Occasional Paper No. 19

Lessons learnt about strengthening Indigenous families and communities

Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004

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Stronger Families and
Communities Strategy

An Australian Government Initiative

Improving the lives of Australians

Administrative Arrangements Orders changes

In January 2006, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) and the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) merged to form the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). Following this, in December 2007, Administrative Arrangements Orders were announced that created a new Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to replace the former FaCSIA. The acronym FaCS has been used in most instances to refer to the Department now known as FaHCSIA.

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Executive summary

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (the Strategy) 2000–2004 was an Australian Government initiative funded by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to help build family and community capacity to deal with challenges and take advantage of opportunities. In 2002, a consortium led by CIRCLE (the Collaborative Institute for Research Consulting and Learning in Evaluation) at RMIT University was commissioned by FaCS to undertake a national evaluation of the Strategy.

This report discusses what has been learned from the Strategy 2000–2004 about how to strengthen Indigenous families and communities. These lessons have implications for future interventions funded through the Strategy 2004–2009, and through other funding initiatives and programs. The report provides insights into critical factors that explain the success of some projects and some of the frustrations experienced by others.

Evidence for this study has been drawn from multiple sources, including research and policy literature and the data gathered as part of the national evaluation of the Strategy 2000–2004. This has included: questionnaire responses from Indigenous projects; three in-depth qualitative case studies; site visits to nine other Indigenous projects; review of progress reports and final reports (where available) for these projects and a further 16 projects; and consultations with FaCS staff.

Achievements of the Strategy

The evidence shows that the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy has made an important contribution to the process of strengthening Indigenous families and communities. These findings are consistent with the research literature (that investment in capacity building and using an early intervention and preventative approach can be effective in strengthening families and communities).

There has been a high level of community participation in some (but not all) project activities. This is a substantial achievement given that many projects operate in an environment where there are multiple factors that militate against involvement, including lack of transport and substance abuse.

The Strategy has strengthened internal bonds and relationships within Indigenous families and communities. Outcomes reported include more positive interaction between mothers and infants, between young mothers and their women Elders, and between fathers and sons. The Strategy has also raised awareness and understanding about a diverse range of family and community issues, from parenting to depression.

The Strategy helped develop and deliver several new family and community services and social activities for Indigenous people, as well as improving their access to existing services. New skills and capacities have been developed in a range of areas ranging from life skills, to child care, to leadership. Training of both participants and staff has been a core activity undertaken by Indigenous projects. As a result some participants have been enabled to make life choices, such as returning to education, that arguably would not have been open to them were it not for the Strategy. It also appears that in the course of doing family and community development work and training, some service providers have become more oriented towards a preventative and early intervention approach to working.

The historic pattern of interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has left a legacy of distrust that can be difficult to change in the short to medium term. Nevertheless many Strategy projects have been successful in building new partnerships, including new relationships with bodies that have generally not been involved in Indigenous projects in the past. This includes mainstream non-government organisations (NGOs), local government authorities and universities. Some partners have contributed to enhanced coordination and have become new sources of funding.

These are all important achievements on the path towards stronger Indigenous families and communities.

While this report has a focus on Strategy projects funded as Indigenous projects it is important to note that Indigenous families and communities also participated in many Strategy projects that were not specifically targeted at Indigenous families or communities and were therefore not classified as Indigenous projects.

What's working?

Some interventions to strengthen Indigenous families and communities were particularly effective.

Some projects have been adept at piggybacking project initiatives on the back of existing activities, social events and structures rather than creating new ones. This approach of seeking to engage project participants by working through activities in which they are already meaningfully involved has been effective. Where this has been done it has not been necessary for projects to establish new mechanisms in order to get their message out.

Projects have received effective support from several quarters. In particular, projects need the support of competent and committed staff possessed of close relationships with the local community, cultural competence, and relevant subject matter expertise. In most cases this has meant a team comprised of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous project staff with complementary capacities.

Projects have also benefited from the support of an auspice with demonstrated strengths in the areas of administrative capacity, relevant previous project experience and established links with Indigenous people. Where the auspice is a non-Indigenous body without existing relationships with the Indigenous community, difficulties are likely to be experienced in developing relationships within the limited lifespan of the project. Such organisations need to invest heavily in building trust with participants. There appear to be efficiencies of scale and certain other advantages where the auspice is a regional organisation. Small scale and fledgling community organisations sometimes struggled to adequately fulfil the role.

Furthermore, projects value external assistance in areas such as project planning, preparing funding applications and budgets, and being linked with the right project partners. Some projects also needed intensive after-care during the implementation phase. FaCS officers gave most of this external assistance, but in some instances it came from other project partners.

Many projects benefited from their engagement in action learning processes, which involve: experience and critical reflection on that experience; group discussion; trial and error; discovery; and learning from one another. Many projects applied the action research cycle (action, observation, reflection and planning) to ensure program/service delivery continuously improves and remains relevant to key stakeholders. These processes have the potential to contribute to our understanding of what works, under what conditions, and why it works in Indigenous contexts.

Mentoring, role modelling, providing home-based services and using a buddy system have all been popular and successful strategies used to achieve training outcomes. There are numerous examples where Indigenous understandings, skills and initiative have been built on the job as a consequence of practical hands-on involvement in Strategy projects.

Finally, a word of caution. In many instances, definitive information about the effectiveness of particular strategies in strengthening Indigenous families and communities is hard to come by. There are contextual differences that mean that what works well in one setting may not necessarily do so in another, and few projects have run for long enough to be too prescriptive.

What's not working?

There is evidence of projects that were able to effectively strengthen Indigenous families and communities. However, the evidence suggests, for the most part, that projects have not yet achieved higher order outcomes within Indigenous communities such as greater resilience, the capacity to initiate action beyond the initial Strategy project and long-term sustainability. Furthermore it was found that the Strategy has been less effective in strengthening Indigenous families and communities than in strengthening families and communities more generally. Several inhibiting factors may explain why this is so.

To begin with, many projects operate in difficult and unsupportive social environments that are not conducive to smooth project implementation. In particular the experience of some projects has brought into sharp focus the degree to which ill health and security anxieties restrict the capacity to participate and the life choices of many Indigenous families and communities. Sometimes the peer pressure that is so influential in shaping high-risk behaviours (such as gang culture, unsafe sexual practices, petrol sniffing, binge drinking and smoking) tends to overwhelm the best efforts of project staff to change dysfunctional patterns of behaviour through awareness raising.

In some communities, projects have been inhibited by a lack of basic infrastructure, such as appropriate places to conduct project activities, suitable office accommodation and vehicles. These and other factors contribute to recurring high staff turnover, feelings of burnout and a host of other human resource issues that have long plagued Indigenous projects. Recruiting and retaining quality staff is a critical issue for Indigenous projects, especially in rural and remote areas.

Most projects reported that they needed funding and various other forms of support in order to continue beyond the expiration of Strategy funding, and there was little evidence that many projects had planned for this transition. Few partnerships have been built between Indigenous Strategy projects and mainstream business and philanthropic bodies. This evaluation found fifteen projects with some form of partnership with the private sector. Furthermore, almost no projects are generating any notable income of their own through their self-funding activities. This is understandable given that there is virtually no private sector in remote regions and most Indigenous communities are impoverished.

Indigenous family and community issues are complex. Knowledge and understanding about how best to strengthen them is still quite limited in many respects and there is still much that needs to be discovered, learned, shared and disseminated. The experience of the Strategy has contributed to understandings in this regard, but there is still a way to go.

Such factors need to be weighed in determining achievable project objectives, an adequate scale of intervention, the necessary duration of the project and the level of funding and other resourcing realistically required.

Lessons learnt

So what are the lessons for future interventions in Indigenous contexts?

‣ Strong Indigenous families and communities are outcomes that can only be attained through sustained, long-term intervention.

‣ Indigenous capacity-building activities are more effective when undertaken in connection with a specific practical social purpose in association with a particular project activity (as distinct from an isolated workshop or training exercise).

‣ Strengthening Indigenous families and communities is as much about healing the effects of trauma, attitudinal and behavioural change, and the rebuilding of confidence and self-belief, as it is about the transfer of particular knowledge and skills. There is an opportunity to review the effectiveness of healing initiatives.

‣ When investing in Indigenous capacity building, a key issue is finding the appropriate balance between upstream institutional capacity building (building the capacity of organisations to plan and implement projects) and downstream capacity building with families and communities (enhancing the self-reliance of families and communities).

‣ There is an opportunity for projects to learn from each other's experience by fostering dialogue about issues such as effective strategies of participation in Indigenous contexts. Some Indigenous projects appear to be isolated from other projects with a similar focus. There is an opportunity to support greater networking between similar initiatives. One option is to establish linkages between projects and organisations that are considered leaders in their field, for example, leadership development projects and the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.

◗ There is an opportunity to assist and resource Indigenous projects to build partnerships and better access support from the mainstream philanthropic and business communities.

◗ Strategic partnership arrangements provide much-needed stocks of linking and bridging social capital for Indigenous projects, but they do require a lot of time and energy to build and maintain.

◗ The choice of an appropriate project auspice has a critical bearing on project success. Projects that have a well-established auspice organisation with administrative capacity, relevant project expertise, and an existing solid relationship with the Indigenous community can add considerable value to an Indigenous project.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

This report draws together the available evidence about the process of strengthening Indigenous families and communities. This evidence is a synthesis drawn from several sources. It draws particularly on data collected during the national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004—questionnaires, case studies, site visits to projects (including face-to-face consultations with project staff and participants around Australia), and FaCS project files and other documentary sources. The report also draws on research findings and analysis drawn from the relevant academic literature, including the international literature.

The focus of this report is on what we have learned about what works and what does not in relation to strengthening Indigenous families and communities. Specifically it:

◗ provides background information about the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004 (the Strategy) and its policy context

◗ identifies the main achievements of the Strategy for Indigenous Australians

◗ identifies the main enabling factors contributing to the success of Indigenous projects

◗ identifies the main factors inhibiting the Strategy in Indigenous contexts

◗ identifies what has been learnt about strengthening Indigenous families and communities.

In the course of doing so this report also sought to:

◗ understand how Indigenous projects viewed the value of the Strategy and the support received

◗ consider the extent of Indigenous participation in the Strategy

◗ identify approaches that successfully engaged Indigenous participants in Strategy projects

◗ compare Indigenous projects with mainstream projects to highlight any notable differences

◗ identify potential critical success factors

◗ consider the future implications of these findings

◗ provide a bibliography of literature sources relevant to strengthening Indigenous families and communities.

From the outset it is important to acknowledge that there are still, as yet, many unanswered questions about how to effectively strengthen Indigenous families and communities. Some of the more important gaps in what is known lie in core areas such as the search for effective family and community responses to endemic levels of substance abuse and violence, how best to re-engage men and youth in family and community functioning, how to improve school attendance, and how to build social cohesion in those communities which are tearing themselves apart. Western understandings are limited and much still needs to be discovered, learned and disseminated.

Despite such challenges, the available evidence indicates that the Strategy has made a substantial contribution to strengthening Indigenous families and communities in important areas such as:

- increased participation

- the reinforcement of internal bonds and trusting relationships within Indigenous families and communities (for example, between mothers and infants, between fathers and youth, between young mothers and their Elders, and so on)

- greater awareness and understanding of family and community issues and enhanced skills among project participants and staff to address them

- the development of new partnerships

- bridging the gaps between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous groups from which they have been cut off on social, economic, cultural, racial or other grounds

- an expanded range of social activities and services that are available to Indigenous people (thereby meeting needs, countering social isolation and increasing choice)

- strengthening non-government social organisations as channels that can advocate and voice local Indigenous issues and concerns.

1.2 The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004 was an Australian Government initiative funded by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to help build family and community capacity to deal with challenges and take advantage of opportunities. It had a special focus on those at risk of social, economic and geographic isolation. In April 2004 the continuation of the Strategy was announced and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009 commenced in July 2004.

The Strategy 2000–2004 consisted of seven community-based initiatives, that provided funding and support for projects in the community, and six broader initiatives. The seven community-based initiatives were:

- Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support

- Stronger Families Fund

- Early Childhood Initiative

- Potential Leaders in Local Communities

- Local Solutions to Local Problems

- National Skills Development for Volunteers Program

- Can Do Community.

The six broader initiatives were:

- The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

- Greater Flexibility and Choice of Child care

- National Early Childhood Agenda Initiatives

- National Skills Development of Volunteers (non-linked project component) including International Year of Volunteers activities in 2001

◗ Can Do Community (non-linked project component) including web page and awards

◗ Volunteer Small Equipment Grants.

All community-based projects funded under the Strategy 2000–2004 were underpinned by the following eight principles:

◗ working together in partnerships

◗ encouraging a preventative and early intervention approach

◗ supporting people through life's transitions

◗ developing better integrated and coordinated services

◗ developing local solutions to local problems

◗ building capacity

◗ using the evidence and looking to the future

◗ making the investment count.

The formal period for the Strategy was 2000–2004, although some projects were subsequently extended to be completed in 2005 and, in a few cases, 2006. Total funding for the Strategy 2000–2004 was approximately $225 million, of which $80 million was expended on the seven linked initiatives that were the main focus of the national evaluation.

The Strategy 2004–2009 has a specific early childhood focus. Guided by research and consultation feedback from the National Agenda for Early Childhood, the renewed Strategy has been aligned with the following four key action areas identified in the developing National Agenda for Early Childhood: healthy young families; early learning and care; support for families and parenting; and child-friendly communities. There are four streams to the new Strategy: Communities for Children (CfC), Early Childhood—Invest to Grow, Local Answers, and Choice and Flexibility in Child Care.

Arrangements for supporting projects under the Strategy 2004–2009 have changed and in each of the 45 targeted regions funded under the CfC initiative a non-government organisation has been selected as a CfC 'Facilitating Partner' to coordinate and support projects in targeted areas. In addition, the department has funded local evaluators to support projects funded through the Communities for Children and Invest to Grow funding streams with project design, action research and evaluation. All three streams are also provided with support through the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).

The second phase, the Strategy 2004–2009, differs from the Strategy 2000–2004 in a number of ways, particularly:

◗ A new set of funding initiatives have been developed—Communities for Children, Invest to Grow, and Local Answers.

◗ There is a greater emphasis on early intervention in early childhood.

◗ FaHCSIA state and territory offices are not directly involved in assisting community organisations to develop project proposals—under the new Strategy support for proposal development is provided by Communities for Children Facilitating Partners, CAFCA and ARACY.

◗ Decisions about local initiatives funded through the CfC initiative are now made by CfC Committees. Identification and coordination of projects in targeted regions funded under CfC is undertaken by the facilitating partner rather than by FaHCSIA state and territory offices.

◗ While the Strategy 2004–2009 does not earmark a specific level of funds for Indigenous projects, it has a strong focus on assisting families and communities in need that necessarily includes Indigenous communities. For example, some Communities for Children sites have a major Indigenous population.

1.3 Indigenous focus of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

The Strategy 2000–2004 had a particular focus on projects for Indigenous families and communities. Of the $80 million allocated to community-based projects, a minimum of $20 million was specifically earmarked for Indigenous projects.

The purpose of the Strategy 2000–2004 was to raise the capacity of families and communities to address their own concerns. It sought to strengthen, empower and support families and communities, including Indigenous families and communities, to work together so that they could effectively address the multiple factors that impact on their social health and wellbeing. But it is important to note from the outset that the Strategy did not claim to be the panacea that could solve all of the myriad and complex issues that confront Indigenous families and communities, such as poverty, substance abuse, self harm and family violence. Rather, it sought to equip families and communities so that they could better handle these issues themselves.

In 2000, FaCS convened an Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable that developed eight additional principles to guide the work of the department in its interactions with Indigenous families and communities:

◗ encouraging partnership between government and Indigenous peoples in program design and implementation

◗ identifying positive role models and successful approaches

◗ empowering Indigenous peoples by developing leadership and managerial competence

◗ targeting the needs of youth and children in areas including leadership development, esteem building, cultural awareness and anti-violence training

◗ empowering Indigenous peoples to develop their own solutions to their own issues and to take responsibility within their own families and communities

◗ giving priority to initiatives that encourage self-reliance and sustainable development

◗ fostering projects that incorporate Indigenous culture and spirituality

◗ building on the strengths, assets and capacities of Indigenous families and communities.

Using a strength-based approach meant that the starting point was identification of the capacities people already had—their resources, skills, knowledge, understandings, interests, hopes and achievements—rather than initially focusing on those areas where families and communities may have been lacking in some way. It was important not to construct Indigenous peoples as, almost by definition, always the ones who lack capacity. A 'deficit' approach risks undermining trust, confidence and self-belief.

FaCS also formulated a Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People entitled 'Indigenous Business is Everybody's Business 2003' which, among other things, states that:

> Our purpose is to take the lead and work with others to help families, communities and individuals build their self-reliance and make choices through:
> ◗ Economic and social participation
> ◗ Prevention and early intervention
> ◗ A responsive and sustainable safety net.

This Statement of Commitment explicitly recognised the importance of developing partnerships between key non-government organisations, private and public sector stakeholders who could influence policy development, service delivery and other roles in Indigenous communities.

1.4   National evaluation

In 2002, a consortium led by CIRCLE (the Collaborative Institute for Research Consulting and Learning in Evaluation) at RMIT University was commissioned by FaCS to undertake a national evaluation of the Strategy. The scope of the evaluation was limited to the Strategy 2000–2004 which consisted of the following seven community-based linked initiatives:

‣ Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support

‣ Stronger Families Fund

‣ Early Childhood Initiative

‣ Potential Leaders in Local Communities

‣ Local Solutions to Local Problems

‣ National Skills Development for Volunteers Program

‣ Can Do Community.

The national evaluation focused on the 635 projects funded through the initiatives listed above, together with summary information on activities associated with the International Year of the Volunteer and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

The national evaluation addressed the following specific evaluation questions.

‣ How is the Strategy contributing to family and community strength in the short term, medium term, and longer term?

‣ To what extent has the Strategy produced unintended outcomes (positive and negative)?

‣ In broad qualitative terms, what were the costs and benefits of the Strategy relative to similar national and international interventions?

‣ What were the particular features of the Strategy that made a difference?

‣ What is helping or hindering the initiatives to achieve their objectives? What explains why some initiatives work? In particular, does the interaction between different initiatives contribute to achieving better outcomes?

‣ How does the Strategy contribute to the achievement of outcomes in conjunction with other initiatives, programs or services in the area?

‣ What else is helping or hindering the Strategy to achieve its objectives and outcomes? What works best for whom, why and when?

‣ How can the Strategy achieve better outcomes (identifying both good practices and areas requiring improvement)?

1.5   Information sources

Data to support the findings of the national evaluation in relation to Indigenous projects was collected from multiple sources:

‣ in-depth case studies of particular projects

‣ nine project site visits

‣ documentary sources, including FaCS project files

◗ consultation

◗ questionnaire responses from funded projects (an initial questionnaire about the processes of project development and a final questionnaire about project activities and outcomes)

◗ research and policy literature.

In-depth case studies

In-depth case studies were conducted of three Indigenous projects of different types:

◗ an Indigenous leadership development project

◗ an Indigenous integrated family strengthening project

◗ an Indigenous capacity-building project.

The sites were selected in order to ensure a mix of projects operating in different contexts (for example, urban and remote) and also because preliminary discussions with FaCS staff and other stakeholders suggested that each provided an opportunity for valuable learning about the effectiveness of the Strategy.

Case study reports of particular projects have been made available at the discretion of the participating projects (‹www.fahcsia.gov.au›).

Project site visits

Nine project site visits and associated face-to-face consultations were conducted in relation to the following Indigenous projects that were nominated by FaCS staff as sources of valuable learning about the Strategy. These were the:

◗ Aboriginal Men's Group Project under the auspice of the Goolburi Aboriginal Corporation in Bourke in north western New South Wales

◗ Far West Social and Emotional Well Being Centre under the auspice of the Maari Ma Aboriginal Corporation in Broken Hill (New South Wales)

◗ Gordon Centre in Dubbo originally under the auspice of the Central Riverina Orana Western Tenants Association (CROW), but subsequently under the auspice of the Dubbo Community Information Service (New South Wales). (On the advice of the FaCS office in Sydney, Dubbo was not visited but discussions were held with relevant FaCS staff and project files were comprehensively examined.)

◗ Kununurra Men's Group project under the auspice of the Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service in the northern east Kimberley (Western Australia)

◗ Building Strong and Healthy Families in Derby project under the auspice of the Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation in the West Kimberley (Western Australia)

◗ Integrated Approach to Capacity Building Project under the auspice of the Cape York Indigenous Health Council in Cairns (Queensland)

◗ Preventing Family Violence Workshop under the auspice of the Gallang Place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation in Brisbane (Queensland)

◗ Future Parents Program under the auspice of Save the Children in Brisbane (Queensland)

◗ Intergenerational Learning Centre under the auspice of the Tangentjere Aboriginal Corporation in Alice Springs (Northern Territory).

A summary of lessons learnt from site visits to projects can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Documentary sources

Documentary sources were used, including FaCS project files and project evaluation reports, in relation to a further 16 Indigenous projects as follows:

Early Intervention, Parenting, and Family Relationships

▸ Indigerelate—Lismore (New South Wales)

▸ Kickin the Blues—New South Wales

▸ Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corporation Project—Casino (New South Wales)

▸ Bushmob—Alice Springs (Northern Territory)

▸ Breakthrough—Indigenous Family and Community Services—Redland Shire (Queensland)

▸ Gurriny Yealamucka—Family Well Being—Yarrabah (Queensland). (This project was also part funded under the Potential Leaders in Local Communities and the Local Solutions for Local Problems initiatives.)

Stronger Families Fund

▸ Family Income Management Trials—Cape York (National)

▸ Indigenous Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters (HIPPY)—La Perouse (New South Wales)

▸ Bowraville Growing Community—New South Wales

▸ Red Ochre Links—Dubbo (New South Wales)

▸ Building Stronger Families and Communities in the Daly/Cox-Finniss Region—(Northern Territory)

▸ Strengthening Indigenous Communities Pilots (Wadeye)—Northern Territory

▸ Wide Bay-Burnett Indigenous Stronger Family Program—Bundaberg (Queensland). (This project was also part funded under the Early Intervention Parenting and the Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiatives.)

▸ Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert—Wiluna (Western Australia).

Potential Leaders in Local Communities

▸ Miimi Mothers Creative Circles—Bowraville Leadership Program (New South Wales)

Local Solutions to Local Problems

▸ Lajamanu Horse Sports—Northern Territory.

Consultations

In the course of this evaluation, consultations were held with FaCS project staff in Sydney, Canberra, Darwin, Alice Springs, Brisbane, Townsville, Perth, Halls Creek and Broome, and relevant FaCS policy and project file documentation was examined.

Questionnaire responses

The questionnaires completed by Strategy projects were:

▸ an initial questionnaire that was sent to all Indigenous projects during implementation

▸ a final questionnaire that was sent to all Indigenous projects on the expiry of their funding contract with FaCS.

For a summary of the responses of Indigenous projects to both questionnaires, see Appendix B of this report.

Research and policy literature

Research and policy literature relevant to strengthening Indigenous families and communities in areas such as social capital, capacity building, parenting and childrearing, violence and substance abuse was reviewed.

1.6 Indigenous projects

This section of the report analyses the available data relating to the number of projects that were funded and the level of expenditure by the type of initiative. Wherever possible, a state/territory breakdown is provided to give an indication of the spread of the Strategy across the nation. Comparisons are also made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous data to highlight similarities and differences.

It is important to note that Indigenous families and communities participated in many Strategy projects that were not specifically targeted to Indigenous families or communities and therefore were not classified as Indigenous projects.

Table 1: Numbers of projects by FaCS office and Indigenous status

FaCS office	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	Projects	%	Projects	%	Projects	%
NSW	36	21	133	79	169	100
VIC	7	8	83	92	90	100
QLD	19	16	98	84	117	100
WA	23	30	53	70	76	100
SA	11	15	62	85	73	100
TAS	0	0	11	100	11	100
ACT	1	8	12	92	13	100
NT	28	78	8	22	36	100
National	14	28	36	72	50	100
Total	**139**	**22**	**496**	**78**	**635**	**100**

Table 1 shows that 635 Strategy projects were funded across Australia under the Strategy 2000–2004, of which 139 (22 per cent) were Indigenous projects. The Indigenous projects were located in the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and in all states except Tasmania. There were also 14 national Indigenous projects funded through the FaCS National Office in Canberra.

Table 1 also shows that in the Northern Territory Indigenous projects accounted for 78 per cent of all Strategy projects in that jurisdiction, a much higher percentage than elsewhere. This largely reflects the different demographics of the Northern Territory where Indigenous people comprise a much greater proportion of the total population than in other states and territories. The state with the single greatest number of Indigenous projects was clearly New South Wales with 36.

Table 2: Funding approved for projects by FaCS office and Indigenous status

FaCS office	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	Projects ($)	%	Projects ($)	%	Projects ($)	%
NSW	4,970,657	24	15,520,996	76	20,491,653	100
VIC	606,295	6	8,923,802	94	9,530,097	100
QLD	3,348,341	24	10,637,791	76	13,986,132	100
WA	3,984,745	42	5,476,109	58	9,460,854	100
SA	1,036,696	15	5,810,940	85	6,847,636	100
TAS	0	0	2,011,306	100	2,011,306	100
ACT	109,940	12	829,503	88	939,443	100
NT	2,457,069	72	961,584	28	3,418,653	100
National	4,620,031	35	8,621,005	65	13,241,036	100
Total	**21,133,774**	**26**	**58,793,036**	**74**	**79,926,810**	**100**

Table 2 shows that, of the almost $80 million of Strategy 2000–2004 funding on project expenditure, a little over $21 million (26 per cent) was approved for Indigenous projects. It is important to bear in mind that this figure is likely to underestimate the reach of the Strategy into the Indigenous sector because some mainstream-funded Strategy projects also had Indigenous participants and staff. No data were available on the extent of such Indigenous participation and employment in mainstream projects.

Average project expenditure for the Indigenous projects was greater than that of non-Indigenous projects. While Indigenous projects represent 22 per cent of all Strategy projects, they account for 26 per cent of all outlays. This trend is most marked in Western Australia where Indigenous projects accounted for 30 per cent of all Strategy projects, but 42 per cent of all financial outlays. The reasons for this trend are not clear, although it is noted that Indigenous projects were more likely to be located in rural and remote regions where projects costs may tend to be higher.

Table 3: Summary of funding approved for Indigenous projects by FaCS office ($)

FaCS office	Projects	Funding	Average funding	Median funding	Maximum funding	Minimum funding	90th percentile	10th percentile
NSW	36	4,970,657	138,074	121,058	358,000	5,000	276,300	15,000
VIC	7	606,295	86,614	62,500	175,000	31,554	175,000	31,554
QLD	19	3,348,341	176,228	79,600	937,132	10,000	727,500	14,600
WA	23	3,984,745	173,250	81,159	1,041,250	4,092	391,850	7,273
SA	11	1,036,696	94,245	76,069	224,530	20,000	182,766	30,000
TAS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ACT	1	109,940	109,940	109,940	109,940	109,940	109,940	109,940
NT	28	2,457,069	87,752	60,000	470,140	18,694	212,742	22,500
National	14	4,620,031	330,002	205,000	1,447,987	60,000	915,000	80,000
Total	**139**	**21,133,774**	**152,042**	**83,354**	**1,447,987**	**4,092**	**300,000**	**20,000**

Table 3 reveals that the average amount of approved funding for Indigenous projects was $152,042. The use of average figures masks great variance across FaCS jurisdictions. National Indigenous projects generally attracted the largest budgets, averaging $330,002 for each project. By contrast, average expenditure for Indigenous projects in Victoria was just $86,614 and in the Northern Territory just $87,752. The largest single amount of funding approved anywhere was $1,447,987 for a national project, the smallest just $4,092 for a project in Western Australia. Even within states and territories there was enormous variability. In Western Australia, for instance, expenditure for projects ranged from a high of $1,041,250 to a low of just $4,092.

This pattern of expenditure reflects the fact that the focus of Indigenous Strategy projects is hugely diverse. At one end of the continuum they include large-scale multi-pronged macro-interventions aimed at addressing the multiple needs of Indigenous people across an entire region over several years. Examples would include projects that strive to:

◗ build the capacity of families and communities (for example, intergenerational training centres)

◗ adopt a sustained early intervention and/or preventative approach (for example, parenting education)

◗ provide new and expanded community services (for example, Meals on Wheels)

◗ establish networks among service providers (for example, establishing new coordination structures).

Conversely, Strategy-funded Indigenous projects also included numerous small-scale, short-term and localised one-off micro-interventions with quite a narrow focus. Examples include:

◗ funding of a one-off social event (for example, a ball, a family fun day)

◗ funding of a training course or workshop (for example, leadership development)

◗ the one-off provision of a resource (for example, playground equipment).

Table 4 classifies the 139 Indigenous Strategy projects according to their accessibility as defined by their ARIA classification (Department of Health and Aged Care 2001). ARIA is an index of remoteness derived from measures of road distance between populated localities and service centres. These road distance measures are then used to generate a remoteness score for any location in Australia.

Table 4: Summary of funding approved for Indigenous projects by ARIA class ($)

ARIA class	Projects	Funding	Average funding	Median funding	Maximum funding	Minimum funding	90th percentile	10th percentile
Highly accessible	44	6,659,860	151,361	115,799	915,000	5,000	300,000	31,554
Accessible	26	4,274,500	164,404	68,250	937,132	4,092	358,000	14,600
Moderately accessible	12	1,070,889	89,241	45,000	470,140	7,200	150,000	18,250
Remote	16	3,257,995	203,625	131,749	1,041,250	30,000	305,000	33,444
Very remote	41	5,870,530	143,184	79,600	1,447,987	7,273	262,500	18,694
Total	**139**	**21,133,774**	**152,042**	**83,354**	**1,447,987**	**4,092**	**300,000**	**20,000**

Note: Projects are classified by the postcode of the auspice organisation, which may not reflect the primary location of project activities.
ARIA classification:
◗ Highly accessible—relatively unrestricted accessibility to a wide range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction
◗ Accessible—some restrictions to accessibility of some goods, services and opportunities for social interaction
◗ Moderately accessible—significantly restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction
◗ Remote—very restricted accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction
◗ Very remote—locational disadvantage—very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.

The data reveals that Indigenous projects have been funded in urban, provincial, rural and remote regions. A little more than 50 per cent of funded projects (70 in total) were classified as being in an accessible or highly accessible area. These projects accounted for $10,934,360 of funding on all Indigenous projects, representing 52 per cent of total approvals for all Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy. Fifty-seven projects were classified as remote or very remote accounting for $9,128,525 of total outlays on Indigenous projects (43 per cent of total outlays). A limitation in using this data is that each project has been classified on the basis of the postcode of the auspice organisation and occasionally this may not reflect the primary location of project activities.

Average expenditure on projects was greatest for those classified as remote ($203,625) and least in projects classified as moderately accessible ($89,241). However, this should not be interpreted as indicating a trend towards higher levels of funding for the more isolated projects. Indeed it is instructive to note that average project funding in the highly accessible areas was $151,361, but just $143,184 for projects classified as very remote. It should also be noted that these averages mask great variability within each classification. For example, nearly all categories have a range of funding from under $10,000 to approximately $1 million or more.

Table 5: Numbers of projects by primary initiative and Indigenous status

Primary initiative	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	Projects	%	Projects	%	Projects	%
1. Early Intervention						
— Parenting	19	18	85	82	104	100
— Family Relationship Support	12	18	56	82	68	100
— Play Group	3	27	8	73	11	100
2. Stronger Families Fund	14	29	35	71	49	100
3. Early Childhood—SFCS	0	0	11	100	11	100
4. Potential Leaders in Local Communities	43	30	101	70	144	100
5. Local Solutions to Local Problems	43	21	165	79	208	100
6. National Skills Development for Volunteers Program	0	0	26	100	26	100
7. Can Do Communities	5	36	9	64	14	100
Total	**139**	**22**	**496**	**78**	**635**	**100**

Table 5 lists the nine initiatives that comprise the Strategy and reveals that of the 139 Indigenous projects, most were funded under just two initiatives: Local Solutions to Local Problems (43) and Potential Leaders in Local Communities (43). Four of the nine initiatives have rarely been used to fund Indigenous projects, namely: Can Do Communities, Early Childhood Initiatives, Early Intervention Playgroups and National Skills Development for Volunteers Program. Eight of the 139 projects were funded from these four initiatives.

Table 6: Funding approved for projects by primary initiative and Indigenous status

Primary initiative	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	Projects ($)	%	Projects ($)	%	Projects ($)	%
1. Early Intervention						
— Parenting	2,417,570	11	12,196,171	21	14,613,741	18
— Family Relationship Support	2,236,221	11	8,985,508	15	11,221,729	14
— Play Groups	207,734	1	701,904	1	909,638	1
2. Stronger Families Fund	7,274,736	34	10,883,138	19	18,157,874	23
3. Early Childhood—SFCS	0	0	1,226,789	2	1,226,789	2
4. Potential Leaders in Local Communities	6,028,614	29	13,688,263	23	19,716,877	25
5. Local Solutions to Local Problems	2,573,274	12	6,203,007	11	8,776,281	11
6. National Skills Development for Volunteers Program	0	0	4,343,144	7	4,343,144	5
7. Can Do Communities	395,625	2	565,112	1	960,737	1
Total	**21,133,774**	**100**	**58,793,036**	**100**	**79,926,810**	**100**

Table 6 shows differences in the proportion of funding from each initiative that made up total allocations to Indigenous and non-Indigenous projects.

When compared to non-Indigenous projects, Indigenous projects were more likely to be funded through the Stronger Families Fund and the Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiatives. More than 60 per cent of funding allocated to Indigenous projects came from these two initiatives. More than $7 million was allocated from the Stronger Families Fund spread across 14 projects, while Potential Leaders in Local Communities

provided funding of about $6 million spread across 43 Indigenous projects. Although classified as a family-focused initiative, projects funded through the Stronger Families Fund also had a strong focus on community capacity building.

Indigenous projects were less likely to be funded through the parenting and family relationships support funding streams of the Early Intervention initiative. No Indigenous projects were funded through the National Skills Development for Volunteers Program although some Indigenous people may have participated in non-Indigenous projects.

Table 7: Summary of funding approved for Indigenous projects by primary initiative ($)

Primary initiative	Projects	Funding	Average funding	Median funding	Maximum funding	Minimum funding
1. Early Intervention						
— Parenting	19	2,417,570	127,241	103,528	305,000	22,500
— Family Relationship Support	12	2,236,221	186,352	182,987	325,000	71,220
— Play Groups	3	207,734	69,245	60,000	129,040	18,694
2. Stronger Families Fund	14	7,274,736	519,624	374,925	1,447,987	81,159
3. Early Childhood—SFCS	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. Potential Leaders in Local Communities	43	6,028,614	140,200	110,000	915,000	15,000
5. Local Solutions to Local Problems	43	2,573,274	59,844	30,000	263,600	4,092
6. National Skills Development for Volunteers Program	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Can Do Communities	5	395,625	79,125	60,000	169,000	26,625
Total	**139**	**21,133,774**	**152,042**	**83,354**	**1,447,987**	**4,092**

Table 7 reveals great variance in the average expenditure on projects across initiatives ranging from an average of $519,624 on Indigenous Stronger Family Fund projects, to an average of just $59,844 on Indigenous Local Solutions to Local Problems projects. This reflects the large-scale, holistic, multi-faceted and regional nature of the Stronger Family Fund projects. Local Solutions to Local Problems projects, on the other hand, tended to be more localised and small-scale interventions.

Table 8: Numbers of Indigenous projects by primary initiative and ARIA class

Primary initiative	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote	Very remote	Total
1. Early Intervention						
— Parenting	8 (18%)	6 (23%)	2 (17%)	1 (6%)	2 (5%)	19 (14%)
— Family Relationship Support	5 (11%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	3 (7%)	12 (9%)
— Play Groups	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (2%)	3 (2%)
2. Stronger Families Fund	3 (7%)	4 (15%)	1 (8%)	2 (13%)	4 (10%)	14 (10%)
3. Early Childhood—SFCS	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4. Potential Leaders in Local Communities	15 (34%)	6 (23%)	3 (25%)	4 (25%)	15 (37%)	43 (31%)
5. Local Solutions to Local Problems	10 (23%)	9 (35%)	5 (42%)	4 (25%)	15 (37%)	43 (31%)
6. National Skills Development for Volunteers Program	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
7. Can Do Communities	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	1 (6%)	1 (2%)	5 (4%)
Total number of projects	**44 (100%)**	**26 (100%)**	**12 (100%)**	**16 (100%)**	**41 (100%)**	**139 (100%)**

Table 8 shows the spread of Indigenous projects by each initiative of the Strategy across highly accessible, accessible, moderately accessible, remote and very remote regions. This reveals that those initiatives that account for most of the Indigenous projects and most of the Indigenous Strategy funding—namely the Stronger Families Fund, Potential Leaders in Local Communities and Local Solutions to Local Problems—were spread across all regions. Local Solutions to Local Problems projects were the most numerous of all Strategy initiatives in all zones, with the exception of the highly accessible region where Potential Leaders in Local Communities projects were the most numerous.

Table 9: Total funding for Indigenous projects by primary initiative and ARIA class ($)

Primary initiative	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote	Very remote	Total
1. Early Intervention						
— Parenting	1,209,458 (18%)	644,350 (15%)	138,000 (13%)	305,000 (9%)	120,762 (2%)	2,417,570 (11%)
— Family RelationshipSupport	876,834 (13%)	271,830 (6%)	0 (0%)	398,660 (12%)	688,897 (12%)	2,236,221 (11%)
— Play Groups	129,040 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	60,000 (2%)	18,694 (0%)	207,734 (1%)
2. Stronger Families Fund	749,309 (11%)	2,284,632 (53%)	470,140 (44%)	1,305,658 (40%)	2,464,997 (42%)	7,274,736 (34%)
3. Early Childhood—SFCS	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4. Potential Leaders in Local Communities	3,037,443 (46%)	501,426 (12%)	172,085 (16%)	572,633 (18%)	1,745,027 (30%)	6,028,614 (29%)
5. Local Solutions to Local Problems	517,776 (8%)	572,262 (13%)	264,039 (25%)	447,044 (14%)	772,153 (13%)	2,573,274 (12%)
6. National Skills Development for Volunteers Program	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
7. Can Do Communities	140,000 (2%)	0 (0%)	26,625 (2%)	169,000 (5%)	60,000 (1%)	395,625 (2%)
Total funding	**6,659,860 (100%)**	**4,274,500 (100%)**	**1,070,889 (100%)**	**3,257,995 (100%)**	**5,870,530 (100%)**	**21,133,774 (100%)**

Table 9 shows the spread of Indigenous project funding across highly accessible, accessible, moderately accessible, remote and very remote regions of Australia disaggregated by the type of initiative. This reveals a tendency for Indigenous Potential Leaders in Local Communities project funding to be concentrated in the more accessible areas. The highly accessible zone alone accounts for about 50 per cent of all outlays on Indigenous Potential Leaders in Local Communities projects. On the other hand, Stronger Families Fund and Local Solutions to Local Problems funding is much more evenly spread across all zones. The initiative that accounts for the highest level of expenditure in all zones is the Stronger Families Fund, with the sole exception of the highly accessible zone where Potential Leaders in Local Communities is the initiative that accounts for most of the Strategy funding. Together the Stronger Families Fund and the Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiatives account for 63 per cent of all of the funding on Indigenous projects.

In summary, Indigenous projects account for almost one-quarter of all projects funded under the Strategy. There is great variation in the scale and budget of these projects. Stronger Family Fund projects were generally larger in scale than projects funded under other initiatives. The most important initiatives for Indigenous Australia both in terms of expenditure and the total number of projects were the Stronger Families Fund, Potential Leaders in Local Communities and Local Solutions to Local Problems. Indigenous projects were evenly spread across all regions of Australia. Some differences were found between the pattern for Indigenous projects and that displayed for projects more generally. The most notable difference was that average project expenditure was higher for the Indigenous projects. The state with the greatest number of Indigenous projects was New South Wales. The jurisdiction with the greatest proportion of Indigenous projects in its total caseload was the Northern Territory.

1.7 Policy context

Overview

The policy environment in which contemporary Indigenous family and community issues are positioned has been subject to a range of complementary trends of thought. These include:

◗ passive welfare

◗ models of service delivery

◗ Indigenous self-management

◗ preventative and early intervention approaches

◗ capacity building

◗ whole-of-government initiatives

◗ development of partnerships

◗ healing.

The Strategy picks up on all of these threads.

Passive welfare

In recent years there has been much debate about the long-term negative impact of passive welfare on Indigenous families and communities. It is argued that welfare ultimately contributes to a culture of dependence, and people do not feel empowered to take responsibility for their own lives. Further, it is suggested that many Indigenous people have become so accustomed to government agencies making many of the decisions, assuming much of the responsibility and providing for many of their needs that they have lost the 'can do' capacity and confidence required to act for themselves.

Such dependence has become deeply entrenched in the social fabric of many Indigenous families and communities.

> There is every indication that the transmission of reliance on welfare and high levels of unemployment are inter-generational, placing some Indigenous children at risk of future economic marginalisation and poverty. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 1)

Daly and Smith (2003) argue that there is now a considerable body of evidence that supports the view that welfare dependence:

◗ tends to undermine esteem

◗ is associated with a diminished sense of control over one's own life

◗ diminishes the capacity to cope with stress

◗ increases the likelihood of problem behaviours among children and underachievement at school

◗ creates an expectation of continuing dependence among family members (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 10).

One contribution of the Strategy has been to re-orient some participants, project staff and committee members away from 'welfare' thinking and more towards preventative and early intervention approaches that put the onus on participants to enable and empower themselves to address their own issues. A decade ago Jalaris (Western Australia) was a welfare and crisis intervention organisation offering food and other emergency assistance to Indigenous people in need in Derby (Western Australia). Today it is an organisation at the forefront of preventative and early intervention strategies in Indigenous contexts.

Models of service delivery

There is a substantial body of literature critiquing the effectiveness of service delivery models in the field of families and communities (for example, Cunneen 2002). The thrust is that past models of direct service provision by government have generally failed to enhance wellbeing to any notable extent and that a new approach that places responsibility for service delivery with non-government local community organisations is more effective.

Rather than government accepting primary responsibility for delivering most family and community services to Indigenous people, the trend is now towards service provision by community organisations located much closer to those in need. The main strength of this model is 'in being able to analyse and respond to issues at a local level' and in being able to design 'programs that resonate with local conditions' so as to accommodate the differences in regional and cultural contexts (Cunneen 2002, p. 26).

Indigenous self-management

Indigenous Australians aspire to greater self-management and control over their own affairs. Arguably nowhere is this aspiration stronger than in relation to Indigenous family issues because of the past intrusiveness of governments in these areas.

The practice of Indigenous control over many areas of service provision to the Indigenous population has been well entrenched in Australia since the 1970s (for example, the central role of Aboriginal Medical Services in the Indigenous health and wellbeing sector) although this model is not without its critics. In recent years a trend has been evident in several Indigenous justice initiatives, intended to make offenders more accountable to their own community. Increasingly it is evident in relation to the provision of Indigenous family and community services.

The Strategy has supported the delivery of family and community services by, with, and for the benefit of, Indigenous people. However, what has characterised the approach of FaCS is that most often this has been done in partnership with non-Indigenous partners rather than in isolation.

Preventative and early intervention approaches

Early intervention includes both prevention and early remediation. Prevention is about avoiding problems before they arise. Early remediation is about addressing issues at an early stage, before they become entrenched or lead to other problems.

There is now a substantial body of evidence demonstrating that the adoption of an early intervention and preventative approach can be effective in promoting the development of stronger families and communities, as reflected in measurable social outcomes. The benefits of an early intervention and preventive approach typically include improved relationships between parents and children, enhanced social and emotional stability, increased community capacity, improved confidence, behavioural changes, better communication skills and improved support for families (Libesman 2004, pp. 20–21).

The most crucial transition point at which to intervene is in early childhood, including the prenatal period. Available evidence strongly suggests that early childhood interventions are very influential in achieving better educational outcomes and a capacity to positively participate in society in a range of areas, including employment.

> The strong and healthy bond that a child develops towards family in early years is the foundation for future relationships with others, and for physical, social and psychological development. When a child has a strong and healthy attachment to family, both trust in others and reliance on self can develop. (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, p. 181)

Specifically, it has been found that children need to form good attachments to their carers if they are to become healthy, productive adults.

The transition from teenager to adult has also come to be regarded as a crucial life transition point where the use of effective early intervention and preventative strategies can have a profound impact on the socialisation of youth. It has been found that intervention can have a positive impact on parenting by developing skills essential to effective family functioning.

> Working with young people provides the opportunity to short-circuit the reproduction of harmful behaviours related to family violence, and may have a positive effect on reducing contact with welfare and juvenile justice agencies. (Cunneen 2002, p. 27)

Despite the obvious importance of early intervention as a principle, the 'Early intervention—particularly in early childhood' Issues Paper (Rogers, Edgecombe & Kimberley 2004), developed as part of this evaluation, cautioned against over-emphasising its importance in social policy:

> Despite the importance of early intervention, it is also necessary to not overstate its importance. A focus on early intervention and prevention should not mean giving up on those who have existing problems, who will probably need considerable help to address them.

> Nor should it mean becoming complacent about individuals and families that have received early intervention support. Positive outcomes can be understood as resulting from the mix of risk factors and protective factors. While early intervention projects seek to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors, positive long-term outcomes for individuals and families often require further support along the way, particularly at times of subsequent transitions. (Rogers, Edgecombe & Kimberley 2004)

Capacity building

In recent years capacity building has become a central plank of policy in many areas, including family and community services and, more recently, Indigenous affairs. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs have both lent their support to the emergent capacity-building approach to Indigenous issues.

The emphasis within capacity building is on strategies that provide families and communities with better access to the knowledge, information, skills and resources that they require in order to better help themselves. In the area of Indigenous justice, for example, there are now several initiatives that support offenders to take responsibility for their own actions and behaviours, and enable them to re-enter their own community (Memmott 2002).

The notion of capacity building begs the question 'the capacity to do what?' Clearly all families and communities have the capacity to do some things, but not others. For instance, some Indigenous communities have considerable cultural capacity (that is, the capacity to practice and maintain their culture), while simultaneously lacking the administrative capacities required for sound project management. Capacity has little meaning until it is linked to a particular purpose. There is no such thing as a generalised capacity relevant to all purposes.

The capacities required to effectively address family and community issues are ultimately about the degree to which families and communities are able to manage their own affairs and sustain action that achieves positive outcomes. It is about developing self-reliance by equipping families and communities to help themselves. The particular capacities required to do this encompass many things:

▸ confidence and a sense of hope and optimism about the future

▸ a willingness to put trust in others

▸ partners to work with

▸ knowledge, understanding and awareness of the issues

▸ access to relevant skills

▸ drive and initiative

- leadership and vision

- organisation and structure

- financial and other resources

- resilience and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances

- a supportive social and economic environment within which all of these things can happen.

Whole-of-government initiatives

The prevailing view in much of the literature is that only a whole-of-government response can hope to strengthen families and communities faced with endemic and entrenched disadvantage. In part this approach reflects a growing awareness that the benefits of social investments are generally maximised through cooperation and integration between family and community services, and that no single agency has the capacity to solve complex social problems in isolation. Australia's acceptance of the need for a whole-of-government approach has extended to the Indigenous sector in recent times.

A whole-of-government approach has several defining characteristics (Jackson 2003):

- 'joined up' and integrated service delivery arrangements rather than a program-by-program response to needs

- an emphasis on place management rather than program management

- a primary focus on the achievement of agreed outcomes

- shared responsibility across agencies for the achievement of outcomes (including integrated service delivery, accountability and reporting arrangements)

- decisions and actions underpinned by an evidence-based approach.

The notion of 'place management' has become influential in the literature of public policy and public sector management in recent years. Governments in many countries have adopted its principles in embracing a new way of doing business with families and communities at a local level. Place management is a process involving the regional management of the resources in a particular place in order to address local needs and capitalise on local opportunities. Service delivery is organised around the needs of the people in that place rather than around discrete generic functions such as health, youth and education. The emphasis is on building lateral linkages between people and organisations at a regional level, rather than on building vertical, hierarchic and patron–client linkages between regions and distant bureaucracies.

In 2002 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) established a process directed towards achieving a 'joined-up, whole-of-government' approach to service provision in order to achieve sustainable social and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples. The aim was for all tiers of government to work with Indigenous regions to refocus existing resources and deliver these in a more coordinated way to better address local needs.

The COAG trials were established in Indigenous communities to:

- tailor government action to identified community needs and aspirations

- coordinate government programs and services where this would improve service delivery outcomes

- encourage innovative approaches to doing business

- cut through blockages and red tape to quickly resolve issues

- work with Indigenous communities to build the capacity of local people to negotiate as genuine partners with government

◗ negotiate agreed outcomes, benchmarks for measuring progress and management of responsibilities for achieving those outcomes with the relevant people in Indigenous communities

◗ build the capacity of government employees to be able to meet the challenges of working in this new way with Indigenous communities.

In all trial sites, the Australian Government appointed a lead agency as the 'face of the Commonwealth' for that trial. The CEO (Secretary) of that department took on the lead role and the Minister responsible for the portfolio took on the lead Ministerial role within government. This served to connect people on the ground with the highest levels of government. FaCS was the lead agency for one COAG trial at Wadeye in the Northern Territory.

Strategy funds were used in conjunction with COAG trials at Shepparton (Victoria), Cape York (Queensland), Wadeye (Northern Territory), the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka region (Western Australia), Murdi Paaki (New South Wales) and in the Pitjitjantjarra Lands (South Australia).

Activities associated with the eight COAG trials have now ceased, and the overall approach has been evaluated. This evaluation highlighted the effectiveness of a place-based approach delivered through whole-of-government processes, with an emphasis on delivering services that are flexible and responsive to the individual characteristics of each community.

Development of partnerships

A partnership exists when two or more parties commit to jointly contribute to the achievement of goals. Partnership implies a mutual, long-term relationship and requires a capacity to work together with other families, groups and organisations (either formally or informally). It is about taking joint decisions and actions and coming together around a common purpose and shared interests. A partnership requires, as an essential prerequisite, some degree of trust between partners.

The concept of partnership is firmly embedded at the centre of what is generally understood to be good practice in relation to building stronger families and communities.

It is for this reason that partnership is one of the eight principles that underpin the Strategy. This is also true for the Indigenous sector.

> Good partnerships and meaningful collaboration between government and Indigenous organisations are vital to the development of effective child protection and broader child welfare strategies. (Libesman 2004, p.1)

Experience in Australia and overseas shows that providing financial resources alone does not achieve sustainable change in Indigenous contexts.

> In describing a number of Native American child and family services entities considered exemplary, one report identifies collaboration as the key feature of their success. Several of these organisations had complex partnerships between various combinations of state agencies, tribal organisations, and non-government organisations. (Libesman 2004, p. 17)

Where partnerships last well beyond the duration of the project, they make a valuable contribution to long-term social sustainability.

The literature of social capital helps explain the importance of partnerships in Indigenous contexts. Social capital is a valuable resource.

Social capital has been defined as 'networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate co-operation within or among groups' (OECD 2001) and similarly as 'the norms and social relations embedded in the social structure of societies that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desired goals' (Lochner quoted in Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 37).

Social capital is the product of the trust, engagement, participation, social interaction and reciprocity **between people** and consequently it can only ever accrue to families, groups and communities, and never to an individual.

The evidence is that it is a crucial component of the capacity of any community, and that without it sustainable change is not possible. Social capital has been positively correlated with achieving: positive social outcomes in many areas; improved health and emotional and psychological wellbeing; greater social cohesion and equality; reduced crime rates and a reduced incidence of violence and corruption; and increased income, economic growth and development (Cullen & Whiteford 2001). Unfortunately the pathways and mechanisms by which social capital contributes to the achievement of such beneficial outcomes are not always so clearly or well understood.

Generally a distinction is made between three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Our concern in this context is with bridging and linking social capital. Bonding social capital is discussed in Section 3.4.

Bridging social capital is the partnership created when people from different cultures and socioeconomic groups within a particular area are linked together; for example, local businesses and Aboriginal people. By enabling them to better access local resources and expertise, this process can open up what were previously closed social and economic opportunities for the marginalised and the disadvantaged. Bridging social capital is:

> … crucial to the success of civil society because it provides opportunities for participation, increased networks for exchange, and channels to voice concern to those who may be locked out of more formal avenues to affect change. (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 10)

At present Indigenous people generally have very few bridges to the wider non-Indigenous community. Bridging social capital has the power to cut through the social divisions that underlie this state of affairs.

> Long-term solutions to the problems of inadequate resources and social exclusion require connecting the marginalised to mainstream resources and services through mechanisms of bridging social capital, which unites these excluded groups with the majority … Bridging social capital is most likely to help improve the standard of living for these excluded and marginalised groups. (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 26)

Linking social capital is about access to external resources and support beyond the immediate region. This resource is created when people at the regional level are directly linked to influential external institutions, such as Ministers of State, the senior levels of the public sector, corporations and philanthropic bodies. Building linking social capital can facilitate the delivery of appropriate and efficient services to communities because it means that people at the local level are linked to the decision makers. Stocks of linking social capital enable people to more effectively advocate in support of their interests and apply influence to obtain the resources that they need, thereby increasing the responsiveness of institutions.

> [T]he capacity of various social groups to act in their interest depends crucially on the support or lack thereof that they receive from the state as well as the private sector. (World Bank Social Capital Website quoted in Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 5)

On the other hand, stocks of **bonding social capital** are a valuable source of mutual support which can aid the day-to-day survival of Indigenous families and communities; the literature suggests that it is stocks of bridging and linking social capital that are necessary if they are to further their interests and improve their socioeconomic circumstances. A lack of linking and bridging social capital places many Indigenous families and communities at a great disadvantage. Typically Indigenous people have few established partnerships and networks that extend to those in positions of power and to those with the capacity to shape public and private resource allocation decisions.

Partnership arrangements have the capacity to generate much needed stocks of linking and bridging social capital for Indigenous projects. Whenever partnerships that regularly bring together representatives of Indigenous people, government, non-government organisations, academic and private sectors are created, new possibilities for building bridging and linking social capital are created. Such arrangements can strategically link Indigenous people to relevant expertise and networks, including access to the highest levels of the corporate and government sectors.

There are several different types of partnership that can be developed. Some partnerships primarily exist to foster communication. A stronger form of partnership is that which involves cooperation between agencies.

A form of partnership that is even stronger still is collaboration. This involves joint decision-making and action to address shared concerns. Collaborative ways of working between agencies can often achieve outcomes that could not be achieved by any one agency working alone.

> A problem for Aboriginal people around Australia is that they have very few representatives from their own communities working in government offices, delivering services to their own people, drafting policy or making decisions that impact upon their everyday lives. Aboriginal children and families are therefore dependent on informed, sensitised non-Aboriginal people. Such people are rare, so Aboriginal families are vulnerable to ethnocentric and, at times, racist judgments by non-Aboriginal workers. (Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996, p. 43)

Collaborative partnership arrangements improve coordination to the extent that they commit all parties to shared objectives, complementary responsibilities and agreed outcomes. Such arrangements create the potential for creative synergies in which the total impact exceeds the sum of the parts.

The extent to which partnerships have been built through the Strategy and their contribution to the process of strengthening Indigenous families and communities is discussed in Section 4.5.

Healing

Healing is an emerging response to family and community issues that is concerned with assisting people to recover from trauma, grief and loss. The approach is a restorative one. Healing approaches are premised on an understanding that everyone has fundamental physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs, and that behavioural problems and a lack of resilience are the likely results where people lack the capacity to express their innermost self and these needs are unfulfilled (Tsey 2003).

Healing is about restoring the social and emotional health of participants (sometimes referred to in the literature in terms of repairing the soul and the spirit). Spiritual connection, it is argued, is what gives meaning and purpose to our lives. Spirituality is about the sense of connectedness that we feel with something greater than ourselves (whatever we may perceive that something to be). It is noted that the Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable sought to support projects that were inclusive of Indigenous culture and spirituality.

Within the Indigenous communities there is a keen interest and growing acceptance of healing approaches. It is a way of working that provides new hope in relation to some of the really hard issues, such as addiction, domestic violence, sexual abuse, suicide and other forms of self harm. But of course there is no quick fix. Healing from trauma is necessarily a long-term journey (Memmott 2002, p. 14).

In recent years it has become increasingly recognised that the life experiences of many Indigenous people have left a legacy of untreated post-traumatic stress. Recognition of Indigenous people's need to heal from traumatic life experiences first came sharply under the policy spotlight a decade ago with the *Bringing them home* report. More recently the Gordon Inquiry in Western Australia drew attention to the fact that 'to survive over the years, many Aboriginal people have had to suppress and/or deny their feelings of distress and despair' and that too often this finds expression in destructive forms of behaviour (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002, p. 57).

Healing is concerned with addressing the needs of both victims and perpetrators. In the case of the latter, the acceptance of personal responsibility is seen as the starting point of the healing journey (Libesman 2004, p. 16). Healing often involves group work involving narrative therapy within a safe setting. The aim is to give participants an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words in an environment where they feel comfortable doing so.

The process of 'audiencing' (that is, telling one's own story in the presence of a group) can help to authenticate feelings, to build shared empathetic understandings and to build bonds with others who have had similar experiences. The process encourages each participant to reflect on their life journey, the quality of their relationships, their values and their beliefs. Specifically it provides participants with opportunities to express personal feelings, to hear the experiences of others, to share their own experiential knowledge and understandings and to be a source of encouragement for others. As people change they may also begin to re-author their stories, that is, tell a new and different story of personal hope and survival.

A safe group environment is crucial to healing work. Ground rules of acceptable behaviour within the group are usually negotiated in advance. These commit members of the group to working together, respecting confidentiality, listening to the views of others, allowing equal talk time to each person and offering mutual support. Participants learn that they are not alone, that others have similar issues, and that they can be supported to give voice to their pain.

2   The current situation for Indigenous families and communities

2.1   Overview

The overwhelming weight of the available data suggests that most Indigenous families and communities are far from strong. Their daily reality is impacted upon by unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, violence, security anxieties, incarceration and a lack of education, as well as inadequate nutrition, poor health and wellbeing, poor housing and dependence.

All families and communities are complex systems made up of relations, kin, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, fellow residents and shared interests. There are several aspects to family and community strength: psychological strength (esteem, identity, wellbeing), physical strength (good health), social and cultural strength (bonds, good relationships, positive identity), and financial strength (resources, infrastructure, income, wealth).

‣ A strong community is one that has social and economic opportunities, ample stocks of trusting relationships, high levels of community participation, a safe physical environment and a range of accessible family and community services. The existence of strong networks and support systems is also characteristic of strong communities.

‣ A strong family is one that can meet the physical, financial and emotional needs of all of its members. In short, family members are loved, nurtured, healthy and safe and they are adequately fed and clothed. Strong families also have a positive sense of their own identity. They are also resilient, being able to cope with and survive tough times.

Patterns of behaviour that demonstrate mutual caring, sharing and emotional attachment are characteristic of both strong communities and strong families.

Some of the more important variables affecting family and community strength include:

‣ the absence of one or more parents

‣ how well adult family members parent and provide for their children

‣ nutrition

‣ substance abuse

‣ social isolation, that is, the extent of connections to support from family, friends, neighbours and the outside world

‣ financial circumstances

‣ employment status

‣ educational achievement levels

‣ the extent of welfare reliance

‣ prevailing social conditions such as the quality of housing, violence and crime.

Indigenous Australians are not faring well on any of these fronts (SCRGSP 2005).

Those wishing to explore the data in greater depth than is possible here are referred, in the first instance, to the work of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP 2005) which has been endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments. It outlines national benchmarks and 'relevant and meaningful indicators that can demonstrate the impact of government policies and programs on outcomes for Indigenous people' (SCRGSP 2005, p. xix). This framework is designed to monitor progress in overarching priority areas as measured by the following 12 headline indicators:

- disability

- school retention/attainment

- post secondary education

- labour force participation

- income

- home ownership

- suicide and self harm

- child protection

- violence

- crime

- imprisonment

- life expectancy.

The report also specifies useful strategic change indicators for Indigenous Australia.

This section will briefly examine just four aspects of the current disadvantaged state of Indigenous family and community wellbeing: living conditions; children and youth; education; and violence. There are many more that could also have been examined. The section then concludes by exploring some of the points of cultural difference that distinguish Indigenous families and communities from those elsewhere in Australia.

2.2   Living conditions

Many Indigenous families and communities live in difficult physical conditions.

Indigenous families generally live in much larger households than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The median Indigenous household has 3.4 persons, compared to 2.6 persons for other Australian households (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 3). About 10 per cent of Indigenous children live in households containing more than one family, compared with only 2 per cent for other Australian children (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 3). Survey data in one community revealed that more than half of all Indigenous households had three or more generations present under the one roof, with an average household comprising 6.5 members (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 3).

Almost two-thirds of Indigenous households live in rental accommodation, compared with only about one-quarter of other Australian households (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 4). This reflects the important role of community and public housing for the quality of life of Indigenous Australians (especially in remote regions where there is a much greater reliance on community housing).

It would be difficult to overstate the central importance of sound environmental health practice in relation to Indigenous communities.

> Improvements in sanitation, drinking water quality, food safety, disease control and housing conditions are major contributory factors to improving health and quality of life. (SCRGSP 2005, p. 10.2)

> Water and food borne diseases, tuberculosis and rheumatic heart disease can lead to premature death and temporary or permanent disability, which affects people's ability to work, study and engage in family and community activities. Trachoma can lead to blindness. Overcrowding in housing and poor water quality and sanitation have been identified as causes of respiratory diseases, urinary tract infections and kidney stones, intestinal worms, trachoma and infectious diarrhoeas. (SCRGSP 2005, p. 10.1)

Environmental health concerns such as inadequate fresh water or sewerage systems relate primarily to remote communities. However, there is ample evidence in the literature of poor living conditions in remote, rural and urban areas. While housing standards are worse in some areas, living conditions are also influenced by a complex mix of factors that include: the ready availability of alcohol, access to fresh food, access to services, and access to education, training and employment.

2.3 Children and youth

The Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable (2000) targeted the needs of youth and children as a priority area under the Strategy.

The Indigenous population has an extremely youthful demographic. Children under the age of 15 years account for 39 per cent of the Indigenous population, compared with only 20 per cent of the non-Indigenous population (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 3). One implication of this is that Australia can expect to see a continuing rapid increase in the number of Indigenous people reaching working age. This age profile has considerable service provision implications in terms of:

▸ a current and anticipated ongoing high requirement for maternal and child health services, school places and a range of other family and community services

▸ an anticipated high rate of growth in the number of people of workforce age and, on current trends, a probable increase in the need for welfare support.

Numerous studies have found strong evidence of high relative levels of Indigenous child poverty in Australia.

> Virtually every study of the wellbeing of families shows that children who spend their lives in households that are poor are more likely to lack adequate nutrition, quality housing, residential stability and other critical resources … the households in which Indigenous children live have substantially lower incomes than other Australian households. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 7)

Indigenous infants in Australia are twice as likely to die before the age of one and twice as likely to have a low birth weight as non-Indigenous infants (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 13).

Forty-two per cent of Indigenous children live in households where no adult member is employed, compared with only 16 per cent for other Australian households (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 9).

> Economically active or working parents serve not only as a source of financial stability for children, but also as influential role models. Unemployment has been linked to social and economic exclusion because it reduces individual choice and motivation, and undermines the financial independence of families … Of particular concern is the lack of any transition from young adults leaving school into paid employment … many Indigenous children grow up in households where the majority of adults provide no role model for stable engagement in paid employment, and are reliant on low and sometimes erratic levels of welfare income. Many children live in households that rely on forms of bookdown, or micro-credit advances against welfare payments. Such households live constantly on the edge of financial crisis, reeling through a 'feast and famine' cycle where children and the aged are vulnerable to fluctuations in income and care. (Daly & Smith 2003, pp. 8–9, 11)

Indigenous children are also much less likely to live with their biological parents than are non-Indigenous children. Forty-two per cent of Indigenous children are growing up in households with a single parent, compared with only 18 per cent of other Australian children.

> In local surveys with households in two Indigenous communities, 82 per cent had either a sole parent and their children in residence, or children in residence without any parent present … Sole parenthood is closely associated with poverty for all Australians, but this is particularly so for Indigenous Australians … Indigenous sole parents are also far less likely to receive child support from the non-custodial parent. (Daly & Smith 2003, pp. 6–7)

A relatively high proportion of Indigenous children are either living in unrelated households or in some form of foster or alternative care.

> Only 43 per cent of children living in Indigenous households are natural or adopted children in couple families, compared with three quarters of other children. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 5)

Many Indigenous children also suffer poor nutrition, hunger and violence as everyday occurrences in their lives. Of particular concern is the impact that traumatic experiences, such as being a frequent witness to or victim of violence, have on personal development, mental health and wellbeing. Other key concerns include the high incidence of juvenile detention in the justice system, as well as substance abuse and suicide. Some have drawn attention to a general lack of youth programs and social, recreational and other meaningful activities for Indigenous children and youth in many towns and communities (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002).

Many Indigenous communities are not safe and nurturing places for children and young people. It is for this reason that numerous projects funded under the Strategy have had a specific focus on developing youth and children including projects aimed at early intervention, community capacity building and community leadership.

It is clear that many Indigenous children and youth in Australia are currently growing up in circumstances that severely limit their chances of achieving their potential. It is for this reason that children and youth have both been prominent groups assisted through Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy. The current FaCS-funded Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children is expected to provide more detailed information to better inform future policy and practice in this area.

2.4 Education

The main issue for Indigenous youth and children highlighted in the literature is schooling, or more particularly concerns about truancy, retention rates and achievement levels.

Research has revealed a strong correlation between the pace of child learning in the early years and the level of education attained by their parents. Census data reveals that Indigenous children are much more likely to have parents who left school early. Over half of Australian children live in households where at least one parent has completed Year 12, compared to only 23 per cent of Indigenous children (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 11).

> [I]n one central Australian community, 86 per cent of the adult population have no educational qualifications at all, and staff at the nearby regional Indigenous high school report the average educational skills of incoming Indigenous high school students as being at grade 3 primary school level … The Learning Lessons review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory … judged that English literacy and numeracy at the level of Year 7 are necessary for any person to function effectively in the wider Australia community, and that literacy and numeracy at the level of Year 10 are required for employment in any management or administrative role in most communities. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 12)

The Munjurla Study undertaken as part of the Western Australian COAG trial in the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka region of Western Australia found that years of formal western education completed were extremely low throughout the region (Lingiari Foundation 2004, p. 138). Eighty-four Aboriginal people in the region (15 per cent) reported that they had never attended school and 163 (29 per cent) reported that they had not proceeded beyond Year 7 (Lingiari Foundation 2004, p. 38). Few Aboriginal people were familiar with information technology. In the 2001 Census almost no Aboriginal people in the region reported using a computer and the Internet (ABS 2001, Tables I10 & I11).

Among other things, low levels of educational achievement and literacy are likely to have an ongoing impact on the governance capacity of Indigenous Australia until such time as the issue is systematically addressed and rectified. Some Strategy-funded projects have instituted some innovative responses to educational needs, but the ultimate success of these in improving educational outcomes such as retention rates can only be evaluated in the medium to longer term.

2.5 Violence

The rate of violent behaviour in Indigenous communities is disproportionately high when compared with rates in the Australian population as a whole (Memmott et al. 2001, p. 6). Aboriginal women in Western Australia, for example, are 45 times more likely to be the victims of domestic violence than non-Aboriginal women (Cunneen 2002, p. 24). It has also been estimated that family violence occurs in 90 per cent of Aboriginal families living in communal Deed of Grant Trust areas in Queensland (Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force 1988, p. 256). Women, children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable.

All forms of violence (family violence, interpersonal violence, child abuse, self harm and suicide) tend to be prevalent because the living environment often displays many of the characteristic features of families and communities that are vulnerable to such patterns of behaviour:

◗ an intergenerational history of abusive behaviours

◗ high levels of stress

◗ alcohol and substance abuse

◗ socioeconomic disadvantage

◗ inadequate housing

◗ physical illness (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002, pp. 20–21).

Other contributing factors include an inability to control emotions such as jealousy, long running inter-family feuds and a deeply felt urge to exercise power and control over others.

Violence has psychological as well as physical effects. Many communities and families are fractured by internal conflicts and tensions, leaving an all-pervading air of stress and anxiety.

> Aboriginal men, women and children are hurting. In some communities, both urban and remote, the nature, severity and extent of violence is such that it is beyond the understanding of those it affects the most. Women cannot see any options but to accept the violence, for it is their own kin involved. The future looks bleak for many of these women, and in talking to them it is clear they feel a sense of real powerlessness and shame. (Atkinson 1990, pp. 13–14)

There has been an encouraging growth in the number of Indigenous anti-violence programs in recent years, albeit off a small base. Some are funded under the Australian government Partnerships Against Violence initiative, while others are state/territory government programs.

Some innovative responses to Indigenous violence have emerged. The Wadja Warriors football team at Woorabinda in Queensland, for instance, decided several years ago to drop any player involved in violence (Cunneen 2002, p. 26). Subsequently there was a reduction in the incidence of violence in that community. This idea has since spread to other places far and wide, including the Mowanjum community in the West Kimberley (Western Australia) and to a Strategy-funded project in Bourke, New South Wales. Anecdotal advice suggests that this strategy has been successful in these contexts as well; however no systematic evaluation has been conducted.

The 2002 *Putting the picture together: inquiry into response by government agencies to complaints of family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities* report (Gordon Inquiry—Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002), initiated by the Western Australian government, identified child abuse and family violence in Indigenous communities as major issues requiring a concerted and decisive policy response. The State Government subsequently formulated an 'Action plan for addressing family violence and child abuse issues in Aboriginal communities' as its formal response to the Gordon Inquiry. This action plan is intended to strengthen responses to abuse and violence in Aboriginal communities and improve safety within communities.

Some headway has also been made in addressing violence through community-based justice initiatives such as the Koori Court in Victoria and the Nunga Court in South Australia.

> Community involvement in dealing with offenders will impose a community sanction on the offender's behaviour and demonstrate the community's intolerance of family violence. It is argued that this demonstration of community intolerance will have a greater and more meaningful impact on Aboriginal offenders than the existing criminal justice processes. (Lawrie & Mathews 2002, p. 16)

In many communities violence is so endemic as to be accepted as 'a normal and ordinary part of life' (O'Donoghue 2001, p. 15). It is difficult to even contemplate the notion of 'strong' Indigenous families and communities so long as the incidence of violence remains at current levels.

> The powerful value systems that draw people into cycles of violent behaviour must be eroded … there are complex social and psychological factors involved in many forms of violence that need to be dealt with in a holistic manner, requiring community-wide attention. (Memmott 2002, p. 14)

Some Strategy projects have sought to tackle these complex factors by working with the perpetrators and supporting them to deconstruct their behaviour and embark on a healing journey. This is extremely difficult work. There are entrenched and cyclic intergenerational patterns involved and it has often been found that perpetrators of violence are themselves suffering the effects of traumatic life experiences.

2.6 Cultural differences

Indigenous Australians, irrespective of the context or region in which they live, have managed to retain a distinctly Indigenous approach to family and community life. It is generally the case that Western concepts such as 'household', 'family', 'parent', 'sole parent', 'community' and 'resident' tend to reflect non-Indigenous values and struggle to adequately represent Indigenous conceptualisations and realities (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 2).

To some extent Western understandings of these matters has been informed by anthropologists who have long been involved in recording their observations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, clan groups and extended families. They have written extensively on kinship patterns, social interactions, networks, social organisation, moieties and skin groups, avoidance relationships, social obligations and responsibilities, marriage, initiation, socialisation processes, parenting, gender relations, and the dynamics of male and female roles in society and belief systems.

In more recent times Western understandings of Indigenous family and community issues has also been informed by a rich and rapidly growing number of very personal accounts written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves. Often they are moving stories of family dislocation and the search for a sense of identity and esteem. Much of this work is autobiographical, but some accounts have been written by or with non-Indigenous authors. They write of their hopes and fears and aspirations for a better future. Sometimes this is expressed creatively through poetry and in other forms which 'speak back' to non-Indigenous constructions of Indigenous community and family life.

The first and foremost point of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous families and communities is, and always has been, the significance of the extended family.

> The central importance of family and kin in everyday life is a valued form of social and cultural capital in many Indigenous families and communities. If family is the fundamental source of social capital … then for Indigenous people it is the extended family formation, not the nuclear family, which serves that pivotal role … Indigenous households are characteristically large and compositionally complex. They are multi-generational, and constituted on the basis of kinship. These co-residential extended families are linked to other similar households through wide-reaching economic and kinship networks … These networks act as crucial mechanisms for cushioning against financial hardship, and enable the sharing and redistribution of cash and other resources across households. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 14)

Indigenous family structures often differ greatly from Western notions of family. Aboriginal families typically have other relatives living with them and it is not unusual for grandparents and other family members to fulfil at least some of the parenting role. Communalised child rearing has a central place in Indigenous societies, with children often being looked after by grandparents, aunts and other relations.

> The complexity of Indigenous extended family formations is matched by equally complex cultural practices surrounding parenting and childcare. Parenting responsibilities are socially and economically distributed beyond biological parents to a wide range of relatives. The primary care group for many Indigenous children lies in the wider extended family located across several different households. The care and financial support of a child may be shared out on a daily basis, with different people assuming different responsibilities. The kin referred to by the English terms 'aunty' and 'granny' are particularly influential as primary carers and socialisers of children. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 14)

It is not unusual for grandparents to be the primary carers. The circumstances that lead to this are many and varied. They are certainly cultural, for grandparents have always played a special nurturing role in Indigenous families as much-respected matriarchs, patriarchs, storytellers, teachers and peacemakers. But in contemporary society the central place of grandparents can also come about as the result of factors such as the premature death of one or both parents, relationship breakdown, poverty, substance abuse, parental health problems or incarceration.

In Indigenous society the Elders have always been responsible for passing on their knowledge and experience to younger generations. Their role has always been one of family support and anchor.

> Teenage mothers are frequently not well grounded in parenting skills, and find that child-rearing places restrictions on normal teenage activities. The older and more experienced women therefore play an important role as they step in to care for the child during the early years and, at the same time, educate and advise the young mother on parenting skills. In this way, traditional child-care practices are carried on, and the child may return to the biological mother or stay with relatives. Either way, the crucial point is that the child remains in touch with his or her Aboriginality and family. Thus the relationship between the biological parent and child is in no way diminished, while an appreciation of the valuable contribution made by members of the wider family to the nuclear group is gradually established. (Gray, Trompf & Houston 1994, pp. 116–117)

Contemporary Indigenous families tend to be matriarchal. The men are often absent for a variety of reasons including premature death, chronic ill health, substance abuse and incarceration in the prison system.

> Women are widely regarded as being the most important members of the household, as it is the mother who provides economic stability through welfare income, provides care and nurturance and is often a leader in community initiatives … However economic deprivation and the traditional marriage responsibilities of men have left women in a vulnerable position. There is less obligation for husbands to stay with the family and women may not have appropriate 'care-taking' relatives to whom they can turn, for instance in the case of male violence. (Gray, Trompf & Houston 1994, p. 108)

In mainstream society, one-parent families and female-headed households have generally been found to be especially subject to stress and vulnerability. One attribute of strong families, the quality of time spent together, is generally considered to be diminished when a child grows up with only one or no parent present. Single-parent households tend to lack support when caring for and socialising their children (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 5). However, for cultural reasons, this is not necessarily the case in Indigenous contexts.

> Indigenous sole parents live primarily in extended family households, whereas other Australian sole parents commonly live by themselves with their children. Moreover, in Indigenous households there are often several generations of related sole parents living together … Sole parents are not isolated from family support and assistance and, perhaps more importantly, their extended kin networks act as an important reservoir of support, socialisation and care for their children. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 15)

It has only been in relatively recent times that the value of Indigenous child rearing practices has been recognised. In the not so distant past they were generally regarded as 'lacking in discipline' relative to western norms (Gray, Trompf & Houston 1994, pp. 83–84).

> Because they are only seeing things through their white culture, they [government workers] will misinterpret the way I discipline the kids, and they won't notice that my kids are happy and loved and growing up in a way that they can look after themselves and do the right thing by their family. They know who they are and where they belong and that their family would stand by them through thick or thin. They know that I'll give my last cent for them and that if I lost them, my life would be destroyed. Now they are older, I know they can and will be there for me if I am sick and need them. (Anonymous Nunga mother quoted in Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996, p. 43)

More recently it has been found that some child-rearing practices that were once viewed negatively by non-Aboriginal people can, in fact, be effective means to develop independence and emotional and physical resilience among Indigenous children thereby enabling them to cope with the often harsh circumstances that they are likely to encounter later in life (Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996). The socialisation of children in Indigenous families and communities is typically achieved through the use of subtle and indirect means, such as paying selective attention, the use of stories that communicate a value laden message, or the encouragement of children to imitate parental actions. Older children are often expected to assume responsibility for supervising and protecting the younger ones and taking responsibility for things such as what they eat and how much.

It is important to recognise that there are many points of difference between family and community structures in Indigenous and mainstream contexts. Generally the following are characteristic of Indigenous families and communities:

- The extended family (not the nuclear family) is the basic social unit in Indigenous Australia.

- There is a strong sense of family and clan group identity.

- Classificatory relationships of 'brother', 'sister', 'aunty' and 'uncle' often have parity with biological family relationships.

- There is a high incidence of separation of natural family members.

- A large proportion of households are composed of extended family groups and several generations.

- There are strong cultural obligations to share money and food with extended family members and others.

- Elders and extended family members play a central role in child rearing and accept responsibility for functions that would normally be the sole responsibility of parents in non-Indigenous society.

- Grandparents are often the primary carers.

- Children are often transferred between family members and between homes.

- Contemporary Aboriginal families tend to be strongly matriarchal, especially in urban areas where men may be absent for a variety of reasons including ill health, substance abuse and incarceration.

- A high proportion of the male population 'floats', constantly moving in and out of households.

- Many children live in households where one or both parents are absent.

- There is a more lenient and tolerant attitude towards child behaviour.

- Geographic mobility is common.

- There is a high incidence of child growth retardation and infant death.

Cultural differences have implications for policy and practice. For instance, if the whole Indigenous extended family shares responsibility for child rearing, then it is towards the whole Indigenous extended family that awareness raising activities need to be directed: aunts, cousins, grandparents, siblings and so on, not just towards the parents. This has very real implications for targeting parent education and antenatal programs.

The literature of Indigenous family and community issues identifies the need for modes of service delivery that succeed in incorporating cultural knowledge in a meaningful way. It is all about adapting services to fit the cultural context (Libesman 2004, p. 2). This notion is captured by the term 'cultural competence' which has been defined as 'a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations' (Tong & Cross 1991, p. 12). One who is culturally competent has the capacity to appreciate and value diversity and understands the cultural factors that impact on a project (Tong & Cross 1991, pp. 12–13).

> For service delivery to be culturally competent it needs to move beyond incorporation of Indigenous staff in standard delivery programs, to the incorporation of cultural knowledge into the service delivery framework … Services need to develop and incorporate locally identified knowledge, skills and values in order to achieve cultural competence. This includes knowledge of the peoples in the area, their communication systems and culture, and their contemporary realities including local inter and intra community politics, and socio economic situations … (Libesman 2004, p. 33)

This has put the spotlight firmly on the need and ongoing search for more culturally sensitive models of intervention, 'a model of service delivery which acknowledges and complements Aboriginal beliefs and practices' (Slattery 1987, p. 62). Some Strategy projects are doing some groundbreaking work in developing bicultural approaches to family and community issues. The case study of the integrated family strengthening project, for example, found that the project was successful in emphasising the connectedness of people and place and that it had created a central place for birthing ceremonies, rituals and local knowledge alongside Western understandings of child growth and development.

> The most effective parent training programs are those that blend principles derived from modern child development with the spirituality, customs, traditions and other cultural ways of the tribe. (Horejsi et al. 1992, p. 335 quoted in Libesman 2004, p. 25)

3 Achievements of Indigenous projects

3.1 Overview

The analysis of all the evidence collected and analysed in the course of this national evaluation shows that the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy has made an important contribution to the process of strengthening Indigenous families and communities. In summary this evidence is:

▹ Questionnaire responses received from Indigenous projects reveal a high level of satisfaction with the outcomes achieved to date (refer to Appendix B).

▹ The three in-depth Indigenous qualitative case studies found that these projects have produced a range of positive outcomes (refer to Appendix A).

▹ Project site visits involving a further nine Indigenous projects across Australia found that they had all produced positive outcomes (refer to Appendix A).

▹ Project progress reports, project evaluation reports and other file documentation reviewed in relation to a further 16 Indigenous projects again found that all reported positive outcomes.

These findings are further supported by extensive academic literature that indicates that investment in capacity building and the adoption of early intervention and preventative approaches is generally an effective way in which to strengthen families and communities.

Specific ways in which the Strategy has contributed in the short to medium term include:

▹ increased participation

▹ reinforcing internal bonds and trusting relationships within Indigenous families and communities (for example, between mothers and infants, between fathers and youth, between young mothers and their Elders, and so on)

▹ greater awareness, understanding and skills (among project participants and staff)

▹ the development of new partnerships

▹ connecting Indigenous people with non-Indigenous groups from which they have been cut off in the past (on social, economic, cultural, racial or other grounds)

▹ expanding choice by raising awareness and extending the range of social activities and services that are available to Indigenous people (thereby meeting social needs and countering social isolation)

▹ strengthening non-government social organisations as channels that can advocate and voice local Indigenous issues and concerns.

Supporting evidence for these achievements is presented in this section.

3.2 The outcomes hierarchy

The outcomes hierarchy for the Strategy at Figure 1 was constructed in the early days of this national evaluation in 2002. It envisions a schema where projects achieve lower order outcomes towards the bottom of the ladder, such as increased participation and interpersonal trust, before moving up to achieve higher order outcomes, such as greater community resilience, a capacity to drive their own solutions and a reduced reliance on external support.

Of course, like all models, the outcomes hierarchy is a simplified representation of a more complex reality. It is not suggested that all projects necessarily move through exactly the same linear steps in sequential order. In reality processes and outcomes tend to be more iterative. The model is purely intended as an aid to conceptual understanding.

The achievements of the Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy are described below in relation to the steps of the hierarchy. The evidence shows that these achievements primarily relate to the three lower levels of the hierarchy. In other words there is much evidence to suggest that Indigenous projects have increased participation, enhanced trust, raised awareness, developed new partnerships, provided greater choice, contributed to better understandings, increased skills and built a capacity for initiative. However, there is not much evidence to suggest that the Indigenous families and communities that have participated in the Strategy are now more resilient with a demonstrated capacity to apply new found understandings, skills and capacities to other family and community issues beyond the original Strategy project.

This finding was not surprising given that the literature relevant to building stronger families and communities makes it clear that building this kind of higher order capacity is likely to be a long process requiring a level of sustained support and commitment way beyond what was achievable within the life span of the Strategy 2000–2004. Indigenous family and community building is necessarily a long-term process requiring ongoing engagement with Indigenous people.

The diagram of the outcomes hierarchy (Figure 1) shows the seven levels from this outcomes hierarchy. Initial **participation** and the development of **trust** (level 1) contributes to increased **awareness** (level 2), and then to **development of skills** (level 3), and to the **application** of these skills (level 4), which in turn contributes to increased family and community trust, **resilience** and adaptability (level 5), and an **environment of sustained self-determination** (level 6).

This chain of outcomes, repeated several times as families and communities work together to make the most of opportunities and to address challenges, contributes to maintaining and improving individual and collective wellbeing and **stronger families and communities** (level 7). This is the end result of strengthening families and communities.

The diagram emphasises the iterative nature of the processes involved in strengthening families and communities. The outcomes hierarchy is not a linear process of moving simply from level 1 through the various levels to level 7, but one with feedback loops where early successes lead to increased engagement and opportunities. Increasing capacity has the potential to amplify benefits over time by continuing to improve wellbeing, and continuing to develop the different forms of capital, which in turn improve wellbeing and so on, creating a positive feedback loop.

Figure 1: Adaptation of the outcomes hierarchy focusing on iterative capacity building
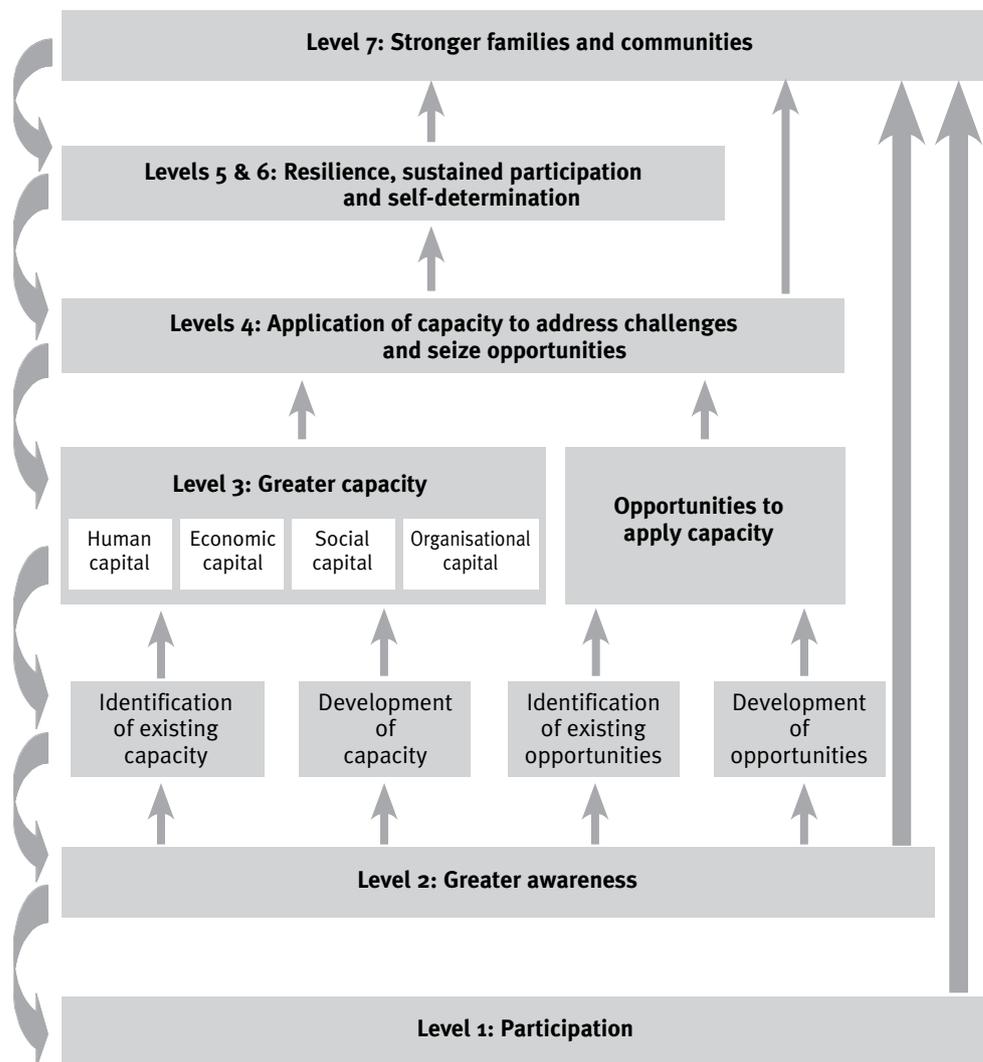
3.3 Participation

The outcomes hierarchy suggests that getting people to participate constitutes one of the first rungs when climbing the ladder towards strong families and communities. Some Indigenous Strategy projects have been especially successful in getting high levels of Indigenous participation, and analysis of the data collected in the course of this national evaluation has helped to tease out the reasons underpinning this success and the lessons to learn from it.

Participation is the capacity (confidence, motivation, willingness, knowledge and skills) to work, interact and effectively engage with others. In this context it is about the extent, range, nature and quality of family and community involvement in project activities. It encompasses both involvement in Strategy processes (such as the initial consultations about project ideas) and subsequent participation in project activities (such as the operation of a playgroup).

The Indigenous community development and capacity building literature both emphasise the importance of participation. 'Involvement of, and consultation with, community members should take place throughout the project cycle, from design through to evaluation' (Libesman 2004, p. 17). Such processes are seen as a necessary step towards building a sense of local project ownership. Active local participation is seen as making for responsiveness to community needs and priorities.

> Social problems and unacceptable behaviour are inseparable from community life. Preventative and rehabilitative responses are more likely to be effective if they are planned by people who possess an intimate knowledge of the offending behaviours, the social capacities of the community, and the solutions that are likely to work. (Memmott 2002, p. 11)

Questionnaire responses indicate that 'bringing people together' and 'community consultation' were major activities undertaken by a majority of Indigenous projects. Bringing community members together was identified as a major activity by 64 per cent of Indigenous projects. Community consultation was identified as a major activity by 62 per cent of Indigenous projects. These were also major project activities identified in all three of the in-depth Indigenous case studies.

Furthermore, the questionnaire responses from Indigenous projects indicate that community involvement has 'contributed a lot' or 'a fair bit' to projects. These questionnaire responses, the case studies, the site visits and other consultations all indicate that in most cases the original idea for projects came from the Indigenous community and that there was extensive prior community consultation. In most cases (86 per cent), members of the Indigenous community, or Indigenous groups, participated by taking on key roles in project development and implementation.

The following are some examples of what Indigenous projects had to say themselves about the nature and extent of participation.

> The family fun day, held in October was a great success with about 250 people attending and joining in the games and sports that were organised … Families put aside their differences and just had fun. This day gave us a very positive opening with the community and an opportunity for all local services to promote and put a face to their service. (Project Progress Report)

> The … consultation process proved to be particularly effective in ensuring the community's involvement and commitment to the project. Many participants stated that all too often Indigenous community members are 'consulted' about issues without seeing any outcome. Participants noted that 'kids felt that they had the input into the process'. The process of being involved in the development of the resource and the outcome also had the extra effect of rallying the community around a particular issue of concern to most members. The participants felt it 'brought the community together'. (Strategy project evaluation)

Even some Indigenous communities lacking social cohesion have had some great success in fostering community participation in social, sporting and recreational activities that have managed to cut across existing divides. But not all projects were successful in achieving high levels of Indigenous involvement. The experience of those projects that experienced difficulties in this regard are discussed in Section 5 of this report (which discusses the main factors that inhibited Indigenous Strategy projects).

The projects that have had the most success in building participation have been those that unambiguously employed strategies of engagement that connected with Indigenous people in a meaningful way. These projects all had an initial hook. Successful strategies used include:

▸ activities with a cultural base (such as art and craft, bush trips, hunting and gathering, family tree mapping)

▸ camping

▸ cooking and eating food

▸ sport (especially football)

▸ music

▸ horse skills

◗ community-initiated social events

◗ photography and video filming.

Some specific examples of some effective strategies that were reported as being very successful in engaging local Indigenous people included the following:

◗ the Lajamanu Horse Sports project (Northern Territory) which placed young men under the direction and mentorship of older men with horse skills, thereby providing a platform for rebuilding intergenerational bonds of respect

◗ bush hunting trips for women in the Building Stronger Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project (Western Australia) and also at the Ramingining Women's Centre (Northern Territory) provided a platform for intergenerational learning about parenting involving young mothers and their Elders

◗ the Building Stronger Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project reported enthusiastic participation from young women in planning and conducting a Ball, thereby providing a platform for raising esteem and confidence.

These activities tapped into people's existing interests and patterns of naturally occurring social interaction and involvement. They were already seen as relevant and fun. Project staff did not have to spend time luring people to participate.

The evidence of this national evaluation strongly suggests that participation will be higher if, for example, projects promote guitar lessons or some other fun social event, than if 'how to be a better parent' or 'child abuse prevention' workshops are run. Not only is this likely to have more appeal, but it is also a strength-based approach in that these activities do not imply any deficit, personal failing or stigma. All of the projects referred to above had clear, immediate, practical and, above all, very positive objectives.

This is not to suggest that the broader long-term goal of improving family and community functioning should be abandoned in favour of sport and recreation, but rather that an initial preoccupation with hard and confronting content may not be the most successful place to start the process. The most effective projects were those that paid close attention to both process and outcomes.

A couple of projects used incentives to encourage participation. For example, one project held a healthy baby and also a clean house competition. Another project encouraged attendance at its workshops by using a door prize and providing family meals, transport to and from home and child care. No hard data is available on the effectiveness of such incentives to foster participation in Indigenous contexts. This is an area that could be further researched.

It is not suggested that any of the strategies identified here will necessarily work in every context. In some cases, finding the most successful approach will necessarily involve some experimentation. What is being suggested is that projects with a clearly defined and effective strategy of engagement have a better prospect of strengthening Indigenous families and communities than those that do not. Participation occurs naturally where an activity is perceived to be a worthwhile, interesting and enjoyable thing to do **by the participants**. High levels of participation are achieved by identifying those points where the community 'energy' already lies (who, what, when and where), and then working with and through these from the very outset.

3.4 Enhanced trust

Lack of trust is a serious impediment in strengthening Indigenous families and communities. Trust is a firm belief that a person, organisation or institution can be relied on. It involves having faith and confidence in another. It goes to the quality of relationships.

Trusting relationships are vital to rebuilding families and communities. Without trust there can be no participation, no cooperation, no collaboration, no partnership. Starting a project necessarily requires an environment in which people feel sufficiently safe to come together around shared interests and concerns. It presupposes some foundation of trust.

Understanding the importance of trust in strengthening families and communities is informed by the literature of social capital. Social capital is a valuable resource. The evidence is that it is a crucial component of the capacity of any community, and that without it sustainable change is not possible. Social capital has evidenced positive social outcomes in many areas, including: improved health and emotional and psychological wellbeing, greater social cohesion and equality, reduced crime rates and a reduced incidence of violence and corruption, as well as increased income, economic growth and development (Cullen & Whiteford 2001). Unfortunately, how social capital helps achieve such beneficial outcomes (and the pathways and mechanisms used) are not always so clearly or well understood.

Generally a distinction is made between three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital is discussed below; the other forms are discussed in Section 1.7.

Bonding social capital is the mutual support that is created through the connections that people have with each other within their immediate circle, personal networks and community. Bonding social capital is about personal relationships which evidence trust. Interpersonal trust is the capacity for reciprocal trust with others at a family, friend and neighbourhood level. It is central to the quality of the relationships within families and communities. It is about the bonds of solidarity that tie family members, friends and neighbours together, and the norms of reciprocity and exchange that they share. In a community with ample stocks of bonding social capital one would expect even strangers to act responsibly and respectfully towards community members, a trust and respect returned in kind.

Bonding social capital is an important social protection in times of family and community need, in particular a source of economic and social security. Where stocks of bonding social capital are strong, those in the group will share what they have when others are in need.

Many (but not all) Indigenous families and communities already have a valuable stock of bonding social capital on account of their family, clan and community connections and the high value that they place on maintaining appropriate and reciprocal relationships. This is evident from the previous discussion of points of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous families and communities. People are bonded by multiple factors including kinship, the strength of their Indigenous identity and their shared historical experience (Burchill 2004, p. 7). In Indigenous contexts it has long been observed that those in close relation routinely help each other to pay for food and clothing, and that there is a network of financial support and an established pattern of shared child care.

However, in contemporary Indigenous society there is often a lack of trust, not in the outside world, but within communities and even within families. Past policies and practices such as dispossession, protection and assimilation have left a legacy of damaged Indigenous families and communities. In recent years a particular focus has been on the issue of the separation of children from their families occurring as a result of the operation of both the welfare and the justice systems. Negative impacts include the breakdown of family and community networks, the lack of an intergenerational transfer of parenting skills, and an absence of community leadership.

At their core, many of the issues that now confront Indigenous families and communities are about the absence of trust. These include:

▸ Trusting relationships that have always bonded Indigenous families together have, in many instances, been damaged by social dislocation and endemic levels of substance misuse and all forms of violence (interpersonal, family, child abuse, self harm).

▸ Trusting relationships between the various and competing interests that make up Indigenous communities—family groups, language groups, traditional land owners and the displaced from elsewhere—often need to be reconciled before people can live together in harmony.

▸ Trusting relationships between communities and governments have been severely damaged by an historic pattern of unequal power relations and the ongoing difficulty of effectively communicating and interacting effectively across linguistic and cultural barriers.

◗ Trusting relationships between the Indigenous communities and the wider Australian society remain unbuilt in most instances for example, relationships with the mainstream non-government organisation, philanthropic, academic and business sectors.

Repairing and nurturing all of these trusting relationships is essential in fostering an environment that is conducive to building stronger Indigenous families and communities.

Many Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy have directly supported families and communities to develop healthy internal relationships. Directly supporting families to develop healthy relationships was identified as a major activity by 53 per cent of Indigenous projects that responded to the questionnaire.

Several projects have deliberately sought to repair and reinforce internal bonds: between mothers and their children, between youth and their Elders, between teenage mothers and women Elders, between parents and school children. In particular, the Indigenous Stronger Families Fund projects have fostered positive interactions between parents and infants by encouraging the use of developmental play activities (such as language, music, art and story telling) as a means of enhancing childhood learning. The Strengthening Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project, the Ramingining Women's Centre and the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project have all employed the strategy of bringing younger women and women Elders together to discuss issues such as pregnancy, parenting, nutrition and child care. Similarly, the bonding between male youth and older men in the community has been a central aspect of the Goolburi Aboriginal Men's Group Project in Bourke, New South Wales and the Lajamanu Horse Sports project (Northern Territory).

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) project in the Daly/Cox-Finniss region of the Northern Territory sought to increase participation in education by Indigenous children and youth by re-engaging parents with their children. FAST was originally an American program, delivered by accredited trainers required to have FAST International Certification. This project aims to give parents the esteem and confidence necessary to take charge of their children's education. Bonding between parents and children was encouraged through one-to-one play and the use of creative toys. Praise and affirmation of observed positive interactions between children and their parents were an integral component of this project as it encouraged the trust of parents. Participating parents rated the program highly. The project evaluation found evidence of both improved communication between parents and their children, and all the children who attended the FAST program in Term 2 were now attending school regularly.

What has become increasingly apparent during the work with Indigenous projects in the course of this national evaluation is that, in many cases, a very substantial amount of time consuming front end work often needs to be done to gain the trust of participants before they commit to involvement. In some cases there is no established culture of trust and involvement. People are not ready to work with each other. Comments from some projects highlight the extent to which many Indigenous communities are divided.

Some of the Indigenous strategy projects have been established in communities where there is much internal division and where there is very little trust outside of one's immediate circle. For example, a large community where a project was located has long struggled to achieve some semblance of unity. There are 23 different clans and numerous language groups. Violent outbreaks between rival factions and families are commonplace. A family strengthening project, for example, operates from a women's association in the community under the auspice of a new community-wide representative structure which comprises two people from each land-owning clan group that has now been established in the community in the interests of achieving social stability and harmony. Women involved in the Strategy project have been active contributors to this process.

Issues of cultural security and confidentiality have been found to be crucial, as is creating 'safe' spaces where marginalised people can develop their confidence. The experience has been that Indigenous people will only open up in an environment where they feel comfortable. This was certainly true with men's groups. Alienated and socially dislocated people need to choose to connect with others and they will only do so where there is a foundation of trust. Trust can never be taken for granted. It has to be earned. This was the common experience of Indigenous Strategy projects in a range of different contexts right across Australia.

> What is important to understand is that yarning will occur where the person feels safe enough to discuss their issues. It is a critical factor with most Aboriginal people that the environment is safe for them to engage and ask for help in dealing with or finding support for their issues. (Project Progress Report)

> It was something new for the children, like a club. A family activity—nothing like this before in our community. I was a bit nervous about coming to something strange and new. (Project Progress Report)

Bringing people together too early in communities that lack cohesion is just as likely to fuel existing conflict as it is to generate a shared vision. As a matter of strategy it is often necessary to work separately with different families and groups before attempting any reconciliation of values and interests.

Several projects have reported that, with the benefit of hindsight, they now appreciate that they initially underestimated the lead time required to create a safe and comfortable environment, and build trusting relationships based on empathy and rapport. This was especially the case for organisations that had little previous experience working with Indigenous peoples and no previous presence in the community. In every instance examined, trusting relationships took a long time to build. There are additional hurdles for non-Indigenous organisations to overcome in building trusting relationships with Indigenous participants.

One factor that can make Indigenous participants feel unsafe is the involvement of non-Indigenous participants, particularly in the early stages of a project.

> We had quite a bit of interest from other non-Indigenous women who want to bring their children to playgroup. They have said however, they will wait some time before they come along. Previously, a local playgroup was started but the Indigenous women did not come along because they felt it was only for non-Indigenous children. These non-Indigenous women want the local women to become comfortable and develop ownership of the playgroup this time. (Project Progress report)

In one project, the perceived confrontational approach adopted by one non-Indigenous facilitator was deemed inappropriate because participants felt hesitant and unsafe.

It is well documented that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have been traumatised, and communities divided, to the point where they are in need of healing before they can even begin to trust others. This assumes a degree of hope and optimism about a better future, and a commitment to action, that simply may not be present in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

> In one community, when asked what kind of future they thought their children would have, over 50 per cent of respondents gave a pessimistic response. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 17)

In many Indigenous communities, considerable confidence and esteem-building work is required as a prerequisite to repairing trusting relationships with each other.

In addition there is the issue of trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to consider. Ironically, high stocks of bonding social capital within some Indigenous families and communities might be one factor that is contributing to low stocks of bridging and linking social capital. The work of the World Bank in relation to bonding social capital suggests that 'high levels of internal trust may generate distrust of non-family members and networks, preventing potentially productive relationships' (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 9). The strong bonds between family and friends can lead them to be suspicious of outsiders. 'The downside of social capital is that the same strong ties that are needed for people to act together can also exclude non-members …' (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 12).

Public trust is the trust people have in institutions such as government. The available evidence from social capital literature suggests that in deeply divided communities, low levels of interpersonal trust generally correlate with low levels of public trust in government and public institutions (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 19). The implication is that where there is a lack of trust in one domain this is likely to engender mistrust in the other. This is consistent with the experience of Strategy projects in Indigenous communities where social cohesion was clearly lacking. It particularly reflects the documented history of one Strategy project being implemented in a troubled rural town. Not only do local people in such communities tend not to trust each other, they also profoundly mistrust government, and practically everyone else outside their immediate circle of family and friends as well.

Within the Indigenous community there is a continuing suspicion of, and lack of faith in, government. Contact with the family, community, welfare and justice spheres are often perceived as especially threatening (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002; Libesman 2004; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, pp. 458–59). Evidence of mistrust is widespread.

> The past resonates in the present. Fear and lack of trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have become embedded over the generations and today whatever faith we as Aboriginal people have in others is fragile and easily disturbed or destroyed. (Burchill 2004, p. 6)

> The consequences of historic policies of assimilation and widespread removal of children from their families are evident in contemporary family dislocation, parenting problems and child abuse and neglect. These policies have also left a residue of massive distrust of authority and in particular distrust of 'the welfare' ... Historically, Aboriginal people were subjected to massive welfare intervention on a scale not experienced by any other group in Australia. (Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice 1994, pp. 494–95)

> Indigenous people's experience of child welfare services is closely associated with experiences of forced separations of children from their families and colonial policies of dispossession. (Libesman 2004, p. 11)

> Aboriginal women are ... suspicious of involvement with justice and welfare agencies ... There is a profound mistrust of social work agencies who may take the children away from a violent home, and there is still considerable suspicion of police involvement in domestic disputes. (Blagg 2000, p. 7)

The historic pattern of interaction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and government has left an entrenched legacy of distrust that is difficult to change in the short to medium term. Nevertheless some Indigenous projects appear to have succeeded in building partnerships with a range of government agencies. These arrangements are discussed in Section 4.5.

A few Indigenous Strategy projects have consciously sought to build trust with the non-Indigenous community, that is, beyond government. The Breakthrough Community and Family Support project in Brisbane, for example, has a reconciliation agenda that seeks to foster relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. In one case the building of trust and cross-cultural understanding emerged as an unintended positive outcome.

> The non-Aboriginal teacher on the course has reported that her understanding of working with and teaching Aboriginal students has changed as a result of her contact [with] the students, the Elders and the program.

Much of the early work to strengthen Indigenous families and communities is about building trust. But almost everywhere the experience has been that it takes a long time to gain traction and momentum. The first steps are often about developing a firm foundation of optimism, confidence and self-belief among families and communities. Typically it has been necessary for project staff to get themselves known, begin to develop empathetic relationships, and then slowly build rapport before even attempting to bring different families and groups together.

3.5   Greater awareness

Strategy projects have been successful in raising awareness of family and community issues among Indigenous people.

Awareness raising is an early intervention strategy that seeks to prevent problems before they become serious by ensuring that people are better informed. It is about education and effective communication. The prevailing approach to awareness raising is usually to foster the sharing of knowledge and information throughout the whole broad social network within which people live and interact, as distinct from trying to target particular groups within a community. Where people are closely connected, their existing network of relationships can be a convenient mechanism to disseminate information easily and rapidly (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 26).

Many Strategy projects have improved the links between Indigenous people and their sources of ideas and information about family and community issues. There are strong awareness-raising elements to such projects.

The Community Networkers project in Wellington (New South Wales) designed and produced a ready reference contact list to raise awareness of the family and community services and resources available to the local Indigenous community.

Some projects have produced and disseminated newsletters to keep their communities, project partners and other stakeholders aware and informed about project activities. Newsletters are not always the most effective means of disseminating information within communities where English is a second language and where literacy skills are limited. Nevertheless, projects have still found that this is an important means of maintaining information flows with project partner organisations, thereby contributing to the maintenance of networks and collaborative effort.

The case study of the integrated family strengthening project found that staff had done an inordinate amount of leg work to promote awareness of their project by attending meetings with communities and peak regional bodies. The Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project have adopted a similar rationale and approach.

Among other things, one project has been instrumental in organising meetings where community members have been able to discuss issues with people such as the state Ombudsman, local Police and representatives of the Aboriginal Legal Service. Not only has this raised awareness and understanding of law and order issues, but the project has also claimed some success in crime reduction.

> The Liaison Officer has been involved in the men's group at the … Centre, which has been instrumental in reducing the incidence of stolen cars and is also involved in addressing issues with the police, including death in custody and harassment. (Project Progress Report)

Another project found that its process of initial community consultation had a strong awareness-raising element.

> The project ideas were new to many ordinary people involved in the initial consultations. To some extent, the process of consultation itself was an educational one, teaching people about the potential power of group budgeting and financial management. Consultations uncovered key issues that needed to be covered in the project proposal (for example, management arrangements), as well as practical issues that had to be taken into account (for example, lack of local people with required skills for some of the jobs) … The consultations also helped with drawing up some of the rules or parameters for participation, identifying possible pitfalls and problems and ways of preventing or addressing them, and how workers would go about engaging people. In short, this project could not have been successfully developed without the intensive involvement of the communities concerned. (Project Progress Report)

The Hervey Bay Indigenous Community Leadership project was primarily intended to develop leadership capacity. Nevertheless, it was found that this project had (largely unintentionally) helped to raise community awareness of local concerns about the need for greater social cohesion.

One awareness-raising strategy used by some projects with considerable success has been to piggyback on existing major events, such as regional music, cultural and sporting festivals. This has proved cost-effective in establishing a new means of getting the message out because the project is associated with the social capital existing in the major event. The case study of the integrated family strengthening project documents how information about healthy parenting, diet and lifestyle were transmitted in association with regional events.

Another large project made extensive use of this piggybacking approach. This project has worked closely with a known and acclaimed school intervention program and with school Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program committees throughout the region. Furthermore, unlike most others, this project did not invest its energy into developing its own management committee from the ground up. Rather it co-opted an existing regional body to manage the project.

> Representation for any group within the [region] is complex. There are three layers of government, accessed through many agencies and many elected representatives and there is countless non-government organisations and community events. To achieve this milestone—at a regional level, [the project] sought membership to the [regional] Human Services Network Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Group, an already existing interagency network and then would further investigate the establishment of meetings in identified communities. (Project Progress Report)

The Building Stronger Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project (Western Australia) has made extensive use of photography to educate people about its activities and achievements. This has proved a most effective mode of communication with both participants and with Steering Committee members in a region where English is not the first language and where literacy levels are low. This project has also been involved with the production of local language videos that promote appropriate and holistic approaches to child rearing, child development and parenting. The Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project plans to emulate this awareness-raising strategy.

Some of the Indigenous Strategy projects have sought to raise awareness through the delivery of in-home support services with promising results. These include the HIPPY Project at La Perouse that works with 4 to 5 year olds and their families to prepare children for school, and a range of family services provided by the Building Strong and Healthy Families in Derby project (Western Australia). The latter raised awareness of family issues by providing a flexible face-to-face home-based service where project resource staff worked alongside participants in a homemaker role. The literature suggests that a home-based approach accords with recognised best practice in family and community strengthening work. Research in other contexts has found that family and community services are usually more effective when they are delivered to people in their own home environment (Libesman 2004, p. 22).

> Home visits involve additional time and effort, but relative to the alternative of under utilisation of office-based interventions, home visits significantly enhance care and the effectiveness of counselling. (Norton & Manson 1997, p. 336, quoted in Libesman 2004, p. 23)

Other projects have also adopted a hands-on approach to awareness raising. Cooking demonstrations to enhance knowledge of nutrition have been a common strategy employed in several projects.

In some cases projects have sought to raise awareness of new issues that have generally not previously been on the radar in Indigenous affairs in the past, such as foetal alcohol syndrome. One project, for example, raised awareness of protective behaviours in response to abuse among Indigenous teenagers in five communities through the use of workshops co-facilitated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous presenters.

A larger project encompassing a large regional area sought to increase awareness of depression and to make it more acceptable for young Indigenous people in rural areas to seek help and recognise others in need. It did so by developing an innovative comic resource for Indigenous youth and those who work with them. Twenty thousand copies of the comic were widely distributed through organisations that serve the Indigenous community, including schools and community centres.

An independent project evaluation found that the use of a comic format had resonated with young Indigenous people and that this resource was sensitive and appropriate to the literacy level of the target group.

> Results from this evaluation suggest the main objectives and outcomes were met. [The auspice] have a very high profile in the community and particularly among Indigenous young people … Developing knowledge of an issue is the first stage in problem solving. It is through such awareness that one finds strategies to deal with problems. This evaluation suggests that the comic resource has had an impact on the use of and access to services by youth. Young Indigenous people are aware of the services they might call upon if the need arises. (Project Evaluation Report)

The evaluation also suggested ways to build on the achievements of this project by recommending the future development of more comic resources in the areas of anxiety and obsessive and compulsive disorders. It also suggested discussions with schools about the inclusion of the comic resources in curriculum. In addition the project evaluation pointed to the need to develop additional resources such as parent information kits and videos.

The Boggabilla/Toomelah Community Link Centre project raised awareness of information technology. Strategy funding employed a Coordinator. Progress reports stress the need for patience as participants gradually came to appreciate the value of the Centre and information technology, and subsequently to take greater ownership over its activities through the Boggabilla Community Centre Management Committee.

Awareness-raising activities have been a primary focus of Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy. The focus of these activities has also been broad. It has encompassed old issues such as parenting, child protection and nutrition. But it has also extended to encompass new issues like foetal alcohol syndrome, youth depression and computer literacy. Various strategies have been employed by Indigenous projects. They range from the more traditional community meetings, booklets, newsletters, contact lists and media exposure through to some more innovative strategies such as comics, home visits, Aboriginal language videos and piggybacking on community events. Some projects have successfully employed several of these awareness-raising strategies simultaneously.

3.6   Greater choice

This section of the report is about the extent to which the Strategy has enabled Indigenous people to have greater choice. Greater choice is about the options that are available to families and communities and their access to a range of services, activities and pathways.

When it comes to service provision and program delivery, the choices that are open to Indigenous Australians are often quite limited. A service is simply the provision of assistance to benefit an individual, family or group. A program is a set of interrelated projects that contribute to a common strategic objective. There are important gaps in service and program availability in rural and remote regions, as highlighted in the case study of the integrated family strengthening project. Even in urban areas there is often an unwillingness to use such services because of perceptions of cultural insensitivity or inappropriateness.

A common approach to enhancing choice has been to develop one-stop-shops, that is, comprehensive regional or neighbourhood-based centres that offer a range of family and community services and activities, and that can link and refer people to other services. These are known as service hubs because of their strategic location at the centre of family and community service delivery networks. This model owes much to the place management concept discussed earlier.

It is also consistent with the academic literature that suggests that a holistic approach works best when it comes to strengthening families and communities. A holistic approach is one that is multi-faceted and seeks to address underlying causal factors (Cullen & Whiteford 2001).

> For policies of early intervention to be effective a broad range of services are needed. These may include parent support programs, respite care and day care, counselling and substance abuse treatment programs, suicide prevention programs, and educational and recreational facilities. (Libesman 2004, p. 34)

Generally the term holistic is used to distinguish broadly-based social interventions from more narrow therapeutic ones. Both in the Indigenous communities and in the literature relevant to Indigenous family and community issues there is now widespread agreement that interventions need to be holistic if they are to be effective.

> A consistent message from reports and consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been the need for a holistic community and family response to the needs of children … Many authors and community consultations find that a 'whole of community' approach to child protection and other social service and treatment interventions is more appropriate and likely to lead to success. (Libesman 2004, pp. 14–15)

Narrowly-based strategies are generally seen as ill equipped to address the range of interconnected underlying factors that, in combination, work to undermine family and community strength.

> Australian and international reviews and reports into the delivery of child welfare services to Indigenous communities have found that conventional individualistic responses to children's wellbeing do not substantially improve conditions for Indigenous communities and families and that a more holistic and community based response is required. (Libesman 2004, p. 3)

The term holistic needs a little unpacking. Many Indigenous Strategy projects describe their approach as holistic, but it is only by examining the precise nature of each particular intervention that one can discern the sense in which a project might be said to be holistic. In the course of this national evaluation it became apparent that holistic is an umbrella term that is used to describe different kinds of comprehensive and multi-faceted interventions. Projects which include all or some of the following approaches may be described as holistic:

‣ seek to address several family and community needs simultaneously

‣ employ multiple strategies

‣ are cross-sectoral interventions involving several agencies

‣ are whole-of-community interventions rather than those that focus on a particular target group within a community

‣ draw their resources from a diverse range of sources

‣ work across two or more cultures

‣ seek to simultaneously address the needs of both victims and perpetrators

‣ work at individual, organisational, community and societal levels all at once

‣ are large scale regional interventions

‣ use a preventative and early intervention approach.

The stated objectives of the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project reveal just how holistic some projects aim to be:

‣ strengthen families using early intervention and prevention strategies

‣ take a capacity building approach

‣ identify community development needs and build linkages within the community and services in the community

‣ employ a whole of family and community approach with a particular focus on outcomes for children

‣ link to initiatives on health, substance abuse, housing and similar problems in a holistic manner

‣ provide worthwhile activity within communities particularly for women

‣ add value to existing community structure where possible

‣ leverage state commitment and get more effective service delivery on the ground

‣ work with communities in their local area and develop innovative ways to strengthen family functioning in response to agreed community needs, with particular emphasis on early childhood and parenting

‣ use action research to generate national longitudinal data on effective practice and prevention and early intervention strategies

‣ improve family wellbeing and build on existing infrastructure, including the establishment of a Families Centre in the community to provide coordinated support to families

‣ improve life opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children between zero and five years.

Most of the Stronger Family Fund projects were similarly bold in scope. The integrated family strengthening project (which was the subject of the case study) sought to address issues such as parenting, child growth and development, gender issues and malnutrition across a vast region. Activities included playgroups, bush hunting

trips, women's meetings and men's meetings. Similarly, another project uses multiple strategies: educational workshops, children's activities, social gatherings, bringing youth into contact with positive role models, healthy lifestyle promotion, youth activities such as a youth club, discussions about healthy relationships, positive parenting advice, and operating a family centre and playgroup.

The Wide Bay-Burnett Indigenous Family Violence Prevention and Support Project encompassed diverse activities such as the provision of family support services and resources, early parenting education, perpetrator programs, youth at risk support programs, school retention initiatives and family mapping.

The Family Dreams for the Future project operating out of the Ngepan Patha Centre Women's Association in the Wadeye community in the Northern Territory is a multifunctional women's centre offering a range of family functioning and wellbeing activities including child care, training, art and craft, gardening, health and hygiene care and nutrition. A core activity is a breakfast club to encourage school attendance.

Many of the men's group projects were found to provide a range of services for Indigenous men, as illustrated by the following example:

> The … Project has run successfully for more than 4 years … and has offered confidential support, referral, counselling, group work, education, and information events, one to one support for men regarding health, wellbeing, and emotional and psychological issues … The focus of the work done is for 'men to feel better about themselves', their relationships with families and their communities. The implementation of this has been done in a holistic way, combining early intervention, community education, and community development for men. (Project Progress Report)

In theory, holistic interventions seek to deal systematically with the full gamut of factors that contribute to family and community dysfunction. In reality there are very real limitations on the extent to which it is possible to do this. In the field of Indigenous family and community affairs, needs are always great, causal factors multiple and complex, simple and effective remedial strategies hard to find, and the resources required to act always in short supply. This means that actions and energies need to be prioritised, inevitably leaving some areas of need to be addressed later.

> As an Aboriginal service provider, Indigenous staff are aware of the multi-complex issue surrounding Indigenous people and in keeping with the Aboriginal Holistic Cultural perspective, staff implement a holistic approach and work outside the normal parameters of the mainstream counselling model. (Project Progress Report)

Some Strategy projects have primarily been about expanding the choices that are available to Indigenous people by improving the range of, and the access to, family and community services. The following are examples of Indigenous Strategy projects that have broadened choice.

The **Breakthrough Community and Family Support project** (Queensland) has increased the range and accessibility of culturally appropriate youth services. It promotes greater awareness of relevant services and resources, thereby raising the capacity of young Indigenous people to cope with their own issues. It is an integrated response to youth needs. Project activities encompass case management, small group work, counselling, outreach, advocacy, referral, cultural support, court support and prison visits.

The **Community Networkers project** in Wellington (New South Wales) has improved the access of parents and families to parenting programs. Its primary focus is on Aboriginal families with children in the 0 to 8 year-old age group and teenage parents in need of support.

A Women's Centre found that it had extended the range of local community services through the operation of a Meals on Wheels service for elderly and infirm residents.

Some projects have expanded life opportunities. The **Bushmob project in Alice Springs** reports some success in helping young Indigenous people who engage in petrol sniffing to return to education, thereby potentially expanding their range of life choices. A survey of participants in the Family Income Management Trials (Cape York) project in far north Queensland found that families had a more regular food supply, that their homes were generally better resourced, that they had a greater propensity to save and acquire assets, that there was a greater sharing of household expenses, and that their families were less stressed and anxious than previously.

In the instance of the Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre, a project that operates in a town camp community in Alice Springs, enhanced community security was the key to expanding choice. Previously, substance abuse and violence were major issues for this community, but the Strategy project (in combination with other initiatives) has contributed to a marked improvement in social conditions. Initiatives include the operation of a night patrol service that works in tandem with the Police and employs a Security Officer. This project has substantially improved access to health, financial, legal, educational and community services because agency staff now feel safe enough to visit and to deliver their services. At the same time, participants feel safe to participate in a range of learning and other project activities.

Indigenous Strategy projects have broadened choice in several ways, by improving access to existing family and community services, improving coordination between existing services, establishing new services, and enabling people to make life choices that otherwise would not be open to them. The experience of some Strategy projects has also brought into sharp focus the degree to which violence and security anxieties can restrict the choices of many Indigenous families and communities.

3.7 Understanding, skills and capacity for initiative

Having the understanding, skills and the capacity for initiative is about equipping families and communities with the capacity to meet their own needs. It involves the transfer of knowledge and expertise to both project staff and participants, not only for application during the life of a particular project, but also for the purpose of future application to a range of other family and community issues. The skills developed may relate to generic project planning and management or they may relate to the particular issues being addressed by a project, such as parenting.

Questionnaire responses indicate that training, mentoring and role modelling have been major activities undertaken by most Indigenous projects. Training was identified as a major activity by 52 per cent of all projects that responded to the questionnaire, while mentoring and role modelling were identified as major activities by 58 per cent of Indigenous projects. Most Indigenous projects reported that their project had 'contributed a lot' or 'a fair bit' to enhanced capacity through skill development in the target group.

Training, mentoring and role-modelling were also identified as major project activities in all three of the in-depth Indigenous case studies, especially for leadership development. It is notable that in the capacity building and integrated family strengthening projects that were the subjects of case studies, community members were able to assume key positions of employment in Strategy-funded projects. In both places there was evidence of a valuable transferral of skills and responsibilities from non-Indigenous to Indigenous employees over the life span of the projects. In one project the learning occurred on the job in the context of delivering specific community-based services. In the other project, the on-the-job training of Indigenous project staff was complemented by accredited child care training delivered in block release mode to playgroup workers.

By contrast, the teaching that occurred in the Hervey Bay Indigenous Community Leadership project (Queensland) was structured around group learning in two facilitated workshops. There was no on-the-job component. The case study of this project found that it had not developed new leaders or transferred leadership skills. This project did, however, make use of positive Indigenous role models as facilitators and as guest speakers. This was a popular activity with the participants.

The lesson is that capacity building in Indigenous contexts is more effective in situations where Indigenous people have an opportunity to directly apply what they have learnt. This is in contrast to situations where skills are developed in isolation in classroom and workshop settings. It appears that some projects were focused too narrowly on discussing leadership, but provided no opportunities to apply it. Throughout the national evaluation of the Strategy we became aware of numerous projects where Indigenous understanding, skills and capacity for initiative were gradually established on the job. But we are not aware of any project that succeeded in substantially building capacity through the provision of training alone. It appears to be the case that Indigenous capacity building activities are most effective when undertaken in connection with a specific social purpose, that is, in association with a particular activity. One reason for this is that the capacity of Indigenous families and communities is as much about gradually rebuilding people's confidence and self-belief as it is about the transfer of particular knowledge and skills.

The scope of training undertaken in association with the Strategy is broad. The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre offers leadership training. The Far North Queensland Indigenous Consortium for Social and Emotional Wellbeing trains Indigenous people in counselling skills. Nyaangyatjarra College trains playgroup workers in a TAFE accredited child care certificate course. Numerous training providers are active in the Indigenous family and community services sector. In seeking to enhance the skills and capacity of Indigenous participants, several projects have used existing training and development courses rather than reinventing the wheel.

This has generally involved some modification to take account of cultural considerations and the literacy levels of the participants. It is important to stress that the skilling that has occurred in relation to strengthening families and communities has often involved a 'both ways' bicultural approach; one that seeks to incorporate Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings. Exemplars in this regard would include the Strengthening Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project and the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project. Both have focused on identifying effective parenting and coping strategies drawn from both local Aboriginal and Western culture.

The use of mentors as a mechanism for transmitting knowledge and skills has been popular with Indigenous Strategy projects. Mentoring has been a central feature of the operation of one large regional project concerned with issues of female youth empowerment (among others). This approach is credited by those associated with the project with achieving a substantial improvement in the confidence of participants. Reports suggest a high level of commitment, both by the mentors and by the young women participants.

> Mentors in the community are leading the development of a Regional Indigenous young women's network ... to lend a greater 'voice' to young Indigenous women and their issues. The target group is young women and girls from 16 to 30 years, with a focus on those most 'at risk' ... The concerns of Indigenous women regarding the specific difficulties faced by young women in their communities were highlighted at three Women's Forums ... (Project Progress Report)

Mentoring was also a central feature of other projects, for example, the Ramingining Women's Centre, the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project, the Goolburi Aboriginal Men's Group in Bourke, and the Family Income Management Trials (Cape York).

Several projects have focused on intergenerational learning involving Elders and younger people working together. These include:

◗ the Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre Project (Northern Territory)

◗ Strengthening Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (Western Australia)

◗ Ramingining Women's Centre (Northern Territory)

◗ Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert (Western Australia)

◗ the Lajamanu Horse Sports project (Northern Territory).

Many projects have sought to develop Indigenous leadership capacity. Several different approaches were used. The Koori-Link project at Bowraville, New South Wales provided for professionals to work with the community to develop leadership skills and facilitate the personal development of the participants. The Miimi Mothers project, New South Wales sought to develop a core group of committed Indigenous women leaders by engaging them in developmental activities conducted in a series of camps.

Some projects placed considerable stress on developing the life skills of participants. For example, the men's group in Casino, New South Wales sought to develop life skills in areas such as communication, positive family relationships, and understandings of grief and loss. As a result of their involvement in the Strategy, some projects identified a need to have a greater focus on the development of life skills in their future activities, especially in relation to personal and household budgeting. The Family Income Management Trials being conducted in Cape York have the potential to inform future projects focusing on this area.

In summary, training has been a core activity of Indigenous projects under the Strategy. The training has been in diverse fields, including parenting, child care, leadership and life skills. This capacity building has been

directed both towards project participants and staff. Mentoring, role modelling and the buddy system all appear to have been popular and successful strategies employed. There are plenty of examples where Indigenous understanding, skills and capacity for initiative were built on the job. But we did not encounter any instances where substantial capacity was built through the provision of workshops conducted in isolation. It appears that Indigenous capacity is most effectively built when it is undertaken in connection with a specific social purpose.

3.8 Higher order achievements

This section of the report focuses on the achievements of Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy in relation to the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh steps on the hierarchy of outcomes in Figure 1. Higher order in this context refers to achievements such as demonstrated initiative, resilience and sustainability.

Demonstrated initiative is the capacity of families and communities to drive their own solutions and represent their own interests in relation to issues beyond the Strategy project. This involves the capacity to determine their own directions and the ability to recognise and take advantage of opportunities as they emerge. It goes to the issue of self-reliance.

Resilience is the capacity to adapt and constructively respond to changing circumstances and emerging future opportunities, issues and concerns. Resilient families and communities are able to survive periodic shocks and setbacks.

Sustainability is about the establishment and continuity of activities, structures, processes, ways of working and services that can persist and endure. It is about the ongoing application of knowledge, skills and understandings to family and community issues and the maintenance of positive patterns of behaviour. It is also about having control over one's own life: 'We define sustainable development as the ability acquired and held by communities over time to initiate, and control development thus enabling communities to participate more effectively in their own destiny …' (Lyons, Smuts & Stephens 2001, p. 1237).

The questionnaire responses suggest that there were very real limits on the extent of the higher order outcomes achieved by most Indigenous Strategy projects. Few were able to report that they had yet achieved greater resilience or an environment where communities have the capacity to solve their own family and community issues. Only 22 per cent of Indigenous projects reported that the Strategy had 'contributed a lot' to achieving stronger families and communities although an additional 44 per cent reported that they had contributed 'a fair bit'. And only 44 per cent of Indigenous projects reported that the Strategy had 'contributed a lot' or 'contributed a fair bit' to achieving an environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions.

Questions that asked projects to rate achievements according to the outcomes hierarchy were not included in later versions of the questionnaire and were consequently only answered by a small number of projects. However these conclusions are supported by findings from the case studies, other site visits and the review of project documentation.

While the Strategy has undoubtedly produced positive outcomes for Indigenous people, the questionnaire responses suggest that it has been less effective in strengthening Indigenous families and communities than in strengthening families and communities more generally. Specifically the questionnaire responses indicate that the Indigenous projects were **less likely** than the other mainstream projects to:

- contribute a lot to achieving stronger families and communities

- contribute a lot to achieving increased family and community trust, resilience or adaptability

- contribute a lot or a fair bit to achieving an environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions to strengthen their families and communities

- create an expectation of further changes for participants or others in the community to continue after the expiry of Strategy funding

- have a component of self-funding.

These differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous projects can be explained by a number of inhibiting factors that impact adversely on many Indigenous projects and which most mainstream projects do not have to contend with, at least not on the same scale:

◗ an unsupportive social environment which is not conducive to smooth project implementation

◗ the complex and 'wicked' nature of many Indigenous family and community issues

◗ a lack of basic infrastructure and accessible services, especially in remote regions

◗ a range of human resource management issues, including a high incidence of staff burnout and turnover.

These and other inhibiting factors are discussed in Section 5.

If projects are to demonstrate capacity, resilience and sustainability once Strategy funding ends they first need to be able to continue. Eighty per cent of Indigenous projects responding to the questionnaire indicated that they expected that further changes for the participants or others in the community would continue to occur after the expiry of Strategy funding. But in their final questionnaire responses, most Indigenous projects indicated that they would require various forms of ongoing support in order to be able continue project activities beyond the expiration of Strategy funding.

The types of ongoing support needed, as identified by Indigenous projects in final questionnaires, were as follows. (The percentage of projects that responded to the questionnaire identifying that type of support is shown in brackets.)

◗ further funding (98 per cent)

◗ the support of an Indigenous community organisation (71 per cent)

◗ other forms of community support (81 per cent)

◗ specific expertise, skills or professional services (85 per cent)

◗ volunteer support (77 per cent)

◗ in kind support (75 per cent)

◗ support of their existing networks, linkages and referrals (77 per cent).

Some Indigenous projects do not appear to have devoted much time and energy towards securing additional funding to sustain activities beyond the expiration of the approved period of Strategy funding. In some instances there also seems to have been an assumption that, if they performed well, then there was every reason to expect that further funding would be forthcoming.

> We work as though the project will continue—so commitments are made and resources are expanded … we expect that funding will not cease—there is so much to do with current non-participants. The resources funded do not allow the growth needed. We will all burn out if the concurrent volume is too much. (Project Progress Report)

The three Indigenous case studies found that all of these projects would need some source of funding in order to continue. One had devoted substantial resources towards securing new funding and new partners that would enable at least some project activities to continue. The other two had not identified any new funding sources at the time of the case studies.

Greater Indigenous participation in the 'real economy' is essential to any sustained strengthening of Indigenous families and communities.

> Participation in mainstream economic opportunities, all its assimilatory undertones notwithstanding, might actually afford a mechanism to support Indigenous families. Whatever cultural options Indigenous families might want to choose for their children's future, their capacity to make and exercise those choices will continue to be seriously restricted if the cycle of inter-generational welfare dependency and economic exclusion is not broken. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 18)

Few Indigenous Strategy projects have a specific focus on economic participation. Clearly many projects have limited opportunities to generate income because of the impoverished socioeconomic circumstances of Indigenous Australians and because of the lack of economic opportunities in many rural and remote regions. One of the three case study projects was charging a small fee for its Meals on Wheels service. Another had sold some 'Healthy Snack Packs' at community events. The other project generated no revenue of its own.

A handful of Indigenous projects have demonstrated some progress towards greater financial independence. The Bushmob project in Alice Springs, operating under the auspice of the Drug and Alcohol Services Association Alice Springs, has undertaken fee-for-service work for the Alice Springs Town Council, BP Australia, the Gap Youth Centre and Yirrarra College. Another project generating some of its own income is the Family Dreams for the Future project operating at the Wadeye community in the Northern Territory. It operates the local Mi Patha Takeaway and Bakery.

Very few of the Indigenous projects have focused on increasing economic participation through employment and vocational training initiatives. One project, for example, stated that while 'early family change is evident', the longer term objective of achieving greater workforce participation is far from being achieved (Project Progress Report). The Koori-Link project, in New South Wales, has developed links with TAFE and Wesley Uniting Employment to open up some employment pathways. The Miimi Mothers project ran a Job Ready Preparation Workshop where participants prepared job applications and practiced their interview skills.

It should not necessarily be deduced from this discussion that the Strategy should have a greater focus on Indigenous economic participation rather than social participation in the future. It remains to be seen whether investments in economic participation can reap a worthwhile return on investment unless they are accompanied by a marked improvement in the social wellbeing of Indigenous people. Arguably both are necessary for people to demonstrate the capacity to be involved in the real economy.

The evidence suggests that Indigenous Strategy projects have generally:

◗ not yet achieved greater resilience, capacity to initiate action and sustainability beyond the initial Strategy project

◗ not yet achieved higher order outcomes to the same extent as non-Indigenous projects.

Most projects will need funding and other forms of support in order to be able to continue, but very few projects appear to have planned for their sustainability beyond the expiration of Strategy funding. Only a few projects are generating any substantial income of their own through their self-funding activities because opportunities are limited. A few projects are seeking to enhance the employment and training opportunities of their participants but the success of initiatives in this area is not yet clear.

4 Enabling factors

4.1 Overview

In the course of this national evaluation seven factors were found to be enabling and supportive of Indigenous projects in achieving their objectives. These are:

 ‣ committed and capable project staff

 ‣ competent and well-established auspice

 ‣ external project support

 ‣ partnerships

 ‣ capacity for action learning

 ‣ the advantages of starting small

 ‣ balancing the talking with the doing.

Each is discussed in turn below.

4.2 Committed and capable project staff

This national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy has consistently found that competent and capable staff have added considerable value to the Indigenous projects. Their energy, commitment, skills and personal attributes are critically important to success.

In the questionnaire responses, many projects commented on the importance of attracting and retaining the right people. There are three aspects to this:

 ‣ having solid relationships with the Indigenous project participants

 ‣ possessing the personal qualities necessary to work cross-culturally

 ‣ demonstrating the skills to do the job.

The literature highlights the importance of relationships of empathy, trust, rapport and respect between project staff and project participants. A key finding of all three Indigenous case studies was also that quality relationships between project staff and the communities within which they work are central to achieving positive project outcomes. Such relationships are facilitated by employing local people on project activities because they bring with them their established community links and networks. The recruitment of people who are already linked into community networks has generally meant that participants feel able to speak more freely about family and community issues.

> Recruiting people who are known and trusted in the community has meant that generally people are very open and willing to talk about the issues in the community with them. (Project Progress Report)

Employing local Indigenous people can bring with it a deep understanding of cultural issues and respect for local protocols. It is noted that where projects have been successful in recruiting and retaining local Indigenous staff, they have generally been mature people with both cultural status and authority within the community. This has been the experience of the capacity building and integrated family strengthening projects that were the focus of case studies.

One project has also found that 'the person must have the appropriate status in the local community to discuss important issues' and the 'right gender' and furthermore that 'local ways of working separately with regard to women's and men's business must be respected' (Project Progress Report).

Other projects have also stressed the importance of staff gender, especially in relation to involvement in the work of men's groups and women's groups. This does not necessarily mean that only men should work with men and women with women. Rather it is about appreciating the appropriate role of each gender and who can speak on what topics.

However, it cannot be assumed that it is always advantageous or possible to employ local people. In highly factionalised environments outsiders may have the advantage of not being perceived as having a stake or any involvement in local community politics and family factions. However, it is noted that the employment of an Indigenous 'outsider' in one divided community still encountered strong opposition from some within that community.

A capacity for effective communication across cultures is required in Indigenous contexts—'the ability to carry out cultural "translation", that is, to work both within a specific culture or across cultural boundaries' (Slattery 1987, p. 61). Observations made during site visits, consultations and during fieldwork for the case studies suggest that it helps if staff members have the following set of personal attributes, sensitivities and understandings:

- an ability to communicate, consult and negotiate effectively in a cross-cultural context

- respect for different values

- a non-judgmental attitude

- a capacity to feel comfortable working in environments that are often characterised by ambiguity

- an ability to maintain personal motivation in the face of severe setbacks

- a commitment to teamwork

- patience.

These desired attributes apply to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

Projects also require people with professional expertise in areas such as early childhood development, parenting, playgroups, empowerment strategies, leadership development, capacity building and healing. The difficulty is that, at present, there is a shortage of Indigenous people with qualifications in these areas and therefore projects often feel that there is no alternative but to employ some non-Indigenous professionals. The attitudes and ways of working which non-Indigenous project staff have are a critical factor. One danger is that professional expertise can sometimes be accompanied by an attitude that solutions to local family and community problems can only come from outside the Indigenous community.

> I think it is important to go into a community with a view that you are a learner not 'the expert'. One way of doing this is to leave your jargon at home—make sure that plain English is always used. Yarn in plain English; don't use flash words. Aboriginal people want to share in the dialogue rather than be intimidated by flash talkers. (Burchill 2004, p. 8)

Some projects have teamed Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff to bring a balance of local and professional knowledge, skills and understandings to bear on the project. The evidence suggests that project staff are most effective when, working together, they are able to bring both cultural and professional understandings to their work in this way. Subject matter expertise and local knowledge both matter.

One feature of several remote projects is a side-by-side buddy mentoring arrangement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous project staff known as *malparrara*. It is now regarded as best practice in Central Australia. It involves partnering an Aboriginal worker with local cultural knowledge with a non-Indigenous person possessing professional qualifications. This way of working creates opportunities to strengthen personal

relationships between project staff and community members. Initially the Aboriginal and non-Indigenous workers must build a relationship and learn how they can best work together. The case study of one project using this practice found that a good teamwork environment had been built between project staff. The process also improves communication because the Indigenous staff can introduce non-Indigenous staff to community members and they can explain things in the local language.

These *malparrara* relationships appear to foster much of the action learning.

> Physically it is easier having two people. We are able to debrief and talk about things and how they can be done better/differently. Things have certainly evolved more quickly now we are working together … On the way to the next community … [we] talked about how we could run these introductory playgroup sessions 'better' and optimise our visits. It was felt that one day in a community is a 'flying visit'. We thought about really 'flying' between communities and offering morning and afternoon playgroup sessions. It was felt that this was not realistic or cost effective. It was felt that staying in communities for a few days at a time would be better. (Comment from a project)

The ultimate vision is, of course, that local workers will gain relevant, formal qualifications, and thus projects will be able to dispense with the need for external (usually non-Indigenous) expertise. Several Strategy-funded projects have attempted to do this, but it has been found that the training of local people, who often have little formal education, is resource-intensive and time-consuming work that can be difficult to accomplish within a project's life. In remote areas it is also difficult to organise, as explained in the case study of the integrated family strengthening project.

4.3 Competent and well-established auspice

An unequivocal finding of this report is that the choice of a project auspice matters. Auspice organisations are a valued source of support for many Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy and crucially important to project performance. For the most part they served a role that was much more than just a convenient incorporated body agreeing to accept responsibility for administering funds. Many auspice organisations were actively involved in the planning and running of Strategy projects.

In their initial questionnaire responses, 56 per cent of Indigenous projects reported that the support of their auspice organisation had 'worked very well', with a further 28 per cent indicating that it 'worked well'. Seventy-three per cent of projects stated that the auspice organisation would be directly involved in planning and running the Strategy project. Ninety-seven per cent of Indigenous projects had an auspice that had been in existence prior to the Strategy project.

In many cases the auspice had previous experience in running related kinds of activities, often possessing personnel with relevant professional expertise. Some Strategy funded projects were able to reap the benefit of this stock of experiential knowledge. In the questionnaire responses, 46 per cent of projects stated that the community having had previous experience with a similar project had been 'very helpful', with a further 21 per cent stating that it was 'helpful'. In many cases the auspice organisation was able to bring this experience to the Strategy project, thereby making an important contribution to project success. Several Indigenous auspice organisations commented in their questionnaire responses that their reputation for professionalism, confidentiality and accountability had been important to their success.

Some projects also benefited from existing trusting relationships between the auspice organisation, other organisations and the community. In these cases it was not necessary to invest substantial amounts of time and resources into developing new partnerships and building trust as a prerequisite to project commencement. It was already present. This was particularly found in the case study of the integrated family strengthening project.

Generally it was the larger well-established auspice organisations that provided projects with the most support. The nature of this support was varied and diverse. Typically it encompassed some or all of the following:

‣ assistance with project submissions (including budgeting)

‣ financial management and control (for example, compliance with grant administration, audit and acquittal procedures)

- report writing (including progress reports and reporting against performance indicators)

- staff recruitment processes and human resource management (for example, payroll and personnel management systems)

- the provision of professional advice and expertise (relevant where the auspice body had a previous track record in the same field of work as the Strategy project)

- providing links to other sources of resource support (that is, established auspice organisations were able to draw on their existing networks and partnerships).

Consultations conducted during project site visits and the case studies revealed that where a capable auspice organisation assumed responsibility for administrative matters, this effectively freed project employees to concentrate on establishing project activities and to focus on community building.

This report notes that some auspice organisations were regional rather than community-based organisations. A regional rather than a community-by-community approach appears to have several potential advantages. Firstly, there are likely to be economies of scale where a project services several community sites. Secondly, there are opportunities for the cross-fertilisation of ideas between sites and greater learning about what works and what does not. Thirdly, a regional approach may also lessen the influence of localised community power bases (Libesman 2004, p. 23). This is important where local political control rests with certain men and, particularly where issues of family violence and child abuse may be involved, 'perpetrators may occupy positions of power in Indigenous community councils and agencies' (Memmott 2002, p. 13). In order to end the 'great silence' about the extent and nature of violence and abuse, women and children need to feel safe to speak about their issues and concerns without fear of retribution.

The Strengthening Families and Communities Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project (Western Australia), Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project (Western Australia), the Far West Social and Emotional Well Being Centre (New South Wales) and the Integrated Approach to Capacity Building Project (Queensland) all had regional Indigenous medical services as their auspice.

Arguably these were perhaps the only major Indigenous organisations that were capable of carrying out strategic level projects of this nature. As such they offer an opportunity for Indigenous community development that is probably not possible under any other circumstances.

In some cases Indigenous projects had auspice bodies that were not Indigenous organisations. Some were large mainstream non-government organisations or organisations affiliated with an established Church. The auspice for the Wide Bay-Burnett Indigenous Family Violence Prevention and Support Project is, for example, the Calvary Presbytery (the Queensland arm of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress). The experience such mainstream organisations bring as auspices for Indigenous projects gives valuable insights into the potential advantages and disadvantages of such arrangements.

Such organisations often do have relevant project experience and much needed administrative capacity (management expertise, systems of financial accountability, a reputation for service quality and efficiency). Uniting Care Burnside, for example, is an established non-government organisation providing a variety of child playgroup, youth and family-focused projects accessed by communities throughout the Orana region (New South Wales). Prior to becoming the auspice for an Indigenous Strategy project it already had valuable experience running similar projects elsewhere.

The main hurdle for such organisations appears to be whether or not they have the capacity to quickly demonstrate cultural relevance to Indigenous people. The auspice for one project was a mainstream non-government organisation, which found that the local Indigenous community had little if any prior knowledge of it, and this inhibited this project. Similarly another non-Indigenous non-government organisation, which was the auspice for another project, experienced difficulties in gaining the trust of young Indigenous people.

Another non-Indigenous auspice organisation worked with a number of Indigenous communities with which it had no previous relationship. The organisation experienced instances where they felt welcomed and included by communities, but they also experienced instances where their involvement was met with suspicion and

uncertainty (especially in the early stages). The organisation found that as an outsider it had to invest heavily in developing mutually respectful relationships. However, once these were established it also found that issues and disagreements arising could usually be resolved constructively, albeit often by means that differed from the established ways of working in non-Indigenous society. Overall the organisation found it challenging to engage young Indigenous people in an environment characterised by poverty, identity issues and deep alienation. It came to the recognition that, while it could not hope to fix these complex issues with a one-off intervention, it might usefully be one part of a multi-faceted intervention framework, provided that there was sufficient time to engage and build solid relationships with the communities.

It was also suggested by FaCS that, where the auspice is well connected and respected in the community, introducing new staff tends to be smoother because there is an existing level of trust.

It would seem that one criterion of a good auspice is having sound connections with the Indigenous community. This would seem especially problematic for organisations without an established and regular presence in the communities they service.

In some instances local government authorities undertook the role of auspice for Indigenous projects. The Moree Plains Shire Council, for example, was responsible for financial management, providing administrative support, human resource management and project reporting under the FaCS contract relating to the Boggabilla and Toomelah Community Link Information and Access Centre Coordinator project. Indeed some local government authorities were consciously chosen for the role of auspice because of their administrative capacity.

> [The auspice organisation] was agreed by FaCS and the community reps as the most appropriate auspicing body because of its excellent record in financial management and administration of community and commercial projects. Rather than having separate contracts with each of the communities involved, they agreed to have one contract, with MOUs between [the auspice organisation] and other organisations. (Project Evaluation Report)

Small and fledgling organisations often lack the capacity required to effectively manage projects and require substantial support in order to do so.

> Currently new project sponsors are too often left to sink or swim on their own merits alone. What is needed in relation to new Aboriginal managed organisations is carefully staged support and collaborative arrangements which maximise skills transfer. We have not given enough attention to the need for transitional support arrangements for Aboriginal service provider agencies. Aboriginal managed organisations may initially need more than a conventional funding contract to ensure that they are able to deliver appropriately. Partnerships with more established agencies could facilitate the provision of this transitional support. (Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice 1994, p. 506)

The landmark Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (Cornell & Kalt 1988) concluded that the social and economic status of North American Indigenous communities is primarily reliant upon the effectiveness of governance arrangements. The evidence strongly suggests that governance is a more important factor than other considerations, such as natural resource endowments and education standards. Governance is about the effectiveness of decision-making processes and mechanisms. It encompasses the:

▸ institutional structures of self rule (for example, dispute resolution processes) and the cultural match between these institutions and local notions about what represents the legitimate use of authority

▸ adoption of a long-term strategic vision

▸ accountability of the leadership.

In one Strategy project, the auspice body had difficulties securing office accommodation and developing sound processes to administer the project. As a result project workers had to operate out of their own homes.

> Workers came on to the project thinking they would simply carry out the objectives as listed in the agreement with Family and Community Services, the reality was that rapid growth of the auspicing organisation presented another and more complex range of developmental needs which had to be addressed by project workers. Furthermore, some community members have not seen the real work done by [auspice organisation] project workers. This caused division in the community and highlights the need for the funding authority to have confidence in the capacity of the auspice organisation. (Project Progress Report)

The project evaluation of this project found governance training was needed to enable the Indigenous board members to more effectively carry out their role. Unfortunately FaCS eventually had to terminate the funding agreement for this project because of administrative difficulties and internal governance issues affecting the auspice. A non-Indigenous non-government organisation subsequently took over as the new auspice.

Where projects did not have the support of an auspice with substantial organisational capacity, staff often complained of being consumed by red tape and administrivia. Memmott (2002, p. 13) has commented on 'the strain caused by continually preparing applications for short-term, stopgap grants in the absence of recurrent funding from governments'. These strains were certainly evident in the instance of several organisations visited.

The *Community capacity building* issues paper (Funnell, Rogers & Scougall 2004) developed as part of this national evaluation makes the point that in many cases it is first necessary to invest in developing the governance capacity of institutions (upstream capacity) before seeking to strengthen the capacity of families and communities (downstream capacity). Many Indigenous community organisations lack upstream capacity and, as a consequence, it is often necessary to invest heavily in its development to enable them to operate effectively. However, it may be possible to limit the extent of this form of social investment by strategically piggybacking on those organisations that have already demonstrated institutional strength, as evidenced by an established track record of good governance. Such an approach would allow for the more effective targeting of limited Strategy resources into project activities that build the downstream capacity of families and communities, as distinct from the upstream governance capacity of the auspice.

Not only is this conclusion supported by the site visits, consultations, questionnaire responses and case study data collected during this evaluation, it is also consistent with earlier evaluation work which examined the effectiveness of the Indigenous Coordinated Care Trials.

> Those trials that operated from within pre-existing organisational structures … or that relied on considerable support from trial sponsors … did not need to invest in organisational development activities to the same extent as other trial organisations whose aim was to establish such capacity within the communities they served …
> (KPMG 2001, section 4.1.3)

It is a key finding of this national evaluation that an established auspice organisation with administrative capacity, relevant project expertise and connections, and an existing relationship with the target group can add considerable value to an Indigenous Strategy project. Where the auspice is a non-Indigenous body without existing relationships with the Indigenous community, difficulties are likely to be experienced in developing relationships within the limited lifespan of a project. It would also appear advantageous if the auspice is a regional organisation. Small scale and fledgling organisations generally struggled to adequately fulfil the auspice role. A key strategic consideration for agencies investing in Indigenous capacity building is the balance struck between upstream institutional capacity building and downstream capacity building with families and communities.

The previous section on the importance of having capable and committed project staff reported on the importance to projects of project staff having solid relationships with Indigenous project participants. If project staff were new, existing trusting relationships between the auspice and project participants facilitated the building of trust between new staff members and project participants.

The advantages and disadvantages associated with employing local people as project staff depended on the context in which the project operated, as discussed in the previous section.

4.4 External project support

Most projects were satisfied with the level of support that they received. (Under the Strategy 2000–2004 much of the external support was provided to projects by FaCS State and Territory officers. The Strategy 2004–2009 has built on these learnings and further developed mechanisms for supporting projects during the development of proposals and the implementation of projects. Under the Strategy 2004–2009, Communities for Children projects are supported by non-government organisations selected as Facilitating Partners. In addition, projects funded under all streams of the Strategy 2004–2009 are supported by AIFS, primarily through the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.)

In their initial questionnaire responses most Indigenous projects that responded to the questionnaire reported a high level of satisfaction with the assistance that had been provided by FaCS in the development of projects. Fifty-one per cent of projects reported that FaCS support had 'worked very well', with a further 33 per cent stating that it 'worked well'. Forty per cent of projects reported that processes for getting information about the Strategy had 'worked very well', with a further 38 per cent stating that it 'worked well'. Forty-one per cent of projects reported that the process of preparing and lodging an application for Strategy funding had 'worked very well', with a further 41 per cent indicating that it 'worked well'. In their final questionnaire responses, 90 per cent of Indigenous projects that responded to the questionnaire reported that Strategy funding had 'helped a lot'. Forty-five per cent of projects reported that FaCS had been involved in assisting them to identify and form partnerships.

The three Indigenous case studies also revealed that there was a high level of satisfaction with the support provided by FaCS and the Strategy in assisting the development and implementation of projects. This assistance involved:

▸ informing projects about the Strategy

▸ assisting applicants to prepare and lodge their application for Strategy funding

▸ providing Strategy funding

▸ assistance during project implementation (for example, identifying new potential partnerships or sources of resource support).

Observations made around the country during project site visits and consultations over the past two and a half years also support the view that valuable support was provided to Indigenous projects by FaCS staff. This appears to be founded upon a sound grasp of the principles that underpin the Strategy among most staff. During the case studies and other project site visits, some FaCS officers were singled out for high praise for their assistance and dedication. This was especially the case where they had helped organisations with their initial application for Strategy assistance. In some cases overly ambitious initial plans needed to be tempered by assessments of what was realistically achievable within the time and budgetary constraints of the project.

Some Indigenous projects encountered major challenges during implementation and only a high level of external support from FaCS staff had enabled them to continue. This was especially the case in relation to one project. Projects that ran smoothly did not appear to have needed a high level of FaCS involvement post-approval. This was certainly the case with most of the Stronger Family Fund projects where the Australian Institute of Family Studies was involved, or where support was provided by universities or some other large well-established institutions. Some variability was apparent in the extent of project support provided by FaCS, especially post-approval. Some projects were never or seldom visited.

The main complaint from projects was about the length of time it took between submitting a funding application and a funding decision by the department. Many experienced a long delay before receiving funding. It was clear that some projects lost momentum and enthusiasm during this period. Delays in approval were less pronounced in the latter stages of Strategy 2000–2004. The perception of one project was that internal processes were not yet been bedded down in the early days.

> The Strategy wasn't really in place, especially the idea of setting aside an amount for projects of national significance and the approval process for these—there was a lot of confusion about who needed to approve the project. It took a very long time to go through all the processes which impacted at the community level—added to cynicism that anything would come of all the effort they'd put in to developing it. (Project Progress Report)

In summary, most Indigenous organisations appreciated the assistance they received in putting their applications together and some also needed intensive support during implementation. In some cases this was provided by FaCS, but could also have come from other external sources. Irrespective of the source, many projects valued this support and hope that it might continue.

4.5 Partnerships

Where Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy have entered into partnership arrangements this has generally been found to be a valuable source of support.

In their final questionnaire responses as part of this national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, 67 per cent of Indigenous projects responding reported that local partnerships and networks had been 'very important' to the project. The development and enhancement of networks and linkages was identified as a major activity by 76 per cent of projects. Most also reported that their project had 'contributed a lot' or 'a fair bit' to achieving enhanced partnerships.

Furthermore the questionnaire responses reveal that networking was a common activity undertaken by Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy. A network can be understood as a group of people or organisations sharing a common interest and cooperating with each other for mutual benefit. Networking is sometimes a precursor to the formation of a partnership, although not all networks become partnerships, nor want to. The *Partnerships* and *networks* issues paper (Williams, Sankar & Rogers 2004) prepared as part of the evaluation discusses different types and purposes of networks and partnerships in some detail.

Many strategic partnerships have been built during the course of the Strategy, effectively linking Indigenous projects to a diverse range of community and government agencies. Jalaris in Derby, Western Australia and the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project at Wiluna, Western Australia are exemplars when it comes to building partnerships with a broad cross-section of government and non-government organisations.

Two of the three Indigenous case studies undertaken as part of this national evaluation found that developing and enhancing networks and partnerships were major project activities. The integrated family strengthening project and the capacity building project both involved establishing new partnerships and consolidating existing ones. Indeed, building strategic partnerships was recognised as one of the most important achievements of the family strengthening project. As a result, many organisations, both within the area covered by the project and far beyond, provided advice and support to this project. However, in the case of the smaller scale Hervey Bay Indigenous Community Leadership project, little evidence of the formation of new partnership arrangements was found.

Many Indigenous Strategy projects have partnered with local Indigenous organisations at the local level. Partnerships with Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) organisations were common, with some Strategy project staff positions being funded from CDEP; for example, Family Income Management Trials (Cape York) project (Queensland) and the Strengthening Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project (Western Australia). The Family Income Management Trials (Cape York) project also works with local substance abuse and Home and Community Care services. Some partnership arrangements with Indigenous community organisations were about reinforcing the cultural identity of the participants, such as the Muurbay Aboriginal Language Centre participation in the Koori-Link project (New South Wales).

Strategy projects have partnered with a vast array of government agencies and programs.

Collaboration involved extensive co-funding arrangements in many instances. The Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project (Western Australia), for example, is funded by the Strategy, the Best Start Program (Western Australia Department for Community Development), the WA Department of Health, Lotterywest, the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. Similar funding arrangements are described in the case study of the integrated family strengthening project. The Family Income Management Trials (Cape York) project (Queensland) is also funded from a variety of sources. The Gurriny Yealamucka Family Wellbeing Project at Yarrabah (Queensland) has been funded by the Strategy and by Queensland Health (Public Health Services).

One shared objective of the Strengthening Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project (Western Australia), the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project (Western Australia) and the Moree Family Support Stronger Families Fund Project (New South Wales) was that they all sought to broaden choice

by strengthening coordination arrangements between existing Indigenous and non-Indigenous family and community services. Several other projects had a similar objective. Some Indigenous projects identified the lack of effective coordination between family and community services as a major barrier to enhancing Aboriginal access for example, the Aboriginal Men's Program at Casino (New South Wales).

Several projects have established partnerships with local government authorities. In many cases this is their first substantive involvement in Indigenous affairs. The Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project at Wiluna (Western Australia) is, for example, being run in parallel with a new local government community development initiative oversighted by the Youth, Recreation and Community Development Officer employed by the local Shire.

Some writers have suggested that difficulties are likely to arise in partnership arrangements between government and community organisations because the power and authority that necessarily attaches to government tends to undermine efforts to truly share decision-making (Libesman 2004, p.17).

> Good partnerships between agencies and Indigenous organisations require some equality in the relationship. This usually requires the agency to relinquish power and to recognise the authority of the Indigenous community or organisation. (Libesman 2004, p. 33)

While this may be the case, it is noted that at no point during this national evaluation did any Indigenous project raise concerns about unequal power relations with government partners. In fact there is much evidence that partnerships between government organisations and Indigenous projects are valued.

However, one project did identify a 'need for government departments to receive further education and to develop real sensitivity to the need for appropriate protocols when working in Aboriginal Communities' (Evaluation Report). This highlights some of the core capacities that non-Indigenous organisations need to develop in order to work effectively with Indigenous families and communities. This includes the capacity to:

◗ actively listen and effectively communicate

◗ practice sensitive cross-cultural ways of working

◗ understand cultural beliefs and practices relating to family and community issues (for example, gender roles, child rearing, marriage, health, healing, old age and death)

◗ mediate and manage conflict and anger

◗ empathise with people who are recovering from traumatic experiences.

While most Indigenous projects have generally succeeded in building new partnerships, it is important to note that for the most part these have been with Indigenous organisations and government agencies. Relatively few have been with the mainstream non-government organisation, philanthropic, academic and private sectors, but there are some important exceptions. The Bushmob project in Alice Springs stands out as one Indigenous project that has successfully reached out to the mainstream philanthropic and business communities. Valued relationships have been built with a mining company, an oil company, the philanthropic Myer Family Foundation and several local businesses. A reciprocal relationship has also been put in place with 'The Outdoor Experience', a leader in the field of Adventure Therapy in Victoria.

The Building Strong and Healthy Families project in Derby (Western Australia) and the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert (Western Australia) projects have also both been successful in eliciting substantial funding support from large mining corporations and, in the case of the project in Derby, in also gaining some other much valued support from some local small businesses. The Family Income Management Trials on Cape York have an arrangement with Westpac where bank staff are periodically seconded to the project.

None of the Indigenous case study projects were receiving any support from the philanthropic or business sectors. Indeed the task of seeking out such support was especially difficult for two of the projects because they operate in remote regions where there is no mainstream private sector and no active mining. The case study of the Hervey Bay Indigenous Community Leadership Training project (Queensland), found that the body was not in partnership with any non-government mainstream organisations.

A handful of Indigenous projects have entered into innovative partnerships with academic institutions. The auspice for the Indigenous Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters (HIPPY) based at the La Perouse community in Sydney was the University of Sydney. The Breakthrough Community and Family Support project in Brisbane works with Griffith University to access research into contemporary youth issues. The University of Queensland has been involved in supporting the Gurriny Yealamucka Family Wellbeing Project at the Yarrabah community in far North Queensland. Similarly Maari Ma in Broken Hill has a valuable relationship with the Department of Rural Health at the University of Sydney.

A number of projects have also used mainstream non-government organisations as their auspice. For example, the auspice for the Breakthrough Community and Family Support project located in the Redland Shire in outer suburban Brisbane is Boystown, a mainstream non-government organisation. The issue of mainstream non-government organisations fulfilling the role of auspice for Indigenous projects is discussed in Section 4.3.

The case study of the integrated family strengthening project makes the point that building and maintaining partnerships is resource intensive work. It demands a lot of staff time and energy; therefore it should not automatically be assumed that more partnering always represents the best use of limited resources. Rather this is a matter requiring strategic assessment in each instance.

Some projects reported that the experience of working closely with other organisations gave them a greater appreciation of the valued contribution that partners can make.

> Working in partnership with a wide range of local services has been integral to the success of the Project. (Project Progress Report)

In summary, many new partnerships have been built between Strategy projects, Indigenous community organisations and government. The partnerships with government have been important in attracting new sources of funding and have enhanced coordination. Some partnerships have been built with organisations that have not previously had much direct involvement in Indigenous affairs, most notably local government authorities and academic institutions. Relatively few partnerships have been built with the mainstream non-government sector such as business and philanthropic bodies, but there are some important exceptions.

In the end it may well be that one of the most important and lasting legacies of the Strategy for Indigenous people will not so much be the activities that have been funded, but rather the enduring partnerships and networks that were developed with those in a position to influence decisions and make things happen. These are powerful resources for the Indigenous community to draw on.

4.6 Capacity for action learning

Some Indigenous projects have clearly developed an understanding of the contribution that action research can make to building an evidence base that can inform good practice. They have built new capacity and a self-evaluative ethos.

Systematic action research is a participatory group process directed towards evaluating activity during its lifetime and improving its practice. Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers have advocated its use on the basis that it is compatible with Indigenous cultural practices and ways of working (Burchill 2004). Numerous projects have developed a capacity for systematic action learning and self-evaluation as a result of their involvement with the Strategy. They include the Integrated Approach to Capacity Building Project (Queensland), the Strengthening Families Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands project (Western Australia), the Building Strong and Healthy Families in Derby project (Western Australia), Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program (Queensland), and the Intergenerational Learning Centre (Northern Territory).

Systematic action research was identified as a major activity by 28 per cent of Indigenous projects that responded to the questionnaire. The 17 Indigenous projects funded under the Stronger Family Fund initiative of the Strategy were linked to the action research expertise of AIFS from the start. All of these projects were assigned a member of the AIFS Stronger Families Learning Exchange Training and Support Team to guide them

through the process of action research evaluation. Some projects funded under other initiatives have also put in place their own action learning methodology with the support and facilitation of bodies other than AIFS, for example, the Breakthrough Community and Family Support project in Brisbane.

AIFS was engaged by FaCS to work with the Stronger Family Fund projects to:

▸ facilitate a process of critical reflection and self-evaluation working with project staff and committee members

▸ operate a Stronger Families Learning Exchange to gather and disseminate information that identifies those services that have demonstrated a capacity to have a positive impact on families and communities, thereby contributing to the evidence base about 'what works'. The learning exchange also provided access to evidence based research about what works in strengthening families and communities.

The Stronger Families Learning Exchange (funded by FaCS) was a national clearinghouse that provided the latest information on research and programs concerned with early intervention and preventative family research and programs. Projects were both informed by the Learning Exchange and were a source of data and project stories for it. Strong links with AIFS enabled projects to more easily access this body of research as well as theoretical frameworks relevant to family issues and child growth and development. AIFS Stronger Families Learning Exchange Training and Support team staff linked projects to other understandings about effective practice. There was a two-way exchange of ideas and information. Local knowledge (action research learnings) and knowledge from systematic research were both important, and that action research drew on, as well as contributed to, knowledge about what works.

The Learning Exchange web site ‹http://www.aifs.org.au/sf/› provided useful information and links to resources relevant to preventative, early intervention and capacity building projects. The Learning Exchange created an opportunity for projects to learn from the experience of early intervention and preventative approaches used with Indigenous peoples internationally. The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative in Canada, for example, is a long running early intervention scheme for pre-school children operating in both urban and remote settings. It promotes parental and community involvement in child growth and development, education and health, and it fosters the transmission of Indigenous language and cultural identity.

The contribution of AIFS to Strategy projects took several practical forms:

▸ creating a space where project staff and committee members could critically reflect on and document the impact of their projects

▸ planting seeds of ideas from other contexts that may be relevant to the local context

▸ serving as a sounding board which provided project staff with an opportunity to debrief (a particularly valued and necessary form of support in a stressful work environment)

▸ the linking of local knowledge possessed by project staff and committee members to the theoretical and research expertise of AIFS staff

▸ the sharing of information about what works and what does not

▸ the linking of projects to the relevant available literature and evidence base

▸ capturing and documenting good practice and disseminating information about what has been learnt from successful Indigenous projects

▸ developing a self-critical and evaluative ethos.

The case study of an Indigenous integrated family strengthening project showed that most of the learning about what works and what does not in this project had been derived from learning by doing. AIFS assisted this project with:

▸ introducing an appropriate participatory action research framework for the project

▸ developing appropriate performance indicators

- formulating a strategic plan

- practical approaches to providing family support

- advice on how meeting processes might be improved

- providing one-on-one counsel to project staff

- staff professional development

- identifying lessons learnt.

Arguably the biggest contribution of AIFS to Indigenous projects has been to simply encourage staff and committee members to think critically about how their project is going. One project found this to be particularly valuable.

> We have found that investing time and energy in creating a learning environment early on in a project, lays good foundations for strong relationships and resilient projects ... We have also found that training is not enough. Projects sometimes need intensive support to develop and maintain a learning culture. They also need support to quarantine time for reflection as part of their core work which is not always easy. (Project Evaluation Report)

Feedback from staff from the sample projects visited as part of this study indicates that AIFS has been a valued sounding board providing a mechanism whereby issues could be talked through in a non-directive way. There was a strong evaluation ethos in the projects and AIFS had helped to foster this. Those involved in the projects were required to provide a rationale for what they were doing. This needed reasoned justification for any proposed course of action, the presentation of their supporting evidence and critical reflection upon it. This helped to create an environment of collective responsibility.

The role of AIFS in supporting Stronger Family Fund projects is the subject of more detailed discussion in the *Stronger Families Fund case study* (Stevens & Rogers 2005) developed as part of this evaluation.

One of the objectives of the Strengthening Families in Wiluna and the Western Desert project was to enhance the Australian evidence base on early childhood, early intervention and prevention. Arguably contributing to the evidence base ought to be an objective of all Strategy projects, especially given the paucity of that evidence base in some key areas.

Links between projects doing similar things gave projects the opportunity to learn from each other's experience. In the process of developing their projects, some sought information and advice from similar initiatives already operating elsewhere. For example, one project borrowed heavily from the experience of an existing (non-Strategy) project already operating in a different geographic area.

Several projects drew on the evidence base of tried and tested mainstream initiatives that were adapted for use with Indigenous people. The Gurriny Yealamucka Family Wellbeing Project at the Yarrabah community in far North Queensland was originally developed as a program in Adelaide in 1993. In an environment where there is still much to learn about what works it is especially important to capture and share what is known about strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective in promoting stronger Indigenous families and communities. In a few cases Strategy funding was used to support successful existing projects to enable them to continue and extend their activities.

One project found that repeating project activities created an opportunity to implement changes based on experiential learning. Running an activity a second time, for example, made it possible to amend a training manual to take account of the lower literacy levels of the participants. It was found that the formal evaluation tools initially contained some foreign concepts not meaningful to participants.

> On reflection, the best step towards sustainability was repeating the program there ... The program is now 'known' and trusted, so the recruiting of families into the second and future programs was, and will be, easier. (Comment from a project)

It is important to note that where project activities are only run once there is no direct opportunity to reap the gains of experiential learning.

An evaluation of one project stressed the importance of enhancing performance by gathering the right information, rather than being preoccupied with quantitative indicators.

> Having complicated reporting and data collection requirements can limit the capacity of a project to do evaluation that focuses on improving the project. Sometimes information that would be very useful for improving practice is not gathered because information needed for a report to funding bodies necessarily takes precedence. (Project Evaluation Report)

Arguably, some of the performance indicator data required from projects was difficult to gather in any meaningful form. For example, Strategy performance indicators for the Early Intervention Parenting and Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiatives ask projects to calculate 'the percentage of participants who have been assessed as having improved confidence, self-esteem, parenting skills or who make increased usage of and are satisfied with services'. Exactly how this might be measured is problematic. Some performance indicators also required feedback from participants after project completion.

The reality is that it is difficult and resource intensive to maintain contact with highly mobile populations. Other indicators focus on the total number of partnerships and networks that have been put in place, whereas the core issue is their quality and strategic relevance. It is clear from FaCS project file documentation that some Indigenous projects were struggling to provide meaningful responses to the generic performance indicators. This may, in part, reflect a lack of governance capacity. Nevertheless, a review of their effectiveness and efficacy and also how this information is actually used by projects and FaCS to improve performance would seem to be in order.

The evidence suggests that many projects can benefit from support to assist them to undertake cycles of ongoing review, reflection and change implementation. Many projects benefited from action learning processes, which involve: experience and critical reflection on that experience; group discussion; trial and error; discovery; and learning from one another. Many projects applied the action research cycle of action, observation, reflection and planning to ensure program/service delivery was continuously improved and remains relevant to key stakeholders. These processes can enhance our understanding of what works, under what conditions and why in Indigenous contexts.

Leadership projects, for example, could potentially benefit from the expertise of a body like the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre. Such support could be beneficial in assisting projects to address some of the key issues that have been identified elsewhere in this report such as:

◗ assisting Indigenous projects to better access potential support from the philanthropic and business sectors

◗ assisting grant recipients to plan for the period following the expiry of Strategy funding

◗ the recruitment and professional development of project staff and volunteers employed in the Indigenous family and children's sector

◗ the development of appropriate education and training resources.

Capacity has been built across numerous projects in critical reflection and self-evaluation.

The practice of action research in Strategy projects is contributing to understandings of what works, under what conditions and why amongst practitioners, project participants and policy makers. There is potential value in extending such learning to encompass a broader range of projects.

> [I]n relation to our prevention programs we need formative evaluations, that is, evaluations focussed on process, not just summative evaluations focussed on outcomes. That is, we not only need to know if programs work but we also need to know how and why they work. Knowing the therapeutic ingredients—what actually happened in the program and under what conditions, to make it work, is vital if we are to adapt programs and transfer them to other contexts. (Scott 2000, p. 2)

Under the new Strategy 2004–2009, local evaluators facilitate program improvement through action research type processes and thereby support projects funded through the Communities for Children and Invest to Grow streams. In addition, the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth are available to support projects.

4.7 The advantages of starting small

The community development literature suggests that it is often best to start with small and achievable objectives and look for early successes that will motivate participants before expanding and progressively taking on new activities and more issues. This is the 'ripple in the pond' approach.

The idea is that practitioners in the field should not seek to address every issue or seek to engage everyone initially. Rather they should focus on the strengths and commitment of a small nucleus of interested and motivated participants before gradually expanding outwards as others are attracted. It would appear that many projects need some short-term tangible achievements in order to actively engage participants and maintain interest. These may provide an important springboard for later and more substantial community capacity building activities. Another advantage of this approach is that it ensures that projects remain small and manageable in the early stages when typically needs are greatest and resources are at their most scarce.

One project was preceded by a long period of consultation to identify the key issues facing women. A great many issues emerged—too many. They included money/personal financial management, suggested alternative ways of paying Centrelink benefits, substance abuse, overcrowding of housing, the appropriateness of housing design, lack of transport, the need to foster more employment and training, access to education, insufficient sport and recreation activities (especially for young people) and health. Rather than attempting to work across all of these issues at once, the women chose to initially focus their energy and resources on achieving positive social change in just one area.

> The women were frightened for themselves and for the community. They were not sure how to go forward, but knew that they needed to work together. Eventually they came together to deal with one very important issue. The community health clinic had repeatedly been vandalised, and the ambulance stolen for joy rides. From getting together around this issue, and seeing that their plans had worked, the women saw that their actions could make a difference to the issues facing the community. They realised that they could get together as a group to map out strategies to deal with the important issues in their community, then they could create change. (Project Progress Report)

Similarly another project also found that its community consultation process had identified too many issues to possibly deal with all at once.

> [It] is impossible to address all the issues that came out of the summit effectively in every area. (Project Progress Report)

A conscious decision was made by the Aboriginal Community Working Party to initially focus on just one area—youth issues.

> The Aboriginal Community has become concerned and interested in addressing these problems. The Aboriginal Community has united in a big way and this can be seen by the amount of people who turned up to help on the day of the Youth Forum, there were over 20 adults who volunteered and facilitated workshops. The government and services have also had a shift towards a youth focus. (Project Progress Report)

Several projects have found that it is important not to crowd participants with too many expectations in the early stages.

> Initially, we are focusing on encouraging participation from families in playgroup and focusing on parent interactions with their children. Children can have weetbix in the morning if they are hungry, and then fruit for morning tea. Activities are mostly unstructured, other than some art and games. We will aim in the future, when families become comfortable with the playgroup environment, to include more activities and education. Parenting skills will be taught casually, through hands on experience. Health discussions and education will be provided further on down the track. As well as the development of many other skills. Our first step however, is encouraging participation. (Project Progress Report)

Starting small was successfully used in the integrated family strengthening project which has been described in a case study report for this national evaluation. Initially there was only one playgroup and bush trips were only conducted with the women in one community. Now these activities have been spread to several communities.

The lesson is that the confidence of project participants can be effectively built by focusing activity quite narrowly, rather than initially trying to work on multiple fronts at once.

4.8   Balancing the talking with the doing

While most projects acknowledged the importance of in-depth consultation and communication with families and communities, some projects also stressed the importance of balancing the talking with doing.

The point was made that, in the past, there has been much consultation with Indigenous people and a subsequent failure to follow through with action often has contributed to cynicism.

> Because of the very new and different (to anything else in the community) approach of this project, it has been very important to take the time needed to put ideas out into the community, allow people to think and talk about them, ask for their responses and then act on those responses … For credibility, it is important to be seen to be doing something concrete and not just be another service consulting without doing anything for the community. (Project Progress Report)

A similar point was made in the case study of the integrated family strengthening project. The experience of this project was that there was not any notable degree of engagement until such time as project activities actually commenced. The talking and the doing now occur side-by-side in an iterative process.

5   Inhibiting factors

5.1   Overview

This section describes the main factors that were identified by Strategy projects as inhibiting their progress. They are:

◗ unsupportive social environment

◗ a complex and 'wicked' problem

◗ staffing issues

◗ a lack of infrastructure

◗ low levels of participation

◗ peer pressure.

Each will be considered in this section.

5.2   Unsupportive social environment

In reflecting on what has and what has not been achieved by Indigenous projects, it is important to take account of the context within which these projects seek to make a difference. Many exist in social environments that are not conducive to smooth and easy project implementation. An appreciation that not all projects have the same starting point provides insight into why it is that many Indigenous projects are yet to produce outcomes commensurate with the higher levels of the outcomes hierarchy.

The literature suggests that the social conditions experienced by communities under stress typically include low levels of trust, high levels of anxiety, low levels of social control, high vigilance, low efficacy, disorganisation, unpredictability, and high and frequent mobility.

> [I]ndividuals in socially disadvantaged situations are exposed to more psychosocial stressors (adverse life events) than those in more advantaged environments. These stressors act as triggers for the onset of symptoms and the loss of the individual psychological abilities necessary for social functioning ... The psychosocial pathways to the development of mental disorders include higher levels of life events, anomie, learned helplessness, thwarted aspirations, low self esteem and less security ... (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 21)

Chronic stress and anxiety is known to be closely associated with feelings of vulnerability. Cullen and Whiteford (2001, p. 39) refer to the psychological pressures associated with low social status, specifically 'perceptions of indignity, inferiority, and a lack of control'. Common consequential behavioural patterns include high risk behaviours such as substance abuse, smoking and unsafe sexual practices (2001, p. 39).

Aggressive behaviour and violence, including internalised violence, are also common psychological responses among minority groups that have been subjected to trauma, poverty, marginalisation and prejudice. The consequences of separation of children from their families, for example, are known to include a sense of deprivation arising from the lack of a loving childhood, loss of cultural training, a lack of bonding and mentoring, an inability to develop parenting skills, identity issues, an inability to sustain intimate relationships, lack of life skills, substance abuse, mood swings, grief and anguish, and self harm.

Such behaviour patterns are the markers of social distress right throughout the world, including Indigenous Australia.

> In a setting of unremitting deprivation, adaptive potential is compromised with the orientation increasingly towards the short term, a day-to-day existence. Such activities as gambling and drinking are powerfully reinforced among a group with little to lose. (Hunter 1993, p. 239)

Opinions differ as to the extent to which alcohol misuse is a cause of violence and other social dysfunction in Indigenous communities. But at the very least, alcohol misuse certainly does contribute to a loss of control and responsibility.

Many Indigenous communities also lack social cohesion. The literature indicates that divided communities are not able to maintain effective control over dysfunctional forms of social behaviour or to define and realise whatever common values their residents might possess (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 23). Social pathologies such as substance abuse, violence, and the abuse of women and children are all symptoms of such communities. Furthermore these social pathologies have generally been found to interact with each other and with underlying causal factors such as poverty and dependence, thereby intensifying the detrimental effect on individual behaviour and family and community wellbeing (Desjarlais et al. 1995, pp. 6–7).

> National and international research suggests that where a person is exposed simultaneously to many risk factors the damage caused by each is compounded. The effects are seen in later life, in ill-health, behavioural problems and continuing disadvantage … Many Indigenous children are experiencing multiple risk factors, and are growing up in multi-generational households where intergenerational welfare dependence and poverty have become entrenched. (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 14)

The three Indigenous case studies in this evaluation revealed the extent to which Indigenous projects can be disadvantaged by their starting point on the climb up the ladder that leads to stronger families and communities. All three projects had to travel far and carry a heavy load due to both the magnitude of their disadvantage and the general absence of any other complementary interventions. There were major gaps in existing family and community services and also access issues. The case study of the integrated family strengthening project discussed the dearth of mainstream family and community services in the region and its adverse impact. Even in urban environments, Indigenous people may be reluctant to access family and community services due to issues of cultural security.

The occurrence of traumatic events within the wider Indigenous community often disrupted Strategy-funded project activities. In one instance a project worker was murdered and some activities were delayed for several months as a result. A tragic house fire in another community meant that work on the project ceased for several weeks.

In addition to generally high levels of stress and anxiety, a high incidence of alcohol abuse and violence, frequent trauma, a lack of social cohesion, and the absence of many mainstream family and community service providers, there may also be other factors at play that also make it more likely that an Indigenous project will not be able to match the achievements of a similar scale mainstream activity. Contextual differences in the Indigenous project may include:

- isolation, distance and remoteness

- the impact that poor health status, death and frequent funeral attendance have on the capacity of Aboriginal people to actively participate in project activities

- a high incidence of ceremonial activities which take people away from participation in project activities

- high participant mobility

- recurring personal crises related to poverty, contact with the legal system, pregnancy, violence and other behavioural issues

- a deep sense of alienation

- a general lack of confidence and 'can do' spirit

- low levels of trust (for example, historic mistrust of governments, internal community divisions)

‣ overloaded local service providers trapped in a crisis response mode and unable to cope

‣ a lack of familiarity with preventative and early intervention approaches

‣ over reliance on the capacity of a few key individuals

‣ cross-cultural communication difficulties in regions where English is not the first language

‣ logistical difficulties associated with working across multiple jurisdictions and time zones

‣ limited connections to resources and sources of support in the outside world (that is, low stocks of bridging and linking social capital)

‣ stigmatised external perceptions of remote communities

‣ difficulties in recruiting and retaining competent staff and a high incidence of staff burnout (see Section 5.4)

‣ a lack of adequate basic infrastructure such as staff housing, vehicles and project space (discussed in Section 5.5).

The prevailing social context affecting many Indigenous projects and the time required to build trusting relationships in such environments are factors that need to be carefully considered in any assessment of the appropriate scale, duration and resource requirements of a project. Furthermore, most Indigenous families and communities have multiple needs and require intensive ongoing support. Recognising all of this serves to temper expectations as to what Indigenous projects might realistically achieve.

With the benefit of hindsight it appears that some may have been overly ambitious. As one project staff member commented:

> [We] are still juggling the constraints of having stated what the project will do with the reality of where we are. We are having to run before we can crawl or even more before we have got a footing. Given all this—how do we adjust our action plans and work goals? (Project Progress Report)

All of the available evidence suggests that in order to strengthen Indigenous families and communities, a substantial and sustained long-term commitment to building social capital is ordinarily required.

> Regardless of the level of intervention, the process of developing social capital takes a long time. Consequently, investing in social capital should be seen from a life-course approach, for investments now may not only benefit this generation, but also the next. Similarly, current dis-investment may not have parallel long-term effects. It has been posited that interventions that target various dimensions of social capital simultaneously may be more effective. This would entail intervening across multiple levels, including macro-social policy reform while also increasing access to external resources and power. (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 13)

There is no good reason to expect that outcomes, such as improved parenting or a reduced incidence of child abuse and neglect, could be achieved in the short to medium term in Indigenous contexts. There is a tension between the bold long-term ambition of building stronger Indigenous families and communities and the relatively short-term nature of most Strategy interventions. Within Indigenous affairs and within the broader field of community development there has long been discussion about the value of short-term funding and one-off interventions that are not sustained.

The risk is that expectations are built and then projects fold because no source of ongoing funding is identified. The Western Australian Government's Gordon Inquiry (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002) was most critical in this regard. Does such funding do more harm than good?

> Programs may be effective but unsuccessful in gaining ongoing funding and so can damage communities. We have seen too many examples of programs which draw heavily upon the social capital in a community—that precious reservoir of hope and goodwill, and where people invest energy and hope only to have the program collapse after a year or two for lack of funds. These programs drain the social capital from vulnerable communities. Thus it is essential that before the program begins there is a viable strategy for its sustainability in place. (Scott 2002, p. 9)

The prevailing social circumstances within which many Indigenous families and communities are located are difficult. These need to be carefully considered at the project design stage if project objectives are to be realistic and achievable.

> Intervention with families who demonstrate serious dysfunction requires long term and intensive therapeutic services. (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002, p. 80)

5.3 A complex and 'wicked' problem

'Wicked' problems are those that are:

◗ (almost overwhelmingly) large in dimension

◗ difficult to define because they are associated with multiple and iterative underlying factors

◗ characterised by complex intersections of causes, effects and behavioural responses.

Such problems challenge the understandings of both practitioners and policy makers about how best to respond because knowledge about what works is often so limited.

Solving the puzzle of how to strengthen Indigenous families and communities is complex work. The underlying causes of dysfunction are not always well understood, the problems deeply entrenched, and the solutions often uncertain.

Daly and Smith argue that the situation in many Indigenous families and communities is now so serious that the capacity of Indigenous society to reproduce desired cultural values and relationships is under serious threat.

> From our work in communities with families and households, it appears that Indigenous forms of family, social and cultural capital are under enormous pressure as a result of poverty and exclusion from the economic mainstream. The problem is compounded by the age structure of the Indigenous population, which is youthful and rapidly expanding. For example, female and aged family members are vulnerable to excessive demands on their incomes … culturally-based networks of social and cultural capital are being distorted and undermined by the extent of 'whole-of-community' welfare dependence, the erratic flows of cash, and the unrestrained and sometimes physically intimidating demands by some family members for cash and resources … (Daly & Smith 2003, p. 16)

This kind of Indigenous family and community dysfunction constitutes what policy analysts term a 'wicked' problem (Rittel & Webber 1973).

Prevailing circumstances for Indigenous people in one community, as described in one Progress Report, spotlight the sheer multiplicity of hurdles to be overcome.

> The community is very impoverished. Across the surviving three-four generations there is a huge loss of cultural knowledge and identity and a breakdown of traditional social structures. There are generally low to very low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, poor school attendance/completion to year 10, high levels of unemployment that in some families includes up to three generations of no one having a job, poverty, high levels of juvenile crime and incarceration, learned welfare dependency, high levels of drug and alcohol abuse and family violence. There are limited community services and no public transport … There is intense conflict between families in relation to a land claim. Each of the Aboriginal services tends to be dominated by one family and there is a common perception that whatever family dominates the service will only make decisions that are favourable or advantageous to their own family making access to the service difficult for other families … At every meeting the issue about the land claim has been raised but we have managed to agree to put it aside and focus on family matters however we believe that some women will not attend because they want to avoid any situation that may lead to conflict. (Project Progress Report)

The list of causal factors commonly identified in the literature as contributing to the current situation of Indigenous families and communities is daunting to say the least.

Table 10: Contributing factors to the current situation of Indigenous families and communities

Historical factors	◗ the impact of colonisation and consequential socioeconomic marginalisation and deprivation (for example, dispossession, unemployment, poor housing) ◗ the breakdown of authority structures and social controls within families and communities ◗ the lack of social cohesion which occurs when different families and language groups are thrust together against their will ◗ life experiences marked by racism, discrimination, violence and a lack of respect from others.
Social factors	◗ loss or prolonged separation from one's mother or father due to a multiple factors (for example, ill health, death, relationship breakdown, institutionalisation of children by welfare authorities, incarceration) ◗ the absence of parenting role models for those who were institutionalised as children has inhibited the intergenerational transmission of positive child-rearing behaviours ◗ gender inequality ◗ the loss of the traditional Aboriginal male role as a provider and authority figure ◗ the peer influence of regular association with people who routinely engage in high risk behaviour ◗ the normalisation of violence and substance abuse in value and belief systems.
Economic factors	◗ unemployment ◗ poverty ◗ lack of education.
Psychological factors	◗ intergenerational trauma (for example, exposure to death, violence and child abuse) ◗ detrimental experiences in early childhood (for example, suffering rejection, feelings of insecurity, lack of attachment and affection, exposure to physical punishment, bullying and threats) ◗ high levels of stress and safety related anxieties ◗ feelings of social disconnection, isolation, alienation, powerlessness and lack of control over one's life ◗ a confused sense of identity ◗ substance abuse ◗ lack of coping strategies and social skills as evidenced by an inability to control anger, aggression and impulsiveness ◗ mental health disorders.

Not surprisingly the combined impact of such factors can make it difficult to form healthy, stable, secure and loving emotional attachments. Quayle (2002, p. 2), for instance, refers to 'the difficulties that Aboriginal children experienced in forming relationships later in life due to prolonged separation from their families, culture, identity, community, language and land'.

The central point here is that when it comes to finding strategies to strengthen Indigenous families and communities causality is seldom simple or linear. Indeed one of the characteristic features of family and community dysfunction in Indigenous contexts is that it is often extremely difficult to distinguish between cause and effect.

> For example, the presence of domestic violence may cause children to roam the streets and makes them more vulnerable to sexual abuse, especially in areas with high alcohol consumption. Further, female heads of households often care for large numbers of children (which may in itself be due to family violence) and are forced to live in derelict houses that cannot be adequately locked to prevent external intruders entering the house and assaulting residents (children or adults). (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002, pp. 61–62)

Similarly, substance abuse is both a contributing factor to family and community dysfunction and a consequence of it. Furthermore it has an adverse impact on other elements, such as the incidence of violence thus perpetuating the cycle.

Adding to the difficulty of doing something constructive about Indigenous family and community issues is the fact that one-size-fits-all prescriptions seldom work well in a policy environment that is characterised by cultural and contextual diversity (Libesman 2004, p. 1). Rather programs and services have to be tailored to meet local needs and circumstances.

Table 11: Possible policy and program interventions

Family support services	◗ parenting support ◗ child care and playgroups.
Community development	◗ community centres ◗ women's groups ◗ men's groups ◗ youth groups ◗ healing and personal empowerment.
Community safety	◗ safe houses ◗ refuges and emergency accommodation ◗ community wardens and night patrols ◗ family violence support services ◗ community-based justice initiatives ◗ advocacy ◗ strengthening cultural identity.
Building human capacity	◗ leadership development ◗ on-the-job training ◗ formal training ◗ mentoring ◗ peer education ◗ life skills education, for example, personal financial management skills, communication skills, literacy (reading, writing and computer).
Behavioural change	◗ suicide prevention ◗ conflict mediation and resolution ◗ awareness raising.
Therapy	◗ anger management ◗ group therapy ◗ family and other counselling ◗ cognitive behaviour therapy.
Health promotion	◗ nutrition education ◗ health awareness ◗ substance education.
Welfare responses	◗ child protection, for example, foster care ◗ emergency and financial assistance ◗ income support measures ◗ services for the homeless ◗ Meals on Wheels ◗ school breakfast programs.

Such complexities challenge practitioner understandings about how best to respond to family and community issues. Do practitioners start by addressing the historical, the social, the psychological, the economic or the physical factors? Or should they endeavour to work holistically across all of these fronts simultaneously?

The list of possible policy and program interventions that the litany of Indigenous family and community issues gives rise to (see Table 11) is equally as long as the possible causal factors.

When it comes down to effective responses to Indigenous family and community issues there is much hesitation, not just because policy makers do not yet know with much certainty which policy levers to pull and in which order and in which combination, but also because of the legacy of a past era of policy intrusiveness.

> Intervention in Aboriginal families has become such a vexed issue that responses now range from inertia based on fear to instant inappropriate intervention based on over-reaction. Non-Aboriginal workers with an understanding of their own ethnocentrism and a personal desire not to compound the injustices of the past, may fear to intervene at all. (Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice 1994, p. 502)

There are still very real limits to what is currently known and understood about how to strengthen Indigenous families and communities. There are many unanswered questions:

◗ How can cycles of entrenched dependency be broken?

◗ What shifts in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are required and appropriate among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?

◗ What are currently the most effective strategies for fostering child growth and development in Indigenous contexts?

◗ What are the most effective elements of existing programs established to strengthen Indigenous families and communities?

◗ How can government most effectively support the process of strengthening Indigenous families and communities?

Some of the core areas where there is still much to learn include:

◗ substance abuse prevention and rehabilitation

◗ anti-violence strategies (encompassing interpersonal conflict, child abuse, self harm and suicide)

◗ youth development

◗ the re-engagement of Indigenous men and youth at the centre of family life.

In summary, ameliorating the situation of Indigenous families and communities is difficult because current understandings by policy makers of the interactions between the multiple causal factors is limited and confidence in any set of chosen strategies not always well founded. This is not to imply that the problems are necessarily intractable, but it is to suggest that it is still early days when it comes to making strenuous efforts to solve these 'wicked' problems. Documenting the collective experience of the Indigenous Strategy projects promises to be a valuable learning aid in this regard.

5.4　Staffing issues

This national evaluation has found that the quality of project staff is crucial to project success, but it has also found that many Indigenous Strategy projects have experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining quality staff. Staff turnover and human resource management issues have long been problematic in most organisations working in Indigenous contexts, especially in isolated and remote locations. There is an almost constant movement of people in and out of communities and agencies.

First and foremost, family and community work with Indigenous communities is a difficult and stressful occupation that inevitably takes an emotional toll. The prevailing social situation is such that staff are inevitably required to deal with traumatic events and traumatised people. Not surprisingly burnout is a common phenomenon in these environments (Memmott 2002, p. 13).

Staff are also routinely called upon to make tough judgment calls in relation to a range of complex issues that defy simple answers such as:

‣ finding the right balance between talking (community consultations) and doing (project implementation)

‣ waiting for participants to drive their project and providing some direction themselves

‣ balancing the need for project consolidation against expectations of project expansion into new activities and the recruitment of new participants

‣ judging the right time to bring people together in deeply fractured communities where social cohesion is an issue

‣ knowing when to transfer responsibilities from non-Indigenous staff to Indigenous staff and/or project participants.

Workers may also find that their political skills and instincts and their capacity to maintain professional standards under duress are severely tested.

> While coming into a project with complete trust in your own ideas, ethics and commitment there is an underlying tension that constantly sabotages the process … Workers need to be skilled in iterating between their professional practices and personal values. Although the passage has not always been easy the workers on the project have all expressed growth and learning by being involved with the project and the community. (Project Progress Report)

External factors such as delays in project approval and commencement, long project lead times, delays in the release of funds, disappointing levels of participation and lack of continuity of funding can also be frustrating and do impact on the capacity of projects to attract and retain good staff. The hard reality in Indigenous contexts is that needs are endless, while the resources available to address them are always limited. One project offered the following advice to others following in its footsteps.

> DO NOT underestimate the client time needed. DO NOT take on too much—look for quality rather than volume outcomes. (Questionnaire response)

Secondly it is difficult to recruit and retain local people with the skills and motivation required, especially in remote regions.

> Experienced, reliable and consistent staff at the RW [Resource Worker] level is vital at all sites … Local staff recruitment is an issue. We have had five locals at times but no-one sustains. Other crews have similar problems I am led to believe. Local skill levels (literacy/numeracy) are inadequate for administration at the level we require and regularity and reliability are hard to find … The few locals who are adequately skilled are already employed. Employment of locals will be a long road that we cannot give up on. (Project Progress Report)

And even when capable local employees are recruited there is always the risk that they will be poached by other employers in the region offering better pay, conditions or longevity of employment.

When experienced staff members leave for whatever reason, it is not just knowledge and expertise that is lost, but also a whole delicate network of goodwill. The cost to the project is high. Cooperative and trusting relationships take a long time to build, not just with the families and communities, but also with potential project partners. Capacity is seriously eroded.

Staffing problems are further exacerbated in those situations where basic infrastructure such as adequate staff housing, office space, equipment and vehicles are not provided, as is the case with some Indigenous projects funded under the Strategy. One project working in remote communities, for example, has been inhibited by ongoing staffing problems.

> Staff conditions are not ideal and … accommodation standards … will affect the sustained employment of the quality of staff we require. It is one of the [organisation] foundations to look after skilled staff including good conditions and housing—and this needs attention. (Project Progress Report)

Issues of staff recruitment, management, professional development and retention have been problematic, providing good reason to reflect on how projects might be more effectively supported in this crucial area in the future. To date insufficient attention appears to have been given to effective staff recruitment and retention strategies in Indigenous contexts.

There is an opportunity to institute good practice human resource management strategies in a range of areas to ensure that staff are supported in their work:

◗ better targeted staff recruitment

◗ use of a buddy mentoring system between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff

◗ the provision of training in best practice recruitment practices

◗ ensuring that project staff numbers have critical mass (that is, not having isolated outposted positions lacking in supervision and support)

◗ providing staff with preparatory briefings and an orientation program and resources before they commence

◗ material support (that is, providing salaries, accommodation, rental and air conditioning subsidies and working conditions that are labour market competitive)

◗ administrative support (that is, a project auspice with the capacity to put sound human resource management systems and personnel records in place)

◗ professional development opportunities for staff (for example, supervision and teamwork training)

◗ ongoing emotional support (for example, regular opportunities to debrief).

Staffing is a critical issue for the whole Indigenous sector, especially in rural and remote areas. This includes Strategy projects. The extent and nature of staffing issues encountered throughout the Strategy 2000–2004 suggests that there is scope to provide greater support to projects in areas such as recruitment, training and the maintenance of personnel management systems.

5.5   Lack of infrastructure

There is considerable variation across Indigenous projects throughout the country in the level and type of physical infrastructure that is available. The non-availability of staff housing, office space, vehicles and suitable venues to conduct project activities is especially problematic in many rural and remote localities. And it is particularly acute in towns experiencing mining and other development booms where there are chronic shortages of land and housing.

Several projects complained of inadequate working conditions.

> The [project] office is adjacent to the Store. It is secured behind a perimeter cage and after hours access from the store is through the office … The office is one room and (at times) houses the RW [Floating Resource Worker] and administrator, two local workers, two bank secondees, project manager, numerous participants—and additional visitors. It is noisy, disruptive and matters of participant privacy, telephone conversations etc are compromised. (Project Progress Report)

The Family Income Management project in Cape York has been inhibited by the lack of banking facilities in the Gulf and Cape regions. Establishing a credit union to address this gap in service provision has been mooted.

It is noted that Strategy funds generally cannot be used to purchase or construct major capital items and the lack of infrastructure in some areas has delayed the commencement of certain project activities. One project took many months to find a building from which it could operate, by which time its Strategy funding period had only a short period to run.

Some project staff were surprised by the amount of time that it took to acquire the infrastructure necessary to support the implementation of their projects after Strategy funding had been approved.

> When we started this project I didn't have any idea that we would have to worry about finding a home for the organisation as well as running the project. (Project Progress Report)

In some instances the development of facilities has, by necessity, become a major project activity in itself (for example, the refurbishment of disused buildings for use by playgroups). However, there are very real limits on the extent to which a lack of essential social infrastructure can be overcome through self-help alone. The case study of the integrated family strengthening project highlights the impact that a lack of staff housing and some other basic infrastructure has had on that project.

Lack of basic infrastructure, such as office accommodation and vehicles, has limited what some projects have been able to achieve. And as noted in the previous section, it also adds to the difficulties of attracting and retaining quality staff.

5.6   Low levels of participation

Some projects funded under the Strategy have struggled to get and maintain adequate levels of Indigenous participation as reflected in poorly attended meetings and low turnout at project activities. As previously discussed, substance abuse, family violence and a lack of social cohesion are major concerns in many Indigenous communities. Understandably such factors necessarily exacerbate difficulties associated with engaging project participants and maintaining high levels of participation.

In some communities, internal conflict has been a major obstacle to participation.

> Some of the difficulties relate to the different Aboriginal Family groups ... It has been difficult to get the different groups involved in the project and some people have been suspicious of the Working Party concept. (Project Progress Report)

Another project identified ill health, lack of transport, high social mobility and cultural obligations as factors that inhibited participation.

> Aboriginal youth and men's participation on the program fluctuates depending upon the issues confronting particular people and their families. A significant factor contributing to the fluctuating number of participants for the program is the high morbidity rate experienced by Indigenous communities. Adding to the fluctuation of Aboriginal participants is the lack of adequate transport services and cultural kinship obligations that may have participants leaving town on short notice to care for extended families ... (Comment from a project)

One project found that Indigenous participation was adversely affected by an influenza outbreak and the absence of two families, who were attending a funeral in a distant community. This project also struggled to get community members involved in its project management group.

> It is difficult to establish a representative group of people from the various communities owing to distance of travel and the need for us to establish relationships with them first. [Another organisation] has experienced similar concerns in establishing Indigenous governance ... The level of dysfunctionality in the region has meant that they have had few regular attendees from a limited number of communities to their meetings. (Project Progress Report)

It is important to note that the difficulties were not limited to the community side. One project in a remote location found that for logistical reasons it was difficult to get relevant agency representatives from the capital city to attend meetings in the region all at the same time.

Similarly, another project in a remote location had little success in establishing stable and consistent local project reference groups at a community level. The project has had to contend with constantly changing membership.

The board of one project was comprised of up of 50 per cent young Indigenous project participants. The experience has been that 'it is often difficult for our most committed young people to attend meetings due to the irrational and violent circumstances in which many of them live' (Project Progress Report). This is hardly surprising given that this project caters for the needs of the most marginalised and at-risk youth in this community, namely those involved in petrol sniffing and other substance abuse.

Some non-Indigenous organisations were perplexed and frustrated by the low levels of Indigenous participation and in one case appeared to adopt blaming behaviour towards the target group.

In summary the main reasons put forward by projects to explain low levels of participation were:

▸ lack of self-confidence among participants

▸ tensions and conflicts between families and groups which make it difficult for them to share the same space

▸ lack of transport

▸ lack of child care

▸ high residential mobility

▸ poor health or injury

▸ funeral attendance

▸ court appearances and incarceration

▸ some projects had notoriously hard to reach target groups such as alienated youth, those in the prison system and perpetrators of family violence.

In some cases there also appears to have been an assumption that participation would be a natural flow on from extensive prior community consultation, and there was some surprise when it was discovered that this was not necessarily the case. But the talking and doing phases of a project are different and may therefore require different strategies and techniques in order to foster and sustain high levels of Indigenous involvement. Following on from the earlier discussion about effective participation, it may also be the case that some projects did not give sufficient consideration to identifying an effective hook of engagement at the initial design stage.

First and foremost, projects need to reach people before they can even begin to make a difference. There is a need for more dialogue between projects around the effectiveness of strategies of participation in Indigenous contexts. The high levels of participation achieved by some of the Indigenous Strategy projects suggest that there are opportunities to learn from each other's experience.

Opportunities for projects to learn from each other are provided in the new Strategy 2004–2009 through the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia as well as through regular forums involving projects funded through Communities for Children and the Invest to Grow funding streams.

5.7   Peer pressure

The link between greater awareness and behavioural change can be tenuous. Most people are aware that smoking causes cancer, but many choose to smoke nevertheless. This is testimony to the power of peer pressure and makes us aware of the limits of awareness raising.

The norms that govern interpersonal behaviour within families and communities are transmitted through processes of socialisation that occur as a result of social interaction. Where the bonds between people are strong, knowledge, understandings and patterns of behaviour are transmitted more quickly and easily. The upside is that this can facilitate the transmission of positive messages about things such as diet, lifestyle, parenting and child care.

But on the downside 'Social interaction can have negative as well as positive effects—as good behaviour spreads, so does bad … Networks can just as easily influence and reinforce bad choices as they can good' (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 12). Examples of such dysfunctional behaviours spread in this way might include drinking and gambling circles, gang culture and petrol sniffing. A parallel could be drawn with the rapid spread of disease through close-knit communities, where people come into frequent contact with each other.

Furthermore, in families and communities where bonds are strong it is also easier for some to make excessive demands on the resources of others (Cullen & Whiteford 2001, p. 38). Experience suggests that in Indigenous family and community contexts it is those who are in receipt of regular income who come under most pressure. It is especially so for the elderly and women who are in the most vulnerable position. This kind of social behaviour works to undermine the impact of positive messages such as those about the need to better manage the household budget.

There are certain entrenched patterns of dysfunctional behaviour which undermine effective governance and which do not create an environment conducive to positive social change. These behaviours include alcohol misuse, grog running, petrol sniffing, family violence, interpersonal violence, suicide, self harm, child abuse, theft, misappropriation, vandalism and littering. Many of these behaviour patterns are characteristic of those suffering feelings of disempowerment, low esteem and a sense of fatalism associated with underlying factors such as poverty, hunger, ill health, unresolved trauma, dispossession and despair that sap hope. Arguably all people have a need for belonging and social status. If these needs cannot be met through constructive social interaction then some will naturally seek the recognition they need through more destructive behaviour, especially where this is the only avenue open to them. People need to feel valued.

Human behaviour is a product both living environment (economic, social, cultural and psychological) and of the systems that govern us (processes and structures). It naturally follows that behaviour can be influenced by environmental and system changes. The challenge is to design environments and systems that foster more positive patterns of behaviour.

There are several effective ways to influence the behavioural choices that people make including counselling, education, monetary and other incentives, and behavioural therapy. In one project, education and awareness raising strategies are credited with all but stamping out petrol sniffing. In several communities, the perpetrators of family violence are not allowed to play football, an effective social sanction. At Warburton there is a 'no school, no pool' policy. One Strategy project in an Alice Springs town camp community is credited with contributing to a substantial reduction in petrol sniffing behaviour.

In the broader community, attitudes to wearing seatbelts, smoking and drink driving have been changed radically by social marketing, by intensive community education and by the use of heavy financial penalties and price signals. This is not to imply that strategies can simply be lifted from other contexts and applied in Indigenous Australia. It is important not to reduce strategic responses to an oversimplified level that fails to take account of culture, kinship, history, remoteness, environment and other social, economic and structural realities. It is not suggested that behavioural modification is easy. We simply wish to make the point that there are some grounds for optimism that dysfunctional behaviour patterns can be modified when the right levers are pulled.

Indigenous Strategy projects have certainly raised awareness about many family and community issues, but it is important to bear in mind that there are very real limits on the capacity of greater awareness to bring about sustained positive social change. This harsh reality is a source of much understandable frustration for many project staff, despite their best efforts.

Appendix A: Lessons learnt from site visits to Indigenous projects

This section summarises some of the key lessons about the Strategy that emerged from all of the site visits.

Participation

The projects that had the most success in relation to fostering Indigenous participation were those that had an effective hook that served to initially engage people in a meaningful way in project activities.

Music, bush hunting trips, photography, video and sport were all used to great effect to involve people in project activities at the sites that were visited. In some cases these were already spheres where people were actively involved and projects took advantage of this to get their message out.

Many projects had a slow start and initially struggled to get adequate levels of community participation. There are many reasons for this, including initial mistrust or in some cases feelings of shame or an unwillingness to admit that there is a problem that needed to be addressed. However, by their completion, many projects had moved beyond mere participation. They had developed a strong and growing sense of community ownership over the project.

Lack of reliable transport was repeatedly recognised as a factor inhibiting Indigenous participation in Strategy projects. There are several closely related reasons for this: lack of money to buy fuel or carry out repairs, low levels of private vehicle ownership, the unreliability of many private vehicles and irregular or non-existent public transport services in some areas.

All of the Strategy projects that were visited had some form of committee that allowed for community participation in decision-making and enabled local people to translate their project ideas into actions. In some cases this was comprised only of community representatives. In other cases committees were comprised of community members, project staff and, in one instance, the staff of other agencies all jointly sharing decision-making responsibility.

Choice of auspice

The choice of an appropriate and trusted auspice organisation is important to project success.

Where the project auspice organisation had prior project experience, knowledge, skills and understandings that were relevant to the Strategy project, this was found to be important in contributing to the achievement of outcomes. Gallang in Brisbane, for example, already had a strong track record in relation to the development and delivery of Indigenous counselling services.

Some projects were auspiced by large regional bodies that possessed considerable administrative capacity. For example, an Aboriginal community-controlled Health Service has an established profile and a high degree of acceptance in the area covered by one project. This freed project staff to concentrate on family strengthening and community building project activities unencumbered by reporting requirements and administrative matters.

Most Indigenous projects had an Indigenous organisation as their auspice. Where this was not the case the auspice bodies found that they came under considerable suspicion from some sections of the Indigenous community. One project auspiced by a non-Indigenous organisation subsequently reflected that it is crucial for a non-government organisation to develop strong links to the host Indigenous community if it wishes to work effectively with Indigenous people. It took a long time for this project to build trust. A considerable amount of 'professional loitering' in communities was needed to build the necessary rapport. Meanwhile, in another project, a climate of mistrust always enveloped the relationship between the Indigenous community and the non-Indigenous organisation that was initially selected as the auspice.

Capacity building

Strategy projects have enhanced understandings among stakeholders about how to build capacity in Indigenous contexts.

Many Strategy projects have involved developing the skills capacity of particular Indigenous target groups and, in the course of doing so, they have provided insights into effective teaching/learning strategies. Knowledge transition has generally also been found to be most effective when it occurs naturally in a cultural setting, away from the distraction of community stresses. A classroom approach to information dissemination and awareness raising has generally been found to be less effective.

Other factors that have been found to be especially important include the choice of appropriate language and avoiding jargon and 'high English'; the fostering of group identity among participants to reinforce the message that 'you are not alone'; the development of a sense of participant ownership over the process; the fostering of equal relationships between participants and staff; the use of male and female facilitators working as a team; the use of Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators working as a team; the modelling of respectful and appropriate behaviours; the adoption of a peer education approach to training and awareness raising activities; opportunistic responses wherever and whenever local people express interest in relevant issues; and allowing participants to learn at their own pace.

Emotional issues were found to have a large impact on the delivery of courses relevant to the needs of Indigenous people. It would be difficult to underestimate the depth of hurt that many participants have previously experienced, and this is a major inhibiting factor. The creation of opportunities for participants to express their emotions and have them validated is therefore most important.

Recognition of the capacities that people already have has generally been found to be an effective starting point. The Future Parents workshops, for example, recognised that many Indigenous youth already have experience caring for siblings, cousins and friends. This project took the opportunity to build on this seeking to develop sound parenting skills and behaviours at an early age.

It is also important to note that it is not only Indigenous people who need to build capacity.

Some projects' staff suggested that many non-Indigenous people had little awareness or understanding of Indigenous ways of working, and that this is an area requiring greater investment in capacity building.

One of the main learnings has been that community capacity cannot be developed in a vacuum or as an end in itself. Rather capacity only exists in relation to achieving a particular social purpose and in the context of a particular community need. In one community, for example, Indigenous leadership and management capacity was built around a flagship activity (Meals on Wheels) that provided a meaningful focus for planning and action. Another important factor with this project was the recognition of the right time to transfer management responsibility to local women. The case study found that this project provides a successful model for developing community leaders and that it demonstrates the value that a relatively small project can add to a small isolated community.

It is also important to note that the experience of one project shows that many of the sustainable changes required to improve store practices and generate nutritional outcomes need to occur at a regional and at a national policy level. Capacity building cannot always be achieved through localised action alone.

In many settings the need for a greater focus on life skills development emerged as critical in relation to matters such as household budgeting/indebtedness, licences, banking, Centrelink entitlements and responsibilities, tenancy responsibilities, taxation, child support, and numeracy and literacy (including computer literacy). Many projects have found that there is an acute need to raise participant awareness about available services in a range of areas including substance abuse and counselling services.

Finally, it was found that the development of Indigenous capacity is at least as much about attitudinal and behavioural change, and the rebuilding of confidence and self-belief, as it is about the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Staffing issues

The continuity of experienced and qualified staff was found to be important to project success.

Some Strategy projects, especially in rural and remote areas, have suffered from high staff turnover. One project, for example, experienced several changes of coordinator over the life of this project and difficulties were encountered in attracting suitable replacements. This contributed to a general air of constant disruption surrounding this project.

Project management in Indigenous contexts is also fragile in many instances because it is critically dependent on the retention of just a few key individuals. It is especially important to be able to attract and retain an effective coordinator who has the skills to work in culturally sensitive ways, who is responsive to community needs, who can secure the appropriate delivery of services at the right time and who can enhance local governance capacity.

There is evidence to support the proposition that recruiting mature and locally known Indigenous staff—those who possess authority and respect within their cultural context—is important in giving projects credibility with their Indigenous participants. The experience of all projects is that Indigenous people are more likely to respond to, and have rapport with, skilled Indigenous workers who have empathetic understandings and can engage and connect with their experiences (that is, it is crucial that staff have cultural, spiritual, psychological, emotional, social and historic understandings). In regions that retain an orientation to traditional values, an understanding of the family kinship system has been found to be very important.

The experience in the integrated family strengthening case study was that project messages were more likely to be well received if delivered by senior women who have the right to speak and to be listened to because they are custodians of the land and culture, and senior women have a legitimate cultural responsibility to transmit such knowledge. Their involvement also overcomes communication difficulties that are common in isolated and remote regions where English is not the first language.

The project site visits revealed that the ways of working employed by staff were the key to building good relationships with participants. One project, for example, found that it was especially important to have a trusted Indigenous staff member as the first point of contact when working with Indigenous men in the prison system; someone with the capacity to listen without being judgemental. This is especially important for organisations that seek to offer counselling and healing services in a safe environment where participants can seek assistance and obtain support without fear of being blamed.

Gender is also an important issue in relation to the question of who is most appropriate to work with whom. Generally there is a clear Indigenous view that only women should be involved with women's projects and that only men should be involved in working with the men. It is true that this project did use a male and female team for its work with male prisoners. This was considered necessary so that the men could hear a female perspective, but there was still a clear demarcation in the participants' minds as to what constituted men's business and about who was entitled to say what.

Social cohesion

Intensive long-term work is required to build family and community strength effectively in communities that lack social cohesion and are afflicted by a high incidence of substance abuse and violence.

It is difficult to build sustainable levels of family and community strength in an environment characterised by a lack of social cohesion. It is questionable whether any project operating in this situation can be expected to make valuable progress towards sustainable community management in the short to medium term. Rather, the evidence suggests that community development work in such contexts needs to be a long-term process of engagement and capacity building over a sustained period of time.

It is also questionable whether it is possible to have a Strategy project under the control of a community-controlled steering committee where people are divided by feuding and meetings too often degenerate into bitter dispute. This has been the experience of one project and suggests that stable management structures are unlikely to emerge from the local community alone. External involvement and support seem likely to be required for the foreseeable future, although this may not always be welcome.

A situation where social cohesion needs to be built from the ground up places heavy demands on the limited human and financial resources of agencies such as FaCS. For example, one project collapsed on several occasions and only substantial input from FaCS staff rejuvenated it. FaCS staff often found themselves acting in the role of 'go-between' to sustain workable relationships among stakeholders.

The complexities of the social environment within which this project operated highlight both the need to adopt a whole-of-government approach and the difficulties that are inherent in doing so. Many of the changes required to achieve positive social change in the local area lie outside the direct sphere of influence of FaCS; for example, the creation of employment opportunities, sustainable improvements to housing standards, improved public transport services, and so on. Arguably intensive support from many quarters is required to build a solid core of capacity. Undoubtedly FaCS would have an important part to play, as one part of a wider long-term, multi-faceted community renewal strategy that addresses the underlying issues.

Many projects commented that a holistic approach is required to effectively address the complexity of issues related to the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people. The importance of simultaneously addressing issues of personal behaviour, social relations, physical environment, health and emotional wellbeing was stressed.

The site visits provided the evaluation team with a reality check. The experience left us with a greater appreciation of the extent to which prevailing social and economic conditions can undermine and erode project achievements. A shocking example was the murder of a worker on one project. This set that project back many months as staff and community members dealt with their grief and trauma. The same project had also been adversely affected by the poor health of the population. One staff member had to resign to look after a family member in very poor health.

In fractured communities, disunity itself seems the most important impediment to capacity building. More work needs to be done around the question of 'how do we build trust and work effectively with communities that lack social cohesion?'

FaCS support

The relationship between FaCS and projects was mostly constructive, even where face-to-face contact had not been frequent.

Some projects had received a high level of assistance from FaCS staff during the initial application phase. Applicants generally appreciated the flexibility of Strategy funding in supporting new kinds of initiatives. The biggest criticism levelled at FaCS related to frustrating delays, sometimes of many months, between the submission of the initial application and the final decision to fund a project.

Infrastructure

Lack of physical infrastructure is a limiting factor for some projects.

One project in particular encountered lengthy delays in securing suitable premises to serve as a base for their healing centre. These difficulties were the result of a combination of a tight local property market, high real estate prices and local government authority zoning regulations. The delay in securing premises meant that initial progress was slow and that for many months this project was unable to operate in the way that was initially envisaged. Another project was also inhibited by a shortage of adequate staff accommodation and vehicles and a lack of suitable buildings to convert to playgroup centres. Vehicles were shared between staff.

Building partnerships

Some Strategy projects have been very successful in building strategic partnership arrangements that have served to attract some new sources of funding and support.

The most notable example is in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The broad funding arrangements that have now been put in place for this project have increased the likelihood that at least some project activities can be sustained.

This success in attracting funding reflects extensive time invested in strengthening and maintaining partnerships with organisations and agencies involved with service delivery in the family and community sector. Partnerships come at some cost.

It is noted that there are opportunities to extend partnership arrangements beyond the government and Indigenous community sectors to also embrace the mainstream non-government organisation and philanthropic sectors. Few Indigenous organisations were found to have these links.

Service coordination is rendered more difficult in Indigenous contexts because of factors such as the functional split between the three tiers of Australian government and various Aboriginal community organisations. There is also the geographic spread of agencies to cope with. In the case of one project based in a remote area it was found that some service providers were based in the region, some in Alice Springs, some in Kalgoorlie and some in Perth; all separated by thousands of kilometres and differing time zones and jurisdictional boundaries. None of these things facilitate partnership.

A preventative and early intervention approach

Strategy projects have been able to break out of the cycle of crisis response and promote a preventative and early intervention approach in communities that often have little or no experience of it.

Many Indigenous Strategy projects have made a big investment in the early years, particularly in playgroups and parenting projects that support and enhance early development and support mothers in their role of caring for kids. By contrast, most agencies in the Indigenous family and community services sector were found to operate in an environment where they are constantly consumed by reactive crisis intervention work, with little or no time to adopt a preventative and early intervention approach.

In the literature, a welfare/crisis support model is often conceptualised as diametrically opposed to the preventative/early intervention model. However, the situation revealed on the ground is more complex and more of a continuum than a choice between two options. Some projects have found it necessary to engage with people by addressing their fundamental (basic survival/welfare) needs first, such as hunger and poverty and cold, before they are even in a position to start working more developmentally. Jalaris initially started out by providing only crisis care and emergency assistance in Derby a decade ago, but over time it has come to appreciate the value in shifting the balance, and it has progressively adopted a more preventative and early intervention approach. The Strategy has played a role in bringing about this shift.

Sustainability

Few projects have yet been able to secure the ongoing core funding required to continue operations beyond the expiration of Strategy funding.

This is primarily an issue for projects involved with the provision of what are arguably essential family and community services, such as playgroups and Meals on Wheels. One of the case studies highlighted the need for a funding model that recognises the importance of service continuity in communities that have limited access to other funding sources. Jalaris serves as another fairly typical example of a small community organisation that has operated for many years in an environment where it is constantly chasing short-term funding and assistance from various government and non-government organisations. This is taxing on limited administrative resources.

There is an ongoing need for the services that organisations like Jalaris and others offer, but it is not clear how such projects could ever become sustainable in the sense of not needing any external source of funding. This raises the question as to whether the Strategy is an appropriate vehicle for such funding.

Demonstrating outcomes

It is difficult for Indigenous projects to demonstrate the achievement of sustainable improvements in family and community strength.

Many projects have struggled with the issue of how to effectively measure and demonstrate positive change.

There are several difficulties when it comes down to measuring outcomes in Indigenous contexts. Firstly, it is not easy to get written feedback from participants where literacy is an issue, although it is noted that a few Indigenous projects have used a written feedback sheet.

Secondly, many project outcomes cannot be demonstrated until the medium to longer term, well after the completion of the Strategy project. Examples would include better child rearing, child growth and development, improved parenting practices, improved nutrition, more resilient families and communities, and better relationships between men and their partners. Measuring improvements and changes in behaviour in these circumstances requires the capacity to track people long after they have ceased to be project participants. In most instances this is simply not feasible, especially with a mobile population.

Thirdly, some organisations overstated their anticipated outcomes at the application stage. This may be a result of being overly ambitious or done in the hope of improving their chances in a competitive process for a limited pool of funds. Some projects also received substantially less than they had asked for. One project, for example, initially sought four years of funding to achieve its objectives, but only nine months of Strategy funding was actually approved (subsequently extended to fifteen months). This inevitably meant that initial aspirations were substantially scaled back.

There is need for more work to identify simple and effective indicators of Indigenous family and community strength. In the course of the evaluation team's consultations, staff at one Indigenous organisation stated that they had found that truancy is often a good marker of families that are in need of intensive support in many areas. The broader usefulness of truancy as a simple indicator of family and community strength may warrant some further investigation beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Knowledge sharing

There are opportunities for similar projects to learn from each other's experiences. Some projects have developed a considerable experiential knowledge base relevant to their particular field, for example, playgroups, men's groups, counselling. The case study of the integrated family strengthening project, for example, found that it had informed stakeholder understandings about what works and why in the following areas:

◗ the organisation and operation of playgroups in remote Indigenous contexts

◗ the potential benefits of partnerships and how to build them

◗ effective ways of working cross-culturally in remote Aboriginal contexts

◗ the identification of potential sources of resource support for family strengthening projects

◗ the identification of effective strategies of participation and engagement in remote Aboriginal contexts

◗ effective information dissemination strategies in remote Aboriginal regions

◗ human capacity building required to improve family functioning

◗ the roll out of a project across a large region of great need and limited resources

◗ the application of action learning 'on the run'.

The case study of the integrated family strengthening project found that one of the factors that contributed to the successful project outcomes was that it had borrowed and amended good practice ideas and activities from other contexts, especially the Territory Health Services Growth Assessment and Action program and its Strong Babies, Strong Culture program.

Similarly the Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre project in Alice Springs is a successful model that appears to have broader application to many town camp communities. It has been particularly effective in enabling and supporting the whole community to deal with substance abuse. By offering a range of educational and training activities to all generations in the same location, it created opportunities for broad community participation in a supportive environment.

Project staff on one project found that, generally, parenting and homemaking skills are best developed by example working side-by-side with people in their own homes, rather than by telling people what they should do in a judgemental way. The experience of this project lends support to the notion that family and community support services be offered in the home. This approach is supported by the literature and recommended in the Western Australian Government's 'Gordon Inquiry' Report (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002).

The lived experience of projects such as these is a valuable resource, but it is not one that will benefit other projects until there are mechanisms in place that allow for this knowledge of good practice to be shared. Strategies that would contribute to this outcome would include project conferences, newsletters, learning exchanges and establishing some form of professional organisation.

It is important to note that AIFS already operates a learning exchange relevant to projects funded under the Stronger Families Fund initiative. Feedback received from two of the Indigenous Stronger Family Fund projects suggests that AIFS, with its broad knowledge of successful initiatives operating elsewhere, was well positioned to help Indigenous projects reflect on how well they were going. It was found that both of these projects had developed a strong evaluation ethos. AIFS support will continue into the new Strategy 2004–2009 with the funding of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia.

There is an opportunity to more effectively link Strategy projects to similar projects operating elsewhere, so that there can be a process of learning about each other's effective practice.

Appendix B: Analysis of Indigenous questionnaire responses

Initial questionnaire

Number of respondents

Sixty-six Indigenous Strategy projects responded to the initial questionnaire and the response rate for individual questions ranged from 56 to 66 projects.

Indigenous responses

Responses indicate that the most common way in which projects found out about the Strategy were word of mouth (47 per cent) and directly from FaCS (55 per cent).

Responses indicate a high level of community involvement in projects.

- 91 per cent of projects **'spoke or worked with individuals within the community'** in enlisting support for developing and setting up their project.

- 85 per cent of projects **'spoke or worked with other community organisations, clubs or community groups'** in enlisting support for developing and setting up their project.

- 80 per cent of respondents indicated that the idea **for the project had come from the community**.

- 97 per cent of projects **involved community members in the identification of local issues or possible ways to address them**.

- 86 per cent of projects stated that **community members or groups had taken on key roles** in developing and setting up their project.

- 58 per cent of projects indicated that **community involvement** had 'contributed a lot' to their project, with a further 38 per cent of respondents stating that it had 'contributed a fair bit'.

- 51 per cent stated that the process of carrying out **community consultations to set up the project** 'worked very well', with a further 37 per cent stating that it 'worked well'.

Responses indicate that FaCS is seen as a valuable source of project support by most projects.

- 51 per cent stated that **FaCS support** 'worked very well', with a further 33 per cent stating that it 'worked well'.

- 40 per cent stated that the process for **finding information about the Strategy needed when setting up the project** 'worked very well', with a further 38 per cent stating that it 'worked well'.

- 41 per cent stated that the process of **preparing and lodging an application for Strategy funding** 'worked very well', with a further 41 per cent indicating that it 'worked well'.

- 30 per cent stated that the process of **obtaining final approval for Strategy funding** 'worked very well', with a further 42 per cent stating that it 'worked well'.

- 29 per cent stated that the **Strategy guidelines** 'worked very well', with a further 53 per cent stating that they 'worked well'.

Responses indicate that support provided by the auspice organisation was important in setting up projects.

▸ 56 per cent stated that **auspice support** had 'worked very well', with a further 28 per cent indicating that it 'worked well'.

▸ 21 per cent stated that the **idea for the Strategy project** had come from the auspice organisation, with a further 43 per cent stating that it had come jointly from both inside and outside the auspice organisation.

▸ 73 per cent stated that the **auspice organisation would be involved in planning and running** the Strategy project.

▸ 97 per cent stated that their **auspice organisation existed before the Strategy project**.

▸ 95 per cent stated that the **auspice was involved in running other activities** in addition to the Strategy project.

▸ 42 per cent stated that the **Strategy project was part of a larger existing project**.

Responses suggest that support from FaCS and/or the auspice organisation were not the only factors impacting on projects.

▸ 70 per cent stated that there were also '**other significant factors that were helpful** when setting up the project'.

▸ 66 per cent stated that there were also 'other significant factors that created problems when setting up the project'.

▸ Only 26 per cent of projects had **spoken or worked with local businesses** and 38 per cent with **local government** in enlisting support for developing and setting up their project.

Indigenous responses compared with responses from non-Indigenous projects

There were a few discernable differences in responses to the initial questionnaire between Indigenous and non-Indigenous projects.

A higher proportion of Indigenous projects rated the community consultation process when setting up projects as working very well (51 per cent compared to 35 per cent of non-Indigenous projects). This difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous projects reduced when ratings of the process of community consultation as 'worked well' and 'worked very well' were totalled (88 per cent of Indigenous projects rated community consultation processes as working very well or working well, compared with 82 per cent of non-Indigenous projects).

Indigenous projects were less likely to have heard about the project from a local government or shire council (2 per cent compared with 12 per cent of non-Indigenous projects) and were also less likely to have spoken or worked with a local government in developing the project (38 per cent compared with 58 per cent of non-Indigenous projects).

Indigenous projects were also less likely to have found out about the Strategy through a website (3 per cent compared with 8 per cent of non-Indigenous projects).

The idea for the project was more likely to have come from the community when it was an Indigenous project (80 per cent) than when it was a non-Indigenous project (62 per cent). Community members or groups were also more likely to take on key roles in developing and setting up the project (86 per cent compared with 72 per cent of non-Indigenous projects).

Indigenous projects were more likely to have 'other significant factors' that created problems when setting up the project (66 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (49 per cent). However, they were also more likely to have 'other significant factors' that were helpful when setting up the project (70 per cent of Indigenous projects compared with 60 per cent of non-Indigenous projects). Indigenous projects were also less likely to have spoken to, or worked with local businesses (26 per cent) when setting up the project than non-Indigenous projects (33 per cent).

Final questionnaire

Number of respondents

Fifty-five projects responded to the final questionnaire; however the response rate for individual questions varied. Some projects completed a longer, earlier version of the questionnaire (the length of the final questionnaire was reduced in response to feedback from projects) and projects that were still continuing completed an interim version of the final questionnaire.

Response rates to individual questions varied from 8 to 56 projects. Some care is required in interpreting final questionnaire responses for Indigenous projects where there were small response numbers to questions. The response rate from Indigenous projects is shown after each question in brackets.

Major project activities

In the final questionnaire projects were asked about major and minor project activities. Table B1 shows the proportion of Indigenous projects that directly provided the following services to participating families.

Table B1: Activities that provided services directly to participating families (per cent)

Activities that provided services directly to participating families	Major activity Indigenous	Major activity non-Indigenous	Major or minor activity Indigenous	Major or minor activity non-Indigenous
Mentoring or role modelling (55)	58	43	74	74
Directly supporting families to develop healthy relationships—for example, supported playgroups (55)	53	44	78	67
Counselling and other practical assistance, for example, youth bush camps, life skills courses (55)	40	39	73	66
Providing assistance to allow people to participate in other activities—for example, providing transport or child care (54)	35	33	66	68
Providing group parenting programs (54)	20	34	39	49
Case management (54)	17	13	32	32

The following table shows the proportions of projects engaged in activities that supported communities.

Table B2: Activities that supported communities and facilitated community capacity building (per cent)

Activities that supported communities and facilitated community capacity building	Major activity Indigenous	Major activity non-Indigenous	Major or minor activity Indigenous	Major or minor activity non-Indigenous
Bringing community members together—for example, women's centres (56)	64	65	87	90
Community consultation (55)	62	57	97	88
Skills development training for members of the community (20)	57	60	83	77
Initiating or running a significant community or cultural event (55)	40	31	69	58

Projects also undertook activities that developed organisational capacity and enhanced relationships among service providers as shown in Table B3.

Table B3: Activities that developed organisational capacity and relationships among service providers (per cent)

Activities that developed organisational capacity and relationships among service providers	Major activity Indigenous	Major activity non-Indigenous	Major or minor activity Indigenous	Major or minor activity non-Indigenous
Developing and enhancing networks and linkages, for example, partnerships between services or organisations, referring or linking clients to other services (54)	76	77	91	95
Training project staff or volunteers to do the project's work (46)	52	53	87	78
Undertaking systematic action research (53)	28	35	47	62
Education/training of service providers outside the project (45)	22	23	55	63

Over half of the Indigenous Strategy projects (52 per cent) responding to the questionnaire identified the development of resources to support families, communities or agencies as major project activity.

Project achievements

Most projects expressed satisfaction with project achievements as shown in Table B4.

Table B4: Project achievements—self rating (per cent)

How much has the project achieved of what you wanted it to? (34)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Exceeded what we wanted	27	35
Achieved all of what we wanted	8	23
Achieved most of what we wanted	44	33
Achieved some of what we wanted	13	6
Made some progress toward what we wanted	6	3
Made little or no progress towards what we wanted	2	-

Questionnaire responses indicate that Indigenous projects were more likely to experience unanticipated positive outcomes than unexpected negative outcomes as shown in Table B5.

Table B5: Unexpected project outcomes (per cent)

Were there any unexpected outcomes?	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Unexpected positive outcomes (51)	75	82
Unexpected negative outcomes (49)	53	44

Eighty per cent of Indigenous projects expected further changes for participants or others in the community, after the expiry of current Strategy funding.

A majority of respondents thought that projects would continue beyond the period of Strategy funding as shown in Table B6.

Table B6: Likelihood of projects continuing beyond the Strategy funding period (per cent)

How likely is it that the project will continue or further develop after the current Strategy funding agreement is completed? (47)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Very likely	55	44
Likely	28	32
Unlikely	9	15
Very unlikely	9	9

Factors contributing to project achievements

Respondents identified whether a range of factors had been either very helpful or helpful, or very important or important in contributing to project achievements as shown in Table B7.

Table B7: Factors contributing to project achievements (per cent)

Factors that influenced achievements of the project	Very helpful/important plus helpful or important Indigenous	Very helpful/important plus helpful or important Non-Indigenous
Overall helpfulness of the Strategy and FaCS (13)	100	87
Identifying and responding to community issues (49)	96	92
Community support (49)	94	88
Local partnerships and networks (49)	94	94
The people involved (49)	94	94
Support from FaCS during the project (13)	92	71
Strategy funding (51)	90	96
Support from the auspice organisation (49)	83	87
Flexibility and adaptability of the Strategy and FaCS (49)	83	79
Other services or activities within your community (49)	74	73
Activities carried out by the auspice organisation before the project began (49)	74	83
Activities carried out by the auspice organisation during the project—other than the project itself (49)	70	79
Community had previous experience with similar projects (48)	67	74
Activities carried out by other organisations during the project (41)	65	73
Activities carried out by other organisations before the project began (49)	55	64
Other activities	54	34
Local conditions (49)	47	67

Partnerships

Partnerships have been an important component of Strategy projects. Table B8 shows the types of partners involved in projects.

Table B8: Partnerships—types of partners (per cent)

Types of partners	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Non-government (36)	75	89
Community group (37)	86	90
State government (36)	69	65
Indigenous organisation (39)	97	39
Local government or shire council (35)	66	72
Private sector (33)	42	62
Australian government (33)	52	53
Other (21)	29	36

As shown in Table B9 almost a quarter of the partnerships formed by Indigenous projects did not exist before the project commenced.

Table B9: Formation of partnerships (per cent)

Were any of the partnerships formed before the project started? (42)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
All were formed before	14	6
Most were formed before	21	21
Some were formed before	38	56
None were formed before	24	15
Not applicable	2	3

The majority of partnerships operated as informal working relationships although some partnerships were formalised to varying degrees as shown in Table B10.

Table B10: Types of agreements with partners (per cent)

Type of arrangements with partners	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Formal, legally binding agreements (43)	21	22
Semi-formal written agreements (47)	43	41
Informal working relationships with partners (48)	88	89

Table B11 shows the types of activities undertaken by partnerships during the development and implementation of projects.

Table B11: Activities with project partners (per cent)

Activities with partners	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Identifying needs and opportunities within the local community (49)	94	90
Networking, exchanging or providing staff, knowledge, experience or expertise to each other (49)	90	91
Undertaking project activities together (either as a part of the project or in conjunction with the project) (49)	90	91
Identifying local community strengths or advantages that could be used (49)	90	86
Participatory decision making (48)	85	80
Referring participants between the partners for services or activities (49)	82	82
Preparing funding submissions (48)	63	60
Other (28)	32	28

Most projects considered partnerships as very important, as shown in Table B12.

Table B12: Importance of partnerships to projects (per cent)

Importance of partners to the project (44)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Very important	84	77
Important	14	19
Not important	2	4

Most Indigenous projects considered that the Strategy had contributed either 'a lot' or 'a fair bit' to the enhancement of partnerships, as shown in Table B13.

Table B13: Level 3—enhanced partnerships (per cent)

How much did the project contribute to enhanced partnerships? (7)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Contributed a lot	29	50
Contributed a fair bit	57	33
Contributed a little	14	10
Not applicable	0	8

The likelihood that many partnerships will continue beyond the Strategy funding period, as shown in Table B14, suggests that an increased capacity to work in partnership is a legacy of the Strategy.

Table B14: Likelihood of new partnerships continuing after the Strategy funding period is complete (per cent)

Will any of the new partnerships continue after the current Strategy funding period is completed? (35)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
All are likely to continue	37	36
Most are likely to continue	37	29
Some are likely to continue	20	27
None are likely to continue	3	5
Not applicable	3	3

Support and resources used by projects

Projects indicated that they were currently receiving financial support, in addition to Strategy funding, from various sources, as shown in Table B15.

Table B15: Sources of additional funding (per cent)

Sources of additional funding	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Australian Government (40)	33	24
Other sources (36)	31	27
State or territory government (38)	26	27
Self funding (36)	25	34
Other non-government organisation or community group (40)	23	32
Local government or shire council (38)	18	31
Indigenous Land Council or other Indigenous community organisations (42)	14	1
Private sector (37)	11	23

Non-financial support, in a variety of forms, was also important. Table B16 shows the different types of non-financial support used by projects.

Table B16: Non-financial support received by projects (per cent)

Non-financial support received	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Community support (47)	91	86
Indigenous community organisation or corporation (46)	89	19
In kind support (47)	87	84
Support of existing networks, linkages and referrals (48)	83	91
Volunteer time (44)	75	82
Employment and training programs (45)	60	21
Professional services (43)	53	59
Other (32)	16	18

Organisational capacity building

Eight projects responded to the earlier version of the final questionnaire that asked whether the auspice organisation had changed during the project. One Indigenous project (13 per cent) reported a change of auspice.

Projects indicated that there have been some changes in the capacity of the auspice organisation during the course of the project; the low response rates to this question, as shown in Table B17, suggest that these findings be interpreted with caution.

Table B17: Changes in the capacity of the auspice organisation (per cent)

Have any of the following areas of your auspice organisation changed for the better through having been involved in this project?	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
The ability to respond to your target group or project participants (8)	63	72
The ability to find and work with partners (8)	63	60
Management, systems and processes (8)	43	32
Infrastructure and facilities (8)	29	35

Likelihood of projects continuing or further developing

A majority of projects considered that it was either likely, or very likely, that the project would continue or further develop after the current Strategy funding agreement had been completed as shown in Table B18.

Table B18: Likelihood of projects continuing beyond the current funding period (per cent)

How likely is it that the project will continue or further develop after the current Strategy funding agreement is completed? (47)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Very likely	55	44
Likely	28	32
Unlikely	9	15
Very unlikely	9	9

Projects were asked about the form that the project would take if it continued or developed further. Table B19 shows the potential for further development identified by respondents to the questionnaire.

Table B19: Potential further development of projects (per cent)

If the project was to continue to develop further what form would it take?	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Continue the project with the current activities and target groups (46)	70	61
Run a similar project with new target groups (46)	28	27
Run a similar project at a different location or in a different community (46)	26	26
Run a similar project with new activities and the same target groups, building on the previous work (46)	41	46
Other (46)	22	27

Table B20 clearly shows that projects anticipate that a range of financial and non-financial resources and support will be needed to continue or build on current achievements.

Table B20: Support and resources needed to continue or build on project achievements (per cent)

Will any of the following support and resources be needed to continue or build on the achievements of the project?	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Funding (48)	98	89
Specific expertise and skills including professional services (48)	85	73
Community support (48)	81	77
Support of existing networks, linkages and referrals (48)	77	55
Volunteer time (48)	77	70
In kind support (48)	75	78
Indigenous community organisation or corporation (48)	71	47
Employment and training programs (48)	52	32
Other (48)	10	14

Most projects indicated an intention to apply for further funding as shown in Table B21.

Table B21: Sources of further funding that projects intend to apply for (per cent)

Sources of further funding that projects intend to apply for	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Australian Government (10)	80	84
Other sources (10)	20	21
State or local government (10)	90	60
Other non-government organisation or community group (10)	50	42
Local government or shire council (10)	30	42
Indigenous Land Council or other Indigenous community organisations (10)	60	11
Private sector (10)	60	41

Projects were asked whether there were any other factors that would affect whether or not the project continues beyond the current Strategy funding agreement. The response rate for this question was low so care should be taken when drawing interpretations from the data presented in Table B22.

Table B22: Whether other factors will influence whether or not projects continue (per cent)

Are there any other factors that would affect whether or not the project continues beyond the current Strategy funding agreement? (10)	Indigenous projects	Non-Indigenous projects
Yes	50	19
No	50	81

Indigenous responses compared with responses from non-Indigenous projects

When the responses provided by Indigenous projects are compared with the responses provided by all Strategy projects, some discernible differences in the pattern of responses are apparent. Care is required in interpretation in respect of apparent differences between Indigenous projects and others, because of the small Indigenous project sample size.

Project activities

In terms of project activities Indigenous projects were less likely to provide group parenting programs (a major or minor activity in 39 per cent of Indigenous projects compared to 49 per cent of non-Indigenous projects). Activities that directly supported families to develop healthy relationships—for example, playgroups—were more likely to be a major or minor activity of Indigenous projects (78 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (67 per cent).

Project achievements

When rating the level of achievement of the project, Indigenous projects were less likely to rate projects as having either exceeded expectations or achieved most of what was wanted (35 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (58 per cent).

Factors that influenced achievements

Local conditions were rated as very unhelpful by a higher proportion of Indigenous projects (29 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (12 per cent).

The support received from FaCS during the implementation of the project was considered either very helpful or helpful by 92 per cent of Indigenous projects while 71 per cent of non-Indigenous projects rated this support as either helpful or very helpful. Similarly 100 per cent of Indigenous projects rated the overall helpfulness of the Strategy and FaCS as either very helpful or helpful compared with 87 per cent of non-Indigenous projects.

Activities carried out by the auspice organisation before the project began were rated as very important by 60 per cent of non-Indigenous projects compared with 45 per cent of Indigenous projects.

It was more likely that there were other significant factors reported as being helpful to the project achieving its goals by Indigenous projects (78 per cent) as compared to non-Indigenous projects (47 per cent).

Partnerships

Indigenous projects were less likely to partner with non-government organisations (75 per cent) than non-Indigenous organisations (89 per cent). This may reflect an absence of non-government organisations to partner with in some locations. Indigenous projects were also less likely to partner with private businesses (42 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (62 per cent).

Not surprisingly, only 39 per cent of non-Indigenous projects partnered with an Indigenous organisation compared with 97 per cent of Indigenous projects.

FaCS was much more likely to have been involved in identifying and forming partnerships with Indigenous projects (45 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (15 per cent).

Project funding and support

Fewer Indigenous projects had some self funding (25 per cent) compared with non-Indigenous projects (34 per cent).

Indigenous projects were also less likely to have received funding from local government (18 per cent) than non-Indigenous projects (31 per cent).

The private sector contributed funds to 11 per cent of Indigenous projects compared with 23 per cent of non-Indigenous projects. It is interesting to note that 60 per cent of Indigenous projects planned to apply for further funding from the private sector compared with 41 per cent of non-Indigenous projects.

A higher proportion of Indigenous projects (60 per cent) stated that they received employment and training support compared with non-Indigenous projects (21 per cent).

Support and resources need to continue or build on achievements

Indigenous organisations were more likely to identify a need for the support of:

◗ Indigenous community organisations (71 per cent) compared with 47 per cent of non-Indigenous projects

◗ existing networks, linkages and referrals (77 per cent) compared with 55 per cent

◗ employment and training programs (52 per cent) compared with 32 per cent.

Another (hardly surprising) difference is that non-Indigenous Strategy projects were less likely to attract, or plan to seek support from Indigenous organisations.

Indigenous Lands Councils or other Indigenous organisations provided funding for 14 per cent of Indigenous projects and non-financial support to 89 per cent of Indigenous projects compared with financial support for 1 per cent of non-Indigenous projects and non-financial support for 19 per cent of non-Indigenous projects (which include Indigenous families and communities).

Eleven per cent of non-Indigenous projects intended to apply for further funds from the Indigenous community sector compared with 60 per cent of Indigenous projects.

Future expectations

When asked how likely it was that the auspice organisation would take on new activities given what has happened with the project, 25 per cent of Indigenous organisations responded that this would be very unlikely compared with 16 per cent of non-Indigenous projects.

List of shortened forms

AIFS   **Australian Institute of Family Studies**

AIFS hosted the Stronger Families Learning Exchange and has an ongoing role in the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009 hosting the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA). ‹www.aifs.gov.au›

ARACY   **Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth**

ARACY is a national collaboration of researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines, whose aim is to generate and translate knowledge to enhance the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people. ARACY is now using online conferencing technology to conduct presentations and discussions with the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners at 45 sites around Australia. ‹www.aracy.org.au›

CAFCA   **Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia**

Funded by the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009, the CAFCA, within AIFS, aims to improve access to current information and resources to assist those working in the field of early childhood and community development. It continues the work of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange which supported the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004. ‹www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/index.html›

FaCS   **Department of Family and Community Services**

The Australian Government department responsible for administering the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy until January 2006. ‹www.fahcsia.gov.au›

FaHCSIA **Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

The Australian Government department currently responsible for administering the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009. ‹www.fahcsia.gov.au›

SFLEx   **Stronger Families Learning Exchange**

A research unit of AIFS funded by the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000–2004 to provide support to Strategy 2000–2004 projects funded under the Stronger Families Fund to implement action research. ‹www.aifs.gov.au/sf›

Under the new Strategy, Communities for Children (CfC) Facilitating Partners will provide this type of support. In addition, through CfC and Invest to Grow (ItG), the department has funded local evaluators to assist with project design, action research and evaluation. Three streams of the new Strategy (all streams except for small equipment grants) are supported through the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).

SFCS   **Stronger Families and Communities Strategy—also referred to as the Strategy**
‹www.fahcsia.gov.au/sfcs›

The first version of the Strategy, 2000–2004, funded seven linked community-based initiatives, as well as several broader initiatives, to strengthen families and communities.

The renewal of the Strategy (Phase 2) was announced in April 2004 with funding of $365 million, which was subsequently increased to $490 million, with a specific early childhood focus. In the new SFCS, attention has been focused on early intervention in early childhood and this is the primary vehicle for implementing the Government's National Agenda for Early Childhood (NAEC), which focuses on improving national coordination.

Phase 2 of the Strategy began in 2004 and will continue over five years until 2009. It aims to:

‣ help families and communities build better futures for children; build family and community capacity

‣ support relationships between families and the communities they live in

‣ improve communities' ability to help themselves.

Phase 2 of the Strategy comprises four streams, the Communities for Children initiative, Invest to Grow, Local Answers and the Choice and Flexibility in Child Care initiative.

The new Strategy from 2004–2009 builds on the strengths of the previous Strategy particularly in relation to early intervention and prevention, but also with respect to the role of community organisations in identifying and responding to needs within their community. It has responded to feedback on the previous Strategy about the need for clearer simpler processes and greater certainly for community organisations.

The new Strategy has addressed these issues specifically through the development of the Communities for Children initiative, a model that has created the role of Facilitating Partner to coordinate local agencies to achieve service integration and coordination in conjunction with a local level evaluator. This model provides for more flexible service provision, where funding timeframes that are generally associated with grant programs do not apply except at the local level.

The Local Answers initiative has also improved on many aspects of the previous Strategy by offering two widely advertised funding rounds per year and streamlining its administrative processes.

Finally, Phase 2 of the Strategy gives projects particular support through a wide range of services delivered by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and Local Evaluators under FaHCSIA funding. This includes training, information sharing, conferences, evaluation support and help in implementing evidence-based practice.

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Occasional Papers

1. *Income support and related statistics: a ten-year compendium, 1989–99*
   Kim Bond and Jie Wang (January 2001)

2. *Low fertility: a discussion paper*
   Alison Barnes (February 2001)

3. *The identification and analysis of indicators of community strength and outcomes*
   Alan Black and Phillip Hughes (June 2001)

4. *Hardship in Australia: an analysis of financial stress indicators in the 1998–99
   Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Expenditure Survey*
   J Rob Bray (December 2001)

5. *Welfare Reform Pilots: characteristics and participation patterns of
   three disadvantaged groups*
   Chris Carlile, Michael Fuery, Carole Heyworth, Mary Ivec, Kerry Marshall
   and Marie Newey (June 2002)

6. *The Australian system of social protection–an overview (second edition)*
   Peter Whiteford and Gregory Angenent (June 2002)

7. *Income support customers: a statistical overview 2001*
   Corporate Information and Mapping Services, Strategic Policy and Knowledge Branch,
   Family and Community Services (March 2003)

8. *Inquiry into long-term strategies to address the ageing of the Australian
   population over the next 40 years*
   Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services submission
   to the 2003 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Ageing (October 2003)

9. *Inquiry into poverty and financial hardship*
   Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services submission to the
   Senate Community Affairs References Committee (October 2003)

10. *Families of prisoners: literature review on issues and difficulties*
    Rosemary Woodward (September 2003)

11. *Inquiries into retirement and superannuation*
    Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services
    submissions to the Senate Select Committee on Superannuation (December 2003)

12. *A compendium of legislative changes in social security 1908–1982*
    (June 2006)

13. *A compendium of legislative changes in social security 1983–2000
    Part 1 1983–1993, Part 2 1994–2000*
    Bob Daprè (June 2006)

14. *Evaluation of Fixing Houses for Better Health Projects 2, 3 and 4*
    SGS Economics & Planning in conjunction with Tallegalla Consultants Pty Ltd (August 2006)

15. *The 'growing up' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: a literature review*
    Professor Robyn Penman (November 2006)