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*Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) Early Childhood Report.*

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

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***Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study  
of Indigenous Children (LSIC)  
Early Childhood Report***

**Summary Report**



## Acknowledgement of Country and contributions

The authors acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to community, land, and waters. We pay our respects to these peoples and cultures, and to their Elders past, present, and emerging. We also acknowledge the participants of *Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)*, including the children and their families, communities, and educators, for their ongoing contributions to this landmark Australian study. We acknowledge the LSIC Steering Committee and colleagues in the Department of Social Services for their leadership of the study, and the guidance, feedback, and collaboration they offered in the development of this Report.

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\* These authors shared the leadership of this Report.

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Artwork by Kylie Monteleone (Western Arrernte)

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that this publication may include photographs of deceased persons.

***Footprints in Time:***  
**The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)**  
**Early Childhood Report**

**Summary Report**  
**2025**

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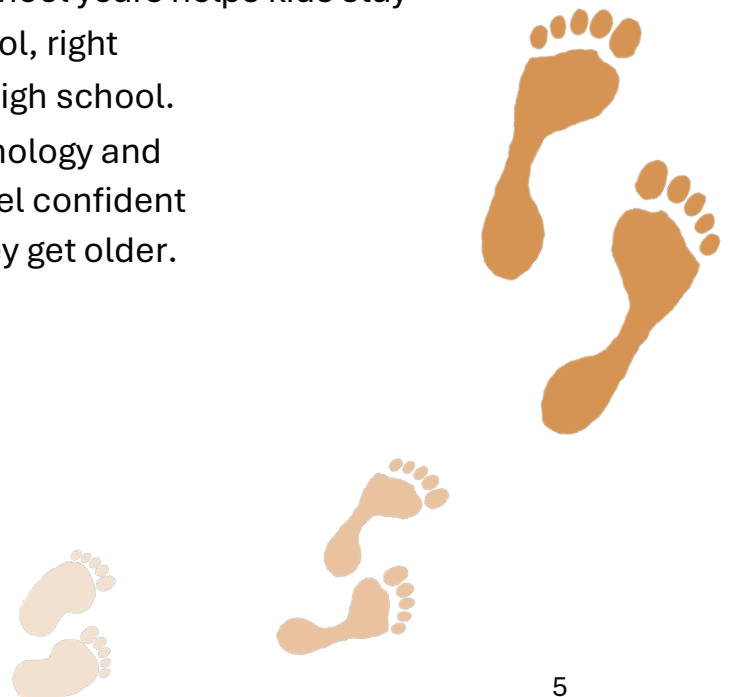
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## Introduction

This Executive Summary of the LSIC Early Childhood Report shares what we learned about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up strong. It includes stories from families and community members who took part. Knowing more about what helps children from their early years right through to their teenage years means communities can feel stronger, and services can be better planned and supported. These are the main things we found:

- Where children grow up (geographic location) shapes their developmental experiences, during early childhood and the years beyond.
- Early connections to culture, Country, language, and feeling proud and strong in identity, and belonging to Mob are important for kids' wellbeing as they get older.
- When parents feel good and have support, their kids grow up stronger.
- Going to pre-school or playgroup, and time spent interacting with family (e.g., reading, playing, and singing together) helps children learn important early skills like talking (language), writing and drawing, and paying attention. These early skills help children do better in school as they grow.
- Good relationships with teachers and feeling confident about classroom learning in the early school years helps kids stay connected and interested in school, right through primary school and into high school.
- Having safe, early access to technology and the internet at home helps kids feel confident and skilled with technology as they get older.



Many of these learnings are part of "Ty's" own story of growing up strong, shared by Ty and his family over the years through the Footprints in Time (LSIC) study.



*'Ty' is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boy born to a mother and father who are both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who live with Ty and their other children. From when Ty's a baby, his mum knows that to grow up strong Ty will need to not just understand his culture but also use it. Ty's mother is proud of both her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, especially resilience in maintaining cultural protocols. Before Ty goes to school, he learns about culture at home, in his community, and at daycare. His knowledge of culture comes through dancing, singing, attending community functions, and speaking language every day. With culture as a basis for growing up strong, by the time he's a teenager, Ty's mother knows he has all the mentors and family supports that he needs to make the right choices about his future. Still speaking language every day, Ty knows he'll continue to grow up strong by being educated, having his family's support, being respectful, getting a good job, and knowing culture.*

## ***About Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)***

This study follows the development of more than 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families living in cities, regional towns, and remote communities across Australia. Since 2008, children, families, and teachers have shared their stories and experiences each year as part of the Footprints in Time (LSIC) study.

The information used in this LSIC Early Childhood Report (the Report) was collected between 2008 and 2021.

To help tell the story, we grouped the information across these 14 years into four key stages of children's development:

- **Pre-school:** The years before children started their first year of formal school, from the child's birth until 5 years of age.
- **Early school years:** The initial two years of primary school (Foundation and Year 1), when children were 5-to-7-years-old.
- **Middle childhood:** The final two years of primary school (Years 5 and 6), when children were 10-to-12-years-old.

**Adolescence:** Three years during secondary school (Years 8, 9, and 10), when adolescents were 14-to-16-years-old.



## Children’s experiences were different depending on where they lived

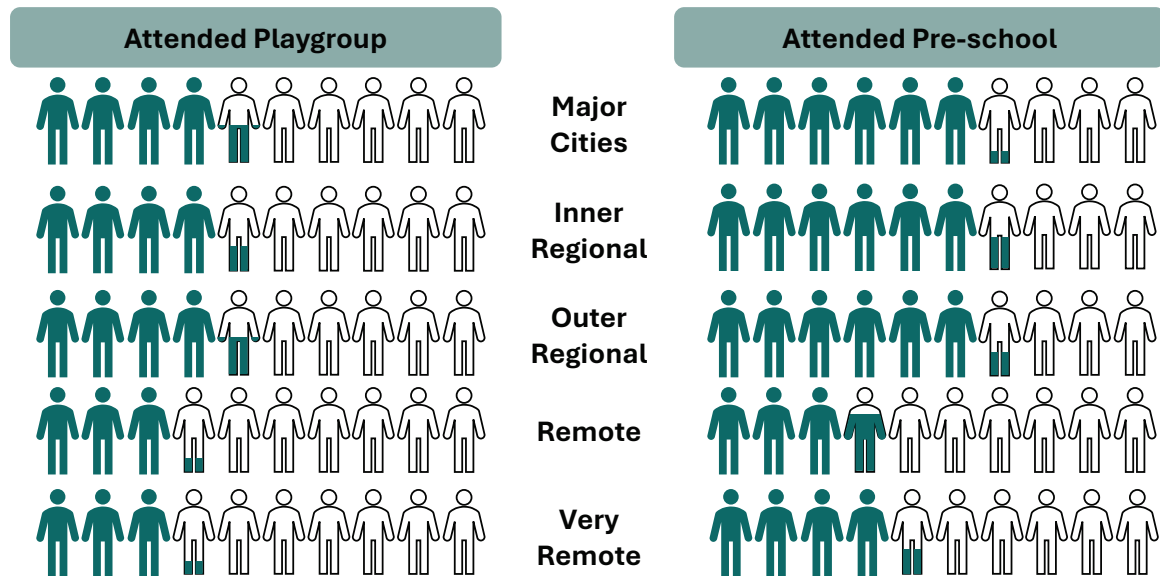
The Report shows that the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families were often shaped by where they lived.

Some experiences were more common for children living in remote and very remote areas, like those illustrated in Figure S1. Children in these more remote areas were more likely to take part in cultural activities, stay connected to Country, speak an Indigenous language, and feel strong in their identity and connection to Mob.



**Figure S1.** Proportions of children whose parents said they had various cultural connections during early childhood, shown by how remote their family’s home was (each coloured figure represents 10%).

Other things were more common for children living in major cities and inner regional areas, like going to playgroup before school and attending pre-school in the year before starting school (see Figure S2).



**Figure S2.** Proportion of children who went to playgroup before school, and to pre-school in the year before school, depending on how remote their location was (each coloured figure represents 10%).

### Why does this matter?

- These are important differences between regions for communities, policy makers, and service providers to understand.
- We need to recognise that each place is different, and may need particular approaches to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up strong.

## Early childhood cultural connections matter for later wellbeing

Throughout the Report, we show that early cultural experiences – like connection to Country and speaking an Indigenous language – are linked with stronger social and emotional wellbeing as children grow into middle childhood and adolescence.

### What does stronger social-emotional wellbeing look like?

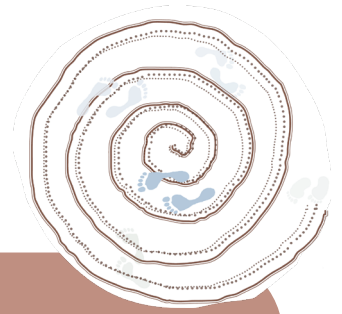
We used an adapted model (Dinku et al., in press) of social-emotional wellbeing (Dudgeon et al., 2025; Gee et al., 2014; Figure S3) to understand how children:

- **Connect to their body** – having healthy habits, good physical health, and taking care of the body.
  - **Connect to their mind and emotions** – feeling safe, mentally well, and having a positive outlook.
  - **Connect to their family and kin** – having strong relationships with family and loved ones.
  - **Connect to their community** – feeling a sense of safety and belonging in the community.
  - **Connect to their culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirit** – having strong ties to culture, identity, and feeling proud to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.
- 
- Where children’s data showed high scores across all five of these areas, we considered them to have **strong social-emotional wellbeing**.
  - Where data showed high scores on two or fewer of these areas, we considered children to have **lower overall social-emotional wellbeing**.



**Figure S3.** *Social and Emotional Well-Being model (source: Dudgeon et al., 2023).*

## Growing up strong through culture



*'Allira' is a Torres Strait Islander girl with a non-Indigenous mother and a Torres Strait Islander father, who live together with their children in a large city in Australia. When she's young, her mum knows Allira will grow up strong if she understands her cultural heritage and can contribute to her Torres Strait Islander community. By the time she's four years old, Allira's dad is taking her to shows and exhibits to teach her about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.*

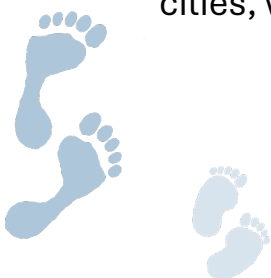
Before starting school, 3 out of 4 children (76%) had been to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural event, about half (54%) had learned cultural arts, painting, or dance, and half (51%) had taken part in cultural practices like fishing or hunting.

More than 88% of children in regional and remote areas took part in these cultural activities, compared to 76% of children living in cities.

LSIC children who had these early cultural experiences were more likely to have strong social and emotional wellbeing later on, during middle childhood and adolescence.

### Why does this matter?

- For children who do not have regular access to family members who can share traditional knowledge and practices, it's important to create more opportunities for cultural connection – like cultural events run by community groups and early learning centres.
- These opportunities may need to be adapted for children living in cities, where fewer kids are taking part in cultural activities.



## **Growing up strong through connection to country**

*'Layla' is an Aboriginal girl born to an Aboriginal mother, who's a single parent of three children living in a remote part of Australia. From the time Layla's a baby, her mother knows that Aboriginal culture will help her grow up strong by knowing her identity. Although their Country isn't near where they live, Layla's visited by the time she's 9 months old, creating a link to her people and Country.*

Overall, 2 out of 3 parents (64%) said their child had a connection to Country in the years before starting school. This depended on where families lived. Children in the most remote areas had the highest connection levels (80%), while children in major cities were the least likely to be connected to Country (46%).

When we looked at this over time, we saw that most LSIC children connected to Country at some stage during their childhood or teen years.

Having a connection to Country early in life was linked to stronger social and emotional wellbeing as children grew into middle childhood and adolescence.

### **Why does this matter?**

- While most children experience some connection to Country from their early years, all children and families can benefit from more chances to build and keep those connections strong.
- This can happen through Indigenous-created resources – like books, videos, and performances – that share stories of Country and culture
- Initiatives to foster connection to Country must consider the locations of children and families. Innovative approaches may be necessary in places such as major cities, where connections to Country are not as likely.



## Growing up strong through language

*‘Tegan’ is born on Country, a place far away from any of the big cities. The daughter of an Aboriginal mother and father, Tegan has four older brothers and sisters. Before she starts school, Tegan’s is surrounded by her Mob’s language. She uses it for yarning, singing, dancing, drawing, and playing. Tegan’s mum knows that language and other aspects of their culture will help Tegan grow up strong. Over time, the family grows and moves, but their use of language remains constant. By the time she’s sixteen years old, Tegan’s still speaking her Mob’s language.*

One in 4 LSIC children (27%) spoke an Indigenous language before starting school, and this rose to almost one in 3 (30%) by the first two years of primary school.

Where children lived made a big difference: less than 10% of children in major cities and inner regional areas spoke an Indigenous language, while over 70% of children in very remote areas did. When we compared children who spoke language to those who didn’t, either before school or in their early school years, we found that children who spoke an Indigenous language:

- Had stronger social and emotional wellbeing during both middle childhood and adolescence.
- Maintained steady and strong wellbeing as they grew, from middle childhood through to their teen years.
- Felt a deeper connection to culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirit during middle childhood and adolescence.



Almost 60% of children who spoke an Indigenous language before school were still speaking it during middle childhood, but this dropped to 46% by adolescence.

This shows that adolescence is a key time to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to keep learning and speaking language, including through opportunities at school.

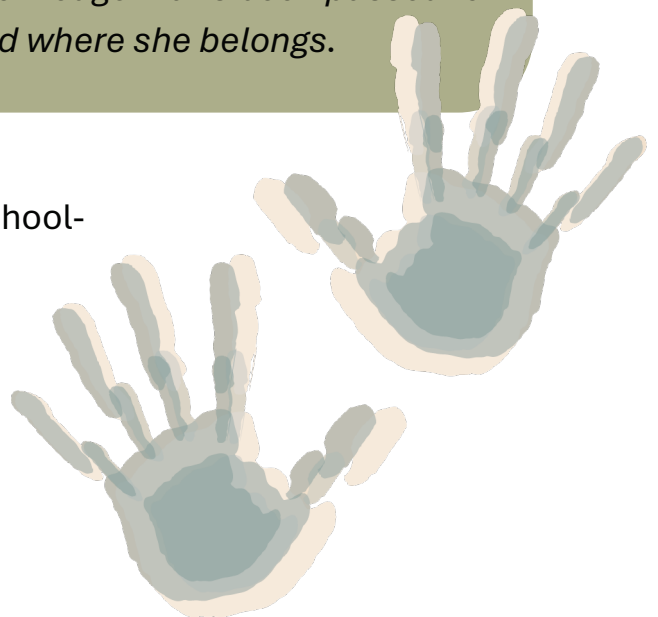
### Why does this matter?

- The strong link between speaking an Indigenous language in early childhood and better social and emotional wellbeing later on highlights the importance of language revival, revitalisation, and keeping language strong.
- It also shows the value of including Indigenous language programs in early learning centres and schools across Australia.

### ***Growing up strong through identity and belonging***

*‘Mahalia’ is an Aboriginal girl, born to an Aboriginal mother who’s a single parent of two children living in a town not far from a big city. Mahalia’s mum is proud to be Aboriginal and wants Mahalia to be too. She wants Mahalia to be confident in herself and know her Mob. By the time she’s fourteen years old, Mahalia wants this too, knowing that growing up strong will involve making use of all the knowledge that’s been passed to her, being proud of who she is and where she belongs.*

Two in 3 LSIC parents (63%) said their preschool-aged child identified with at least one Mob (Nation or language group). This was most common for children living in remote areas (over 75%), and less common for those in inner regional areas (57%) and major cities (49%).

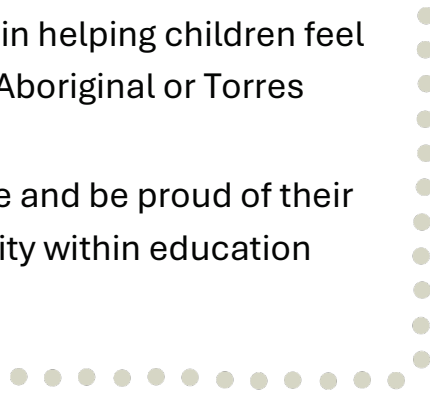


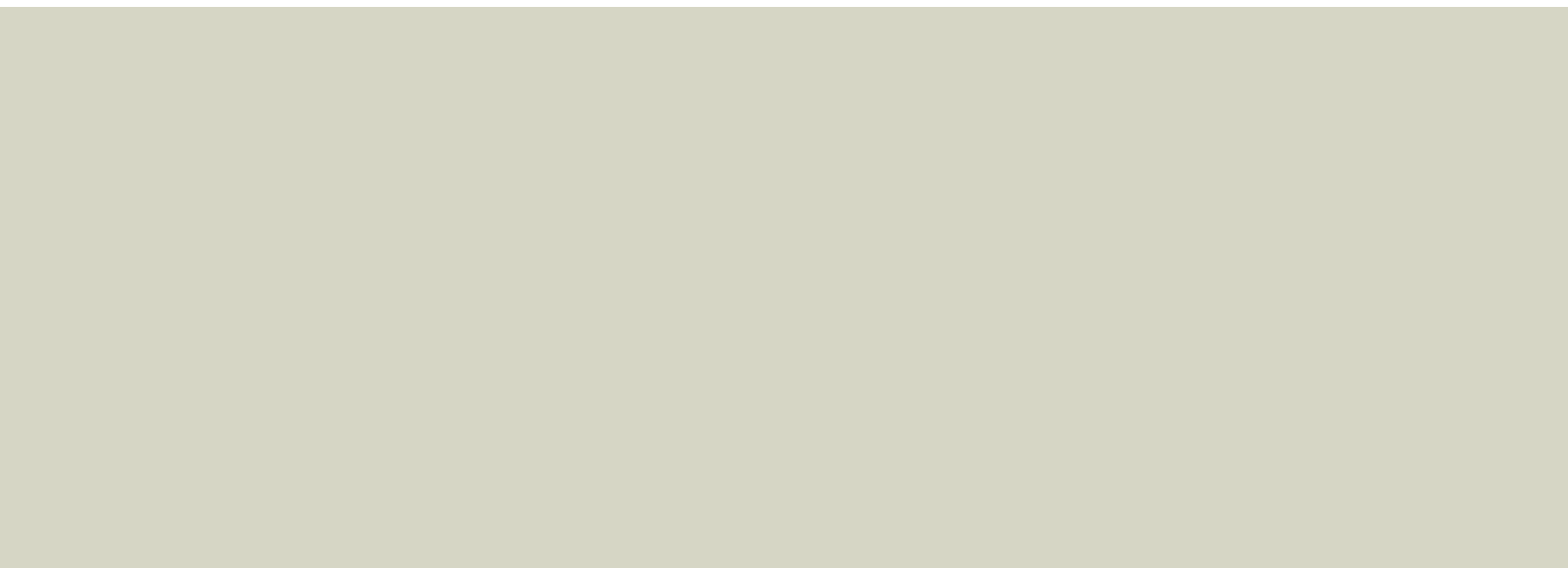
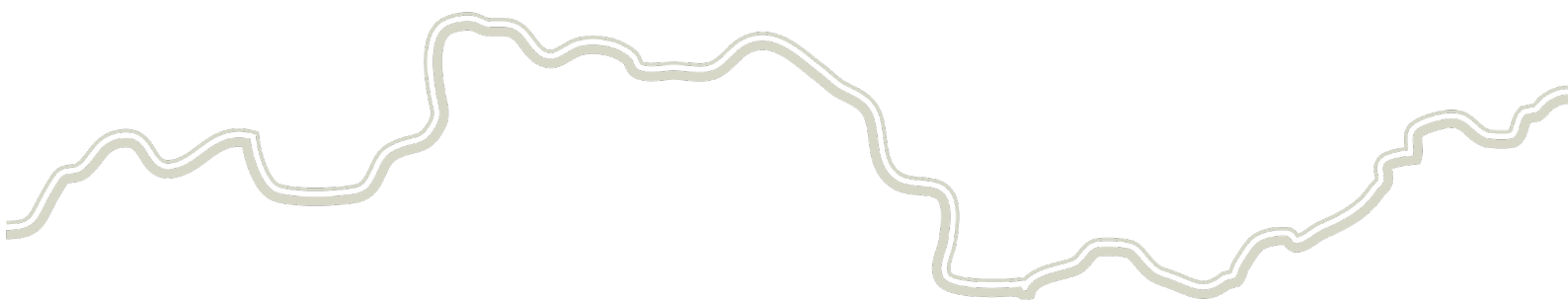
When we looked at children who identified with their Mob (or Mobs) before starting school, compared to those who didn't, we found they were more likely to have:

- Stronger social and emotional wellbeing during both middle childhood and adolescence.
- Stronger connection to culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirit as they grew into middle childhood and adolescence.



### **Why does this matter?**

- Early childhood learning centres, schools, and community organisations have an important role to play in helping children feel safe and confident to share who they are as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander youth.
  - Increasing opportunities for children to share and be proud of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity within education should be a key priority.
- 



## Parent support and wellbeing makes a difference

*'Logan' is an Aboriginal boy living with his Aboriginal father, non-Indigenous mother, and his siblings in a town not far from a big city. Before he starts school, Logan's mum recognises the importance of a strong sense of family and community in Aboriginal culture, which means Logan's part of a large network that'll support him to grow up strong. As he grows, his family connects Logan to Aboriginal culture. He spends time with his Aunties, who tell him stories, and he learns through painting and attending cultural events.*



In their child's early years (before they started school), LSIC parents were asked if they had family or friends from whom they could seek advice about parenting. Half (47%) of parents said they had family or friends from whom they could seek advice before their child started school, while 53% said they did not have family or friends who could provide such support.



Children whose parents had family and friends from whom they could seek parenting advice during these early years were more likely to:

- Manage their emotions and learning well in the classroom during the early school years.
- Be more engaged in school during middle childhood.
- Achieve higher academic results in Year 5 and Year 9 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing.
- Have strong thinking and problem-solving skills (executive functioning) during adolescence.
- Show stronger overall social and emotional wellbeing during middle childhood.
- Be stronger in key wellbeing areas – including connection to mind and emotions, community, and culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirit – during middle childhood.

LSIC parents also reported on their levels of wellbeing during their child's

pre-school years, including their levels of resilience and distress. Most parents reported strong wellbeing, indicating high resilience and low distress.

Parents with stronger wellbeing were more likely to:

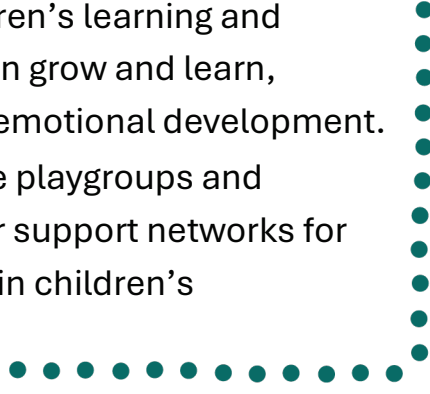
- Spend more time doing home learning activities with their children, like reading, playing, and singing.
- Feel more confident in their parenting.
- Show more warmth and care in their interactions with their children.
- Use less harsh discipline.

When parents had stronger wellbeing during their child's early years, it was linked to a range of positive outcomes for their child as they grew, including:

- Better overall health for children during pre-school, early school, and middle childhood.
- Stronger early learning skills before school, including understanding language and writing skills (using pencil and paper).
- Better reading comprehension and stronger attentional skills, managing emotions, and learning in the classroom during the early school years.
- Higher school engagement through middle childhood and into adolescence.
- Fewer social and emotional difficulties, and lower distress during middle childhood and adolescence.



## Why does this matter?

- These findings show that stronger parental wellbeing and social support from family and friends impact children’s learning and social-emotional outcomes, and how children grow and learn, including their thinking, learning, and social-emotional development.
  - Giving families more access to culturally safe playgroups and parenting programs could help build stronger support networks for parents and lead to more positive outcomes in children’s development.
- 

## Early childhood learning experiences matter for later school engagement

When LSIC parents were asked about their child’s school engagement – like how well children managed their schoolwork, made friends, stayed organised, and enjoyed school – parents reported high levels of engagement in both middle childhood and adolescence.

We explored what early childhood experiences were linked to stronger engagement at school:

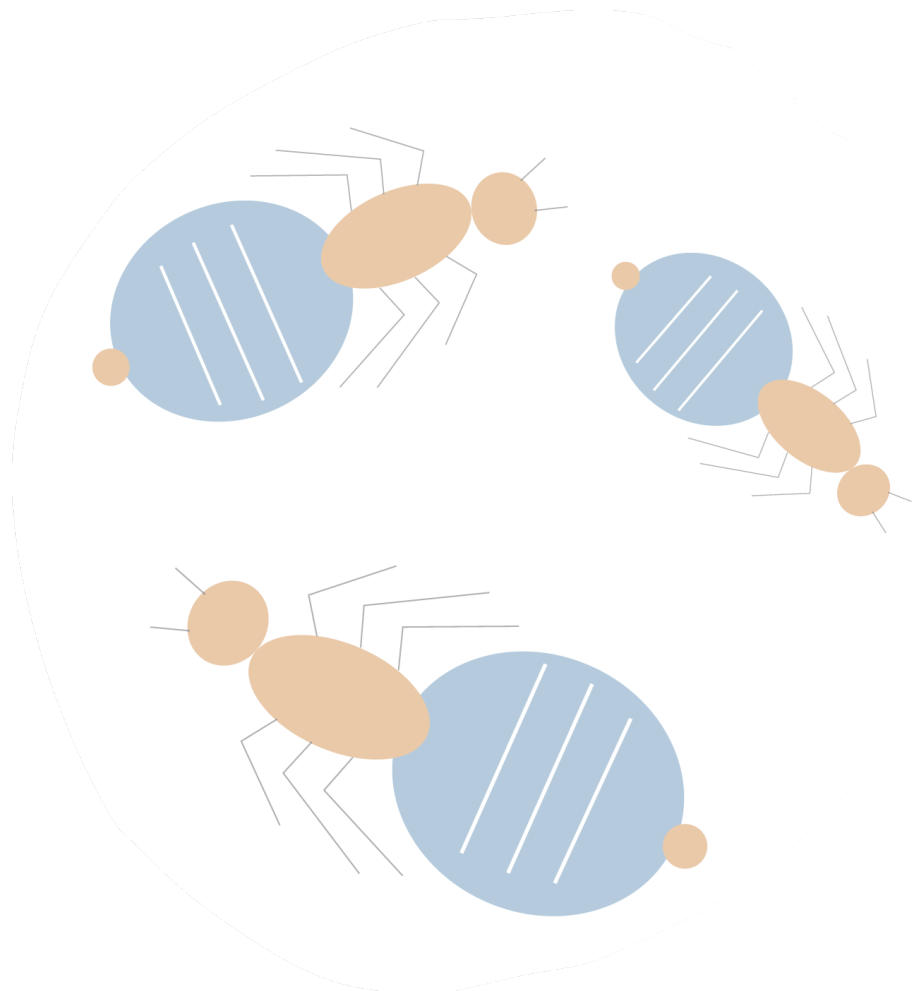
- Children who went to playgroup (community-based groups for children and parents prior to school) were more engaged with school in middle childhood than those who did not attend playgroup. Going to playgroup helped build self-regulation skills, which supported stronger engagement at school later on.
- Children who had a close relationship with their teacher in the early school years were more likely to be engaged in school during both middle childhood and adolescence.
- Compared to these children, children who had more conflict with their teacher in the early years were less engaged in school as they got older.

In those early school years, parents told us about their child’s attentional

self-regulation (like staying focused on activities), and teachers described classroom self-regulation (like working independently and sticking with tasks). Children who showed strong self-regulation in the early years were more likely to stay engaged at school through middle childhood and into their teenage years.

### Why does this matter?

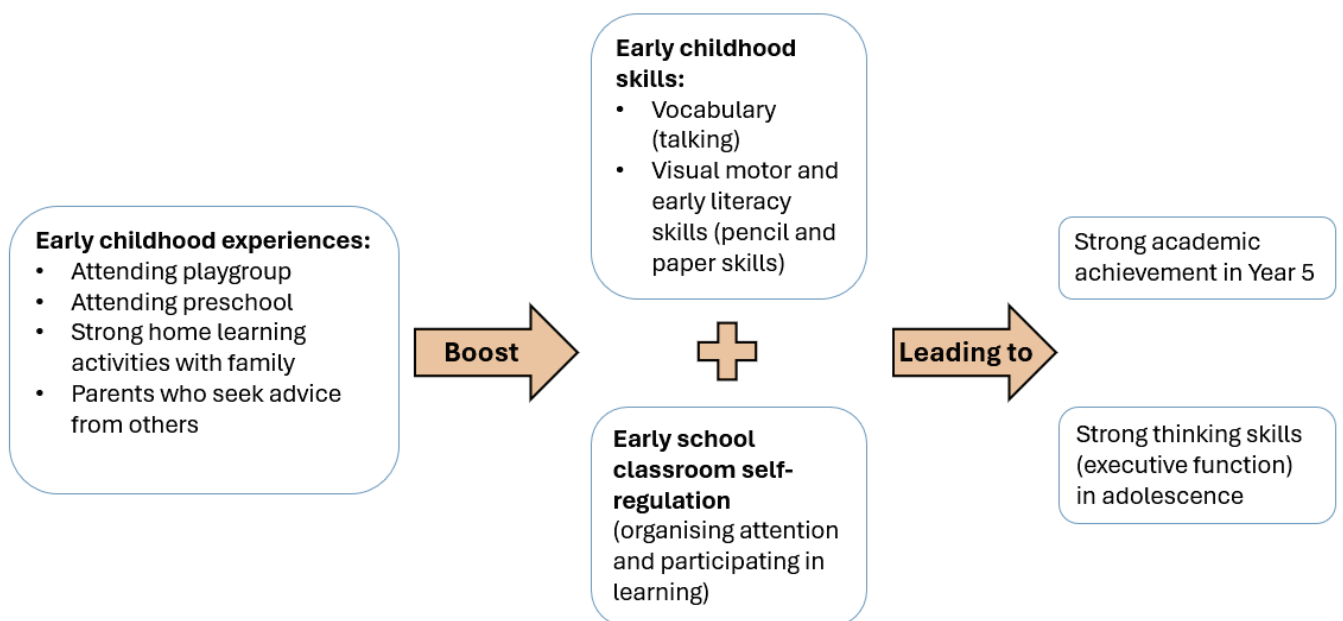
- Overall, these findings show how important it is for children to have positive early learning experiences and a strong start, when they begin school.
- Learning how to manage emotions, focus, and build good relationships with teachers in the early years helps set kids up to stay engaged with school as they grow. These early experiences lay the groundwork for better learning and success later on, through middle childhood and into the teenage years.



## Pathways to academic achievement and thinking skills

Figure S4 shows the pathways we identified between strong early childhood experiences and later learning outcomes. Positive early experiences helped build early skills and supported children’s ability to focus and learn during the early school years. This, in turn, led to stronger academic results later on, including in Year 5 NAPLAN reading and numeracy.

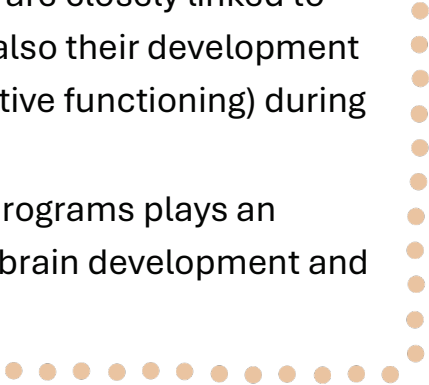
We also found similar pathways linking early experiences and skills to the development of cognitive abilities in adolescence – known as executive functioning. This includes skills like being able to maintain attention, remember information, manage behaviour, being flexible, and planning ahead. These skills are key for later success in learning, employment, and wellbeing throughout life.



**Figure S4.** Pathways from early experiences to strong later thinking skills and academic achievement.



### Why does this matter?

- Overall, our findings show that high-quality early childhood experiences help build key skills, like self-regulation, visual-motor abilities, and early literacy. These early skills are closely linked to how well children do in school later on, and also their development of thinking and problem-solving skills (executive functioning) during adolescence.
  - Going to playgroups and formal pre-school programs plays an important role in supporting children's early brain development and learning.
- 



## Early childhood technology use

Indigenous digital inclusion means making sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have fair access to digital tools, internet services, and the skills needed to use them. Without this access, families may miss out on important social, education, and work opportunities in today's connected world. The Australian Government has taken steps in recent years to improve digital inclusion for Indigenous communities.

In this Report, we looked at three key areas of digital inclusion – access, affordability, and ability – for LSIC children. Here's what we found:

**Digital access:** In the early school years (based on 2011-2013 data), 37% of parents said their children used the internet at home.

**Digital affordability:** Home internet use was higher in major cities (56%) and much lower in very remote areas (9%), showing that where children lived made a big difference to digital access.

### Digital ability:

- Children who used the internet at home had stronger early skills, including pencil and paper, and classroom self-regulation skills, and better reading comprehension.
- These children went on to have more confidence using technology in middle childhood and adolescence, felt safer online, and used mobile phones for more tasks.
- They also had higher executive functioning skills in adolescence compared to those who didn't use technology early on.

### Why does this matter?

- Digital inclusion is now part of everyday life, from finding a job or booking a doctor's appointment, to accessing education, Centrelink, and Medicare services.
- Giving children safe and early access to technology helps build the skills they need to take part fully in today's world, and supports their learning, confidence, and development as they grow.



## What does “grow up strong” mean to children?

The LSIC Early Childhood Report highlights ways to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as they grow – from early childhood into their teenage years.

The poem that follows is woven from the voices of children who took part in LSIC during middle childhood and adolescence, sharing in their own words what has helped them grow up strong.

*When you are older you are brave and smart.  
Growing up mentally strong and get through any problem in life.  
Having a well supported family, having good mates,  
Being confident, knowing what to do and help people,*

*I think it means to be strong in life.*

*Being healthy and making good decisions,  
Growing up healthy with a strong mind.  
Good relationships. Confident, independent, and reliable.*

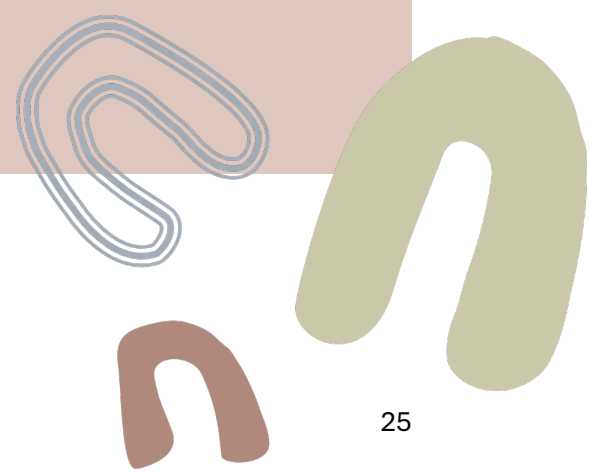
*Respect my Elders and culture,  
Being kind hearted, helping and looking after people.  
Getting a good education, keep growing strong.  
Being resilient and persistent. Getting better at something.*

*You have learnt how to be a good person and be safe. Strong and brave.*

## Recommendations and policy alignment

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES

Recommendation	Alignment with Closing the Gap Strategy	Alignment with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy
<p>1. Celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s identity and embed opportunities for cultural learning and engagement in cultural activities, such as arts and dance, and Indigenous language learning.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 3:</b> Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.</p> <p><b>Outcome 15:</b> People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical, and economic relationship with their land and waters.</p> <p><b>Outcome 16:</b> Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.</p>	<p><b>Goal 2.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years.</p> <p><b>Goal 3.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to establish and maintain strong connections to culture, Country and language.</p>
<p>2. Provide high quality early childhood education and care services that use evidence-based strategies to promote early self-regulation skills and build the foundation for learning and school success.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 4:</b> Children thrive in their early years. Focussing on these early skills with have a direct impact on the associated target of children being developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census.</p>	<p><b>Goal 2.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years.</p>
<p>3. Prioritise enriching children’s oral language and literacy skills, visual-motor, and self-regulation skills to set them up for the best start in school.</p>		



## SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS



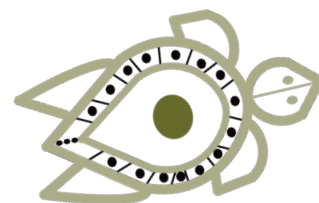
Recommendation	Alignment with Closing the Gap Strategy	Alignment with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy
<p>4. From the early school years, focus on promoting positive student-teacher relationships and reducing student-teacher conflict, to build a strong foundation for students' engagement with and enjoyment of school.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 5:</b> Students achieve their full learning potential. Setting the foundation for school engagement will have a direct impact on the associate target of increasing proportion of individuals achieving a Year 12 qualification.</p>	<p><b>Goal 2.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years.</p>
<p>5. Through co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, develop school-based initiatives for promoting identity and belonging in classrooms, and fostering positive cultural identity.</p>	<p><b>Priority Reform 1:</b> Formal partnerships and shared decision-making.</p> <p><b>Outcome 15:</b> People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical, and economic relationship with their land and waters.</p> <p><b>Outcome 16:</b> Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.</p>	<p><b>Goal 3.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to establish and maintain strong connections to culture, Country and language.</p> <p><b>Goal 5.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are active partners in building a better service system.</p>



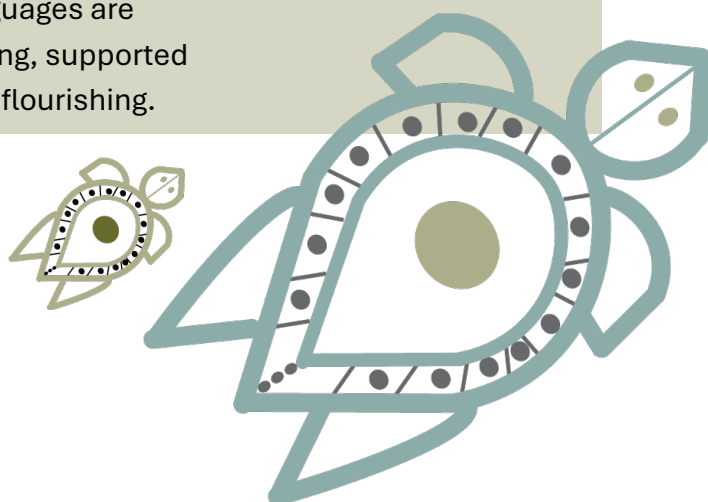
## EDUCATION POLICY

Recommendation	Alignment with Closing the Gap Strategy	Alignment with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy
<p>6. Expand the Indigenous early childhood education, care, and school workforces, to further embed the adoption and teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices in education.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 8:</b> Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities.</p>	<p><b>Goal 3.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to establish and maintain strong connections to culture, Country and language.</p>
<p>7. Increase opportunities for access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language programs within Australian early childhood education and care services, primary and secondary schools.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 16:</b> Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.</p>	<p><b>Goal 3.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to establish and maintain strong connections to culture, Country and language.</p>
<p>8. Ensure all children across Australia have access to high quality pre-school programs in the year prior to starting formal schooling.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 3:</b> Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.</p>	<p><b>Goal 2.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years.</p>

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

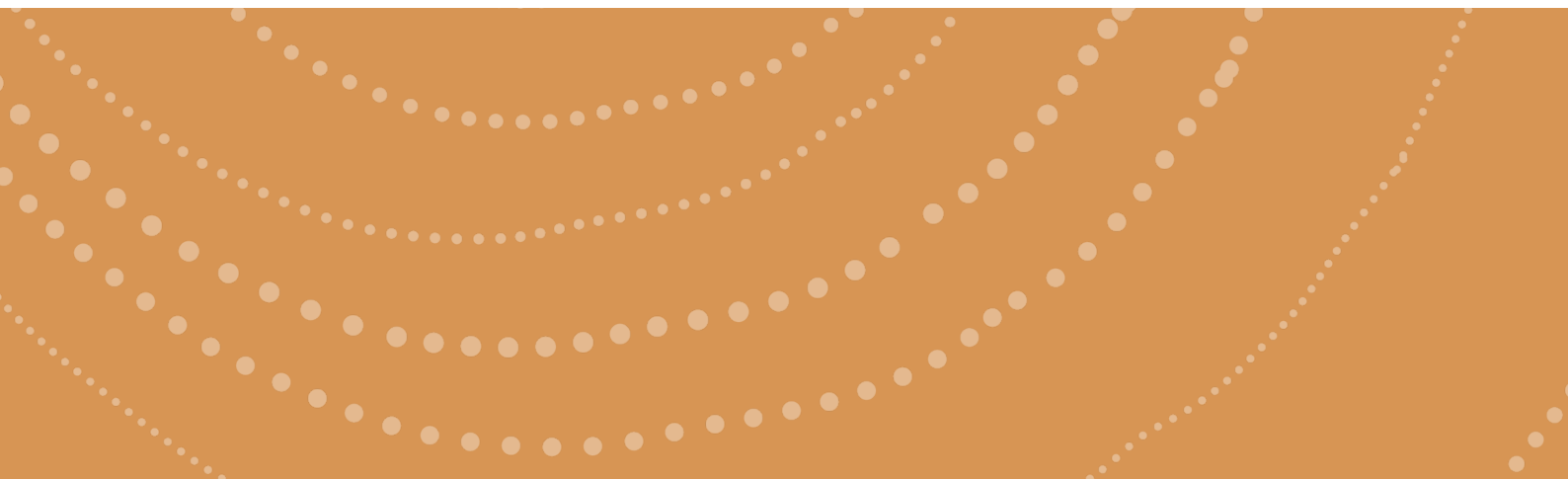


Recommendation	Alignment with Closing the Gap	Alignment with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy
<p>9. Increase access to culturally responsive playgroups and parent support groups to build parents’ self-efficacy and social capital and to support children’s early development.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 4:</b> Children thrive in their early years</p> <p><b>Outcome 14:</b> People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing</p>	<p><b>Goal 2.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years.</p> <p><b>Goal 3.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to establish and maintain strong connections to culture, Country and language.</p>
<p>10. Establish resources and settings in the community, especially in urban areas, for parents and other caregivers to facilitate children’s engagement with cultural activities, including traditional practices and arts, prior to children starting school. Such settings could include cultural events run by community organisations or early learning centres. These events can be settings for supporting children’s connections to language, Country, and Mob, and to their Indigenous identity.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 15:</b> People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical, and economic relationship with their land and waters.</p>	<p><b>Goal 4.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up in safe nurturing homes, supported by strong families and communities.</p> <p><b>Goal 5.</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are active partners in building a better service system</p>
<p>11. Expand community Indigenous Language and Arts programs to support the revival of Indigenous languages.</p>	<p><b>Outcome 16:</b> Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.</p>	



## Future research directions

- The longitudinal data gathered in *Footprints in Time* provides a vital opportunity to hear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's and families' views on what is needed to help children grow up strong, including this examination of how children's early experiences relate to their developmental outcomes into middle childhood and adolescence. Further follow-up of the LSIC participants will afford opportunities to examine how these young people transition through adulthood.
- This LSIC Early Childhood Report analysed data from early childhood through to adolescence, establishing how strong social-emotional wellbeing in early childhood is associated with strong wellbeing in middle childhood and adolescence. As future waves of LSIC data become available, further research could examine whether this association continues into adulthood.
- Future research could seek to identify factors that may contribute to fluctuations in children's connections to Country, culture, and learning of Indigenous language over time. Research could explore avenues for further supporting these connections in early childhood and throughout development.
- Further research could enhance existing understandings of ways that connection to language promotes social and emotional wellbeing, and how these connections can be promoted alongside attempts to revive, revitalise, and preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.



- This LSIC Early Childhood Report demonstrates the value of integrating multiple methods of inquiry, including through working at the interface of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. This approach involved using storytelling approaches to centre the experiences of children and families and using this to inform quantitative analysis of longitudinal data. Future research could consider adopting these and other innovative methods so participants' experiences can guide analysis. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities are best placed to lead solutions that ensure strong developmental outcomes.
- The strengths-based approach underpinning *Footprints in Time* provides a model for future research projects. This LSIC Early Childhood Report benefited from the availability of rich qualitative responses recorded verbatim from participants to questions that emphasised their capabilities, positive attributes, and strengths.
- As the early childhood experiences of children described in this Report were gathered from participants between 2008 and 2015, there is a need for new longitudinal studies that measure experiences of growing up as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person today – particularly in areas that are characterised by marked change (e.g., digital access, affordability, and ability).



## How we conducted this research

In producing the Report, our team of Aboriginal researchers (Jessa Rogers, Stuart Ekberg, and Tirritpa Ritchie) and non-Indigenous researchers (Emma Carpendale, Kate Williams, Donna Berthelsen, Lauren Piltz, and Kristin Laurens) committed extensive time to whole-team discussion, learning, reflection, and debate to ensure that we privileged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing, in our work. Our analyses used a strengths-based approach centred on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Report used both qualitative and quantitative data provided by participants. Led by our Aboriginal team members, two Indigenous research methodologies – based on **storying** or **yarning over time** and **Indigenous poetic inquiry** methods – were used to bring to life the experiences of LSIC participants. By building narratives around key pieces of information collected across 14 years of data collection, the team developed stories that explored similarities and differences in children’s experiences of growing up strong as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young person. Multiple stories were developed to illustrate variations in experience across geographic, cultural, and familial contexts. These stories feature prominently in our Report, and guided areas of inquiry for quantitative analysis. The Report finishes with a series of poems about growing up strong as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young person, developed using direct quotes from LSIC parents and Study Youth. Throughout the Report, artworks by Kylie Monteleone provide contemporary Aboriginal representations of the findings in this Report, inspired by the many places that LSIC participants call home.

