kids in the office somewhere and that's why they thought about and said 'Can we have a centre that we can look after, or a community centre?' That's where the idea came in and the committee, through the council formed a management committee, to look into it, into a centre.

Child Care Management Committee Chairperson & Council Member

The local health clinic nurse sees the centre as providing a service for many working members of the community.

We have a large number of our staff, predominantly female who use the childcare which seems to be a very, very satisfactory arrangement.

Non-Indigenous Health Nurse

In addition to working parents, parents who leave the community for any number of reasons know that they can find day-time care for their children at the child care centre.

...If the parents are away they usually put them in child care...But mainly it's dedicated for working mums and dads.

Indigenous Preschool Teacher



Parent playing with children at child care

EDUCATION STARTS IN CHILD CARE

The community has had a strong vision of how their child care centre should be run and who should run it. It was important that the centre was run by the local people, and not by outsiders. It was a point of pride that the centre has been managed entirely by local people.

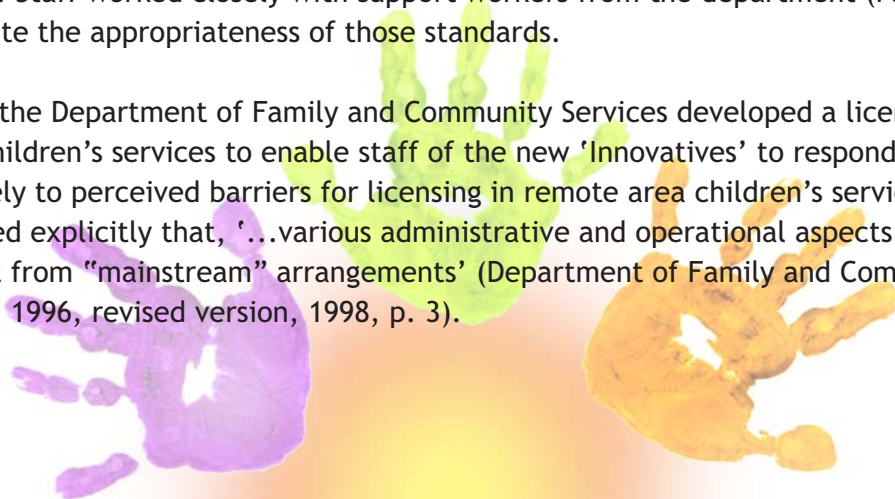
The staffing over at the centre is entirely local staffing, people who have gone off and on the certificates 1, 2 and 3 in childcare (in) the last three or four years. They are the core of the trained people in the childcare centre. Now there are issues about attendance at work and things like that, at the same time it is run completely by local people.

Non-Indigenous Chief Executive Officer

The need for trained child care staff has also been seen as critically important in the development of the service. Many of the current staff have had the opportunity to attend a series of staff development workshops provided in the early stages of the centre's development. Staff from this centre received significant support and training from the funding agencies and from staff at Batchelor College. This period coincided with a major research project, Talking Early Childhood (Willsher & Clarke, 1995) which offered workshops and consultations that brought together women from 14 remote Aboriginal communities to discuss the concept of formally funded child care and identify the kinds of child care services that communities wanted. In addition, a designated child care specialist funded by the Department of Health and Community Services and the then Batchelor College worked closely with the staff from this centre to develop aspects of the centre such as staffing arrangements, routines for children and staff, types of child activities, task rosters, and centre rules. Formal training was conducted on-site over a long period of time to enable all of the staff to receive child care qualifications.

Funding under the Innovative Funding scheme at that time required that the service comply with Territory licensing standards but this requirement was interpreted very flexibly and allowed time for 'practicing' licensing requirements before being assessed. Staff worked closely with support workers from the department (FaCS) to investigate the appropriateness of those standards.

In 1996, the Department of Family and Community Services developed a licensing kit for children's services to enable staff of the new 'Innovatives' to respond more effectively to perceived barriers for licensing in remote area children's services. It was raised explicitly that, '...various administrative and operational aspects will be different from "mainstream" arrangements' (Department of Family and Community Services, 1996, revised version, 1998, p. 3).



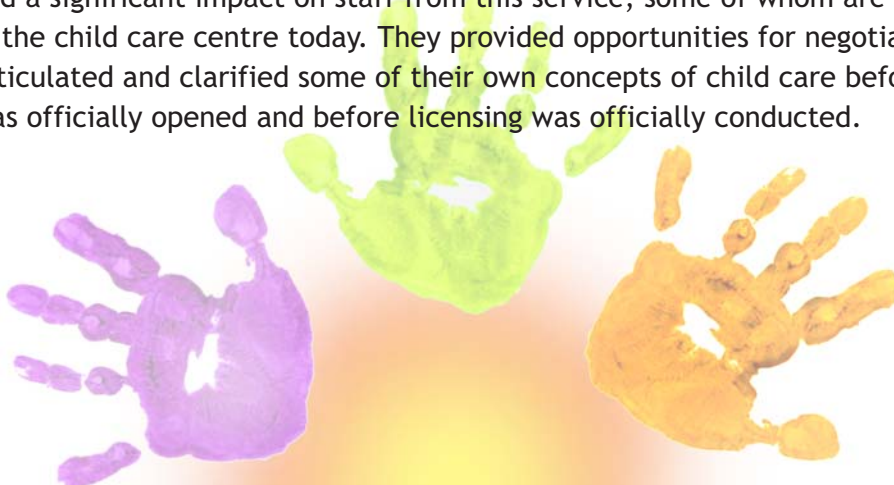
An additional support in the form of a Licensing Workbook was developed by departmental officials for the purpose of enabling child care staff and community management committee members to 'workshop' the necessary licensing standards. These processes built among community participants' the concept of licensing and allowed a negotiation of those items that were core and, therefore, required and those that could be varied according to the needs of the community. The director of Galiwin'ku child care talked about this licensing experience as 'practicing'. Their centre practiced for a year before they felt ready to be assessed by licensing authorities. The 'not negotiable' items related to the following issues:

- *The building be to the building code*
- *The numbers of children don't exceed license*
- *Written permission for child handovers*
- *Insurance*
- *What does 'proper and effective supervision' mean to parents and carers?*
- *Prevention of communicable disease*
 - *Refusal of admission to infected children and adults*
 - *Minimising risk of spreading communicable diseases*

(Zanet, 1997, in Roles and Responsibilities Workshop, Appendix 3)

In this process staff identified some of the standards associated with licensing, designed for urban centres, as inappropriate for their own service, for example the requirement to have child sleeping mats separated by a certain number of centimetres. The staff felt this was not appropriate for their children who would normally sleep close together at home.

These kinds of activities and the long term support provided by funding agents have had a significant impact on staff from this service, some of whom are still working in the child care centre today. They provided opportunities for negotiation as staff articulated and clarified some of their own concepts of child care before the centre was officially opened and before licensing was officially conducted.



INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS WAYS OF WORKING

In the Roles and Responsibilities workshop, community participants identified the need for all workers in child care to have both Indigenous and non-Indigenous 'ways of working'. They emphasised as well that all workers in their proposed centre should be trained in cross-cultural ways of working (Zanet, 1997). The importance of teaching the children the skills and knowledge they would need to succeed in school was another important issue at this time. The centre director was involved in these activities. She was also the principal of the school for a number of years before she moved into the child care director role. Her current vision for the service has retained these earlier views of what child care can be.

That's why I like to see my vision, because children have to get education here. I like to see children get their educations. ...Starting earlier so that when they grow up go to preschool, they know, knowing that there's no, like how to say their numbers, recognize their names or use the help items, fitness, fitness know how to look after their bodies...We can't just look after the children and that's all. We have to do other things. We have to clean. We have to keep childcares clean and how come we, as childcare, is to look after ourselves so we can look after the other children.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

Another child care worker, who was also part of the original consultations, emphasises similar educational and health outcomes for children.

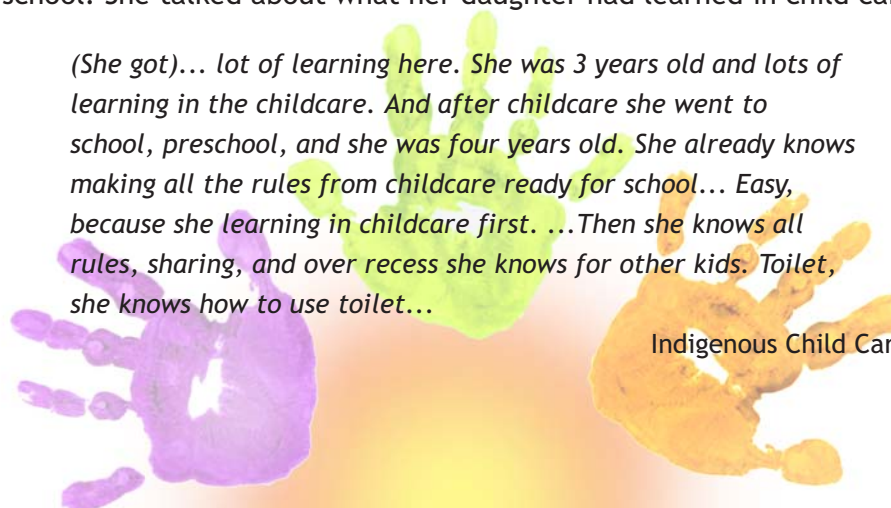
Teach them. ...they learn language, colours and numbers. We work with them and washing hands, use the toilet and after toilet wash hands before lunch. If they eat the food will make them more stronger.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

This same staff member's child attended the child care centre but had since gone onto preschool. She talked about what her daughter had learned in child care.

(She got)... lot of learning here. She was 3 years old and lots of learning in the childcare. And after childcare she went to school, preschool, and she was four years old. She already knows making all the rules from childcare ready for school... Easy, because she learning in childcare first. ...Then she knows all rules, sharing, and over recess she knows for other kids. Toilet, she knows how to use toilet...

Indigenous Child Care Worker





Child care worker helping baby do a drawing

Staff who had worked in the centre for a while talked about child care as a service where children would learn important skills for keeping them healthy and safe and also preparing them to make the transition to school. Education and health continues to be the clear focus of the centre.

One of the child care workers born in the community (but not Aboriginal) talked about her views on the importance of the child care centre in the overall long term education of the children.

I find it interesting, because it's important, because it's the child's mind. What image is coming in, it's coming in learning. From this new concept from his mother, his grandmother, what is this child going to come up to be and all his environment here? What we are faced with, unemployment and all these things, how are we going to build a mind of the child? Yolngu are very particular about the values of their cultures and who... And see, that is where the work of the parents is very important, because this is going to tell us the child that is coming up is going to turn the whole lifestyle of the community. Because I keep telling the carers, 'These are going to be the leaders. If we bring them up properly in this child care, then they'll be able to adapt, and make their way up into the high school, university. It starts right here. So that's how I see it.

Non-Indigenous child care worker

An Indigenous council member also spoke of this long term view of education which he believes starts with young children and their families and in the child care centre.

After that meeting, when we had that secondary education meeting, I said, 'There's one thing, one area that we missed out, and it's really important. The early childhood, the childcare and beyond that.' That's why I said, 'Put emphasis on the family, to start supporting that child development. You're talking about life. You're not talking about something. It's a life, precious to us, that can lead us. (That child is going to be an) active leader one day.' If we start concentrating and focusing to on ...the community, to start looking the way it should, as communities should look. The child development will shape the community.*

Child Care Management Committee Chairperson & Council Member

** He is referring to the Review of Secondary Education in the NT consultation which occurred at the same time as this research.*

Child care is important to the whole community. A Councillor tells us how important child care is in the bigger picture of education at the community.

It's the first step in the learning path...We want to have good education.

Indigenous Community Councillor

The community is very proud of the child care centre as a successfully run community enterprise. All of the staff are Yolngu with the exception of two Fijian staff members who have lived in the community for many years. For a number of years, all of the staff working in the child care centre had child care qualifications.

They have their Certificates I, II and III (in child care studies). No Balanda (Non-Indigenous) in charge!

Indigenous Community Councillor

This achievement (a fully trained, fully Indigenous managed and run organisation) has not been matched by any other organisation in the community.

WHAT THE CHILDREN NEED FROM CHILD CARE

The centre has a well organised program for children with a strong emphasis on nutrition, safety, health and learning behaviours that will help them when they go to school such as learning to mix with children who are not necessarily from their immediate family.



Inside activity area in the child care centre

Children are divided by age groups with different caregivers taking responsibility for different age groups (the babies, the toddlers and the pre-school age group). Children attend the centre from 8:00 until 4:00. In the mornings the 4 year olds go to the pre-school and return after preschool to the child care centre at 11:45. The director tries to build on what the 4 and 5 year old children are learning at preschool when they come back to the child care centre. Pre-

school children 'learn counting, naming shapes, recognising their names and some other words. They also learn manners and the importance of washing hands before eating.' (SNAALICC, 2004, p 9). The BBC program for ear health (Breathing, Blowing and Coughing) is also practiced so that children learn how to clear their ears in order to hear better. Staff encourage all children to learn how to use the toilet, wash their hands and eat at the table. They have a range of play activities provided on tables on the veranda; drawing with crayons, puzzles, playing with blocks and small sorting toys, reading books, riding bikes and other wheeled toys, playing in the sand pit

with trucks and buckets, climbing on the climbing frame, walking on the balance boards, and jumping on the trampoline are available daily. The staff speak to all of the children in both English and Yolngu Matha (Yolngu language) so that both Balanda and Yolngu children are learning both languages.



Prayer before lunch

Children always receive healthy snacks and meals prepared by staff in the kitchen. Children and staff say a prayer before they eat lunch.

They have a breakfast program and prepare healthy lunches each day for the children.

We have breakfast for them too. We cook for them... porridge, Weetbix. Mainly, the children like Weetbix with honey. They love it.

Indigenous Child Care Centre
Director

Staff are very particular about keeping the children's toys and play spaces clean so that the children will stay healthy. There is a regular roster for washing the toys and cleaning the centre and a dedicated cleaner.

I get all of the toys. All of them. And I wash them and put them out in the sun. Every day. I wash them, every day. The kids coming in and playing with them, clean toys.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

As well as using a systematic cleaning routine, staff keep records of children's attendance, plan weekly programs for the children's activities, and organise occasional excursions.



Washing routine



Cot outside

The centre has developed a relationship with the CDEP funded Fisheries program to educate the children about local food and language, and to act as a model for the work roles that occur in the community. The children also benefit from eating this healthy bush tucker.

They normally catch fresh fish and they (bring it to) childcare...fish, turtles and crab...Some of them learning things as well, when they look at that in the Yolgnu way and in the Balanda way, how it works. They (the kids) can listen to the words and 'I see that real fish there'.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

The Chairperson of the Child Care Centre committee (and Council member) explains how the Fisheries program goes beyond learning about sea animals and language. It is part of a long term strategy to model for young children what they might do when they are older, to bring to them examples of the work roles that are available for young people in the community.

We're thinking about the support, the learning, for the childcare is to have some sort of project group to, actually for the community to balance who they are and what things they do to help them (pause). They see the fish, but who got the fish? That they see things, but what do they actually do? So when they see this part of the learning, part of their growth, you know, for these young people.

Indigenous Child Care Management Committee Chairperson

Overall, the child care centre is seen as a very positive asset. This statement by the community nurse reflects these views.

Certainly if you go, and I go to the childcare centre, if you go there people seem to be very happy. The little kids they're not crying or sitting huddled in a corner. There seems to be very good interaction with, between the kids there, some Yolngu, some Balanda and the staff at the childcare. And I have no doubt that the standards, although I don't know, I would think that the standards of the childcare and responsibilities are certainly being met. I see (the director) and I think she's a good manager, a very good manager.

Non-Indigenous Health Nurse



There are young staff members who are mothers themselves and older staff members with experience and knowledge, a mix that the centre Director thinks is important to maintain. She talks about the benefits of having older workers with younger ones.



Singing songs

Well they would probably be bringing lullaby songs. They be bringing shell for children to play and other things, you know? They bring relations between the old ladies and the child. And they got more, more the old people got energy, no, not energy, I'm talking about sense, to think how to look after children. Because these young people, their children have been brought up by Grandma. See? People that have got the jobs here...

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

Another older child care worker talks about the importance of having older people to work in the centre.

We should get older ladies, older women to work in here... They think only young people working here... Hard you know. Hard work. Sweep and wash.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

As noted earlier, in this community Indigenous (Yolngu) and non-Indigenous (Balanda) families in the community use the centre and there are views about what both can learn.



Yolngu and Balanda children playing

Each child learns... different dialects and languages. So just imagine... You can't imagine! Well we are talking about why we can't make their learning the Western way of, you know, the 'Western' culture. But at the same time they got their own and we're looking at a small child who wants to learn, with a mother, father, grandfather, grandmother have their languages all the same time learning the 'Western', English, you know. And playing around with all the Balanda children, it's just lovely to see that.

Non-Indigenous Child Care Worker

Other staff members echo this view.



Lunch routine

At 5 years old they're learning their home responsibilities, learning about their home Yolngu language, to say 'thank you' and to say 'yes'. They have to learn about their Yolngu ways, also Balanda ways too. ... Both Ways, Yolngu, Balanda.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

Balanda, this Balanda child will come with a very broad way of thinking, because he's brought up with Yolngu children and this is how I see. I was mentioning it to, who is the Minister for Defence, he was here the other day, and we talked about reconciliation. Reconciliation starts here, when we saw the children sleeping in that room.

Non-Indigenous Child Care Worker



Child care worker helping child learn to ride a bike

Both ways, normal and Balanda ways...They all understand. They understand Balanda way...Yolgnu and Balanda they learn together... They have to learn about things but try to talk...their language, Yolgnu and Balanda.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

The perception of the staff is confirmed by the Indigenous pre-school teacher.



Child care worker drawing with children

I noticed a lot of difference with the ones that come from the childcare. They sort of more advanced. They sort of know the normal routines, like health and hygiene, washing their hands...they are already toilet trained where ones that just come straight in from the camps you have to teach them their toilet routines, set times every now and again sort of thing. But the childcare is really great. It's sort of like a head start for the child and children learn lots of things like behaviour stuff, how to behave at a childcare or at preschool because they are two different environments, where you have your home

which is different to behaviour you have in classroom and...you have a bit more, you concentrate a lot on behaviour for children before they start working on things. Stuff like that's very important...Social skills and things like toilet routines, speech, you know, different ways to talk to people. You know, when at



Hand washing

the beginning of the year, make it very clear to the parent and children that school starts 9:00. I am (name), their teacher. When the bell goes at 11:00, when you finish that morning tea, that's when I become your kinship relationship, like aunt or nana. That's what they call me, but during class it's (name)- teacher. And that seems to be work really well.

Indigenous Preschool Teacher

The CEO of the Community also reflects this view.

My observation has been that they have been taught how to sit and respond to instructions and get involved in discussions and talking and that sort of thing, painting and little activities and things. When the kids who haven't been there turn up it's unusual that they've had to sit still for half an hour at a time at anytime so it's much harder for them to settle in to the new school environment.

Non-Indigenous Community CEO

GETTING THE RIGHT 'MIX' OF STAFF AND PARENTS

While the centre is well respected and operates daily, there have been some problems in recent times with staffing and the mix of parents accessing the service. The staff in the centre, and more widely in the community, mentioned the problem of ensuring regular staff attendance. When staff are away from child care the centre may have to close because there are not enough staff to look after children. The director talked about the situation as she saw it.

There's something missing or something going on...You (can) tell straight away...if a person stays home. Because I know the background of Yolngu people. Aboriginal people, if they stayed home, there's a reason.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

One of the issues she is alluding to is that Aboriginal people have many responsibilities that may take them away from the child care for periods of time, such as funerals, illness, cultural responsibilities, trips to town and so on. If too many staff are away the child care centre has to close.

The child care centre is open from 8:00-4:00, the normal working hours of parents in the community. This is a long day for the Indigenous women who work there who have many other responsibilities to fulfil outside of their paid employment. They enjoy their work but also feel the pressure from their other responsibilities.

We have to look after the children. It's like looking after your own kids. You have to sit with a kid to train kids. You have to teach, cuddle the kids. You've got to make the children happy. When you go back home, then you've got another job there with your own kids and that's the biggest job in the child care that we ever come across. Like parents, like the carers here, the ladies, I think that they find it very difficult. It's a lot of work. Sometimes I can't do my other things because I have to be here all the time, look after the kids.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

Another staff member says that she cannot understand why the staff do not come to work as regularly as they should, although she adds that it might be because they find the work too hard. When asked if she personally finds the job enjoyable she says,

Sometimes I get stress. I go home...There is no time off during the day to do things. No time for nothing, rest break, lunch break.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

Another staff member mentions a different work related source of stress. Her child used to attend the child care centre but has now started going to the school. Even though she attends school she occasionally comes to the child care centre and asks her mother for food. This causes her mother some stress as she is aware of the fact that the food is for the children who attend the centre.

If she is starving for food and she'll come and ask me for lunch. And I'll get some food for lunch. But I'll buy it for her. Lunch.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

Another staff member suggests that some staff work erratically because child care work was not their first career choice. They may be there because the child care centre is one of the few opportunities in the community for training and employment.

Despite these problems, staff members who have been long term employees show a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to the service and the children. One such staff member has had to take an extended leave of absence because of her family responsibilities. She is the only person in her family able to look after a sick relative. She makes these comments.

I'll have to help the new person coming here. I'm really, my heart feels sad, a little bit, because I'm away, just for a little while. But I'll be back. I like to work here.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

There was discussion while we were visiting the community that some community members use the service more than others. Many of the staff are related to one another through family connections. Not all clans are represented on the staff of the centre although this was one of the original intentions. A child care worker recalled the original plans for the centre saying, 'This is all one family coming here. And that's not what it was originally for. It was for the whole community.'

The director of the centre has been trying to figure out why the mix of staff members working at the centre has changed.

Sometimes, they're here, might be that the interpretation has been went wrong, like the education here, that those ladies have been doing training and they think the training is only for the young people, and childcare is only for the young people to work, even though, I like to see this that anyone can get a job. Like if I could start...with two people, middle-aged or old people, to look after work.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

A non-Indigenous community member was asked about his perception of the use of the child care centre by the community. He offered this comment.

The clan focus in an organisation can be good but also can be detrimental when members of other clans shun a program because it's seen to belong to one clan.

Non-Indigenous community member

Another non-Indigenous community member who uses the centre for her own child suggested that cultural relationships, such as avoidance relationships that mean some family relations should not speak to one another, could be discouraging some families from using the centre. In this context she mentioned the fact that the preschool used a different approach to deal with this issue. The preschool has a regular attendance of large numbers of preschool children from different clan groups.

The non-Indigenous school Principal explained that the pre-school has explicitly recognised clan groups in their program. For at least part of the day, mothers have attended with their children. The pre-school teacher organises many of the children's activities by clan groups in separate areas within the classroom, and this arrangement seems to work well. He thought that this arrangement was one of the reasons why so many of the mothers came with their children to the pre-school and stayed with them for the morning. In addition, according to NT DEET* access rules, 3-year-olds must be accompanied by a parent in order to gain early entry to preschool.

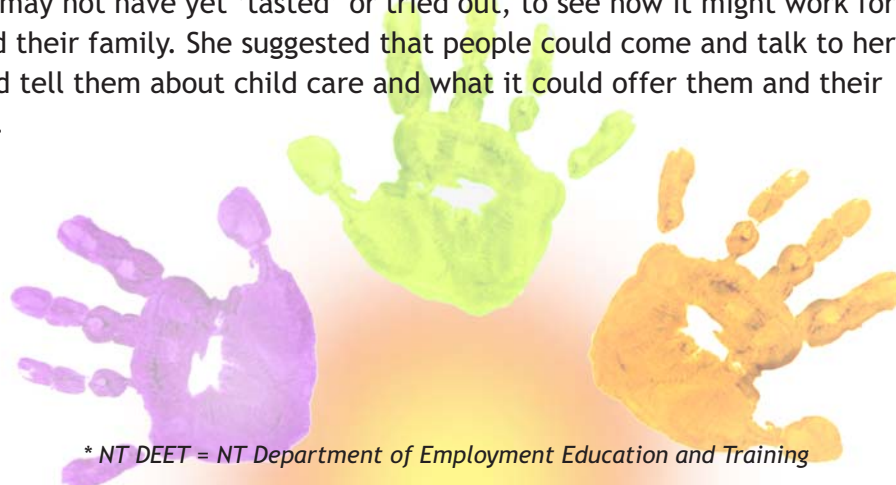
The variation in child attendance in programs was illustrated one of the days we visited the school. Most of the children were not at the school that day because there was a funeral in a nearby community. The Principal talked about the incredibly high mobility rate for children in the community associated with cultural activities and responsibilities. The dry season is also a time when people move around a lot for various reasons. During any given year, the principal explained, there could be nearly a 100% turn over rate of children who attended each class in the school, with perhaps only one child per class attending continuously for the whole year. In the previous year (2002), a total of 135 children had attended the pre-school at one time or another. When we were there in August, 2003, already 90 different children had attended the pre-school, with 48 children attending daily.

This mobility could also be affecting the child care centre attendance. In recent times there has been some decrease in the number of children who regularly attend the centre although this fluctuates a lot. The centre director reflected on this issue with us. We asked her whether some parents in the community might not know about the services that were offered by the child care centre. She responded;

They do, they know. They can see...(and then on further reflection) They don't know how to taste. You know, when you taste the honey or salt, bring the child to here.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

The director could see that child care was still a very new idea, one that some families may not have yet 'tasted' or tried out, to see how it might work for their child and their family. She suggested that people could come and talk to her and she could tell them about child care and what it could offer them and their children.



* NT DEET = NT Department of Employment Education and Training

The Chairman of the Child Care Centre Management Committee agreed and added,

This is what the childcare, this is what childcare is. And the services that childcare offers. And only gets to know, parents or friends, whatever, comes in, sit-down and maybe one night or one evening or so... sit down and talk, and socialize. (We should have an) event that will give them lot of (information), so they can completely go and talk about something. They can talk to, ask questions, and have a look at the centre, what the centre (is doing), during the normal hours. Other parents would like their kids to be there, would like to come in and say 'Look I want to come around and pay a visit down there one day.' (We need) stories to go out to the communities. This is what, this is what services... this is what childcare is.

Indigenous Child Care Management Committee Chairperson

Another 'tasting' issue that emerged in this conversation was the fact that parents must pay a fee for food provided at child care. Each parent pays \$5 per day for children's meals at the centre. This fee is automatically deducted from working parents' wages. If parents aren't working, the regular payment of fees becomes more difficult. Asked whether this fee could discourage some parents from using the centre the Director and Centre Management Committee Chairman agreed that it might.

That's one of the problems that we face.

Indigenous Centre Management Committee Chairperson

...Because in the schools they don't pay, help themselves, but you see here, we have today, they have to pay. And my question is that all along...Some parents weren't working...That was the problem. Because sometimes we had to ask where the five dollars was. No five dollars the next day. We never see that child. Maybe three or four child or five or ten child doesn't come.

That's where you going to be, you know, you have to be, one voice, talking to those people with no money, you know, looking at that you know, because child care is not different from the school. They're the same. Why these children are not getting? Aboriginal parents aware of these programs?...I was talking to one of the ladies...she comes here to Elcho for the ASSPA meeting ...and she said (child care children) was too young. Why too young?

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

The program the director is referring to is Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) funding provided to parents of children at the school. In some fundamental way, she sees the school and the child care exist for much the same purpose. They are there to support parents and to educate children. To the Director the different funding arrangements are inequitable. We talked about the Commonwealth government policy for ASSPA funding. The director responded,

Doesn't matter about the policy and we have to change the policy for this particular Yolngu community.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

In another discussion the director talked about the multiple sources of funding coming into the community to support young children. She thought that they could be coordinated more effectively, and suggested that perhaps the child care centre could be the coordinating body. For example, the 'Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture' money and the 'Breakfast Program' money were distributed through two other organisations within the community. Her strong belief was that funding for children must work for the convenience of the community, not for convenience of the funding agencies.

We should, these people should...helping each other because we're getting one money coming from one, from the Commonwealth. These people should be all working together. Like sometimes I have to look for somebody to cook the food for us.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

The Director would like to have a wider base of workers to draw on and sees the pooling of funding as one way to enable this to happen.

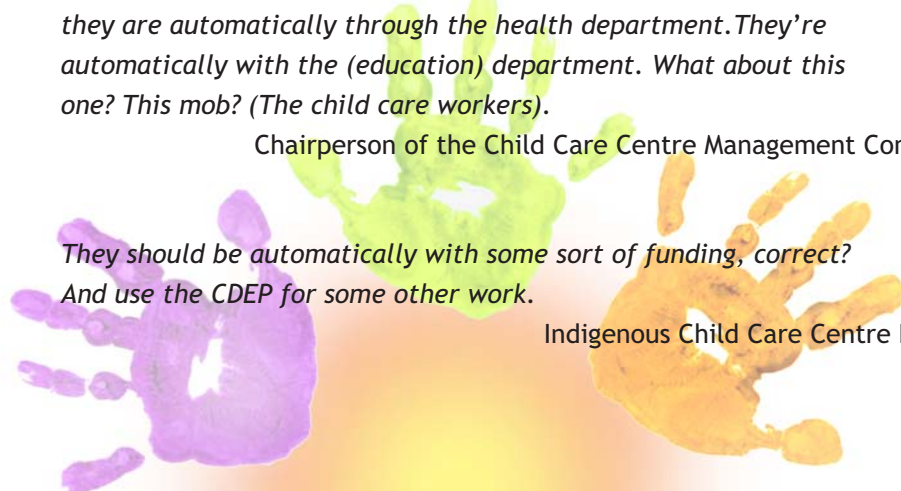
Chairperson of the Management Committee and the Director both spoke about child care staff being treated differently from school or health department staff in terms of funding and conditions.

But what we are saying is...teachers there, or health worker, they are automatically through the health department. They're automatically with the (education) department. What about this one? This mob? (The child care workers).

Chairperson of the Child Care Centre Management Committee

They should be automatically with some sort of funding, correct? And use the CDEP for some other work.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director



They were making the point that child care is, after all, education.

It's an early education anyway for them (the children) to take on board when they go to pre-school. By the time they get to preschool they know how to brush their tooth or whatever.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

Another possible reason for fluctuating attendance is the importance in the community that very young children are looked after by someone the family knows and trusts, a person with a family relationship to the child. Unlike the preschool, where mothers often attend with their children, at the child care centre children are left in the care of others. We asked the centre Director whether she thought this could be one of the reasons for the change in attendance and she agreed and talked about strategies for achieving the 'right mix' of people to work in the child care centre. She explained that at the beginning, when the child care centre was first trying to get established, the main thrust of their energy was staffing the child care centre with women who were interested in getting training and working in the child care centre.

That something I can help with. Because I know for me, like I've come to a point where, I'm not sure how we can, we need to talk about how we can work together so I can better support the childcare centre. Before now it's been all about getting more women trained, now they're trained and we need to talk, now what do we do?

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

While talking about these issues with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members many people made helpful suggestions. The centre director brought up the idea of relocating the child care centre to operate within the school. She thought that perhaps this might lead to improved access to resources for child care, increased attendance of children and additional staff support as there would be a larger staff pool to draw on when child care staff were not able to come to work.

An Indigenous council member thought it would be a good idea to have a camp leader for each camp (or clan), funded through the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), someone who could support families belonging to one clan on their 'learning journey', linking them to suitable programs available in the community. He talked about the importance of people being able to participate in cultural activities and meet their cultural obligations while at the same time complying with licensing regulations and 'Western' expectations and funding requirements. For example, when a funeral occurs, he thought that programs such as child care should not have to close due to lack of staff as they currently did. The program should be flexible enough to allow people to fulfil their cultural responsibilities.

A non-Indigenous person suggested that a solution to the problem of perceptions that one clan owned the service might be to advertise for workers in a wider way, rather than relying on people known to the service employees who were apparently available for work. The Director is also aware of this issue and confirmed that the original staffing profile represented different clans. However, over time this had changed. One of the reasons for the change was the difficulties the Director had in speaking to staff from a different clan group about work performance issues. Sometimes it was not possible for her to speak directly to that person. She often had to seek help from non-Indigenous support workers outside of the community in order to have these kinds of discussions.

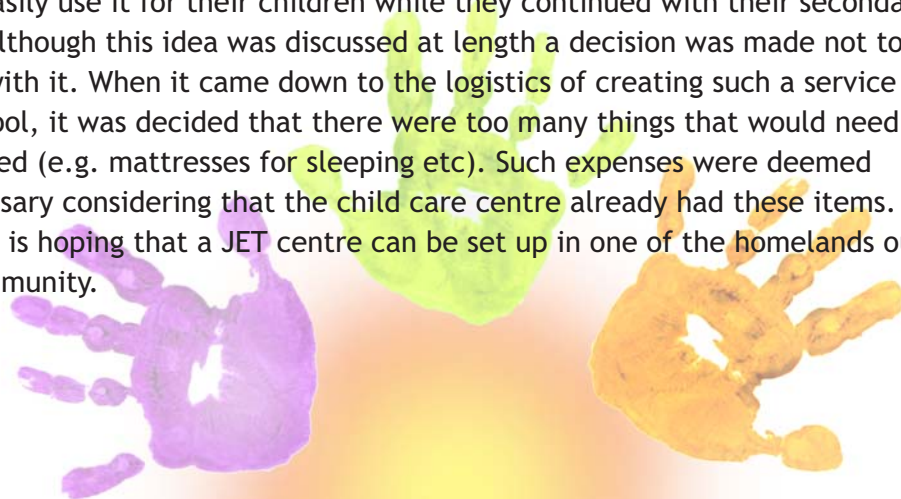
Another Indigenous community member suggested that there should be 3 key positions available in any organisation so that it would be possible to recruit from and have representation from each main clan group.

A non-Indigenous community member suggested that a lot of trained people in the community were not using their training. For instance, he was aware that many grandmothers had been trained as teachers but stayed at home to look after children. This may also explain why younger women were more likely to be recruited as workers in the child care centre, because they were available for work and needed the opportunity to get some training.

CONCLUSIONS

This child care service is an important service for the community and plays a key role in its long term plans by providing education and health services for young children. The vision for child care as the starting place for education, as a preparation for school, and as a place for both Yolngu and Balanda children to learn together seems to be widely accepted in the community and is certainly reinforced in the child care centre. The centre is also valued as providing training opportunities for many younger and older women.

For a period of time the community considered the viability of setting up a Jobs, Education and Training (JET) crèche linked to the school so that young mothers could easily use it for their children while they continued with their secondary study. Although this idea was discussed at length a decision was made not to go ahead with it. When it came down to the logistics of creating such a service within the school, it was decided that there were too many things that would need to be purchased (e.g. mattresses for sleeping etc). Such expenses were deemed unnecessary considering that the child care centre already had these items. The director is hoping that a JET centre can be set up in one of the homelands outside the community.



In recent times the child care centre has experienced some change in the participation of parents who use the service and identified that the change may be related to the staffing profile. Staff who have worked for a long time in the child care centre are deeply committed to their jobs but also very tired. The mix of staff has changed over time. These issues have been acknowledged by the director and some ideas for solving the problem are being discussed.

The child care centre continues to be a symbol of successful Indigenous control and management of a community service and the community is proud of having achieved such a high level of training amongst the staff. It has come full circle in its development cycle and seems to be at a point where fresh ideas are being explored in order to renew the service.



CHAPTER 4



GURUNGU

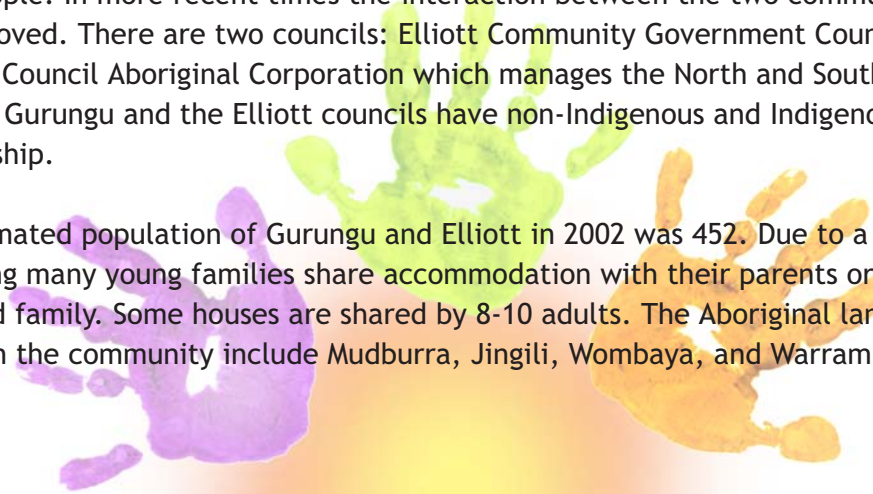
Open to opportunities + what the community needs now = A good place for 'kids'

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

The community of Gurungu is located approximately 250 kilometres from Tennant Creek and 850 kilometres from Darwin on the Stuart Highway. The Gurungu community is split in two parts (North Camp and South Camp) with the township of Elliott located in the middle. It has an air strip that can become flooded for periods of time each wet season as can the highway both north and south of the community.

The community is the traditional home of the Jingili people (Djingili) which include people at Beetaloo, Newcastle Waters, Elliott and Daly Waters. The traditional name for the area is Kulumindini. The town of Elliott and Gurungu community sit side by side. Their location is on important dreaming tracks, past cattle droving crossroads and the main road highway in the Territory running north and south. After the arrival of Europeans many local Indigenous people in the surrounding area were employed in the pastoral industry. In World War II Elliott was a staging post for the army as it moved north to Darwin. Gurungu North Camp came into being in 1968 and South Camp in 1976 when award wages were made mandatory for Aboriginal workers resulting in many people coming in from the surrounding areas to live in Elliott. There was a long history of exclusion of Indigenous people by the non-Indigenous people in the township of Elliott which is still remembered by many local people. In more recent times the interaction between the two communities has improved. There are two councils: Elliott Community Government Council and Gurungu Council Aboriginal Corporation which manages the North and South Camp. Both the Gurungu and the Elliott councils have non-Indigenous and Indigenous membership.

The estimated population of Gurungu and Elliott in 2002 was 452. Due to a shortage of housing many young families share accommodation with their parents or extended family. Some houses are shared by 8-10 adults. The Aboriginal languages spoken in the community include Mudburra, Jingili, Wombaya, and Warramungu

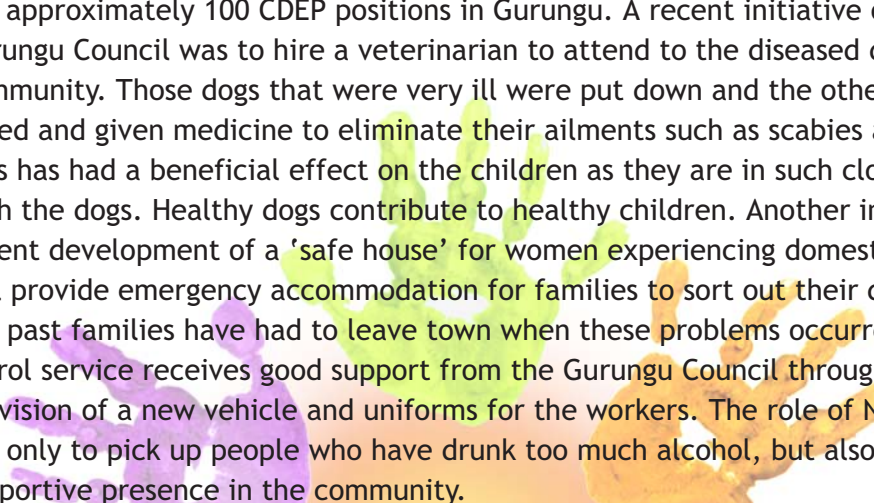


although the majority of people speak English well or English only (Elliott Community Profile, 2002, Aboriginal Community Health Information Profiles).

On the Stuart Highway there are three petrol stations with stores and take-away services attached, one of which is owned and run by the community. This community facility also provides serviced rooms for travellers. A pub on the highway provides accommodation as well and sells some locally made crafts and carvings. Two other road houses are also available and two caravan parks. In the town of Elliott, the school, church, health centre, youth centre, the Elliott Town Council, police station, women's refuge, library, post office, and foot ball oval are located. In North Camp, the Gurungu Community Council, the radio station (BRACS), basket ball courts, and Women's Centre and child care are located. There are 34 houses in North Camp and 10 in South Camp. A skateboard park was built just off the highway in the Elliott township but has since become a bit of a 'white elephant' as children do not have skateboards to use on it and concerns about legal issues prevent its use.

Approximately 100 children are enrolled in the Elliott school which employs 4 teachers, 3 assistants, and offers preschool through year 11. A language centre operates at the school three days per week. The school has been operating since 1956. For a while it was a school for non-Indigenous only and the Indigenous children went to the nearby community of Marlinja. In the 1960s it once again opened as a school for all of the children in the community. There is no doctor or dentist in town. This means that people with chronic diseases or conditions requiring the supervision of a doctor must leave town.

The Gurungu Council is responsible for a number of community businesses and enterprises including the Women's Centre, school canteen, night patrol, and the Ampol Petrol station which includes a store with controlled prices and an accommodation facility. The Council also runs a town bus service that picks up and delivers people to the different town and camp locations throughout the day. There are approximately 100 CDEP positions in Gurungu. A recent initiative of the Gurungu Council was to hire a veterinarian to attend to the diseased dogs in the community. Those dogs that were very ill were put down and the others were de-sexed and given medicine to eliminate their ailments such as scabies and worms. This has had a beneficial effect on the children as they are in such close contact with the dogs. Healthy dogs contribute to healthy children. Another initiative is the recent development of a 'safe house' for women experiencing domestic violence. It will provide emergency accommodation for families to sort out their difficulties. In the past families have had to leave town when these problems occurred. The Night Patrol service receives good support from the Gurungu Council through the provision of a new vehicle and uniforms for the workers. The role of Night Patrol is not only to pick up people who have drunk too much alcohol, but also to be a supportive presence in the community.



There used to be a significant problem with break-ins and vandalism in the community but this has improved significantly in recent times. At one point a world class international football oval with a computerised watering system, toilet block and flood lighting was installed outside of town. However it fell into disrepair through lack of use. Recently it was resurrected through a Gurungu community initiative. It became an army staging post when the Australian army supported the campaign in East Timor. The whole town turned out to support this community initiative which involved feeding and accommodating 300 army personnel. The community was recognised for the high quality services they provided with awards from the army.

THE GURUNGU CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

We remind readers again that there are a number of factors fundamental to the development of a children's service in a remote community including;

- the overall capacity of the council to conduct the business of the community,
- the size of the community,
- the amount of ongoing support and training provided by interested external agencies, and
- the length of time a specific service for children has been operating.

Given these factors, for this case study, the message we want to highlight (a) openness of staff to opportunities for collaboration within the community and (b) attention to what the community needs now has meant that for children in Gurungu (c) the Women's Centre is 'a good place for kids'.

The Gurungu service for young children is located at the Women's Centre, and plays an important role in the community. The Women's Centre is named, 'Naayakuku, Wawala, and Amanjamanja Centre', which translates 'Women, Babies and Children's Centre'. It is located in a building that previously housed the CDEP office near the Gurungu Community Council.

The first funded service for young children began in the nearby township of Elliott in 1991. It was funded under a 'Special Services, Child Care' grant from the Commonwealth through the NT Department of Health and Community Services. During the period 1991–1993 it received a recurrent grant. It was run from the original Women's Centre located in the township of Elliott, underneath a house on stilts. That house is now being redeveloped to become a 'Safe House' for women and children in the community. The Women's Centre moved to its present location in Gurungu North Camp in 2001. The current facility receives funding from Jobs Education and Training (JET) for a crèche for young children, Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) funding to run a program for older school aged children, funding for Vacation Care programs, and funding associated with the Women's Centre

programs such as Aged Care. The Centre operates from 8am–12 noon, Monday through Friday, for children 0–4years old during the school term. The Senior Supervisor for all of the programs sums up the overall program as ‘a place for kids’. The centre is open for all children in the community.



Women's Centre sign

The Centre took on responsibility for Outside School Hours Care in 2002. This program operates on weekdays from 2.30–4.00 pm after which time most of the children are either picked up by the Youth Centre Program Coordinator or they stay at the centre. The Centre has a good relationship with the Youth Centre Program which provides sport and recreation activities for children from 4.00–6.00 pm. These kinds of activities are beyond the scope of the child

care program because they do not have the space or the equipment to run them. The OSHC service is used primarily by school age children up to ten years olds during the school term.

During school break periods the Centre also runs a Vacation Care Program on weekdays for the school age children and the preschool aged children join in. At this time the staff try to organise exciting activities that involve not only the children but their families as well. One example that is still talked about is the ‘Family Fun Day’ that was held at the local lake not far from town.

The kids love going out bush—Family Fun Day at the lake got good support.

Indigenous Women's Centre Senior Supervisor

The community owned bus goes out to Marlinja, an outstation 25km north of Elliott, two or three days of the week. Children from Marlinja are able to take part in school holiday activities as well as the local children. The older teenage children who go away from the community to boarding school come back to town during their school breaks. They are involved in helping out at the Centre with their younger siblings. As a result, the school holiday program is the largest and most active program operating at the Centre.

The Women's Centre offers the younger children a range of activities. The children have equipment and materials for playing inside and outside. The equipment and toys include things like bikes, balls, buckets, paints, pencils, trucks, dolls, and books. Wooden shelves have been built in to one side of a storeroom where most of the toys are kept. The art and craft supplies are kept in the storeroom in a steel cabinet that has locking doors.

The Centre has child-size tables and chairs, a television and video, a radio/CD/cassette player, a very large bookcase with lots of books. There are also some cots for the babies and sleep mats.



Children in play room

There are two large children's play rooms, two sleep rooms, an office, a kitchen, a nappy change area, a bathroom with a shower and one adult size toilet and one child size toilet, a storeroom and a work room for the women's activities. One room is set up with a mat next to the book shelves where children often play with toys.

The women's activity room is a small room with a work table, paints for women's painting, ironing board and a sewing machine. A washing machine is located in a shed outside the building so that people can access it after hours and on the weekends. Most of the community come to the Women's Centre to use the washing machine, especially on the weekends. Men come to use the machine too. Staff talked about this arrangement as working well because it brings more of the community to the women's centre and they can see what goes on.

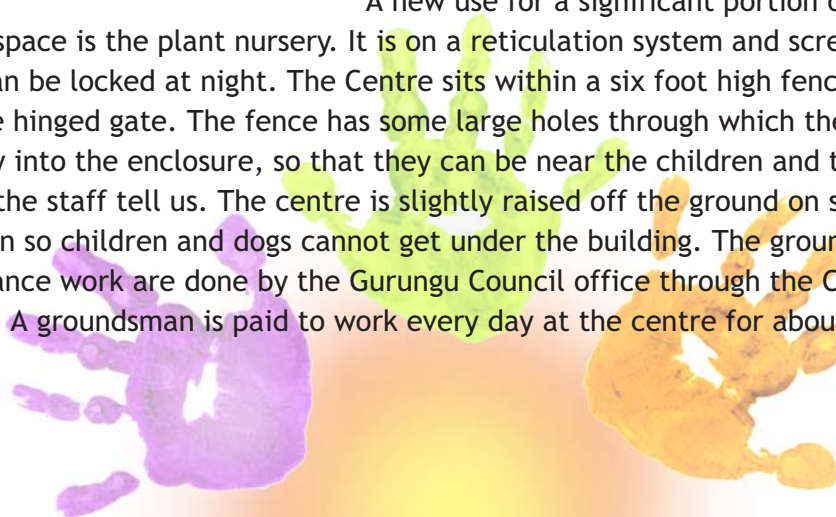
The building has a large overhanging roof which allows for outside shade and shelter. The women and children use these areas to meet, talk, play, and for



Children in digging patch

watching what is happening in the community. While the yard has no fixed playground equipment it is a good place to play. There is a popular digging patch at the back of the centre. The front yard of the centre has grass, shade trees and shrubs. Along the side of the building is a sandpit. Near the laundry shed is a cleared area used for large group activities.

A new use for a significant portion of the outdoor space is the plant nursery. It is on a reticulation system and screened in so that it can be locked at night. The Centre sits within a six foot high fence which has one large hinged gate. The fence has some large holes through which the dogs find their way into the enclosure, so that they can be near the children and their families the staff tell us. The centre is slightly raised off the ground on stilts but is meshed in so children and dogs cannot get under the building. The grounds and maintenance work are done by the Gurungu Council office through the CDEP program. A groundsman is paid to work every day at the centre for about 4 hours.



Maintenance work, however, can at times be slow. Council workers have done a lot of work at the centre, such as moving the shed and constructing the new plant nursery. Some things get done quickly. The director says that working with the Council is good because they say to her, 'Just give us a list' and then they do the work. Sometimes though, things can take a long time to get fixed, for example the lock on the front door to the centre was broken for months.

A typical day for the staff at the women's centre starts at 8.30. A few young children arrive every day for breakfast. An important part of the program is the breakfast, and morning and afternoon teas provided each day to children.



Mother visiting
with baby

It's the little ones in the morning, only five or six in the morning, the little ones...I make smoko's for the little ones, when the little ones come in. To give them breakfast here, cause the kids don't have breakfast at home. So we give them breakfast here...We get some of the preschoolers coming here in the morning that don't go to preschool so they come here in the mornings.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

Community members told us that they preferred that the children went to the Women's Centre if they were not going to go to school because they know then that the children are being looked after and are safe.

Some mothers come and sit with them. Settle them down and help them eat breakfast.

Indigenous Senior Supervisor

Children go home for lunch. The staff prepare the activity rooms and do some cleaning. When there is a community event on, such as a meeting or visitors, the Women's Centre staff will prepare some food for the meeting and make sure that the right women attend the meeting. Children can do painting and pasting activities, play in the sand, play with trucks and dolls, have water play, listen to stories and music, sing, go on excursions around town and watch television and videos. One of their favourite videos is of the Open Day that took place in 2002, a special event held for NAIDOC week. One staff member commented on how much the children love to watch themselves in the egg and spoon race and the tug of war.

Some activities for children are set up by staff but often children find their own activities. The pre-school aged children come to the centre at 11:00. They always have a drink and something to eat then. After lunch break some of the younger children come back to the centre. At this time the children find their own activities and play inside or outside as they choose.

The Elliott Primary School is located in the town of Elliott about 2 kilometres up the road so the School bus brings the children attending the Out of School Hours Care program at about 3:00. Children have a drink and a snack. They usually do



After school care children

outdoor activities such as throwing balls, riding on bikes, playing with dolls or play in the digging patch at the back of the centre. Some children will stay inside to do some drawing or weaving. At 4:00 the Youth Centre bus picks up any children who want to go back to Elliott to participate in the Youth Centre program. Some children stay at child care until home time which is between 4:30–5:00.

Because of the eligibility requirements for families using the JET Crèche program, i.e. parents need to be participating in work, study or activities at the centre, the Senior Supervisor must keep these records as well as attendance records of children. The grants are paid to the Gurungu Council which is responsible for administering the monies for the different programs and for supporting each of the programs.

According to the staff at the centre families expect the child care program to provide their children with the following services;

- a place for children and a place where children want to go to and where they can be looked after, be safe and supervised
- fun things and toys that keep them busy and activities like painting, listening to stories and music, dancing, going on excursions, playing in the sand.
- help to learn to respect things and look after the equipment and other people's things.
- learning about looking after themselves and having good hygiene like using the toilet, blowing the nose, washing hands before eating and after toileting.
- good foods and snacks and to learn about having a healthy lifestyle.
- community people who can teach children about their Language and Culture
- help to learn about growing plants and how to look after them.





Children & staff in new
plant nursery

The new plant nursery has fruit and other trees for sale to members of the community and it may also be used to teach children and adults new skills about caring for plants. Like the washing machine it is seen as a draw card to bring more of the community into the Women's Centre.

There are fewer young children attending the centre in year 2003–2004 than in 2002–2003. When we asked about the drop in enrolments the staff and community members were not sure why this has happened. They talked about the children who live in

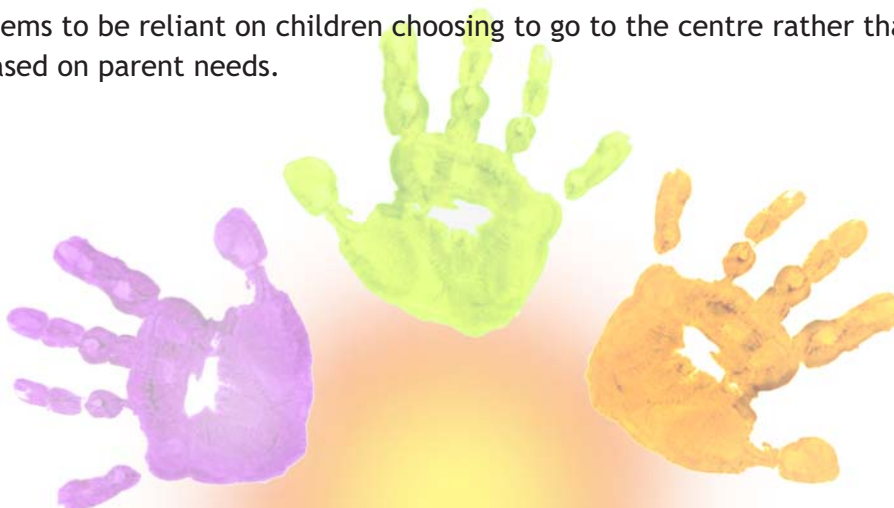
North Camp and who could easily walk to child care by themselves as those who tended to come most regularly. Children from South camp or the town of Elliott must come with parents on the bus. The community owns and runs a publicly available bus system that circulates throughout the town and both sections of the community continuously but younger children don't use it by themselves and very few families own cars. Staff believe this could be having an effect on attendance at the child care. Staff also thought that many of the children in the community who used to attend the child care had reached preschool age and thus no longer attended child care in the mornings. The nurse at the Health Clinic told us that there have been very few children have been born in the community in the last few years.

A child care worker talked about how children seem to arrive at child care when they see other children are there.

They just walk in the (centre)...Usually when they see a lot of kids... 'Oh, there something happening! Let's go see what's happening.'

Indigenous Child Care Worker

The use of the centre seems to be much more informal than town-based child care centres or even than those centres we have visited in other remote communities. It seems to be reliant on children choosing to go to the centre rather than being based on parent needs.



Those families who use the centre are very happy with their children going to the Women's Centre. They feel the children are well looked after. One parent compared the children's lives with his own growing up in the community.

When we was growing up, walk in the scrub, jump off houses with big umbrellas, climb up tanks, jump off tanks...We did some dangerous things too. Lucky no one got hurt. In child care everyone's watching them all the time. You know they're being looked at. We use to just roam around, you know.

Indigenous parent

This parent also drives the school bus in the mornings to pick up children for school. Sometimes they won't go to school and in that case he thinks it's better for them to be at the Women's Centre.

Sometimes I come around on the bus and they're sitting there and I honk the horn and tell them to jump on the bus and get them to school...But it's up to the parents, you know what I mean? Well, if they're not going there, it's good if they come here (meaning the Women's Centre)...It's better than if they are, instead of just waltzing around like we used to.

Indigenous parent

He also talked about how his 3 year old little girl loved going to the centre.

She's very smart, thanks to the Women's Centre. Sometimes she doesn't even want to come home. She'd rather be down there than with us at home (laughing). Makes me worry sometimes. And they get fed there as well which is good because my girl at home doesn't eat much.

Indigenous parent

The CEO of the Gurungu Community Council told us that the community as a whole supported the Women's Centre.

The whole community knows and appreciates what is done at the Women's Centre, especially the Vacation Care.

CEO Gurungu Community Council

The location of the Women's Centre away from most of the other facilities for children and families in Elliott means that close cooperation between the child care program and the health clinic, school, shops and other services in the township that might support the child care program is not automatic or easy. For example, if the shop were near the Women's Centre perhaps it would be more convenient for parents to bring their child to child care while they did the shopping. In other ways its location near the Gurungu Council Office is very convenient.

The senior supervisor/ director needs to check in and take care of paper work at the Community Council on a daily basis. She lives across the road from the Women's Centre and tells us that she likes being able to keep an eye on the centre at night. Staff can walk over to the Gurungu Council to borrow the 22 seater bus for excursions. They like to take the children to the nearby lake. The main meeting area for the community is next to the Gurungu Council offices, making it is easy for the women to provide the catering for meetings. The centre also has its own 8 seater van that can be parked in the Council vehicle lock up where it will be safe. On school holidays they walk children across the road to the basket ball courts which are also close by.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME

The centre has a central role in providing women in the community with opportunities for paid work and a range of other activities. As the Senior Supervisor puts it, the centre is 'for all the women in the community to come and join in'. The staff in the centre often organise whole of community activities that they cannot manage on their own. Both men and women from the community come and help out. The women in the community use the centre regularly for a range of different activities. They sew, care for the children, work for other programs such as meals on wheels for the elderly, paint pictures, make sandwiches for community meetings and just meet up to talk to each other.

It's a place for women to meet, to sit down and talk, a place that gives women something to do.

Indigenous staff member

Although known through out the community as the 'Women's Centre' and place for women and children, men are also made to feel welcome.

Even the men come for smoko...Men can come. They ask first though. They often help out with what needs to be done.

Indigenous Women's Centre Senior Supervisor

Men also play a significant role too in helping the centre raise extra funds.



Disco dance

Men, they're there for us—help out with barbecues, the discos, their local band. When we have um, also we have the band, the local band members for support. You know, like whenever we have a fundraiser or something or when we get ah, something special, they're there for us. They put on a band.

Indigenous Women's Centre Senior Supervisor

JUGGLING STAFF AND PROGRAMS

The programs for the women and children work closely together. The children's programs operate in conjunction with and to support the women's activities. Separate funding is received for the different programs that operate at the Women's Centre. The funds go towards operating and administering the programs, paying staff to work in the programs, and buying equipment to run the programs. Parent/ family members do not pay to use the programs.

The staff and community are very proud of their Women's Centre and the recognition they have received for their hard work through the Territory Tidy Town awards. They have won the award twice.



Tidy Towns 'Best Women's Centre' Award

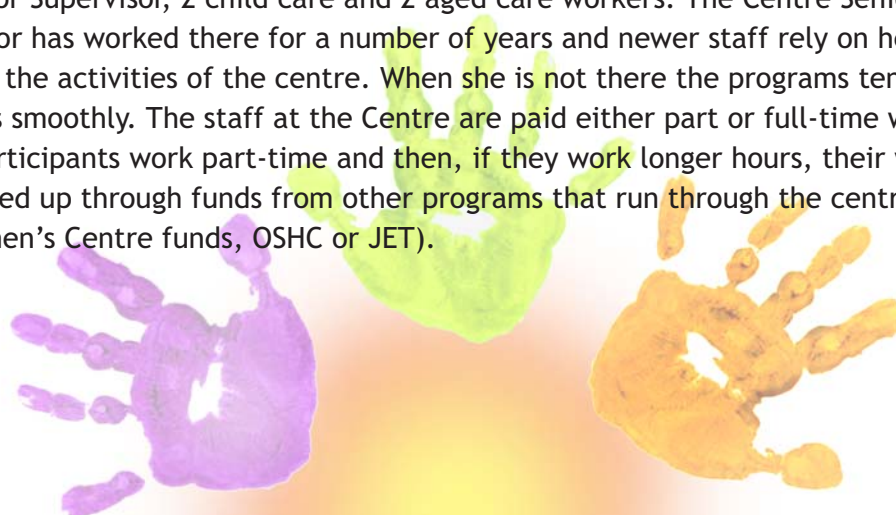
When we was, see we went up (to Darwin) for...Territory Tidy Town. We won...the Women's Centre won runner-up. ...The last time we won the best centre. It's up there (pointing inside). When we get the award we come back and we put on a big 'barbe'.

Indigenous Women's Centre Senior Supervisor

When they had the tidy town thing, the award there, at Carlton Hotel, it was really good cause it's nice up there, and after we got our award people started calling us cause they wanted advice about running a Women's Centre at their home. So they started ringing us and asking us how we got our program up and running.

Indigenous child care worker

There are 5 staff employed at the centre although this varies depending on the availability of CDEP positions within the community. Eight staff were employed at the Women's Centre on our first visit. On our second visit there were five including the Senior Supervisor, 2 child care and 2 aged care workers. The Centre Senior Supervisor has worked there for a number of years and newer staff rely on her to organise the activities of the centre. When she is not there the programs tend not to run as smoothly. The staff at the Centre are paid either part or full-time wages. CDEP participants work part-time and then, if they work longer hours, their wages are topped up through funds from other programs that run through the centre (i.e. the Women's Centre funds, OSHC or JET).



Most of them comes in the morning, and just leaves me and (C) in the afternoon. Most of the ladies does the mornings like they cleaned and sweep up, mop the floor, wash the dishes, and all that...

Indigenous Child Care Worker

Many of the women who work in the program work through the CDEP. They tend to move in and out of positions in different organisations and/or businesses run by the Community Council because their CDEP pay can move with them without too much disruption. We talked to the Community Non-Indigenous CEO about work opportunities in the community. He told us that there were more opportunities now for the women to access the CDEP and get paid work than in the past. One of the Indigenous community members confirmed this. 'It wasn't like that before. The Senior Supervisor, although she finds it hard to manage the new staff who come and go, recognises that they can bring new skills and knowledge to the centre.

It can help to have people who have moved from job to job, as people learn new things in every job.

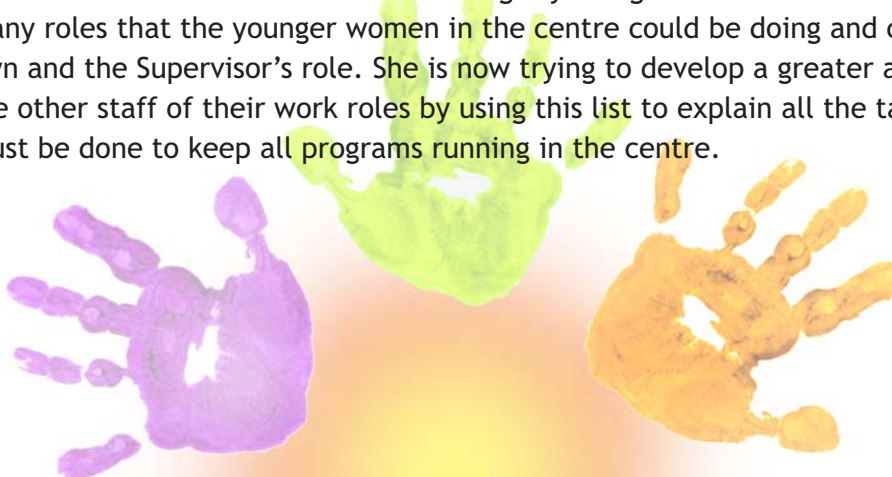
Indigenous Senior Supervisor

Staff who work at the Centre tend to be related to each other which is not surprising in such a small community. They like to come and work in a place where they know the other staff and already have an established relationship.

It's like one large family...Yes, it's just like one family because of such a small community.

Non-Indigenous CEO

The jobs and work of the Centre are shared out amongst the staff. A long term and reliable staff member who had worked closely with the Senior Supervisor passed away late last year. She knew her role and helped with many of the tasks that had to be done in the centre. The Senior Supervisor talked about how difficult it is for her when staff leave the job suddenly or don't come to work. Recently she reviewed all of the roles and responsibilities of staff at the centre as a result of discussions she had with us about staffing. By doing this exercise she identified many roles that the younger women in the centre could be doing and clarified her own and the Supervisor's role. She is now trying to develop a greater awareness in the other staff of their work roles by using this list to explain all the tasks that must be done to keep all programs running in the centre.



When we discussed staff roles they explained that workers at the centre were employed to carry out these duties:

Childcare Workers

- Look after and supervise the children but don't necessarily tell them what to do all the time.
- Get activities ready for the children and pack up and clean up after.
- Encourage the children to help with clean up.
- Clean, sweep, and mop floors.
- Clean the toys.
- Cook food for the children
- Clean the dishes.
- Feed the children; breakfast and snacks.
- Help children with their toileting needs.

Aged Care Workers

- Assist with the aged people in the community.
- Cook meals and assist with feeding where necessary.
- Assist with washing clothes.

Gardener

- Look after the grounds and plants; planting, watering, pruning, raking, weeding and mowing.
- Assist with setting up the plant nursery.
- Help the children to learn about growing plants and caring for them.

Senior Supervisor

- Coordinate the activities of the Centre.
- Open and close the centre
- Staff the programs of the Centre.
- Organise opportunities for the women at the Centre and the community to access and gain new skills and knowledge.
- Support and assist the workers to understand their jobs
- Keep attendance/ activity records of staff and children who use the programs.
- Organise fundraising activities for Women's Centre programs as well as other community groups.



None of the staff in the centre have had child care training although some have received formal and recognised training in other areas such as a Certificate in Librarianship, driving licenses, Growth and Assessment training, training in suicide prevention and so on. A Remote Area Child Care Support Unit staff member has been visiting the community and providing in-service training for the child care staff to help them to develop their program, provide developmentally appropriate play activities, work on health and hygiene practices, and so on. She also assists staff through regular phone calls and by encouraging and enabling their attendance at child care related forums and conferences.

Over the years community women have had the opportunity, many of these organised through the Women's Centre, to participate in workshops and learn skills in the following areas:

- Sewing and art and craft work
- Health and hygiene
- Driver education
- Drug and alcohol awareness workshop
- Suicide prevention workshop
- Nutrition in general and nutrition for new mums
- Ear care and hearing
- Growth and Assessment Screening
- Activities to do with children
- How to set up play spaces for children
- How best to store and utilise equipment
- Setting rules with and for children and guiding them to follow the rules
- Encouraging children to look after their equipment and to help to clean up after activities



The Senior Supervisor spoke about recent in-services for community women and staff provided through the Women's Centre.

We get the nutritionist comes down here and she teaches the ladies about cooking and that...(and we) had two ladies came out from Darwin we asked them if they could have a program... They got this growth assessment too but, (we asked) if we could have it here at Women's Centre... We get people from like um, from the health department that comes teach us about (health), how to look after the bodies with high blood pressure and heart diseases.

Indigenous Senior Supervisor

Another opportunity to learn, mentioned by the staff, was visits from the JET Field Worker. When she visits she helps staff with their program. For example, on her last trip she noticed that rooms where the children played had become disorganised so she spent time helping staff to organise their equipment. She also reinforced the need for the program to meet funding requirements. There have been some problems recently. The number of child care aged children using the centre (the under 5 year olds) has dropped. The JET staff member we talked to explained that the funding available for supporting child care initiatives in remote communities is limited and there are many communities asking for funding. A funded program must continually demonstrate that it has an ongoing need for the funds or else the funds will be redirected to a community with a greater need. In 2003, the Gurungu child care program was at risk of losing its JET funding as a result of this situation.

Child care training and support activities provided from outside the community are appreciated by the staff but they only occur every few months which makes it difficult for staff to sustain the suggested practices. During our visits we discussed this situation with the Senior Supervisor. We talked about the nationally recognised assessment process known as 'Workplace Assessment'. The Senior Supervisor thought that workplace assessment would be a good way to have her own and other staff's existing skills recognised. A lecturer from Batchelor Institute is planning to work with staff in July 2004 to conduct workplace assessment in order to document workers existing skills and make training plans for the competencies they will need to complete a Certificate in child care. The Senior Supervisor talked about her wish to access more child care training. She wanted to learn more about children and how to manage the many programs and staff of the Centre. If possible, she would like to train as a teacher.

Train for childcare work and even do the early childhood thing (teacher education)...What I want to do is something for the kids.

Indigenous Senior Supervisor

The Gurungu Council CEO indicated that funding for training in general had become very tight in the last year.

I did that the last year, organized all this training, a mile of it. It comes to about \$100,000 worth of training. Then they froze all the funding for training, through DEET. And that was the end of it...I just sat there looking at it. The only thing I managed to get going was the automotive training and there's eight people doing that now, at the workshop. But the trainer's not getting paid for it. The funds were frozen. It still is frozen.

Non-Indigenous CEO

The CEO did not think that a child care course delivered in the community was viable with only 2 or 3 women likely to take it up. For Batchelor Institute (the leading training organisation delivering training in remote Indigenous NT communities) to deliver on site training, at least 10 students must be available to do the course. There would not be enough people interested in child care training to warrant putting on a course in the community. The women would have to leave the community to get training. This can be very unsettling for families and, in the case of the Women's Centre, it would mean closing down while the women were away training.

Over the years staff have had some opportunities to attend workshops for child care workers outside the community, for example in Darwin. Recently staff were going to take a trip to Borroloola to see the new child care centre that had just opened. These learning opportunities are highly valued by staff but, again, they have occurred infrequently.

We got invited to go to Borroloola to watch the, to look at how they run their program, their thing up there. So they invited us to go down there.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

Two of the child care workers from Gurungu were able to go to a workshop called, 'It takes a whole community to keep children safe and strong' in October 2002, held in Darwin by the Remote Area Children's Services Support Unit (RACSSU). This workshop brought 15 communities together. One of the key recommendations from the workshop was that an annual opportunity to get together was needed.



The Women's Centre and Community work together to support each other. The Women's Centre offers much more than child care to the community. In talking to staff and community member it is clear that they see the role of the Women's Centre as working for the whole community.

It's not just looking after children. It's more of meeting place for the women to get together and discuss matters and things that they need to discuss, you know, 'women's business'...It's not just after school care. It's not just vacation care. When the children finish school there's somewhere for them to go. When the school is closed, they've got somewhere else to go. Programs are put on for them. Sports are put on for them. They have trips to the lake. There's things organized for them when the school closes down. That's done through the Women's Centre. So is not just childcare.

Non-Indigenous CEO



Senior Supervisor selling plants from the nursery

Fundraising is an important activity of staff at the centre. They are keen fundraisers and do this well. The monies earned are used for things like Christmas gifts for children, sporting activities, and to enable community members to attend activities out of town. The Centre Senior Supervisor talked about the most recent 'money spinner', the plant nursery.

Shady trees, and we sell it to the community and they come and buy it and we told them they not going to put them aside. We want the money up front so when we get that, we'll have plants and we'll have a little nursery, a money spinner.

Indigenous Senior Supervisor

The money is banked during the year and when Christmas comes the money is used to buy presents for every child in the community.

What we do, the women centre ladies, we...have a Christmas time, we get Christmas for the kids. We collect the presents. That's what we do. We put money away so we'll have money for presents for the kids. That's what we did last year. We had a little party. We had a little Christmas with Santa Claus. That's what we did last year. (C) went with them to Katherine. Bought all the Christmas.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

During one of our visits we were able to witness one of the regular fundraising activities. The Women's Centre organised an evening disco at the basket ball courts near the Women's Centre. Virtually everyone in town attended. Staff held a raffle at the disco and sold soft drinks. There was a small entry fee. There were many tasks to be accomplished to enable this event to take place. The basket ball courts had to be swept to remove any broken glass. One of the men organised this. The cooler had to be filled with ice, cans of drink purchased from the store, the music system transported to the basket ball courts, CD's located, tables and chairs organised and so on. Sometimes the local band, the 'Storm Riders', help out by playing music at the disco. Many people helped out and the disco was a great success. We asked the women how they got so much support from the community for these kinds of events.

When they need help, we can help...We can help them...Even for the footy, footballers, when the footballers want something eh, cause they want to have a fundraising for their money to buy ice and insurance, so they ask us to help them. We are there for them and they are there for us.

Indigenous Women's Centre Senior Supervisor

In addition to the workload associated with the different programs funded through the Women's Centre, other important community issues and events demand the time and energy of the Women's Centre staff. For example, the Women's Centre was critically important to the success of the recent Army Staging Camp event in 2003. They organised the women to help with the cooking when the Australian Army used Elliott as their staging camp. Elliott has an international standard, but disused, football oval located just outside of town. In recent years it had fallen into disrepair. The whole community pitched in to fix it up and make it a suitable place for the Army to camp on its way up to Darwin.

So, we had Army come through here one day and they needed to stay somewhere. About a month ahead I thought we could give the oval a try. So we got it all set up there. Put lights up, prepared all toilets, the seats and the drains and stuff, and they came and they stayed at the oval. So now we are the staging camp for the Army. We had 300 people a night in here, 300 Army personnel. We had tanks. We had 33 semitrailers come through. We had the lot stay down there. We had AMPOL supply all the food. We had all the local people, staff, working, feeding everybody. It went off really well. So now North Camp is known as a staging area for the Army when they come in to Elliott, which is great... We learned a lot from that first time, the second time is easier. Now we look forward to seeing them come again. They'll be back.

Non-Indigenous CEO

This event created significant income for the whole community. For a few months it became the focus of the whole community. The community hopes that the Army will continue to use the staging post in the future.

Another more recent and much sadder event occurred that required that the Women's Centre staff organise a women's meeting. A sexual assault worker visited the community because a little girl had been sexually assaulted. A meeting for the women was set up at the Women's Centre. The staff at the Women's Centre told us about the meeting. It brought together older and younger women and was run by the worker from Alice Springs. Because of the emotional and sensitive nature of the issues involved the staff said that it was better that someone outside the community led the discussion about these issues rather than parents. Staff told us that lots of ideas, especially from the older women, came out in the discussion.

The older women reminded the younger women how, in the old days, children had been taken away from their families and pointed out that the same thing seems to be happening again. Children are still being taken away when they are fostered out, outside of the community. The women would rather children stayed in the community. The staff told us that the older women were hurt when children were taken away outside of the community because they needed to be near their grandchildren to teach them and this could not occur when children were taken away. The best idea, suggested by one of the older woman, was to work with the family that wasn't looking after their children properly, for example where drinking was a problem, to find ways to help that family so the children would not have to be removed.

One of these ladies at the meeting was saying 'We're talking about all of these good ideas but now we want action! Too many times we been talking and talking, telling people what's wrong but nothing happens. We want to see changes happening.

Indigenous Women's Centre Senior Supervisor

Another event for the community is being planned by the Women's Centre staff. A nutrition worker had visited the community recently and talked about teaching mothers about healthy food. The Senior Supervisor has decided to hold a community-wide 'Health Week' once the dry season starts. While we were visiting she had begun to organise this event. She invited the nurse at the Health Clinic to be involved. Even though it was March and the dry season doesn't start until May, she was thinking ahead to this next community event.



CONCLUSIONS

Child care at Gurungu is not the only or primary concern of the Women's Centre staff. They are attuned to what is going on in their community and, indeed, are the people that make a lot of things happen in the community. They are always ready to participate in supporting other community members and organisations through fundraising, catering and other forms of support. The community relies on the Women's Centre to play this role and appreciates what the women do.

The programs for school aged children are running well. Attendance of younger children has fallen in recent times threatening the continuation of funding for this program. Staff are aware of this and have begun to consider some ideas about how to improve the situation.

There is a strong view amongst community members we spoke to and in the centre that the Women's Centre is doing a good job supporting the community and that children are benefiting as a result. They trust the Women's Centre to provide children with good food and to look after the children so that they are safe while they are in the centre.

Juggling multiple programs is complex and difficult for the senior supervisor, and she recognises that work roles need defining and some distribution of responsibilities amongst other staff may be a solution. The need for training is acute. The senior supervisor would like to understand better how the funding works in relation to all of the programs she oversees and to gain management and early childhood training.

Links to the school and clinic could be strengthened to better support the Women's Centre in their approach to child care provision.



CHAPTER 5



IKUNTJI

Learning together + community support = Getting stronger every day

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

The community of Ikuntji has approximately 170 people. It is located 2 ° hours by road from Alice Springs. The road can become impassable in wet conditions. People in the community speak a number of languages including Luritja, Western Arrente, Pintubi, Warlpiri, Arrente and Anmatyerre as well as some English although competency in English varies.

Ernest Giles first travelled through the area that is now Ikuntji in 1872. In the early 1900s pastoralists began to move into the area and take up the land. The Indigenous people living in the surrounding areas were drawn to cattle stations that began to be established at the time. Ikuntji itself was originally a cattle station established in 1944. A large Indigenous population had grown up around Haasts Bluff in the 1950s, approximately 1000 people. Haasts Bluff is not far from the present location of Ikuntji. Ikuntji was created out of a need to provide for another water source for all the people living at Haasts Bluff. The community of Ikuntji was officially opened in 1960 with a significant proportion of those people living at Haasts Bluff moving to the new community. In the 1970s legal rights to the land were afforded to Aboriginal people and in part as a response to this development the Department of Aboriginal Affairs which was responsible for the community transferred control to the community in 1979. The Ikuntji Community Council was incorporated in 1985. There are 5 small outstations associated with the community; Winbarrku, Ngankirritja, Brown Bore, Autili, and Atji (Department of Family and Community Services, 2004).

The community has 12 CDEP positions shared with the neighbouring community of Papunya. For a while three of these positions were devoted to the child care program but they are now used for other programs. There is a serious housing shortage in the community making the occupancy rate at about 10 people per house. There is limited housing for visitors to the community and few non-Indigenous people can be hired to work in the community. The community has a clinic, a community run store, a thriving art centre where many of the residents sell their art work, a station house that provides reasonably priced

lunchtime meals for community members, a community council, and a primary school. There used to be a Women's Centre but it has now become the Art Centre. In order to be more inclusive of men artists as well as women, the Art Centre has shed its association with the Women's Centre. Approximately 30 children aged 5–14 years attend the primary school. There are two teachers including the teaching principal and one teacher assistant. After 14 years of age, children must go away from the community to attend high school. There are not enough preschool aged children to warrant a dedicated preschool teacher so preschool aged children go to the child care centre.

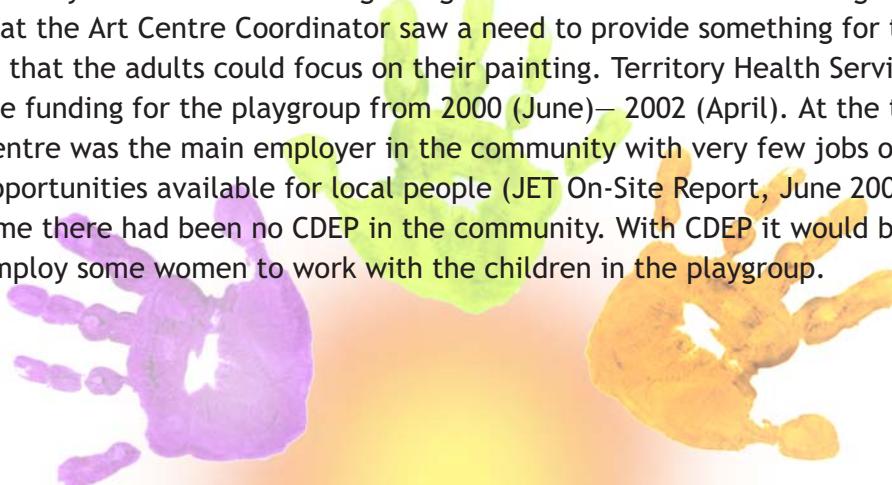
THE IKUNTJI CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

As we have emphasised in each of the chapters, it is important to understand that there are a number of factors accounting for the development of a children's service in a remote community including;

- the overall capacity of the council to conduct the business of the community,
- the size of the community,
- the amount of ongoing support and training provided by interested external agencies, and
- the length of time a specific service for children has been operating.

Given these factors, for this case study, the message we want to highlight is that (a) the ability to learn together as a staff team and, (b) with the trust and support of the community behind them, has enabled this small service to (c) grow and establish itself as a stable service in a relatively short period of time.

From 1991–1993, the Ikuntji community, through the Women's Centre, received a one-off small capital grant through Commonwealth funding to run a playgroup (Willsher & Clarke, 1993, p. 26). However, no one who we spoke to during this project mentioned this program and we can assume that it foundered after the funding expired. In June 2000, a playgroup was started at the Art Centre in Ikuntji. So many children were coming along with their artist mothers and grandmothers that the Art Centre Coordinator saw a need to provide something for the children so that the adults could focus on their painting. Territory Health Services provided the funding for the playgroup from 2000 (June)–2002 (April). At the time the Art Centre was the main employer in the community with very few jobs or training opportunities available for local people (JET On-Site Report, June 2000). Until this time there had been no CDEP in the community. With CDEP it would be possible to employ some women to work with the children in the playgroup.



This development coincided with a set of workshops run by Waltja, the remote area child care training and support agency for Central Australia, located in Alice Springs, targeting several communities to conduct child care training needs analyses. Waltja staff came to Ikuntji to discuss the possibilities of the JET crèche with the Women's Centre Coordinator.

At the Art Centre, adults had been worried that the children were being exposed to the chemicals associated with the painting activities and that it was not a safe place for the playgroup. They had outgrown the facility (a veranda on the back of the Art Centre extended by a shade cloth and sharing an outdoor sink with the artists). The veranda was a very unprotected space for this kind of activity, especially in the cold winter months. The prospect of receiving funding to move the playgroup through the JET program came at the right time.

When we first started our child care centre we were operating from the back of our Women's Centre. When winter came there was no place inside for us. And the child care staff decided to ask our Council if we could do up a community house.

Indigenous Centre Director

Before the JET program began however, the service was identified by the Commonwealth government as a proposed 'Innovative' Child Care Centre. Their successful program demonstrated that their service was viable and worth supporting. This announcement provided fresh enthusiasm to staff who had been working in the Art Centre and who were looking for a better place to hold the playgroup. As a small community with very limited spare housing it took a while before a suitable building was found. When a building became free in the community the playgroup was able to move. The Ikuntji Community Council supported this move by contributing \$20,000 to modify and renovate an empty house to suit its new purposes. Community volunteers painted the building to give it a new look. The fence was fixed around the outside of the centre to keep the children safe and the dogs out of the centre. The child care service has been in this temporary residence for two years.

In the early days we used to work at the Art Centre and there was getting really cold, probably May, it was getting really cold. We were all talking one day (Indigenous Centre Director) came up with the idea. This house had been empty for a really long time, and she said it's got good features, good veranda, big room inside. We had to ask (Indigenous Centre Assistant Director) first, because it was her family's house, and then we had to ask council if we could (use it). And that's how we ended up here. Because the house was vacant for 'sorry', wasn't it, for a very long time?

Non-Indigenous Facilitator

As recipients of a new, purpose-built child care centre, the staff and community were consulted about the design of the proposed new purpose built centre.

They showed us their plan and designs. They asked us first and we decided to think about it. What's right here for mothers? To watch kids playing in the middle (pointing to the middle of the plan). So the play room should be in the middle. Glass windows, office windows, changing (room) windows... We've got to see what the children are doing. Playing in the middle.

Indigenous Education Worker



New centre under construction

After the design went to tender, a short-fall of capital funds was identified. The centre was able to contribute some of its new funding to enable the building to go ahead. The new centre is nearing completion and is due to open in July 2004. It is positioned on the edge of the community but near all the key community facilities with an unobstructed view of the long line of hills surrounding the community.

In 2002 a non-Indigenous woman from outside the community was employed by the Community Council to be the facilitator/mentor for child care staff. Her role was clearly explained as being a facilitator, someone who could help the child care staff to develop their service but who would not be in charge of it.

The aim of our centre is to be able to build the capacity of the local staff to enable them to run the program themselves without the assistance of a mentor. We've been working towards this goal from the beginning.

Non-Indigenous CEO

As a young person with no child care training or experience working in an Indigenous community, the facilitator/mentor worked together with staff to develop her own and staff's child care knowledge. In a step by step fashion they figured out how to set up a child care service. The Facilitator brought her experience in working in tourism and hospitality, retail, and office work. A local Indigenous mother was hired as the Child Care Director and a local Indigenous grandmother as the Assistant Director. These women became co-Directors in 2003. Both brought their cultural knowledge of child rearing and their significant life experience to their roles as child care workers. Two other young Indigenous women were employed to make up the staff team. They both had young children for whom they were responsible and these children attended at the centre while their mothers worked.

On the basis of the Waltja-BIITE needs analysis, in June 2002, Batchelor Institute began to provide accredited child care training for the Indigenous workers in the centre. Five women in the community have now received training, four from BIITE onsite in their community, and one from the then Centralian College (now Charles Darwin University) by external study mode.



Graduation

In August 2003 (Indigenous Co-director) graduated with Certificate II in Community Services (Children's Services). The Council Clerk and the Child care Centre attended. It was a very proud day. The coordinators from Mt. Liebig and Titjikala were also there to graduate.

Indigenous child care staff

As the service developed the facilitator began to take more of a back seat in the running of the centre. The Indigenous grandmother moved temporarily to another community for family business. Family and sorry business is a priority that cannot be ignored. There are now two Indigenous staff including the Indigenous Director. One of the staff members who worked at the centre, a young woman aged 15, left the service after a year and the service is seeking another staff member to replace her. A previous staff member who has been away having a baby is returning to work in the centre when they occupy their new building.

The Indigenous staff have commenced the Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services) through BIITE. Three of them are on the STEP program (Structured Training and Employment Program). They will get progression incentives and when they graduate they will receive a pay rise. On a recent visit into Alice Springs the staff went to the Batchelor Institute training facility to see how the Certificate in Spoken and Written English training was offered there. This training also includes maths skills and using computers. As a result of that visit three of them have identified a need for improving their literacy and numeracy skills and intend to take up some training.

The temporary centre is located in a house across the street from the small school and not far from the other main facilities in the community such as the shop, the Station House (where some community members purchase their lunch time meals), the Council offices and the health clinic. Because of its proximity to people's houses in the community very young children often bring themselves to child care as well as arriving with family members. Location near the school enables staff to walk children nearing school age across the road to the school for familiarisation visits. The centre has access to a 4-wheel drive car which enables them to go on bush trips, attend meetings in town, do the shopping and network with other services in Alice Springs.

This temporary child care centre has one adult-sized toilet, a shower, a big sink for baby's baths, a nappy change area that staff have created near the big sink, a washing machine, a well equipped kitchen with a stove, microwave, jug, pantry, refrigerator and plenty of dishes, cutlery and cooking pots. This room also doubles as a staff room with a large round table in the middle. The main areas inside are an indoor play area with carpet, cushions, a sleeping room with cots, a store room, and a child eating area with long child-sized tables and chairs and a couple of high chairs for younger children. Children's indoor play equipment includes dolls and building blocks, some drawing/painting/craft equipment, a few puzzles, a home corner with plastic foods and a book display shelf with small assortment of robust cardboard & plastic covered books. Outside, the house has a large shaded veranda. Two large gum trees provide shade to the sand pile during the day. There is a moveable low plastic basket ball hoop, a swing set and plastic climbing frame with slippery dip in the outdoor play area every day. Outdoor play toys are stored in two large lockable containers on the veranda where small push along bikes, buckets and shovels, many different kinds of balls, baby walking device, skipping ropes, a Xylophone and a parachute are stored.

The centre has access to a vehicle that seats seven and a baby seat. The staff have bought some child-sized crowbars so that children can dig witchetty grubs and honey ants when they take them on bush trips. Surrounding the centre is a tall fence but it has many holes that dogs take advantage of at every opportunity to come into the yard where the children are playing.

The staff are looking forward to moving into their new purpose-built facility although they have become attached to their current child care centre. They thought initially that the new centre would be too big, but, as it took shape, they began to dream about how it would be to work there.

I'm really, really happy that we started the child care in a house first to get the kids comfortable with the idea. If they had gone straight into a flash building I really think they would've been scared.

Non-Indigenous Centre Facilitator

They (the staff) will get scared. ...We started to get excited, 'Look at the new building'.

Indigenous Centre Director

The Director explained that the staff thought the centre was going to be much bigger than it turned out to be and they were relieved to see the final product. After a tour of the new building it was clear that they were looking forward to working in this new facility. It will have a well designed nappy changing space, an easy to access shower stall, child- as well as adult-sized basins and toilets, kitchen,

staff room, a small sleep room, one large indoor play space, office, store rooms inside and out, and a large shady veranda. Staff and community members advised the designers to place the playground in the front of the building so that the community could see what was happening in the playground. The outdoor area has a round sand pit covered by a small shade structure. The service has recently secured funds from NT Health and Community Services (HACS) through a license related upgrade to enable them to expand the amount of shade in the playground. This came about when the local Children's Services Advisor from the NT HACS came to do an inspection of the new facility and noticed the limited shade available. Initial capital funds usually cover a shaded sand pit and a bike track. Some non-essential items in the original plans have been dropped because of a shortfall in funds. The Facilitator and Director have made a submission to the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) for capital upgrade funding to further develop the playground. Often the full development costs of playgrounds are not made available in the original building plans. They had to call an urgent meeting to workshop a preliminary playground design with all of the staff, the Children's Services Advisor from Health and Community Services and an architect from Tangentyere Designs, the Alice Springs based architectural firm that designed the building. They needed get their submission in within a two week turn around time that included obtaining three quotes. This is very difficult in such a remote location. A follow up design workshop will be held to allow for a more detailed plan to be developed. They are hoping to have a small water feature that simulates a natural river bed in the area with water that can be turned on and off. The water will recycle into the garden. If their submission is not successful they will have to find another source of funding to develop the playground.

The child care staff have developed a partnership with the local shop to improve the selection of baby and toddler supplies in the shop. Child care staff keep track of the stock and reorder it when it runs out. They have agreed to keep the prices at town supermarket levels. This was done to improve nutrition and health in the family environment as well as in child care. Before this initiative only a few baby supplies were sold at the store.



Facilitator/mentor in the shop

Now mothers can buy babies nappies, bottles, food, drinking cups for toddlers, bottle brushes and so on. The child care centre staff do the inventory for these items and can see the worth in undertaking this extra project every time they visit the shop and have to order more supplies.

LEARNING TO DO CHILD CARE TOGETHER

The child care centre is open four days a week from 9:00 to 3:00 with the intention to extend their hours when they move into their new building. A regular routine developed with tasks associated with each time period.

- Bath and breakfast
- Clothes washing
- Morning tea
- Two staff prepare lunch
- Two staff set up activities
- Lunch
- Cleanup
- Rest time
- Free play
- Put clean clothes on
- Snack
- Home time

The washing routine begins each day in child care. Washing facilities are unavailable in many people's homes. Staff decided to shower and bath the children and wash their clothes at the start of each day. Their large washing machine makes this possible. Staff take individual children in turn to have their showers and change into clean clothes. Some staff appreciate the opportunity to use the facilities themselves as well.



Bath time

When the kids come in the morning we take care of them...(washing them)... We wash their clothes, their own clothes for afternoon so they can take child care clothes off and put their clean clothes back on... We used to have those kids with scabies before and now not much.

Indigenous Centre Director

A selection of clothes to suit different-sized children were bought from town so that there would be enough clothes for changes. Children love to choose which clothes they will wear, with some children showing clear preferences for some items.



Roast beef & vegies

The other key issue that staff are addressing is that the children are hungry and need a nutritious breakfast when they arrive in the morning. After they have their baths they have breakfast.

They need food in the morning.

Sometimes they're really hungry... We do have problems with some skinny kids.

Indigenous Centre Director

The staff cook meals for the children every day. They have developed a set of recipe cards with step-by-step directions illustrated with photographs for making different meals such as spaghetti, tuna mornay, and chicken bake. They got the picture recipe idea from attending a conference in Darwin where Nguui child care centre did a presentation on their nutrition program. Every staff member now knows how to cook the lunch for the children. They have all been involved in making the recipe cards as well.

When they first started offering healthy food the children were not enthusiastic. They would not eat the vegetables but slowly children got used to this new food. Now they will eat virtually everything that is served to them.



Jobs roster

Staff have developed a way to share the jobs in child care. On the wall in the kitchen a roster for jobs that need to be done to keep the child care centre clean and organised is displayed. Staff choose which jobs they will do by sticking a piece of paper with their name on it next to the job they will do that day. This means that no one gets stuck every day with a job they don't like and everyone learns how to do all of the jobs.

By adopting these strategies, all of the staff have learned how to do all of the jobs required for the smooth running of the centre. We asked how they had organised for this to happen. Staff told us that early in the development of the service they decided to purchase some key resources for supporting their work; i.e. a computer, a digital camera, and a colour printer. This equipment has proved to be invaluable for enabling staff to develop shared knowledge of child care routines and procedures.

As the need arose all of the key routines and activities, such as those above, were converted into wall charts with photos to illustrate step by step procedures (eg, recipes, hand washing routines, nappy changing procedures, a daily jobs roster, program plans, cleaning, purchase orders, reporting forms and so on).

Another key to this joint learning approach was the strongly held and widely accepted view that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people need to work together to make the centre work. One of the ways this has occurred is through their access to training and support networks involving peers in other remote area services and training and in-service organisations. For example, when the service took up the Batchelor Training they elected to train as a group, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are resources for making the child care centre work.

Non-Indigenous Facilitator

The community participants we spoke to mentioned that people working together, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, was important for getting their child care centre going. We asked about the decision to hire a non-Indigenous facilitator at the beginning of the child care program. The current facilitator was living in the community at the time working as a volunteer. She established herself as a trustworthy person and hard worker. When the decision was made by the Community Council to hire a mentor/facilitator for the child care centre she was offered the job. She began working with the women in child care centre while it was still at the Art Centre.

The issue of who works in child care is difficult in a small remote community such as Ikuntji. There are few people who are suitably qualified or experienced and also interested in doing the job. In addition they need to be accommodated within the community. Houses for everyone, but particularly for people from outside the community, are in very short supply. To bring someone in from outside requires that sufficient accommodation is available. This is a challenge at Ikuntji where, according to the Community CEO, the average occupancy rate for community houses is 10 people. There is a one bedroom 'silver bullet' for temporary staff, 2 x education staff houses, 2 x health houses, 1 x store manager's house, 1 x Essential Services Officer's house and 5 x single bedrooms for visitors with shared facilities in a demountable.

Many people receive Social Security Benefits through Centrelink and this income is nearly the same as CDEP wages. Social Security Benefits are often referred to as 'sit down' money in communities because people receive it automatically.

The other hard thing we've got is when you give people a job they have to get off 'sit down' and sometimes the hours they are going to be working are not enough and they won't actually be making as much money...And they think 'Why? Why do I want to work?'

Non-Indigenous Facilitator

For this reason, the decision was made to give the child care workers 'top up' money from their operational budget. This also brought them more closely in line with the mainstream child care worker's wages. This arrangement creates another problem for workers, however, in that they end up being taxed as if they have a second job. What they take home after a full day's work is not very much more than what they would get on CDEP or 'sit down' money.

This idea of having a facilitator/mentor to support new child care services had been promoted by the Commonwealth Field Officers in Alice Springs. There was a budget line under salaries for mentors. In this community, the facilitator/mentor did not start out with child care knowledge but learned about child care by working with the other women. She clearly acknowledged to her co-workers that she did not know how to raise children in Indigenous ways but that she brought literacy skills and knowledge of 'Western' ways of doing things to the centre. As she learned how to do the management and administration of the centre she helped the Indigenous workers to learn how to do these tasks and together they produced the resources they needed in the future.

We talked to the Indigenous Director about the working with the facilitator/mentor and she explained how they had become friends as they worked together. She said that since they were both young women they had a lot in common. For example, she and the Facilitator talked about how they had both had 'Cabbage Patch' dolls as they were growing up. They both adored their dolls.

While we were talking about Indigenous and non-indigenous people working together the Director called our attention to centre's banner. The banner reflects her view that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together at their centre. She told us that the yellow footprints are non-Indigenous people working in child care and the red and brown are Indigenous people.



Ikuntji banner

Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people coming together

Indigenous Centre Director

We strongly build a sense of community. Everybody in this community is equal, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

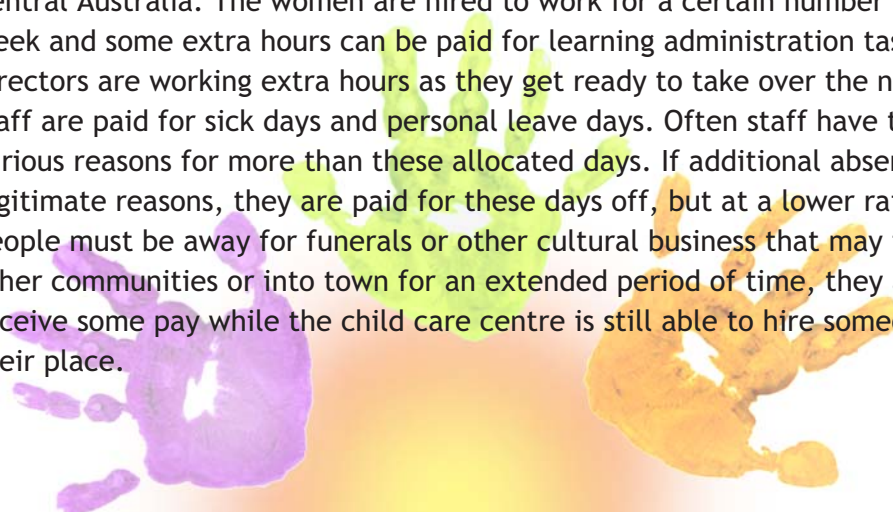
Non-Indigenous CEO

It was hard working in child care for all of the staff at first. The facilitator and director talked about how their knowledge developed and how they helped each other tackle each new problem that arose. For example, there were times in the early days when staff would not want to talk with the facilitator because they were not comfortable with her yet. Instead they would talk to the Director in language. The Director was able to speak to the staff in language and explain to the Facilitator. The facilitator began to rely more and more on the Director to negotiate with the staff about work roles and procedures and this arrangement worked much better. As staff became used to the facilitator and got to know and trust her, these problems decreased.

In relation to some issues, staff may still find it difficult to talk with the Facilitator. For example, one staff member had to leave the community and therefore her job at the child care service, for a number of reasons, some of which were personal and therefore weren't disclosed to the facilitator. She returned intermittently. Another staff member had family problems that took her away from the service for a period of time. Another had to care for a sick child and was unable to come to work. The non-Indigenous facilitator found some of these absences difficult to understand when she did not have the full story. Much later she realised the reasons for staff absence and that sometimes staff must prioritise work requirements below other responsibilities. In one case a staff member was literally not allowed to come to work for cultural reasons because it meant that she would have had to walk near a house that happened to be in the same a street as the child care centre. 'Sorry business' can last for months.

These kinds of issues can be difficult for the staff member to explain to someone not familiar with Indigenous culture. As the staff have opened up to the Facilitator much more in recent times and explained to her some of the cultural reasons for being away, this has helped the Facilitator to understand.

The staffing in the centre has remained remarkably stable for a long period of time and this allowed the them to develop as a team. This centre is known to have one of the best attendance rates of staff for all of the remote area child care centres in Central Australia. The women are hired to work for a certain number of hours per week and some extra hours can be paid for learning administration tasks. The two directors are working extra hours as they get ready to take over the new centre. All staff are paid for sick days and personal leave days. Often staff have to be away for various reasons for more than these allocated days. If additional absences are for legitimate reasons, they are paid for these days off, but at a lower rate. So when people must be away for funerals or other cultural business that may take them to other communities or into town for an extended period of time, they are able to receive some pay while the child care centre is still able to hire someone to take their place.

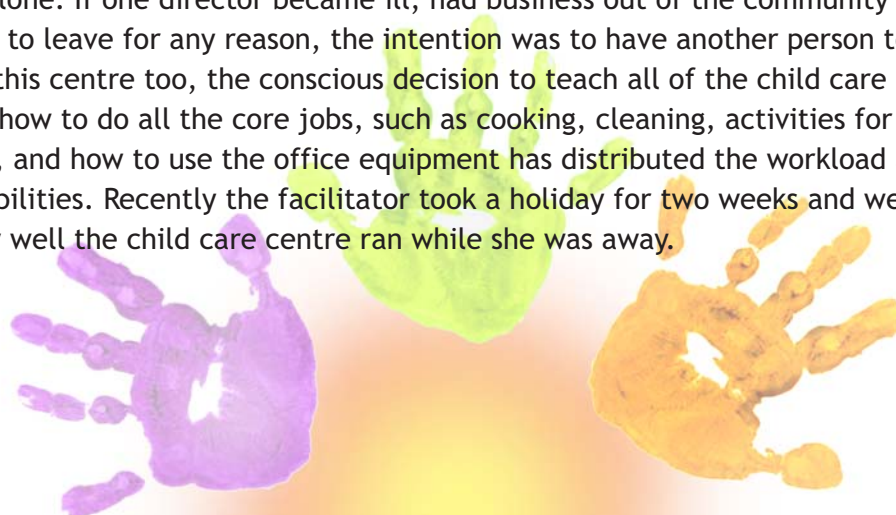


Staff have developed a spread sheet that shows graphically the daily hours worked by every staff member. It is colour coded for reasons of absence (such as blue for sick days and yellow for holidays). This makes it clear to staff when they have been away and for what reasons and how many actual hours they have worked each week. When it comes to holidays, they used to be paid for their full allocated hours per week rate. However, this was not financially viable for the service, now they are paid over their holidays on their average hours worked per week (plus leave loading).

The creation of a Child Care Committee (management group) was discussed early in the centre's development. It has been planned to include the staff of the child care centre, Indigenous community members, senior people, non- Indigenous members and 2 representatives from the Community Council. In such a small community, however, to have so many people focused on one activity is difficult and the committee is still being developed. After visiting Titjikala community, the facilitator found out about their Women's Committee that oversees a number of different programs. This seemed like a good idea and she will be sharing this model with the women at the Ikuntji community.

The child care service and the staff who worked there have had a very successful development process that has taken just over two years. The presence of the facilitator/mentor has meant that the Indigenous staff have been given the time and the support to learn how to run the business side of the service. These tasks included how to do purchase orders, prepare invoices, use a range of office equipment, support staff to negotiate their needs with visiting Departmental staff, write reports, keep attendance records and so on. These are all the complex 'Western' expectations that take time to learn.

The mentor has understood from the beginning that she will not be staying in the community and so has worked explicitly to support the co-directors to develop many of the management skills necessary to keep the service running when she leaves. The decision to have two co-Directors was made in recognition that the weight and responsibility for service management might be too much for one person alone. If one director became ill, had business out of the community or was required to leave for any reason, the intention was to have another person to take over. In this centre too, the conscious decision to teach all of the child care workers how to do all the core jobs, such as cooking, cleaning, activities for children, and how to use the office equipment has distributed the workload and responsibilities. Recently the facilitator took a holiday for two weeks and we were told how well the child care centre ran while she was away.



One of the younger staff members who is an auntie-mother to a baby boy in the centre talks about how she has learned to look after little kids from the facilitator, the Directors and her own family. She recognises that her experience in child care has been valuable for helping her learn to care of him as well as other children.

Child care staff share views on what to do when there are conflicts between children although this rarely happens at this child care centre. The co-Director talked about how to manage children's behaviour in the centre. If the mother of the child was in the centre at the time she should sort out any problems in the first instance, but when she isn't there then it is ok for a child care worker to intervene. We spoke to a community member who said that the reason there were not very many problems with discipline at the child care centre was because the child care workers spoke to the children in language.

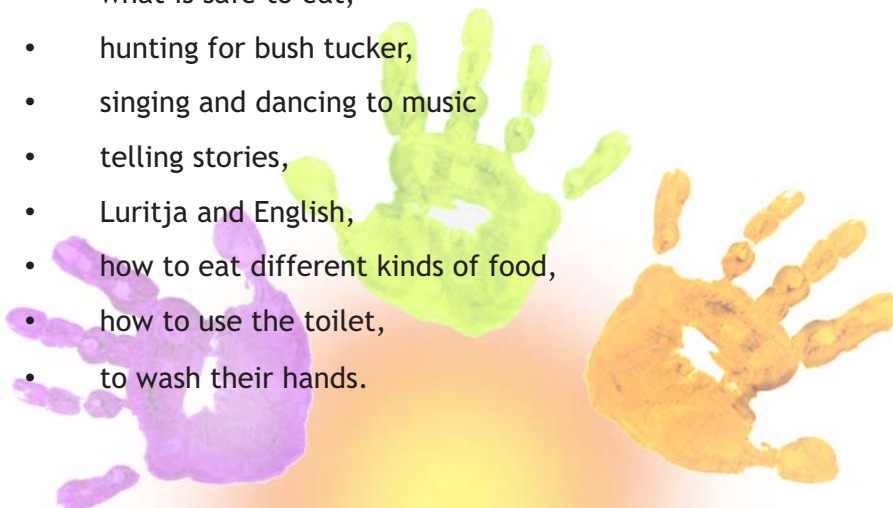
Staff believe that it is good for children to learn both English and their local language. The main language used in this community is Luritja and child care staff use this language with the children in child care and the facilitator speaks to them in English. An Indigenous Education Worker from the school explained that children would benefit from learning both English and Luritja.

It's good for the workers to speak to the little ones in English too so that they can understand when they grow up. I teach in language, tell stories in language and talk to them in language at school.

Indigenous Education Worker

As the centre has developed, the staff have negotiated and learned together what running a child care centre all about. Child care is seen as a place where children can be safe, eat healthy food and get ready for school. These are the things that the staff and community members mentioned that children learned in child care;

- how to sit and listen,
- what is poisonous and what is not
- what is safe to eat,
- hunting for bush tucker,
- singing and dancing to music
- telling stories,
- Luritja and English,
- how to eat different kinds of food,
- how to use the toilet,
- to wash their hands.



Taking children out hunting is very important and was mentioned by many of the workers. For example, one of the child care workers wanted to teach the kids to look for bush onions.



Getting ready to go hunting
for witchetty grubs



Child with witchetty grub

As often as they can they take the children on hunting trips for honey ants, sweet potatoes, and witchetty grubs. They have even purchased small crowbars so that the children can help. On one of our visits we accompanied some staff and children on an excursion to look for witchetty grubs. We were told that these grubs are known to be good 'tucker' for babies, while honey ants can be too sweet for them.

We noticed that the staff sometimes played with the children at child care, although most of the time they seemed to sit and watch rather than interfering or directing children's play. For example, one day the co-director sat in the sandpit and played a game with the children she called 'digging for goanna'. This involved burying a child's foot or hand and then digging it up accompanied by much laughter. The children asked for it again and again. They later repeated this game on their own in a small group, burying their hands, feet or even their whole body.



Director playing 'digging for goanna'



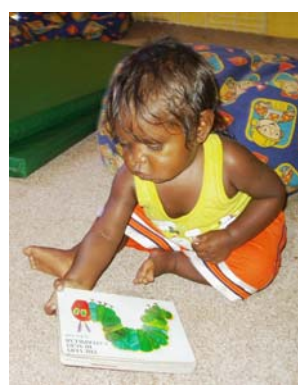
Children playing on their own

Reading to children was not evident in the program during our first visit. Staff seemed to have other priorities and there were only a couple of books on display. When we asked, staff told us they were working on other aspects of the program and although they had some books they were stored on a shelf in the store room. We talked to the Director about how even the young children can enjoy looking at books. During our next visit we noticed that the book display shelf had been replenished with many sturdy cardboard and plastic coated books, a lot of these with photographs of real animals and everyday things.

The staff now read children stories whenever they can. We noticed that the children know how to hold the books and look at them by themselves and were obviously familiar with being read to.



Director reading to child



Baby looking at book

Child Care is a place of safety for children. Sometimes children bring themselves to child care and then take themselves home. To make sure they are safe, someone always keeps an eye on them when they leave the centre. The Director told us a story about a time when there were so many 'cheeky' dogs she had to walk the children through the community on a route that avoided the dogs because she wanted them to be safe. Since that time the community put some procedures in place to deal with the excess of dogs problem including putting some down,

warning people about keeping collars on their own dogs and treating sick dogs with medicine. The sign (left, was put up by the police warning people about the need to look after their dogs because there had been complaints about children being bitten. Dogs and children spend a lot of time together in this community and sometimes there are up to 15 dogs in a household.



Sign about dogs

At first child care was primarily a place for children but this has changed. It has become more and more a place for young mothers, aunties and grandmothers and visitors to the community. Mothers, aunties and grandmothers see the child care centre as a place to spend time with their children, chat with other mothers, have a cup of tea, and sometimes play with their children.

Some mothers might want to stay with their kids and play with their kids.

Indigenous child care staff

During one of our visits a grandmother arrived at the centre with her granddaughter. She brought her to the centre two days in a row. She stayed all day and took care of everything that her granddaughter needed. She fed her, put her down for a sleep, and played with her, showing her how to use the play equipment in the centre. When her granddaughter had a nap, she also had a short sleep in the sleep room on the floor beside her granddaughter.



Visiting grandmother and children playing a game

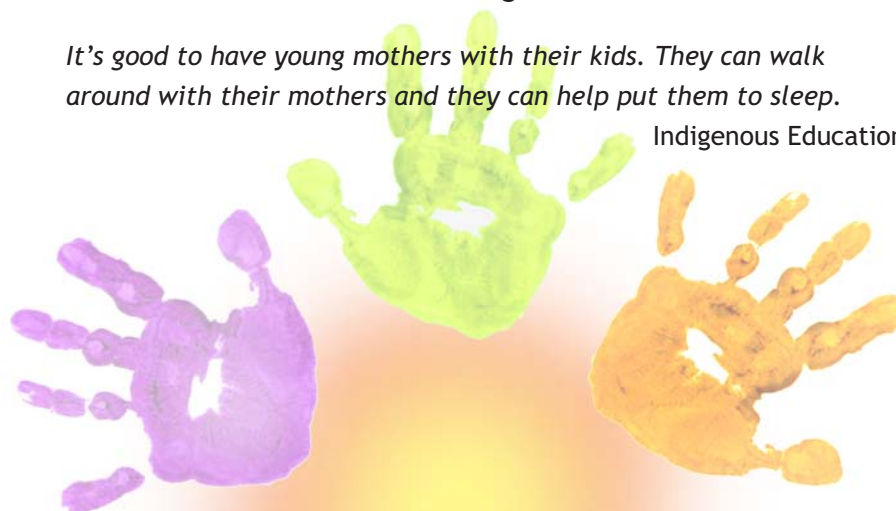


Grandmother showing granddaughter how to use the xylophone

Having extra and unanticipated visitors can create some difficulties for staff with gauging the amount of food needed at meal times. Staff have negotiated a solution to this issue by making a rule— 'If there is enough food left over after the children have been fed then others can have a meal'. It is clear that staff are keen to make visitors welcome and can see benefits to having more adults in the centre.

It's good to have young mothers with their kids. They can walk around with their mothers and they can help put them to sleep.

Indigenous Education Worker



Staff and visitors often sit outside in front of the child care centre during the cooler months because it is warm in the sun. They can watch the children while they chat and draw in the sand. This is a welcoming way for staff to connect other mothers in the community who come and join the group to have a cup of tea and talk. While staff are at work this location is ideal because they can see what is going on in the



Staff and visitors sitting outside the child care centre

community. Many people in the community stop outside the fence to deliver messages to staff or ask them about something. The public phone box for the community is located just outside the child care fence and staff often answer the phone when it rings, and find the person in the community for whom the call is intended. Being at work does not remove the women from the life of the community.

The children watch the adults too while they are sitting in the sun. We noticed that the younger children stay close while the older children (over 2 year olds) race off and play with the toys. The children learn by watching the adults. Many examples of this kind of learning occurred. The photos below provide a concrete example.



Adult drawing in the sand



Child drawing in the sand

Children in the centre played in very self-directed ways. They found their own games and activities without asking adults to help them. When they arrived each



Child playing ball with baby

day they went straight to the big locked storage units on the veranda and the only help they needed was for an adult to unlock the containers. They helped themselves to the toys that they wanted to play with. Very rarely were there disputes about who played with which toys. We noticed too that older children played with younger children or let them join in with their games.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Ikuntji is a small community and while this has drawbacks in terms of available human resources, it also has its benefits. The child care sits within a community that, according to the Community CEO, over the years, like many remote communities, has had its fair share of problems. As evidence of its improved functioning there has been only one break in during the preceding two years. The community is dealing with some of the problems that occur such as the occasional drinking issues. The staff at the centre told us that they feel supported by their community. They know their community trusts them by sending their children to this new service.

Everybody is supporting child care, the council, family, everybody. Because they ask for somebody to look after their kids, their grandchildren.

Indigenous Co-Director

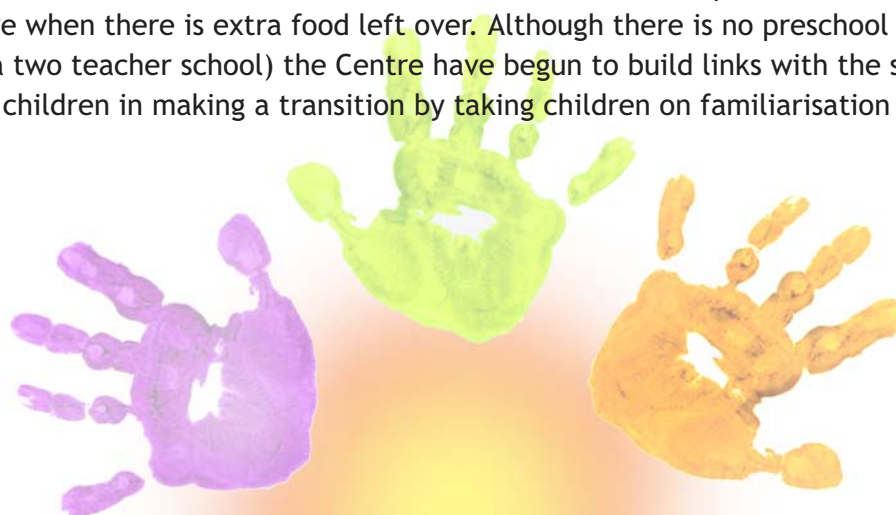
I think one really important point about our community is that because we are small any problems like sniffing or alcohol abuse are dealt with quickly to make sure that it does not get out of hand. That's a really important factor in our centre running as well as it does. A strong community is a safe community and the people feel supported and cared for which helps them want to work and contribute to their community.

Non-Indigenous Centre Facilitator

When you see the little kids walking around the town with no parent around you got to wander over.

Indigenous Centre Director

Three out of the twelve CDEP places allocated to the Ikuntji Community (via Papunya Community Government Council) have been devoted to the child care program. This is a relatively massive investment. Staff access the Health Clinic which has a nurse on duty and a visiting Doctor if they have any concerns about children's health. Sometimes the cook from the Station House provides meals to child care when there is extra food left over. Although there is no preschool at the school (a two teacher school) the Centre have begun to build links with the school to assist children in making a transition by taking children on familiarisation visits.



Decisions about who should work in the child care were made by talking to the women who used to work in the old child care centre when it was attached to the Art Centre and through discussions with the community council. There is a clear view in the community that the people who know most about what the child care is doing and how it is developing are the local women who work there.

The most important people to talk about the development and structures, how it works and so on, are (the co-directors at the time). We got the house done up, we got (R), and then we got (K) coming on board as a senior lady. And it's really starting to develop in ways that the community wanted it to.

Non-Indigenous CEO

The fact that the community has established rules is seen as a support for the child care. For example, a community bus can be borrowed. However, if the bus is brought back dirty or damaged the person who borrowed it cannot use the bus again. This has meant that the bus is usually in good condition and can be used for excursions. A strong community traditional owner who holds a prominent position on the council is involved in most decision making processes. When problems occur the Council takes action. For example, there is virtually no petrol sniffing in the community because the community addresses the issue immediately there is an occurrence of sniffing.

This community now employs many women. In the past there weren't many opportunities for the women to work. Having a child care centre has been a resource to the community.

Having the child care has made it much, much easier for women to work and it made the women more keen to work. They know where their child is. Previously they took their child to work. It didn't really work. The kids were distracting in the work environment or they left the kid at home and you're distracted that no one is looking after the kids. Now a number of women work, there's absolutely no problem with sending their kids to the child care.

Non-Indigenous Community CEO



The child care centre is used by virtually everyone in the community at some time or another. Visitors to the community often bring their children to the child care centre. This suggests a significant level of confidence in the child care centre.

Staff have had few opportunities to participate and link up with other staff working in child care centres in remote communities. Whenever there is a chance to visit others they are enthusiastic participants. In the 2 years they've been operating they have attended one networking conference ('It takes a community to keep children safe and strong' facilitated by BIITE Remote Aboriginal Children's Services Support Unit, 2002) in Darwin and the NT Early Childhood Conference (2003), also held in Darwin. They still talk about these experiences and the good ideas they learned.

The Darwin one has given us lots of ideas. That's where we got the recipe idea. The Galiwinku and the Nguuu woman were inspirational and gave us so many ideas for our centre.

Non- Indigenous Facilitator

When the nearby Mount Liebig Child Care Centre opened (1 hour drive away) during 2003 all of the staff went to celebrate with them. They all wore their child care uniforms on the trip. Ikuntji child care staff are now looking forward to their own opening. They would like to invite child care staff from every remote community in the NT, to 'do it a special way'. They gave the Mount Liebig staff the idea to have uniforms.

The ability to access formal training is a key social resource issue for the child care centre. Their main support has come from Batchelor Institute, community-based, on-the-job, child care training. There has been some support from Waltja, the remote area training and support service for central Australia. The staff have used their own initiative to secure additional training. After breaking down and being unable to change their own flat tyre, two of the staff decided to do a three day, four wheel drive course in Alice Springs. They also completed a Senior First Aid on another trip to town.

CONCLUSION

When Ikuntji staff move into their new purpose-built child care centre they will need to make more changes in the way they conduct child care in this new environment. This time around they will be able to bring to their work a wealth of child care skills and knowledge learned in the old centre. This service provides an example of a group of people who have learned almost from scratch what child care can be. At the beginning they evolved a set of routines and activities that prioritised children's health and wellbeing and as these issues were dealt with they have begun to focus on new goals and activities for children's learning, e.g., easing children's transition to school and developing preschool skills.

They have taken advantage of every opportunity to learn from others, visitors like ourselves, staff from organisations that train and support child care services such as RACSSU, BIITE and Waltja, from the rare opportunities they have to attend networking meetings or conferences and most importantly from each other. Through the respectful relationships they have developed with each other they have solved many of the problems that confronted them in the early days. Their strategy of documenting every procedure and routine in a pictorial and written form has built their capacity as a team. Every staff member has become familiar with the jobs and responsibilities necessary for child care to run smoothly.

They have earned the respect of their community as their service has grown and developed over the short period of time they have been operating. Evidence of the community's acceptance of the service can be seen in the increase number of mothers, grandmothers and aunties visiting the centre with their children. When set backs and problems have occurred, such as losing staff through family business or illness, staff have worked together to solve the problems. The non-Indigenous Facilitator/Mentor is leaving the community in October 2004. One of the Indigenous Co-Directors recently stated that the child care workers want to try and run the Centre by themselves. With this approach their service is in a good position to grow and develop further in the new purpose-built facility.



CHAPTER 6



NGUIU

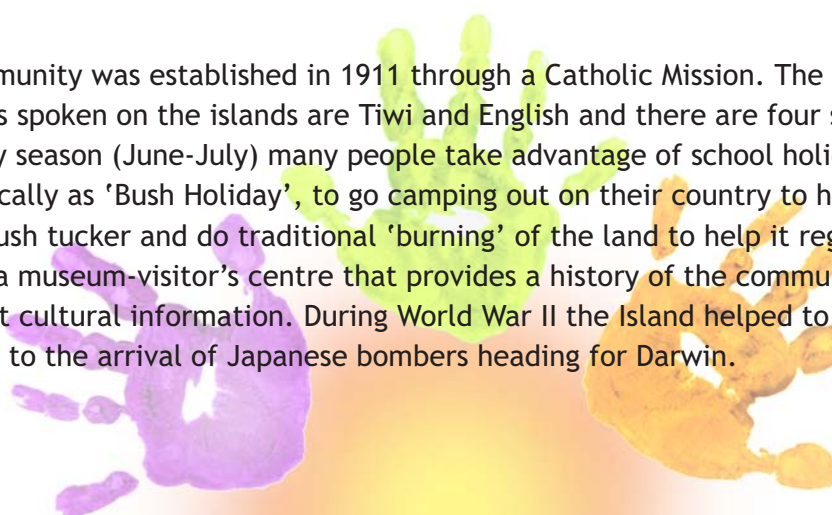
Energized Management + Multifunctional focus = Responsive & evolving service

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

Nguiu is the largest of three main communities located on Bathurst Island, one of two islands known as the Tiwi Islands, about 70 kilometres across the Arafura Sea from the city of Darwin. It takes about 20 minutes to fly, with two airlines providing two to seven flights a day between them, to the bitumen, all weather air strip. The community provisions are also delivered weekly by the Tiwi Barge. There are about 1500 people who live at Nguiu.

The community is administered by the Tiwi Island Local Government (TILG). There are other communities and outstations on the islands. The community has access to a range of community facilities such as Centrelink, EFTPOS, banking and post office facilities, a take away, a local store, a social club that sells alcohol for limited hours, a health centre, two non-Indigenous police officers and one Indigenous police aid, a restaurant and two art centres. It also has a swimming pool, recreation hall, a football oval, mechanics workshop, rubbish removal, a community transport system and a night patrol car. The Catholic school provides preschool, primary and high school for community children and has an accommodation block for visitors. Most jobs are administered through CDEP. There are regular tours of the islands for visitors run by Tiwi Tours. Tiwi Designs produces screen printed fabrics, pottery, carvings and paintings that are sold through a retail gallery.

The community was established in 1911 through a Catholic Mission. The main languages spoken on the islands are Tiwi and English and there are four skin groups. In the dry season (June-July) many people take advantage of school holidays, known locally as 'Bush Holiday', to go camping out on their country to hunt and collect bush tucker and do traditional 'burning' of the land to help it regenerate. There is a museum-visitor's centre that provides a history of the community and important cultural information. During World War II the Island helped to alert the mainland to the arrival of Japanese bombers heading for Darwin.



THE NGUIU CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

As for the other chapters we continue to emphasise that it is important to understand that there are a number of factors accounting for the development of a children's service in a remote community including;

- the overall capacity of the council to conduct the business of the community,
- the size of the community,
- the amount of ongoing support and training provided by interested external agencies, and
- the length of time a specific service for children has been operating.

Given these factors, for this case study, the message we want to highlight is that (a) the energised management of the service and (b) the multifunctional approach they have adopted in the development of their child care service has meant that the service has been (c) remarkably responsive to its community and has evolved a number of new ways of doing things.

Child care began on Nguiu in November 1997. Funding from the JET On-Site Crèche program enabled the community to hire two child care workers to work in the Purmanyanga Playgroup and Drop-In-Centre. The meaning of the word Purmanyanga in Tiwi language is 'lightening' to represent 'children who like to be noisy, screaming and laughing' (JET On-Site Crèche Report, no date). The funding was used in combination with CDEP and allowed for more women to be involved, full time and part time. The original director of the service a local Indigenous woman, was talked about by many people in the funding agencies and the community as someone who was remarkably persistent and committed to developing a child care service for the community. It was largely through her efforts that the first JET funding was secured.

When new 'Innovative' funding for child care services in remote Indigenous communities became available Nguiu was identified as a promising location with an established JET crèche. The purpose-built child care centre was built after extensive consultations about design with community members in 2000.

MULTIPLE PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

From the start, the community talked about providing a safe and healthy place for children to play and to be looked after so that their parents could pursue work and training opportunities. The child care centre was seen as one of the key strategies contributing to the community-wide vision 'that Tiwi people will fill all the employment positions currently held by non-Tiwi people by the year 2010' (Nguiu JET On-Site Crèche Report, 2000).

The JET crèche became a licensed child care centre through Commonwealth Innovative Child Care funding in 2001. As a designated Innovative service, training for the child care staff was important and became a goal for the service. By 2000, 5 women had completed the Introduction to Child Care Training program through the then Batchelor College and 9 women were enrolled in the Cert III in Children's Services. The current director was working in the Art Centre at that time. She recalls the impact that the child care program had on the community.

Originally, the (old) child care centre was a crèche, JET crèche. It was situated in the old council building with a large trampoline. It helped the community get used to the idea of child care, children being in someone else's care other than close family.

The original director, Tina Vigona, in consultation with the Steering Committee, worked very hard to develop the child care centre with the idea of creating a 'one-stop-shop' for families. There was a great concern for the general poor health of Tiwi children. We had the main goal of enhancing the quality of life for all Tiwi children and families.

Non-indigenous Director

In the early days, the crèche was funded to provide a breakfast program for the school aged children from 7:30-8:30 five days per week in recognition that child nutrition was a problem in the community. They received a one - off grant from NT Health and Families Services to purchase toys and equipment. According to a JET report of the program's activities in 2000, and as the director confirmed, the emphasis of the program was already multidimensional; it provided programs to address nutrition, health and hygiene, children's development and cultural maintenance, instead of just child care for children.

She also made the point that, as a JET crèche, the program worked well for the community coming to terms with the new institution of child care.

It's beneficial to start with a JET creche. I think it's important because people got a chance to develop their skills, start training and the community started to appreciate child care. The community is still adjusting to some of the child care policies, such as the collection policy (i.e. policy about picking up children at the end of the day).

Non-Indigenous Director



At first parents thought that child care was just for working parents but that perception has changed.

They originally thought it was going to be for the mums that work. It was only until it started that they realised that anyone could use it. So now mums who have other business to do drop their kids off in the morning and they do their housework, or that, their shopping, they can do their washing, whatever they need to do, and know that the kids are being looked after and then they come at 12:00 and pick them up. It took a while but they realised that anybody could use it, anybody in the community could use the crèche.

Indigenous Community Services Officer

The original Innovative funding was for a 30 place child care centre that became the current facility, Jirnani Child Care Centre. A design workshop was held to discuss the design of the future centre with members of the community and workers in the crèche. A Steering Committee was convened to assist with planning of the new centre and included representatives from all of the service providers and funding agencies in the community catering for children in some way, i.e., child care staff, pre-school teacher, community management, health programs, and NT and Commonwealth children's services staff. During the planning stages a vision of cooperation and network of support was proposed, linking all the stakeholders of the child care centre.

When the child care workers moved into their new purpose built centre in 2001, the community continued its focus on more than child care alone. Problems with malnutrition in the children aged 1-6 had been documented through health statistics. The child care service decided to apply for and subsequently received consistent funding to provide a Family Program and a Nutrition Program (SNAICC, 2004). 'Tiwi for Life', a health program run through the community health clinic, provided nutrition training for both staff and parents at the centre. Funding for a new kitchen was also secured to support workers to implement the nutrition program. The new child care service was able to offer 4 different programs that would support children in the community; long day care, after school care, a family program and a nutrition program.

Approval for a 55 place centre was gained and the original Jet crèche coordinator left in early January 2001. An acting director was employed to oversee the move to the new child care centre when it was completed. Then, with the establishment of the new centre under way, a non-Indigenous director was hired (not the current director) who worked with the local staff to develop some of the basic routines and rules that continue to be used today.

This director left in 2002 and the current director took over. The current director had been working in the service as the nutrition worker until this time. She has just finished her Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services). As she is married to a local man, she has many established relationships with families in the community.

INNOVATIVE STAFFING PRACTICES

The facility is a purpose built child care centre with wide covered verandas and securely fenced yards. There is an office, staff room, separate training room, large industrial sized well equipped kitchen, television and computer lounge with two computers for children's use that also doubles as a play room, another smaller playroom specifically equipped for the younger children with typical early childhood materials, a baby change room, separate laundry, toilets for staff and children, a designated sleep room and a large, centrally located, interior area used for group time activities, play, and eating.



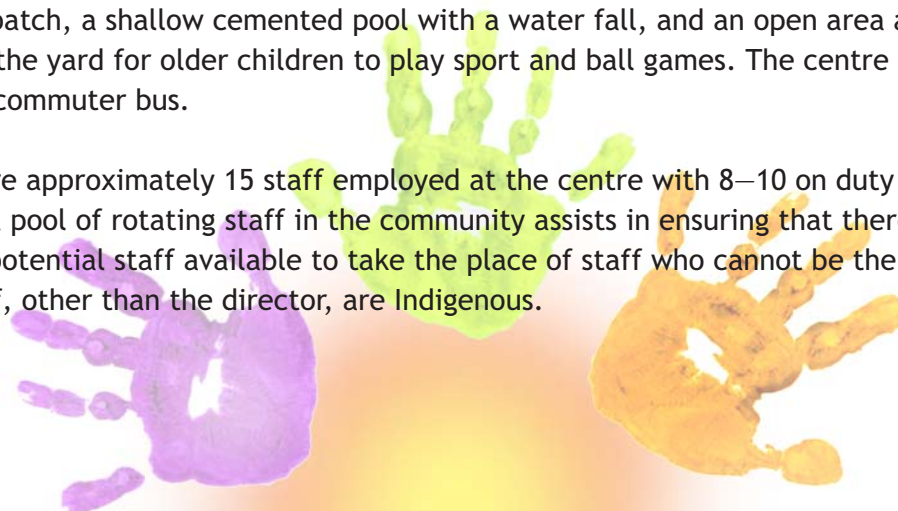
Pre-school room



Verandah

All of the rooms open onto the large internal space. The current program is fully licensed for 55 children aged from birth to 12 year olds. The outdoor play areas are fenced and have well maintained gardens, a bike path, a small vegetable and fruit garden patch, a shallow cemented pool with a water fall, and an open area at the back of the yard for older children to play sport and ball games. The centre has a 14 seat commuter bus.

There are approximately 15 staff employed at the centre with 8–10 on duty daily. Having a pool of rotating staff in the community assists in ensuring that there are always potential staff available to take the place of staff who cannot be there. All the staff, other than the director, are Indigenous.



Innovative and culturally responsive staff management practices have evolved to enable the complex work of the centre to run smoothly. The Director explains how the rotation of staff works and why this system has been adopted in their centre.

...you know, the long-term staff get a bit tired or burned-out, so they leave for a while and then come back. Quite a few staff, people in the community, have worked, had a break and come back next year.

You can't, like in the mainstream, say, "Oh I don't have enough staff. Let's call up this relief". Instead we employ more staff than required to meet licensing, to ensure that there are enough staff, in case any staff are sick.

Non-Indigenous Director

Two of the Indigenous child care workers talk about how this system has worked.

Yes, we've got six or seven of us regular ones. Maybe two or three come to work two on three days and then go home.

Indigenous Family Coordinator

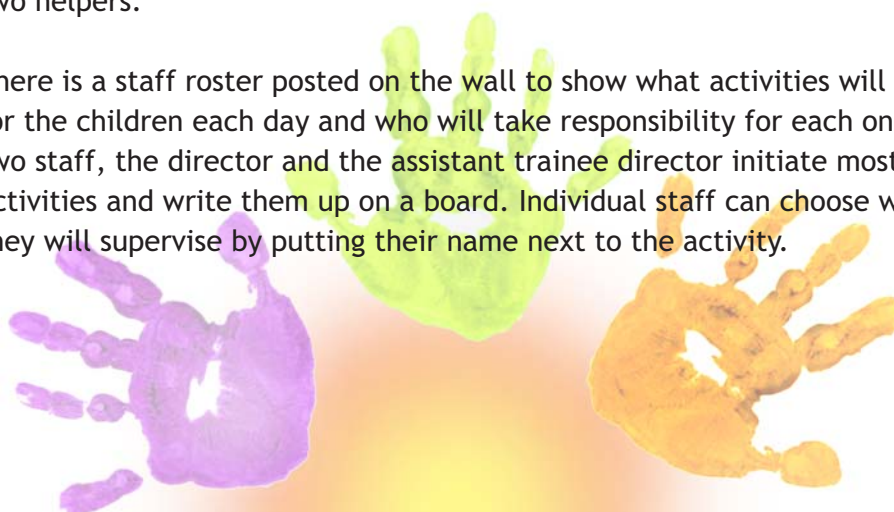
Been away since Christmas. I just came back to work in April. I had a long leave, a little rest. I needed a rest after that.

Indigenous child care worker

At the moment there is also a full time gardener who maintains the centre's garden and works as an assistant to the director. For a number of years the centre has had a small garden with fruits and vegetables as a source of healthy food to be used in meals at the centre and as a way to show children how things grow. In the past, the staff have involved some of the local youth in preparing the garden beds for the centre.

Some staff members were hired specifically to work in the kitchen because the food program is such a large part of the overall program. There is a head cook and two helpers.

There is a staff roster posted on the wall to show what activities will be provided for the children each day and who will take responsibility for each one. At present two staff, the director and the assistant trainee director initiate most of the activities and write them up on a board. Individual staff can choose which activities they will supervise by putting their name next to the activity.



Although not a perfect system the director finds that it helps to distribute the work load and 'gives people ideas' as she says.

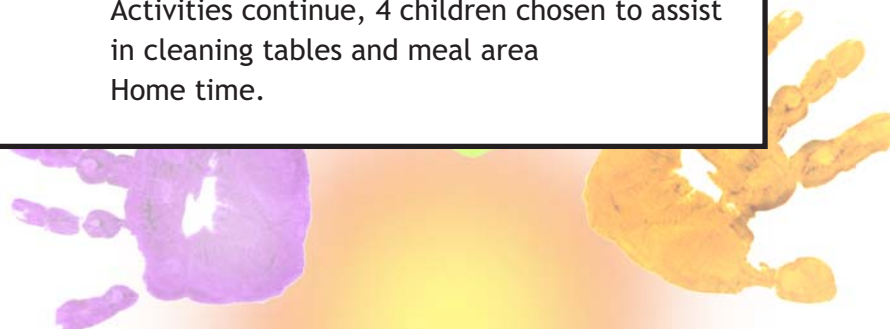
Staff just arrive and they put their name next to the one that they want to do. And they are responsible to set it up, supervise it, and put it away. And so they do it like that and again in the afternoon. That means I've just got to put it up and all I have to do is cover all the different areas of development. And then they can go up and write up anything else they want up there. It works or it doesn't work, but it gives people ideas.

Non- Indigenous Director

The director has a strong commitment to fostering staff's development to take over more of the responsibilities in the centre. The assistant trainee director is explicitly being trained to take over as the director. As assistant director she is paid a higher wage and this acts as a support and incentive to work towards this new role.

The routine for the program is posted on the wall.

7:30	Children arrive, roll taken, Staff choose activity and set up
8:25	Children wash hands
8:30	Breakfast
8:45	Rostered staff wipe tables, Morning activities after breakfast
9:25	Children wash hands
9:30	Children morning tea
9:45	Rostered staff wipe tables, Morning activities continued, adapted to need
10:00	First staff group to morning tea
11:00	Second group to morning tea
11:10	Children wash hands
11:15	Lunch
11:30	Sleep time
12:00-1:00	Staff Lunch
1:00	Activities set up for after school
1:30	Children arrive and roll taken
2:00	Lunch for after school care
2:20	Activities continue, 4 children chosen to assist in cleaning tables and meal area
4:00	Home time.



Staff arrive early to set up activities and prepare breakfast for the children before they go to school. After they are fed, staff offer children different activities such as painting, drawing, play dough, building with blocks, sand play, bikes, pretend play and so on. The centre is very well equipped. We observed how staff supervise children closely by sitting near them and talking to them while they play.



Staff supervising children



Staff playing with child

...the kids, the kids are important. Help them with their learning as well, their culture, before they get to pre-school. I help them with their reading, writing and getting mixed with other kids.

Indigenous Family Coordinator

Before lunch children gather on a mat as a group for 15 minutes for talking, stories, and songs. Every day staff try to make sure that children have a chance to practice the cultural dance associated with their dreaming story. Murals of the animals associated with these dances are painted on the walls and doors surrounding the mat. All of the staff participate in this routine.

Staff take a half hour morning tea break in two rotations while children have their morning tea and do some more activities. After another short play time, at 11:30 children wash their hands for lunch. Children from the preschool arrive at this point.



Child scraping his plate from lunch

After lunch children scrape their plates into a bin and stack their cups and plates for washing. Then they go to sleep in the sleep room although all children are not expected to sleep. Children who aren't requested by their parents to stay all day are dropped off at home in the child care bus.

The staff lunch time is 12:00–1:00 and they often withdraw to the air conditioned computer/lounge room to watch favourite TV programs and relax. Immediately they are finished with lunch they set up the activities for after school care.



After school care activities

Older children from the school arrive at 1:30. The school age children receive a hearty lunch at child care and engage in a wide range of activities on their own, with staff or with the younger children. In the afternoons there can be up to 55 children in the centre, 35 of which are school aged children on average. Afternoons can be very hectic times for the staff and younger children.

One solution has been to create a playing field behind the centre where older children can play more boisterously and still be supervised by staff. The director has prepared a submission to work with the Sport and Recreation officer to explore together how to use staff and coordinate a special program for 9–12 year olds away from the centre. These children currently use the child care program as well as the Sport & Rec program that runs at the same time.

The program feeds up to 100 children per day, although the centre is only licensed for 55. The school aged children rotate through the centre daily at lunchtime with some coming to the centre just for lunch and then going home.

A teacher from the school explained.

The pre-school kids go to child care for lunch around 11:30. The tuck shop at the school is for kids with money only. At 1:30 most of the school kids go to the crèche for lunch.

Non-Indigenous Teacher

The Director describes the tension that they struggled with initially around the need to limit the number of older children using the centre.

When we first moved down into this area it was hard...we can only have 55 (children), so we had to turn away and we'd never done that before. And that was hard. We felt uncomfortable at first about turning away those kids.

Non-Indigenous Director

As the program developed it became clear that some sort of system had to be developed that would be fair to all of the school aged children and that didn't show any favouritism. More children arrive for lunch every afternoon than can be accommodated by the centre. The children of parents who have paid for lunches at the child care centre are given priority of access. Children know that if they attend one day, they may not be allowed in on the next day, to enable a different child to come. As a result the children literally race from school to the child care centre. A roll is taken of children each day and staff ensure that children who have missed out are included the next day. When there is enough space and food no limits are set.

Staff try to feed as many children as they can because they know that the children are hungry.

On some days no tucker at home. So then they come to child care. That's a couple of days, Mondays and Tuesdays.

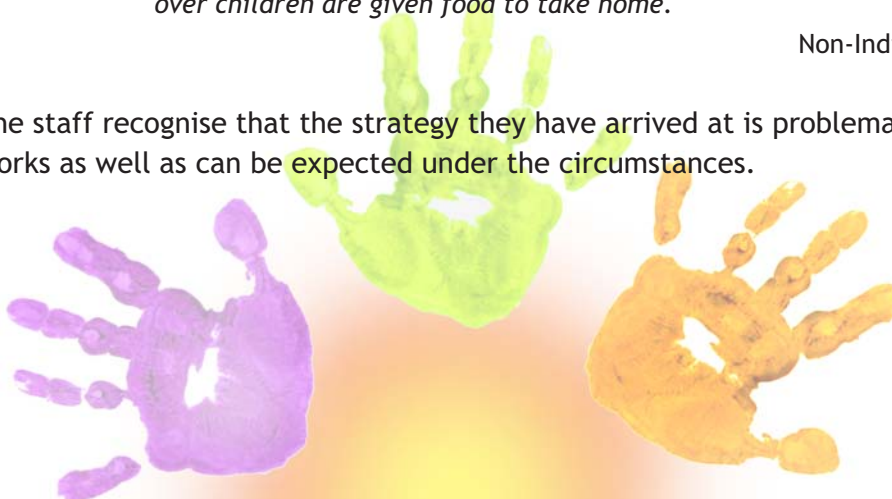
Indigenous Family Coordinator

Some children only attend for the lunchtime meal and then leave the centre allowing other children to enter. Staff were feeling exhausted by the work of feeding so many children.

Because of the stress on the staff and that, we can only have 55 after school care kids attend child care. We might end up feeding 100 children that come to the gate. Therefore, the left over children are given food to take home.

Non-Indigenous Director

The staff recognise that the strategy they have arrived at is problematic, but it works as well as can be expected under the circumstances.



Other community members are aware of the pressure on the centre because of the success of this program.



School aged children arriving at the gate and the Family Coordinator checking the role

I don't know if we can allow more kids to go to the childcare centre...With the kids standing around outside, I feel like we should have somebody thinking about (it). The next day, (the kids are thinking) 'Oh I'm going to come a little bit earlier.' You can see them, as soon as it's three o'clock or something, they are running towards it...I reckon it would be good to have another one, really good. The other kids... you know, there's 2000 people in the community. It would be useful if they had another one. Maybe one for, I don't know, if there's a childcare centre for older kids.

Indigenous Community Services Officer

Although the older children create some pressure on staff because of their numbers, they contribute to the centre as well. Near the end of the day some of the older children are chosen to do a child care job for a small reward, such as a tin of milo to take home. The staff started this practice so that children could learn life skills and also to help staff who were tired at the end of a long day.



11 and 12 year olds wiping tables, cutting fruit and mopping floors

During one of our visits we saw how they helped with chores like wiping down all the tables, mopping the floors, sweeping the cement and cutting up fruit for the afternoon tea. They took their chores seriously and did them competently. Clearly, they had been taught how to do them properly.

Another important practice that has evolved is the way the centre consciously works to collaborate with and link up with members of the wider community and with other services in the community. Whenever there is an opportunity to build a link to another program within the community the centre welcomes the chance to gain more support.

For example, staff recognised that the newness of child care as a concept in the community might mean some families would not come to the centre of their own accord. They created reasons for new families to visit the centre. Families that have not used the centre for child care have many opportunities to visit the centre and see what is happening there - when they bring their children for health check ups, when they attend cooking classes, when they come to learn about 'first foods for babies' and so on.

The centre encourages new families to stay with their children when they first start coming to the centre.

Some families keep the kids at home. Like working moms and working dads they bring the kids here to childcare. And like some, a couple moms do housework bring the kids to childcare. But the first time we tell the moms to come and sit with the kids all day so they get used to it.

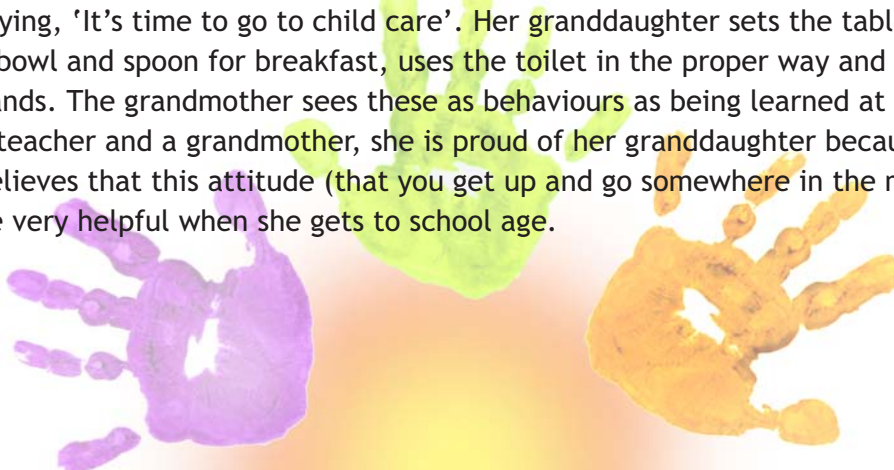
Indigenous Family Program Coordinator

The child care centre works collaboratively with the school. The popularity of the child care seems to have had a good effect on school attendance. A rule was developed by the community council to encourage school attendance. If the school aged children want to come to the child care they must go to school first. The rule seems to have been very effective.

As soon as the kids in that preschool for the day have finished at the school they're allowed to go over to the child care centre. They do go there and hang around, watch videos and stuff. So most of the young kids go to school first.

Indigenous Community Services Officer

Children who attend child care are also developing new practices as was demonstrated by a story told to us by an Indigenous teacher at the school. She has been impressed with the changes in her three year old granddaughter's behaviour since she has been attending the child care. She told us that her granddaughter is the first one to get up in the morning at home. She gets her grandmother up too saying, 'It's time to go to child care'. Her granddaughter sets the table herself with a bowl and spoon for breakfast, uses the toilet in the proper way and washes her hands. The grandmother sees these as behaviours as being learned at child care. As a teacher and a grandmother, she is proud of her granddaughter because she believes that this attitude (that you get up and go somewhere in the mornings) will be very helpful when she gets to school age.



DEVELOPING STAFF AND THE COMMUNITY THROUGH CHILD CARE

The centre has developed a number of different strategies to incorporate staff and parent training opportunities into every day. Because there are many programs operating at the centre, a decision was made to appoint a particular staff member to be the designated program coordinator. Each program initially had a program coordinator who took responsibility for that program. For example, the Nutrition Program and the Family Program each had a specific coordinator. This practice has enabled staff to develop in depth knowledge about her area. It has also distributed responsibility more widely amongst staff so that the director is not seen as the one and only 'boss'. This system has evolved to having a director, an assistant and trainee director, a family coordinator and a head chef.

Having special programs at the centre provides opportunities for staff to gain new skills. For example, the Nutrition Program works closely with the Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture program operated by Tiwi Health Board and the nutritionist from the Department of Health and Community Services to provide healthy food for children at the centre.

The centre offers workshops to staff and parents on 'First foods for babies', an ear health program and dental workshops to learn about dental hygiene. Parents are also encouraged to participate in these learning opportunities.



Mother learning about babies first foods from Director

Informal staff development activities are provided regularly by the director. Morning tea time is a half an hour long, long enough to allow time for staff to discuss child development knowledge or programming or any other topic that is of current importance to their training. A plate of freshly baked warm damper with jam and butter is always available at these sessions. This activity will sometimes include parents who have been identified as being at risk and are part of a new program the centre has just begun to offer called 'Exploring Together Parenting Program'.



Whenever there are visitors from training organisations or government departments visiting the centre, they are asked to share their knowledge. For example, a box of new resources arrived at the centre when we were visiting. The Director took the opportunity during morning tea to show the staff what they might do with them.



**Director showing staff new resources at morning tea
and modelling their use at mat time**

These training opportunities complement the formal staff training that has occurred on site through regular visits from lecturers at Batchelor College (now Batchelor Institute). The centre has had to address training in the context of a high staff turnover. Because training is ongoing and built into a routine, it creates the opportunity for all staff to continually build their knowledge about different child care practices.

The Family Health program is another example of a productive strategy for accessing training with a side benefit of linking the child care staff to yet another program in the community that is working for children. The program offered in collaboration with Menzies School of Health Research. Families from the community bring their children to the centre for regular health check ups when a visiting health researcher from Menzies comes to the community (usually fortnightly). The Menzies staff were given the use of a room in the centre to conduct this program.



In the early stages the centre director recalls that there was not a lot of communication between the Menzies visitors and the staff of the centre. The staff discussed this situation and decided that it could be another opportunity for staff development and for drawing on the expertise of the health workers.

The director approached the Menzies staff to discuss the possibilities, particularly the possibility of training for one of the staff who had expressed an interest in becoming more involved in children's health.

They were there and they were doing their thing. We were doing our thing and there wasn't much connection. I just approached them and said, '(one of the child care workers) must be part of this. She really wants to be involved...If you can come back to us, come speak to us during the day or at the end of your visit, or the beginning of your visit,(and tell us) these are the children who are underweight, these are the children who have ear problems, and these have gone well. If we could have some feedback, then we can talk to you...We can really work (to support you)'...And that's what's happened.They said, 'We didn't realise this.' because they were coming and going. So you have to be sure that you keep that communication, just like you need to with parents, keep that communication flow going and that's happening now.

Non-Indigenous Director

The interested child care worker was trained by the Menzies health staff with the skills necessary to check children's ear health. Now all of the staff have been given this training and the regular checking of children's ears has become a rostered job for all of the staff. In addition, while Menzies operates out of the centre all of the children benefit because their health needs are identified early and addressed.

The child care staff have developed leaflets illustrating healthy food recipes and distributed these through the shop and the child care centre. Mothers who use the centre also attend cooking classes originally at the centre and now organised with Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture Program at the local shop. They have been learning to cook healthy foods for their children, often using the recipes developed at the child care centre. The recipes are photographs of the food and the process of cooking a meal with minimal text to enable staff and parents with low literacy levels easier access to the methods and information for cooking healthy foods.



The networks built by this service offer support to other services. For example, when the preschool is not able to operate, as was the case for a long period of time in 2003 when the preschool teacher was ill, the preschool aged children were able to attend at the child care centre all day. As their relationship with the school developed, the child care centre began to provide the school tuck shop with ideas about healthy food for the children using their knowledge of nutrition and healthy food gained from own their nutrition program.

The contact we have had with the schools assists them with many ideas about healthy food, and they now have a really good tuck shop there where they don't sell soft drinks or chips and things like that...

Non-Indigenous director

MAKING TIME AND SPACE FOR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Many people talked about the cultural activities which have become an important part of the everyday program. For example, children learn and practice their dreaming dances at group time and do Tiwi word games. This activity came about because of a concern that children were losing their Tiwi language.

We do little things like Tiwi word game activities. We want them to be proud of who they are. They're being proud that they are Tiwi, because this generation now is so influenced by television and wanting to be like the 'Home boys' and whatever. The generation before, they were brought up in the Catholic Mission...so much culture wasn't allowed. The next generation now is where we have to bring it back.

Non-Indigenous Director

Kinship relationships are also emphasised, as part of managing children's behaviour in culturally appropriate ways.

We have culture for kids at like group time...Yes, we have cultural activities and group time...staff talks to the kids about kinships, and when they playing together or if they fight, we say "You're related to that, that boy or girl is your nephew or cousin.

Indigenous Family Coordinator



The Director explained that if the children are spoken to in English, they are encouraged to respond in English. If they are spoken to in Tiwi, they are encouraged to respond in Tiwi. The culture dances are conducted in Tiwi language. Each day the children practice their dances at group time. As children are dismissed from mat time, those with the same dance perform together. The staff in the centre dance with the children showing them how to do their dance.



Staff and children dancing

A new program has recently been introduced which staff refer to as the Cultural Program. Women from the community come to the centre and provide cultural activities for the children. An earlier attempt to start this program did not succeed because these workers believed they should receive some compensation for their work and this was not available. The current program ensures that the workers receive a small amount of pay each time they provide the activities. During our first visit the Family Coordinator explained how they had been working on this issue.

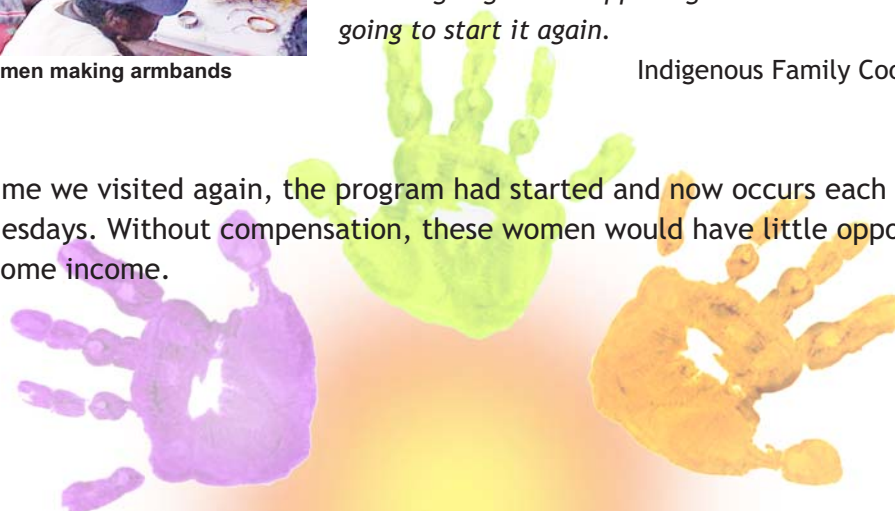


Women making armbands

Earlier this year we invited couple of elderly people to come and talk to the kids. They showed interest for awhile but like, money wise, they wanted money...to teach about culture activities with kids. But it's going to be happening soon. We're going to start it again.

Indigenous Family Coordinator

By the time we visited again, the program had started and now occurs each week on Wednesdays. Without compensation, these women would have little opportunity to gain some income.



One of the older staff members discussed the importance of teaching culture to the children at the centre. She is worried about the loss of culture for the older children and teenagers. She hopes that by sharing cultural activities with the younger children she can pass on her knowledge.

They have their own way, you know? They have their own way like when we encourage young people to get up and dance, they too shy. They dance not really like us when we dance. We really mean it when we dance in our way, in our culture. ...You can be strong...but it's changing today amongst the young people. They have their own way...

I want them to learn everything from me...We have lots to teach. And we still have some ladies at our community who are doing weaving...pandanus. They go and get some pandanus and some dye and they make baskets. ...They (the children) learn culture... From little, little, they learn culture right up to when they grow up.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

She also spoke about how pleased she was that the Culture Program was going ahead in the centre. She spoke about her own interest in learning how to make cultural objects.

...We have arm bands when we have our ceremonies you know, when somebody passed away. We have ceremony. We wear them arm bands...Older ladies do that. They teach us too. One day, they teach me too.

Indigenous Child Care Worker

The community was created as a Catholic mission and Christian beliefs are strong in the culture of the community as well. Children always say a prayer before eating lunch.

And that's why we have the prayer, because the staff are (Catholic) and we're fine with that because it shows respect to let the children have a prayer at their meal table.

Indigenous director



SUPPORTING CHILD CARE THROUGH LINKS TO COMMUNITY AND BEYOND

This child care program has recognised the opportunity and taken full advantage of a wider network of supports and contacts external to their community. Its location, 20 minutes by plane from Darwin, makes the service an appealing and easily accessible destination for visiting government officials and bureaucrats from Darwin, interstate and Canberra. As a result, the centre is often on display to outsiders as a model of remote Indigenous community child care. Staff seem to take this continuous scrutiny in their stride and open their doors to these visitors. The benefits are the strength they have gained as a successful team and the recognition from the community and beyond. They are beginning to understand their own uniqueness and worth.

Over the years Nguiu staff and community women have had the opportunity to attend and, as their experience and knowledge grew, to present child care training workshops such as their presentations at the 'It takes a community to keep children safe and strong' Workshop in Darwin (October, 2002), the Honouring the Child, Honouring Equity 2: Risking Change to Make a Difference conference in Melbourne, (November, 2002), and the Australian Early Childhood Association Conference (September, 2003). They were participants in many of the early development activities offered to remote area women when formal child care was first being discussed in the Territory. They were represented at the Talking Early Childhood consultations, regional workshops for child care workers in remote areas, interstate SNAICC conferences, including a recent consultation on outdoor play design convened through the Dept of Health and Community Services and so on. In the early days of its development the Commonwealth and Territory licensing and funding agents provided on-site support and training as well.

One of the child care centre's resources that enables ongoing contact with other services and the child care world beyond the centre is the well equipped office. Staff can have ongoing contact with people and services encountered through in-services or workshops they have attended throughout the NT and beyond. The office has computers, internet, phone, fax, a digital camera, storage space, staff mail boxes, filing cabinets, office desks and chairs and a time clock for staff to register their arrival and departure each day. The office and equipment make it possible for the staff to create high quality newsletters, recipe booklets, staff rosters, training sheets, programs, flyers, wall charts and so on. The access to reliable electronic communication means that distribution of these materials and contact with other remote area child care centres occurs regularly (or at least with other communities that also have these facilities). Having a director who is familiar with 'Western' bureaucracy, has a high literacy level and a deep personal commitment to supporting the community, including her relationship to others in the community through marriage, has been beneficial to the development of the service.

In addition, she is committed to building the staff's capacity to run the centre independently. She is aiming to work at the centre part time next year.

Overall the service has become recognised as a valuable and necessary community asset.

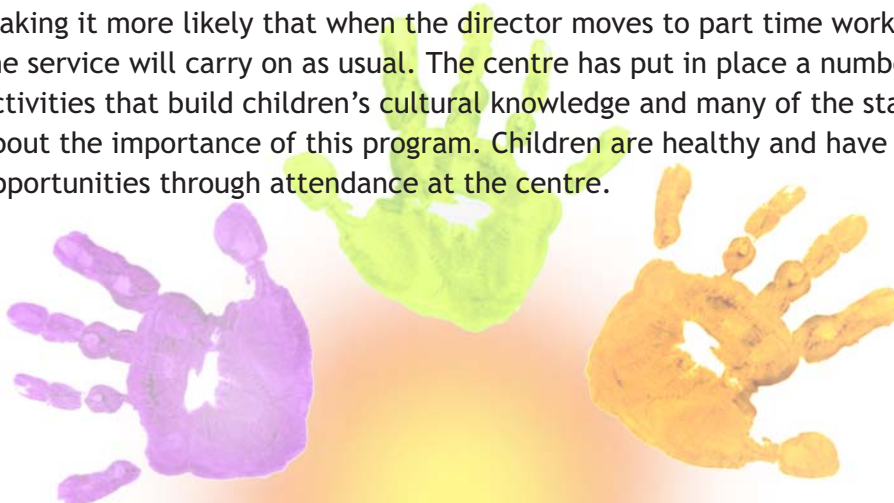
I didn't think we needed childcare but when I think about it now I reckon it's pretty well done that we got a childcare centre...It would be something different for the community and I thought it was, I was sort of thinking that it could fit into the community. Actually it has. It's pretty good. And the thing is that the kids really love it.

Indigenous Community Services Officer

CONCLUSION

At each stage of development this service has had a director with a strong voice who could advocate for what was needed both within the community and beyond. This service has received significant support from the beginning and this has been ongoing. The location of the community, a short flight from Darwin, has meant that the child care centre receives many visits from NT and interstate or national politicians as well as other visitors interested in remote Indigenous child care centre development. This continuous scrutiny has given the service a sense of its own worth and importance as a symbol of Indigenous enterprise and competence.

Many of the original staff who were involved in the development of the service are still involved. Staff have developed innovative practices for involving new community members in the activities of the centre. They have developed new practices to solve difficult problems such as lunch time for the school aged children. Their staffing and training practices seem to fit the needs of the staff so that staff attendance has been much less of a problem than is the case in many other communities. On site training has made it possible to maintain a large pool of qualified child care workers on the island. All of the staff are participating in and taking responsibility for many aspects of this complex and multidimensional service making it more likely that when the director moves to part time work later in 2005 the service will carry on as usual. The centre has put in place a number of routine activities that build children's cultural knowledge and many of the staff talked about the importance of this program. Children are healthy and have many learning opportunities through attendance at the centre.



CHAPTER 7



TITJIKALA

*Long-term Commitment + Motivation to Learn = A 'Can Do' Place**

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

The Titjikala community is 130km south of Alice Springs and is accessed via a dirt road that can become impassable in the wet weather. The closest airstrip is at Maryvale Station about 10 minutes drive from the community.

A flight to Alice Springs is about 25 minutes. The community population is approximately 275 people (ABS, 2001) and is growing at about 10% which means that there are a lot of young people and children in the community. (Flexible Funding Submission, 2004, p.17). In 2004 approximately 40% of the community was under 15 years old (Scott, 2004, personal communication). The main languages spoken are Luritja, Pitjantjatjara, and Arrente and English is the second language for virtually every Indigenous community member (Titjikala Community History, 2002). The community is also known as Tapatjatjaka and Maryvale.

In the 1940s and 1950s Aboriginal people came with their families from the surrounding regions to work at Maryvale Station as domestic workers, stockmen and cameleers and to access the Mission Truck that provided rations. They set up camp and settled in the area that is now Titjikala. School classes began to be offered for primary aged children in a demountable known as a 'Silver Bullet' in the 1960s (Titjikala Art Centre Information Sheet). The community began to develop with the building of permanent houses occurring in the mid to late 1980s and freehold title was granted in 1987.

The community has a primary school, a health clinic with one nurse, a community run shop, a Lutheran church, a purpose built training facility with a flat attached for visitors, a radio and television broadcast facility, a football and soft ball oval and an airstrip. The school employs 4 teachers and 2 Indigenous staff members and up to 50 children attend each day. It is an unofficial 'two-way' school in that staff attempt to learn and use words from children's languages. Aboriginal staff speak in language to the children.

* Arthur Yandell's description

The Community Council also provides regular rubbish removal, a Night Patrol service, and other services to the community. There are plans for a swimming pool to be built in 2004. There are 38 houses in the community.

The Council runs the CDEP program that is fully managed by local Indigenous workers. There are 80 CDEP positions that are part time, approximately 25% of which are funded with extra 'top up' wages to enable people to accumulate more hours of paid work. There are 10 full time workers involved in community enterprises; i.e. the rubbish removal, freight, Council office workers, construction workers, workers out bush and in the child care centre (Scott, 2004, personal communication).

The Art Centre is a thriving concern and employs many of the women and some men in the community. In 2001 approximately \$17,000 was paid in wages to women artists and, by 2004, the figure had reached \$58,000. This figure does not include the sales from paintings, and other art work which are sold at national and international art galleries as well as in the fortnightly markets in Alice Springs. There are plans this year to advertise the Art Centre on the main road to attract tourists to the centre.

In 1999, the primary school developed a school plan. It is called the Tjukurrpa. Tjukurrpa in this context means future dreaming or plan, which is similar to a school philosophy. It is a set of values created by parents and community members that show what is important for the school to teach their children. There are five areas. These community's key values for children's learning in 'The Plan for learning at Titjikala School included: 1) Everyone can teach and everyone can learn, 2) Having visitors and visiting other people, 3) Learning about culture, learning about language, 4) English and Maths, 5) School should be a fun, safe place where kids want to learn (Arama Mataira, June 15, 2004, personal communication).

A recent skills audit found that many community members had multiple certificates at Certificate I and II levels. Access to on-site child care training, especially at higher levels, and regular training has been an ongoing issue for this community.



THE TITJIKALA CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

For the last time, it is important to remember that there are a number of factors accounting for the development of a children's service in a remote community including;

- the overall capacity of the council to conduct the business of the community,
- the size of the community,
- the amount of ongoing support and training provided by interested external agencies, and
- the length of time a specific service for children has been operating.

Given these factors, for this case study, the message we want to highlight is that (a) the long term commitment of staff who have been involved in the service since the beginning, combined with (b) and their motivation to learn, Titjikala (c) is a 'can do place' for little kids.

A service for young children started at Titjikala as a playgroup on the veranda of the Women's Centre (which was also the Art Centre at the time). An older woman who is a traditional owner worked there at the time. She explained, through her daughter who interpreted for us, how the centre came about.

Started at the women's centre. They had to share one building, women's centre and art centre. Mothers and grandmothers was painting and those kids was humbugging them. We asked the council. Had a ladies meeting in the women's centre. Talking to the council for helping with our kids.

Traditional Owner

In the early days the women raised funds for the playgroup and the Women's Centre by selling things at the local markets in Alice Springs. The traditional owner remembers this time and how her daughter helped with the fund raising.

(We made) music sticks, (my daughter) burnt them. She got some at home there, for selling. Different now (at the art centre). Shut the doors and still working in the art centre. The kids got separate yard and the ladies look after them. They got preschool now.

Traditional Owner



In 1996, the service was run as a playgroup for mothers and children. In 1999 the service became a JET crèche funded through Jobs Education and Training and offered child care. For a period in its history the program moved into a demountable that had previously been a Health Clinic.

When we established the JET program, the women set up the old health clinic by putting in a shower and a small hand basin for them to wash their hands and (bubbler) to drink from. The demountable was very small for the fifteen plus children, but they managed by using the outside concrete slab to eat on and use as a little play area. They had a nice little sand pit and toys to play with. The women basically ran the program themselves from this demountable while I was stationed at the Women's Centre.

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

It was relocated to two temporary buildings situated between the Women's Centre and the Art Centre where it remains today. While a new building is being



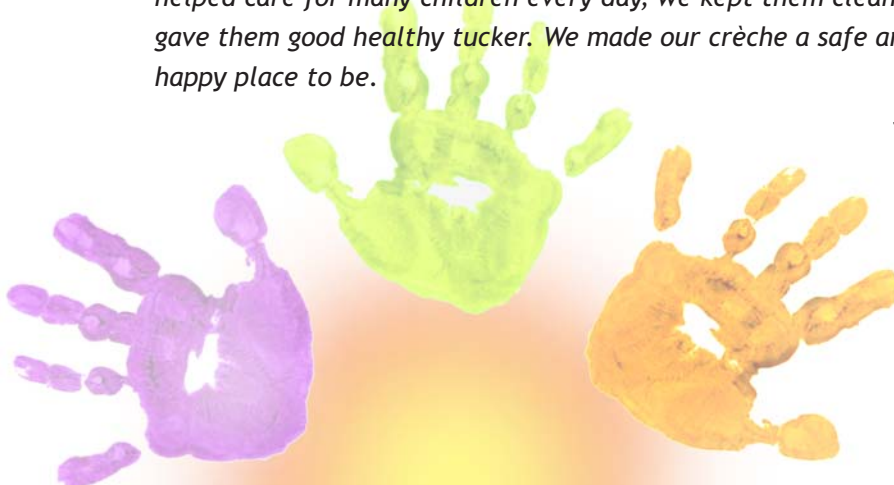
Titjikala child care centre

completed, the program has moved into the Women's Centre. The community is very proud of its achievement in developing a child care centre. On the Titjikala Community website, a photographic survey of the community's assets undertaken in 2000 for the Titjikala Community Council, displays the child care centre as one of the community's assets

In the JET Newsletter, 2000, the Titjikala Women's Centre director reported on the program and described their early difficulties and successes.

We had a few teething problems, we made a few mistakes, we had some good experiences, we learn from our mistakes. We helped care for many children every day, we kept them clean, gave them good healthy tucker. We made our crèche a safe and happy place to be.

JET Report 2000



An important issue at that time was catering for babies and young children who 'failed to thrive' or 'skinny kids' as they were referred to locally. The service addressed this issue by providing healthy meals. In addition, the report noted other benefits of running the crèche.

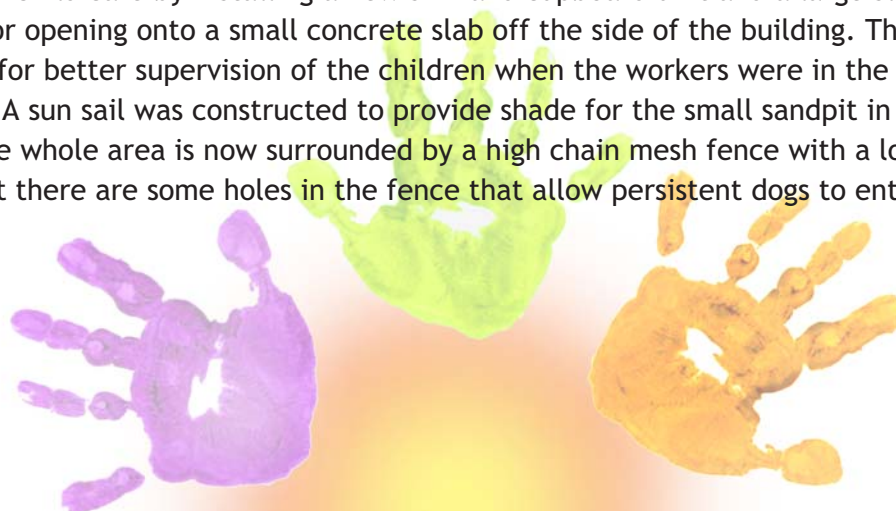
Since starting the on-site crèche at Titjikala, we have enjoyed seeing the social impact it has had on our children their families and the community at large. The children have gained more confidence, the separation from their mothers, playing together and sharing, the kids love coming to crèche so much, they start "humbugging" their mothers as soon as they get up in the mornings...It has been a life saver having the funding from the JET programme, to help us continue to provide a very necessary service for our community.

JET Report 2000

The centre moved from the old health clinic and operated for a while in the Women's Centre itself but this was difficult because of all the other programs that operated out of the Women's Centre. After a while, two demountable buildings located next to the Women's Centre and Art Centre were taken over to house the crèche program.

These buildings are well placed at the centre of the community giving easy access to the families that live nearby. In fact, children can, and often do, bring themselves to child care. It is also located within the 'women's enclave' (Scott 2004 personal communication), the part of the community where women tend to spend significant amounts of time each day. One of the buildings, a demountable, is used as a preschool classroom. It contains children's play and art materials, two tables and chairs, a teacher's desk and filing cabinet and some storage shelves. The other building contains the kitchen with a stove, sink and refrigerator, a storage cupboard and tables and chairs. Both have air conditioners.

The Council through CDEP workers converted the building into a more useable space for child care by installing a new sink and cupboard unit and a large sliding glass door opening onto a small concrete slab off the side of the building. This allowed for better supervision of the children when the workers were in the kitchen. A sun sail was constructed to provide shade for the small sandpit in the yard. The whole area is now surrounded by a high chain mesh fence with a lockable gate, but there are some holes in the fence that allow persistent dogs to enter.



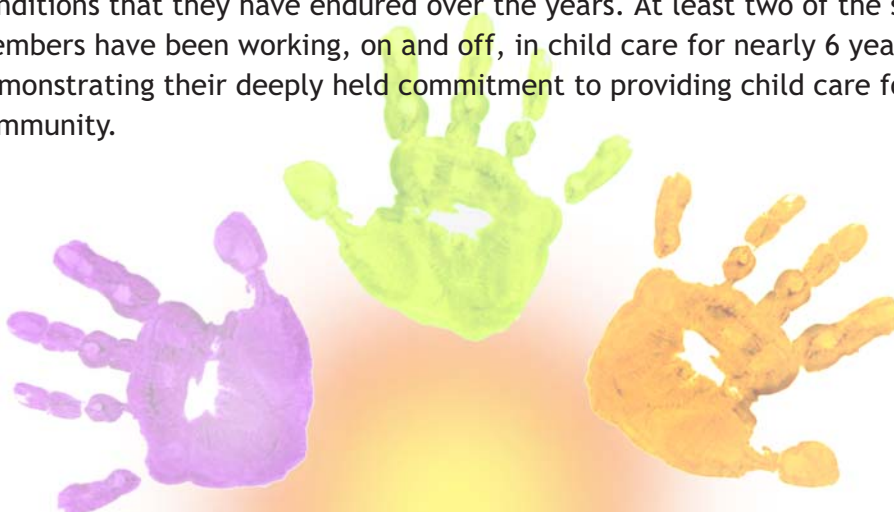
There is water plumbed into the kitchen but there are no hand washing or toilet facilities on site. Children and staff have been able to use the public toilet block near by, but these were locked up by the Council for many months in 2003 due to vandalism. Although the child care program was identified as a positive community asset in the Photographic Survey, the comment from the women who worked there was that it was 'too small and vulnerable to break and enters by younger people'. (Community Development Plan, p. 6 of 13). The women who work in the centre know that their centre needs many things, but they are proud to have been able to hold their service together during the 6 years it has taken to receive funding for a more permanent facility. They are 'ready and waiting' for the opportunity to learn and use the skills they have already gained over the years.

In July 2002, the child care centre was identified by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services as a recipient for Innovative child care funding as a Family and Children's Centre. This development has meant that a new purpose built 25 place child care centre has begun construction on the previous site. The building commenced in April 2004 and should reach practical completion by November 2004.



New child care centre under construction

Staff are very keen to move into their new facility because of the difficult working conditions that they have endured over the years. At least two of the staff members have been working, on and off, in child care for nearly 6 years demonstrating their deeply held commitment to providing child care for the community.



In the current child care centre, staff tell us the key problems that make child care work hard is the lack of space for inside play or storage of play materials in the



Children dancing in the kitchen

present facility, lack of equipment, no toilet or hand washing facilities, lack of sleep areas or nappy change areas for the younger children and the holes in the fence that allow dogs into the children's play areas. The child care centre supervisor talks about some of the problems with the current facility and what she hopes to see improved in the new centre.

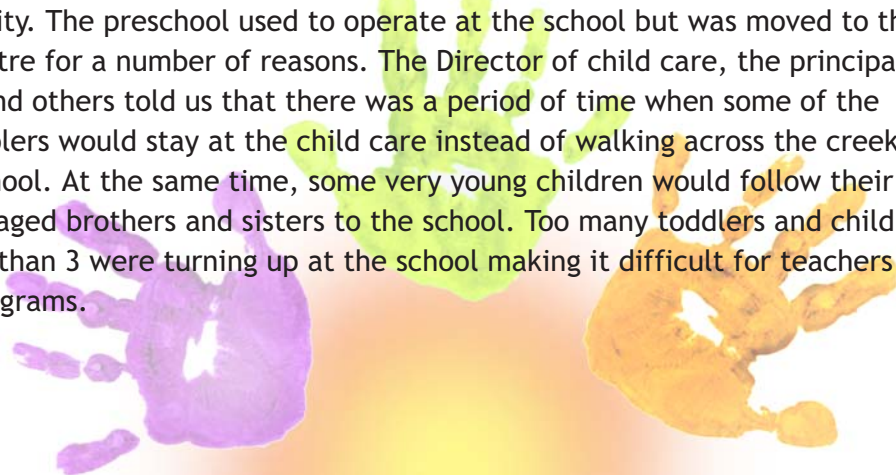
Not much areas for the kids to run around. I like to get more equipment. Skipping ropes so the kids can jump and get their bodies better. Coughing is good for the body. Circle games like musical chairs. A bike track, beds, painting easels. Mothers can come in because of air con. Staff room for people to come together, Batchelor and Waltja, and also the young girls...Washing hands in the sink would be good. Now in a bucket of soapy water. Somewhere to bath babies... change nappies and toilets for the kids. Doors for the dogs.

Indigenous Child Care Centre Director

Despite these difficulties the child care staff have provided a child care service that meets many of the needs of the community. There are two outstanding features of the program that are valued by the community; the preschool program for the 3 and 4 year olds and the nutrition program that provides children with healthy food.

CHILD CARE WORKING WITH OTHER SERVICES

The child care centre hosts the preschool program for the three to four year old children in the community. The school is located about 400 meters away from the child care centre and from the main community facilities (i.e., shop, clinic, women's centre, etc.) across a dried out river bed on the road leading out of the community. The preschool used to operate at the school but was moved to the child care centre for a number of reasons. The Director of child care, the principal of the school and others told us that there was a period of time when some of the preschoolers would stay at the child care instead of walking across the creek bed to go to school. At the same time, some very young children would follow their primary aged brothers and sisters to the school. Too many toddlers and children younger than 3 were turning up at the school making it difficult for teachers to run their programs.



Children like to be with their brothers and sisters. ...We've got a lot of little childcare here coming in, and I said 'No, you got to go back...you have to grow up and come back'... Cause little kids used to come to school here all the time so (the preschool teacher) had to give it there...

Indigenous Education Worker, School Family Liaison Officer

As this problem became more apparent, the child care workers and the principal worked together to find a solution. If the children were staying at child care instead of coming to the school, the school would bring the preschool teacher to the children. It was also hoped that having 'school' at child care might solve the problem of the younger children coming to school with their older siblings. The Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) who had worked with the preschool aged



children at the school now runs the preschool program at the child care centre. She works with the children in the child care centre in the mornings and in the afternoons she returns to the school to work with the older children. The problem of the younger children going to the school seems to have been solved. This development has strengthened the child care centre's relationship with the school and provided them with a reliable additional worker subsidised by the school.

The principal of the school would like to give the child care staff and the IEW even more support because she believes the work they are doing helps to orient the younger children to the notion of school.

The crèche to school transition is easier for the kids attending crèche.

Non-Indigenous School Principal

There has been a longstanding and very close working relationship between the Women's Centre and the Child Care Program. The Women's Centre coordinator administers all of the Women's Centre programs as well as the Child care program. The Women's Centre has been the instigator through the Women's Committee for many of the programs related to children and families including home and community care for the elderly. The Aged Care program involves general care for the elderly community members, preparation and distribution of their meals and washing of their blankets and clothes. The other main program administered by the Women's centre is the child care and nutrition program. In the past, the Art Centre was also managed through the Women's Centre until the recent appointment of a full time Art Centre coordinator.

The Art Centre is located next door to the current child care facility. Managing so many programs has made it difficult for the Women's Centre Coordinator to support the child care centre as much as she would like.

The Child care centre, Art Centre and Women's Centre are a hub of activity and inspiration for the community and are all initiatives that have started through the Women's Committee.

The Women's Committee is very anchoring for the community, and now the women are earning so much money. It goes straight into their bank accounts. They spend it on what they want...on food, blankets, presents. A woman just sent her daughter some money down in Hermansberg. They can do that now.

Non-Indigenous Chief Executive Officer

The Child care centre will be the first entirely Indigenous women run enterprise in the community.

They're the leaders. They're the avant garde. We're trying to get a significant amount of employment (of Indigenous people) to be role models for the young people. The child care is one of these places.

Non-Indigenous Chief Executive Officer

An important program that operates through the child care centre is the nutrition program. Two staff members cook nutritious meals for the children every day, morning teas and lunch.



Kitchen and child care centre

Child care staff and children also participate in the maintenance of the market garden, a community initiative to improve nutrition. The children from child care sometimes accompany child care workers to tend the garden, pick healthy fruits and vegetables and use them in meals at the centre.

Well, the women take the children with them. Sometimes the children help with picking the vegetables. They also helped plant and weed and water the seedlings. Now the women have got the garden flourishing. We have been eating beans, zucchinis, capsicum, onions and spring onions, heaps of sliver beet and lots of different types of salads. The pensioner 'meals on wheels' and child care have had home grown vegetables on a regular basis including weekends when they are able to help themselves.

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

WORKING IN CHILD CARE

The child care centre Director is the staff member primarily responsible for maintaining the child care program. She coordinates the day to day program for children and oversees the work of 3 other staff members, including young girls who work there from time to time. Child care staff are paid through CDEP for up to 20 hours per week but only receive wages when they work. In the recent past the Director has been paid through STEP (Structured Training Employment Program under the New Apprenticeship Training Scheme). Through this program the community receives an amount of funding per apprentice on the proviso that the apprentice finishes training and goes into a higher level position when training is finished. The Director has completed her apprenticeship in August 2003 and so has moved to a higher wage paid out of the child care funding. The Community Chief Executive Officer has talked about his intention to put the Director on a 'proper wage', as a full time worker, when the new centre opens.

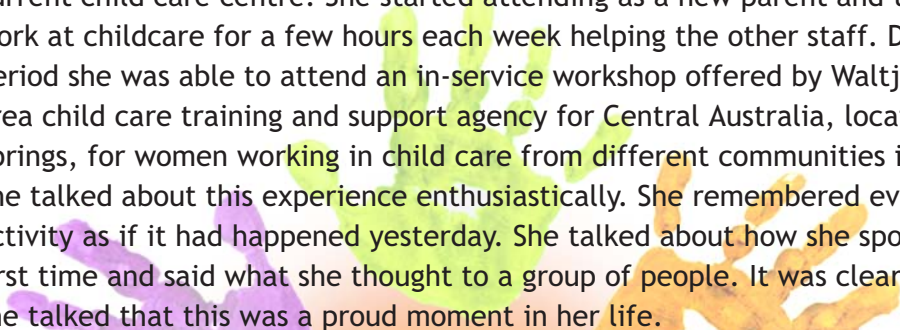
Staff attendance has tended to fluctuate with different staff working at the centre for a time and then moving off to do other jobs. The Director has been there consistently over the whole period of the child care centre's existence with the support of one older woman who has also remained involved in the service. With different staff coming and going it has been difficult for the permanent Director to share child care knowledge, roles and responsibilities amongst a staff team.

There are a number of younger women in the community who are beginning to see that child care can be a place of potential employment. They may start by using the centre themselves, as a place to visit, have a chat and let their children play. Then they may be invited to become staff members. One young mother we spoke to talked about child care as, potentially, a good place to work, particularly when the new centre is built.

One day going to build this new childcare. I might work someday.

Young Indigenous Mother

This young woman had been employed as a part time nutrition worker at the current child care centre. She started attending as a new parent and then got some work at childcare for a few hours each week helping the other staff. During this period she was able to attend an in-service workshop offered by Waltja, the remote area child care training and support agency for Central Australia, located in Alice Springs, for women working in child care from different communities in the region. She talked about this experience enthusiastically. She remembered every event and activity as if it had happened yesterday. She talked about how she spoke up for the first time and said what she thought to a group of people. It was clear from the way she talked that this was a proud moment in her life.



Because of her association with the child care she has begun to see herself in a new light, to see a future for herself as a worker in child care.

To the staff of the current centre, the new purpose built child care centre seems to have taken a long time to come about. Nearly two years has gone by since the announcement that Titjikala would receive a new child care centre. With the support of the Women's Centre Director the current Coordinator has maintained her involvement in the child care program since 1996. She has had some time off but she has always come back to the child care. The Women's Centre Director spoke about how difficult it is for staff to maintain their energy and enthusiasm while working in the current facility. She does what she can, but she has a number of other programs to run and cannot give as much time as she'd like to child care. Every time the staff have a chance to do some child care training or attend a workshop, she notices that they are reinvigorated to implement the new ideas they have learned about. But this energy dissipates during the months when there is no outside support.

We talked to the current child care Director about what she hoped for in the new child care centre. As a way to help us understand she drew her ideas on a poster. She has put lots of bush tucker around the outside and written the Luritja words and English words for different bush tucker foods to show what is important for young children to learn about it in child care. In the centre of her poster she has written 'Sharing and Caring Together with Childcare Centre'. She has indicated the organisations that need to be linked up to the childcare and these include the Women's Centre, and the Health Clinic, the Community Council and the School.



Director's poster

The other long term child care worker who is now employed as a nutrition worker also drew her ideas about what child care could be. She wrote 'Mothers, grandparents bring their children to childcare centre'. Within the childcare centre she put the preschool teacher teaching children to draw or colour the paper and 'childcare workers teaching the kids to blow their nose' and 'Mothers and grandmothers taking the childcare kids for hunting or picnics for witchetty grubs or goannas. Only a few childcare kids go, not many'. This has to do with the fact that there is no vehicle that the centre can use that is big enough to take a large group of the children. Along the sides are pictures and the words, 'two childcare workers to wash their hands before eating and after going to the toilet, also tells the kids to eat good food so they can be strong and healthy', showing how important health, hygiene and food is to the program.

Every time Waltja comes to the community to support the nutrition program they take the women and children on a bush trip. This is emphasised by many people as one of the most important parts of a program for young children.

We spoke to one of the traditional owners of the land in this region. She spoke about what is important to teach young children. Her daughter translated what she said.

Witchetty grub. That's good for little kids. Makes them healthy and goannas. Take them out bush. Learn them up bush tucker...In that troop carrier. They go to get the music sticks (clap sticks). Take a picnic, hunting and all that... We tell them, wild bananas. That's long time, always get them by Alice Springs...Make the little kids healthy. In the morning they forget and walk all around. They like sweets too much, at the shop.

Traditional Owner

Every contribution by outsiders to the program that supports the child care, especially opportunities to take the children hunting, is appreciated by the staff and the community.



GETTING SOME REGULAR TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE

The child care centre administration and financial and other reports to government funding agencies are done by the Women's Centre Coordinator. She has provided ongoing and on site support to the program since it's beginning. She makes herself available to help solve problems and offer encouragement. She feels a strong commitment to supporting the local women to learn how to run their own centre but in order for that to occur she believes they need more regular training and support from the child care world beyond the community.

They (child care workers) really need more training and support now that they're getting their new child care centre. They like the training and say, 'That's a good idea', 'We could try that one'... and it ends up being a long time before training comes again. They need more regular support.

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

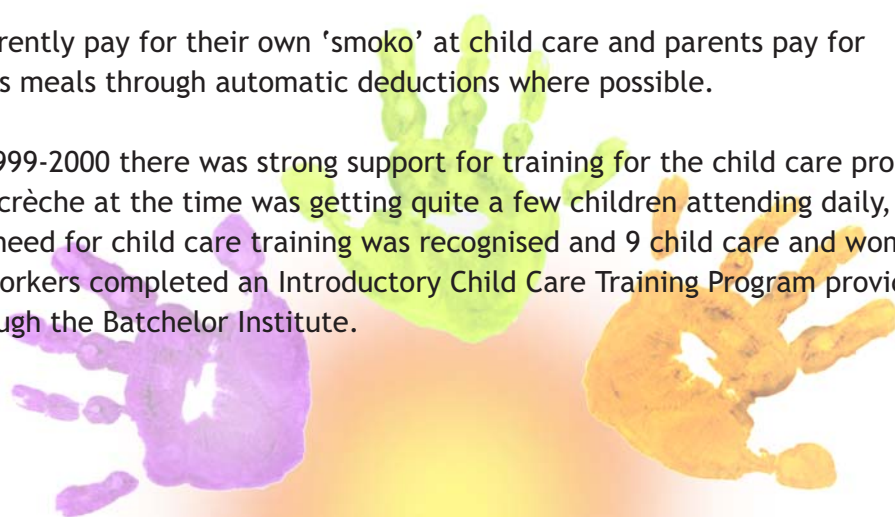
One of the problems that arose for the centre was the cost of buying food for all of the children who were using the centre, some of whom were from out of town. The centre purchased food for the program from the local community shop. A system of 'book up' was in place where staff and parents from the centre would 'book up', or buy on credit, the food they needed for the child care centre. This was causing problems because the amount 'booked up' could not be covered by the child care budget. The Women's Centre coordinator worked with the women to find solutions to these problems.

To begin with the women contributed one dollar a day per child to help cover the cost of tucker. This changed to two dollars when they wanted the children to have smoko and a hot lunch. The women do their own shopping. They can only buy healthy food, no sweets, ice cream etc. The money is now collected through automatic payment, either through Centre Link or CDEP deductions.

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

Staff currently pay for their own 'smoko' at child care and parents pay for children's meals through automatic deductions where possible.

During 1999-2000 there was strong support for training for the child care program. The JET crèche at the time was getting quite a few children attending daily, up to 25. The need for child care training was recognised and 9 child care and women's centre workers completed an Introductory Child Care Training Program provided on site through the Batchelor Institute.



The child care Director has also completed an apprenticeship through the STEP program and finished the Certificate II in Community Services, Children's Services. She is now beginning to study the Cert III through Batchelor Institute. Some support visits and in-service training workshops have been provided by Waltja. Staff have also been able to attend some Waltja committee meetings and training workshops in Alice Springs. Waltja supports the nutrition program and funds two nutrition workers at child care as well. Two staff have completed a Certificate II in Aboriginal Health Work.

Many practices in child care are new to the women in the centre and the understanding of the purposes of these practices can be lost without support and encouragement from world beyond the community that have created them. While staff enthusiastically adopt new practices learned in training, it can be hard to maintain them when there is little day to day on-site or external support to do so. For example, four staff did the GAA training (Growth and Assessment program) which taught them to weigh and measure babies for growth and to ensure children were developing properly. The Women's Centre Director described how staff responded to this new training experience.

*When the women did GAA training they came back all excited,
pumped up, and would help weigh and measure the babies...*

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

Now the Aboriginal Health Worker comes to weigh and measure the children at child care on a regular basis and the women support her.

Some staff would like to extend their training to Certificate III and to receive at least some of that training in their community, particularly on-the-job training that the child care workers prefer. However, due to the lack of an appropriate on-the-job training facility, training is difficult. That is, the child care centre does not have all the necessary equipment and space required to demonstrate, practice and acquire new child care skills and knowledge. A Batchelor Institute lecturer has provided support and training since 2003. Support and training visits to the community occurs 3 to 4 times a year.

The Community Council created a community development project called the 'Neighbourhood Hub'. This coincided with the Commonwealth government 'Child Care Links' program and has been funded under that initiative. The project aims to foster a 'cradle to grave' learning culture within the community. A community person will coordinate all the training that comes into the community for all of the different age groups and organisations to maximise the benefit to the community as a whole.



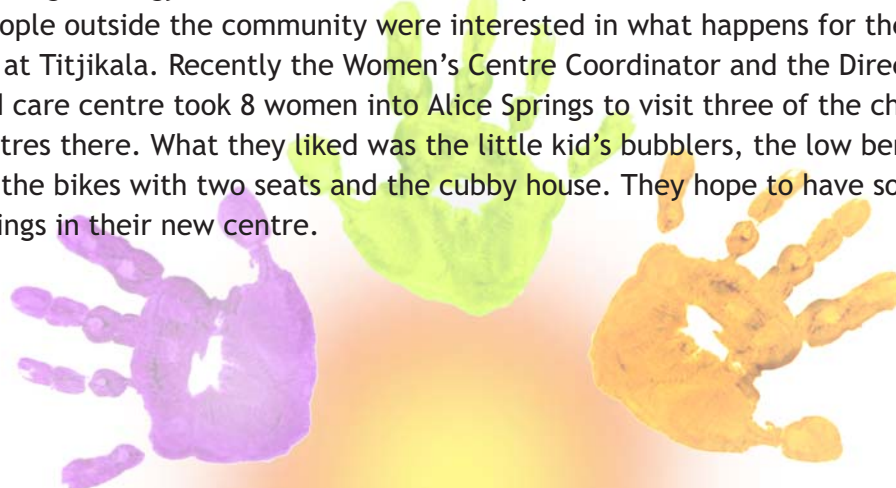
The new project targets the child care service as the central feature of the development program in order to strengthen the networks between and integrate services for children and families as well as coordinate training provisions for parents and others.

It will be really good when (new) project starts. We need to get that going first.

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

This initiative coincides with another project currently underway in the community. The Toolbox Champions Project offered through the Titjikala Training Centre will boost the capacity of the community to support training activities within the community. Using innovative Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) technology, this project has a number of aims, one of which is to redevelop an interactive child care training CDROM ('Cyber Tots'), originally developed for mainstream learners, to make it more accessible to low literacy learners. The overarching goal is to investigate uses of technologies that support student learning at a distance. It will do so by facilitating their interaction with each other and with their training materials and use the computing facilities in the Training Centre. Child care staff have been discouraged in their training because of the long time gaps between visits of training providers. This project specifically addresses the loss in motivation that comes with having little ongoing training support and contact with outside training providers.

The Director of the child care centre emphasised that the best support was the opportunity to visit children's services in other communities or get together with other remote area child care staff to talk about issues and learn from them. She has saved all of the posters she made at different workshops for child care workers. She talked enthusiastically about her visit to the Ikuntji child care centre and how much she appreciated the chance to see that service in operation. She also saved the health and nutrition posters that Ikuntji staff had given her. She will be putting them on the walls of the new child care centre. She recalled a visit she made to Canberra as part of a group of Indigenous women who contributed to the Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy. This was a wonderful experience that showed her how many people outside the community were interested in what happens for the children at Titjikala. Recently the Women's Centre Coordinator and the Director of the child care centre took 8 women into Alice Springs to visit three of the child care centres there. What they liked was the little kid's bubblers, the low bench seating, the bikes with two seats and the cubby house. They hope to have some of these things in their new centre.



MAKING CHILD CARE WORK

The centre is open from 9:00 to 12:00 weekdays. The number of children who attend varies but there are often 10 children attending. Most of the children who attend currently are 3–4 year olds and so they use the preschool service provided at the child care centre. A few babies are cared for at the centre, usually when their mothers attend as well. Sometimes visitors to the community leave their children at child care.

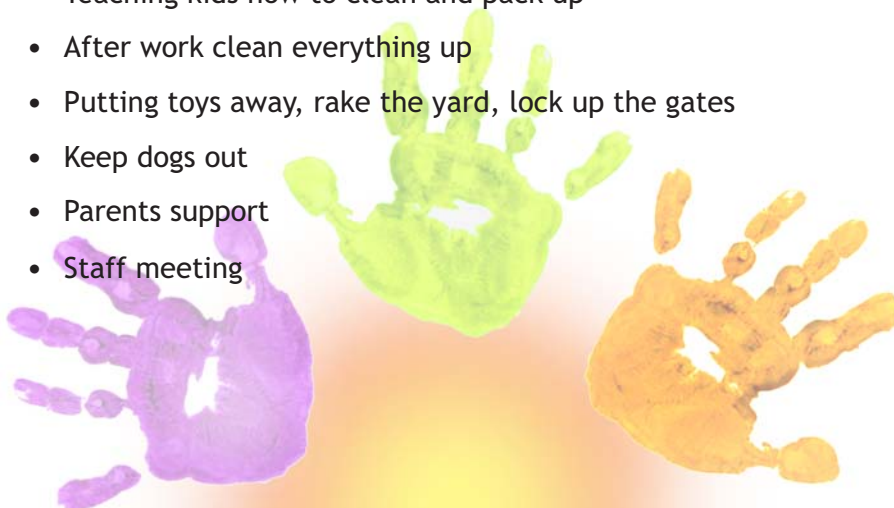


Preschool

The preschool program provides opportunities for the children to learn some of the behaviours expected at the school. They sit at tables and do activities with their teacher, such as colouring in and painting. They have access to books, puzzles, games and toys although the pre-school has very little early childhood equipment.

A poster made by the Director of child care explains what happens in child care. These are the items she included.

- Healthy food—store/family members, need money for food
- Toys
- Teaching kids
- Duty statement—Roster
- Training for workers
- Health check
- Exercise, walking, hunting, culture
- Looking after babies, changing nappies
- No fighting, no swearing, teaching about discipline
- Learning two languages
- Teaching kids how to clean and pack up
- After work clean everything up
- Putting toys away, rake the yard, lock up the gates
- Keep dogs out
- Parents support
- Staff meeting



Until the new centre is finished staff find it hard to offer a full program for children. The children are given a healthy morning tea of fruit when they arrive and a hearty lunch.

In child care kids get fruit instead of lollies... I think it's really good, it is really good.

Indigenous Education Worker and School Community Liaison Officer

Children have been taught to wash their hands before they eat their food.

The kids know how to wash hands in a bucket.

Indigenous Child Care Director

While the preschool children are in the demountable doing their preschool program the other children play outside in the yard or the sand pit.

When they can access a vehicle staff take the children out of the community. Staff told us they use these trips to teach the children to look for bush tucker, to learn about the tracks that different animals make in the sand and to learn what snakes are poisonous and which are not. Virtually all of the women who work in child care talk about how they would take the children on bush trips more often but they do not have access to a suitable vehicle.

The staff see child care as a place for children to learn and grow up in a healthy environment.

Child care helps kids grow and get bigger for school.

Indigenous Child Care Director

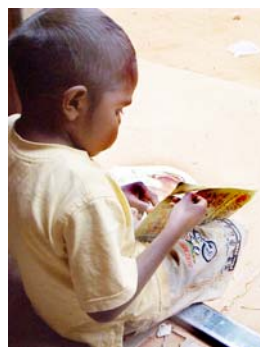
Community members are aware of the impact that child care attendance has had for easing children's transition to school.

Child care's good because they won't be frightened to come to school.

Indigenous Education Worker and School Community Liaison Officer



Titjikala School



Child reading book
at the Preschool

I think it's made a difference, especially for those who attend child care regularly. The transition seems to be less stressful for everyone. The teachers comment on how well they settle into the school routine.

Non-Indigenous Women's Centre Coordinator

Child care also is a place for learning about good food, language, bush tucker and the stories that families tell their children.

Mother's are kid's first teachers and then people like me. We're the second teachers. It's important for kids in child care to learn in language and also to teach them about plants and Tjurparra (traditional ways).

Indigenous Education Worker and School Community Liaison Officer

The IEW and School Community Liaison Officer also emphasised that children learn early about tracking and hunting.

Like ah, you know...we used to go (hunting for) animals...in creeks and things like that and they look at that (tracks) and the kids can learn from ,...and they start following it they see the tracks right away.

Indigenous Education Worker and School Community Liaison Officer

He mentions one of the child care workers as a good person to be working with the young children.

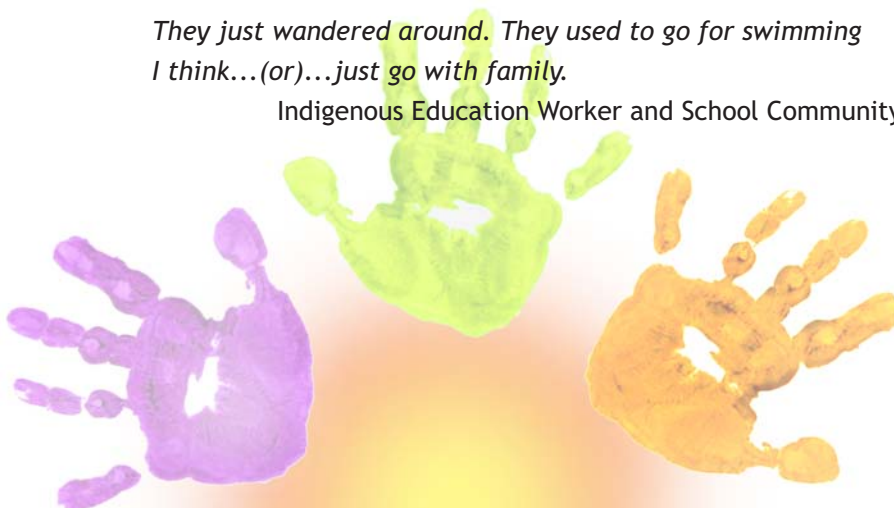
She cooks really good, she knows everything. She knows how to cook kangaroo and she knows bush tucker.

Indigenous Education Worker and School Community Liaison Officer

Before there was a child care centre at Titjikala the Indigenous education worker at the school remembers that there was not much for the children to do in the community.

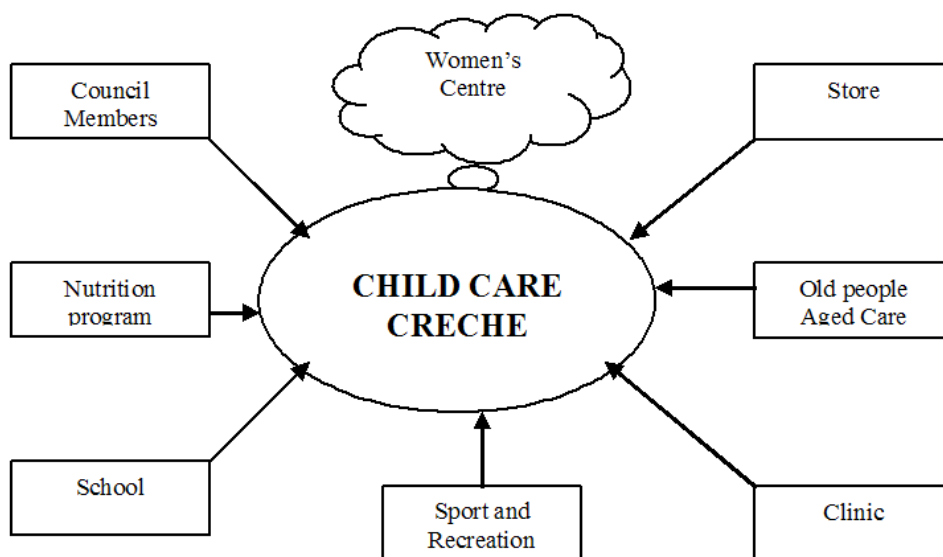
They just wandered around. They used to go for swimming I think...(or)...just go with family.

Indigenous Education Worker and School Community Liaison Officer



The child care provides a daily activity and place for the younger children in the community to go to. Parents visit often as well. The location of the centre next to the Women's Centre and Art Centre and near the shop make it convenient for parents wanting to leave their children while they do tasks or activities in these places. The new child care centre will be finished mid-year 2004 and a new phase of development will commence.

Another poster made by the Supervisor of the child care centre illustrates her understanding of the way the whole community must support the child care centre. This is a diagram of what she drew.



CONCLUSION

The child care staff are working steadily with their current facility as it is and looking forward with great anticipation to their new centre being completed. Some new staff are likely to be attracted to the child care work when the service is offered in the new facility and this will be helpful to the original staff members who have worked so hard over so many years to maintain a functional and sustainable service for the young children and mothers in their community. The current facility has many drawbacks but it serves the community's needs as best it can. The opportunity for on-the-job training is limited in the current centre but will be available when the new centre is completed, giving the women who have been working in child care a much needed boost and the opportunity to gain higher level training in child care, above the Certificate II level that has dominated their provision so far. Other women in the community have expressed a renewed interest in being involved in child care with the advent of the new purpose built facility.

Staff and community members have developed some strong ideas about what child care is for and how child care can support the young children in their community. The existence of the centre has contributed significantly to children's welfare by providing healthy food on a daily basis. The relocation of the preschool to be offered through the child care centre has given the preschool-aged children daily access to the Indigenous Education Worker who works with them to practice skills seen as preparing them for school. The relationship with the school has been strengthened and is likely to continue to grow and develop through the connections that have been made thus far. The principal of the school is a keen supporter of child care. Through the new networking initiative of the Commonwealth government, 'Child Care Links' (2004), the child care centre will be further supported to develop for the benefit of children and families in the community.



New child care centre nearing completion



CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF THE 'BOTH WAYS' PROJECT

In Chapter One, and throughout our description of the six case study sites, we have emphasised the individuality of each of the children's service provisions. Each has a quite different profile to the others. Each is embedded in the life of the host community differently, with different attachments and relationships among different individuals, groups and organisations within the community. Indeed, in some respects, the differences are more stark than the similarities across the six provisions, a point that gives us food for thought in connection with answering the key question for the research:

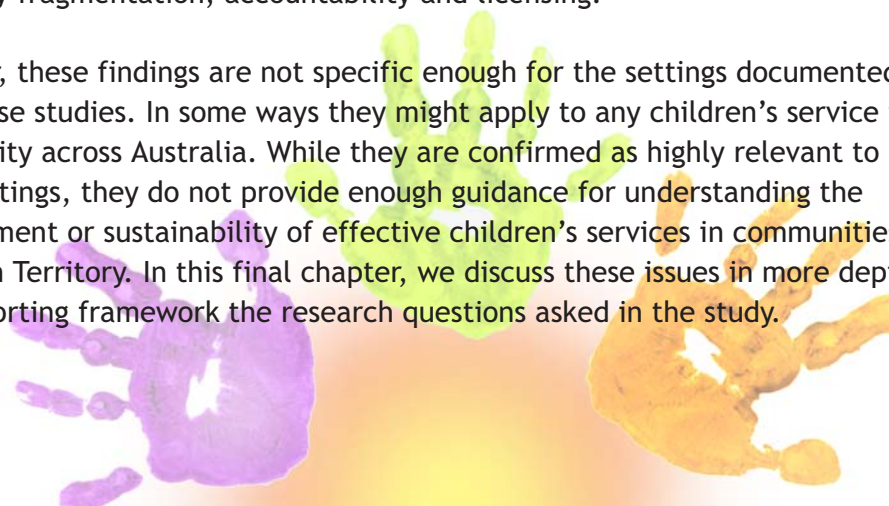
What constitutes an effective and sustainable children's service in remote NT communities?

PREVIOUS LEARNINGS

For the 'BothWays' project the key themes that emerged from the review of relevant literature undertaken at the start were confirmed by the current research project. They were the importance of:

- Access and support for locally workable and meaningful training, resources and ongoing support for all aspects of service delivery,
- Local control in terms of Indigenous ownership and management of services for children and cultural maintenance within those services, and
- Targeted and purposeful resourcing of physical, human and social strategies to enable effective management and administration of services and support to address barriers to service delivery presented by fragmentation, accountability and licensing.

However, these findings are not specific enough for the settings documented in these case studies. In some ways they might apply to any children's service in any community across Australia. While they are confirmed as highly relevant to these local settings, they do not provide enough guidance for understanding the development or sustainability of effective children's services in communities in the Northern Territory. In this final chapter, we discuss these issues in more depth using as a reporting framework the research questions asked in the study.



RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors make these children's services functional, sustainable and appropriate to their communities?

- *the access of the sites and their communities to a wide range of resources,*
- *the diversity of the sites and their communities, and*
- *the ways each community worked for a common purpose.*

FINDINGS

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Here we have provided a chart (see Appendix 4) summarising a range of resources noted and asserted by local participants as critical in developing and sustaining their service. Looking at some of these more closely will help us understand the children's service development journeys of each of the communities. In comparing and contrasting their different resources it is clear that resource issues were critically important to the development of sustainable, functional and locally appropriate services and that there were significant differences in access to resources amongst the communities. The access factors discussed below include the size of the community, distance from a major service centre or 'remoteness', access to funding sources, to the fundamental physical resource of a building, to qualified staff and to a functioning community that could support its development.

Size of Community

The size of the population in a community is an important resource for any service. The sheer number of people who are interested, available and willing to take up some of the tasks associated with a service for children within a community varied widely. In addition, their skills profile differed greatly.

Nguiu and Galiwin'ku are large communities comprising 1500 to 2000 people, Barunga and Gurungu fell in the middle range with a population of approximately 450, and at fewer than 275 people, Titjikala and Ikuntji were very small communities by any standards. In terms of human capacity, some communities had much more to work with than others. It is worth noting that regardless of size, the core business of remote Indigenous communities remains essentially the same. Every community must provide its residents with the basics; education, health services, governance, sanitation, water, electricity, housing, food, and so on. While the size of the community may be seen to increase the amount of work to be done, the range of necessary services does not vary greatly. In some communities, therefore, the tasks associated with providing a service for children must be accomplished by far fewer people.

For the smaller communities finding workers for the children's service was an ongoing challenge. In addition, when a core person left the community or took up another role in the community, they left a large gap in the children's service. For example, when the key person left Barunga their children's service stalled until another person came into the community to take up the role. Population also counts in terms of accessing training. Smaller communities have had to work hard to collect enough people together to warrant the involvement of a training provider. A rule of thumb is that it takes a cohort of 10 potential students to make delivery of a program in a remote community viable. While size was not the only factor, the two larger communities (Nguui and Galiwin'ku) were the first to receive on-site training and to achieve fully trained status. They could maintain within their communities a bank of trained child care workers who could be called upon to fill in when unavoidable staff absences occurred as well.

Distance from a major service centre or 'remoteness'

The point needs to be made that 'remoteness' is relative. These services, located at they were in their own communities, country and culture, were not in any sense 'remote' from many of the most fundamental elements needed for their effective and sustainable operation. However, they were remote from the services and supports that most mainstream services take for granted. For all of these services this latter form of 'remoteness', remoteness from a major service centre, created many barriers to accessing critical resources. It also affected them in different ways.

All of the communities we visited were 'remote' or 'very remote' according to Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) remoteness categories. ARIA measures 'remoteness' along a continuum that varies depending on the community's distance by road from its nearest service centre or town. However, more than the distance by road from a service centre is needed to capture the nature of remoteness. For the two island communities, Nguui and Galiwin'ku, time and money might be better measures. Both communities could be seen to be relatively 'close' to Darwin, their major service centre, by being only a short flight away, but the expense of air travel becomes the key access issue. It is less onerous for outsiders to support these services because of the relative ease and speed with which they can get to the community and return home. We noticed that these communities had frequent visits from politicians and officials from Commonwealth and Territory departments providing much support in the form of outside recognition and therefore status in the community for these services. In practice, for Nguui and Galiwin'ku staff, access seems to have been increased in that they have been subsidised to take part in many training, in-service, conferences, consultations and other child care support activities occurring in Darwin and elsewhere in Australia.

Many of these opportunities appeared to have been less accessible to the more inconveniently located remote communities. Barunga and Gurungu communities,

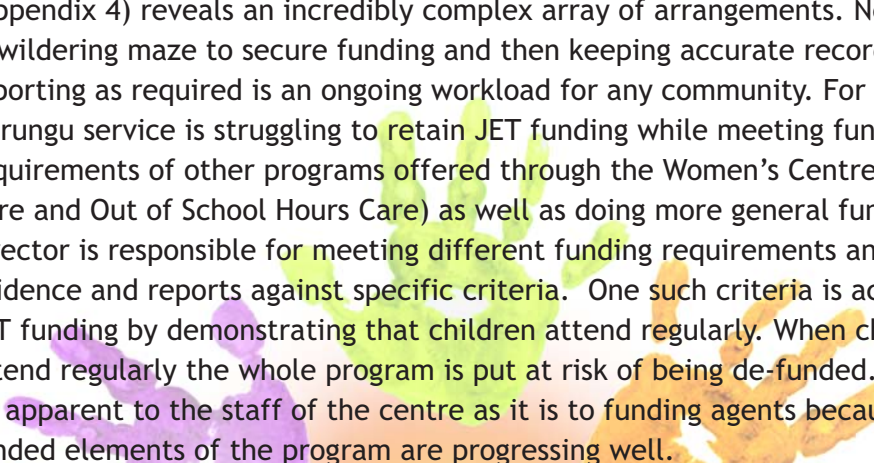
although located relatively close to the regional town of Katherine, experience periods during every wet season when the roads close, as we discovered twice during our research visits to these communities. In remote communities regular bus services are rare and many community people do not own a car. Even where community members have cars they are often not reliable. Barunga residents sometimes rely on taxis costing nearly \$150 to go to Katherine, one and one half hours drive away. This was also mentioned by Taylor (2002) in his analysis of the spatial context of service delivery to remote Indigenous communities. The two hour drive on a rough, corrugated and occasionally impassable road connecting Alice Springs and Titjikala took 6 hours on one of our visits because we stopped to assist one of our participants whose car had broken down on the road.

In these circumstances, access to all manner of resources is limited to what is available in the community. Many of our participating children's services talked about the importance of providing children with good food but relied for the most part to what was available in and at the cost charged by the local store. Where communities wanted to address this issue by buying in bulk, as was the case at Barunga and Ikuntji, access to the closest service centre to get fresh food became a major issue and expense for the service. These examples remind us that remoteness is more than distance. It is also financial and involves time. Yet, these services were, located within their own communities, country and culture and were not in any sense 'remote' from many of the most fundamental resources needed for their effective and sustainable and culturally appropriate operation.

The Commonwealth government has introduced measures to address remoteness including providing a 'disadvantaged area subsidy'. Apparently, only one of the services involved in this study qualified for this subsidy.

Funding access

Issues related to accessing funds for remote area Indigenous children's services are many and varied. A brief glance at the funding sources section of the chart (Appendix 4) reveals an incredibly complex array of arrangements. Negotiating the bewildering maze to secure funding and then keeping accurate records and reporting as required is an ongoing workload for any community. For example, the Gurungu service is struggling to retain JET funding while meeting funding requirements of other programs offered through the Women's Centre (i.e., Aged Care and Out of School Hours Care) as well as doing more general fund raising. The director is responsible for meeting different funding requirements and producing evidence and reports against specific criteria. One such criteria is accounting for JET funding by demonstrating that children attend regularly. When children do not attend regularly the whole program is put at risk of being de-funded. This may not be apparent to the staff of the centre as it is to funding agents because the other funded elements of the program are progressing well.



It is also difficult for staff in the communities we visited to be fully aware of funding requirements and consequences because of 'outsourcing' of finances and bookkeeping. Often lacking the necessary level of literacy and/or training to understand and manipulate budgets, financial procedures and funding accountability requirements, staff rely on Community Council employees to manage their financial matters. In our discussions it appeared that staff were largely unaware of how much money was available for their programs or, in some cases, how it was tagged to particular budget lines. For example, that after school care money should support school-aged children and JET money should support under 5 year olds in a service was not clear to staff at Gurungu. In practice, activities and expenses for these age groups overlap. Adding more programs to the mix increases the complexity significantly. It would seem most productive for community council employees managing money and staff in the children's service to be trained together to manage funds and to understand the complexities of meeting accountability requirements, using forms and procedures.

The notion of 'buckets' of money, or multiple funding sources derived from agencies for different programs can be confusing. At Galiwin'ku, community members and staff remarked on the fact that there were 'buckets' of money available for children but because they were allocated against specific programs that operated out of different community organisations, they were unavailable to child care. This was a source of much frustration because it was clear to the director, in a general sense, that there were plenty of funds designated for the wellbeing of children reaching the community, but that it was not reaching the child care service. Her previous training and experience as a school principal provided her with a perspective on the funding situation that was unusual amongst these services. She made the point that the child care service was 'education' and, in that sense, should not be funded any differently to the 'education' offered through the school. She expressed a belief that pay and conditions for child care workers should be more on a par with education workers, a belief shared by many mainstream child care workers across Australia (OECD Country Report, 2001, Warrilow & Fisher, 2003).

The directing of funding for multiple programs to a single service occurred at Nguui. Different staff members took responsibility for specific programs. Accountability expectations were the responsibility of the manager in conjunction with the finance accountants. This approach was developed in the context of a whole of community vision for children that seemed to underpin the effective integration we saw there and could not be replicated simply by copying the practice. This service also made connections with other programs for children in the community where there was no shared funding arrangement. When the preschool at Nguui was not operating because the preschool teacher was away, the child care staff filled the gap. This kind of collaboration also occurred in other communities but it cannot be expected to happen automatically.

Access to funding for multiple services for children is supported by the development of good relationships and shared vision amongst all services for children operating within a remote community.

It should be noted that integration of multiple sources of funding is not a viable solution when child care workers become stressed in meeting so many needs of children within a community. What may have been a 'workable' program in the early days of service development may develop beyond the capacity of one group to manage. The very success of the Nguu program has created a good deal of stress for workers. The ability to link with other programs within the community to relieve this pressure may help the situation and they are exploring this option. If they are to remain viable, funding agencies in conjunction with the whole community need to monitor continually the working conditions and capacities of children's services to meet diverse needs of the community.

When communities look around for funding sources they do so with greater or lesser access to the information and knowledge needed to take advantage of them. Some services had more access than others. Those with more access to sophisticated telecommunications equipment within their services and the staff who could use them effectively were advantaged. Access to a computer, internet, long distance phone capability, fax and email helped staff in some services stay in touch with funding opportunities beyond their communities, with support staff in government departments who administer funds, and with networks of other communities and supportive people. As services become aware of opportunities, often via the electronic 'grapevine', this knowledge is shared. In communities where these facilities are located in the Council offices or at the school for example, opportunities may not be recognised or acted upon in time to benefit the children's program. Staff in the service need their own equipment.

That many funding programs have remarkably short 'turn-around' times seems to be an unavoidable issue, both for government departments dispensing funds and services applying for funds. For example, the Ikuntji child care staff had two weeks to put a submission together to secure upgrade funds for their playground. Three quotes for development costs were required in the submission, an incredibly difficult task to achieve in a remote community. Services in remote communities may need to plan ahead and be ready 'at the drop of a hat' to take advantage of these opportunities. One suggestion for how government departments might handle this issue include phone, fax or emailing of opportunities to all remote services as soon as a decision is made and follow through support provided as needed.

Services also perceive some funding decisions to be somewhat arbitrary. The criteria justifying the funding of one community over another is not as transparent as it could be. However, it must be noted that when funds become available, the funding agencies themselves are often given very little lead time to disperse

their funds and are under pressure to make rapid decisions. A service that is well known to a funding agency may benefit at the expense of struggling and lesser known services.

There has been a history of short fall in capital funding needed to complete the 'Innovative' child care centres in these communities. From the time the building is discussed, designed, sent to tender and constructed, two or more years may have elapsed increasing the building costs considerably. Funding that was sufficient at the start is insufficient by the time the building is erected. Playground development seems to be the area that suffers most. Most services received minimal funding for the development of playgrounds, a remarkable oversight given the amount of time that children spend outside of the centre. The extremes of weather in these remote communities can turn a playground into a dust bowl or a quagmire. The full development costs of playgrounds, beyond the provision of the 'basics' (a sandpit and a shade cloth) needs to be costed into the initial master plan or building design.

In the communities we visited the key funding access issues highlighted the need for financial and management training for children's service staff and community councils in order to understand the complexities of funding arrangements and to monitor and control the use of funds. Children's services staff need access to telecommunications equipment and the ability to use it in order to keep in touch with new funding opportunities and other services. They need sufficient time, ongoing support and clear guidelines to prepare funding submissions, and sufficient funding allocated at planning stages to ensure that playgrounds to be fully developed.

Physical resources in the form of buildings

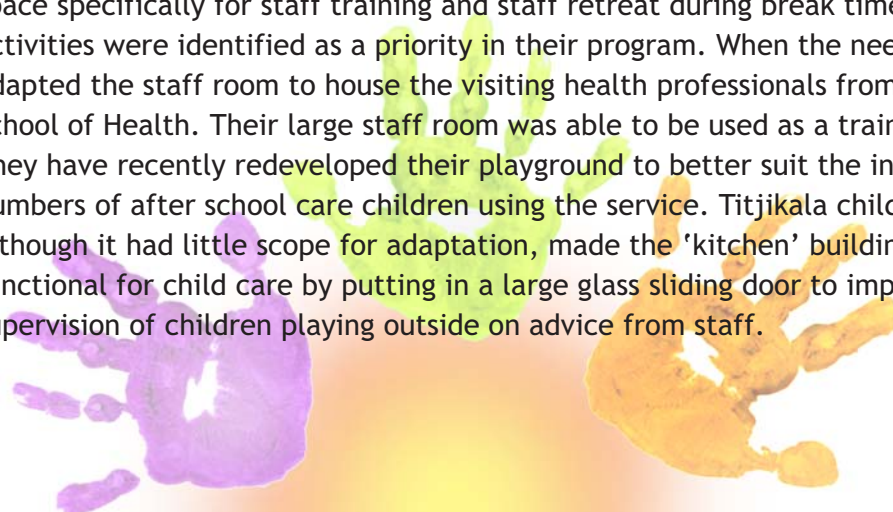
Although it hardly needs to be said, all of the children's services we visited had received community support through the provision of some kind of building in their early phase of development. This is an important indicator of community support because buildings are always in such short supply. As services developed from ad hoc playgroups or crèches, they became seen by their communities and outsiders as viable and a building was made available.

The location and the ownership of buildings for a children's service can create another kind of access issue in remote communities. For example, at Ikuntji, the child care program would not have thrived to the degree it has done if it had stayed on the veranda of the Art Centre. This is a very small community with very few buildings. The temporary building they have occupied until recently was secured only after an extensive negotiation process. Staff at the centre who understood community views on the uses of buildings negotiated the use of a house where someone had passed away. Staff knowledge and pre-existing relationships within the community made this possible.

At Barunga, the child care centre closed and the service was moved to the school. Its location at the school had an affect on how the community regards the program. Some staff believe that there are community members who resist using the service because of past negative associations with schooling. At the same time the school provided the infrastructure that enabled a service for young children to continue. At Titjikala the buildings available to the child care program are basic but, without them, it is unlikely that child care would have survived. The merging of the preschool and the child care programs within one of the two small buildings available has helped to provide stability that sustained the child care staff as they have waited for their new building.

The ability of staff and the community to have input into the original design of a new building has been important to the development of children's services in remote communities as well. Where staff and the community have been consulted about design they have contributed significantly and have, to a degree, been able to put their 'stamp' on it. After viewing the original building designs, Ikuntji asked for open areas and more windows so that they could see who was approaching the centre. The original playground was repositioned on their advice in front of the centre rather than behind it so that parents could see what was happening inside. A similar issue arose at Galiwin'ku. The original plan was to erect a mud brick fence around the perimeter of the service. This idea was discarded and pool-fencing was installed so that families could see what was happening inside. They also wanted the buildings to take the form of a cross to signify the importance of Christian beliefs in their service for children.

The ability to change children's services buildings, including those that were purpose-built, has been important in the development of services. For example, the Gurungu program needed to adapt a separate building to enable Women's Centre business to occur alongside the child care program. Women needed space to work on painting and sewing away from the children's play rooms. The washing facilities were moved to another location so that the general community could use the machine on the weekends. The installation of their new plant nursery necessitated the moving of the sandpit. The original Nguu centre design, include space specifically for staff training and staff retreat during break times. These activities were identified as a priority in their program. When the need arose they adapted the staff room to house the visiting health professionals from Menzies School of Health. Their large staff room was able to be used as a training room. They have recently redeveloped their playground to better suit the increasing numbers of after school care children using the service. Titjikala child care, although it had little scope for adaptation, made the 'kitchen' building more functional for child care by putting in a large glass sliding door to improve supervision of children playing outside on advice from staff.



The provision of buildings, as fundamental resources for children's services development, is obvious. Less obvious is the opportunity of staff and community to have significant influence over the design, to continually adapt current facilities and to obtain the support and funding needed to achieve changes critical to the development of sustainable and effective services that respond to community needs.

Access to Qualifications

Northern Territory licensing and regulations for child care require that approximately 50% of staff are qualified in children's services. The recognised qualification required for a group leader is the Diploma in Community Services (Children's Services). Certificate III in Community Services (Children's Services) is also recognised in award pay rates. 'Innovative' children's services are different. In recognition of their emergent nature, they are required to have a proportion of staff to be qualified at a minimal level in order to meet adapted licensing conditions. JET funded centres do not have these requirements. Although JET crèches do not have to meet these guidelines, if they are to make the transition to a more securely funded and licensed status, staff must gain recognised formal qualifications. Access to formal training is, therefore, a critical issue for all of the services we visited.

In Australia, the Vocational Education and Training system is defined as an industry-led system of 'education and training for work' (ANTA, 2004, no page). Through the provision of industry-led Training Packages, different levels of nationally recognised qualifications have been developed. Children's services are a component of the much broader category of work referred to as community services. Qualifications are structured around sets of competencies matched to work roles at different levels of responsibility as identified by industry bodies. Qualifications include core and elective competencies. In Children's Services, qualifications start at Certificate III level and progress to Certificate IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma. The aim of the system is to ensure consistent, high quality and nationally recognised training across Australia. Anyone receiving training should be able to use their qualification anywhere in Australia. The system was introduced in 1996 and virtually all registered training organisations, as educational institutions have come to be known, have adopted the system. As competencies focus on skills used in the industry, the training is very practical. This system has many advantages for remote Indigenous community members. Experienced workers' skills can be recognised through a process of work-based assessment. Students can demonstrate their ability to do the job in practical ways rather than being assessed primarily through verbal or written assessment.

Most of the services have had access to a variety of formal training opportunities. However, some communities have had significantly more than others and in a form that they preferred than other communities. Onsite, on-the-job, type of training is preferred because it is least disruptive to the service, allowing staff to maintain their family and work responsibilities while receiving training.

Trips into Batchelor Institute for intensive training blocks are effective forms of training and enjoyed by staff, but when too many staff members are away from the community the service must close down. As discussed in the section on population size, in larger communities with more potential students, on site training was a more viable option for training providers. It is not surprising then that the two larger community services were those with the fullest complement of trained staff.

In almost all cases, staff qualifications in the communities we visited rarely went beyond Certificate III level. There has been an amazing diversity of courses and certificates, in addition to those related to children's services, offered to staff in these communities. Most have been at Certificate II level. The exceptions were Nguu (Director having completed a Diploma in Community Services - Children's Services) and Galiwin'ku (Director having completed a teaching qualification).

Staff who work in management roles in children's services in remote Indigenous communities need training in financial management and administration. These competencies are 'elective' rather than 'core' for child care workers at Certificate III level in the Australian National Training Package for child care workers. They are 'core' in higher levels (i.e. Diploma or Advanced Diploma). The argument to include financial management, administration and planning at Certificate III level was made by the Batchelor College staff when they originally developed a course for remote area children's services. This content was included at Certificate level. When new National Training Packages were introduced (ANTA, 1997) this emphasis had to be reviewed in light of other competencies required as core at this level. They have continued to include this emphasis as a component of the course but, as can be seen from the chart, (Appendix 4) only a few of these services have directors who have completed Certificate III level training and those who have completed it are still struggling with the challenges presented by the financial matters associated with service delivery. There is a strong role for in-service support staff such as RACSSU in building directors' understanding and capacity to manage and manipulate finances.

Another access issue relates to the nature of the training that is available to children's services staff in remote communities. As many authors have pointed out in recent years (Delpit, 1995; Moss, 2002; Woodhead, 1996) the prevailing models of early childhood education and care tend to be dominated by views emanating from the English speaking countries in Europe and North America. It is important that while pursuing recognised qualifications, students from remote communities do not lose sight of the worth of their own child rearing practices and beliefs about what children need. In the struggle to obtain formal training, remote area children's services staff must be supported to value their own cultural perspectives and priorities for children, particularly those that relate to their specific circumstances. These can be overlooked or marginalised when mainstream training priorities and generic outcomes take precedence.

The competency-based training approach for children's services is used across Australia and is used by BIITE as well. Until relatively recently, the BIITE course for Indigenous children's services students was the first two years of a three year early childhood teacher education degree, called an Associate Diploma in Early Childhood Education. By the mid to late 1990s, Australia-wide, the notion of competency-based training had been adopted and promoted through a radical restructuring of vocational training. Nationally recognised training packages, linked to specific work roles within the child care 'industry' and to 'industry'-endorsed outcomes and awards at different levels, replaced more academic courses for child care workers. This approach has many benefits in that it makes possible the gaining of specific competencies needed by workers and packages training activities in small units that can be assessed and completed within a short time-span.

Training providers across Australia, including BIITE, adopted this nationally-recognised, competency based form of training for its children's services courses. Competency-based learning has received significant criticism in Australia and overseas. One of the common criticisms is the tendency to fragment learning into individual competencies. These then must be put back together again by the learner in her/his on-the-job practice. Learners are said to be trained rather than educated. Mulcahy (2002, p. 261) citing Wenger (1998) distinguishes between education and training.

Training commonly involves bringing someone or something to a desired standard or state. Unlike education, which explores 'new ways of being that lie beyond our current state', training focuses on competence in specific practices, practices that reside within current circumstances and conditions

Wenger, 1998, p. 263

In New Zealand, Carr & May (1997) make this same distinction when they describe the two currently dominant models of early childhood teacher education referring to one as a 'Competency model' and, the other as a 'Teacher change model'. These models closely reflect those in common usage in Australia as well.

Competency model	Teacher change model
<i>Teacher education is like adding layers and each layer represents a competency clearly separated</i>	<i>Teacher education is about challenging preconceptions and beliefs. The earlier layers are not left intact.</i>
<i>The domains or units are clearly separated</i>	<i>The units are interconnected and influence each other</i>
<i>The competencies are measurable against a standard that can be precisely defined</i>	<i>The knowledge skills and attitudes are assessed by judgements and criteria cannot always be precisely defined</i>
<i>The units are developed from clusters of roles and jobs in the workplace</i>	<i>Most units are regarded as context-specific. Contexts are not just sites for technical competency, but have historical, cultural and sociological perspectives</i>
<i>Learning is sequential and cumulative</i>	<i>Learning may be sequential but is not necessarily so. It may also be in the form of networks of knowledge - a 'weaving' model rather than a 'steps' model.</i>

Carr & May, 1997, cited in Moss, 2000, p.111

The point made by Carr and May (1997) is that the development of a critical and reflective practitioner within the current competency-based training model is unlikely.

Purdon (2002), a BIITE educator who experienced the Institute's transition to competency-based training, put forward a related argument focusing on the extent of the skills and knowledge that 'underpin' competence in a competency based program.

It is not competence-based curriculum in itself that is problematic for Batchelor. Rather it is the VET system's failure to recognize the socio-cultural aspects of the diverse contexts of our clients and of the "underpinning skills and knowledge" they need to draw on. Funding is based on the nominal hours that the Training Authority believes it will take to develop the required underpinning knowledge. But if cultural diversity is not recognized beyond tokenism, a normative approach develops and it is assumed that all students will need similar time and effort.

Purdon, 2002, p. 27.

These are some of the issues related to accessing appropriate training that students in remote Indigenous children's services confront. Not only is the content of courses usually modularised and fragmented, it is spread out over many months and even years in some cases. In addition, the recognised courses have been designed to 'industry' standards with agreed outcomes developed nationally. Very few remote Indigenous children's services' 'industry' workers have had input to these standards and so what is seen as important competence in remote communities may well be missing from the standards. There is a continuous tension for both the BIITE training team and for their students to express and codify what could be seen as 'locally endorsed standards'. As trainers and students work together within this national framework, they need to be constantly vigilant in recognising that it carries within it the standards and ideals for children's services work valued in very different contexts from those in which these services operate.

One model that is evolving in children's services course delivery at BIITE is community-based and on-the-job training. This approach has been used in many communities with good results. A lecturer from the Institute visits the community as often as possible to conduct training on-the-job, as people are working. In some cases, group workshops are held on campus or in the community's study centre. BIITE has had to customise its training significantly in order to deliver effective courses. In recent years there has been a steady stream of successful students emerging from this training and using their skills in children's services. However, this form of customised training is a very time consuming process that can take many months and even years to complete, and, as Purdon (2002) has indicated above, can be very costly. Students are assessed using nationally recognised elements and performance criteria from a National Training Package.

However, these criteria are first negotiated with students to ensure that the training meets the community's needs, student's cultural obligations and literacy and numeracy levels. Contextual resources are developed for each service and these are often shared with other communities. What is more difficult to ensure is that other locally valued competencies not included in the national framework are fore-grounded and included as training outcomes for Indigenous workers.

When the National Training Package for children's Services was developed, business administration competencies were positioned at Diploma rather than Certificate levels, although basic competencies in these areas can be picked up as electives at the Certificate level. These competencies are needed as core for workers in remote communities given that very few students have progressed to Diploma levels (only one Director in the study sites has finished this qualification) or will have the opportunity to progress to this level in the near future. One solution may be for communities to apply for Flexible Response Funding (FRF) and Community Response Program (CRP) funding to address this need specifically. This funding, available through NTDEET, is designed to meet the specific training needs that cannot be met through other means and can enable perceived gaps to be filled. Waltja has run a series of 3 day workshops (short courses) in Central Australia that attempt to address gaps in training, especially for new child care workers and proposed licensed child care centres, e.g. courses for management committees, community governance, children's health and development activities and nutrition. In their Remote Children's Service Support role, Waltja has recently identified the need for training in environmental health techniques and is working with BIITE to develop a specific workshop for child care centres that addresses training in chemical handling, cleaning, personal hygiene, pest control, food handling and rubbish removal.

Another effective approach is to utilise and further develop training materials that already exist in some of these services. For example, training providers could use and build on existing financial planning, procedural and programming formats that some of these services have developed for themselves. These could become the basis for developing valuable sets of resources to assist in customising the materials currently available to training providers. While this kind of resource sharing between communities already occurs in an ad hoc way, by individual trainers and support workers, these types of resources could be made more permanent and used more formally as training materials.

Finally, this analysis also supports the continued use and strengthening of a critically reflective approach to training that is a part of the processes at BIITE. However, the demand for community based training and the pressure to gain formal qualifications, can cause trainers to focus on the efficient and speedy delivery of competencies and neglect the critically important processes of analysing the worth and place of these competencies in remote aboriginal community contexts.

Community Wellbeing

It is important to emphasise the fact that these services do not exist in isolation to what else goes on in their community. Children's services are a microcosm of their community and they work well when they are supported by a strong community. It is difficult to represent the overall capacity or strength of a community and to attempt to do so was beyond the scope of this research. However, it may be the most important ingredient in the sustainability and functionality of a child care service in a remote community. In all of the communities we visited there appeared to be strong support for the children's service. However, the way that support was demonstrated varied. Depending on the workload of the community as a whole, support was given in varying degrees to the child care program.

Most of the communities in this study were affected by alcohol problems to a greater or lesser degree, and in some, gambling, petrol sniffing and/or marijuana were concerns as well. These issues increase the workload of the whole community as community people are deployed to work in such services as 'Night Patrol' or in caring for those family members who are neglected when alcohol or gambling uses up most of the families resources. Most of the communities had tackled the problems associated with petrol sniffing problem where it had occurred. Communities that dealt with this issue directly and immediately managed to reduce its impact. In the past, some of the communities had had some break-ins but because of a whole of community approach there had been no significant incidents for a long time. The issue of alcohol was proving more difficult to manage.

Some of the communities had access to alcohol because of their location near a pub, a town or through a regulated arrangement to sell limited amounts of alcohol during set times. All of the communities were 'dry' meaning that alcohol was not allowed to be brought into the community. However, even in a 'dry' community alcohol could become a problem when some members of the community defied this rule.

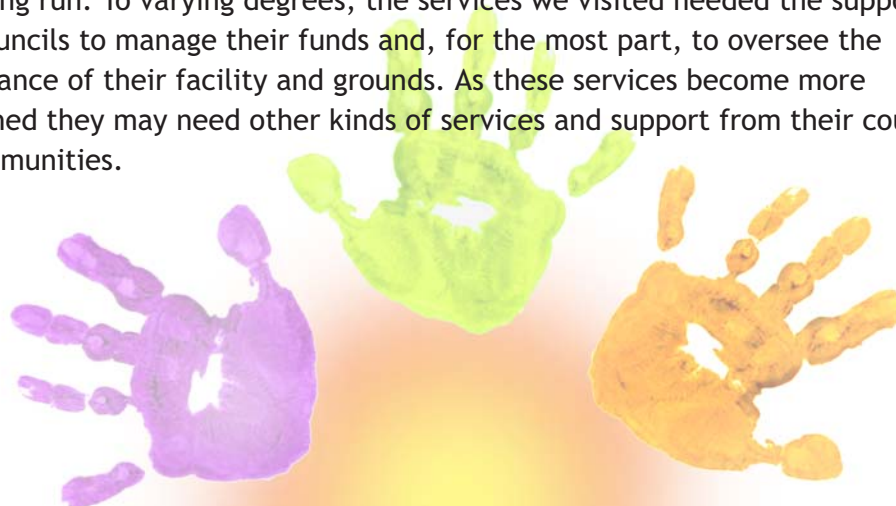
The devastating impact of alcohol is well known on families and communities. Abuse and neglect of children can occur when money for essential items such as food and clothing is no longer available. Gambling in communities can also be a serious a problem in that it can become an all consuming activity for some people, taking up the lion's share of their family's income. We were told in some communities that the children's service was one of the key services that helped those families when gambling or alcohol had become a problem and their children had no food. There is always food in child care. However there can be problems for the workers when an inebriated parent arrives to pick up a child or, alternatively, fails to pick up his or her child. When a community is dealing with these kinds of issues much precious energy is used to cope with the resulting problems, leaving less energy available to support programs like child care.

The services we worked with were located in communities seen to be functioning well and this was the case overall. A strong community is one of the most important resources a children's service can draw on to accomplish its work.

Another issue of critical importance to the support of child care within a community is the availability of a Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). Virtually all of the children's services used CDEP to employ some of the women who worked in the program. Their wages were usually 'topped up' by child care funding. Without CDEP many programs would not function. Some communities have much more access to CDEP than others. In the smaller communities the child care program was one of the largest employers of CDEP workers showing the level of support that these communities were willing to devote to the program for children. However, it should be noted that CDEP does not provide a high wage. There is little difference between CDEP and New Start Allowance (an unemployment benefit), for example, and those receiving New Start Allowance do not have to contribute in any way to community activity. In addition, it must seem somewhat pointless to undertake training (over many months or years in some cases) when other untrained community members paid through the CDEP program receive the same wages and often for a much shorter workday than child care staff. At Galiwin'ku, all child care workers are paid at the award rate with increases when they achieve higher levels of qualification. CDEP assists them in funding to the award rate. However, as they have pointed out, the workers in the school receive much greater support, higher pay and better conditions for working with children than do child care workers. These discrepancies are very obvious in small communities.

Some of the services relied on families more than others to help run the service. For example, Barunga, Titjikala and Nguu worked to involve parents and other family members in their programs, either through offering training or as extra hands to help with the program. Family involvement was a fundamental and important feature of the program.

Finally, what the service needs from its community today may not be what it needs in the long run. To varying degrees, the services we visited needed the support of their Councils to manage their funds and, for the most part, to oversee the maintenance of their facility and grounds. As these services become more established they may need other kinds of services and support from their councils and communities.



DIVERSITY OF SETTINGS

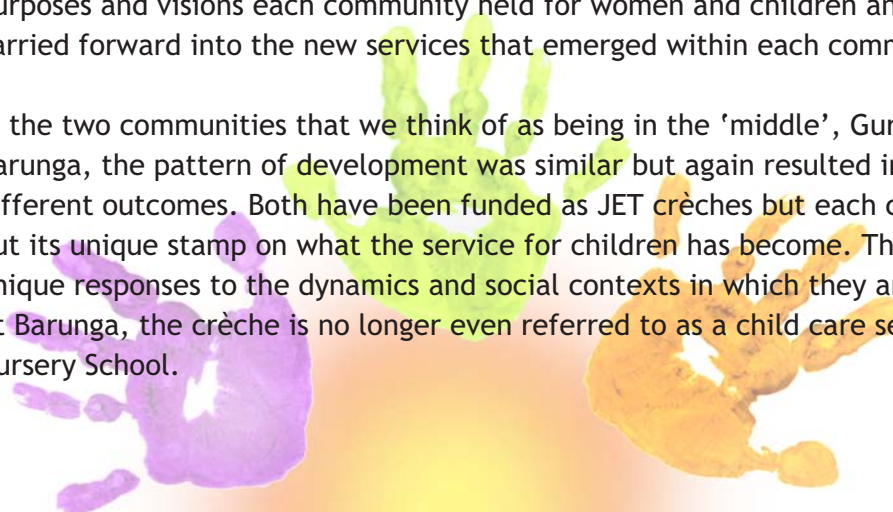
Diversity is about differences. This section discusses the differences in the pathways followed by each of these services and the kinds of services these pathways produced. To some degree this has been discussed already in the last section where we discussed the differential access to resources in different communities. In this section we focus more on the differences among the children's services as community responses to the unique needs of that community and of their children. The diversity discussed here also relates to differences seen in these services and mainstream child care services.

These services range from emergent to licensed child care centres. Of these six centres, two have been officially licensed by the NT Department of Family and Community Services (Nguui and Galiwin'ku). They are both funded as 'Innovative' child care centres and the condition of funding is that they are licensed. There is a third service that is reaching for this licensed status at the time of writing this report (Ikuntji) and another, will occur within the year (Titjikala).

How does a remote Indigenous community children's service manage the challenge of reaching fully licensed status while at the same time learning about a new kind of service for children never before seen or employed in the community? It is clear that the intensive support provided to both Galiwin'ku and Nguui from the Innovative Child Care Scheme in their early development has been a crucial and driving force in how the services evolved. For Galiwin'ku the support extended well into the year after the completion of a new building for child care and a similar pattern of support occurred at Nguui. However, this is not the whole story.

In both communities there had been pre-existing and strong perceptions of a need for some sort of provision to address both young children's poor health and/or educational prospects and women's desire to work or gain training. The communities had developed 'fledgling', community-driven initiatives, i.e. the playgroups and informal child care services operating out of women's centres. These were the community-specific foundations upon which the new formal children's services would be built. These foundations contained the distinctive purposes and visions each community held for women and children and these were carried forward into the new services that emerged within each community.

In the two communities that we think of as being in the 'middle', Gurungu and Barunga, the pattern of development was similar but again resulted in very different outcomes. Both have been funded as JET crèches but each community has put its unique stamp on what the service for children has become. These are unique responses to the dynamics and social contexts in which they are developing. At Barunga, the crèche is no longer even referred to as a child care service. It is a Nursery School.



These diversity issues distinguish the services we visited from the accredited child care centres found in cities and towns across Australia. Their location on islands or the mainland, their size, the history of their communities, the relations amongst the staff and amongst staff and families, the ways they handle staff absences, and so on, are all part of this diversity. They are local, grassroots and emergent types of services that have developed in relative isolation from other similar services. All have been developed essentially within the last 5 years. They have been tailored to meet the needs and conditions of their individual settings and to reflect their community's Indigenous cultural expectations. They are fragile and in need of ongoing support from the families who use them, their communities more generally and from outside agencies that provide funding, training and support. Their existence today should not be taken for granted as established and permanent. In the NT there are too many examples of emergent child care services in remote communities that have not survived initial phases of development. Indeed, some of the services in this study have been through periods where they have foundered and, through the determination of the community, have been renewed through various means.

BUILDING A 'COMMON PURPOSE'

This section relates to the ways that each community has developed a 'common purpose' or understanding of what a children's service should be in their community. Each of the communities worked in quite different ways to create or find a common purpose for their service or enough of a common purpose to sustain their service and allow it to grow and develop. In every phase of service development, there have been major struggles to overcome to reach a position of viability and sustainability. Finding a common purpose seems to have been fundamental to this process. The common purpose also evolves as the service develops, and is not a static thing. It responds to new opportunities as well as set backs. We have identified some of the 'engines' that seemed to be behind the development of common purposes for the children's service within these communities. They are;

- the ways Women's Centres were involved in the early development of child care services,
- the opportunity for professional development experiences by groups of child care workers,
- the interactions amongst families, other community services and the children's services around what child care could be, and
- a community concern that prioritises young children's health, learning and overall wellbeing.



Women's Centres

In many of the communities a service for children started in the Women's Centre and with a common concern for young children's overall health and wellbeing. Titjikala, Ikuntji, Gurungu, Barunga and Nguui all had their foundations in Women's Centres. The children's service at Titjikala still works within the supportive surrounds of the Women's Centre, as does the Gurungu child care program.

As women developed through participating in Women's Centre activities, their need for child care became more apparent (Willsher, 1995). Often a strong leader emerged who lobbied for a children's service, both within their respective communities and beyond them, giving voice to a common purpose for other women. In the early days in many service development stories, the purposes for child care often centred around children's health issues and support for the women who were raising these children. With the introduction of more CDEP jobs more women could work. The provision of a children's service supported women's development to work in paid employment and to undertake other activities such as training.

Local women were central to these initiatives and have been the main providers and drivers behind the development of services for children within the communities we visited. Building a common purpose within a women's collective has focused community attention on the needs of women and their children. When so many other priorities in a community compete for attention and community decision making has been dominated by men's priorities, Women's Centres have been powerful catalysts for service development and the development of common purposes that prioritise the needs and rights of young children.

Group professional development experiences for staff

Participation in training activities and attendance at workshops, consultations and conferences played a key part in the development of children's service in the communities we visited. These activities became a strong force driving the development of common purpose amongst participants. Training provides much more than knowledge related to child care, especially training together as a group. When people trained together it helped them to build a common purpose, a common way of talking about what they hoped to achieve and an understanding of what they were doing. When we look at the original workshop notes from the early workshops conducted by the Talking Early Childhood project (Willsher, 1995) many of these articulated views are still circulating in the way people talked about what they are doing and why. The Nguui staff originally articulated a 'whole child' focus for their service. Promotion of children's health, education and culture were prioritised from the beginning and it continues.



Nguiu staff have been able to participate in training as a team and in their own centre where the value of a new idea or strategy is seen immediately as it is put into practice. The impracticality of a new idea or strategy also becomes immediately apparent to the group as they talk together daily about what to do. Having space and time to work together in these ways helps the service to build and reinforce its common purposes. At Ikuntji, the home-made charts for routine procedures also illustrated this process. They were developed by the staff team who took it in turns to demonstrate a routine, take photos of each step in the routine, and then, on a computer, put these together with step-by-step simple instructions. This collaborative process has helped to build common staff understanding and purposes for what they were doing in child care. The resources provided staff with visual reference points around which to build common understandings of child care procedures such as a staff roster, cleaning instructions and cooking procedures. At Titjikala staff posters painted during training workshops represented what they wanted in their service. Having these resources for display in the centre has provided a handy reference and a tangible focus for ongoing development of common purpose.

Children's Services working with Families and Communities

Families, children's services and their communities working together created important conditions for service sustainability. Families must support a service by using it if the service is to survive. Whether families support a service or not has to do with a variety of factors, including who works in the service and whether families trust those people to look after their children, where the service is located within the community, whether it costs extra money to use the service, and the views of families that child care is a place for them. Because most of the services met most of these criteria, they were well used by their communities. They were staffed by and largely run by local Indigenous staff and were located centrally in convenient places within the community (except for Gurungu). Not all families however, accessed the services within their communities. Grandmothers or other family members still care for many young children in communities. Sometimes the service can be perceived to be 'owned' by a particular group or clan as happened at Galiwin'ku. Where some services charged for food costs, sometimes families seemed to be discouraged from using the service.

Some families don't know what happens in the children's service and, as a result, may not use it. At Galiwin'ku the director talked about families unfamiliar with child care needing to have a 'taste' first, before they would use it. Formalised 'Western' style of child care is still a very new and foreign idea for many families. At Nguiu the service has created some 'tasting' openings, opportunities that seem to draw families in to the service for reasons other than child care and, once there, they can see for themselves what it is. The Nguiu child care centre and Menzies health professionals collaboration supported by the need of parents to access this health service in the 'family friendly' environment of the child care centre brought more parents to the child care centre.

The 'First Foods for Babies' program worked in the same way. The many school aged children that come to the centre, even when they stay only for lunch, carry back to the community some knowledge of the centre and what it does.

We can see connections being built between the clinic at Ikuntji and the child care services as both services discuss the struggle to make a difference with the 'skinny kids' in the community. The first time the child care service checked with the clinic they found that their children were still 'skinny', despite the good food they had been receiving at child care. Their efforts were appreciated by the health clinic nurse who encouraged them to persist. Their collaboration with the local shop provided another connection point and support. The child care centre working with the shop builds a community awareness of the child care as well as providing more for the parents of babies.

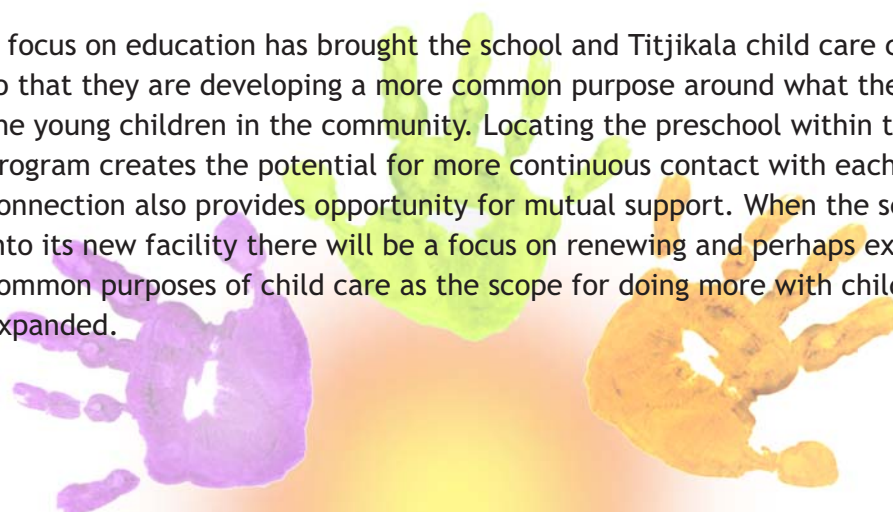
At Barunga, the Nursery School, school and health clinic staff have worked together to support the children's nutrition. This connection has resulted in a remarkable turn around in children's health. At one point the entire Barunga community had a 'Healthy skin day'. Everyone in the community turned out to wash everything they owned in order to deal with scabies and, as a result, 'knocked the scabies on the head'.

Recently the Galiwin'ku child care centre has strengthened its connection with the preschool offering to provide care for young mothers of preschool aged children. When the preschool day is finished, the young mothers can engage in the secondary education program and their children go to the child care centre for the afternoon. Mothers may soon receive 'on-the-job' training in child care. This more direct connection between the childcare and the preschool has revitalised the child care centre and provided a new avenue for sustainability and growth in the service.

Young children are community priorities

All communities have a strong concern for young children's health, education, and general wellbeing but the way this concern has unfolded has been different in each community.

A focus on education has brought the school and Titjikala child care closer together so that they are developing a more common purpose around what they can do for the young children in the community. Locating the preschool within the child care program creates the potential for more continuous contact with each other. This connection also provides opportunity for mutual support. When the service shifts into its new facility there will be a focus on renewing and perhaps extending the common purposes of child care as the scope for doing more with children will be expanded.



What the provision of a children's service means is constantly being negotiated within each community. At Gurungu the children's education, health and well being are pursued through the Women's Centre. This occurs as a by-product of ensuring women's and community wellbeing rather than as a distinctly separate program. The common purpose that has evolved, and that is still evolving, is not focused around a specific program for young children but rather through activities which everyone in the community, young children included, can participate and learn.

At Galiwin'ku, the service for children has evolved under the leadership of the director, who had been the school principal before she became child care director. In addition, there is a whole of community plan that prioritises education. This has underpinned the development of a common purpose for this service. The service provides early childhood activities similar to those that might occur at the preschool or in a mainstream service. Each day children build with construction toys, paint and draw, play on the balance beams or in the sand pit, eat healthy food and learn hygiene routines and practices. It is a point of pride to the staff and community that non-Indigenous parents send their children to the centre. This provides the opportunity for children to mix with non-Aboriginal children and others that come from other clan groups. Education at the child care centre is also about helping children to imagine their future roles within the community. As part of the child care program children are introduced to adult models for what they could become when they grow up.

At Barunga, staff have worked hard to develop their Nursery School. They are struggling to develop a common purpose that is shared by the whole community. They want to help children to learn, through attending the Nursery School, that school is a fun place to be and so get used to coming there every day. Children are learning some of the school routines for example getting up in the morning, coming to school, doing activities and having recess. Child care workers also focus on book reading through sitting and listening in a group, a common school practice. At Ikuntji, the common purpose around education has targeted life skills such as using the toilet, hygiene practices, and learning to eat new foods. As these basics are accomplished, they are beginning to shift their focus to target other kinds of learning. Recently, learning about books and preparation for transition to school have begun to be given more attention. At Nguiu, child care purposes from the beginning have been largely about catering for the 'whole child'. They have developed a common purpose for children's education and learning which occurs through typical early childhood activities, health and hygiene routines, nutrition education, parent education and cultural learning.



Overall, children's needs are prioritised in every community. They have developed the kinds of services that reflect the common purposes each has for its children. None of these is a simple replication of what child care means in mainstream services but each is the result of a constant negotiation occurring within different community contexts and amongst a range of people who have an investment in what happens for their children and families. The reality is that communities have many priorities for their children and it is hard to act fully on all 'fronts' simultaneously. Gradual development of services to address the most pressing needs first is a reality that services are dealing with in their own ways.

QUESTION 1A

What lessons can we learn about children's services development and provision from stories of practice of existing Indigenous children's services?

In answering this question we have selected a few practices these services worked out for themselves in learning to run a children's service.

- *Staffing practices—Who works in the service?*
- *Practices for working with children—What are services doing with children?*
- *Practices for multiple in-house programs for children—How does such a service work?*
- *Practices around who the service is for—Who uses the service?*

These practices included some that are clearly 'borrowed' and adapted from mainstream child care and others that have evolved in response to community perspectives and realities, including challenges and their unique solutions.

There were so many practices that could have been explored that some choices had to be made. Those practices that may be most interesting to the other Indigenous communities are possibly the most productive because they provide tangible examples of the ways people in local situations have developed practices that worked for their communities.

FINDINGS

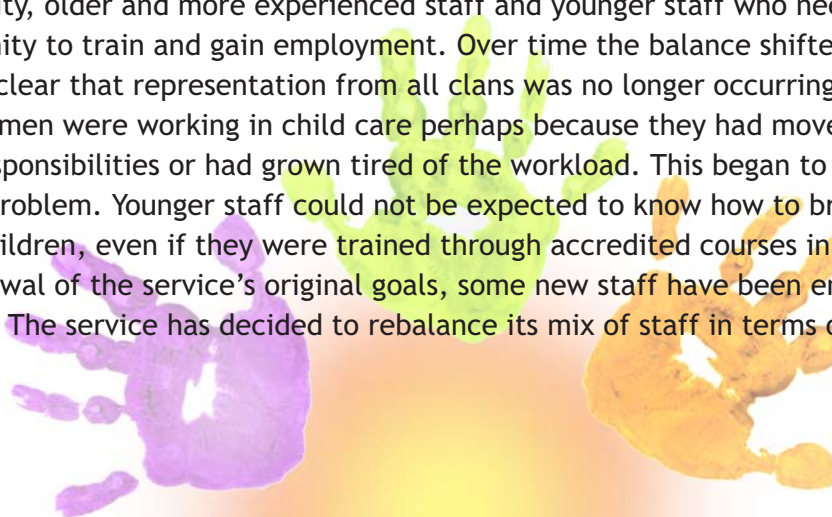
STAFFING PRACTICES—WHO WORKS IN THE SERVICE?

Staffing in every community was challenging and in each situation different solutions were found. Who should work with the 'little kids' was an important issue for each community to resolve. In any community the people who work with the youngest children must be seen to be trustworthy. Unless the community trusted the children's service they would not use it.

Grandmothers and older aunties have been the traditional carers for young children (Willsher, 1995) and continue to be. Yet the introduction of a centre-based approach to child care in remote communities is a significant departure from this traditional practice. This is especially true for the youngest of children. In our observations, families with young babies tended to use the children's service when a family relation was working at the service. Older women were always valued within children's services for their traditional role in 'bringing up little kids'. In every service there appeared to have been a conscious effort to staff centres with a mixture of older and younger staff members. In some cases, too, older women have had opportunities for training and obtained a range of jobs making them unavailable for work in the children's service.

Formal interview processes for employing children's services personnel (i.e. advertising the position publicly, short-listing applicants, interviewing and using standard selection criteria) was not the usual way of finding staff for the children's services. Other practices for finding the 'right' people to work in the service were employed. At Ikuntji, those community women who had worked in child care previously, when it was a playgroup, were seen as the most suitable people to work with children and, therefore, were appointed to the child care centre. They were 'proven' staff members. Some of the new workers employed at the service were young mothers themselves and were chosen as much for the support that child care could provide for them in their new roles as mothers as for their abilities. The sharing of the director role, between an older and younger staff member as happened at Ikuntji, allowed both women to have an important role within the service and equivalent salaries. This arrangement also allowed management responsibilities to be shared and the capabilities of the women to be pooled for the benefit of the service. As it turned out, one of the co-directors had to leave the service, and the community, for a period of time. The other director was able to carry on in her absence limiting the disruption to the service.

At Galiwin'ku, as the service developed, the staff profile shifted. In the beginning, and according to the original vision for the service, a mixture of community people was employed. The mix included staff representing different clan groups in the community, older and more experienced staff and younger staff who needed the opportunity to train and gain employment. Over time the balance shifted and it became clear that representation from all clans was no longer occurring. Fewer older women were working in child care perhaps because they had moved on to other responsibilities or had grown tired of the workload. This began to be seen as a serious problem. Younger staff could not be expected to know how to bring up young children, even if they were trained through accredited courses in child care. In a renewal of the service's original goals, some new staff have been employed recently. The service has decided to rebalance its mix of staff in terms of ages.

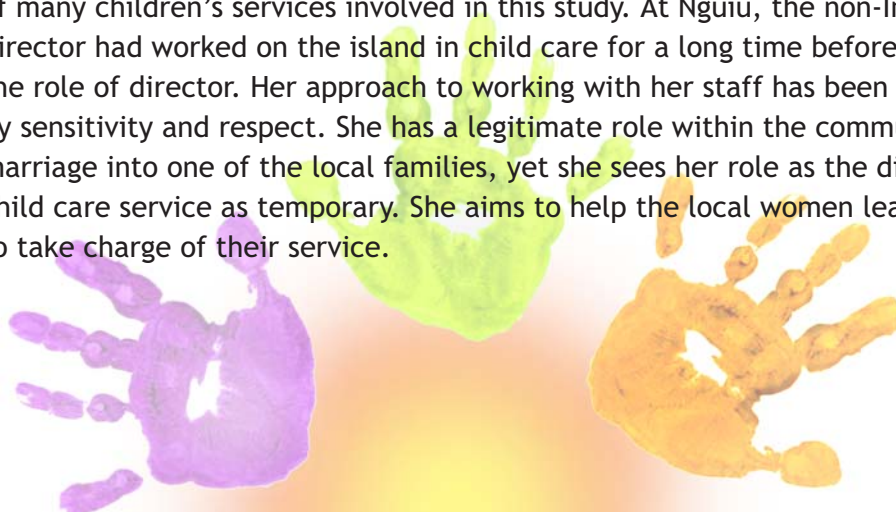


Another staffing issue for services was management of staff when there is a mix of clans, skin groups or family groups. When a director comes from different clan to one of her workers, traditional authority rules may be at odds with a hierarchical management structure. In other words, the director may find herself in a position where she has no right to tell some of the workers what to do. One way this problem has been addressed is to bring in an outside mediator, someone without community affiliations, such as a worker in a government department or support service. This person has acted as mediator to sort through the staff problem in a way that honours traditional relationships but enables the impasse to be removed.

Most of the services expressed the view that it is women who should work with young children. There were hardly any men in child care. Only one service employed a young man and this was unique. The role for men in child care differed in different services. At Gurungu, men were welcome to come to the centre for 'smoko'. Staff talked about how important men were. They depend on the men to help and they appreciate what they do. At Galiwin'ku, some men regularly visit the centre for lunch and were welcome visitors. This program also involved men visiting the service as models for the young children. They share their fishing produce with the centre, enabling children to see future roles for themselves in the community when they grow up.

In communities where service directors were Indigenous, but not from the community, they all talked about the importance of employing local women. Local women had the authority to tell children what to do and the directors or mentors respected this authority. In more than one community the view was put that formal qualifications alone did not ensure that community members would trust that person to look after their children, whether the person was a local Indigenous community member or not. Qualifications were seen as important and provided those who held them with a source of pride and some status in the community. However, their status as trustworthy and appropriate people for looking after children was more important for employment than their qualifications.

The employment of non-Indigenous workers was also important in the development of many children's services involved in this study. At Nguui, the non-Indigenous director had worked on the island in child care for a long time before she took on the role of director. Her approach to working with her staff has been characterised by sensitivity and respect. She has a legitimate role within the community through marriage into one of the local families, yet she sees her role as the director of the child care service as temporary. She aims to help the local women learn the skills to take charge of their service.



At Ikuntji, a non-Indigenous mentor was hired to support the development of the child care service. She was neither experienced nor qualified in child care and had no children of her own. In some ways this should have been a major disadvantage, but she believes this lack of knowledge turned out to be an advantage. It meant that she had to learn along with other staff members how to 'do' child care. From this position she recognised that the women who had raised children, who spoke the local language and who understood cultural expectations of the community had knowledge she could never have. It was also made clear from the beginning that her role was temporary. She set out to ensure that staff developed the same skills that she was developing. This orientation seemed to work well in this case. The close friendship that developed between the mentor and the director created a foundation on which they built an understanding of what was an appropriate child care service for the community. They both talked about misunderstandings that occurred in the early days, but they were able to work these out. Employing non-Indigenous, or even Indigenous mentors in child care, is not an automatic solution for supporting new services as we are aware that in some communities (not involved in this study) it has not worked so well. Yet with appropriate support and intentions, non-Indigenous mentors were critically important in many services' development.

PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN—WHAT ARE SERVICES DOING WITH CHILDREN? To understand what these services are doing with children we needed much more time and engagement in their services than we had. Yet there was sufficient material in what we did accomplish to draw some suggestive insights. We were conscious that we needed to open our lenses up to a 'wide angle view' of what a children's service could be, moving beyond what a mainstream children's service in an urban context might typically do. Some of us had long experience and years of training in mainstream services while others had substantial experience in diverse children's services contexts including remote area Indigenous services. However, we all needed to recognise that our understandings of children's services reflected the cultural, historical and political resources that we had built up and brought with us, from our own training, from our work as trainers and, most importantly, as outsiders to each community, even when some of us were very familiar with the local contexts or were of Indigenous background. To do this we needed to pay close attention to local participants' actions and comments as responses to the demands of their communities, demands that only they could truly understand (Dyson, 1993).

Staff in each of these services have developed different ways of working with their children. How this mix of practices for children evolved, depended on many things, including the expectations for the children's service that communities held, the resources available to the service, the people who worked there and their skills, knowledge, experiences and training, and the kinds of pressures and supports provided to the service by others.

As discussed in the previous section on 'common purposes' the expectations of the children's service held by communities and the perceived needs of children underpinned and produced an emphasis on certain kinds of practices for children in these communities. In some services children's need for food, hygiene and safety were of such a high priority that meeting these needs took up most of the day. The alliances built between the children's service and other services within their community had a strong influence on the service's orientation. The services closely aligned with the school often promoted an education focus for children, such as happened at the Titjikala with their preschool service, and at Barunga and Galiwin'ku. A close alliance with the health centre provided support and encouragement to emphasise health practices as happened at Barunga, Nguui and Titjikala as well. A practice focus evolved too around the presence of certain 'things' available for use. The availability of certain kinds of toys, furniture, outdoor play equipment and other things ensured that some practices took place and not others. In services that were well supplied with typical early childhood resources many more typical early childhood activities occurred. Finally, the people who worked in the services also brought their skills, knowledge, experiences and training, all of which produced some forms of activity instead of others. The fact that all of the services were staffed primarily by Indigenous people meant that their work with children was similar to what happened at home, insofar as this is ever possible.

Licensing requirements have a strong affect on practices in centres where they apply. For example, the regular washing of toys and the supervision of children are licensing requirements taken very seriously at Galiwin'ku and Nguui. They are routine activities in the service and occur according to a systematic roster of staff duties. Some form of written program is recorded for children's activities in most services whether they are licensed or not, although the directors appear to take more responsibility for this than other staff. As a way to help staff learn this practice the Director at Nguui posts a program of activities for children each day. Individual staff members sign up to do the activity of their choice. In this way they are learning about a range of child focused activities that could be offered. We noticed that in some services staff sit close to children and spend time playing or doing activities with them and in others this is not a common practice.

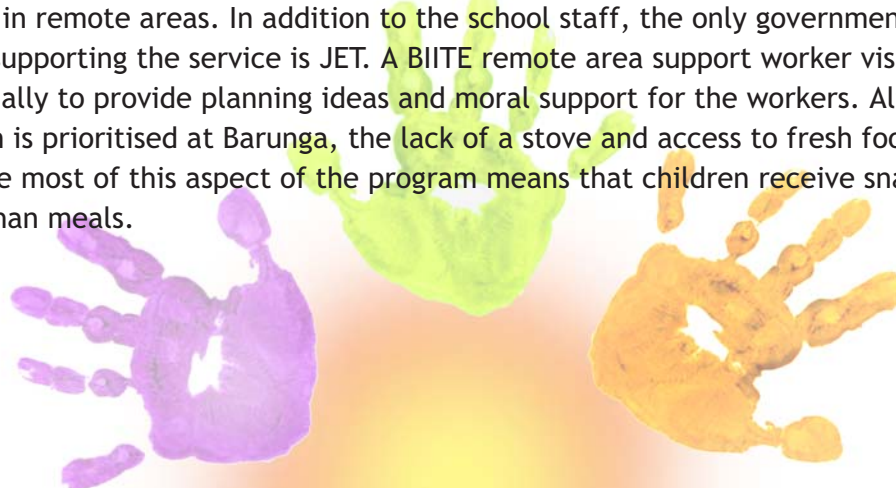
At present, JET crèches are not required to comply with the Northern Territory Standards for Child Centres, although they do have some very basic requirements. A community must demonstrate a need and support for such a service, identify a sponsor and provide a safe building with access to a toilet and running water. The original assumption behind the JET program was that children remain within visual or auditory supervision of their parents i.e. that the crèche would be located within a short distance of where mothers are working or training. JET crèches are funded on a quarterly basis, and therefore required to resubmit information about children in attendance and their parents every 13 weeks, to verify they continue to meet the JET eligibility criteria.

Each service is provided with a small amount of money for food, administration, children's equipment and consumables, in addition to the salaries for carers.

In practice, some JET crèche's in remote communities have evolved to operate unofficially as 'long day care' services. Their beginnings as JET crèches have put few constraints on their ability to develop and operate in the ways that suited their community. However, the relatively low level of funding and lack of licensing standards has meant that some practices have been tolerated that would not have been tolerated in licensed services. Some form of modified 'conditions' of licence would provide services with leverage within their communities to demand that minimum requirements are negotiated and met. In addition, in making the transition from a JET to a licensed service, some services may feel the pressure to 'perform' as a 'town' child care service. What that means is still not entirely clear to them because of their isolation and lack of opportunity for training. Although some have been actively developing rules or procedures, and 'practicing' with licensing requirements in much the same way that Galiwin'ku did, this varies from community to community.

It can be seen that services are both supported by and pressured by others; sources being their interactions with services within their community, with other children's services beyond their community, and government departments and training organisations, all of which 'nudge' services towards certain ways of working with children. In this sense the practices we saw or were told about were practices competing and evolving in a complex political arena.

The Barunga Nursery School works closely with the health clinic to support improved nutrition and with the school as a kind of 'stand in' preschool where none is currently available. Staff's work with children prioritises health routines, such as the daily visits to the clinic to get their vitamins and check ups, and more typical preschool type activities such as painting, pasting, playing dress ups and pretend play with dramatic play props in the preschool such as the miniature home corner or workbench, and group time. Children are encouraged to learn to use the toilet and wash their hands and there are plenty of facilities that enable them to practice these skills. This service has had few opportunities to network with other children's services in remote areas. In addition to the school staff, the only government agency supporting the service is JET. A BIITE remote area support worker visits occasionally to provide planning ideas and moral support for the workers. Although nutrition is prioritised at Barunga, the lack of a stove and access to fresh food to make the most of this aspect of the program means that children receive snacks rather than meals.



Food preparation and eating are central practices in most of the services. Each community is resourced differently but most have a kitchen that contains necessary tools and equipment such as a stove, fridge, freezer, pans of different sizes, potato mashers and so on. This range of equipment and the range and types of food that are found in the children's service are often not available in people's homes. This makes the services very attractive to adults and children and the meals are very important punctuation points in the day.

Language maintenance is not prioritised in all services, particularly services where adults believe they cannot pass on language to their children because they have lost too much of it themselves. In some services where the local language is still strong it seems to be taken for granted that children will learn language incidentally, without the need to plan for it or emphasise it. At both Titjikala and Ikuntji staff spoke to children almost exclusively in their own language. Staff in some services mentioned that children's attendance at the service provided the opportunity for learning English, an advantage when the children go to school. Staff told us that they speak to children in English for this reason and appreciate non-Indigenous staff members for their ability to teach the children English. However, in some communities this practice sits alongside a concern for children's loss of their local language or languages. At Galiwin'ku the director spoke about how the children were no longer learning 'strong' language, but she was unsure of how to reverse this situation. Both local languages and English are used explicitly at the centre. At Nguiu children receive some explicit support for learning language through the Tiwi language games they play at group time and through the use of Tiwi during the culture dances. Staff make the effort to speak to children in both Tiwi and English and encourage them to respond in each language.

Most services attempt to take children 'out bush', to swim in water holes, to look for bush tucker, to share knowledge about the bush or simply to get away from the centre and spend some time in the bush. This is a very important practice in every service we visited. Some services found it difficult to take the children out as often as they would like because of lack of transport. A vehicle devoted to the use of the children's service makes this important activity much more sustainable.

Practices in children's services are geared primarily around the needs and activities of children. We need to remember that for some children the children's service is a different kind of place from home. This is the case for mainstream services too. Children in some homes are not the main focus of activity for adults in the family. Adults go about their business and children fit in with these activities instead of being their focus. Children's services can be seen as somewhat artificial places when the main purpose of adults' activity is to look after children. Both children and staff are learning how to "do" childcare in ways that make sense to them, and children are shaping these practices as well.

PRACTICES FOR MULTIPLE IN-HOUSE PROGRAMS

There are many sources of funding and many different programs being managed in some of these services. This kind of complexity has defeated many managers in mainstream services who have much less challenging contexts to work in. The ways that the services we visited are managing these multiple responsibilities varies. One solution was to appoint separate 'supervisors' to take responsibility for each of the key programs in the centre; parents program, nutrition program, long day care program, out of school hours care program and other short term programs that arise from time to time. This strategy does more than simply spread the workload. It also provides training and experience in leadership and management for all of the supervisors.

At Gurungu the director is beginning to work with other staff members to distribute the workload involved in managing the different programs. Originally she did it all. However the programs have grown and changed to the point where this is no longer possible. The programs at this service include the Women's Centre activities, JET child care and outside school hours care which run from the same location. The new plant nursery involves another set of responsibilities. The Gurungu service has a different orientation to other services in that it is a service targetting the community as a whole and children and families who live in the community benefit from this work. Staff are aware that funding is finite but it seems to be enough to support most of the activities of the service. When funds do not stretch to fill a particular need the practice has been for the Women's Centre to do some more fundraising. However, as with the other services we visited, the director needs to have a clearer idea of the financial situation. The blending of the programs into a holistic service for the community seems to suit the community at the moment. However, as the service develops, the complexity of managing so many programs increases. Accountability for JET funding requirements has become a serious problem. It may be time to think about appointing staff to specific programs rather than relying on one person to oversee all of them. If this happens, the holistic focus of the service needs to be made explicit if it is to be preserved.

PRACTICES AROUND WHO THE SERVICE IS FOR—WHO USES THE SERVICE?

There were differences in how beliefs about ownership of the service evolved in the different communities, issues of 'belonging' in the service and which families used the service. As we noted above, sometimes the families chose to use the service based on who worked there and a family's relationship with staff. Who gets to work in the centre often depend on the relationships within the community or who is seen to 'own' the service. Whose traditional land the service is located on can contribute to the view that it is 'owned' by some families and not by others. The Galiwin'ku service chose a specific site seen as neutral and accessible by everyone in the community and not seen as 'owned' by a particular family. A concerted effort is made before a structure is chosen that needs to be accessed by the general community to ensure it is located on neutral ground and, in the case of the children's service,

near communal facilities. The house that became the temporary child care service in Ikuntji was not able to be used for cultural reasons relating to vacating a house where someone has died. We were told that sometimes houses in these circumstances could become unusable for many months or even years. The use by child care of the vacant house in Ikuntji was negotiated with the community by the co-directors of the service who established that it could be used because no one would be sleeping overnight, a prohibition that made the house unusable by a family for example, but not by a service that only operated during the day. We were told that services in some communities, although not one of those we visited, had experienced problems with staffing when a staff member could no longer come to work because, for cultural reasons associated with 'sorry business', she could no longer get to the building along the normal access route. There were no culturally appropriate access routes to the centre until the 'sorry business' had finished. All of these issues require the respect and consideration of non-Indigenous agents that work with these services such as funding or licensing authorities. Sometimes services may have to close or will not be able to meet licensing expectations of funding agencies due to cultural reasons.

The practices discussed here included mainstream child care practices as well as community based practices. Each service confronts the challenges in its community and is working to develop local solutions that suit their context.



QUESTION 1B

How can these stories of practice support the development of new community-based Indigenous children's services?

In this section we discuss some of the implications of this research for other remote Indigenous communities considering the introduction of a children's service. The stories of practice relate to some general insights we have drawn together from the stories of participating communities. These insights include;

- *the importance of a locally felt need for the development of a service for young children,*
- *access to a range of funding options to meet local needs,*
- *issues surrounding local Indigenous and mainstream expectations for a children's service,*
- *recognition of learning opportunities—within the community, between communities, and from outsiders.*

FINDINGS

LOCALLY FELT NEED

Local people have to have a trigger, a felt need for the introduction of the children's services. This is the basis on which to build and gain wider support. Unless there are a number of people who can see the worth of and prioritise the development of a service, it is unlikely that one or two people can carry the community or the work involved. While in most cases the communities we worked with could hold up key people who seemingly 'made the difference' in the development of a service, these individuals were always tapping into a felt need within the community. In addition, they were one in a series of people who took on this kind of role. The local trigger and local need is strengthened by outsiders but the outsiders are not the reason a service developed. With the introduction of new funding or a new building, for example, a lot of local enthusiasm can be generated, but this alone does not ensure the enterprise survives. Only the commitment and investment of local community members can achieve this.

FUNDING OPTIONS TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS

Access to information and support to enable local participants to understand and exploit the myriad potential forms of government assistance and support helps a community to get started with their children's service. While this is obvious, it is not always accomplished. Government workers need to be available and willing to invest the necessary time and resources to enable local people to understand what types of funding are available and what can be done with them.

Related to this issue is the issue of funding being made available in more flexible 'buckets'. What may be the funding solution at initial set up time is likely to change with the changing needs of the community.

LOCAL INDIGENOUS AND MAINSTREAM EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The issue of programs provided for children always contains a set of tensions related to the local expectations of a program as these interact with prevailing mainstream ways of doing things. Mainstream expectations for children's services, such as the discourses of 'developmentally appropriate practice', can dominate local practices to the extent that local needs and expectations are marginalised. There is much work yet to be done in most settings to balance both departmental and external expectations with local expectations. What counts as a locally 'appropriate' in the children's service must be justified when it does not reflect what counts to external agencies. New approaches to children's service development provided by each of the different participating communities allows other communities to learn from their diversity, in terms of strategies and purposes. Each service was different. Each adapted its program to some degree to respond to the local needs of children, families and their community. Each prioritised different aspects of their service depending on what was needed by their community at the time.

LEARNING THROUGH CONNECTIONS

When a children's service links up with other services within their community who support children, such as the school, health clinic or youth program, they tap into a powerful opportunity for mutual learning. Linking with even one other service can create a community-based alliance from which the children's services workers can learn, and on which they can call for help when problems are encountered. All community services located in remote communities face problems and issues that exceed their capacity to manage. Linking with another group with a common interest in children can provide support and learning that is local and timely. We saw these kinds of alliances. We also saw lack of connection. Sometimes different groups offering services for children within the same community may be seen as competitors, especially when the perception is that funds are distributed unevenly or to the disadvantage of some groups within the community. When this occurs it reduces the opportunity for mutual learning and support. These are not problems that can be solved by outside agencies, although they can certainly contribute to widening the gaps if they are unaware of them.

The powerful potential for learning also occurs when services for children link up with similar services within remote communities. This was mentioned often by participants as the most useful learning experience they had had. The opportunity for interaction amongst these far flung services is probably the best form of training because it adds value to local efforts and local purposes to see others in action in other places and to see what can be done.

The community people who run and staff these centres need to be able to see and exchange ideas with others who confront similar issues in order to imagine new possibilities that could suit their own purposes and needs.

Visitors from outside the community, like the research team also create new ways of thinking. They offer a way for local people to see themselves as others see them. They become more aware of their service and, in doing so, more articulate about what they are trying to do. Remote community children's services, in their isolation, often have little awareness of their uniqueness or the creativity of their local practices, solutions and innovations until someone remarks on them. Where we could, we pointed these out to people and people were often amazed and proud to have their ideas recognised as exceptional or exemplary. Because of their isolation, many of these services simply do not know how to judge what they are doing or to have confidence in their service.

QUESTION 1C

How can the research process support the researchers to develop critical social research skills?

- *access to communities*
- *time*
- *ethical considerations*
- *becoming a research team*

This was an important component of the research as so many of the team were inexperienced in research activities. In this section we discuss our research processes, the challenges of gaining access to communities, our positioning to do this kind of research, and how both the community participants and the researchers changed over the duration of the project and through participating in the research workshops designed to build research skills and knowledge.

FINDINGS

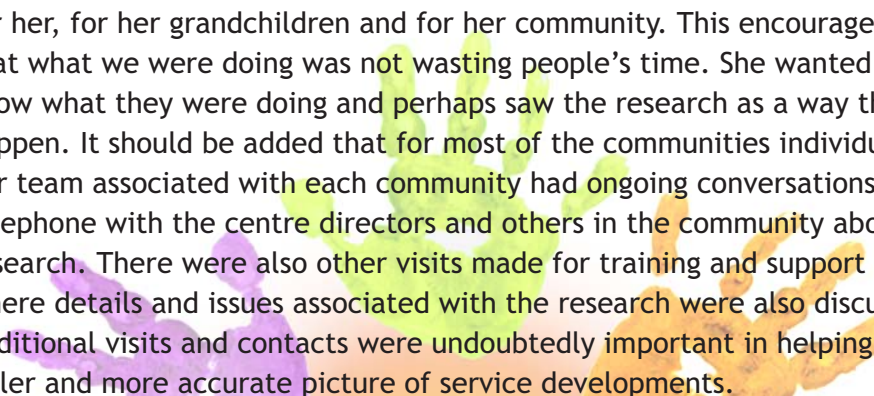
ACCESS TO COMMUNITIES

Gaining access to communities to do this kind of research is difficult and we struggled to do this in ways that were ethical and culturally appropriate. It was critically important that the members of our team had longstanding and close associations with members of their respective communities. They had established relationships with community participants who were pivotal to the success of our project, i.e. the children's services workers. They also knew some of the history of the development of these services and the challenges they had faced. Through these local connections we received advice about who we should talk to and how best to introduce the research to the wider community.

BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT - 2004

On a purely mundane level, because of their familiarity with their communities, members of our team knew the logistics of travel and accommodation that make an enormous difference in accessing remote communities. There are very few vacant houses or places for visitors to stay when they visit remote communities. Forward planning is essential. Even with this advantage, we encountered many setbacks. Weather conditions, especially in the wet season, required the cancellation of three trips. Cultural issues, such as funerals and ceremonies were more common reasons for cancellation. It is a sad fact that in all but one of the communities we visited, one or more deaths occurred, requiring reorganisation of our visiting schedule. Once we arrived in a community we were always adapting our plans to accommodate local situations. People in remote communities are constantly being consulted and researched. As we noted earlier in the report, in three of the participating communities our project followed on the heels of the NT Review of Secondary Education. Sometimes this coincidence fostered an interest in discussing education because community people were already thinking and talking about the place and purpose of education for young people in their community including the early childhood years. In other places there was evidence of 'research burnout'. Some people seemed very tired of having to talk about what could or should be done to improve what was clearly recognised as a critical situation. What they wanted was more action and less talk about what, at community level, was a well known need, the improvement of education for Indigenous children. This problem of over-researching is raised over and over again across all communities.

Funding made it possible for only three visits to each community and these were spread over a period of eighteen months. We usually stayed in each community from 3 to 5 days. While this seemed enough time in the planning stage, it was never enough! People are so busy in communities and finding quiet and appropriate times to talk was an ongoing challenge. For example, in one community we had tried many times to talk to a senior woman and had failed. On our way to the airport to leave she jumped into the car and this is when we talked. She literally spoke to us, non stop, throughout the 10 minute journey, answering all of the questions we had been asking everyone else but which we had not had a chance to ask her. She was extremely keen to tell us what she felt about child care and how important it was for her, for her grandchildren and for her community. This encouraged us in thinking that what we were doing was not wasting people's time. She wanted others to know what they were doing and perhaps saw the research as a way this could happen. It should be added that for most of the communities individual members of our team associated with each community had ongoing conversations on the telephone with the centre directors and others in the community about the research. There were also other visits made for training and support purposes where details and issues associated with the research were also discussed. These additional visits and contacts were undoubtedly important in helping us gain a fuller and more accurate picture of service developments.



TIME

An important issue was the time between visits—the months during which we, as a team, were thinking and talking amongst ourselves but not with the local participants. When we arrived back in a community for a follow up visit inevitably our ideas had already taken on a sort of solidity that comes with time and repetition. When these ideas were tested out with our community participants sometimes they had become irrelevant and dated. In the time we had been away, the community and the service had ‘moved on’. This experience reinforced for us that our returning presence as researchers in the community, our probing questions and the fact of the research itself, was contributing to some of the changes we were seeing. For example, we often commented enthusiastically on some of the things we saw child care workers doing, obviously sending the message that these were ‘good’ things to be doing in a children’s service. We were never ‘objective’ researchers removed from the research situation.

After our second visits some members of our team worried about this aspect. Was it appropriate? How much should/did our research activity influence what we saw happening? This concern was discussed in terms of the research methodology. As a participatory action research project our involvement was never outside the research frame. It was always implicated and part of what was producing the ideas and practices that we were observing. For example, community participants were very keen to hear about how other services in remote communities were operating and what they did. We shared this knowledge. When it seemed appropriate we offered suggestions for problems people told us about or those with which we saw they were struggling. In many ways, our visits became a form of networking amongst community participants. This is not a distant, disengaged researcher role. While we were working to document and explore how communities are developing their children’s services, we were also taking the opportunities that presented themselves for supporting and building the capacity of these services. We are looking forward to bringing together all of the participating child care workers in the near future for the workshop to produce community-specific resources.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was important and a primary ethical consideration that we provided the opportunity for participants to know and respond to what we had ‘found out’ by doing the research. For the final visit we struggled with our already extended time line (we had hoped to finish the project by May) and budget limitations to come up with a method for conveying our findings concerning each community in a form that would be acceptable and accessible. Ahead of our scheduled visit, we sent to each community the individual chapter concerning that community as well as the first and last chapters that introduced the project and summarised the findings. In each community, copies were sent for a traditional owner, the community chief executive officer and to the children’s services staff members who had participated. As an English text, written in an academic form, it was not accessible

to most of the children's services workers or traditional owners. The third visits provided an opportunity to 'talk' the report through with participants, engaging interpreters where necessary.

These plans worked out differently in practice. Some community participants did not respond to the opportunity to review and discuss the report. Those that did provided valuable feedback. Much more time and support was needed to allow all participants to discuss and consider the full complexity and scope of our findings. Community participants tended to focus primarily on the section of the report that described their own story of service development. They suggested many useful changes and sometimes supplied new information. Even this limited form of consultation and feedback was incredibly valuable and worthwhile if only for ensuring that the report was accurate. It was not possible for all participants to thoroughly review the content. A follow up meeting that brings together the children's services staff from all of the services is planned for March 2005. During this meeting the report findings will be workshopped more thoroughly and individual community resources will be extracted and designed for each community. In addition, each community will receive a copy of every other community's booklet.

BECOMING A RESEARCH TEAM

Only one of us, Lyn, was able to go to every community because of funding constraints and, therefore, had a holistic view of the research experience. What this meant to the process of analysing the data was that we had to work hard to listen to and understand each other's stories and perspectives. We often did not all agree with each others insights. Our different orientations, values, and past experiences made for many lively discussions as we brought our often contradictory insights together. For the Indigenous team members, feelings of being overwhelmed by the majority non-Indigenous team members, kept surfacing. These tensions played out in different ways and sometimes created real schisms. Different members of the team took on the role of bridging the gaps and bringing people together again. The good will that evolved amongst the group was tested more than once and yet we managed, with varying degrees of success, to resolve most of our differences. Paying attention to these issues was critically important to the project and we have all learned a lot about how easy it is to exclude others.

One of the main challenges was coordinating time to work together. Not everyone could participate in every planned activity. One of our team attend meetings primarily by teleconference, all of us were busy with tasks beyond the research itself. We planned and ran a series of research methodology and methods workshops, three of which were hosted by the research advisor, Professor Ian Falk and 6 other workshops by the principal researcher, Dr Lyn Fasoli. These workshops introduced participants to different ways of collecting and dealing with the data as well as coding and analysing it. It was through these processes that we began to know each other and learn together.

We gradually developed from a group of disparate people working together on a project to become a collaborative research team. This was critically important to a collaborative research process as Potter (1998) points out;

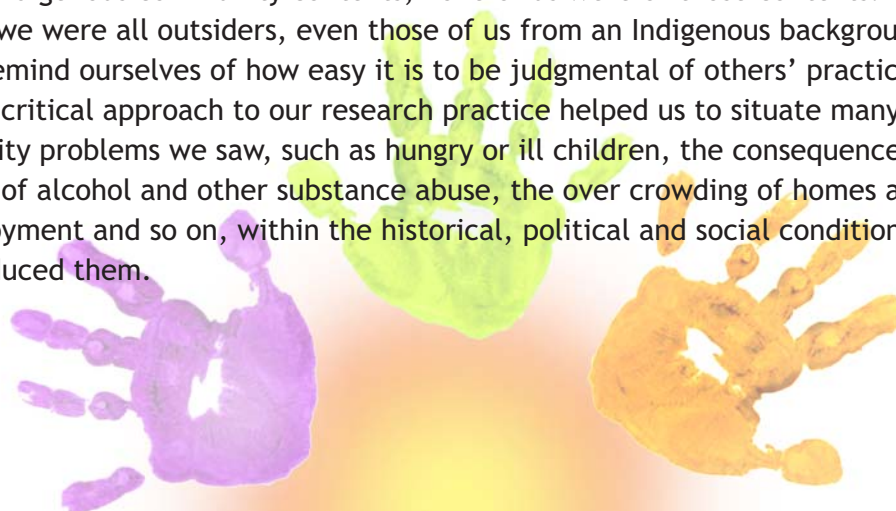
Collaboration is more than a group of researchers gathering together or working on the same project. It is a process which demands a spirit of true cooperation, a genuine partnership and an equal sharing of power, leadership, ownership and responsibility.

Potter, 1998, p. 7

The issue of sharing power, leadership, ownership and responsibility surfaced and resurfaced, making the role of project manager pivotal. Carolyn Preece played this role with tact and determination. Slowly the original regard and general respect we held for each other developed into a much deeper relationship where trust and understanding enabled the group to discuss ever more difficult issues. It was never easy nor is it finished. We continue to search together to work out our differences and resolve the tensions that are inherent in this form of activity.

Doing the research together has changed us, especially in the ways we now think about our work as educators of students and others, whether they are from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds. Our teaching and in-service support work has changed to reflect a much more complex understanding of how children's services are able to develop within their communities, and how their development is both supported and constrained by their communities. These lessons apply to service development in communities anywhere.

As educators, we have all been trained within the dominant discourses of early childhood education and in mainstream practices that we carry with us into any situation as 'cultural baggage'. Our assumptions about how children learn, the nature of childhood itself, and what constitutes 'good' practice with young children were all formed in this experience. What is 'appropriate' practice in an Indigenous community context? Although some of us were more familiar than others with remote Indigenous community contexts, none of us were of those contexts. To a degree, we were all outsiders, even those of us from an Indigenous background. We had to remind ourselves of how easy it is to be judgmental of others' practices. Taking a critical approach to our research practice helped us to situate many of the community problems we saw, such as hungry or ill children, the consequences for children of alcohol and other substance abuse, the over crowding of homes and lack of employment and so on, within the historical, political and social conditions that had produced them.



Was our work in communities making things better for the people we worked with? Were we focusing on the things that mattered to the local people or were we focusing on the things that mattered to us? These were the kinds of questions that challenged us. We were never unaware of the political nature of our work with Indigenous communities but we became increasingly aware of how they had to operate within a mainstream system that funded, and therefore, privileged and promoted certain ways of working with children and ignored others. For example, the issue of language maintenance was often discussed in our group. So many of these services actively promoted English usage and seemed to take local language use for granted. Should we support and promote this? What was our role in challenging local people on these issues? Even more challenging was the response we should make to situations that would never be tolerated in a mainstream service. How could it be acceptable for a children's service in a remote community to operate without an on-site toilet or hand washing facilities for two years? We continue to discuss and argue about these issues and hope that the publication of this project will highlight the inequalities in people's lives in remote communities and the enormous burden that children's services bear as they work to support their children and families.

This research process may have acted to empower and inform some of the community participants. This was an original and rather idealistic intention of the research but not achieved to the degree that we would have hoped. We were limited in the time we spent in communities and by the number of visits we could make. However, it was clear that in being asked to articulate what they knew, believed and hoped for in their children's service, many of the directors and staff of centres became more reflective about their roles and activities. For example, the director of one of the services made a decision to change staff responsibilities in her centre, based on a discussion we had about the potential benefits of distributing tasks to different staff. We were conscious from the beginning that the research should provide something to the participants in communities in return for the time they gave and their involvement in our project. We have planned, following the completion of this report, to hold a workshop that brings all of the participants together to produce community-specific booklets documenting each service's development. This will become a resource that each service will own and can use to promote and broadcast their achievements. This will also be the opportunity to discuss in more depth with the staff who participated, the findings and insights gained through this research process.

For researcher's reflections on the research process please refer to Appendix 2.



APPENDIX 1

OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH AND REPORTS

This section summarises a range of documents and resources related to national, international and NT-based Indigenous children's service development in remote NT contexts. We begin with reference to the national and international contexts in which the NT developments have occurred.

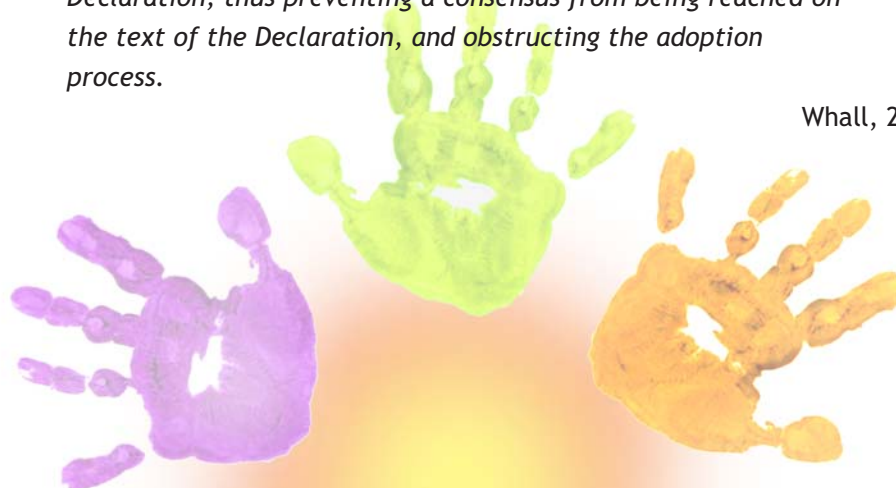
INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

International

International Indigenous issues are dominated by issues of local control by Indigenous peoples in the management of their own human, physical and social resources to further their own interests. The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1993-2004) re-focused the world's attention on the long neglected rights of Indigenous people. The grievances and concerns voiced by groups representing a wide range of the world's Indigenous peoples have continually emphasised basic issues of fundamental human rights and rights to self-determination. The issues under discussion include Indigenous community autonomy and control in relation to health, community development, land rights, language maintenance, women's rights, and the use of traditional resources (United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 2004). In recent times, action to address these issues has begun to occur internationally. One significant action, through the United Nations, is the development of a Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which is nearing completion. However, the Australian government has been a key player in resisting it.

A number of Commonwealth member states, namely, Australia, Canada and the UK, are at the forefront of a small group of countries opposing the recognition of collective rights of indigenous peoples, such as self-determination, in the Draft Declaration, thus preventing a consensus from being reached on the text of the Declaration, and obstructing the adoption process.

Whall, 2004, p.3



An international leader in advocacy and program development for Indigenous children, the Bernard van Leer Foundation supports programs that enhance the life chances of children around the world who are growing up with social and economic disadvantage. In their recent submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Child, the Foundation put a case for Indigenous communities the world over, with particular reference to two longstanding projects in Guatemala and Mexico. The key factors found to be relevant to the effective implementation and development of programs for young Indigenous children included;

- the importance of supporting the community to realise their own vision for children,
- the use of appropriate and culturally relevant curricula,
- the principle that local teachers are best and, when not available, that other teachers receive cultural training specific to the cultural context,
- the importance of the mother tongue in the early years of education as well as the acquisition of a national language after the early childhood years,
- the meaningful involvement of parents in programs for children,
- the decentralisation of education to allow for more local control; and
- the recognition of the importance of the political context for the viability of programs.

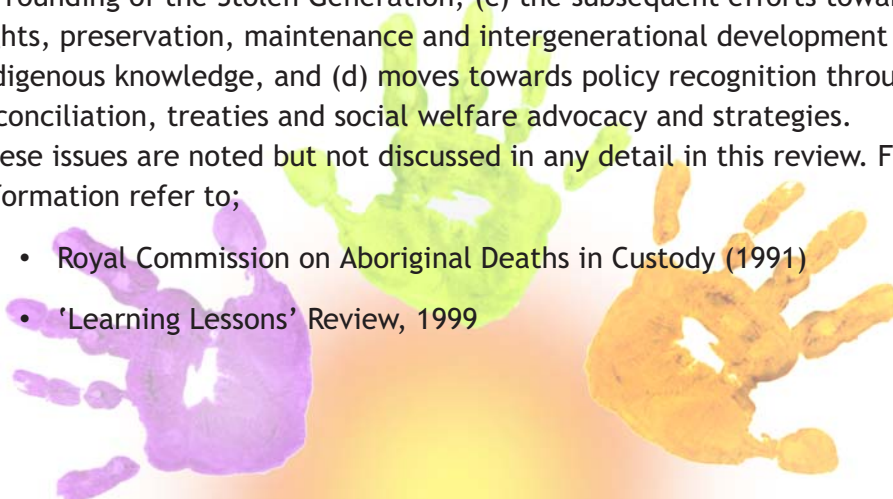
(paraphrased Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2003, p. 6)

International developments have found their way into Australian politics through the signing of the United National International Convention on the Rights of the Child which Australia is yet to ratify.

National

The Australian Indigenous context reflects a history of four major thematic areas: (a) the 'Western' invasion and colonial history of the 1700-1800s, (b) the various ways that deaths of Indigenous peoples resulted from this, and the events surrounding of the Stolen Generation, (c) the subsequent efforts towards land rights, preservation, maintenance and intergenerational development of remaining Indigenous knowledge, and (d) moves towards policy recognition through reconciliation, treaties and social welfare advocacy and strategies. These issues are noted but not discussed in any detail in this review. For further information refer to;

- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991)
- 'Learning Lessons' Review, 1999



The legacy of the past continues to impact on all aspects of life for Australian Indigenous peoples today. In 1997, the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, speaking at the SNAICC National Conference, reminded listeners of the Stolen Children Report and that;

Indigenous children and only Indigenous children were taken away because of their race. Only Indigenous children became wards of the state at birth. They could legally remove an Indigenous child without alleging neglect or abuse. You just had to say they were Aboriginal. There were separate statutes specifically authorising the removal of our children because their Aboriginality was a 'problem'.

Dodson, 1997, p.3

Dodson convincingly argues that this past policy was being perpetuated in current welfare policies and that despite 'best intentions', in their effects Indigenous children continue to be removed from their families and communities. The recently launched Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (2003), a sub-study of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, provides a depressing fact sheet detailing the continuing disadvantage experienced by young Indigenous children. Supporting Dodson's 1997 contentions, the report states (p.9) that young Indigenous children are...

- Six times more likely to be in the care and protection system
- Twenty-five per cent in care are not with Indigenous family carers

The Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2003) reports '*...that Indigenous Australians continue to experience marked and widespread disadvantage*' (p. v). In the report, 'early childhood development and growth' is identified as a strategic area for action and includes statistics on Indigenous children aged 0-3 years. The rates of hospital admissions for infectious diseases, infant mortality, birth weight and hearing impediments are highlighted as key indicators and targeted areas of need. On all indicators, Northern Territory statistics are the worst. A recent Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care report (2002) indicates that life expectancy for Indigenous people is approximately 15-20 years less than that of non-Indigenous people. Educational enrolments in preschool education for Indigenous children has declined rather than improved or been maintained. Youth are more likely to leave school early as compared to non-Indigenous children. Unemployment rates are much higher for Indigenous people, especially for youth, and income levels for many Indigenous families with jobs are marginal with 20% of Indigenous households living on less than \$16,000 per year. Indigenous families make up 14% of the total homeless peoples in Australia. Nearly twice as many Indigenous as non-Indigenous families are living in overcrowded housing. Incarceration rates are significantly higher for Indigenous people.

On virtually every socioeconomic indicator Indigenous people continue to suffer disproportionate disadvantage as compared to other groups in Australia.

Priest (2002) citing NT Aboriginal activist Yunipingu regarding the conditions needed for Indigenous development in Australia.

For Indigenous people to develop robust and effective structures to advance economic development, those institutions need to be based on our law, our history and our culture.

Yunipingu, 2002, p.2

These issues permeate any considerations of child care in remote Indigenous communities.

RESEARCH AND INITIATIVES RELATED TO THE NT 1994-2004

The NT-based reports, journal articles, books, conference presentations, workshops, videos, audio resources and verbal stories provide background knowledge on the issues specific to the development of children's services in remote Aboriginal communities in the NT over approximately a ten year span from 1994-2004. Many of these resources have been developed through the work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and students at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and its predecessor, Batchelor College, some published but many unpublished and therefore unavailable beyond the Institute. A wealth of literature relevant to children's service development in the NT has also been produced more recently by Commonwealth, State and Territory based government departments and is included in this section. Together these materials provide foundational understandings, perspectives and approaches related to the development of remote Indigenous communities early childhood care and education services on which the 'Both Ways' Child Care Project can build.

TALKING EARLY CHILDHOOD

'Talking Early Childhood' is one of an ambitious series of research studies undertaken over a 6 year period (1993 -1999) by the then Batchelor College and funded primarily through the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. The overall project was called the Community Based Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Project. It has become referred to by most of its participants and by the NT community more generally as the 'Talking Early Childhood' project.



The project identified a number of ongoing issues related to the development and delivery needs of children's services in remote area Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. Among others, these included;

- *the lack of provision of services to young children in remote communities despite numerous requests over many years by local people,*
- *the lack of appropriate knowledge and expertise within government departments that fund and regulate child care services to support the development of culturally appropriate children's services in these contexts and*
- *the lack of appropriate training for remote area Aboriginal people wishing to work in services for children.*

Adams, 1999

The 'Talking Early Childhood' report documents the diverse needs expressed by participants for the development of services for their children. They include the need;

- *to supplement the care that can be provided by family when women take up work or study,*
- *for short term care of children when families have other business to attend to,*
- *for good child care practices to support young parents who have missed out due to the illness of older family members who would normally have taught these skills,*
- *to prepare young children, in some communities, for school and 'school ways' depending on how well the school community incorporated familiar language and culture practices,*
- *the need to support communities to improve children's health and welfare through provision of various programs, most notably nutrition and ear health programs.*

Willsher & Clarke, 1995, see p. 135-138

The report promotes no 'ideal' type of child care provision as none could possibly meet the needs of such a diverse range of communities. However, participants indicated that culturally appropriate planning and provision of services was critical for remote area community based services.

The key issues that emerged from the study related to Aboriginal control and need for supports for enacting that control, i.e.

- control over decision-making in service management, funding, staffing, and training,
- control in the content and conduct of programs for young children,
- control over service resources in general and
- control to reduce the fragmentation of services for children in the community offered by various departments and organisations.

The Talking Early Childhood report offered strong messages still relevant today, summarised in these excerpts from the report.

While family based child care is the most common form available to mothers and continues to be an important link in the socialisation chain, there is a growing call for additional forms of childcare and more generally, for early childhood services. However, women stressed that these services must be culturally appropriate and that this is achievable only when services are explored and developed in conjunction with the community, and controlled at the local level.

The field of early childhood provision is complex and Aboriginal people are asking for clear information and simple procedures that will allow them to more readily access funds that can be utilised for the benefit of their children. A rationalisation of some programs and greater cooperation between agencies were suggested as ways in which service delivery could be improved. The provision of training for careers in early childhood is also important to some women as is the need for additional resources and for professional support for staff working in this area.

Willsher & Clarke, 1995, p. vi

Adams (1999), in her overall review of the 'Talking Early Childhood' Project, points to a significant attitudinal changes produced in funding agencies and government departments as a result of the project process and findings. One of the most powerful outcomes appears to have been its role in shifting departmental perceptions that remote Aboriginal children's services need policies and programs to 'fix' their deficits '...in preparation for assimilation into mainstream services and society'.



The report helped produce a new and more positive view of remote community needs. It...

...validated and demonstrated a view that early childhood services must be relevant to the context in which they are developed, and that they should support and express the aspirations of families and children in each setting or community.

Adams, 1999, p. 61

OTHER 'TALKING EARLY CHILDHOOD' RESOURCES

The 'Talking Early Childhood' project also produced a number of other resources designed specifically for use by remote area communities. They have been used widely and appear to have assisted in building remote area Indigenous staff capacity to share their knowledge and support each other.

A series of videos was produced in language and in English including a video called 'Designing a Child Care Centre' (1996) which followed women from a remote service as they visited four different child care centres, three located in Darwin and one at Batchelor and another video called 'Toy Making Workshop' (1996) which demonstrated ways to make toys using the kinds of everyday and natural materials commonly found in most communities. A directory of remote area children's services to be used as a networking tool was also developed. A series of processes designed to support ongoing networking, such as regional conferences, the yearly NT Children's Services Conference, remote area seminars, community to community visits and a network newsletter were recommended and many of these activities have occurred in recent years.

- Additional resources produced through this project include;
- Talking Early Childhood (video),
- Growing Up with Culture Strong (video),
- Kid's Stuff Calendar—Looking through the Windows of Play (1998-1999)
- Talking Early Childhood—A Resource Book.

EVALUATION REPORTS: YUENDUMU & GALIWIN'KU

Yuendumu Summary

Two centres in remote areas funded under the new funding made available for flexible and innovative services was undertaken by Batchelor lecturer Michele Willsher and these provide rich case studies of specific community concerns, challenges and issues. In the evaluation of the first funded 'innovative' centre, Yuendumu Child Care Centre, Willsher (2000) documents community perspectives on the impact of this service on children's health, activities and child care arrangements and their perceptions of the need for further change and improvement.

As part of this project she also evaluated an approach to child care centre licensing adopted by the then Territory Health Services for these services, known as 'issues-based', with a view to making recommendations on improvements to the delivery model, licensing procedures and conditions for remote area 'innovative' children's services. The evaluation involved 18 months of observations and interviews after the first full year of the services operation.

Willsher (2000) noted a general finding indicating that;

...Walpiri staff are developing ways of doing things that are relevant for their centre rather than simply copying all practices from mainstream urban settings. They are fiercely proud of the centre and perceive it as an organisation that belongs to them and their community. However, the Walpiri staff recognise their need to gain further experience and skills and do not yet feel confident to have the centre fully Aboriginalised (p. 6).

Some key insights provided by the evaluation are relevant to the 'Both-Ways' project.

A changed 'vision' was emerging

The vision that emerged was significantly different from that which had originally motivated the development of the service. The vision held by the current users was that child care could be a playgroup/'drop in' centre, a preparation for school, a place for children to learn to become responsible community members as well as provide child care for children of working parents (see p. 31–32).

The notion of 'work' in community was expanded

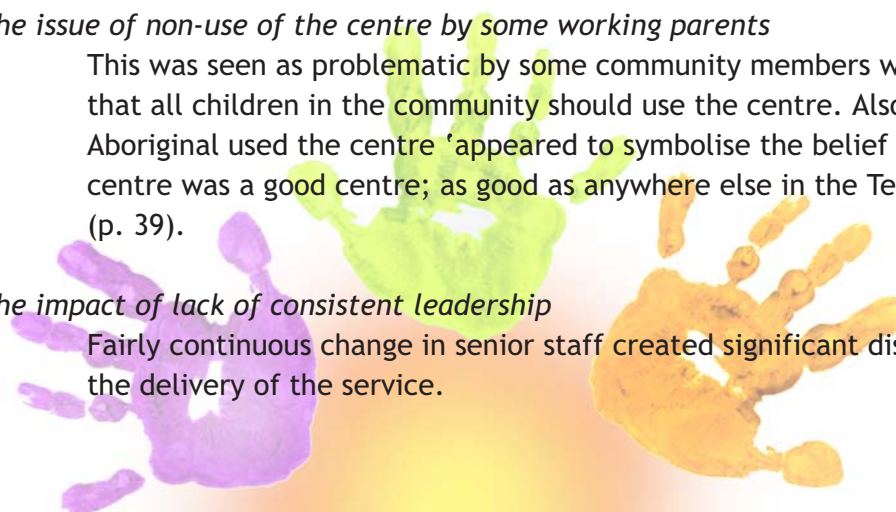
Work was defined more broadly than in mainstream society in that it covered activities in the paid workforce as well as unpaid work, such as 'looking after elderly relatives, housework, washing, cooking, collecting firewood, going into town to sort out money matters' (p. 33).

The issue of non-use of the centre by some working parents

This was seen as problematic by some community members who thought that all children in the community should use the centre. Also, that non-Aboriginal used the centre 'appeared to symbolise the belief that this centre was a good centre; as good as anywhere else in the Territory ' (p. 39).

The impact of lack of consistent leadership

Fairly continuous change in senior staff created significant disruption to the delivery of the service.



Licensing rules as an issue of concern

Licensing was seen as not culturally relevant in some cases. 'We should have our rules too...like for "sorry business". Sorry is really hard for us Walpiri' (p. 42).

The critical importance of Indigenous staff

Yet staffing remained a serious concern despite the fact that staff all identified as a team of child care workers, and their roles were respected by the community. Staff often had to be away from the centre for cultural issues such as deaths and illness. 'For Walpiri staff their involvement in many events is non-negotiable' (p. 63).

Overall positive benefits for children were noted including the perception that children who had attended the child care centre were different in that they knew more about school and how to behave in this setting compared to those who had not attended. Participants also thought that attendance at the child care centre 'helped young children to learn to mix with different families' (p.35). However, there were dangers seen in this apparently positive outcome, as Willsher points out.

All educational institutions, explicitly or implicitly, have at their core a set of values and this is no less the case for the child care centre at Yuendumu than it is for the school. As an institution introduced from the white mainstream there is a danger that the centre will become yet one more assimilative pressure brought to bear upon Walpiri people (p. 56).

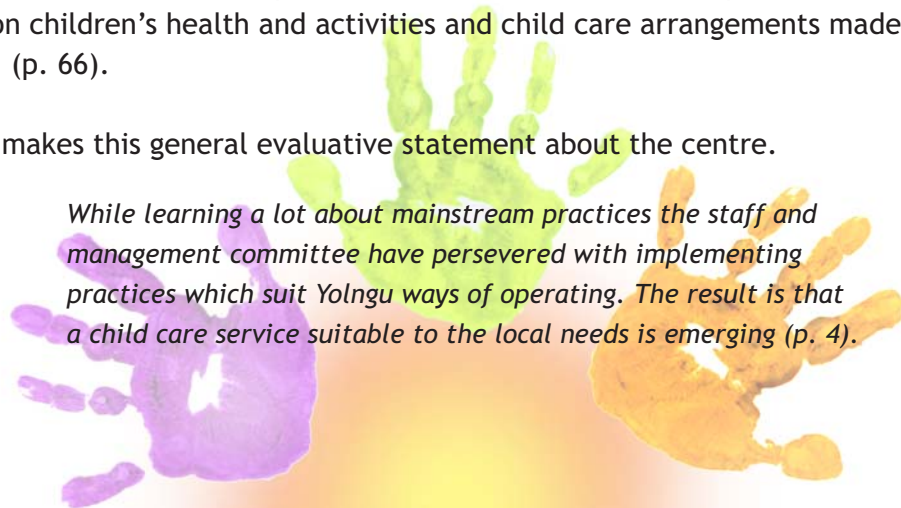
Willsher concludes, 'That Walpiri people are serious about developing their child care centre and that given the appropriate level of support, they will do this in their own way and in their own time,' (p. 84).

Galiwin'ku summary

The centre was the third 'innovative' to open, on April 17th, 2001. Again, Willsher conducted the evaluation, focusing on the management and operation of Galiwin'ku during the first 6 months of operation in order to gauge 'the impact of innovative service on children's health and activities and child care arrangements made by families' (p. 66).

Willsher makes this general evaluative statement about the centre.

While learning a lot about mainstream practices the staff and management committee have persevered with implementing practices which suit Yolngu ways of operating. The result is that a child care service suitable to the local needs is emerging (p. 4).



The centre provided 'long day care, part-time care, health and nutritious meals, good activities for children, culturally strong activities and after school care' (p.14) and these were the purposes originally identified by staff and community members during a workshop held in 1995.

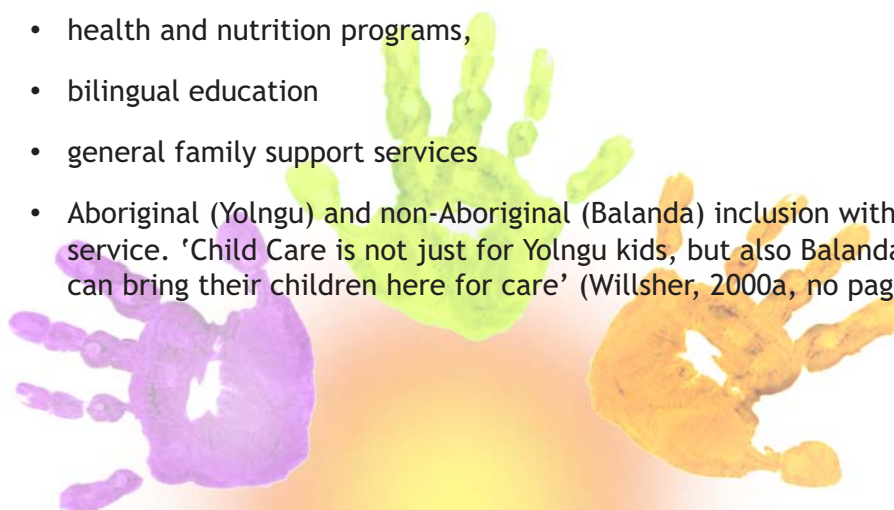
- Noticeable positive changes in children who attended the centre regularly included improved...
- general hygiene
- ability to concentrate
- sit down in a classroom situation
- recognise their names
- counting
- speaking 'strong' Yolngu Matha
- knowing some English
- ability to mix with children to whom they were not closely related

Amongst the 31 recommendations Willsher makes, she points out are a number of regulatory and licensing issues that the then NT Territory Health Services Department needed to review. These included;

- the relevancy of the original purposes of the child care centre,
- the 'issues based' child care licensing approach adopted specifically for remote community child care centres to ensure it is appropriate, and,
- the overall licensing process and conditions of license.

She notes that the original purpose of the 'innovative' centres, stemming from National Strategy for Child Care objectives, was to provide 'work related' child care. Other key purposes were emerging as valued by community members including;

- health and nutrition programs,
- bilingual education
- general family support services
- Aboriginal (Yolngu) and non-Aboriginal (Balanda) inclusion within the service. 'Child Care is not just for Yolngu kids, but also Balanda parents can bring their children here for care' (Willsher, 2000a, no page).



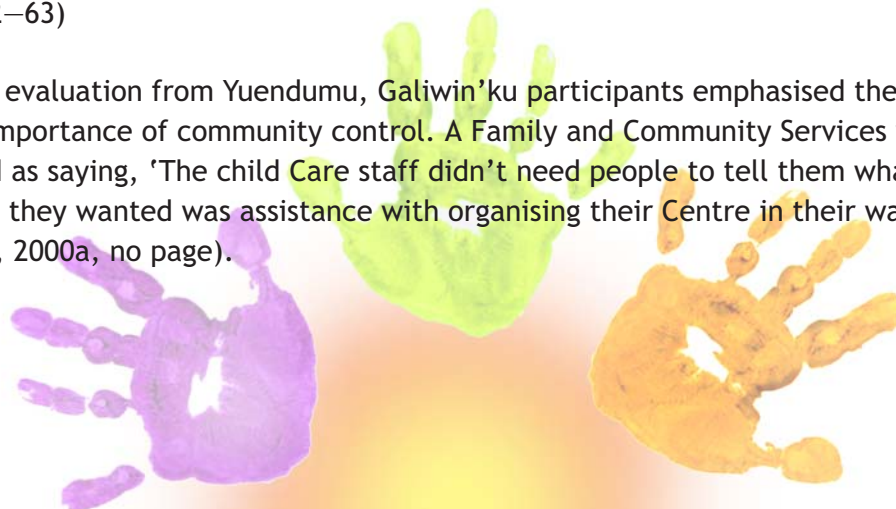
Significant issues relating training, staffing and linkages among services for children in the community were also addressed in recommendations. These included;

- training for management, director and staffing to understand the full range of roles and responsibilities associated with service delivery
- support for 'Yolngu way' staff management practices
- mentor support for the director
- support for dealing with staff punctuality and attendance issues
- support for more parent involvement in the service decision making processes
- appropriate training for staff , and more access to training
- formal induction training for a new director regarding child care finances, administration and management by the Department
- more appropriate and collaborative consultation processes between the Department and the service
- support to develop improved linkages of the child care service with the school, health clinic and other services for children in the community

Willsher highlights the wider role of community capacity building that the child care centre seems to have played through...

- creation of new employment opportunities
- access to training for employees
- access to knowledge about safe and hygienic health practices that could be used at home
- management committee skills learning such as the purpose and benefits of documented policies
- community pride in the fact that the service was staffed entirely by Yolngu staff, the first centre in a NT community to achieve this. (see pg 62–63)

As in the evaluation from Yuendumu, Galiwin'ku participants emphasised the critical importance of community control. A Family and Community Services worker is quoted as saying, 'The child Care staff didn't need people to tell them what to do—what they wanted was assistance with organising their Centre in their way' (Willsher, 2000a, no page).



DOCUMENTATION FROM WORKSHOPS

Batchelor Institute, often in collaboration with other support agencies such as Commonwealth Department of Children and Family Services, have conducted a series of workshop activities as a way to consult with and support remote area communities and services identified as having high child care needs. A report of one workshop held in Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island called 'Roles and Responsibilities Workshop' (Zanet, 1997), was attended by 20 community members from Galiwin'ku, Ramingining and Milingimbi communities and staff from mainstream organisations and departments that provide support, training and licensing services to remote communities. The report of this workshop documents a wealth of information relevant to the current project.

The main focus of the workshop was to familiarise participants with licensing issues where participants prioritised;

- *safety and health of children*
- *children and their needs*
- *the community and how it works (people and organisations)*
- *the child care centre and how it is run (day to day administration and finance)*

Zanet, 1997, no page

Core licensing standards identified by departmental staff as 'not negotiable' included;

- *Building to 'building code'*
- *Children numbers don't exceed license*
- *Written permission for child handovers*
- *Insurances (5 million minimum public liability)*
- *What does "proper supervision" mean to parents and carers*
- *Prevention of communicable diseases*
 - *Refusal of admission to infected children and adults*
 - *Minimising risk of spreading communicable diseases.*

Zanet, 1997, appendix

Workshop activities and discussions resulted in much mutual learning. Many of the perceived difficulties in meeting licensing standards in remote area communities were addressed directly. The program format shows that the issue of standards

for remote area childcare was negotiated. In this exercise for example, community participants identified the need for all workers in child care to have both Indigenous and non-Indigenous 'ways of working'. They should be trained in cross cultural ways of working.

An example of an issue that requires an Indigenous perspective included discipline. After an extensive discussion of discipline the following recommendation was made.

'It is likely that child care workers will have two systems of law to follow (Balanda and Yolngu) - both exist and both have social, legal and ethical implications for the child care workers and coordinator. In some instances child care workers may be reluctant to discipline a child if they are not the right person (Yolngu way) to do this as there are implications which may overflow into the community. Therefore each clan needs to be represented so each child has an identified carer.

Zanet, 1997, no page

This and other remote area children's services workshops (Toy Making Workshop, "It takes a whole community to keep children safe and strong" Workshop) involved some of the participants that are now part of the Both Ways Child Care Project. This series of workshop activities demonstrate that for some services there has been a long history of support for developing their services that commenced long before they were open for business, including involvement in negotiating expectations and access to mainstream knowledge and resources for conducting child care services in remote communities. Services identified as 'innovative' were the primary recipients of this ongoing support because these services were expected to meet licensing requirements.

'IT TAKES A WHOLE COMMUNITY TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE AND STRONG' WORKSHOP OCTOBER 1–3, 2002

This workshop brought together remote area women working in children's services from NT Multifunctional *Aboriginal Childrens Services* (MACS) centres, Galiwin'ku, Nguui, Yirrkala, Borroloola, Ngukurr, Jilminggan, and Gurungu communities. The aims of the workshop were to;

- *Learn about keeping Aboriginal children safe, strong and well.*
- *Learn about ways to give children in our communities the extra attention and support they need when their families are under stress and in crisis.*
- *Learn about ways of working with children who have difficult or aggressive behaviour.*
- *Meet other people and share stories.*

RACSSU, 2002, p. 4

Participants talked about what they would like to have happen after the workshop. They were keen to keep in touch with each other. They asked that the Remote Area Children's Services Support Unit (RACSSU) coordinate the following activities.

- *Newsletters with photos,*
- *Providing more information about conferences and funding grants,*
- *Child care services could provide stories to RACSSU for their newsletter,*
- *Distributing a list of names, phone numbers, addresses of everyone who was at the workshop,*
- *Providing the opportunity for the licensed remote child care centres to visit each other,*
- *Videos,*
- *Radio and broadcasting e.g. BRACS*

RACSSU, 2002, p. 5

One of the key recommendations from this workshop was 'that funding is provided to Aboriginal children's services, particularly in the remote areas to attend workshops and interactive conferences on an annual basis.' (p. 7).

'WORKING TOGETHER' WORKSHOP SEPT 29-OCT 1, 2003

A joint workshop between four remote area children's services was held at Nguuu, Bathurst Island. The focus was team building, communication and child development.

NATIONAL CHILD CARE STRATEGY

The Commonwealth Government proposed a National Child Care Strategy in 1990 and, as national funding priorities changed, further revisions of the strategy were to follow. These strategies took the form of a memorandum of understanding between State/Territory and Commonwealth governments regarding the coordination of child care funding and respective roles and commitments of both levels of government. The 1992–96 strategy revision announced new objectives in the expansion of funded child care places in Australia. These national objectives for children's services aimed;

- *to enable families with dependent children to participate in the labour force and other activities, and enhance equal employment opportunity for women;*
- *to provide quality programs to help children reach their full developmental potential;*
- *to assist employers to improve the efficiency of the labour force.*

Commonwealth Child Care Strategy 1992-1996

'INNOVATIVE' CHILD CARE CENTRES IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

As part of this agreement the Northern Territory government negotiated a proportion of overall funding to be devoted to the development of 'innovative' services in order to better meet the needs of consumers. The notion of 'innovation' seems to have reflected Departmental understanding for the need to adapt child care service delivery models in standard use within urban mainstream services for use in remote Aboriginal communities although no clear definition of 'innovative' was established at the time (NT Department of Human Services & Health, internal working document, 1995). In a later unpublished document the Department of Family and Community Services (1996 and revised 1998, p. 3) 'innovative' services are described as aiming

...to provide Aboriginal people living in remote communities with more relevant approaches to meeting their child care needs, and greater flexibility in the method adopted for funding remote area services. The initiative recognises that previous service models and funding arrangements were not appropriate in small, remote Aboriginal communities, and often mitigated against the viable establishment of such services.

Four remote Aboriginal communities were identified as having a high need for such services and were developed and funded under this model; Galiwin'ku, Yuendumu, Yirrkala and Nguiu. Until 2004 they remained the only Innovative child care centres in the NT. In order to receive the operational and child care assistance funding these services were expected to meet Commonwealth funding and NT child care funding guidelines and licensing requirements. This process required negotiation on the part of both the department and the community. Several barriers and concerns were identified by the Department and resolutions were made to adapt the funding formulae and licensing approach to be more flexible, developmental and supportive in recognition the unique and complex needs of remote area Aboriginal communities (NT Department of Human Services & Health, internal working document, 1995).

In 1996, the Department of Family and Community Services developed a licensing kit for children's services to enable staff of the new 'Innovatives' to respond more effectively to the barriers for licensing. This document recognised explicitly that, ...various administrative and operational aspects will be different from "mainstream" arrangements' (Department of Family and Community Services, 1996, revised version, 1998, p. 3).

JOBS EDUCATION AND TRAINING (JET)

JET started in 1989 as a Commonwealth funded program to support unemployed sole and partnered parents to move into the workforce through enabling their to access training and study opportunities. It has been a remarkably successful program with large number of clients successfully progressing to work and study (Kelly & Vnuk, 2003).

The JET Program's success lies in the way that it works with clients - its approach is individualised support and assistance - a one to one, ongoing relationship with a JET Adviser... and a flexible continuum of learning that may begin with short courses or workshops to build self-confidence and progress on to tertiary education through TAFE or University...Very importantly, JET also provides assistance to parents to find and afford child care.

Kelly & Vnuk, 2003, p. 4.

The ability to support the development of child care services in remote Indigenous communities has been one of the great strengths of this program and the flexible interpretation of guidelines has meant that programs are not rigidly tied to immediate employment/study outcomes.

In the Northern Territory, the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) programme mainly involves the development of temporary unlicensed on-site crèches, to enable parents to participate in JET-eligible activities. Where possible, the JET on-site crèches are established in conjunction with CDEP, to enable access to the crèche by the general community. The JET on-site crèche model was specifically developed for remote Aboriginal communities as it provides the flexibility needed to enable communities to operate these services according to their specific child care needs.

Northern Australia Forum, Family and Community Services, 2002

JET funding in the NT supports remote area Indigenous community participants to address issues of primary need before they are required to participate in formal study or the workforce through a flexible interpretation of 'JET-eligible' activities.

It is recognised that many ... will need to address basic life issues related to self esteem; family relationships, etc. - before they can think in terms of entering study or the workforce. This has suggested the need to adopt a 'Whole of Person' or 'Whole of Life' approach to supporting parents in their efforts to build their personal and social capacity before attempting to engage them in mainstream the JET Program.

Kelly & Vnuk, 2003, p. 5.

Many Northern Territory remote Indigenous communities have been able to take advantage of this program to secure funding for a crèche and some have transformed into licensed child care centres. JET crèches are supported by regular visits from a JET Field Officer and must record minimum attendance levels for children and parents to maintain funding.

ABORIGINAL CHILD REARING STRATEGY (ACRS)

The Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy projects (2002) were another series of powerful projects designed to support Aboriginal women to record their child rearing strategies, in this case focused on communities in the remote desert regions of central Australia. The ultimate aim of the strategy was to strengthen culture, build community capacity and support better health and education for young children.

The project results and literature review aimed to produce resources containing knowledge gained directly from Aboriginal people that could inform and improve child care policy.

The review stemmed from recognition that...

... existing early childhood models of services funding, design and delivery are usually not appropriate for Aboriginal families living semi-traditional lifestyles...Further, the outcomes of the service provided are rarely measured in terms of Yapa and Anangu experiences. Rather, the success of the program is judged against performance measurements designed from a mainstream cultural perspective.

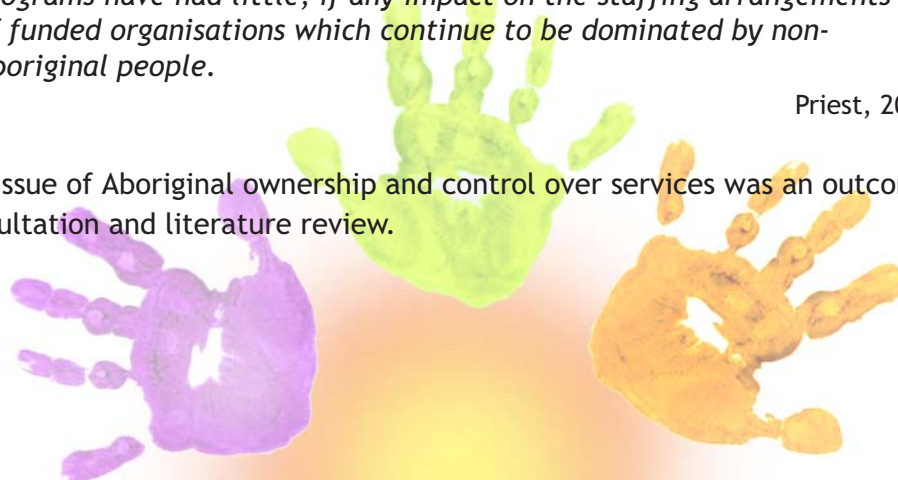
ACRS, 2002, p. 29

In a recent conference presentation ACRS Project Leader, Priest, reiterates key insights gained through the project.

- *mainstream child care centre models of funding, design and delivery are usually not appropriate for Aboriginal families;*
- *current service models are more likely to create dependency instead of building community capacity and self-reliance;*
- *existing mentoring programs, which aim to transfer skills to Aboriginal community members, have achieved limited success. For example, various mentoring programs have been available for Aboriginal people in central Australia for up to 20 years. These programs have had little, if any impact on the staffing arrangements of funded organisations which continue to be dominated by non-Aboriginal people.*

Priest, 2002, p.1

The key issue of Aboriginal ownership and control over services was an outcome of this consultation and literature review.



LICENSING WORKBOOK

The Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services commissioned a project to 'unpack' licensing issues into a workbook format intended to guide Indigenous workers in identifying those issues that were non-negotiable and those that could and should be interpreted in a flexible and culturally appropriate manner. The workbook took the form of a series of questions and answers. It has been used primarily in Top End Innovative child care services and in one centre in central Australia.

'LEARNING LESSONS' REPORT

A report that appears to have had an enduring and significant policy impact is 'Learning Lessons' (1999) often referred to as the Collins Report because it was undertaken by Bob Collins, a former Australian Labour Party Senator from the NT. Three pages in this report refer specifically on early childhood services (p. 96 - 99). The key recommendations for early childhood were as follows;

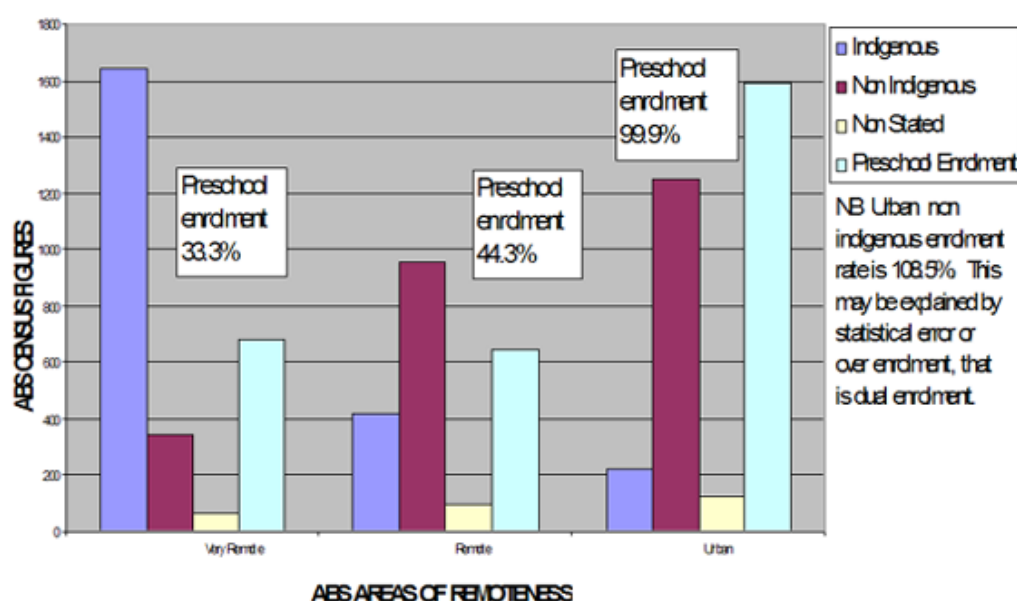
- *that young Aboriginal children receive increased exposure to early literacy and numeracy learning in vernacular and/or English,*
- *that there be joint funding between Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training and the Territory Health Services, Family and Community Services, and DETYA in order to develop play centres and to distribute pre-literacy play materials,*
- *that there be guaranteed access to play centres and preschools within a period of five years,*
- *that new facilities for infants and toddlers should be aimed towards establishing multi-purpose early childhood centres that offer infant health and other early childhood centres.*

The report did not recommend the continuation of bilingual education, seen by some as a disappointing omission because of a number of schools in remote NT using this educational approach apparently successfully (Nicholls, 2001). The recommendations from 'Learning Lessons' have been slow to reach implementation stage in any case. The NT Department of Education, Employment and Training recently introduced a number of measures to address the needs of young children in remote Aboriginal communities who currently cannot access a preschool. Mobile preschools is one such measure. These services are still in pilot stage according to a recent Education Union National Forum on Early Childhood Education provided by departmental staff (Nutton & Davies, 2003) Australian.



The following chart represents Indigenous and Non-Indigenous children's participation in very remote, remote and urban preschools in the NT and are based on 2001 Australian Bureau of Statistics.

		2003	2003	Sum:
		Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	
Government	Preschool	1,181	1,839	3,020
Government	Transition	1,141	1,556	2,697
Government	Trial Preschool	225	4	229
Government	Year 1	1,132	1,358	2,490
Government	Year 2	1,084	1,373	2,457
Government	Year 3	1,087	1,399	2,486
Non Government	Preschool	124	107	231
Non Government	Transition	131	539	670
Non Government	Year 1	127	483	610
Non Government	Year 2	152	502	654
Non Government	Year 3	140	490	630
Sum:		6,524	9,650	16,174



As these charts demonstrate, in 2003 there is still a significant shortfall in preschool provision for Indigenous children in the remote areas of the Northern Territory.

NATIONAL AGENDA FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

National consultations began in 2001 and included the NT. The consultation highlighted the critical importance of the early years for children's long term outcomes and identified a lack of coordination among the three levels of government in the provision of services for young children.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SUPPORT AND TRAINING IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES IN THE NT

Over the last ten years the responsibility for children's services training and support in remote Aboriginal communities has been undertaken primarily by staff from the Batchelor Institute with some training occurring as one-off workshops through the Department of Health and Community Services and Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association(Waltja) in Central Australia. Students with BIITE receive much of their training onsite in their communities complemented by workshops requiring travel to training centres in Batchelor or Alice Springs.

A number of training workshops were held during the 1990's as part of the Department of Health and Community Services consultations around the introduction of the Innovative Child Care Centres.

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY (SFCS) (2000-2004)

This federally funded Family and Community Services program aimed to support children, families and their communities through a four year strategy with a priority on early childhood initiatives.

Strong families with healthy, well-adjusted children require strong, stable communities in which to grow.

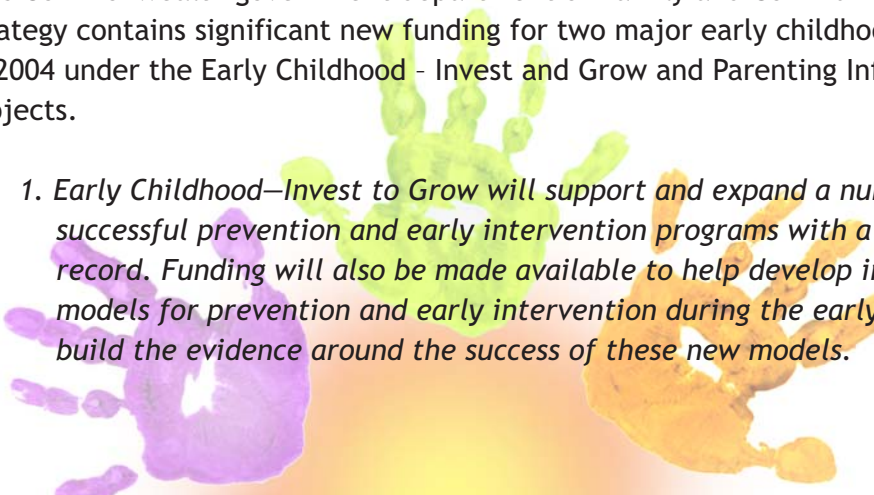
STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY (SFCS) (2004-2008)

This Commonwealth government initiative stems from a recognition that early support for families and their communities by providing the best foundation for young children's development.

Helping children in their very earliest stages sets the scene for the rest of their lives- as young people, as students, as workers and as future parents. With this in mind the Australian Government has made early childhood a priority...The Strategy has always been about empowering communities to develop local solutions to local programs.

FaCs, 2004, p.1

This Commonwealth government department of Family and Community Services strategy contains significant new funding for two major early childhood initiatives in 2004 under the Early Childhood - Invest and Grow and Parenting Information Projects.

- 
1. *Early Childhood—Invest to Grow will support and expand a number of successful prevention and early intervention programs with a proven track record. Funding will also be made available to help develop innovative models for prevention and early intervention during the early years, and build the evidence around the success of these new models.*

-
2. *The Parenting Information Project ‘...aims to inform all levels of government and the community sector on what most needs to be done, and what improvements in parenting information would make the biggest difference for parents and their children.’ The project will help shape future strategies for communicating with and supporting parents.*

Australian Government, 2004, no page, see website <http://www.facs.gov.au/>

Another program under this strategy is the Communities for Children, a strategy that aims to make communities more ‘child friendly’. It draws on the results of the consultations that have occurred through the National Agenda for Early Childhood which recommended government investment to support families through ensuring more effective community collaboration.

Building a supportive community for families requires cooperation between families and schools, service providers, philanthropic organisations, volunteers, neighbourhoods and communities. Services need to have the flexibility to respond to local needs and innovative programs and interventions should be evidence based.

Australian Government, 2004, no page, see website <http://www.facs.gov.au/>

Nearly 25% of the 660 projects arising from this policy have been implemented in Indigenous communities.

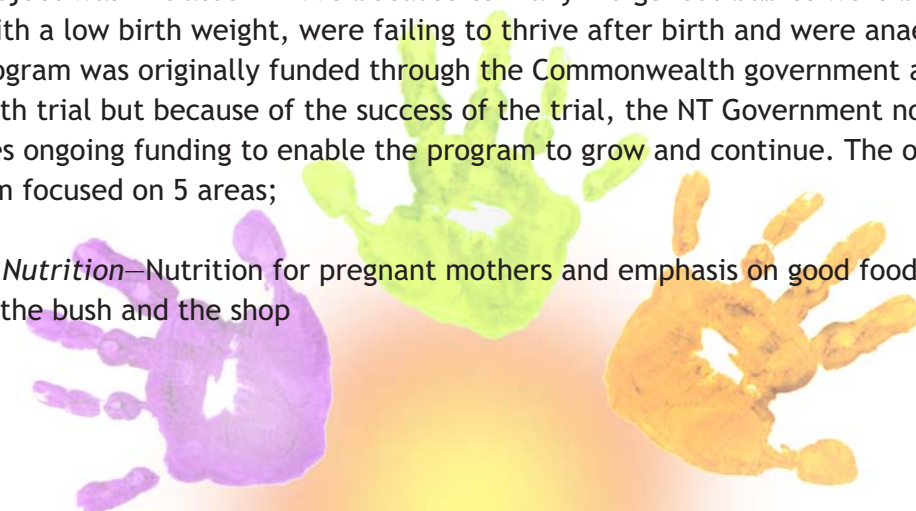
LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN (2000) AND LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN (2003)

A major multidisciplinary longitudinal study of Australia’s children has been funded by the Department of Family and Community Services through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The aim of the project is to track children’s development and health over a 9 year period to identify a range factors that influence good and poor outcomes for children.

STRONG WOMEN STRONG BABIES STRONG CULTURE (SWSBSC) PROGRAM.

This project was initiated in 1993 because too many Indigenous babies were being born with a low birth weight, were failing to thrive after birth and were anaemic. The program was originally funded through the Commonwealth government as an 18 month trial but because of the success of the trial, the NT Government now provides ongoing funding to enable the program to grow and continue. The original program focused on 5 areas;

- 1 *Nutrition*—Nutrition for pregnant mothers and emphasis on good food from the bush and the shop



-
- 2 *Dangers*—Information on nutrition to help mothers understand the impact of poor nutrition, emotional issues social dangers on themselves and their babies and how to avoid it. "Road to Long Life, Good Health and Happiness" poster
 - 3 *Protection and Prevention*—Using culture to protect people from diseases and social problems, helping people face the many changes happening in society
 - 4 *Sharing*—Sharing of information in 2 ways: *Aboriginal women teach community health nurses traditional antenatal and postnatal care. The community health nurses teach Aboriginal women how to take care of each other using the latest methods of antenatal and postnatal care.*
(SNAaIC 2004, p. 38)
 - 5 *Caring*—Sharing knowledge and new skills through out the community including young girls.

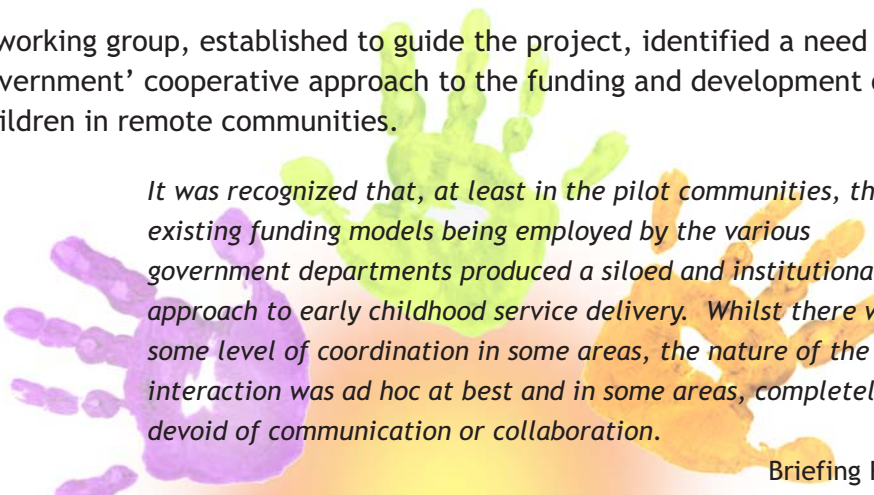
IMPROVING ACCESS TO CHILDCARE FOR INDIGENOUS FAMILIES (2002)

This is a review of literature and the development of Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) is described. MACS are specialist children's service programs that began in 1987. There are now 40 MACS centres in operation nationally. Four centres are located in NT urban and regional centres, although one has recently shut down in 2004. Pocock (2002) stresses the lack of program development for MACS centres showing that no expansion of the services has occurred in the last 10 year despite the fact that there are many communities with significant populations of young Indigenous children around Australia. He recommends the critical need for additional support for existing and new MACS centres.

INTEGRATED EARLY CHILDHOOD PILOT PROJECTS (2001)

In 2001, the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS) began discussions on the development of additional 'Innovative' child care centres in identified communities in Central Australia.

A working group, established to guide the project, identified a need for a 'whole of government' cooperative approach to the funding and development of services for children in remote communities.



It was recognized that, at least in the pilot communities, the existing funding models being employed by the various government departments produced a siloed and institutional approach to early childhood service delivery. Whilst there was some level of coordination in some areas, the nature of the interaction was ad hoc at best and in some areas, completely devoid of communication or collaboration.

Briefing Report (21-10-03)

Out of this working group the Integrated Early Childhood Working Party has emerged. In 2003 the group began a series of intensive consultations with each of the pilot communities to establish community perspectives and needs related to the integration of services for young children. The community consultations were completed in March 2004.

The list below represents the feedback common to all of the communities involved.

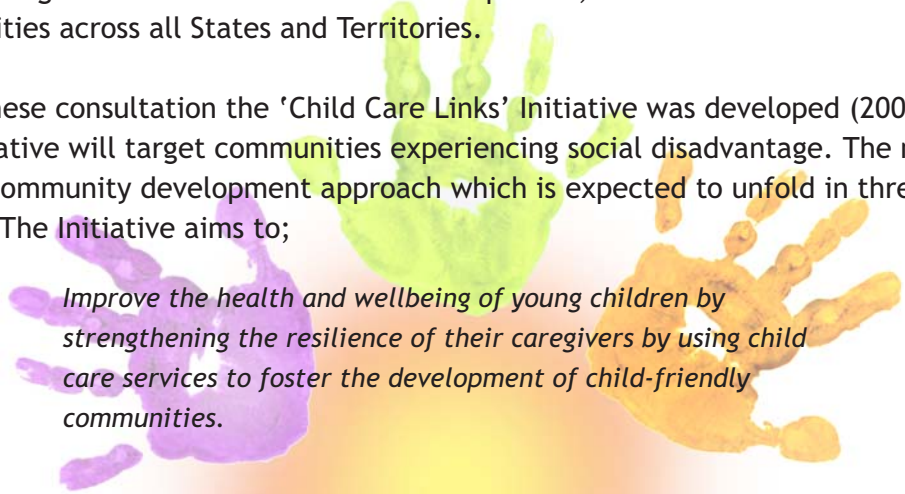
All communities...

- *experienced utilization problems with their childcare services*
- *emphasized the importance of maintaining their own unique cultural security in the operation of early childhood services.*
- *wanted their young children...to be safe and secure*
- *identified a strong need for and ongoing desire to make primary use of the child care facility as a hub for children's services*
- *requested a stronger relationship between the school and child care services*
- *identified a need for a motor vehicle to transport children and parents to out stations and bush places for cultural visits or "out of community" playgroups. This was seen as a means of ensuring children's safety particularly when there were drunks and petrol sniffers causing humbug.*
- *expressed a strong desire to move the focus of the child care centres to a family focus*
- *identified a need for regular children's health clinics to be conducted at the child care centre.*

Briefing Report (21-10-03)

Each community also expressed issues and needs unique to that community and which the Working Party has taken into account. There are 19 sites around Australia participating in similar consultations in metropolitan, rural and remote communities across all States and Territories.

Out of these consultation the 'Child Care Links' Initiative was developed (2004). The initiative will target communities experiencing social disadvantage. The model takes a community development approach which is expected to unfold in three phases. The Initiative aims to;



Improve the health and wellbeing of young children by strengthening the resilience of their caregivers by using child care services to foster the development of child-friendly communities.

(p.7)

The intention of the Initiative is to enable the development of networks and links between the child care service in a community and other family, health and community services. To this end, a Child Care Links worker will be employed for eligible communities to coordinate and support child and family services located in each community through the child care centre. It is intended that this worker will also facilitate increased parent knowledge and understanding of the importance of early childhood development for future outcomes and an awareness and understanding of services available to young children and families.

This project clearly reflects departmental learning occurring over the last ten years regarding the value of integrating services for children in ways that reflect individual community perspectives and needs.

BETTER INTEGRATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES: A WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE IN ALICE SPRINGS AREA (NT) SNAICC REPORT 2004

This is an initiative 'to improve the effectiveness of early childhood services at a local level' p.5. The idea is to integrate the funding for early childhood services and work more closely with Indigenous communities to determine their preferred service delivery models for services to children and families and how to provide ongoing support. This is seen as a capacity building exercise as well as a funding initiative. 'Services' models will not be constrained by physical infrastructure and might include a mix of preschool, childcare, child nutrition programs and any other services related to early childhood development (eg, child health clinics, playgroups, audiometry clinics)' p. 5

The three communities involved are Mt Liebig, Yuendumu, and Mutijulu.

'One option being explored is the idea of child and family centres that might be more like community centres or early childhood hubs offering various in-house and outreach inter-generational learning activities involving young children, parents and also older people talking about their culture' p. 5

The government departments that are currently involved in the project are:

- Commonwealth Dept of Family and Community Services
- Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services
- Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training
- Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.



EDUCATION ADVISORY REPORT 2004:

ALL CHILDREN HAVE THE BEST POSSIBLE START

During 2003 the Education Advisory Council, an unaffiliated Ministerial advisory group, commissioned by the Ministers for Employment, Education & Training and Minister for Health & Community Services, identified current critical issues confronting early childhood and children up to 12 years old in out of school hours care and developed a policy framework to guide policy development for these children in the NT. The resulting framework was based primarily on findings from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 'Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy' (2001). A consultation on a draft framework was undertaken across the NT including remote area children's services perspectives. The report recommends the need to endorse, commit to, implement and monitor a common framework for children in the NT.

The consultation included input from one remote Aboriginal community and relied heavily on the perspectives of a children's services training staff person who has provided services to a number of remote communities in Central Australia.

The key recommendations of this report echo those made by a range of other reports and consultations. In essence, it is recommended that the Territory and Commonwealth Health and Education Departments work more collaboratively to deliver quality services to children.

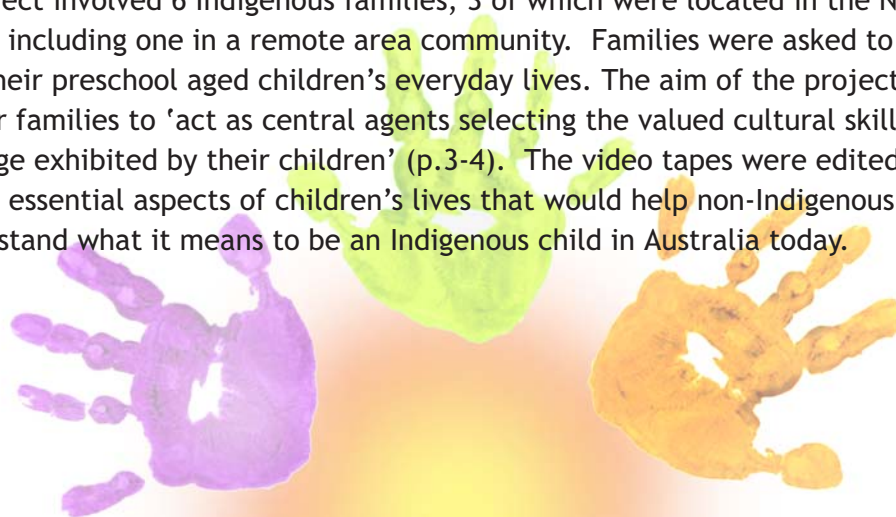
Given the clear findings and strong support for an integrated and collaborative approach between families, communities, services and governments it is clear that an early years framework to guide policy and programs that encourages cooperation and partnership building is needed.

Education Advisory Report, 2004, p.4

BUILDING BRIDGES:

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG INDIGENOUS CHILDREN (2002)

This project involved 6 Indigenous families, 3 of which were located in the Northern Territory including one in a remote area community. Families were asked to video record their preschool aged children's everyday lives. The aim of the project was to empower families to 'act as central agents selecting the valued cultural skills and knowledge exhibited by their children' (p.3-4). The video tapes were edited to highlight essential aspects of children's lives that would help non-Indigenous people to understand what it means to be an Indigenous child in Australia today.



'BOTH WAYS' CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROJECT - 2004

Findings indicated that...

Indigenous families, like most other families, want their children to get a good education. They want their children to read and write and be able to use mathematics so that when they eventually leave school they will have more choices and better opportunities. Indigenous families understand that gaining Western education is important for their children.

(Fleer & Williams-Kennedy, 2002, p.2)

Our children are a part of nature, and therefore we are the symbols of nature too. We read ourselves, we read our families - in order to work out where we belong, who we belong to, and what our roles and obligations are to each other. Our children already know how to read the connections between people, land and Lore. This is one part of the learning cycle. When our children go to child care preschool or school, they learn how to record and retrieve their knowledge using another set of symbols. Some of us have more than one or two ways of thinking and learning. Our lives are richer when we have more than one way of reading the world around us. Two-way learning is making us one person in Australia today.

Fleer & Williams-Kennedy, 2002, p. 23

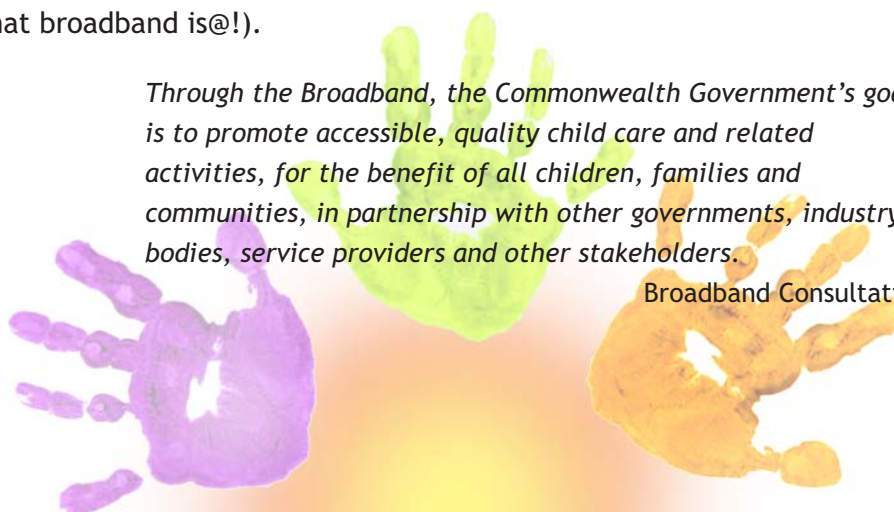
A common thread running through the stories of individual children's lives, and throughout the report more generally is the importance of multiple ways of knowing, of Aboriginal and Western knowledge, leading to effective learning for young Aboriginal children today.

CHILD CARE SUPPORT BROADBAND REDEVELOPMENT CONSULTATIONS (2003)

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services undertook a consultation to redevelop the 'broadband strategy'. The aim is to develop a whole of government strategy that better enables the provision of accessible, affordable and high quality child care (Honestly I can't find a word in the document that says what broadband is@!).

Through the Broadband, the Commonwealth Government's goal is to promote accessible, quality child care and related activities, for the benefit of all children, families and communities, in partnership with other governments, industry bodies, service providers and other stakeholders.

Broadband Consultations, 2003, p. x



Recommendation C17. is particularly relevant to this project.

C17. Creating a dedicated Indigenous program for operational support

It is recommended that the establishment of a dedicated program covering operational funding for all Indigenous services and activities be considered in consultation with stakeholders, having regard to;

- *Whether there will be the creation of a more culturally appropriate accreditation process for Indigenous services*
- *What the nature of future planning processes will be, and whether Indigenous needs and priorities are more suitably assessed as part of these processes or in specific Indigenous processes*
- *What future professional development and a support services look like in each State and Territory, and how these relate to the special needs of Indigenous services and child care workers*
- *The need to build and maintain an integrated perspective on Broadband strategies and impacts.*

(p. xxiii)

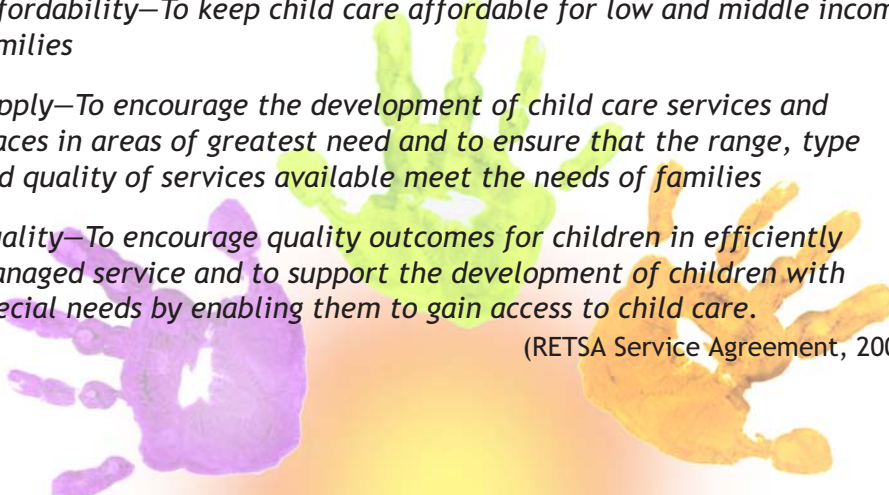
REMOTE TRAINING SUPPORT AGENCY (RETSA)

A key program currently funded through the Broadband and relevant to this project is the Remote Training Support Agency (RETSA). In the Northern Territory RETSA funding is split between the northern and southern regions. The program covers 28 communities in the Top End and 9 in the Centre. The funding to support the RETSA program is severely stretched due to the high cost of remote service delivery. In the Northern Territory only remote Aboriginal community services are currently included in this program.

The Agreed Program Principles as stated in the Service Agreement between BIITE, as sponsors of a RETSA program, and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services - Child Care Program are;

- *Affordability—To keep child care affordable for low and middle income families*
- *Supply—To encourage the development of child care services and places in areas of greatest need and to ensure that the range, type and quality of services available meet the needs of families*
- *Quality—To encourage quality outcomes for children in efficiently managed service and to support the development of children with special needs by enabling them to gain access to child care.*

(RETSA Service Agreement, 2001, p. 5)



The purpose of the RETSA program is to provide Commonwealth funded remote child care services with advice, support, in-service training and access to resources. Recipients of these services include the child care workers, management committees, operators and directors. The role of RETSA workers is to ensure that they work to meet community needs, assist in the development of the service, that the service is financially viable and that the care provided to children is safe and appropriate. The overall goals of the program are to build community capacity to sustain these services as financially viable, appropriate and of high quality. All of the communities involved in this Both Ways Project have, at some point, received visits and support from a RETSA worker.

SNAICC STRATEGIC PLAN 2003-2006

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care strategic plan has recently been released. A key focus area is Early Childhood Development. The report highlights many of the same issues found in other materials in this review. They urge government to address the declining participation rate of Indigenous children in preschool services which is lower than any other group in Australia and falling. They point to the lack of expansion of Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) which were developed to address the specific needs of Indigenous children. There are four MACS centres in the Northern Territory and are all located in urban and rural rather than remote areas. Related to this issue is the lack of trained Indigenous staff to work in services catering for young Indigenous children whether they are MACS centres or not. More than half of the 4000 Indigenous children who use child care services in Australia access non-MACS centres. However this figure does not take into account the Aboriginal children in the NT who attend 36 different Indigenous remote area, non-MAC, early childhood programs. To address these workforce issues SNAICC has recommended '...the development of Indigenous specific early childhood and child care qualifications and the establishment of an accreditation system for Indigenous services' (p. 6). The need for integration of preschool with other services for young children is also recommended. Surprisingly, the SNAICC Strategic Plan does not mention explicitly or acknowledge the range of developments that have occurred in relation to the innovative child care programs that have been developed in remote Aboriginal communities all around Australia.



OVERVIEW OF ISSUES STEMMING FROM REVIEW

This review demonstrates that child care service development and delivery for remote area Aboriginal communities has become a key issue of concern and interest for different levels of government. It also shows that government policy and practices are changing significantly, especially over the last decade, reflecting a growing awareness and responsiveness to the reports and recommendations cited above.

In reviewing the history of children's services in the NT, senior officer in the NT Department of Health and Community Services, Office of Children and Families, Crawford (2002, p. 27) reports that;

...greater attention is now being paid by both levels of government to the role of children's services in promoting good outcomes for children, and to prevention of problems, particularly through better integrated policy and planning approaches.

As mentioned above, the initiative to undertake a joint Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services and Department of Employment, Education and Training policy framework, which resulted in the recently published, *All Children Have the Best Possible Start* (2004), was intended at least in part to respond to 'the growing and urgent need to focus on improvement in young Indigenous children's health and education status, with broader implications for all children and families', (Crawford, 2002, p. 27).

At a national level there have been philosophical policy shifts away from a purely employment-oriented, workforce participation agenda for children's services to one that emphasises equity principles and the rights of children and families to access services, particularly those considered to be 'at risk'. For example, a Department of Family and Community Services (2001, p. 2) document entitled 'Flexible Child Care in Rural and Remote Australia' acknowledges that ...

...traditional types of child care are mainly designed to meet the needs of parents working standard hours and living in cities. In Australia, families living in rural and regional communities can have difficulty finding suitable child care because the usual child care models are either not available or not suited to local circumstances ...

and, that there is a need for integrating services to provide ...

...a mix of different types of child care tailored to meet local conditions. They can involve a mix of different service types from the same venue such as long day care, occasional care,

school holiday care and preschool/kindergarten services and/or family day care...Some communities are also linking child health, nutrition and parenting programs to the child care service (p. 9).

The new Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (2004-2008) promises to provide significant funding for integrating and supporting effective early childhood services, including those that are seen as disadvantaged. Some of this funding has targeted the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to enable the establishment of a national resource service for Indigenous Children's Services.

Nevertheless, the recent results of the National Agenda for Children consultation (2003) indicates that there is still a massive amount of work to be done if the experiences and wellbeing of Indigenous children in remote Australia are to be improved. While most Australian children are doing well this consultation indicates that;

Indigenous children, in particular, have markedly poorer outcomes over their life course- in health, education, representation in foster care, contact with the criminal justice system, employment and expected lifespan.

Commonwealth Task force on Child Development,
Health and Wellbeing, 2003, p. 3

Children's services in remote communities are seen to offer powerful opportunities for impacting positively on children's life chances and wellbeing. They can, potentially, offer avenues for maintaining cultural identity and language as well. They appear to be well regarded and valued by communities within which they reside and are seen to build wider community capacities. Yet there is still a shortfall in services available in different communities as well as in the levels and types of support available to existing services. For at least a decade and up to the present, priority outcomes for child care services, as defined by government funding agencies, have focused primarily on care for the children of working parents or those who are studying in order to gain work. Employment outcomes do not always match the purposes for child care as seen by community members.

Recent philosophical shifts have yet to be realised in practice. As the Director of the Office of Children's and Families in the NT government puts it, 'It can take a long time for the system to realign with the policy intent' (Crawford, personal communication, June, 2004). The development of services in the NT shows that there is no one ideal type or model of service development to suit the needs of the diverse range of communities.

For the 'Both Ways' project the key themes that emerge from a review of children's services development in the NT over the last decade are fundamental issues of control, access and support; control in terms of Indigenous ownership and

management of services for children and cultural maintenance within those services, access in terms of appropriate and available training, resources and ongoing support for all aspects of service delivery but particularly aspects related to management and administration of services and support to address barriers to service delivery presented by continued fragmentation of service funding, accountability and licensing requirements.



APPENDIX 2

THE BIITE RESEARCHERS

This section introduces the Batchelor Institute researchers so that those who read this report can consider the value of the insights they have produced into the remote Indigenous children's services developments in light of their backgrounds, histories and beliefs. In addition, this section discusses the research process and how participation in the process has affected the practices and understandings of this team of new researchers.

Robyn Benbow

Robyn has had a long association with Indigenous people and remote communities across the Northern Territory, as a teacher in the small regional town of Katherine, in the central Australian region, and on Melville Island.



She is a non-Indigenous Australian. She ran a mobile preschool that serviced small communities surrounding and between Tennant Creek and Alice Springs over a two year period. She worked in a small school outside of Fitzroy Crossing in WA and also Menzies in WA. She was the preschool teacher for four years in the community of Milikapiti on Melville Island. When the project began, she was working as an early childhood lecturer at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) teaching Indigenous students from many remote communities, primarily in the children's services courses. She has since moved to the Northern Territory Department of

Employment Education and Training as a curriculum officer supporting the early childhood Literacy and Numeracy Initiative for Indigenous Children. She has always had a strong desire to support Indigenous communities, families and young children to access mainstream educational opportunities, to make sense of it and to value it. Prior to this project Robyn had not participated in research. This is Robyn's reflection on the research experience.

For me, this research experience highlighted how very different communities can be and are. A good idea or intervention at one community is not necessarily going to 'work' in another community. Isolation for these communities takes on new meanings. It is not just geographical, and in these cases we are also talking about professional isolation. Isolation has meant a unique range of solutions to the problem of delivery of services for children. Visiting children's services in other communities or urban centres is not something that happens easily or often. On one hand, this is fantastic, as people do not think they have to approach things in

the same way as others. On the other hand, networking is extremely important particularly in providing new ideas, feedback and affirmation of beliefs, values, approaches etc. The diversity of approaches needs to be celebrated and highlighted, giving everyone the opportunity to learn from others and to assure communities that their solutions are valid. In terms of children's services for remote Indigenous communities one size does not fit all.

With research processes we used, it would have been much easier and clearer if everyone on the team had been involved in the original discussions. There would have been more of us 'coming on board' from the beginning instead of slowly coming around. The initial proposal stage was rushed and few of us were a part of it. This kind of research is hard and takes a lot of passionate committed individuals to get the task done. Some of the theoretical content was difficult to grasp for people like myself who need the practical application of an idea to completely understand the concepts. New ideas and new frameworks take a long time to digest and they need to be made more tangible. They also evolved throughout the research process.

I still don't feel like a 'researcher'. I think what we've been doing is what anyone who is inquisitive does, ask questions. Maybe we're doing research all the time. One thing that did happen in the group was that it became self-corrective. Generalizations were quickly corrected, and the idea that if it happens at one place, it doesn't necessarily happen everywhere.

Katrina Railton

Trina is a non-Indigenous Australian woman who has been involved with Northern Territory Indigenous communities for the past 10 years. The journey began with



extensive travel to remote areas which led to a five year stint working in a Community Education Centre in an Indigenous community 500 kms south west of Katherine. Trina has a Bachelor of Teaching in Early Childhood, and has completed a Graduate Certificate in Applied Linguistics. Her current position is as a lecturer with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the School of Education and Humanities. This is her reflection on the research process.

This research project highlighted the variety and complexity of community child care issues in the NT. Each aspect of child care we looked into needed very careful consideration, and what was discovered about one community tended to be quite different from the others. Our approach to finding out what we were aiming to cover did not always result in direct responses from the participants in communities. Often, more information was shared in the following visits, and sometimes in quite subtle ways.

In the 'decoding' process of working out how to accurately represent the information we had gathered, the importance of remaining objective was a high priority. Much care was taken to try not to put our own values or judgments on the information we were given. This sometimes meant stepping back and changing a 'natural' response to how we generally take in information.

Working on this project has taught me much about the research process. It was great to collaborate with so many colleagues to achieve the final result; however it was difficult to fit in with everyone's busy schedules and ensure each member felt adequately involved in each step of the process. It was vital that the research team had regular opportunities to work together and keep up with each stage of the project. This in itself was one of our greatest challenges due to the constraints of time and distance.

Lyn Fasoli

Lyn is a non-Indigenous Australian, originally from the United States. She has lived in Australia since 1972 and worked in the Northern Territory since 1978. Her work in children's services and early childhood education has included teaching in child care centres, preschools and schools, coordinating a mobile children's service, an out of school hours care program, and during 1978–1980



working in a recreation program at the YMCA residential camp outside of Darwin used extensively by NT schools and remote Indigenous communities. In 1985 she began working as a tertiary educator at the then Darwin Institute of Technology, (now Charles Darwin University). She has a BSc in Early Childhood, MSc in Child Development and recently completed a PhD entitled, *Young Children in the Art Gallery: Excursions as Induction to a Community of Practice using 'communities of practice'* (Wenger, 1998) as a framework for understanding children's learning in a new environment.

Her involvement with young Indigenous children and families began in 1980 with her work as the coordinator of the 'Fun Bus', a mobile playgroup operating in Darwin (see Fasoli, 2000). She worked with Northern Territory University colleague, Margot Ford, to explore the practices that a group of Indigenous early childhood practitioners valued in their work with young children (Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Ford & Fasoli, 2001). Her teaching at the university has always included children's services and early childhood education across the TAFE and Higher Education sectors. She was enlisted to participate as principal researcher in this project with the team of early childhood workers from BIITE, many of whom had been her former students in courses in early childhood.

This project was the most challenging and rewarding of any I have undertaken. I was familiar with Indigenous communities in the NT but mostly as an outsider who visited briefly to supervise teaching students on practicum and for other reasons

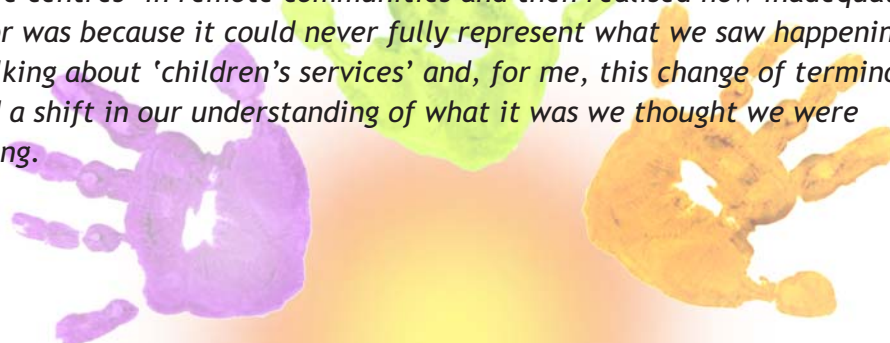
and, in 1998–1999, as a researcher who visited and lived in two remote Indigenous communities for short periods of time, the longest being a mere three weeks. Working with the BIITE research team was what made this project possible. This group had longstanding and committed relationships with remote community people and visiting communities with them has taught me so much about the importance of trust and reciprocity. I was privileged to be able to participate 'on the edge' of these relationships.

I have also begun to understand, on a more visceral level, the life realities of many community people. While I knew that many people lived hard lives, I really had no idea. The generosity of the community participants has been remarkable, especially considering how often they are pursued by people like us who ask endless questions and take up precious time in their already very busy lives.

In working with the team of people from BIITE, I had to learn, again, the importance of making space and time for people to get their thoughts together so that they could make a contribution. In the beginning we used what seemed like fairly artificial strategies for ensuring everyone had their chance to speak and be heard, i.e. to nominate a time keeper, a process monitor, a facilitator, etc. These strategies dropped away as the pressure to make progress took hold. As a result, we spent some months not listening to each other very well. When we got stuck we brought back the strategies.

I learned that my research colleagues have a profound depth of knowledge about working in remote area Indigenous communities and with the staff and parents of the children's services. It became clear to me that the basis for their work has always been the respectful nature of their relationships they have with community people and they know this to be the case. Whenever something we were about to do seemed to threaten this relationship we had to rethink the course of action. These relationships seemed to act as ever-present weather vanes for gauging the appropriateness of our research practices.

This research provided an opportunity for all of us to reflect on our 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about what constituted an effective early childhood service. For example, our focus shifted as we weighed up the importance of a service having a planned program for learning against their ability to provide children with good food and basic hygiene. Another example was the way we talked about 'child care centres' in remote communities and then realised how inadequate this descriptor was because it could never fully represent what we saw happening. We began talking about 'children's services' and, for me, this change of terminology reflected a shift in our understanding of what it was we thought we were researching.



In my work with students in early childhood education and child care courses, I have struggled to explain complex ideas like 'negotiating understanding and meaning across difference' and 'situating practices in a local context'. This research experience has provided me with many ideas and examples for illustrating these concepts. I have more resolve than ever to guard against promoting traditional early childhood practices as applicable to all children in all contexts. There is still much more for me to learn about what counts as worth knowing and doing in contexts such as those which we have had the privilege to work. I know that I cannot do this alone.

Renata Harris

Renata is a non-Indigenous woman who has been working with families and young children for almost 20 years—as a group leader in after school care, vacation care, long day care & mobile services; and most recently as a Director, Project Officer, Children's Services Advisor, Training & Support Field Officer and Early Childhood Lecturer. Renata is currently the NT National Vice President of Early Childhood Australia and over the years has been a member of a variety of management, training committees and early childhood working parties. She has an Associate Diploma in Children's Services, a Certificate 4 in Assessment and Workplace Training and is completing a Bachelor of Children's Services. In her current position as an early childhood lecturer, she delivers accredited training in remote aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory, from Arnhemland in the far north, to Ikuntji in the Western Desert.



At the moment, there is a national focus on the early years (0-8 years), and many initiatives or programs which aim to provide better outcomes for families and young children. I have learned that one model will never fit the varied contexts and needs of so many diverse communities. As a researcher, it was really important not to bring any assumptions or preconceived ideas to the table while gathering & analysing data—and recognise each place as unique and diverse in its own right. There are also many ways of knowing and doing e.g. child rearing and teaching or learning.

I saw this as an ideal opportunity to formalise what we've all learned over the years as practitioners and educators. This was also a chance for the communities to share their stories of practice with the wider world ...talk about their development, achievements, challenges and issues.

I was always very conscious of not speaking for, or on behalf of Indigenous people...putting 'words in peoples mouths'. In our community of practice, we tend

to use a lot of buzz words and jargon without sometimes understanding or agreeing on a meaning. I continue to struggle to define terms that are so easily bandied about:

- What is 'child care?'...because a lot of child care happens beyond the back fence of the child care building and often many people 'teach' and 'care' for young children, especially in communities.*
- What is 'both ways?', 'culturally appropriate?' and 'capacity building?'—There are many interpretations.*

Over the past 5 years, I have visited all 6 communities in a variety of roles and for varying lengths of time ... sometimes up to a week at a time. At times I felt I had to justify what I thought was 'other' relevant data. Is it only information that was collected on a tape, in one brief conversation with someone? ... or could it be those things that I have learned, seen, heard or been told about over the years. I now know that it is all relevant. I was uncomfortable gathering information in the taped 'question and answer' format. I felt it put people under pressure to perform or answer questions like a test. Generally, I believe people were happy to share their stories with us because of the respectful relationships we have established over time.

I have found that even within remote Indigenous communities there is a melting pot of values, beliefs, expectations, strengths, needs, desires and levels of support or training required. To make this type of 'research' work you really need to establish trusting relationships, readily adapt what you're doing to suit different contexts and constantly be aware of individual people's priorities and obligations—whether they be personal, family, work or community priorities. As a 'researcher' be prepared for lots of listening, watching, waiting, long periods of silence, and expect the unexpected.

People talk about learning curves ...I see my journey as an educator, mentor and researcher more like a 'learning spiral'... complete with ups and downs, twists and turns, stops and starts and the odd blow-out! Even as an educator, it's OK to ask for help or to say 'I don't know'. Action research offers great opportunities to learn together, because no one knows everything and there isn't one right way. There are many communities of practice and our learning journeys never end.



Kathy Deveraux

Kathy was given a traditional birth in a stock-camp and has spent her life growing up on cattle stations, in country which is of cultural significance to her. In her primary years, she attended the local primary school at Batchelor and completed



her secondary education at Darwin High School. This year she is completing a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education at Batchelor Institute.

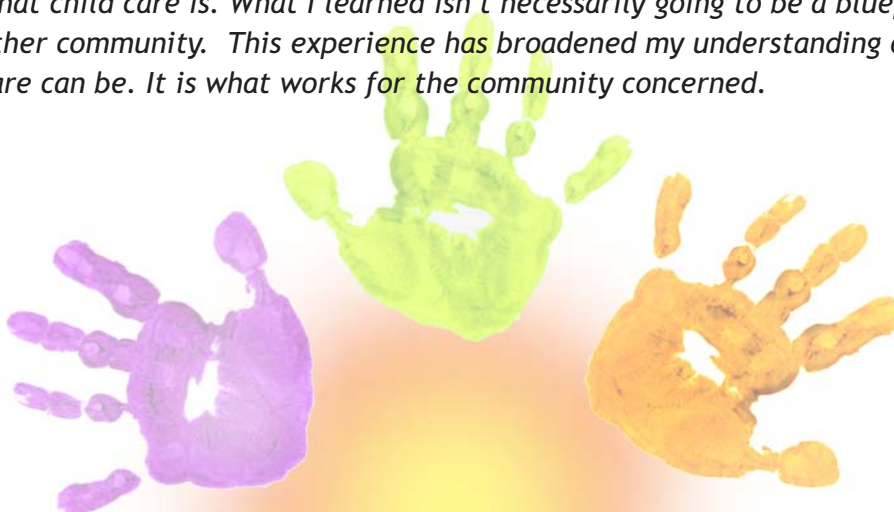
Her interests and hobbies include cultural and contemporary outdoor activities, language and linguistics, cultural art and craft and reading.

As an Indigenous educator, I see my role as that of being an agent of change to address political inequalities experienced by those disadvantaged by lack of education and training to improve social mobility.

I found doing this research was a good opportunity to develop some hands-on experience that allowed me to apply what I was learning in my degree program. I also learned about a new methodology.

Balancing my support work with the research was difficult, especially when the research took priority over my other work. There was a lot of administration to do in order to visit a community which involved extra paper work for the different activities. There were also a lot of forms for community participants to sign and return. They were busy and chasing them up took much more time than expected.

We planned the research as a whole group and this was, at first, very confusing because it was new and different to what we expected. I found working as a researcher in the community, instead of in my normal role of support worker, was very valuable and interesting. The experience of researching has changed my perspective on my work in the community. I think I will go in with a different approach in the future. I've learned more about the whole community's ideas of what child care is. What I learned isn't necessarily going to be a blueprint for any other community. This experience has broadened my understanding of what child care can be. It is what works for the community concerned.



Carolyn Preece

Carolyn has worked in the NT in early childhood positions over two significant periods: from 1975 when she came to teach in Alice Springs and Papunya community followed by a period in preschools in the Centre in the early 80's. From 1996 to 2001 she returned to Alice and then in the past 18 months to BIITE with the



EC team there. The NT work has been interspersed with Montessori preschool teaching in Canberra and Adelaide and work in a progressive school and a child care centre in Adelaide. Previously she has taught in the Cook Islands, Cairns and in early childhood and migrant education in Melbourne.

She has a Trained Infant Teachers' Certificate (TITC) from Melbourne Teachers' College (an 'olden days' qualification), a Montessori Diploma, TESOL qualification, Cert IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and Bachelor of Education. She worked as the Project Manager on this

research.

I have been reminded, working within the layers of this project that there are many parts to play in the education arena in remote communities. The energy, persistence, positive attitudes and focus of many community participants has been stunning. There are enormous hurdles in just the most ordinary functions of living and yet they give more.

The professionalism, sensitivity, knowledge and skills of my colleagues on the team have also been notable. The Principal researcher, Lyn devoted her time not only to the interviewing, analysis through workshopping and writing of the report but to the wellbeing of all the team members. The engagement of our team in the research process and the development of relationships with communities has given a number of team members the confidence and interest to contemplate further research. We have found support and a wealth of information too from the Reference Group members from NTDEET, FACS and Health and Community Services and the team from CDU.

Within my workplace we were acknowledged for undertaking research along with our "day jobs". We often found difficulty in relinquishing ownership of our tasks and employing others to 'back fill' for us given too that replacements were often unavailable. The Head of School and wider Education and Humanities team supported us with understanding and goodwill.

A dynamic sense of ownership has developed in some of the communities I have visited. Over the 30 years of contact I have experienced in remote communities, my feelings have changed from a negative sense that 'we' don't know what to do to improve the equity, access and participation for young children on communities to a positive one through the observation that 'they' are getting on with the job

out there.

I think the sharing through networks between communities is growing.

Communities want to keep their child care centres running and also receive the training they need which indicates to me that we must renew our efforts to deliver training in the bush to cater for the different needs of each community with respect and sensitivity.

I had to overcome a personal bias about child care centres from my own experiences which left me feeling that it is not the preferred option if care at home is possible. I now realize that my interpretation of child care was a narrow one and that it is a wider, deeper, broader diverse experience which affects families in many different ways: most of them positive.

Veronica Johns

I am an Aboriginal woman, married and with three adult children. Twelve of my



young years were spent in a Children's Home. I think it was this upbringing that has directed and guided my interest and work in 'Aboriginal child care'. Since completing my Associate Diploma in Child Care with the Northern Territory University in 1987 I have worked in, and been involved on committees across children's services programs - playgroups, vacation care, long day care, inclusion support, family day care, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), and program support. I now work with Batchelor Institute as a field officer for remote area Aboriginal children's services which has brought me to be involved in this early

childhood research project.

At an Aboriginal early childhood conference in the 1980's an Aboriginal woman was stressing how important it is that Aboriginal people do research on their own people. She stated that Aboriginal people would continue to be researched and unlike the past when others did the research, we must now take an active role. I understood this and could relate to it.

There was a point at the beginning of the research project when we had to sign an agreement to participate in the research. I remember not feeling quite right about how something was worded in the agreement. I was not only feeling uncomfortable for me, but had concerns about how this would be read and accepted out there in the communities that were involved in the project.

The research project opened my eyes and made me more conscious of how we all need to employ better ethical practices. The potential damage if we don't take the time and the patience to explain how information will be used and what rights people have, needs to always be at the forefront of our minds. We need to be sure that everything is clear and understood prior to gaining authorisation from the

appropriate people to proceed. Opting for the easy road and not considering ethics can be disrespectful and quite harmful, as can be seen in the past with Aboriginal history in this country.

With our work and even more so with this research we needed to be flexible with our time and how we used it. We needed to be patient as much can change and/or be happening in the communities. This was quite challenging as we had tasks to complete and deadlines to meet for the research project.

I found it difficult and uncomfortable when on my own in the community to ask questions for the research. It was easier having a co-researcher along or community participant to help share the research information and encourage participation and feedback.

Balancing work with the research and wanting to continue with both but having to prioritise this project and utilise other people to do my usual job was difficult..

Working with colleagues:

- Listening to each other and sharing our thoughts and comments.*
- Building on our relationships both on an interpersonal level and in a cross cultural context.*

One of the real positives for me participating in this research project was to hear and feel through stories the energy, strength and determination of women who play such a pivotal role in the present and future development of their communities.

Ranu James

Ranu is a Papua New Guinea Australian, married and has had 2 children and is expecting her third. She was brought up in a way which has allowed her to operate within the two cultures that she is a part of, that is, Papua New Guinean culture as well as the 'Western' mainstream culture of Australia. Both her personal and professional life has involved working with people and children on issues of cultural maintenance and development. In her personal life she has been very involved with cultural maintenance activities within the Papua New Guinea community in Darwin through attending and co-ordinating various activities for young Papua New Guineans living in Australia. She has also been very involved with the music industry in Darwin. She has found a way to combine these two personal interests as she is one of the founding members of the international performing group Drum Drum. Drum Drum is one of the most innovative contemporary groups in the South Pacific featuring dancers and classically trained musicians from PNG, Fiji and Australia. Dance is the highlight and



Drum Drum's performances include a number of traditional songs and dances, many of which have never previously been performed outside of Papua New Guinea. Since completing her Bachelor of Education with the Northern Territory University in 1992, she has worked as a music teacher, primary school teacher, preschool teacher, worked in an after school care programs both as a carer and co-ordinator, co-ordinated an Aboriginal playgroup, worked as a child care worker and Director with a Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service, as the Training Manager for the Resource and Advisory Program, as a Child Care Licensing Adviser and before returning to work with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education as the Project Co-ordinator of the Remote Aboriginal Children's Services Support Unit.

My professional work life has had much involvement working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and children in both urban and remote settings. I have particularly enjoyed the work I have done in remote communities and have found some similarities in the struggles of the Indigenous Australian people to have their culture recognised and respected just as people of other cultures living within the Australian mainstream culture have fought for their own cultural respect and recognition. I have been greatly inspired by the many staff I have worked with in remote Children's Services who have fought hard to obtain the qualifications they have, as well as fighting for access to ongoing appropriate professional development for themselves ensuring that the little kids they work with can have access to as many opportunities as children in urban settings.

This was my first experience with research. Research is something I have always been interested in but felt I didn't have the 'know how' to do it so I was excited by the opportunity to work with colleagues learning together about research and how it's done. I particularly enjoyed gathering the data and then analysing and discussing our findings. I found that the time spent gathering data for our research gave me the time to be able to interact with people in the community I was working with in a lot more of a concentrated way. Although I have had opportunities to question and discuss issues within the children's service before now, this was usually done in conjunction with a whole lot of other 'work' we were trying to get done. It was a bit of a luxury to be able to just concentrate on the one job and to be able to speak to other people within the community that I normally wouldn't be speaking with.

I have also enjoyed the many discussions we have had as a result of our various findings and it has been interesting to see the vast differences and similarities amongst communities. It has also been interesting to see how all those involved and their ideas have changed and developed throughout the process. Sometimes the discussions became quite heated but this made them even more interesting and fun to 'thrash out'. I have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss issues with the people I work with in the community and to see them really thinking through certain ideas and to then come back and find that they have made some changes

which could have been as a result of our discussions. I have found that I have had a few "aha!" experiences where I have learnt the background to why things may happen in a particular way. I have found this whole experience extremely beneficial both personally and professionally and I have found a deeper understanding for the service I work with allowing me the opportunity to support the service better when carrying out my usual duties. There is always something new to learn and this has been exciting.



APPENDIX 3

COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH*

CHAPTER 2—BARUNGA

Sybil Ranch
Jean Tiati
Paul Amarante
Pamela Ann Talbot
Peter Wordsworth
Nell Brown

Seventhia Runga
Jocelyn McCartney
Margaret Coleman

CHAPTER 3—GALIWIN'KU

Amele Ragata
Ian Mongunu Gumbula
Roselie Bananaki
Rose Guywala
Sandra Wuthangi
D Djalangi
Carol Lamond
Graham Lymbery

Elizabeth Djandilya Throne
Elizabeth Rappa
Cheryl Wirtaner
Litia Vuqa
Roselie Yunupingu
Sandra Wuthangi
Peter Moore

CHAPTER 4—GURUNGU

Karen Cooper
Caroline Jackson
Edward Winter
Heather Wilson
Lindsay Bostock
Maureen Bostock

Daniel Sandy
Reanna June Bathern
Suzy Kidd
Mona Rennie
Gordon Jackson



* These names are those participants who agreed to have their names included in the report.

CHAPTER 5—*IKUNTJI*

Sadie Richards
Melissa Edwards
Scott McConnell
Rebecca Hayes

Alison Multa
Benisa Marks
Kathleen Dixon

CHAPTER 6—*NGUIU*

Mandala Pupangimirri
Consolata Kelantumama
Elizabeth Puruntatameri
Sarah Tipiloura
Dulcie Tipungwati
Maggie Tipungwati
(Ruby) Anges Barbara Tipungwati
Lucy Papajua
Gawin Tipiloura
Lucianne Lynch
Teresita Kilpayuwu Puruntatameri
Luciano Tipungwati
Delores Fernando

Gregreana Tipungwati
Sandra Kantilla
Dehlia Puatjimi
Jennifer Tipiloura
Gerarda Tipiloura
Sandra Puruntatameri
Frances Kerinaiaua
Ronita Pupangimirri
Lorraine Pilakui
John Abraham Pupangimirri
Ethan Kantilla
Terina Kelantumama

CHAPTER 7—*TITJIKALA*

Janie Wells
Lincoln Boko
Arama Mataira
Linda Raima Herangi
Elaine Churchill

Rene Douglas
Hazel Ungwanaka
Carol Meruntju



APPENDIX 4

CHARTS

NOTE TO PRINTER....

the chart for here has been done in a separate A3
pagemaker document ..named Appendix_4

please print document Appendix_4 and insert the
single A3 back-to -back chart manually into this
document.





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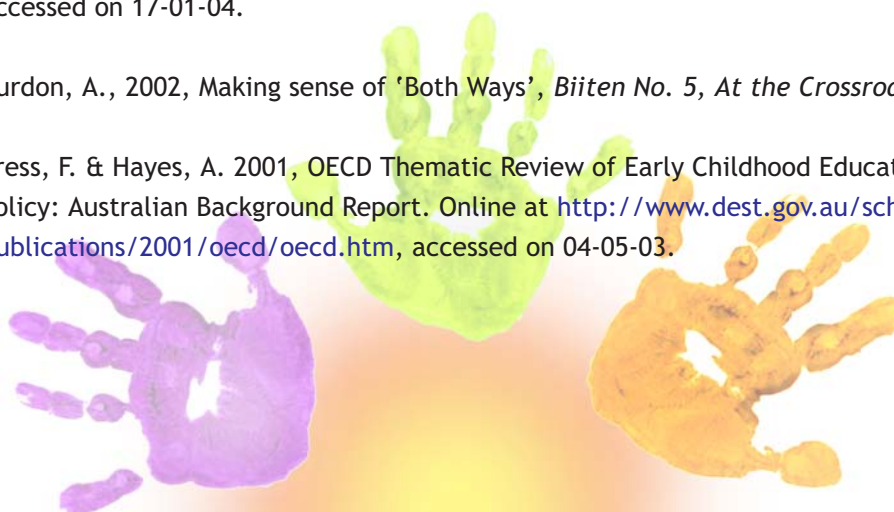
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