

# Indigenous Participation in Early Childhood Education and Care - Qualitative Case Studies

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### Front cover:

Marr Mooditji (Good Hands Painting Nyoongar Country) 2015

Tahnee and Carlene (HIPPY Armadale Tutors)



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## List of abbreviations and terms

ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
ACFC	Aboriginal Children and Family Centre
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
BBF	Budget Based Funded Programme
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CCB	Child Care Benefit
CCR	Child Care Rebate
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
HIPPY	Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters
MACS	Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service
NQF	National Quality Framework
OOSH	Outside School Hours Care (also known as OSHC)
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
SRC	Social Research Centre

# Executive summary

The Social Research Centre (SRC) was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (formerly the Australian Government Department of Education) to undertake qualitative research to explore the facilitators and barriers to Indigenous Australians participating in early childhood education and care services. This report presents the findings of case study research undertaken in seven communities across Australia.

## Background

Widely acknowledged is the importance of access to high quality early childhood education services; it is recognised that access to high quality education not only improves a child's lifelong learning outcomes but also has links to good general health and wellbeing.

## Overview of the research

The main aim of the research was to better understand the issues associated with Indigenous child participation in early childhood education and care. The following specific objectives were developed to address this aim:

- To uncover the barriers to, and facilitators of Indigenous families participating in early childhood education and care services in communities across Australia
- To explore why families take up service offers in their community
- To understand what is working well in terms of early childhood education and care in communities, and
- To identify ways in which Indigenous families could be encouraged to participate in early childhood education and care services.

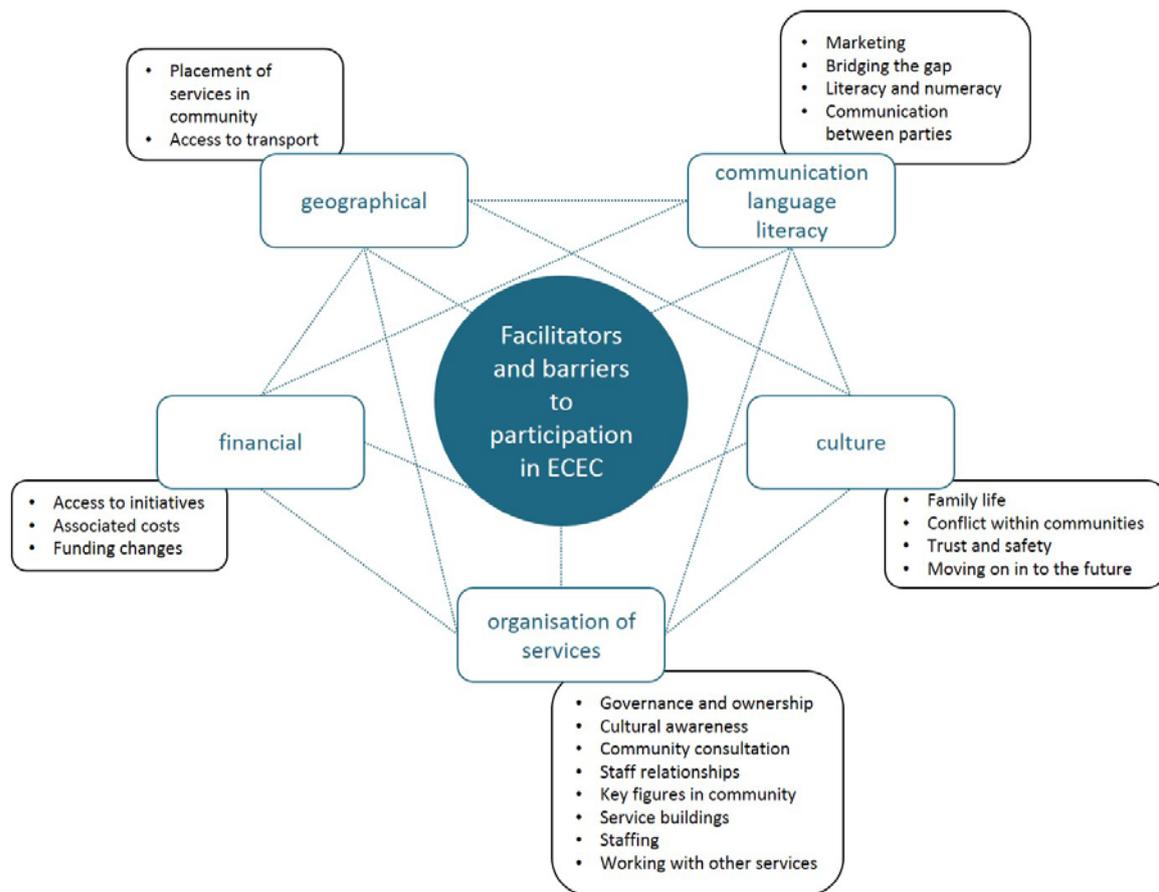
## Methodology

A two-stage approach was developed for this project. The first stage examined quantitative datasets to identify case study communities that had low and high rates of participation in early childhood education and care (reported separately). The second stage, reported here, was a qualitative, in-depth examination of seven case study communities across Australia. The case study approach employed a combination of focus group and in-depth interview methods to build a detailed picture of the provision of early childhood education services and uncover the barriers and facilitators to participation in such services in each community. Within each community, researchers consulted with a range of stakeholders including parents and carers, educators, centre managers and supervisors. Full ethical approval was obtained for this project.

## Key findings

Findings from the research have highlighted both explicit and implicit barriers to families participating in ECEC services including: cost, location, culture, communication and the service itself. Whilst the barriers and facilitators are presented in this findings section as separate factors, it is important to note that they are intrinsically interconnected and overlapping, as illustrated in the following diagram.

**Figure 1 Presentation of the connections between factors that can facilitate or create barriers to the participation of Indigenous families in early childhood education**



### Benefits of early childhood education and care

The research findings show that there were multiple benefits to families who took up early childhood education and care provision in their community. Parents and service providers reported that there were explicit **educational and social benefits** to children attending early childhood education services, for example, improved basic literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally, attendance at services gave children **'school readiness'** in preparation for transition to compulsory schooling. This, it was reported, in turn helped to **'close the gap'** between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children entering primary school. Parents also suggested that take-up of services allowed them to undertake courses, return to work or have time to themselves. Finally, in-home programs were found to **build capacity** and confidence, and gave parents and carers a sense of **empowerment**.

## Facilitators and barriers

Both the facilitators and barriers to participation in early childhood education and care services were wide-ranging, complex and interconnected. Considered by the majority of respondents as the most important factor in determining participation in services was trust.

**Trust** could be a major barrier for Indigenous families considering accessing and participating in early childhood education services. This included distrust of government – for example as a reflection on historical experiences, concerns about the amount of detail required in funding application paperwork, anxieties about dealing with government departments such as child protection agencies, and the issue of Child Protection Orders, and distrust of staff – if they were unknown to families there was often an initial trust barrier.

The research found that Indigenous families were more likely to trust a service if a relationship was developed with the service provider; that is, families were welcomed into the service, staff communicated with parents regularly and were invited to participate in their learning. Trust was also reinforced by employing local Indigenous Australians as educators. Other key factors that could act as barriers and facilitators included:

- **Transport.** Transport could be a barrier for many Indigenous families when they did not have access to private transport or were reliant on irregular, costly public transport. Many early childhood education services in regional and remote communities offered dedicated transport services, which reportedly facilitated participation
- **Cost.** Cost was perceived as a barrier to those families not participating. Service providers explained that Indigenous families who did not access early childhood education services may not be aware of funding initiatives. Word-of-mouth had proved important for communicating the funding initiatives available to Indigenous families
- **Understanding.** Service providers were keen to communicate the benefits of early childhood education with non-participating Indigenous families. Successful engagement strategies included Open Days and community events such as barbecues. Again, word-of-mouth proved significant in encouraging parents to allow their children to attend, and
- **Indigenous involvement.** Services that were particularly successful in engaging Indigenous families tended to be run and/or delivered by local Indigenous Australians or were delivered by educators with strong cultural awareness.

## Key delivery considerations

Stemming from this research with Indigenous communities across Australia, the report presents the following practical considerations for the development of early childhood education services involving Indigenous families:

- **communicate the benefits** of early childhood education services to parents and carers. This can be achieved through:

- infographics, rather than text-heavy information pamphlets and/or developing communication tools in local Indigenous language
  - encouraging word-of-mouth communication of benefits by parents within the Indigenous community, and
  - hosting Open Days and community-based activities, and inviting parents and carers to visit the service for themselves.
- encourage the take-up of **community liaison officer roles**, particularly in communities where participation is reported to be 'low'. These roles exist in all states and are either standalone roles or attached to the police or health service. In their liaison roles, Indigenous members of the community could build relationships with Indigenous families, make home visits (where appropriate), host information days, connect families with community services, and communicate funding subsidies and help families complete paperwork
  - introduce a **dedicated transport service** in regional and remote areas to increase participation and retention rates
  - employ local **Indigenous members of staff**, particularly encouraging Indigenous **male** community members into the sector
  - introduce **in-home programs** to regional and remote communities to enable parents to play an active role in their child's learning. This will provide parents with a sense of empowerment. Programs such as the Indigenous Parent Factor program will also encourage learning through Indigenous language.



# 1. Introduction

The Social Research Centre was commissioned by the Department of Education and Training to undertake research to explore the barriers and facilitators to Indigenous family participation in early childhood education and care services. There were two parts to the research; the first stage was a quantitative evaluation of existing commonwealth data to identify patterns of Indigenous child participation in early childhood education and care. From this data, similar socio-demographic 'pairs' of communities were identified (see section 2.4 for detailed description of community pairing). These communities formed the focus of the second stage of the research, which was a qualitative study. This report provides the findings of the qualitative case study research (fieldwork conducted from October to December 2015), which comprised seven communities around Australia, ranging from "very remote" to "major city" locations (see reference 1 on page 65).<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Background

The Australian Government will invest around \$40 billion on child care support over the next four years through implementation of the *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package. The reform package will provide greater choice for families by delivering a simpler, more affordable, more flexible and more accessible child care system.

The key elements of the *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package are:

- The Child Care Subsidy - Commencing in July 2018, the new Child Care Subsidy will replace the current Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate with a single, means-tested payment.
- The Child Care Safety Net - With some elements commencing in July 2016, the Child Care Safety Net will provide targeted assistance for disadvantaged communities and vulnerable and at-risk children and their families to ensure they get a strong start while supporting parents to enter the workforce.

The reform package represents the Government's response to recommendations from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning, which took into account a wide range of input from families, service providers, early childhood education professionals and businesses.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) aims to raise quality and drives continuous improvement and consistency in Australian education and care services (see reference 2 on page 65)<sup>2</sup>. Launched in 2012, and administered by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), the NQF applies to most long day care, family day care, preschool/ pre-prep/ kindergarten and outside school hours care services (see reference 3

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<sup>1</sup> Rurality determined by Accessibility Remoteness Index Australia 2011 (see section 2.6. for further detail).

<sup>2</sup> [Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \(ACECQA\) 2015 National Quality Framework Overview](#). (accessed 15.12.15)

on page 65).<sup>3</sup> All state and territory governments have agreed on this framework and have demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that Australian children get the best possible start in life, recognising that quality early education and care shapes each child's future, and that the early years are critical for establishing, for example, self-esteem, resilience, healthy growth and outcomes in later life (see reference 4 on page 65).<sup>4</sup> The framework is evaluated in every early childhood education service through seven quality areas:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management

Widely acknowledged is the importance of access to high-quality early childhood education services. Access to such services will not only improve a child's lifelong outcomes for education, but also has beneficial links to good general health and wellbeing. Sims explains how "early intervention/education is more effective, particularly for vulnerable families, when it is holistic", that is, a whole-family approach must be taken into account when presenting early childhood education services to Indigenous families (see reference 5 on page 65).<sup>5</sup> The most effective services, acknowledged by the Australian Government, are those that have an awareness of culture and address cultural competence and safety within their service delivery (see reference 6 on page 65).<sup>6</sup>

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has set 'Closing the Gap' targets for Aboriginal peoples across Australia (see reference 7 on page 65).<sup>7</sup> One of their seven key targets is to ensure access for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities to early childhood education. But wider still, this initiative by COAG indicates a move towards a socially cohesive approach, so that whilst early childhood education is acknowledged as extremely important to a child's development, it is also recognised that these policies will have broader positive outcomes for families and whole communities (see reference 8 on page 65).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Social Services 2015 [National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care](#).

<sup>4</sup> ACECQA 2015 Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Sims, M 2011 [Early Childhood and Education Service for Indigenous Children Prior to Starting School: Resource Sheet No. 7 for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse](#). (accessed 15.01.16)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 2011

<sup>7</sup> COAG 2009 [National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage](#).

<sup>8</sup> Grace, R. and Trudgett, M. 2012 'It's not Rocket Science: The Perspectives of Indigenous Early Childhood Workers on Supporting the Engagement of Indigenous Families in Early Childhood Settings', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37 (2): 10-18

### 1.1.1 Funding initiatives for early childhood education and care

The *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package is a significant investment in early childhood education and care in Australia with an increase of more than \$3 billion to support its implementation (see Appendix 1 for overviews of funding initiatives).

The Budget Based Funded (BBF) Programme provides a contribution to the operational costs of approximately 300 child care and early learning and school aged care services in a limited number of approved locations. These services are predominantly located in regional, remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where the market would otherwise fail to deliver services to meet the needs of children and their families. Many are the sole providers of child care in their communities.

The current funding arrangements do not provide any incentive for services to grow as funding cannot increase in response to greater numbers of children. Many reviews over several years have highlighted a range of issues with the BBF Programme including that the programme is capped and fully committed meaning no new services can be funded in areas of need, there is no incentive for services to increase utilisation and in some cases families pay high fees but are not eligible for any fee subsidy.

The BBF Programme will cease on 30 June 2018 when the new child care system commences. BBF services will be supported to transition to the new system, under the *Jobs for Families Child Care Package* or to move to alternative funding arrangements (see reference 9 on page 65).<sup>9</sup>

Aboriginal Children and Family Centres exist throughout Australia and were established as part of the National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development from 2008 onwards (see reference 10 on page 65).<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Rationale for study

There is limited evidence around barriers and facilitators to Indigenous participation in early childhood education services, particularly understanding why some families access the existing services for their young children, whilst others do not. Whilst other studies have identified some barriers, through examination of census and administrative data (for example, participation and attendance rates), this study employed a case study approach, which enabled a detailed in-depth and exploratory approach, through qualitative consultations with a wide range of individuals within each case study area.

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<sup>9</sup> At the time of conducting fieldwork, respondents indicated that they were concerned that the BBF Programme may cease in 2016. All comments relating to the BBF Programme were made by respondents with this cessation date in mind. The Government has since announced the cessation of the programme in 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Urbis 2014 [Evaluation of the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development](#)

## 1.3 Report structure

The report uses the following structure:

- Methodology, including research partners, recruitment and fieldwork sites (section 2)
- Reported benefits for children and families attending ECEC services (section 3)
- Barriers and facilitators to participating in ECEC services (section 4)
- Key findings and considerations (section 5)

## 2. Methodology

This section summarises the approach to the research, specifically the methodology, recruitment, fieldwork, and analysis of data.

### 2.1 Research aim and objectives

The main aim of this research was to better understand the issues associated with Indigenous child participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In order to fulfil this aim, a number of key objectives were devised:

- to uncover the barriers to and facilitators for Indigenous families participating in ECEC services in communities across Australia
- to explore why families take-up service offers in their community
- to understand what was working well in terms of ECEC in communities and
- to identify ways in which Indigenous families could be encouraged to participate in ECEC services.

### 2.2 Research partnership

In order to assure the research was culturally appropriate and reflected each community's needs and preferences, the SRC contracted Ninti One (a national, not-for-profit company with expertise in research community development in remote areas of Australia). Ninti One aided in the sampling, documentation development and ethics applications for the research. In addition, a staff member from Ninti One undertook fieldwork in two of the case study communities alongside an Aboriginal Community Researcher (a member of the community where the research was to be conducted). The Aboriginal Community Researchers were inducted in research protocols, and had project-specific training delivered by the Ninti One Project Officer, to ensure that they understood the purpose of the research, their role in it and its likely benefits to respondents and the wider community.

Working alongside the SRC and Ninti One was the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). The SRC consulted with SNAICC about the best approaches to working with Indigenous Australian communities and received key contacts in the case study communities from the Secretariat.

### 2.3 Ethics

The Social Research Centre ensures all projects are undertaken in line with the guidelines set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Additionally, as this research involved working with Indigenous communities, the team paid particular attention to Chapter 4.7 of the document, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'.

The SRC team consulted with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Ninti One, who both suggested the team submit applications to the four relevant state-based human ethics committees (at that time, the SRC were made aware that Queensland did not have a human ethics committee that could assess an application for research with Indigenous Australians). At this time, Ninti One also advised that specific approval would need to be sought for Northern Territory as they have a more stringent approach to research conducted with Indigenous peoples. Applications to state-based human ethics committees proved to be lengthy processes; some committees requested additional information and independent reviews by external organisations. These steps added to the initial anticipated timeframes allowed for ethics approval within this research project.

After exploring and eliminating the state-based human ethics committee avenues, the SRC team submitted an ethics application to the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian National University (see reference 11 on page 65)<sup>11</sup> on 9th September 2015. This application covered all seven communities identified to participate in the research project. The application was approved on 9th October 2015 (Ethics application no.: 2015/598), following few amendments to project instrumentation, and fieldwork began upon confirmation of the involvement of the first case study community, Orange.

## 2.4 Case study approach

In order to ensure a holistic, comprehensive understanding of the service provision and Indigenous participation in services in each community, a case study approach was employed. Case studies offer the most flexible of all research designs by enabling the close examination of a phenomenon or setting (such as a community). Case studies focus on a small number of entities or real life ‘cases’ but combine a range of data collection approaches and include a range of stakeholders. The uniqueness of a case study approach is that it enables the inclusion of a range of methods and respondents to understand the subject under investigation, thus providing a robustness and richness of evidence greater than might be obtained using alternative methodological approaches. The case study approach facilitates the triangulation of evidence to provide a ‘spotlight’ on an issue, process or impact focussing on analytical units rather than individuals. In each community, stakeholders were interviewed or took part in group discussions. These included parents and carers, service providers, and Aboriginal community liaison officers (or equivalent).

Seven communities, or ‘cases’ (across Queensland, Western Australia, Southern Australia and New South Wales) were consulted using a combination of in-depth interviews and focus group methods. Between ten and 20 individuals were consulted with in each community; individuals were parent/carers or service providers (service providers included managers, supervisors, education workers, Aboriginal liaison officers and community coordinators).

In order to maintain continuity, semi-structured discussion guides were developed in collaboration with Ninti One; one for service providers and one for parents/carers (see

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<sup>11</sup> The Social Research Centre is owned by ANU Enterprise

Appendix 2). These discussion guides acted as ‘aide-memoire’ for the researchers and their semi-structured nature allowed the conversations to flow fluidly from one topic to another.

**2.4.1 Identification of case studies**

Stage 1 quantitative analysis (now completed) utilised existing datasets (including the Australian Bureau of Statistics population and Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas data, Budget Based Funded service locations, Family Day Care density and Developmental vulnerability from the Australian Early Development Census) to identify 15 homogenous groups (clusters). Within each of these 15 clusters were lists of geographical areas or ‘communities’. From this ‘long list’, pairs (pairs included one Very Low/Low participation community and one High/Very high participation community) of communities were identified (in consultation with the project’s Stakeholder Reference Group [comprising the Department of Education and Training, Prime Minister and Cabinet Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Health]). From the long list, a final ‘short list’ was identified following further discussions with SNAICC and Ninti One to identify, for example, areas with established contacts or existing networks and so forth (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Proportion of Indigenous children attending early childhood education services in case study communities**

Case study pairs	Very low/Low proportion of Indigenous children 3-5 years attending mainstream services	High/Very high proportion of Indigenous children 3-5 years attending mainstream services
1	Gunnedah, New South Wales	Narrabri, New South Wales (did not participate)
2	Orange, New South Wales	Maitland, New South Wales (substituted with Toronto, New South Wales)
3	Ceduna, South Australia	Cherbourg, Queensland
4	Bassendean, Western Australia (substituted with Armadale, Western Australia)	Fremantle, Western Australia (did not participate)
5	Kakadu, Northern Territory (did not participate)	Karratha, Western Australia

**2.5 Recruitment**

Informed by stage one of the two-stage project, ten communities were identified as potential research foci. Two of the communities were substituted for alternative case studies; the substitution was at the suggestion of the research partners who had existing networks or key contacts in the alternative communities. A further two of the communities proved challenging to engage in the research, one, in Western Australia because of low staffing levels and availability to due time of year and the second, a remote community in the Northern Territory because of difficulties with gaining specific ethical approval in the Northern Territory and, as advised by Ninti One (who were informed by key members of the local Indigenous population), the Northern Territory case study community was over-researched and likely difficult to reach at the time of year the fieldwork was to be conducted. The separate

application for ethics approval had still not been approved by late October 2015 so the SRC team made the decision to withdraw from the case study community.

Working with Ninti One, SNAICC, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and Department of Education and Training (who provided regional contacts within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, which were then used to help identify key contacts within each area), early childhood education service providers were invited to take part in the research project. The initial approach was made via emails to centre managers, Aboriginal land councils or named contacts (acquired from Ninti One, SNAICC or the departments). Follow-up telephone calls were made to service providers within a week of sending the initial email in order to explain the research in more depth and gauge interest in participating. Once service providers agreed, a date was set to spend a minimum of two days in the community. The approach was to interview staff at the service provider and Aboriginal parents/carers who sent their children to the centres or participated in the programs. After making contact with an initial service provider in the community, a 'snowballing' approach to recruitment following (asking the service provider for any further contacts within the community). This method helped to capture the full range of views and perspectives within each community.

Within each community, researchers spoke with service providers across a range of ECEC services including long day care, preschool/ pre-prep/ kindergarten and outside school hours care services. Communities were provided with flyers, which invited parents and carers to participate in the study (see Appendix 3). The flyers would typically detail the date, time and location of the 'open day' where parents and carers were encouraged to drop in and chat at any time with the researchers.

Although different approaches were taken for each case study community, there were some key essential stages that took place which appeared to work well. These stages are summarised in the Figure 2 – notably from stage 1 to stage 5 would typically take at least five weeks, and for some communities took up to 2 months to arrange. This was due to a variety of reasons including staffing changes, holiday and busy community schedules. Despite this lengthy process, all of the site visits the team arranged went ahead as planned (even though the research team felt at the time that some of the arrangements may only have been tentative).

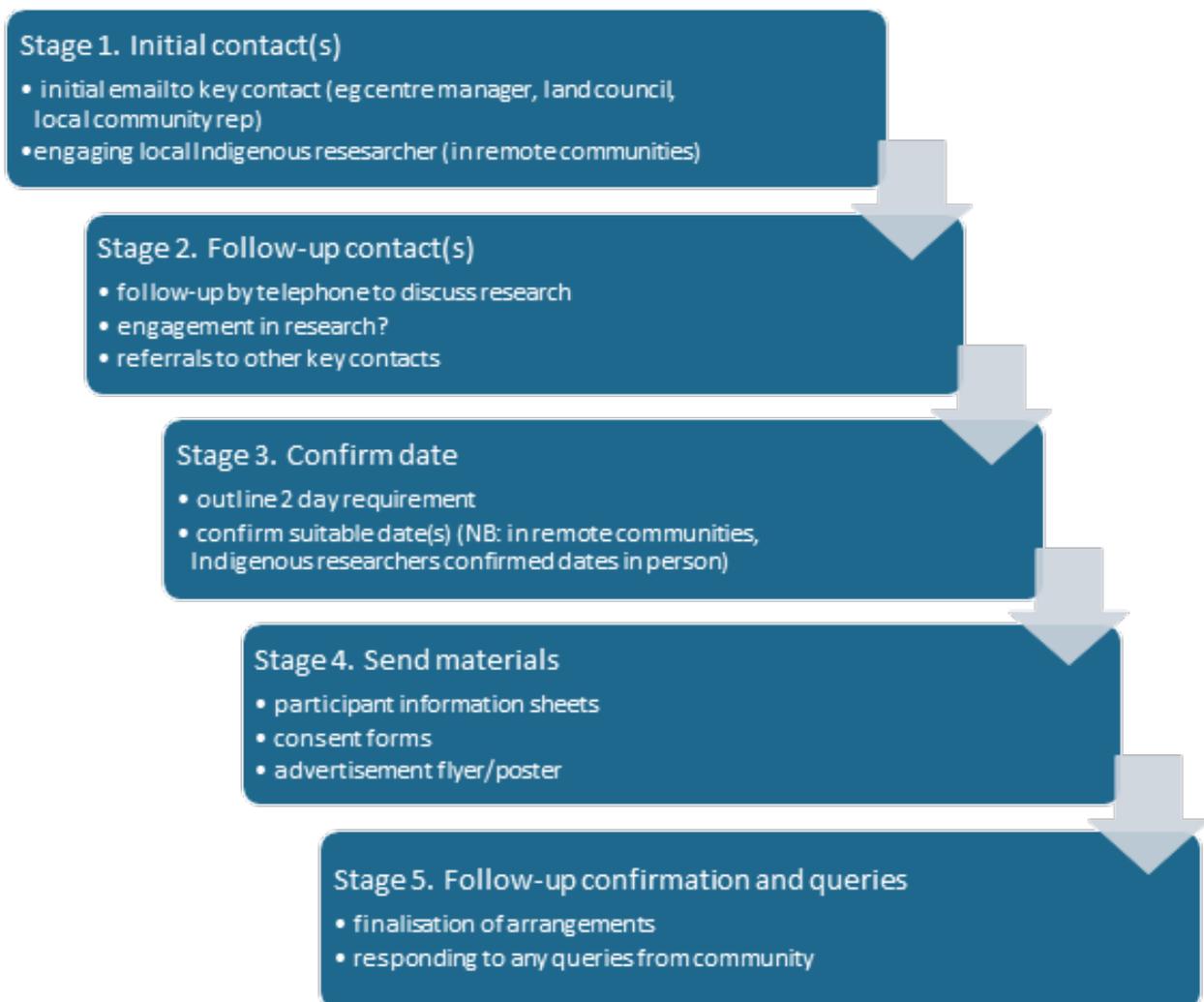
### **2.5.1 Incentives**

Ninti One's policy is not to provide cash incentives for individual respondents in research in order to reduce the potential for people responding with what they think the researcher wants to hear. The research team enabled respondents to participate in the research by visiting them in convenient places, picking them up if necessary, providing lunch, etc. The approach was to provide benefit for the wider community in which the research was taking place. Parents and carers were provided with a USB flash drive, hat, lanyard or tote bag as a token of appreciation for participating in discussions and interviews.

## 2.6 Limitations of study

A few community organisations approached did not wish to participate in the study; examples here include a long day care service and an Aboriginal Land Council. Non-participation was due to a number of different factors: they had recently been involved in other studies and therefore did not wish to participate at the time of invitation, they were being audited or preparing for an evaluation, individuals did not respond to email correspondence or telephone messages, or the limited staffing levels did not allow time for participation in the study. It was also difficult to locate and access non-participating parents/carers, which was also an ongoing issue for the services within the communities themselves).

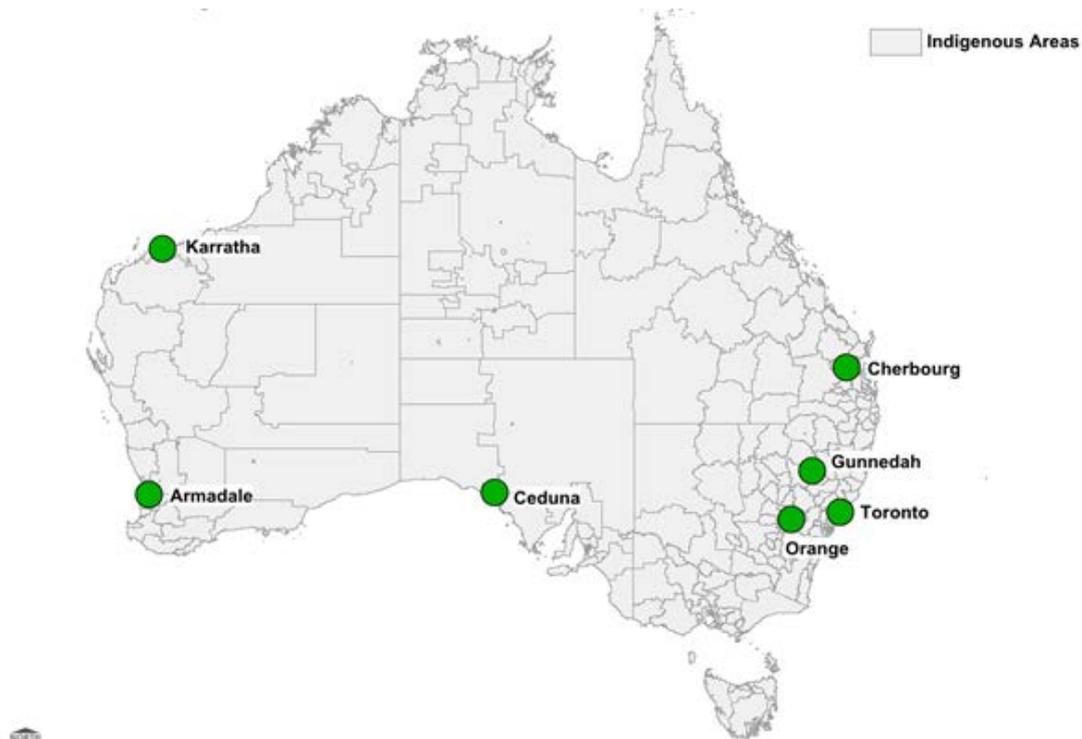
**Figure 2** Example staged process for engaging with case study communities



## 2.7 Fieldwork

Of the ten communities approached, seven communities were able to participate in the research (Figure 3). Table 2 details the communities, their level of rurality and Indigenous children participation rates in ECEC.

**Figure 3** Map to show location of case study communities



**Table 2 Fieldwork sample**

Community	Rurality*	Rate of participation**	Respondents***
Ceduna, South Australia	Very remote	Very low	4 x centre managers 2 x parents/carers 5 x educators
Karratha, Western Australia	Very remote	High	4 x centre managers 4 x parents/carers 5 x parents/educators
Gunnedah, New South Wales	Outer regional	Low	3 x parents/carers 4 x educators 1 x centre manager 1 x bus driver/educator
Cherbourg, Queensland	Outer regional	Very high	1 x IPSU staff 1 x centre manager 7 x parent/educators 2 x educators
Orange, New South Wales	Inner regional	Low	1 x HIPPY staff 1 x elder 3 x preschool teachers 5 x parents/carers 1 x community liaison officer 8 x community organisation members
Toronto, New South Wales	Major cities	Medium	1 x centre manager 3 x educators 2 x parent/educators 5 x parents/carers
Armadale, Western Australia	Major cities	High	1 x HIPPY staff 1 x IPF staff 1 x community development officer 5 x parents/carers

\*Rurality determined by Accessibility Remoteness Index Australia 2011 (see reference 12 on page 65)<sup>12</sup>

\*\*The categories for Very Low, Low, Medium, High and Very High were derived from creating quintiles of the percentage attendance in ECEC (see Appendix 4).

\*\*\* Not all participants wished to be recorded and/or participated in the research during less formal gatherings, for example, a lunch

The communities were visited between October and December 2015 with researchers spending a minimum of two days visiting early childhood education services, Aboriginal Land Councils, youth centres, homes and other local Indigenous centres in each community.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 *Australian Statistical Geography Standard: Volume 5-Remoteness Structure*, Canberra

Interviews and focus groups lasted between ten minutes and three hours (this was dependent on the amount of time each respondent could spare).

Many parents and carers were available for discussions at drop-off and pick-up times. In some instances, parents and carers were more comfortable talking with the researchers in a focus group situation but the majority elected to speak with researchers individually. Similarly, the majority of service providers (Aboriginal Liaison Officers, educators and managers) opted to undertake in-depth, individual interviews rather than focus groups.

### **2.7.1 Participation**

Prior to the beginning of any interview or focus group, respondents were given a respondent information sheet (see Appendix 5), the research project was explained to them and they were given the opportunity to ask any questions. They were also made aware that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the research project at any time. Respondents were given a consent form to read through (or it was read to them if English was not their first language) and signed if they were happy to participate (see Appendix 6). Discussions were audio-recorded wherever possible, but in the absence of audio-recordings, for example, when walking around the centres with staff members or talking with respondents who preferred not to be recorded, field notes were made. Field notes are used in the findings sections within this report to present additional context and opinions.

## **2.8 Analysis of data**

Many of the discussions with parents / carers and service providers were audio-recorded; the recordings were transcribed by an external specialist transcription agency. A single analytical framework was developed; formulated from the discussion guides and an initial review of the qualitative data. Using this analytical framework, each transcript or interview note was 'coded' using NVivo to enable a thematic analysis of the data. The use of this thematic data coding technique ensures that findings are directly traceable back to the raw data, thus providing a fully transparent analytical method.

Verbatim quotations from across the research have been included in this report to illustrate the findings. In this report, a convention is used for quotations: (Parent/carer, female, Orange). Similarly, when field notes are referred to in the findings section of this report they also follow a similar convention (Parent/service provider, field notes, Ceduna). The convention identifies the stakeholder group e.g. parent/carer or service provider (please note, 'service provider' includes managers, supervisors, education workers, Aboriginal liaison officers, etc.), the gender of the individual and the community in which the stakeholder lives/works.

Use of the word 'service' within this report is used to encompass a range of early childhood education services including playgroups, long day care centres, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, occasional care, preschool, kindergarten, out of school hours care, etc.

Where words are shown in square brackets [as such] this denotes the researcher's additional words, included to make a sentence clearer. Where ellipses have been used (...), this indicates that some superfluous text has been taken out of the quote for ease of reading.

### 3. Reported benefits for children and families attending ECEC services

This section outlines respondents' views and experiences of the benefits for families and their children relating to participating in early childhood education and care services. The section begins by exploring the perceived importance in terms of preparation for transitioning to primary school, followed by the development benefits to Indigenous children who participate in early childhood education services. Parental and carer benefits are also identified and conclusions drawn about the general advantages of Indigenous children attending services.

#### Summary of key points

- Parents and service providers reported educational and social benefits for children attending early childhood education services.
- Parents reported that they had opportunities to attend college or undertake courses, or simply have 'me time'.
- Service providers posited the importance of children being ready for school as a result of attending early childhood education services, and that this was reported as important for 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- In-home early childhood education programs can build capacity amongst parents and carers, who act as their child's first teachers. There was a sense of empowerment amongst parents undertaking in-home programs.

#### 3.1 Transitioning to school

School readiness is a key element of child development and a child's ability to transition from early childhood education services to compulsory schooling (see reference 13 on page 65).<sup>13</sup> Readiness for school 'reflects a broad holistic capacity, encompassing a range of developmental, academic, socio-economical and physical skills and qualities that can enable children to smoothly transition to school (see reference 14 on page 65).'<sup>14</sup> Research has indicated that school readiness amongst Indigenous children is lower than that of non-Indigenous children (see reference 15 on page 65).<sup>15</sup> For Indigenous children, two key elements will aid in their school readiness:

1. Access to high-quality early childhood education services, and

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<sup>13</sup> Booth, A., and Crouter, A. 2008 *Disparities in School Readiness*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: New York

<sup>14</sup> SNAICC 2013 [Supporting Transition to School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: What it Means and What Works?](#)

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, R. 2010 "Incorporating Diversity in Preparing Children for School: An Australian Perspective", *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 10 (1): 265-277

2. An Indigenous liaison officer (or equivalent) who will provide links between schools, families and communities to ensure a smooth transition (see reference 16 on page 65).<sup>16</sup>

Attending early childhood education services reassures parents of their child's readiness for school (Service provider, female, Ceduna). The most important aspect of preparing children for school, according to both parents and service providers, was enforcing routine into the children's lives.

We have kids that are like "I'm going on the school bus" and they bring a backpack for playgroup. So it's just building some routine which gets kids school ready. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

It will also change their patterns as well, like their sleeping routines and everything, if they go to preschool. Getting them ready for the five day a week. (Parent, female, Orange)

Respondent evidence indicates that routines such as packing a lunch box or bringing a backpack to pre-school provide children with security and stability (Service provider, female, Karratha). As the routine continues, children "learn to anticipate what will happen" (see reference 17 on page 65).<sup>17</sup>

They've got that couple of years before they have to go to kindergarten and it sort of just, it gets the parents into a routine too; packing lunches, getting the bags ready, so they've even had that head start before they go to school, they're already prepared. "We have to do this, take the kids to school, we have to be there to pick them up on time." They just know by that time. (Service provider, female, Orange)

Enjoyment and fun at early childhood education level, and a program of transition to primary school, can eliminate the stress for both child and parent when moving from one learning service to another. One parent explained their child's eagerness to attend school which was a result of attending early childhood education services before reaching the age for compulsory schooling:

Respondent: Now I've got a three year old at the moment, she's my youngest, I read books with her every single day. She even knows how to spell her name, she counts to 20, she knows all of her A-B-C's and she's well ready before she even starts kindy.

Moderator: She's raring to go.

Respondent: Yeah. She's like "That's going to be my school next year." And it's, like "Yeah, that's going to be your school, you can go to school with your sister." and she's really excited about it. (Parent, female, Armadale)

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<sup>16</sup> Dockett, S., Perry, B. and Kearney, E. 2010 School Readiness: [What Does it Mean for Indigenous Children, Families, Schools and Communities?](#) Issues Paper No. 2, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>17</sup> Ford, C. 2014 *100 Ideas for Early Years Practitioners: School Readiness*, Bloomsbury: London

Some larger service providers had a dedicated member of staff who coordinated the transition from early childhood education to primary school. In this instance, the staff member liaised with the primary school, building the relationship between the service provider and the primary school. Many service providers within the case study communities described programs of transition, which are planned days to visit the school with the children. Children are familiarised with the school and their potential teachers in a way that ensures minimisation of anxiety – for example in Cherbourg and Orange, members of staff from the service providers accompany the children on the transition days.

In these instances, the member of staff helps the whole family, not just the children, to adjust to the changes when moving from play group or pre-school to primary school.

Respondent: Oh, and it's really good because [name's] here for when kid's that come to playgroup, preschool here, they're nearly due to go to school, she can connect with the families to get them prepared for that.

Moderator: So, [name's] the liaison between the transition from here to school.

Respondent: Yeah, she's the transition. (Service provider, female, Gunnedah)

Some of the early childhood centres and services were feeders for primary schools, some of which are located on primary school grounds. Many services arranged transition programs to familiarise children moving from kindergarten/ pre-prep classes into primary schools. The familiarisation of children to new environments was important, therefore, transition programs act to settle children into their new environments more quickly (Service provider, female, Ceduna). It also gives the child reassurance in the form of familiarity with their new school.

In terms of their children, it's very daunting for a child to go to school and they've got to go to a big toilet. There's a canteen. There's this big, new room. There's these other kids in the school that they don't know. So ours is about preparing the kids for that by--we'll take a photo of the school entrance. We'll take a photo of the school bus, a photo of the toilets. We'll have a shoe, so the kids can learn how to tie their own laces instead of having the Velcro system all the time.

(Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

The early childhood education services that participated in this research project spoke of the importance of the relationship between early year's teachers and primary school teachers in forging positive transition to school interactions. For example, one respondent within a service in Orange commented on the difficulties she had experienced in building a relationship with her counterpart in a local primary school, and that there was a breakdown in communication and "the perception that we're not really educators" (Service provider, female, Orange). Parent and carer participation in information events was also highlighted as important – so that they can be as prepared for the transition as their child.

It's all so familiar so when they actually start school it's just a breeze. There's no tears, and because we do transition activities with the school, they're so used to it they go over to the kindergarten classrooms, they've been in there, they've met

the teachers, they actually run transition today and tomorrow. It's down the end there. The kids that I have on the Monday/Tuesday are down there today with one of the school teachers here and she does activities with them. We often meet up and play out in the playground together. And she's also running parent workshop starting next week where the parents can go next week, is a maths workshop, so it's just building that parent education as well. (Provider, female, Orange)

Teachers noted that there was a marked difference between Aboriginal children who attended early childhood education services and those who did not. Their observations indicated that those who had attended early childhood education services were better equipped with social and developmental skills, which aided their transition into school by being able to make friends, listen to the teacher and quickly adapt to the new routine of primary school.

The school [has] said over the years since [service provider] has been established that children who came from [service provider]... they can tell the difference compared to children straight from home because they've already got the social skills, they already know how to hold a pencil, to use the scissors, whereas, children coming straight from home they're behind so they have to catch them up. (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg).

Parents who participated in the research as users of early childhood education and care services also articulated the benefits of sending their child to early childhood education services. They felt that their readiness for school was apparent and there was acknowledgement that child learning was richer in a service than simply learning from parents in the home environment.

But I don't think [name] would be school ready, really, if she didn't go to pre-school. Like I do sit down with her and do stuff, but probably not as much as what she'd learn from here. (Parent, female, Toronto)

## 3.2 Development benefits

Indigenous children's participation in early childhood education services and home education programs has significant developmental benefits (see reference 18 on page 65)<sup>18</sup>, in addition to preparing children for compulsory schooling. Educational and social benefits were lauded as key by service providers and parents. According to service providers, these benefits helped to nurture a well-rounded child.

On top of that, we can sneak in some literacy and numeracy into that, into the sessions with the kids so they enter school with the ability to make friends, the ability to do some counting, to enjoy reading, to have the enjoyment of school. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

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<sup>18</sup> Harrison, L., Goldfeld, S., Metcalfe, E. and Moore, T. 2012 [Early Learning Programs that Promote Children's Developmental and Educational Outcomes: Resource Sheet No. 15](#), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Specific educational benefits were explained by both parents/carers and service providers. The main educational benefits to Indigenous children attending early childhood education services were reported as improved literacy and numeracy skills.

Because day care do some educational stuff, but kindy they do more, you know the teacher actually sits down and says one, two, three and teaches them how to write their name and stuff like that. (Parent, female, Karratha)

Many service providers aimed to incorporate aspects of literacy and numeracy in fun activities and through play-based learning, making the learning more palatable and replicable at home with parents.

If we read a particular book or whatever and having those conversations with family about the importance of all these things, or how easy it can be to be helping kids with numeracy and literacy. It just doesn't have to be sit down and add these things up it can be walking down the street. So I think it's the passing on of knowledge from the educators to the families that the kids benefit not only when they're here but when they're at home. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

As one Karratha service provider explained, by incorporating numeracy and literacy into fun activities, they hope to "create a culture of learning" (Service provider, female, Karratha).

In addition to specific educational and social benefits, parents of children who attended high-quality early childhood education services stated that their children were looking forward to attending compulsory schooling (Parents, female, Orange and Toronto). They had the skills to cope with time away from their parents, to listen to instruction, to adapt to their surroundings, and to continue to learn and grow as individuals (Service provider, female, Orange). Service providers also worked to build each child's confidence, which was seen as a key benefit of attendance at early childhood education services.

So it's getting to know other children. It's building resilience. It's building confidence. Those social skills that are so important. It's the emotional stuff working out how to help your own emotions and all that. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

For many, it was clear that children's experiences of education in their early lives would impact their thirst for learning and subsequently, their school careers and beyond.

At [service] I believe that we prepare our children for school so that by the time they get to school they've already developed a love for learning and hopefully that'll take them all the way through to university and then onto to bigger things into their future. (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

There was general agreement among respondents that by attending early childhood education services and programs, Indigenous children benefit from their development of communication and numeracy skills, social skills and behavioural skills. As evidenced by the case study respondents, the children gained in confidence and enjoyed the opportunity to make friends, play with toys and learn new things.

### 3.2.1 Closing the gap

The Australian Government has committed to ‘Closing the Gap’ between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians in an effort to address the issue of social inclusion (see reference 19 on page 66).<sup>19</sup> One of the most important ways in which equality for Indigenous Australians can be achieved is by ‘closing the gap’ in education. Access to high-quality early childhood education is imperative to closing this gap; notably, a lack of early education leads to challenges for Indigenous children in their later school careers (see reference 20 on page 66).<sup>20</sup> This was corroborated by service providers in Armadale, WA and Cherbourg, Qld. Tracking student progress in Cherbourg since leaving early childhood education has proven that Indigenous children in the community were more likely to complete year 12 level education if they had attended early childhood education programs or services.

It is preparing them for school, because in the past we’ve had kids that went to the school here and they really struggled to go on to high school, yeah. But I think they’re closing the gap in that now because our numbers have been up in Indigenous kids completing year 12. (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

The most recent ‘Closing the Gap’ report suggests that few targets are on track. In fact, one of the key targets for early childhood education was to “ensure access for all Indigenous four-year olds in remote communities to early childhood education” (see reference 21 on page 66).<sup>21</sup> Service providers and parents/carers alike recognised that it was vital that Indigenous children have access to high-quality early childhood education services and programs and were promoting participation within their own communities.

We just want to give our children the best start in life, the same as any other day care within Australia and beyond the wider community (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg).

### 3.3 Parental and carer benefits

One of the main reasons, aside from child development benefits, to enable children to participate in childhood education services was to enable parents and carers to participate in the labour market. Parents stressed that if they had the opportunity to work they could not do so without reliance on family members or services such as those examined in this research project.

I guess for me individually, to have my child here, I’m able to work. So without having the service then I wouldn’t be able to return to work. (Parent, male, Toronto)

Many of the early childhood education services visited as part of this research project were multifunctional centres. For example, one of the ECEC services in Gunnedah was a purpose-

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<sup>19</sup> Council of Australian Governments 2011 [National Indigenous Reform Agreement \(Closing the Gap\)](#).

<sup>20</sup> Karoly, L., Kilburn, M. and Cannon, S. 2005 [Proven Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions](#).

<sup>21</sup> Australian Government 2015 [Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report 2015](#).

built centre which catered for the community as a whole, not just as a children's service provider. At multifunctional centres, the benefits of early childhood education services and programs impacted parents and carers in many positive ways. Computer suites and dedicated training rooms meant parents and carers could attend workshops and courses and leave their children within centres. Parents spoke about the opportunities for training and re-training, in particular learning new skills for jobs or undertaking TAFE-level studies.

So even just by running a course, everyone is actually "You've got to do some more, you've got to do some more" but that hasn't happened yet, but hopefully they will do some more courses like that and I'm sure that people would be interested in anything that they do. Like they've done all sorts of other things, computer courses and little courses and things for the Aboriginal community, so that's really fantastic. (Parent, female, Toronto)

And things are changing because before, there was a lot of families that were not working but that's what this service was set up for. To support families out there to go and study and to find work and, so it's changed over the years now so we've got more working parents which is good. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

For others, the benefits of placing their child in early childhood education programs was to be able to socialise with their friends, to undertake household duties or to simply have some "me time".

Respondent: There's day I could do sleep in, or do shopping. And, yeah, I used to go shopping all the time for [name]. And...

Moderator: So it just frees up your time and...

Respondent: Yeah. And we'd have a girls day out, a sister day, sister time. (Parent, female, Karratha)

I also want parents to have some space. I want them to be able to, you know, when I say to a teenage mum who I haven't met before, "How about you drop in your baby here for three hours and you go down the street on your own?" they go "You mean I can leave him here?" like "Yeah-yeah, you can leave him with me just for three hours. You can go down and you can have a walk around and you can yarn to your friends and then you've got to come back. You've got to be back at 12:00 and you need to make sure you've bought food and you've bought water and yada-yada-yada." It's about if I can build the capacity of the parent, if I can give them three hours to themselves, that means they can come back and be a better parent and build up their own self-worth. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

The presence of a childhood education service within a community was particularly beneficial to parents and carers who did not have family in the community to help with childcare.

### 3.3.1 In-home early childhood education programs

Over the course of this research project, two in-home early childhood education programs were explored because of their direct relevance to the potential participation of Indigenous families in early learning. The first was the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY). Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, HIPPY has been rolled out to more than 75 communities across Australia with the intention of reaching a further 25 communities. Half of the locations identified by the Department will be focused on provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Parents and carers complete the program over a two-year period before children attend compulsory schooling. The program involves parents and carers delivering learning in their own home, in their own time, progressing through workbooks and activities at their own pace. Service providers felt the in-home delivery of this program was particularly significant for Indigenous families, who may have issues with trusting the care of their children to anyone other than family members (Service providers, female, Armadale and Orange).

Additionally, parents have the opportunity to learn the skills to be able to deliver the program at home by attending regular meetings with other HIPPY parents and Home Tutors. HIPPY parents are encouraged to become Home Tutors themselves, working in their community with their peers and gaining valuable skills and work experience to enter the labour market on completion of their two-year tenure.

But HIPPY does have the incentive of the parent being able to become a tutor, to get employment, so I guess that is an incentive. But we can only take two tutors every two years, like yeah. A tutor stays on for two years. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

Indigenous parents and carers were actively encouraged to become Home Tutors by HIPPY staff primarily because they often had the trust of other community members and an inherent understanding of home life situations for Indigenous families (Service providers, female, Armadale and Orange).

So whilst the program was aimed at child development and readiness for school, it was reported that Indigenous families involved in the program developed confidence and gained a sense of achievement through becoming embedded in their child's learning and development, and witnessing the tangible and intangible benefits to their child.

I think what I feel is, for me, families with children before they start school. It's about the whole unit because you're looking, especially looking at HIPPY, you know, they go along to the playgroup but a lot of the learning and the role modelling and the environment is set by the families. I think maybe families that become involved in HIPPYs they feel--they become strong because they realise how much of an influence they actually have. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

A similar second program included in this project was the Indigenous Parent Factor program (seen as a stepping stone for Indigenous families to move on to more structured programs as HIPPY), which is funded by Woodside, a petroleum company. Developed as an Indigenous

program based on the Successful Learning in the Early Years program, the “train-the-trainer” ideology sought to equip members from a community with parenting and teaching skills, which they then delivered to their peers in the wider community (Service provider, female, Armadale). The service provider explained how the program was delivered to regional and remote communities after a period of relationship-building to enter the community:

I prefer to go up there and I’ll run a training workshop and they get the basic upskilling of how to run it. But then, once they’re trained up, they actually run the community workshops back in their own community. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

The IPF program differs from HIPPY in that programs are often delivered in home language; for more remote communities, English was not their first language. This has been a major boon for the IPF program, which has seen increased take-up across Western Australia (Service provider, female, Armadale).

### **3.4 Conclusions**

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that there were important educational and social benefits for children who attend early childhood education; they gained basic skills in literacy and numeracy, learnt to share, concentrate, socialise with other children, and were school-ready. They also noted that there were benefits for them as parents and carers; they had free time each week to spend on themselves – whether returning to work, undertaking training courses, enjoying leisure activities or undertaking home duties. Communicating (and demonstrating) these benefits to Indigenous families who do not send their children to attend early childhood education services may help persuade families that early childhood education was a positive undertaking for everyone.

## 4. Barriers and facilitators to participating in ECEC services

Findings from the research have highlighted both explicit and implicit barriers to families participating in ECEC services including: cost, location, culture, communication and the service itself. Whilst the barriers and facilitators are presented in this findings section as separate factors, it is important to note that they are intrinsically interconnected and overlapping (Figure 4). For example, cost and finance cannot be considered in isolation; personal finance is undoubtedly linked to geography – Indigenous parents and carers living in remote communities may not have access to well-paid jobs nor have had access to education when they were younger. Similarly, if families have low-level numeracy and literacy skills, they may be discouraged from completing the paperwork to enable them to apply for financial aid (Service provider, female, Toronto). Each case study is summarised in Appendix 7.

### Summary of key points

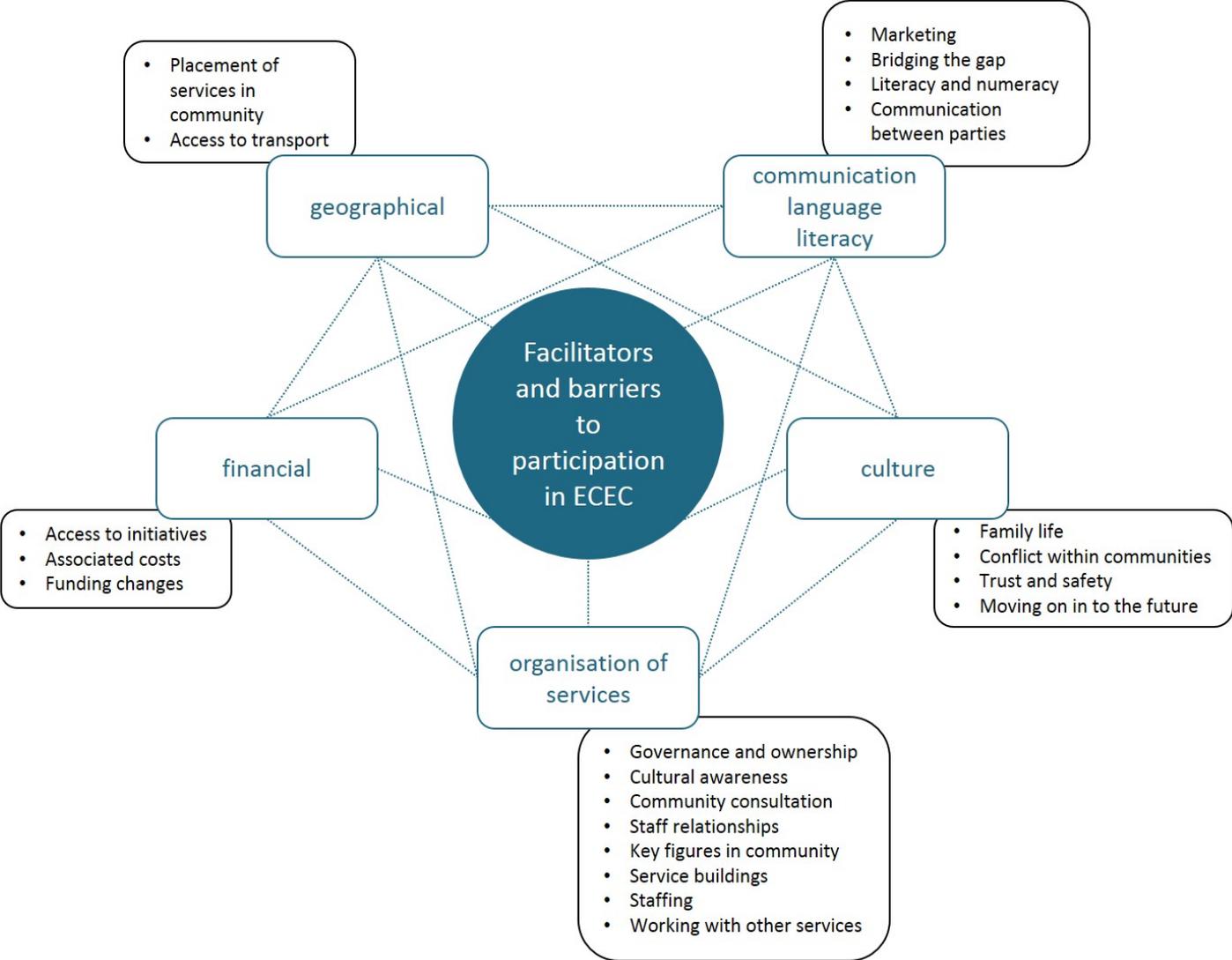
- Trust was a major barrier for Indigenous families considering accessing and participating in early childhood education services.
  - Distrust of government – reflection on historical experiences, amount of personal details required in funding application paperwork, dealing with Child Protection agencies and the issue of Child Protection Orders
  - Distrust of staff – if unknown to families, initial trust barrier

Indigenous families were more likely to trust a service if a relationship was developed with the service provider; they were welcomed into the service, staff communicated with parents regularly and were invited to participate in their child's learning. Trust was also reinforced by employing local Indigenous Australians as educators.

- Transport could be a barrier for many Indigenous families when they did not have access to private transport or were reliant on public transport which can be both costly and irregular. Many early childhood education services in regional and remote communities offered dedicated transport services, which reportedly facilitated participation.
- Cost was perceived as a barrier to those families not participating. Service providers explained that Indigenous families who did not access early childhood education services may not be aware of funding initiatives. Word-of-mouth had proved important for communicating the funding initiatives available to Indigenous families.
- Service providers were keen to communicate the benefits of early childhood education with non-participating Indigenous families. Successful engagement strategies included Open Days, and community events such as barbeques. Again, word-of-mouth proved significant in encouraging parents to allow their children to attend.

- Services that were successful in engaging Indigenous families tended to be run and/or delivered by local Indigenous Australians or were delivered by educators with greater cultural awareness.
- A centre or service that linked with other community services, such as health provisions, legal services and charities, acted as a one-stop-shop for families. The convenience of attending one site with access to community services aimed to 'close the gap' for Indigenous Australians.

**Figure 4** Presentation of the connections between factors that can facilitate or create barriers to the participation of Indigenous families in early childhood education



## 4.1 Geographical factors

Seven communities from across Australia were included in this research. The communities ranged from “very remote” to “major cities” (based on population data from the Accessibility Remoteness Index Australia 2011 (see reference 22 on page 66)).<sup>22</sup> It was anticipated that there may be accessibility differences across the communities based on the fact that some were in more remote areas than others.

The remoteness of many Indigenous communities could severely limit their access to services and programs. For example, Karratha and Ceduna are classed as “very remote” communities and although the immediate urbanised areas have multiple early childhood education services, families residing in outer suburbs or outlying smaller communities had to travel long distances in order for their children to attend services.

Respondent: I’m on a farm, so I come in from a farm. I’m sure there’s probably people that are coming in maybe from Denial Bay. Or not coming in from Denial Bay or different homelands...

Moderator: So how far away is Denial?

Respondent: It’s about 13km out, 12km out on a dirt track. So the outlying areas probably have real issues in coming in to childcare.  
(Parent, female, Ceduna)

Also acting as a deterrent, and a consequence of geography, was climate. Affecting those families with a lack of transport – possibly reliant on walking to the service or using public transport – weather could be a barrier to participating in early childhood education as this respondent acknowledged:

Especially if it's really hot, it can get really hot here, it's really hard to walk in the heat to take a child to kindergarten. (Service provider/parent, female, Armadale)

The provision of a dedicated transport service for these families could combat the problems associated with weather. However, in the first instance, service providers would need to gain the trust of parents and carers to let their children travel on the bus without them.

### 4.1.1 Access to transport

The geographical spread of many of the communities visited during this research was such that families needed transport in order to send their children to early childhood education services. The majority of respondents in this study named transport as a major barrier to Indigenous families attending programs.

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 *Australian Statistical Geography Standard: Volume 5-Remoteness Structure*, Canberra

Now the rapport has been kind of built up, it's been a better year running the program. We have more mums that are willing to try to figure out how to get a way there to the sessions, but transportation has probably been the biggest barrier that we've noticed. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

If parents and carers are unable to walk to the service from their home, they will inevitably require transport to facilitate their participation. Families and service providers discussed three transport options available to help access services:

- Public transport
- Own transport
- Dedicated pick-up and drop-off service

### Public transport

While all of the communities involved in this research had public transport services, the services could be limiting for a number of reasons: transport schedules may not synchronise with ECEC timings, routes may not allow for direct links between homes and centres and costs may be prohibitive. One respondent explained how, even in an urban area, these barriers could impact family participation:

If families need to use public transport the public transport system doesn't necessarily do a circle or take in, say for argument sake, where a family might live and where the school or a playgroup or a family centre is. That could be enough to deter that family from becoming involved in that program which, you know, is probably extremely beneficial but just the physical barrier of not getting there. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

### Own transport

For many families, there was a reliance on their own transport to allow their children to attend services. However, this was difficult if no-one in the immediate family had a driving licence or access to their own vehicle. One service provider explained that:

Low socioeconomic families do not have means by which to get their child from one side of town to the other. Because quite often they don't have access to cars or they don't own cars. (Service provider, female, Orange)

Transport disadvantage was often experienced by families with young children and Indigenous Australians (see reference 23 on page 66).<sup>23</sup> The ongoing costs of car ownership and maintenance could be prohibitive for many families, and affect the attendance of children:

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<sup>23</sup> Rosier, K. and McDonald, M. 2011 [The Relationship Between Transport and Disadvantage in Australia](#).

I've had a child that's been booked in since forever. I've had this child forever. As of March this year, they stopped coming. I'm making phone calls; "Is everything okay?" "Yeah, yeah, everything's fine." Then last time I made the phone call, because I haven't seen them since then, "We just don't have a car at the moment." I'm like, "Oh, okay." So that is a huge barrier. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

Similarly, there may be a reliance on other family members to ensure children attend services. For some respondents, carpooling was a way to enable their children to attend services when they did not have access to their own transport and/or public transport was not available:

A lot of the families work together like aunties and uncles and the nan and pops do drop-offs and pick-ups all the time. (Service provider/parent, female, Toronto)

### **Dedicated pick-up and drop-off service**

In some of the research communities, such as Gunnedah, Karratha and Ceduna, a dedicated bus service had been introduced to overcome the issue of lack of access to their own transport or reliance on poor public transport services (see Figure 5). From the research, it became clear that in remote communities Indigenous child attendance rates were directly linked to a reliance on dedicated transport services, as one service provider in Karratha explained: "We've noticed that the days that we can't provide transportation our attendance really drops" (Service provider, female, Karratha). Centres bid for monies to purchase their own transport or gain sponsorship from commercial organisations to fund buses, which meant the cost of dedicated transport did not need to be passed on to the families (Service provider, female, Gunnedah).

Moderator: So you think that the bus that picks the kids up in the morning, is that, do you think, one of the key things that allows such a high attendance of...?

Respondent: Yeah, that's one of the key...that's really important part of this program. It's really important. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

For parents, a dedicated pick-up and drop-off service can be a "selling point" for a service:

Moderator: So why did you chose the day care that she's in now, why did you chose that one above any other one?

Respondent: It's close to her school. And they do drop-offs and picks up from there. That's the reason why I really use it. (Parent, female, Karratha)

**Figure 5**      **Dedicated transport service**



Trust was a key issue amongst Indigenous families when it comes to early childhood education (see section 4.3). Service providers were aware that they need to build a strong, positive relationship with families before they entrust a service to collect and drop-off their children. Some respondents also remarked that it was positive to have drivers who were Indigenous members of staff at the childhood service providers. Some service providers indicated that rates of participation of Indigenous families had increased, in part due to the dedicated transport service but also, they felt, because Indigenous members of staff were picking-up and dropping-off their children (Service providers, field notes, Ceduna and Gunnedah).

However, one respondent explained that a dedicated transport service could sometimes mean that parents took less responsibility and became lackadaisical about their role in ensuring their children participate in early childhood education:

We just felt as though parents were using the bus run and not coming into the centre to talk to the educators and we want them to come in the centre. So that's why we made that decision in the morning of, "Well look, if you don't have transport, you don't have a car, we can pick you up. But if you do have a car, then it's really your responsibility to get your child here, because we need to talk to you." It's worked quite well. Parents understood that decision. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

Lack of access to transport can be extremely isolating for Indigenous families, as one service provider in Ceduna explained:

It's a really big issue here not having any public transport and families being quite isolated because they either don't have a car or don't have a licence, or don't have enough seats in a vehicle. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Efforts to limit isolation through the introduction of dedicated pick-up and drop-off services had seen participation rates increase (Service provider, field notes, Ceduna).

#### 4.1.2 Placement of services within a community

Evidently, placement of services was particularly important and appeared to influence access, and subsequently, could affect participation rates. According to service providers, the placement of a service may be a barrier, for example, if it was placed on the other side of town or in a location where there are few public transport links:

When the building was planning, there was lots of conversations about where it should be: should it be down in the main street, should it be up here connected with [service provider] and the Area School and I think there were positives to both ideas. As it is we're here, so we're making this work. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Equally, placement of a service within the heart of an Indigenous community could act as a facilitator. For example, the ability of families to walk their children to a service may make the difference between attending a service or not, as one service provider explained:

This is in a wonderful area, it's so close to a lot of the families here that attend our centre and a lot of them don't have vehicles and things, so that's obviously a real blessing for a lot of families, that they can actually get here and get home. (Service provider/parent, female, Toronto)

As mentioned in section 3.1, according to service providers and parents, early childhood education services helped support children in their readiness and transition from pre-school to primary school. To this end, many services including those in Orange, Toronto, Cherbourg, Karratha and Ceduna, were placed near to primary schools in a conscious effort to build relationships, familiarise children with surroundings and, ultimately, enable a smooth transition for both children and their families.

Respondent 1: And it's all, you know, this area it's all within the vicinity of the schooling, so it's in the right area, you know? From here to next, from the three year olds, the four year olds and then going to school. So it's, you know, that transition is all close to each other.

Respondent 2: Yeah, the spot, yeah, where this service is.

Respondent 1: So parents don't have to go one side of town to the other side of town to another side of town to collect kids from different areas. They just park over there and just do a little trek. And pick them up. (Parents, female, Ceduna)

In some instances, such as in Orange, early childhood education providers were located within school grounds to further enable this transition. For service providers, the relationships between staff can then be developed and key information passed between each other in order to ensure a smooth transition.

## 4.2 Financial

Arguably, affordability was one of the most important factors for Indigenous families, when considering sending their children to early childhood education services, and this was evident during the fieldwork conducted at different services in a variety of communities across Australia.

The following subsections of the report provide an examination of financial considerations for parents and carers, as well as from the perspective of service providers.

### 4.2.1 Access to initiatives and costs to families

Access to early childhood education services was often dictated by cost; low income families could receive financial support, through a variety of initiatives, to enable them to access services in their area.

Parents and carers explained that they were often unaware of the help they could receive towards early childhood education payments – when asked about the different funding options, it was evident that there was confusion between different payment schemes, making reference to, for example, “some tax thing” (Parent, female, Gunnedah). In some cases, parents said that they were referred to Centrelink for advice, but did not want to visit the offices as they deemed it to be a waste of time and do not like visiting Centrelink offices:

- Moderator: So the major barrier with you is with him then is not knowing what Centrelink offered, is that right?
- Respondent: Yeah. I still don't know anything.
- Moderator: You still don't know. And he's...
- Respondent: Well, I don't. And I don't want to go down there and talk to them and stuff. Yeah.
- Moderator: And why not?
- Respondent: I just think it's a waste of my time. I'd rather they send me an email or, yeah. (Parent, female, Karratha)

For families who have more than one child aged between three and five, the cost to send their children to early childhood education services, whilst supported to a certain extent by funding initiatives, could quickly become prohibitive (Parent, female, Toronto).

- Moderator: How about finance? Is that a barrier, do you think, for..?
- Respondent: Of course. Yeah. For families that have got more than one or two children coming, of course it is.
- Moderator: I guess when it's non-compulsory...
- Respondent: Yeah.
- Moderator: Like you say, you're juggling three other children. It's kind of like not...

Respondent: Yes. Especially being... like Aboriginal families are pretty big. I know of a family; they've got... six kids. So how are you going to send them? (Service provider, female, Toronto)

Costs could also accrue when the child begins to attend services more regularly. According to service providers, for low-income families, the cost may be deemed prohibitive and could lead to families sending their child less often.

Moderator: ...You were saying that the main barrier for you, thinking of the families, is cost?

Respondent: Yeah.

Moderator: But if it's more than one day that they attend, it's an escalation of costs.

Respondent: It adds up and then they get behind and it just gets chaotic and then they're embarrassed and then they pull their kids out. And because it's Indigenous too, Aboriginal preschool, a lot of Aboriginal people think it should be free, it should be a right due to, you know, colonisation that they should get free education and they say "If you're going to close the gap, why isn't it free?"

Moderator: Which, I guess, is hard for you to justify to them?

Respondent: Like you say, isn't it. Because it's, like, \$78 a day even though they get the CCR and that, it goes down but it still adds all up. (Service provider, female, Gunnedah)

Parents felt that early childhood education services were promoted as a way to give children an educational head-start and prepare them for school (Parent, female, Karratha). Other parents also spoke of the importance of freeing up their time in order to return to work (Parent, female, Karratha). However, many parents felt they were penalised for returning to work as they were reportedly required to pay higher service rates (CCB, one of the main funding initiatives, was based on income, and was means-tested). One parent explained:

Moderator: What do you think are the barriers to bringing your child to a pre-school? Are there..?

Respondent: I think the only... Like, personally, is the amount it costs. The amount that it costs for a working family opposed to the amount that it costs for someone that's on Centrelink benefits.

Moderator: So, it doesn't give you any - it's very difficult and it doesn't give you the impetus to work because...?

Respondent: Yeah. Because if I don't work it's cheaper for the kids to come to day care; if I do work, it's dearer. I don't see the sense in that. (Parent, female, Gunnedah)

Discussions with parents and providers indicated that paperwork associated with accessing funding could be a cause for concern for many Indigenous families. There were two main issues affecting whether paperwork was completed:

- attitudes towards Government and the level of information needed
- literacy of families

This will be explored further in sections 4.3.1 and 4.4.4 of this report respectively.

Initiatives such as CCB and BBF were essential in reducing the costs of education and care for low income families; according to respondents, these funding initiatives needed to be communicated to Indigenous parents and carers more effectively, especially to those who did not access any early childhood education services (Service providers, female, Armadale and Ceduna).

#### **4.2.2 Associated costs of early childhood education and care**

While the cost of early childhood education services varied depending on the provider and a family's entitlement to funding, there were other costs highlighted by respondents which could add to a family's ability to be able to send their child to a service.

##### **Clothing**

Providers spoke of the shame they had observed among parents associated with not being able to send their child to pre-school in clean clothes:

Respondent: I don't know. There probably really is, but all I can think of is the transport, the lunches, the food type thing, clothing, stuff like that.

Moderator: That's really important too, clothing?

Respondent: Clothing's a big thing. Yeah, yeah.

Moderator: As in don't have the right stuff to send them to school in or..?

Respondent: Or just haven't been able to afford to wash--had no washing powder this week. Things like that. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

In order to address this, and reduce the risk of parents not sending their children to preschool because of these issues, some services had laundry spaces within the centres (Figure 6), which enabled families to come to the centre to wash their clothing free-of-charge (Service provider, field notes, Ceduna).

**Figure 6 Laundry facilities for parents at a centre in Ceduna**



## Food

Many of the service providers visited as part of this research provided food for children who attend their facility. Parents and service providers felt that providing children with nutritious food throughout the day enabled the children to concentrate, eat a healthy meal at least once a day and helped parents avoid feeling shame when they cannot provide adequate food.

These respondents elaborated:

You don't have food for your kids, send them along and we'll feed them, and that's going to be a part of the role of the other two new workers as well. We don't want your kids to miss out if you've got no food at home. Send them, we'll feed them and that's a common thing too with parents. A lot of kids miss out because they've got no food, and snacks are really expensive and stuff in Ceduna.

(Service provider, female, Ceduna)

There was also discussion around the 'shame' of families not being able to afford to pack the 'right' kinds of food for their child's packed lunch, and that this could also lead to families' reluctance to attend early learning provision (or to discontinue attendance) (Service providers/parents, field notes, Orange). Service providers talked about the costs associated with fresh food products; parents perceived it to be more expensive to provide their children with fresh nutritious meals as opposed to the alternative of fast food snacks and fast-food restaurant meals. Some service providers have aimed to educate parents by running food workshops whilst children attended childcare (Service providers, female, Ceduna and Armadale).

Some services do not provide food, but believed this was positive as it prepared families for the routine at primary school, where meals may not be provided. It transferred the responsibility back to parents, as this service provider explained:

We used to do lunch and stuff, you know, we had a lunch program happening here. But we felt that ... we need to get parents ready for school. So that they are responsible for their child's lunch and that. That's why we changed it. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Service providers talked about their steps to educate families about the importance of healthy food and drink options, whilst ensuring where possible that this did not discourage participation. Some examples of how this was done included via newsletters that detailed affordable, nutritious recipes and cookery workshops that allowed parents to take their cooking home with them, and general communication with parents. In turn, providing parents with the skills and knowledge to prepare healthy meals and pack appropriate food for their children when attending early childhood education services was advantageous for family school readiness.

Okay, so our preschool system have--they bring packed lunches. Obviously have to bring healthy food. So they bring a piece of fruit to share for morning tea which goes into a basket, I guess and it's cut up into fruit platters to share. We--on enrolment we do give families, I guess, a brochure that has ideas of what to pack in your lunch box, recipes, all of those kind of things and reassure them, if they do pack something that isn't healthy, it will just get packed up and be sent home and so they know. Sometimes it's mainly families that don't realise that sugar content or don't realise that that isn't healthy for the child. (Service provider/parent, female, Toronto)

The research findings suggested that there are both advantages and disadvantages to services offering food; some respondents felt that it reduced the pressure on parents to provide their children with a packed lunch, while others felt that the onus should be on parents to provide food, in preparation for school, and therefore provided support in the form of cookery workshops, and nutritional information and ideas in newsletters instead.

#### **4.2.3 Funding changes for service providers**

According to providers, financial support for services could also act as a significant barrier to accessing services, particularly where funding was short-term, or there were uncertainties for future funding or program provision. Many service provider respondents explained that the changes in government policies and uncertainties surrounding funding initiatives were a cause for concern. As many Indigenous-focused services sought to employ local, Indigenous peoples, a change in funding could lead to fewer parents sending their children to services, which in turn, will lead to a reduction of staff employed to supervise and educate the children.

According to some respondents, fundamental changes to the BBF Programme could be implemented in 2016; a 2014 program review report, made several recommendations which could adversely affect those families BBF was set up to help (Service provider, field notes, Cherbourg).

The original rationale for the introduction of the BBF program within disadvantaged communities was that it would considerably reduce the costs of early childhood education to families (see reference 24 on page 66).<sup>24</sup> The potential cessation of the BBF Programme and the transition of these services to the new child care system was a major cause for concern for the respondents, who considered that the closure of the Programme would put pressure on services to either increase their costs across the board or to take in higher fee-paying

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<sup>24</sup> SNAICC 2015 [Budget Based Funded Services](#).

families to cover their costs (see reference 25 and 26 on page 66).<sup>25 26</sup> Providers perceived that the impact on lower socio-economic families, including many Indigenous families in rural or remote communities, could be high (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). Service providers who participated in this research project expressed their concerns at the changes in funding:

Sometimes it [participating in early learning] may be financial difficulty and I think that when we're talking about the CCB, BBF, the price rise, Cherbourg is a little community, there's not much jobs within our community and that changeover is just going to hit us too with children dropping out, parents just can't afford to keep their children in day care. At the moment, BBF, we have a lot of children coming at the moment and I think it was our biggest worry is that because we're a small community with no work for parents, parents will just take their children out because they can't afford the centre and I think it was a big concern for us hey. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

The concern for services was that, with a change in funding initiatives, services would become underutilised as families pull their children due to lack of financial support (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). Responsibility for children would be placed with family members or the parents themselves and they would potentially miss out on preparation for primary school, and gaining key educational and social skills.

Few may go on there but the rest would be just left up to older siblings at home, grandparents or family members. And I think that's what's going to happen; it's going to go back to children looking after children. (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

Providers were concerned that the potential cessation of the Programme could force services to find additional funding in order to avoid passing rising costs on to parents and carers (Service provider, field notes, Toronto). Services would have had the added pressure of competing against each other and with services across Australia, as one respondent explained:

Moderator: Because I guess there's no way that you could be self-sufficient, you can't rely on funding from the board or local government? I don't know if they fund this?

Respondent 1: No, I don't know we'd have to really... we can apply for subsidised funding but that's with the rest of Australia.

Respondent 2: And you can imagine that kind of admin it's not going to be quick, so there's going to be a gap somewhere.

Moderator 2: And even preparation for the tenders, I mean the educators are not being...

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<sup>25</sup> Note that an extension to the BBF program to 2018 was announced after this research was completed.

<sup>26</sup> SNAICC 2014 [Proposed Changes to Budget Based Funding Program will have Negative Impact on our Children and Families.](#)

Respondent 1: Not fund raisers.

Respondent 2: For tenders and applications. (Service providers/parents, female, Cherbourg)

Some service providers voiced their concerns that the removal of the BBF Programme would require them to become self-sustaining; however, they explained that they were reliant on the income generated through government subsidies (BBF, CCB, etc.) to cover maintenance, amenity and staffing costs (Service providers, female, Armadale and Cherbourg). Services were reluctant to pass on costs to parents and carers - one provider in Armadale explained how services may adapt their programmes to ensure the lowest cost to Indigenous families (Service provider, female, Armadale). Equally, there were concerns that services would struggle to raise additional funds to cover their costs if government subsidies were removed. Service providers expressed their fear that this could lead to the closure of many centres:

Moderator: And you said it will have the same impact on other communities?

Respondent: Exactly. When we had a directors' forum in Brisbane, from all other MACS centres, some of the centres actually got up and said, "We might as well just close our doors now." Because they actually can't see their centre staying open once budget based [BBF] has gone. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Another service provider/parent explained that the service was placed in the community because of a lack of appropriate Indigenous services in the area:

If we don't get re-funded I don't think we'll survive. I really don't. I don't know how we can. Yeah... It is because especially when like we're a new service. These services were built for a reason. It wasn't like let's just do this. (Parent/carer, female, Toronto)

Changes to funding were a concern for service providers and parents, the consequences of which would potentially have two main negative impacts; the parents' ability to return to work and 'school readiness' of children and families (see reference 27 on page 66).<sup>27</sup>

## 4.3 Culture

Evidence from the case studies highlights the relative importance of understanding the cultural aspects of barriers and facilitators to Indigenous Australians accessing early childhood education and care services. From the research undertaken in these communities, which included both regional and remote sites as well as more urban locations, there were key factors relating to trust and safe environments, family life, future aspirations and tensions between different communities.

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<sup>27</sup> Note the Australian Government Department of Education and Training announced in May 2016 that the BBF Programme would remain until 2018 and a new *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package would then commence. Hence it is possible that respondents would feel less concerned about service closures, return to work ability and school readiness of children.

### 4.3.1 Trust and safe environments

Emerging from discussions with Indigenous parents, a major facilitator for parents or carers considering sending their child to an early childhood education service was whether they could trust staff (Parents, female, Karratha and Orange). A lack of trust stems, in many cases, from personal experience:

The trust is definitely a factor when we're talking about how the parents feel and if they've had poor experiences themselves at school. Some of their trust issues are going to come back to the surface when they're faced with having to relinquish their child into the care of the school environment. (Service provider/parents, female, Armadale).

Speaking with service providers, there appeared to be a general distrust of the government among some Indigenous families, including about the reasons behind needing detailed information on finance applications. This distrust, according to service providers, stemmed from the treatment of First Nation Peoples since the European colonisation of Australia, and more recently, the Stolen Generation era:

It's going back to, "Oh we don't want the government knowing our business", "Why do we have to answer that question?" "Where do we live?" "Who do we live with?" And all that. It's in the back of their mind, the government is behind that. (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

Service providers explained that overcoming the barrier of distrust involves heading out into the community and taking the time to build relationships with parents and carers. A service provider in Gunnedah explained:

We must work closely with all those families. The only way to get them through the gate is go out there and have a chat to them. Talk to them about what you can do. Talk to them about what you can't do. Talk to them about what they could achieve and talk to them about how they can achieve. (Service provider, female, Gunnedah)

Building trust can also involve inviting families to services to investigate the programs and groups for themselves as well as communicating the educational and social benefits of services to their children. For example, in Gunnedah, one service provider championed their centre through the invitation of the whole community to centre events:

Respondent: We try to celebrate a day on a calendar and invite the parents and other community members to come along. So we provide them with the information then as to what we're doing and how we're doing it.

Moderator: That's great. So getting the whole community together and then be able to discuss it?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely. Once we get them in--a barbeque works every time. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

Another service provider in Cherbourg explained the hands-on approach that was successful in encouraging families to take up service provision in their community:

Me and the previous director we were practically door knocking and we had to take the phones, “You need to register your child for OOSH.” So we spent most of the days, a couple of weeks out in the community getting parents to ring up, register their child for vacation care, OOSH program. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Service providers shared further thoughts on distrust and how this may also stem from Indigenous families not having had any, or negative, experiences of childhood education services; for those with no direct personal experience of childhood education, it could seem daunting for their own children to participate, but by building trust, both the children and their family can benefit:

I know a lot of Aboriginal families find it a bit overwhelming at first. They usually just put their kid straight into primary school so they haven’t had any experience within preschools and childcare centres. I think it does help them benefit a lot from coming to our centre as well. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

Parents themselves, feeling daunted and unfamiliar with a service, may not feel confident enough to take their children to an early childhood education service, as one Karratha-based provider explained. This could be perceived as a barrier to attendance:

I think it’s mostly confidence, confidence level – like, having the confidence to go to a playgroup. There always seems to be a bit of apprehension if I have someone new come in. So that tends to be a challenge in terms of [staff] recruitment. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

Once families had taken the first step and enrolled their children into a service or program, it was essential that service providers continued to build relationships with the families (Service provider, female, Toronto). One respondent explained how some families could be distant to begin with, dropping their children off and avoiding conversing with staff, but with gradual encouragement and communication from service providers, they could become more receptive to staff and involved in their child’s education and care:

I think that’s the most important thing is to build your relationship with the parents because some parents usually come off as not wanting to talk to you because you don’t give them the effort but I feel if you get in there and you just talk to them they generally open up to you and you build that trust. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

By employing local Indigenous members of staff, it was evident that families already had some trust in the service. For example, in Gunnedah 80% of staff employed at the centre were Indigenous and reside in the community. This, as the service provider explained, played a role in Indigenous families entrusting their children to their care.

It’s about having Aboriginal staff over there. Because we have 80% Aboriginal staff in the early learning and care. A lot of us identify in the community. They

know that we're Aboriginal. We're part of their community, so they trust us. So they're going to bring their children here. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

Providers indicated that this was further precipitated if family members were employed by the service. The involvement of family members in a service was a recurring theme across the research and a facilitator to families trusting a service and participating in early childhood education provision:

If you employ somebody and they've got this group, well their group of friends are going to kind of come and their family's going to come, so I think that happens for any staff. (Service provider, female Ceduna)

Also paramount to building trust was the creation of a safe environment for children. One service provider in Cherbourg talked about the need for parents to see that a service paid attention to their child, where they would receive high-quality care:

It's got to be a safe place, and the parents have to see that it's a safe place and our educators are taking care of their little precious angels. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Many service providers are audited against the NQF, which regards the health and safety of a child as one of seven key quality areas. Service providers strove to exceed these anticipated standards as a matter of course (Service provider, male, Gunnedah). This, they felt, gave parents and carers additional peace of mind when leaving their children in the hands of educators.

### 4.3.2 Family life

Coupled with the barriers of trust and safety was the dynamic of Indigenous Australian's family life. Within this culture, there was an inherent reliance on close and extended family members to look after each other's children. Service providers reported how some families' lives were complicated by family life:

They may or may not be in domestic violence. They may or may not be dealing with legal issues. They may or may not be dealing with issues of poverty, just the issues that poverty brings. They may or may not be dealing with education issues, their children don't do well at school and they're constantly at the school with their children. So they may have all these other complexities that they're dealing with in their lives and then suddenly they've got to deal with another service provider such as an early childhood providers and the things that go with that. (Service provider, female, Orange)

Additionally, it was reported that some families feared being judged because they were sending their children to preschool. For example, one mother in Karratha explained that sending your child to early childhood education services was not 'the norm' in a culture where historically children remained at home with parents and other family members:

They feel that their kids need to be with them all the time. Like, everyone, when I go to the supermarket, "Where's [name]?" "Oh, she's at day care." And I feel

bad saying that because it's a completely different way of upbringing. (Parent, female, Karratha)

Barriers to attendance could also be to do with sufficient organisation to leave the house on time for pick-up or dropping off, "it's really hard to get organised and take the children to kindergarten" (Service provider, female, Armadale).

### 4.3.3 Moving on into the future

History plays a part in Indigenous families not accessing early childhood education services; this includes both personal experiences and generational experiences:

I think, our people can't get past what happened in the past. Their mindset is always there. And I always say, "The only way you're going to do that, move on, move on." If you're living in the past, if you're not going to move on, how are you going to get on in life? (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

Many service provider respondents acknowledged that the best way for Indigenous Australians to move forward was by taking every educational opportunity available to them. One service provider in Orange stated:

We all know that the earlier the access to education the better children stand in school. Aboriginal families, believe it or not, want the best for their children they just may not know how to access it and they may not have the means by which to access it. (Service provider, female, Orange)

Indigenous service providers highlighted the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and the need to "close the gap" (Service providers, female, Ceduna, Cherbourg, Gunnedah and Orange). The perception was that the best way to close this gap was through education with early childhood education having the potential to empower Indigenous Australians, as one worker in Cherbourg explained:

It will help our future generation[s] with their education, because education can help our people, help our mob to close that gap for life, a longer life expectancy. Yes, so education is the key. Not for only life expectancy, but also for – what would you call it...? – the first Australians, our mob, that will give us, our children, power, power in the political sense but in the right, not in political, political but in a sense of belonging, teaching our Indigenous children that we belong in our community, we belong in Murgon, we belong in Brisbane, wherever they live... we've got a place, and we do own our place in Australian society. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Although history had a role to play in creating a barrier to early childhood education participation, some service providers and parents felt that Indigenous Australians, whilst acknowledging this history, had not always been able to take the opportunities for education to "close the gap".

... I'm going to admit. I think parents have got to start taking a bit more responsibility too... I know our people cry about how the government's treated

out ancestors in the old days, took their money, controlled their money, and now they're coming up with this stolen wages and you've got to go through all this paperwork to get any sort of money back, where it was all right for the government to take the money off our old people. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Service providers explained how dealings with governments, distrust, and the history around the Stolen Generations was still prominent in the minds of many families. This, according to some, has had a negative effect on parents and their take up of services; ultimately, it had been a barrier to participation for some families but they were working in the community to change mindsets and make families feel more comfortable with early childhood education services.

I think it is a lot to do with shame factor and not feeling comfortable... We work quite hard at ensuring that, although we're mandated reporters and Child Protection is obviously a huge priority for [our] organisation, that we are here to keep families together and to give people skills for that. But there still is, from my perspective, from what I've noticed and what people have expressed, for a lot of Aboriginal families that kind of Stolen Generations, and Child Protection, is still a very big fear that someone is going to notice something and the kids are going to be taken away. So any place where they might be judged is scary, yeah. So, and when there are child protection concerns we do lots of kind of work around trying to support the family. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

This fear surrounding the removal of children was perceived, by other service providers and parents, to be a barrier to participation (raised in at least two other case studies).

Service providers discussed working hard within their communities to persuade families of the benefits to children in attending early childhood education and care services (through barbeques, open days and door-knocking within the community – see section 4.4.1). One service provider in Gunnedah explained that their Indigenous community was embracing the opportunities for early childhood education due to a change in mindset towards early childhood education:

You're talking about a generation of young mums and dads now that are... the children of parents that have come out of the Stolen Generations era. That has that mental and adverse effect right through the family. So it's a generational thing that we're trying to change... I think the new wave of thinking is that people are now understanding that "I need to give my child the best start in life. These are the little things I can do to achieve that." So people are embracing early childhood at this stage. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

As well as negative personal experiences and impactful generational histories, government involvement could be perceived as a major barrier to Indigenous Australians accessing early childhood education and care (Service provider, female, Armadale), whereby an overload of administrative paperwork was viewed as an invasion of privacy for some Indigenous families:

But the institutions, such as family and community services and other--they're not changing at all. They continue and continue and continue and continue to hide behind the different lots of legislation that provide them with a facility to remove a child. Rather than find a solution--rather than being part of the solution, they're a part of the problem. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

#### 4.3.4 Conflict within communities

Some respondents suggested that tribal tensions may have a role to play in the attendance of children at early childhood education and care services in more remote and regional communities (mentioned in Cherbourg, Ceduna, Karratha and Orange). Whilst staff made every attempt to ensure neutrality and a safe environment, the external factor of conflict within the community was said to make attending services difficult (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). One respondent in Ceduna explained that division within the community can be mirrored within services:

Although there [are] kind of conflicts within the [X] and [Y] community... there [are] quite a lot of divides within Ceduna. And some are very personal, you know, just families not getting along, and, "I don't want to go if that family goes," you know...? And that might change, you know, it might just be short term, or might be more. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Staff members of all services endeavoured to placate the tensions through the children by encouraging attendance and, as one respondent phrased it, by enforcing that "conflict is to be left outside the gate" (Service provider, female, Cherbourg).

Respondent 3: And again it comes back to gaining that trust, you know, that we are here to look after their children to the best of our ability, as though they're are own children.

Respondent 2: That helps pacify what's going on out there as well.

Moderator: Yeah it has a knock on affect to parents in the community, that's great.

Respondent 2: But there's not much of it but, not much conflict. (Service providers/parents, female, Cherbourg)

### 4.4 Communication, language and literacy

In this section, communication, language and literacy will be explored as facilitators and barriers to Indigenous families' participation in early childhood education and care services. In particular, marketing for early childhood education services, bridging the gap between parents and services, communication between families and services and literacy and numeracy will be explored in-depth.

#### 4.4.1 Marketing for early childhood education services

An emergent theme from the research related to barriers to Indigenous families attending early childhood education services was the lack of awareness of the service within the community. According to service providers, effective marketing to Indigenous parents and carers was essential to ensure families were aware of the services in their area; this was not necessarily through paper or electronic formats such as flyers or Facebook pages, but through word-of-mouth or liaison officers within the community. Unanimously, the service providers interviewed from all communities in this study agreed that the best way to market their services within the community was through positive word-of-mouth:

They'll say, "We've never even thought about bringing our kids here... just our friends have taken their kids to [service name] and they're happy with that, so we just put our kids in there." So it's just that word-of-mouth in the community. If a person's happy with an organisation, then that is a big decision making thing for other parents as well. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

Word-of-mouth recommendations from the Indigenous community were said to be persuasive to non-participating parents, but equally, could be a deterrent if a family has a negative experience with a service.

I think it's very powerful because if we do something wrong here and one family goes away feeling they're not doing the right thing then that goes around the community and then children drop out. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Word-of-mouth was most appropriate when parents and carers in the community had low-level literacy skills. One respondent in Karratha explained:

Honestly most of our effective recruitment is word-of-mouth and I've not done the research to know if that's because there's a literacy barrier, but it could be. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

Some services also looked to partner agencies to recommend their services to community members. For example, in Ceduna the one service worked closely with other agencies to make parents and carers aware of their presence in the community:

We are really good at also trying to get referrals from other agencies, so we promote what we're doing quite a lot and try and get, even if we get a referral... (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Promoting the service within the community, through open days and by hosting events, could help make families aware of the service and the provision they offer. One service provider in Gunnedah explained that hosting open days and welcoming all members of the community had made the service more visible within their community:

We have our family fun days. We had our autumn fair here this year. We would have had over 2,000 people come through and visit the centre on that day. We had stalls. We had other schools involved... So we try to celebrate a day on a calendar and invite the parents and other community members to come along.

So we provide them with the information then as to what we're doing and how we're doing it. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

#### 4.4.2 Bridging the gap between services and parents

Since the 1970s, Aboriginal Education Officers (or workers with similar roles and titles) have been employed in schools to bridge the gap between schools and Indigenous families (see reference 28 on page 66).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in many Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Aboriginal Children and Family Centres (ACFCs), services were developing roles that specifically focus on community liaison (Service provider, field notes, Orange, Gunnedah, and Toronto). The rationale behind the creation of these roles was the need to build relationships and open lines of communication with Indigenous parents and carers who do not utilise services, for a number of reasons (see section 4.3.1). In smaller services, proactive members of staff often approached families within the community to make parents and carers aware of their presence in the community and to explain the benefits for their child of attending early childhood education services. In Ceduna, they take a pro-active approach to recruitment, as the service provider explained:

As soon as they come to our attention we try and do a home visit, let them know what we do, yeah, the choice that they come. We'll come and bug them for a bit, then we'll come up with another strategy if that doesn't work, (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

It was hoped that ongoing dialogues would eventually lead to their participation in early childhood education services. Service providers and parents voiced their opinion that it was helpful if the role was undertaken by a member of the community, especially by an Indigenous Australian, because of their existing links with community and their cultural awareness:

We've got an amazing community development coordinator who has lovely connections, we've also got an Aboriginal [worker]... She's an amazing young kid that's got great connections with our teenage mums. I [have] spent two terms every Wednesday, driving around the streets now, we've been driving to homes with [name] from [organisation name] who's amazing and yesterday for the first time we had four teenage mums on our mini bus group. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

The community liaison role could easily link families with a range of services in the local area to ensure a child's overall wellbeing was being catered for. Additionally, community liaison officers could take the time to explain the benefits of attendance at early childhood education services but also walk families through paperwork and entitlements to illustrate affordability:

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<sup>28</sup> Gower, G., Partington, G., Byrne, M., Galloway, A., Weisssofner, N., Ferguson, N. and Kirov, E. 2011 [Review of the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer Program](#)

Having a community liaison... Having someone who understands and is willing to go out into the communities and speak to families... Why not send someone out there to explain, "This is what you could benefit from. You're eligible for this, this and this. You're wanting to study; you can go back to study. These are all the things that you want to do for yourself; here's a way to put your child in childcare." (Service provider, female, Karratha)

#### 4.4.3 Communication between parents/carers and service providers

Key to Indigenous families participating in early childhood education services in their community was communication between them and their service providers (Service providers, female, Armadale and Cherbourg). Communication can be made in a number of ways:

- Through newsletters/portfolios to parents and carers, generally sent home with children
- Via social media, for example, using Facebook to post pictures of the children's activities
- Through telephone conversations
- Through information stations at the service (Figure 7)
- Via face-to-face conversations when parents and carers drop-off or pick-up their children, or when staff members collect children from their home in designated transport

Service providers, involved in this research, highlighted that communication between parents/carers and their staff was extremely important to the participation of Indigenous children in early childhood education services. Building a rapport with parents, ensuring they were welcomed when they entered the centre, knowing their first name and getting to know them, and their families, were evidently important facets of developing relationships and fostering positive communication. Communication methods had been honed to ensure effective communication; in Gunnedah, for example, one service provider explained that staff soon realised that parental literacy levels were low and how this led to them simplifying their newsletters:

So, getting information out to the families; there's no use sending a newsletter that's four or five pages long every term or so because they're not going to be able to sit there and read it. And I don't know if you know but when you have Aboriginal families and if they're not able to understand, then they feel as though they're not a good parent because they don't understand. So, we didn't want to create that barrier... We worked really hard, we changed our whole structure of our portfolios and how we communicate with families. So, we've gone to fortnightly newsletters, not a lot of information, just little bits. Enough for the parents to read and get all the information out to them. (Service provider, female, Gunnedah)

**Figure 7**      **Communication station for parents in service provider foyer, Orange**



Communication between service providers and parents was vital. It allowed for a flow of information between the two parties, which ultimately benefited the child. For example, a service provider described noticing that a child was less engaged than usual. By then discussing this with the parent/carer, the service provider learnt about issues at home impacting behaviour and attendance:

Some days they might be telling full on what's going on at home with one of the teenagers, or something like that, and so it's not just about the kids that are here. It might be about stuff that's going on for mum or dad. It might be someone has got a mental health illness, lots of things. Or it might be about a health need for the child that we can see like developmental needs and things like that that we need sort of further assessments so that we know we can support the child better and they're going to need that sort of documentation later on. They're hard conversations so it's really important to sort of really have that core relationship to be able to address some of those (Service provider, female, Toronto)

Providers indicated that these types of discussions between members of staff and parents/carers helped build strong, trustworthy relationships.

Whilst good communication can be a facilitator to Indigenous families participating in early childhood education, the opposite can be said for poor communication. Poor communication could lead to a family distrusting a service, or withdrawing their child from the service altogether, as one mum in Toronto explained:

Yeah, there was no communication. I just--I really felt horrible when I had to leave my child. I just felt there was--she was just another child in the count and she was just thrown in to make numbers and to make money. (Parent, female, Toronto)

#### 4.4.4 Literacy and numeracy challenges

At the time of this research, it was reported that literacy and numeracy levels were improving amongst Indigenous Australians, however some parents and carers of young Indigenous children still struggled with basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills (see reference 29 on page 66).<sup>29</sup> As a result of low-level literacy and numeracy skills and English not being the first language, initial enrolment and funding paperwork could be challenging for some adults to complete (Service provider, field notes, Orange). According to service providers, an inability to complete paperwork could lead to feelings of shame and in certain instances, had led to parents and carers giving up on enrolling their child (Service provider, field notes, Armadale). In these scenarios, the outcome was that the child did not attend an early childhood education service.

I think because a lot of it is numeracy and literacy, it's a problem with our people. I know TAFE has been running some classes, but once our people see paperwork, "Oh, we don't want to fill that out" and some of them won't even admit they can't read or write... I know a lot of our people won't admit that reading and writing... because they feel ashamed... "We don't want to fill that", "Oh, why?" "I just don't want to". They won't. They said, "I can't read it." (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

Parents and carers were encouraged to improve their literacy and numeracy levels through courses run by local organisations and institutions, such as TAFE (Service provider, female, Armadale; Service provider, male, Gunnedah). However, many service providers found themselves helping families to complete lengthy applications. The service providers were pro-active in their encouragement of families to complete forms in order to help them gain their entitlements for funding towards early childhood education services. For example, in Karratha one service provider sat down with families and went through the application forms step-by-step.

If some families have trouble, we'll sit with them and do it; we'll ask them the questions and we'll write it down. And then if they don't have access to computers or anything, we'll scan it to head office and we'll take on more of that role. So, we help them every step of the way. But if there are some families that are capable of doing it, then we'll just tell them and they'll be like "Yeah, that's fine." For others, yeah, we're more than willing to sit with them and write all the answers and help them every step of the way. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

Communication, literacy and numeracy had the potential to present barriers to Indigenous families participating in early childhood education services. Services needed to work in their community to break down communication barriers, through word-of-mouth communication and open days to promote their provision. Equally, service providers indicated that they needed to be pro-active in their support of Indigenous families when completing paperwork associated with enrolment or funding applications.

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<sup>29</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008 [Australia's Health 2008](#).

## 4.5 Organisation of (and access to) services

This section provides an exploration of the organisation of services, and Indigenous Australians' access to those services. The section covers the emergent factors such as the involvement of key figures in the community, consultation with community, governance and ownership, working with other services, staffing in services, staff relationships with parents and children, cultural awareness, and the service buildings themselves.

### 4.5.1 Key individuals in the community

In each community of this study, there was a key figure (or figures) in the community who was often responsible for championing and driving the early childhood education cause. These individuals were often Indigenous members of the community who believed strongly that education was the best and most effective way to gain equality and “close the gap” for Indigenous Australians (Service providers/parents, field notes, Armadale, Ceduna and Gunnedah). More often than not, these key individuals had lived in the community for most of their lives (Service providers, field notes, Armadale, Ceduna, Gunnedah and Toronto).

I was about to mention that [name], who works with us - always called Aunty [name] - she has been in the early childhood space for [many] years... I think there [are] some key figures that really have improved Aboriginal engagement in the early childhood... She was also a kindy teacher for a long time, but her and Aunty [name] set up an activities shed near the... tin shed... and so while the parents, or carers, were doing kind of painting and other activities, they'd do activities with the kids, and that was kind of the start of really sort of Aboriginal focus pre-school, early childhood. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

These key individuals were not only important for the drive they brought to establishing services or lobbying for provisions in their community, they also promoted the services to the wider community. One service provider in Orange explained how the key individual in their community rallied to recruit families into their new service; a specific Indigenous service that was set up due to a lack of culturally-aware provisions in Orange, at the time.

So I said “Well what do you want to do about it?” and she said “We should talk to other people”. So I called a meeting and developed a flyer and the other lady, I call her sheep or herder because she can go around and talk to people. She just has this unique way of getting people along. (Service provider, female, Orange)

Once services were established, key individuals still had a role to play (despite the fervour of staff for their services). These key individuals, acting as drivers, often continued to take responsibility for guiding the service and played an active role in decision making:

The staff are wonderful. They do go above and beyond the call of duty sometimes with a lot of things that we do do. There are other times where they need a bit of a break from the whole thing too, themselves. Look, I don't take any credit for what's happening here. It's the people that are the ones that are making that happen. We're just, I suppose, like--you called it the driver of the bus or

whatever it may be. Just someone that's steering the traffic around the little bit.  
(Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

#### 4.5.2 Consultation with community

For new services that had been housed in purpose-built facilities, there was community consultation around the needs and wants of families. This was seen as a positive step in assigning ownership to Indigenous communities (Service provider, female, Karratha). However, this consultation must be genuine otherwise communities will not utilise their purpose-built centres, as a service provider in Ceduna explained:

It's about kind of genuine involvement of the local community, not tokenistic.  
(Service providers/parents, female, Ceduna)

Another example demonstrated the importance of a steering committee; for a new service in Toronto a steering committee included local Elders who had a key role in determining building and service outcomes. According to the service provider, this empowered the Indigenous Australian community and gave them a strong sense of ownership.

There was a lot of ownership with that, especially the elders. It was really important and they felt really proud of what came out of it. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

As well as consultation around the buildings, the service providers were often keen to consult with families and generate ideas for new initiatives. One Ceduna service provider explained:

I work for an organisation where we don't walk in and say this is what we're going to do. We try and find a gap. Definitely with community development, try and work with the community. Every community has got strengths. They just have to pull them together and get the right people. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Talking about the service her child attended in Karratha, one mum explained that the service had built a good reputation and relationship with the community because they had consulted with parents about the types of programs they should run, for example:

So, they've made that really good relationship, I think, because they've had [service name], they've been honest with community, I think, and always asking for advice rather than just doing it. That's what I think, myself. (Parent, female, Karratha)

Observed by researchers, all of the services that participated in this research were keen to involve parents and carers in their provision. Consultation with families could be very informal, with discussions occurring in the corridor as parent's drop-off their children, or more formally through feedback forms (Service providers, female, Ceduna, Cherbourg, Gunnedah and Toronto). Regardless of the method of consultation, service providers were keen to action their suggestions and gain involvement from families in their children's learning:

That's what we want from the parents, their involvement, their participation, and we will act on that. We will discuss issues, concerns, ideas from the parents and community, we will discuss that as a whole staff or educator leaders, and with

community members, if community agencies want anything done specific or want involvement into our learning centre, it's our learning space, our community. Families, children, families and community. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

### 4.5.3 Governance and ownership

Linked with 'consultation with community', governance and ownership had a role in Indigenous communities feeling proud of their early childhood education services. When communities had a vested interest, they were more likely to nurture the service, participate in events and utilise facilities, as indicated in a Ceduna service.

Moderator: So the centre itself feels like a bit of a community-owned space?

Respondent: Yeah. That's the whole point of it. So they can be proud of it and want to come here and bring their kids here and bring their grandchildren here. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Similarly, when early childhood education programs were run by Indigenous parents and carers themselves, service providers recorded an increase in the uptake of places by Indigenous families:

When it was transitioned into being a parent run program the numbers are now, you know, increased and the parents that had been involved in helping run the playgroup. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

Ownership and governance was particularly important if the service was administered by a local council. As one respondent from Cherbourg indicated, services had to competitively bid against other services within the same jurisdiction for funds; this was less of an issue when communities governed their own services:

I just visited a few [services] up in the far north Queensland and most of theirs is run by council and it's hard to get [funding] because then they got to compete against other places like services within the council provides for in their community... They just have trouble with funding, buildings being repaired and all that. Whereas ours is run by a committee and then we can say, "Go and spend that money there, spend it here." (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Local councils are often required to run programs and services under their own highly-structured models, and according to some providers this structure could be too restrictive for some Indigenous Australian parents and carers. One service provider in Orange explained how this led to the community not participating in the service; they "voted with their feet":

I was favouring [service provider] at the time [of program implementation] because they build capacity and then they hand back to community. I liked that concept whereas council tends to take its structure and run it under their model... We were targeting kids who had never had contact into an early childhood setting that's where it was supposed to reach, those kids and their families. To build capacity, to build connection and belonging, they're the three main things that that program was set up for. But because it went into rigid structure Aboriginal

people voted with their feet and they just didn't want anything to do with it again which is sad. (Service provider, female, Orange)

For Indigenous parents, the appeal of centres run and owned by the community, fostered a spirit of empowerment and pride in the way it operated:

So I had our daughter on the waiting list before I received the job here. I liked the idea of having a cultural centre that involved the culture and that was close to community. So the idea of all the community that comes and does the different stuff with the children, I really enjoyed and the fact that it wasn't just purely set up for an income basis, like most other centres. It was just a community-based centre, I really liked. So that's why I originally put her down. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

When larger services were owned and governed by Indigenous boards and committees who controlled their day-to-day functions and operations, centres had the capacity and potential to become all-encompassing hubs for the community, for example by running services and activities for other family members, not just the children:

So [the service] is a very important place for the community really, bringing the community together, and they do... a lot of community things, community gatherings, you know like we talked about fathers, the yarning circles... (Service provider, female)

Service providers and parents suggested that a key facilitator to accessing early childhood education was the informality of Indigenous-run services. As mentioned above some Indigenous families preferred a less structured approach to programs. Included in their preference to be less formal, and particularly highlighted by respondents, was the reference to 'Auntie', 'Uncle', 'Nanna', etc. for members of staff (Service provider, female, Toronto). The use of these titles created a sense of belonging to a family and was applicable to all staff. It also demonstrated respect for culture and fostered pride in Indigenous practices.

A lot of the kids here, like we've got that cultural respect. Like all the older, nannas are nannas and the young ones are aunties. And you know? So they all, even like the non-Indigenous kids you know? (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

#### **4.5.4 Working with, and access to, other community services**

All of the service providers that participated in this research spoke of the importance of working alongside other community services, for example, health services and legal services. This section explores the importance of building and maintaining good relationships with community services as a way to improve the overall wellbeing of Indigenous Australian families.

##### **Families and children**

Highlighted by parents and service providers as a key facilitator to child attendance, the ability to access health services on-site was deemed extremely important. Many of the services visited as part of this research explained how they worked closely with health

specialists such as general practitioners, physiotherapists, dentists, speech therapists and nurses (Service providers/parents, females, Ceduna, Cherbourg, Gunnedah, Karratha, and Toronto). Building those links with health services, service providers enabled referrals and ensured the children received the appropriate health checks. Additionally, by providing health professionals with rooms within larger centres, access to health checks was eased via the provision of a 'one stop shop' for the whole community. As a service provider in Toronto explained:

Like we've got children, they drop them off and come and do immunisation, you can do it all in one day. It's just really fantastic. But that's not the only service we have. We've got psychologists and the whole lot, not just doctors, we've got the multipurpose centre, absolutely everything actually. We've had all sorts of services. (Service provider/parent, female, Toronto)

Some early childhood education services worked closely with welfare services such as Centrelink to ensure families were gaining their financial entitlements to access services, and other services that could help with paying off debt and verifying documents, for example.

They have expo days and I think today is one of them where people can go down and with their pieces of identification and actually do all the paperwork with the services there instead of having to go out and individually go to the Department of Transport, Medicare, all those other services, Housing. They can actually work with people there and if they're--if they have a bad debt with Department of Transport, if they have fines, whatever, they will arrange there and then arrangements to pay off the fines. So in terms of that wrap around stuff that's happening. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

Where services were larger and could offer the provision of a variety of services focused in one place (for example, Gunnedah, Toronto, Armadale, Ceduna and Karratha), Indigenous Australians had the opportunity to access key services to improve their overall wellbeing.

## **Staff**

Some service providers mentioned the desire to work more closely with Aboriginal Land Councils as a way to include community Elders and those with knowledge of traditional practices and tribal customs in early childhood education services (Service providers, female, Armadale and Cherbourg).

One of the services included in this research was supported in their delivery of early childhood education by the Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU). IPSUs, funded under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP), operated in all states and territories to help the delivery of CCB and BBF services. The support unit provided mentoring and advice to staff, delivered professional development workshops and courses and collaborated with other local services to deliver a holistic support package for staff. As of 1 July 2016, IPSP was replaced by a new Inclusion Support Programme, which does not include funding for professional development support to child care services. Accordingly, IPSUs ceased operation with the closure of IPSP. The service provider explained that this

was concerning for the service as they look to IPSU for support to run their self-governed service:

I'll just say that it's important for communities to engage with one another through the learning of things that IPSU did. It was very important and I think that's where we're going to miss IPSU through that support and that connection, because that's connecting all the communities together. (Service provider/parent, female, Cherbourg)

#### 4.5.5 Staffing

Staffing was a significant aspect of all of the services involved in this research, with evidence to suggest that services were defined by their staff, their attitudes, behaviours, experience and passion. To this end, staff could act as a barrier or facilitator to the participation of Indigenous communities in early childhood education services.

Many non-Indigenous staff worked in early childhood education settings that Indigenous children attended. One respondent in Ceduna explained that this was not a problem as long as they have 'some level of experience and the right kind of training and outlook [they] can be equally as effective' as Indigenous educators (Service provider, female, Ceduna). Service providers acknowledged that it was important for children to appreciate cultural diversity; many providers run workshops and courses for their staff to maintain knowledge and appropriate practices around cultural diversity (Service providers, field notes, Cherbourg, Karratha and Toronto).

#### Indigenous staffing

Despite the view above, all of the staff interviewed as part of this research agreed that it was important to employ Indigenous members of staff within early childhood education services, when possible.

For some families, getting up the courage to walk through the door of an early childhood education service was observed as difficult (Service provider, female, Karratha). Feeling welcomed by staff upon initial contact was a helpful tool in making families feel at ease and to gain trust (see section 4.3.1). Equally, seeing an Indigenous worker could instantly put families at ease:

[At the service] you feel right at home there because it's run by Aboriginal people and they're professional that's the thing, they're professional... and they do their job. (Parent, female, Karratha)

Respondents also felt that Indigenous staff had an understanding of home life and situations occurring in the community. This level of understanding was said to be comforting to Indigenous parents and carers who, when they explained a situation, felt it was less likely they would be judged negatively (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). Relationships between Indigenous families and staff could develop very quickly as a result of cultural awareness and appreciation for situations:

Moderator: What's the importance of the Aboriginal staff and the relationships between them and...?

Respondent: It's huge. It's huge. I think it's that coming in and—just that instant bond of—it's hard to explain, because it is—the family's come in and they'll see [our Indigenous staff member] there and they go, "Oh hang on. Okay, no worries. She might have that bit more understanding." That's a huge thing, having that understanding. Everyone can have a certain understanding, but unless you're part of that culture, it's a little bit different. (Service provider, female, Karratha)

It was also suggested that Indigenous staff also had a greater empathy with and understanding of issues in the community such as Sorry Business, the practices and protocols associated with the passing of an Indigenous Australian. When Sorry Business occurred naturally, it affected the whole community, especially when it was small and close-knit (Service provider, female, Cherbourg).

All of the respondents in this research agreed that employing local people within early childhood education services was a facilitator to Indigenous families placing their children in those services.

Having a lot of local Aboriginal people, educators... I'm a local educator and so is [name]. There's a few of us here. We know a lot of people out in the community. I think them knowing that we're here and knowing us and knowing our background; we probably know them here as well. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

Consistency of staff was also important; providers discussed the importance of retaining qualified staff. They had built relationships with families, in particular the children, as a service provider in Ceduna explained:

It takes so much to get to know people and to build that trust. When you've got staff coming and going constantly, like you do in this region, it's very hard. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Familial ties with workers further helped to ease concerns about leaving children in unfamiliar settings; local families were aware of workers, even if they were not related to them (Service provider, female Cherbourg). Indeed for many families, awareness of the service was as a result of having family members working within the centres (Parents, field notes, Toronto). Indigenous parents and carers were said to put more trust in, and have a greater respect for, services where family members were educators (Service provider, female, Ceduna).

All childhood education staff were striving to work hard for the children they looked after and taught; they wanted to 'get it right'. One respondent summed up their collective drive:

I love working with the kids and I think... that's our future leaders... so I know it's really important we get it right. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

The employment of local Indigenous community members also contributed to local capacity and provided much needed empowerment opportunities.

It's about the community building too, as far as that employment regime is concerned. That there are people that hadn't worked--mums that hadn't worked for many, many years are now doing some casual days. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

However, there were notable barriers to employing local community members described by respondents. Firstly, in order to work within an early childhood education service, potential employees had to have gained a Certificate III in Children's Services. Gaining this qualification proved a hurdle for some people due to the time required to commit to studying could have an impact on family life (and lead to some dropping out prior to completion), the barrier of travel in order to attend TAFE or undertake a required placement, and/or the cost of undertaking studies. One service provider explained how they tried to overcome these barriers to gaining appropriate qualifications through bringing trainers in to the provider:

Respondent: That's one thing that I can say with our community, especially [the service provider], we have TAFE teachers come here and do onsite training.

Moderator: So that makes a massive difference, you think?

Respondent: Makes a massive difference. Got our TAFE over there, a lot of the classes are held over here. They don't have to travel. In the past, you had to go away... for two or three weeks at a time. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Other reasons associated with Indigenous people not taking up the opportunity to qualify to work in early childhood education included:

- a lack of confidence (Parent, female, Armadale)
- the drawn out qualifications process (Service provider, female, Cherbourg), and
- the transient nature of Aboriginal tribes in more remote Australia (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

While female workers dominated the early childhood education settings explored in the course of this research, one service provider employed a few male educators. In speaking with staff at this service, they explained why it was important that men were included in early childhood education and how the men had impacted their service, in particular:

It's been very good for Uncle [name] as well to be here especially for the children... We've got another young bloke wanting to work here, just go around and talking to people, we've got two other young fellows who want to come and work, so now it's breaking down that stereotype it's women's industry. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

Even though few male workers are employed in early childhood education services, female employees would welcome them and explained how their presence could benefit the children:

That would be awesome if we had a male worker, but preschool, early childhood you hardly ever have male staff. That's kind of the, it's all over. It's not really common for male staff. It would be good if we had a male worker just to show the kids that role model. Sometimes they might not have a father figure, grandfather. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

#### 4.5.6 Staff relationships

Relationships were developed from the moment a family walked into a service and these relationships were a key factor in determining a child's attendance at a service. According to one parent, these relationships often continuing within the community, outside of service hours:

I [saw the educator] back down the street in the holidays and she give the girls a cuddle and that there. She didn't have to, she's only the teacher, but yeah, she did. (Parent, female, Orange)

Parents and service providers explained how they felt children had an extended family at services and centres (Service providers, female, Cherbourg) and, when spending a large proportion of their time at services, grew attached to the educators they interacted with on a regular basis:

Like she has lifelong--she still loves them, comes to visit all the time, because she just loves the staff, she loves the atmosphere, she still talks about her educators when she went to there at the time. She'll still send her cards, makes them cards and one of them had their birthday about a month ago, she made a great big card and came to deliver it. (Service provider/parent, female, Toronto)

For many staff in rural and remote communities, there was a pre-existing relationship with the children as many were family members or known within the close-knit community:

Their children, their cousins and their cousins children and their, you know, grandchildren or, they're all related, so it's so important for them that's why there's lots of hugs and kisses and lots of care and their relationships are really intertwined. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

One of the main benefits of building strong relationships between staff and children was the confidence of the child. One service provider in Cherbourg reported that there was "less separation anxiety" for the children as the educators were often known to them (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). Service providers also supported parents to develop parenting skills, employment skills, and skills for life. For example, programs in Armadale encouraged parents to attend cookery classes whilst their children were participating in early childhood education services (Service provider, female, Armadale). Similarly, in Karratha, services were assisting parents with "resume writing... getting licences, questions about medical stuff" (Service provider, female, Karratha).

#### 4.5.7 Cultural awareness

The majority of service providers suggested that cultural awareness within services was another key factor for Indigenous Australians when considering placing their children in early childhood education provisions:

From my understanding of talking to people who have worked in the sector and have left is that it's not culturally appropriate. The service delivery is not culturally appropriate and that's huge a major, major factor in why Aboriginal families do or don't access services such as early childhood education. When you haven't got that flexibility that goes hand in hand with being culturally appropriate you're left with a rigid format or system that doesn't have the understanding of how families operate not only from a low socioeconomic background but a culturally different background. (Service provider, female, Orange)

One of the services in Cherbourg acted as a training centre for educators who wanted to gain an understanding of cultural awareness; the training educators received allowed them to return to their own provisions with first-hand experience of good cultural awareness practice (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). One service provider highlighted that it was particularly important for non-Indigenous educators to have an understanding and awareness of Indigenous cultures:

I think it's more important for non-Indigenous people for when they do teach when they're educators to Aboriginal children and I think it's not just a cultural competence as in saying "I want to do dot painting" and "we're putting up aboriginal flags", it's actually knowing and actually understanding and respecting what it means to us and all Aboriginal people from different areas, difference tribes, they have their own beliefs. (Service provider, female, Cherbourg)

A service provider in Armadale highlighted that cultural awareness training emphasised that Indigenous tribal practices were different across Australia:

Dot painting isn't something that people did around here, you know what I mean? ... But then there's the more specific, like [the] didgeridoo is played here in cultural things and accepted, but didgeridoos were never played around here, no. They had tapping sticks. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

Some Indigenous educators stressed that cultural awareness training was best delivered in-community, not within the TAFE environment. One service provider in Cherbourg explained that students should get exposure to real-life practice and delivery of culturally appropriate early childhood education provision (Service provider, female, Cherbourg). Importantly for service providers, the Early Years Learning Framework provided the flexibility to include Indigenous "identity, culture, connectedness and partnerships in the community" in culturally-appropriate program delivery (Service provider, female, Orange).

Service providers of programs such as HIPPY and IPF recognised that many regional and remote Indigenous families preferred the programs to be delivered in a less formal manner. For example, one service provider explained that an outdoor training session with mum's in remote Australia was more culturally appropriate than a classroom environment:

We can't just take our manuals, which is what we would normally take up there. So... we just took a whole lot of activities up there, we sat outside under a tree and we ran our training workshop like that... When you go up north, you've just got to be a little more mindful of the community, where they are with their literacy, whether their English is pretty good or it's not. And we've had communities actually run it in their own language, which has been awesome. (Service provider, female, Armadale)

### Cultural traditions

Service providers and parents explained that early childhood education provisions facilitated the teaching of Indigenous traditions, telling of tribal stories and singing of songs in local language, amongst other things (Figure 8). One service provider in Toronto explained how they integrated Indigenous culture into everyday learning at their service:

We teach them about different foods and dances which is good. We teach them about the Aboriginal flag and what it means to be an Aboriginal person. (Service provider, female, Toronto)

**Figure 8** Indigenous paintings by early year's children and Indigenous artefacts at early childhood education centre



Learning about Indigenous culture generated a pride in heritage, which the majority of parents and grandparents had never had (or felt they were not allowed to have) – many parents and carers could not impart knowledge of their Indigenous culture to their children but explained that service providers and Elders were helping to bridge that gap:

I never got brought up knowing my Indigenous background... and my kids are... well, my partner's from WA and he's Indigenous so at least they're getting some of their culture from somewhere because I can't pass anything on. (Parent, female, Armadale)

I know that the children learn about language and dance and cooking and all of that kind of stuff from people that know it, from Elders or from the community. (Parent, female, Toronto)

Many parents explained that they had never had the opportunity to learn about their Indigenous language. However, by attending early childhood education services their children had learnt new Indigenous words and gained knowledge about practice and protocol, which the children shared with their families:

We should all know our language but we don't. Now they're only just like making it with our kids and that. It will be good but they'll come home and teach us.  
(Parent, female, Orange)

#### 4.5.8 Service buildings

Most new services had taken the opportunity to design their buildings in consultation with community members, which help to ensure they were welcoming and fulfilled the needs of the community. For example, in Ceduna community consultation led to an open-plan design of the service space:

In the design of the building they took in all the consultation with the community of how they wanted to be able to do something in one end of the building and be able to keep an eye on their children at the same time. That was a lot of things that the families all talked about, so hence why it's all open spaces and nothing's closed off. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Consultation with communities empowered them to take ownership of the space. This, in turn, meant that Indigenous families were much more likely to utilise the space (Service providers, field notes, Ceduna, Gunnedah). The look and feel of a space was also important. Respondents spoke of the 'homely' feel of centres, down to the colour schemes, and Indigenous designs and artefacts throughout the spaces (Figure 9).

In the whole design of this they consulted with the arts centre, so hence why there's all paintings and stuff on the ground in the floor design. Like there was a story to it. Like there's a community space and there's a meeting place design thing on the ground... We're getting some panels to go on the fence outside. We've got stepping tiles. Did you see on the outside how we've got those little boomerang shaped...? (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

**Figure 9** Aboriginal Children and Family Centre, Armadale



One major advantage associated with being able to design a service building was the ability to include facilities. For example, in Ceduna service providers requested a laundry room so that families without access to a washing machine could ensure they provided their children with clean clothes in order to attend the education service (see section 4.2.2) (Service providers, female, Ceduna).

Whilst new, purpose-built buildings had several advantages, one service provider explained that new buildings could cause confusion within communities. As one service provider in Ceduna explained, it was important to market the education services to ensure attendance:

The community's still working out that we're here and what this building is. There are still people in our community that don't even know this building's here, so our journey for the [centre] is really in its beginnings. (Service provider, female, Ceduna)

Many respondents spoke of the popularity of certain services within their community. This popularity had led to the creation of waiting lists; some children could not access early year's education at their preferred service due to over-subscription (Service providers, female, Armadale, Ceduna, Orange, Toronto and Gunnedah). In some instances, where "programs [had] outgrown the building" (Service provider, female, Ceduna), early childhood education providers were expanding their services and gaining funding for new buildings:

Our out of school hours care program that--the room is just being built now, at the front of the centre. So that is something that's very exciting for us, because there's no out of school hours care in Gunnedah. (Service provider, male, Gunnedah)

## 5. Key findings and considerations

This section draws together the key findings from the research conducted with the seven communities (for case study snapshots see Appendix 7) and identifies some practical considerations to help to increase participation in early childhood education services for Indigenous families.

### 5.1 Communicating the benefits of early childhood education services

There is a need for different agencies to work together to develop clear communication strategies to convey the benefits of services to non-participating Indigenous families.

Strategies could include:

- utilising the potential of word-of-mouth communication (from parents) of the benefits of participating within the Indigenous community
- infographics with visual representations of the benefits rather than text-heavy information pamphlets
- developing communication tools in local Indigenous language (see Appendix 8 for example infographic), and
- hosting Open Days and community-based activities and inviting parents and carers to visit the service for themselves.

### 5.2 Community liaison officer role

Many service providers spoke of the importance of word-of-mouth communications about their service. They reported that having staff venture into the community had built trust in their services and the programs they offered.

One community, where participation in early childhood education services had been reported by earlier quantitative analysis as "low" (see reference 30 on page 66)<sup>30</sup>, had established in-community relationships by implementing a community liaison officer role. The community liaison officer could be an employee of an early childhood education service or a member of the wider community. They would be charged with building relationships with Indigenous families, making home visits (where appropriate), hosting information days, connecting families with community services, and communicating funding subsidies and helping families complete associated paperwork.

### 5.3 Dedicated transport service

In regional and remote areas, the lack of private transport and adverse weather conditions can be major barriers to participating in early childhood education. Introducing a dedicated transport service helps to increase participation and retention rates. Where dedicated

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<sup>30</sup> Data provided from Australian Government Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

transport services do not exist, communities could consider approaching businesses or the Aboriginal Land Council to sponsor rental/purchase of a bus, for example.

## 5.4 Staffing

Service providers and parents reported that a major facilitator to Indigenous family participation in early childhood education services was the employment of local Indigenous Australians. The recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff was highlighted as difficult in some communities, for a number of reasons:

- attaining the Certificate III qualification necessary to undertake education and care services may be difficult because of low education levels
- the transient nature of some communities means Indigenous staff move on before completing qualifications
- family commitments, for example, young children at home, can make it difficult to factor in time to undertake training, and
- time commitment to undertake training (can mean extended periods of time away from families to attend TAFE institutions outside the local region, for example.).

A collaborative strategy between the relevant commonwealth, state and territory departments and agencies, early childhood education services and careers advisors should promote career opportunities within the sector to male Indigenous community members. At one service provider visited, the presence of male staff had positively impacted the behaviour of the children through them acting as role models.

Indigenous early childhood education services often required professional support to run and govern their own services effectively and efficiently. Organisations such as the Indigenous Professional Support Unit provided advice, guidance and continuing professional development opportunities for Indigenous communities, particularly those in regional and remote areas. In light of the changes to the professional support units (mentioned in section 4.5.4), there is a need to ensure there are alternative support mechanisms for Indigenous early childhood education services with regards to advice and mentoring for educators, supervisors and directors.

## 5.5 In-home education

In-home education programs can help bridge the gap between families and centre programs. In-home programs empower parents as teachers and build confidence and capacity within the community. For more remote communities where language acts as a barrier to attending "mainstream" services, services such as the IPF program can be delivered to Indigenous families in their own language.

## 5.6 Data considerations

In planning programs and services in early childhood, data are required to enable to assess, for example, size of the target population and existing rates of participation. For this research, exploration of existing datasets was undertaken, which included the Australian Bureau of Statistics population and Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas data, Budget Based Funded service locations, Family Day Care density and Developmental vulnerability from the Australian Early Development Census. Using these data, communities were initially selected as “pairs” where participation appeared to be “very low/low” in one community and “high/very high” in the other (see Appendix 4). This would enable comparison of services across similar communities and, it was felt, would highlight the key barriers and facilitators to participation of Indigenous families. However, in conducting the case studies (late 2015), researchers found that the reported participation rates had changed from 2011. In most cases, this was due to the introduction of new services; for example, in-home programs, MACS and ACFCs. Instead of looking for similarities and differences across pairs, the research focused on the key barriers and facilitators in each community and drew together emerging themes.

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## Appendix 1 Funding initiatives (as at 1/3/16)

### Child Care Benefit (CCB)

Due to a lack of affordable early childhood education and care options for Australian families, the Government introduced the means-tested CCB in 2000 (see reference 31 on page 66).<sup>31</sup> CCB is only offered by services that are approved and registered, families are responsible for paying the fee and families must also ensure that their child's immunisations are up-to-date (see reference 32 on page 66).<sup>32</sup> Grandparents are also eligible to claim CCB if they are the primary carer/s for the child; they may be eligible if they conform to a number of stipulations set out by the Department of Human Services. This initiative is income and assets tested.

### Child Care Rebate (CCR)

The Child Care Rebate differs from CCB in that it not means-tested. Instead, parents and carers are entitled to 50% of 'out of pocket child care expenses' up to an annual limit of \$7,500 (see reference 33 on page 66).<sup>33</sup>

### Budget Based Funded (BBF) Programme

The BBF Programme was established in 2003 to consolidate the administration of a range of child care, early learning and school age care services, some of which have been operating since the 1970s. Each BBF service is currently allocated funding through an annual grant and the majority of these services are not approved to administer Child Care Benefit (CCB) and/or Child Care Rebate (CCR) to families.

The BBF Programme currently funds around 300 services, many of which are located in regional and remote Australia. Most cater for Indigenous children and families and are often the sole provider of child care in the area in which they operate. Funding is based on historical allocations which are neither transparent nor equitable. Similar services receive very different levels of funding.

The BBF Programme will cease on 30 June 2018 when the new child care system commences.

### Jobs, Education & Training Child Care Fee Assistance

Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) provides extra help with the cost of Child Care Benefit approved child care to support parents on income support payments while they undertake work study or training to enable them to enter or return to the workforce.

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<sup>31</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006 *Trends in the Affordability of Child Care Services 1991-2004*, Bulletin No. 35, Australian Institute for Health and Welfare Cat. No. AUS 71, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Canberra.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Human Services 2015 [Child Care Benefit: Eligibility Basics](#).

<sup>33</sup> Department of Human Services 2015 [Child Care Rebate](#).

JETCCFA can help meet the cost of child care by paying some of the 'gap fee' - the difference between the total fee charged and the amount covered by Child Care Benefit, for care related to JETCCFA approved activities.

## Future Funding Initiatives

### Jobs for Families Child Care Package

- The Government will invest around \$40 billion on child care support over the next four years including an increase of more than \$3 billion to support implementation of the *Jobs for Families* Child Care Package (the Package), plus \$843 million in 2016 and 2017 to ensure all Australian children have access to a preschool program in the year before formal schooling.
- The Package will make child care simpler, more affordable, more accessible and more flexible for around one million families. The Package includes:
  - the new Child Care Subsidy (\$23 billion)
  - Child Care Safety Net (\$1 billion) including the Additional Child Care Subsidy (\$173 million) Community Child Care Fund (\$284 million) and the Inclusion Support Program (\$543 million from July 2016)
  - Interim Home Based Carer Subsidy Program (\$184.5 million)
  - development of a new IT system (up to \$199.4 million)
  - preschool programs under the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (\$843 million)
  - supporting the National Quality Framework (\$61.1 million).
- As part of the 2016–17 Budget the Government announced that full implementation of the Package would be delayed to July 2018. Legislation necessary to give effect to the main elements of the Package and for the Family Tax Benefit changes required to fund the additional expenditure under the Package, will be re-introduced into Parliament as soon as possible to ensure the Package can be fully implemented in 2018.
- The Government is proceeding with those elements of the Package that do not require the legislation. This includes:
  - the **Nanny Pilot Program** that commenced in January 2016 as the first component of the Package, and is now continuing to the end of June 2018
  - investing \$543 million over four years in the new Inclusion Support Program that commenced on 1 July 2016 (25 per cent funding increase on the previous program). This program will assist eligible child care services to include children with additional needs
  - investing \$20 million over two years in the Connected Beginnings Program under the Community Child Care Fund. This program, to integrate child care, maternal and child health, and family support services in a number of

Indigenous communities experiencing disadvantage, also commenced on 1 July 2016

- considering options to enhance compliance measures outside legislation.

The Package will also assist vulnerable and disadvantaged children from July 2018 through a range of initiatives outlined below.

### **Reducing barriers to care for vulnerable and disadvantaged children in their early years**

Through the Package, the Government will address the barriers faced by disadvantaged or vulnerable families who need support to access affordable child care. Participation in early childhood learning is a fundamental aspect of breaking the cycle of intergenerational welfare dependence.

A key aspect of the new Package is the allocation of around \$1 billion for the Child Care Safety Net, which recognises that vulnerable children and families, or disadvantaged communities, need extra support to access quality early childhood education. This funding is additional to the Child Care Subsidy and includes the:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy – aims to ensure that vulnerable and disadvantaged families and children are supported to access quality child care and early learning, and that parents are supported to enter or remain in the workforce where possible
- Community Child Care Fund – a grants program for services to reduce barriers to accessing child care, particularly targeting disadvantaged or vulnerable families and communities
- Inclusion Support Program – to support mainstream child care and early learning services to improve their capacity and capability to include children with additional needs.

### **Assisting mainstream services to be more inclusive**

The Australian Government will invest \$543 million over four years (from 2016-17) in the new Inclusion Support Program (ISP), which represents an additional 25 per cent boost in program funding. The ISP commenced on 1 July 2016 (this element of the Package was able to be progressed without legislation) and builds on the strengths of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

The ISP will assist mainstream child care services to improve their capacity and capability to provide inclusive practices and address barriers to participation for children with additional needs, particularly children with disability, alongside their typically developing peers. The program includes:

- practical inclusion advice and support for mainstream child care services
- access to specialist equipment
- additional funding to the mainstream child care service to assist inclusion of children with additional needs.

# Appendix 2 Discussion guides

## Parent/carer discussion guide



### Indigenous pre-school participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

#### Parent/carer discussion

#### Discussion Guide V4

The purpose of these informal discussions is to get a better understanding of the uptake of ECEC by Aboriginal Australians. The specific objectives of these discussions are:

- To uncover the drivers and barriers to Aboriginal families attending early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in communities across Australia
- To explore why participants take-up service offers, and
- To identify ways in which Aboriginal families could be encouraged to participate in ECEC services

Note: the guide should be viewed as an aide-memoire for the researcher to ensure exploration of the key topics, rather than a list of set questions. It will not be appropriate to cover all topics with all participants – discussion will be tailored to each individual depending on their experiences.

✓ Checklist – please use this list to ensure you have explored the following key issues

1.	Use of Early Childhood Education and Care services – why do they use/not use/no longer use preschool? How did they hear about it?
2.	Quality of service and care– what kind of things do they learn? How has it helped the child?
3.	Safety – importance of Aboriginal staff? Importance of relationships between staff and children.
4.	Community partnerships – who gets involved in running the services? How important is it to have Aboriginal staff?
5.	Distance from home/accessibility issues – is this a major barrier? Do you get financial help in getting your child to preschool?
6.	Trust and confidence in the services – what concerns / worries do families have? Concerns about way Aboriginal culture is portrayed?
7.	Barriers to attendance – paperwork involved, not culturally safe, don't see need for preschool, etc.
8.	*Benefits of service* – why it's important for child to attend preschool – if it is. If not, why do parents think it's not important?

## Explanation to participants

- Introduce researcher and the Social Research Centre
- Explain what the research is about - "We'd like to talk about your and your children's experiences of attending xxxxx [program / group]."
- Explain recording and confidentiality of participant information, seek informed consent
- Explain how data will be used and stored
- Explain the importance of honest opinions, no right or wrong answers
- Housekeeping matters
- Any questions before starting?

## Introductions

You have been invited to take part in this research because your child/ren attend / do not attend a preschool service.

Attend: We want to understand a little more about why your children are taking part in early learning/education/care before they start school and what you think the benefits are.

Do not attend: We would like to understand why your pre-school children are not participating in early learning, education or care. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers and everything you say is confidential.

### 1. Use of Early Childhood Education and Care services

- 1.1. *Does your child go to or take part in any early learning programs or groups?*
- 1.2. *How did you decide which early learning program or group to take your child to?*
- 1.3. *How did you hear about the program / group]? (Via family/friends, direct from service provider, community representative, etc.?) Is word of mouth recommendation important? Why?*
- 1.4. *When did you start coming to the program / group?*
- 1.5. *Can you tell me why you decided to bring your child to the program / group? Did you consider other groups or programs? Why did you choose this one?*
- 1.6. *Did you take your child to any programs or groups before this one? Why did you leave your previous program or group?*

### 2. Quality of service and care

- 2.1 *Can you describe the childcare service your child receives? For example, what does he/she learn about? Is it important that your child learns about their cultural heritage at preschool?*
- 2.2 *What are the positives about this program / group? [Friendships, culture, learning, ease of access, etc.]*
- 2.3 *What are the negatives about this program / group, if any? How can they be overcome?*
- 2.4 *What do you think your child enjoys about the program / group? Why?*
- 2.5 *What do you feel your child achieves by attending this service?*
- 2.6 *How could the service be improved?*
- 2.7 *Do you think the support workers receive enough training? What could be improved for them? How?*

### **3. Safety**

- 3.1 Do you feel this program / group is a culturally safe environment? Why / why not?
- 3.2 Did you know any of the workers at this service before you brought your children here?
- 3.3 [ASK IF ABORIGINAL STAFF ON SITE] How important is it that there are Aboriginal staff on site? Why?
- 3.4 Probe: language, culture, etc.
- 3.5 ASK IF ABORIGINAL STAFF ON SITE] Would you let your child attend this service if there wasn't an Aboriginal staff member here? Why? Why not?
- 3.6 Do you think your child has built a relationship with Aboriginal staff? In what way? Is this important? Why? Does your child have a good relationship with all members of staff?
- 3.7 Should childcare services be accredited by senior members of the Aboriginal community or a specific Aboriginal group? Would this influence you letting your child attend preschool?
- 3.8 How important is it that Aboriginal language is spoken in the group / program? Why is it important, if it is?
- 3.9 Do other Aboriginal families attend this program / group? Is this important? Why / why not?

### **4. Community Partnerships**

- 4.1 Are you involved in the way the program / group is run? How? When did you get involved? Why? How important is it to you?
- 4.2 Are you involved in your child's learning at all topics that the children are taught? In what way? Is this important to you or not?
- 4.3 How important is it that they learn about their culture here? Or is it something that they learn from aunties, uncles, other family members?
- 4.4 How could your community become more involved?

### **5. Distance from home/accessibility issues**

- 5.1 What other early education programs or groups are around here? What do they offer? Probe: new services or services that have closed
- 5.2 If there are, why do you travel further to bring your child to this service?
- 5.3 How far do you travel to get to this service?
- 5.4 How do you get here? Bus, car, taxi, other form of transport
- 5.5 Does it matter how far away the program or group is from your home, if you have to travel to attend the service? Why? Why not? If not, what are the most important factors when deciding on which service to use?

### **6. Trust and confidence in the services**

- 6.1 What concerns/worries did you have, if any, about bringing your child to this program / group? [Aboriginal leadership and involvement, discrimination, trust, cultural sensitivity, safety, etc.]
- 6.2 Has your child mentioned any negative aspects about the program / group? What were they? Have they been addressed/resolved?
- 6.3 Do you have any trust issues when you think about the service? What are your concerns?

6.4 Is Aboriginal culture presented in the program / group? How? Do you feel the staff teach with cultural sensitivity or not? Who teaches about Aboriginal culture?

## **7. Barriers to attendance**

7.1 What makes it difficult for your child to participate in early learning? Would stop you from attending the preschool? [Financial, emotional, cultural/heritage, distance, etc.]

7.2 [if relevant] What made you decide for your child not to take part in any pre-school activities or learning?

## **8. Benefits of service**

8.1 How do you think your child benefits from attending this program / group? Why do you think that?

8.2 How important is it that your child goes to program / group? Why / why not?

8.3 Has attending this program / group improved your child's education? How? Why not?

8.4 How important is it that your child plays and learns alongside other children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal? Why? Why not? What are the positives? What are the negatives?

8.5 In your opinion, what more could be done to encourage families to ensure their children take part in early learning and education before they start school? [Probe – funding, government initiatives, greater collaboration with Aboriginal communities, etc.]

8.6 In your experience, what are the main reasons Aboriginal families are not using the early learning/education and care services available for their pre-school children?

Any other questions? Thank respondent and close

# Providers' discussion guide



Australian National University



Social Research Centre

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NINTI INNOVATION FOR REMOTE ONE AUSTRALIA



Australian Government  
Department of Education and Training

## Indigenous pre-school participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

### Providers Discussion

### Discussion Guide V2

The purpose of these informal discussions is to get a better understanding of the uptake of ECEC by Aboriginal Australians. The specific objectives of these discussions are:

- To uncover the drivers and barriers to Aboriginal families attending early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in communities across Australia
- To explore why participants take-up service offers, and
- To identify ways in which Aboriginal families could be encouraged to participate in ECEC services

NOTE: the guide should be viewed as an aide-memoire for the researcher to ensure exploration of the key topics, rather than a list of set questions. It will not be appropriate to cover all topics with all participants – discussion will be tailored to each individual depending on their experiences.

✓ Checklist – have you covered...?

1.	Use of childcare services – why do they use preschool? How did they hear about it?
2.	Quality of the service – what kind of things do they learn? How has it helped the child?
3.	Culturally safe environments – importance of Aboriginal staff? Importance of relationships between staff and children.
4.	Community partnerships – who gets involved in running the services? How important is it to have Aboriginal staff?
5.	Distance from home – is this a major barrier? Do you get financial help in getting your child to preschool?
6.	Issues of trust – what concerns / worries do families have? Concerns about way Aboriginal culture is portrayed?
7.	Barriers to attendance – paperwork involved, not culturally safe, don't see need for preschool, etc.
8.	*Benefits of service* – why it's important for child to attend preschool – if it is. If not, why do parents think it's not important?

## Explanation to participants

- Introduce researcher and the Social Research Centre
- Explain what the research is about - “We’d like to talk about your experiences of working with and for xxxxx [service provider details].”
- Explain recording and confidentiality of participant information, seek informed consent
- Explain how data will be used and stored
- Explain the importance of honest opinions, no right or wrong answers
- Housekeeping matters
- Any questions before starting?

## Introductions

You have been invited to take part in this research because you provide a preschool service to Aboriginal child/ren. We want to understand a little more about your role and your opinions about the service for Aboriginal community members.

### 1. Use of Early Childhood Education and Care services

- 1.1. What, in your opinion, encourages Aboriginal parents/carers to bring their children to this program / group?
- 1.2. Do Aboriginal families use the program / group regularly? If not, why do you think this is the case?
- 1.3. What, in your opinion, are the benefits to Aboriginal children using the program / group?  
[communication skills, socialising, development]
- 1.4. What, if any, negatives are there associated with using this program / group if you are an Aboriginal parent/carer?

### 2. Safety

- 2.1 How important is it that there is an Aboriginal worker at your program / group? Why?
- 2.2 How do you recruit and retain Aboriginal workers, if at all? What are the difficulties, if any, with recruiting Aboriginal workers?
- 2.3 Do you provide all staff with training about cultural sensitivity? Why? Why not?
- 2.4 Are Aboriginal children encouraged to speak in their language? Why? Why not?
- 2.5 Should childcare services be accredited by senior members of the Aboriginal community or a specific Aboriginal group? Do you feel this would influence Aboriginal families who don't attend?
- 2.6 How important is it that Aboriginal language is spoken in the group / program? Why is it important, if this is the case?
- 2.7 Do other Aboriginal families attend this program/group? Is this important? Why / why not?

### 3. Community partnerships

- 3.1 Do you consult with the local community about program / group activities and curriculum? Why? Why not?
- 3.2 Who do you consult with? [Parents, aunties, uncles, etc.]
- 3.3 How would you describe your relationship, as a provider, with the Aboriginal parents and carers?
- 3.4 How would you describe your relationship, as a provider, with Aboriginal workers here at the program / group?
- 3.5 How would you describe the relationships between the Aboriginal workers and Aboriginal children? Is their relationship different than those of non-Aboriginal workers and children? How?
- 3.6 In your opinion, what difference does it make having an Aboriginal worker within the program / group?
- 3.7 How could community partnerships be improved? For example, developing a curriculum? Teaching non-Aboriginal workers about cultural sensitivity?

## 4. Distance from home/accessibility issues

- 4.1 What other early education programs or groups are around here? What do they offer? Probe: new services or services that have closed
- 4.2 Do you feel that distance from home has an impact on whether Aboriginal children attend the program / group? Why? How can this be addressed?
- 4.3 How do most Aboriginal children physically get to the program / group? Does this hinder attendance, in your opinion?
- 4.4 Do you think the parents elected to attend this program / group because of convenience or is it due to a number of factors? What are they?

## 5. Trust and confidence in the services

- 5.1 In your opinion, do you think Aboriginal parents/carers have an issue of trust when it comes to letting their children attend the program / group? Why? Why not?
- 5.2 Do you feel that the workers at the program / group influence Aboriginal parents' decisions on whether to let their children attend the service or not? Why?
- 5.3 Are there any other issues of trust you can think of when considering Aboriginal parents and their reluctance to send their children to preschool?

## 6. Barriers to attendance

- 6.1 Why do you think some Aboriginal parents/carers decide not to place their children in early education and care programs or groups? [Financial, location, curriculum, cultural/heritage, paperwork, language barrier]
- 6.2 What, in your opinion, is the biggest barrier to attendance? Why?
- 6.3 What could be done to remove those barriers? How can Aboriginal parents and carers be encouraged to place their children into early education schemes? [more involvement in planning, senior community member involvement and endorsement]
- 6.4 Have you come across good examples where Aboriginal communities are involved in developing early education services? What are they? How do they work?

## 7. Benefits of service

- 7.1 How do you maintain a good quality of service?
  - 7.2 Do staff receive regular training on Aboriginal issues or maintain community linkages?
  - 7.3 In your opinion, how important is it that Aboriginal children attend a program or group before starting compulsory schooling? Why?
  - 7.4 How do Aboriginal children benefit by attending programs or groups?
  - 7.5 In your opinion, what more could be done to encourage families to ensure their children take part in early learning and education before they start school? Probe: funding, government initiatives, greater collaboration with Aboriginal communities, etc.)
  - 7.6 In your experience, what are the main reasons Aboriginal families are not using the early education and are services available for their pre-school children?
- Any other questions? Thank respondent and close.

## Appendix 3 Example recruitment flyers



### Have your say about early learning in your community

You are invited to join in this project.

An independent team of researchers from the Social Research Centre would like to talk to Aboriginal families about involving their children (3-5 year olds) in early learning. The research is funded by the Department of Education and Training. They want to know how they can improve early learning programs for Aboriginal children.

They would like to know:

- **Why you send your children to preschool**
- **What would stop you from sending your children to preschool**
- **How schools and programs could be improved**

There will be an event at  
**XXX** from **8.30am** until **4pm**  
on **XXX X<sup>th</sup> November**.

They'd love for you to drop into the Preschool and talk to them.

As a thank you, drinks and snacks will be provided as well as a small gift.

Important things to know:

- The information you give will only be used for this project
- We will keep everything you tell us private. Your name will not be in any of the reports.
- Taking part is your choice.
- You can choose not to answer any questions you do not want to.

Look forward to seeing you there!

You can get more information about this project from **XXX** or you can call the researchers direct on 1800 265 648 or email [qualitative@srcentre.com.au](mailto:qualitative@srcentre.com.au)

# Ceduna Aboriginal Early Childhood Care Research

Through the conversations with families, carers and service providers, Ninti One and the Social Research Centre are hoping to understand in Ceduna:

- *What makes Aboriginal families want to use early childhood education and care services?*
- *Why do some Aboriginal families chose not to use early childhood education and care services?*
- *How services can be improved, if at all, to increase uptake by local Aboriginal families?*

These topics are being discussed in various communities across Australia, and will be used to inform the way services are designed and run, and our little ones are provided for.

Ingrid and Peter will talking to people in Ceduna from Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> – Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October, so get in touch if you'd like to chat!

Contact: Ingrid Johanson

ingrid.johanson@nintione.com.au Ph: (08) 79055525 Mob: 0438 3525 44



# Appendix 4 Rates of participation

Percentage of participation was calculated from the number of children who attended Pre-School (numbers were provided by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training), divided by the total number of 3-5 year old Indigenous children (ABS 2011 data). Table 3 expresses the quintiles used for categorisation of the rate of participation in communities.

**Table 3**      **Categorisation of participation rates in case study communities**

Percentage of participation	Categorisation
< 36%	Very low
36-47%	Low
48-56%	Medium
57-67%	High
≥ 68%	Very high

# Appendix 5 Example respondent information sheet



Australian National University



Social Research Centre

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## Participant Information Sheet

The analysis of Indigenous participation in early childhood education and care project is asking Aboriginal families about their opinions and experiences of preschools in their community.

### Who is the research for?

The Social Research Centre is conducting research on behalf of the Department of Education and Training and is engaging Ninti One to help in this research.

### Who are we talking to?

Aboriginal families who use local preschools and those who do not, people who provide the services and Aboriginal education officers.

### What would I have to do?

We will hold an 'open day' in your area. We'd like you to drop in when you can and talk with us about the preschool services in your community, why your children go there or don't go there and how the preschools can be improved.

### Do I have to take part?

No, you don't have to take part in the research if you don't want to. If you start the discussion with us and decide that you want to stop, that's OK. If there are some questions you don't want to answer, that's OK too.

### How will my answers to the questions be used?

Your answers to questions will help us understand why Aboriginal families like using preschools in their community (or why they don't). And, how they can be improved.

With your permission, we would like to audio-record the discussion, write out what you have said word-for-word and analyse the results.

The information that you provide will contribute to the project which is talking to 9 other communities around Australia.

### What happens to the information I give? Is it confidential?

Yes, it is confidential. We are required by law to keep information you give us private. The information will only be used for this research. There is more information about [privacy](#) on our website:

### **Will I be given another for taking part?**

We will be supplying refreshments on the day and a small gift for you to take home.

### **Are there any risks to taking part in the research?**

There are no risks to taking part in this research. You won't be identified in any of the reporting.

### **Ethics approval**

When we do research like this, we must make sure that we follow all the rules that apply. One of these rules says that we must get ethics approval. This means that a group of people at the Australian National University agree that our research is good and fair. We have received this approval for research. The project number is 2015/598.

### **Would you like to find out more?**

Our phone number is 1800 265 648

Our emails are [hannah.paddon@srcentre.com.au](mailto:hannah.paddon@srcentre.com.au) or [karen.kellard@srcentre.com.au](mailto:karen.kellard@srcentre.com.au)

# Appendix 6 Example respondent consent form



## Written consent for participants

(Analysis of Indigenous Participation in Early Childhood Education and Care)

I have read and understood the Information Sheet you have given me about the research project, and I have had any questions and concerns about the project (listed here

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addressed to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the project.

Yes  No

I agree to this interview being audio-recorded

Yes  No

Signature:

## Appendix 7 Case studies: a snapshot

### Region: Ceduna, South Australia

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>34</sup>: 650

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>35</sup>: Very low

Location: Ceduna is located 786km to the northwest of Adelaide and considered “very remote”. The climate is semi-arid, receiving low average yearly precipitation and hot, dry summers.<sup>36</sup>

Service/s description:

- Three preschools; none had been assessed against National Quality Framework standards
- Long Day Care centre which was “Meeting National Quality Standards”

Main barriers to participation:

- Cost of early childhood education services
- Lack of private and public transport
- Lack of awareness of financial subsidies available
- Some distrust of government services and fear of leaving children with services
- Tension between different Indigenous groups in community
- Shame around not providing lunch or having home facilities to dress children in clean clothes

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Home visits to non-participating families to encourage engagement in services
- Adopting flexible work hours to retain Indigenous staff members
- Providing children with lunch and offering laundry facilities in some centres

What appears most effective?

- Centres and services being consistent/familiar, and having long-term staff
- Implementation of dedicated transport services at most centres
- Flexible approach to employing local Indigenous staff

**Figure 10** Examples of services in Ceduna: education room, centre exterior and children’s bathroom facilities



<sup>34</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Indigenous)

<sup>35</sup> Data provided from Australian Government Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

<sup>36</sup> Bureau of Meteorology 2016 [Climate Statistics for Australian Locations](#). (website)

## Region: Karratha, Western Australia

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>37</sup>: 866

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>38</sup>: High

Location: Karratha is a city located on the coast of northwest Western Australia and considered “very remote”. Karratha has warm to high temperatures all year round and receives low rainfall.<sup>39</sup>

Service/s description:

- Two Long Day Care centres; neither had not been assessed against National Quality Framework standards
- Long Day Care service which was ‘Working towards National Quality Framework’ rating

Main barriers to participation:

- Cost associated with attending services and misunderstanding funding subsidies
- Lack of private and public transport
- Completing paperwork due to low-level literacy skills

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Engaging Indigenous Elders in early childhood education centres – children learning about their culture
- Communication of children’s daily activities through portfolios, photographs in centres and private social media groups
- Involving whole family in early childhood education, for example, running cultural excursions into bush with whole family – ‘hunting and gathering’

What appears most effective?

- Communicating effectively with parents and carers ensures they are informed about children’s progress and gets them involved in their child’s learning
- Having Indigenous staff members visibly involved with the service and the care of the children

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<sup>37</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 *Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Indigenous)

<sup>38</sup> Data provided from Federal Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

<sup>39</sup> Bureau of Meteorology 2016 [Climate Statistics for Australian Locations](#).

**Figure 11** Examples of services in Karratha: education room and centre exterior



## Region: Gunnedah, New South Wales

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>40</sup>: 1,364

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>41</sup>: Low

Location: Gunnedah is a town situated in north-eastern New South Wales and is classified as sitting within an outer regional area. Gunnedah suffers with extreme weather with very hot summers and potentially freezing temperatures in the winter months.<sup>42</sup>

Service/s description:

- Long Day Care centre which was “Meeting National Quality Standards” in all seven quality areas

Main barriers to participation:

- Lack of private and public transport
- Trust in new service and staff
- Service over-subscribed

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Staff learn names of whole family; families greeted = creates welcoming atmosphere and builds trust
- Providing food so avoid ‘shame’ when families can’t afford to supply healthy foods
- Private sponsorship of a dedicated pick-up and drop-off service
- Working with other community services to provide general wellbeing
- Training and employing local Indigenous Australians as members of staff

What appears most effective?

- Local staff built trust with families = more consistent attendance
- Dedicated pick-up and drop-off service enables families without transport to attend

<sup>40</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 *Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Indigenous)

<sup>41</sup> Data provided from Federal Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

<sup>42</sup> Bureau of Meteorology 2016 [Climate Statistics for Australian Locations](#).

**Figure 12** Examples of services in Gunnedah; outdoor play areas



## Region: Cherbourg, Queensland

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>43</sup>: 1,193

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>44</sup>: Very high

Location: Cherbourg is an Indigenous settlement 250km north-west of Brisbane. It sits in an outer regional area of Queensland where it has a warm and temperate climate with a high amount of rainfall.<sup>45</sup>

Service/s description:

- Long Day Care centre which was “Working towards National Quality Framework” standards

Main barriers to participation:

- Trust in perceived government-run service
- Cost of attending services for parents and carers

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Informing parents and carers about the eligibility for education subsidies
- Spreading positive benefits of centre through word-of-mouth and walking through the community
- Employing male Indigenous educators encourages positive behaviours from children
- Training their staff, and external educators, on-site about Indigenous cultural awareness
- Strong relationship with local primary school – transition program in place

What appears most effective?

- Culturally appropriate education programs delivered
- Awareness of self-governance = community buy-in, pride in own Indigenous centre

<sup>43</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 *Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Indigenous)

<sup>44</sup> Data provided from Federal Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

<sup>45</sup> Bureau of Meteorology 2016 [Climate Statistics for Australian Locations](#).

- Mixture of male and female educators act as role models and provide opportunities for local population

**Figure 13** Examples of service in Cherbourg; Indigenous art and artefacts, and classroom



## Region: Orange, New South Wales

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>46</sup>: 2,050

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>47</sup>: Low

Location: Orange is a city situated in the Central West region of New South Wales. The city enjoys a mild temperate climate most of the year but is sometimes subject to snowfalls during the winter months.

Service/s description:

- Two kindergarten services; neither had not been assessed against National Quality Framework standards

Main barriers to participation:

- Removal of Indigenous staff from centres and rise of costs to use centres
- Lack of trust in services due to dislike of people running services = poor attendance
- Cost of attending services for parents and carers
- Fear of judgment around food
- Weather

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Dedicated transport services for some services; help families with no transport and when weather conditions are extreme (snowfall, for example)
- Indigenous liaison officer employed to reach out to parents in the community

What appears most effective?

- Key figures in community setting up early childhood education provision
- Employing local Indigenous liaison officer to make parents and carers aware of benefits of education, opportunities for funding and aware of services available in community

**Figure 14** Examples of services in Orange: education room and outdoor play area



<sup>46</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 *Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Indigenous)

<sup>47</sup> Data provided from Federal Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

## Region: Toronto, New South Wales (LAKE MACQUARIE)

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>48</sup>: 5,594

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>49</sup>: Medium

Location: Toronto is 28km south of Newcastle, NSW. The suburb is classed as a “major city” due to its proximity to Newcastle.

Service/s description:

- Long Day Care centre had not been assessed against National Quality Framework standards

Main barriers to participation:

- Complexities of family life make it difficult to attend
- Cost of attending services for parents and carers
- Perception that early childhood education and leaving children with educators is a ‘white fella’ concept

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Employing local Indigenous staff reassures parents that they understand family life = parents relate to educators and build trust
- Working closely with other community services to improve general child and family wellbeing
- Open days and celebration day activities to encourage enrolment of children
- Staff explaining benefits of attendance for children and parents = break the stigma of leaving children with educators

What appears most effective?

- Visibility in the community encouraged enrolments – now word-of-mouth sufficient but continue activities to maintain community relationships
- Employing local Indigenous staff members = ability to reach out to non-participating Indigenous families thanks to connections within community and encourage participation

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<sup>48</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 *Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Indigenous)

<sup>49</sup> Data provided from Federal Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

**Figure 15** Examples of service in Toronto; centre exterior and community room



## Region: Armadale, Western Australia

Number of Indigenous Australians in region<sup>50</sup>: 1,743

Participation rate of 3-5 years old Indigenous children in education services<sup>51</sup>: High

Location: A south-eastern suburb of Perth, the City of Armadale is classed as a “major city” in terms of rurality.

Service/s description:

- Two in-home education services; one which was “Meeting National Quality Framework” standards in all seven quality areas and the other which had not been assessed against the National Quality Framework standards

Main barriers to participation:

- Cost to parents and carers
- Fear of judgment around food
- Parents own experience of school

Examples of engagement strategies:

- Inviting parents and carers to centres, encouraging attendance and supporting them with administration
- Implementation of in-home program; learning at own pace and easier to build trust
- Cookery workshops run in local centres where children attend early childhood education program
- Partnership program (‘second bite’) with local supermarket to provide food for families in need

What appears most effective?

- Empowering parents to be their child’s first teacher
- Holistic approach to early childhood education, for example, involving parents in cookery classes

<sup>50</sup> Data taken from: ABS 2011 *Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Indigenous)

<sup>51</sup> Data provided from Federal Department of Education and Training and ABS 2011

- Linking with other community services to provide holistic approach to family wellbeing and early childhood education

**Figure 16** Examples of services in Armadale; centre exterior and marketing banners for program



# Appendix 8 Example early childhood infographic



Source: <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-initiatives/early-education/> (accessed 28.01.16)