



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

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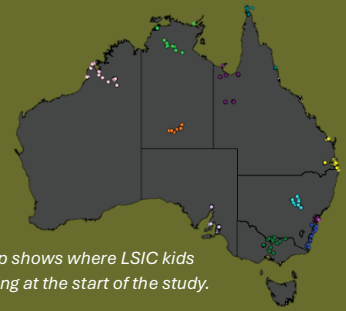
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Knowing Who You Are

Stories of Indigenous Kids Growing Up Strong

About the *LSIC Early Childhood Report*

If you're part of *Footprints in Time* – the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) – your story, along with the stories of around 1,700 others, helps show how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids grow up strong. Since 2008, *Footprints in Time* has been listening to families each year, and now all those stories have been brought together in the Early Childhood Report.

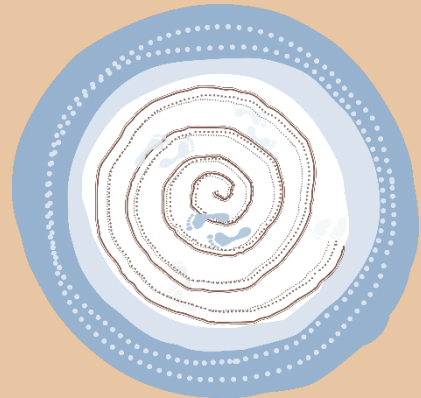


This map shows where LSIC kids were living at the start of the study.

Your stories of growing up strong

Each year, *Footprints in Time* families have answered questions about their lives. For the Early Childhood Report, we put this information together to tell stories of how kids grow up strong. The stories are about real families (but we use made-up names) and show different ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids grow strong from early childhood to adolescence. Some stories are here, and more are in our full Report.

Ty is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boy living a long way from the nearest big city. His parents are proud of their cultures – and know they will help Ty grow up strong. Before he starts school, Ty's learning about culture at home, in community, and at daycare. His knowledge of culture comes through dancing, singing, speaking language, eating native food, and contributing to community. His family knows their protocols are part of the longest continuing cultures on Earth. As Ty gets older, his family are confident he has all the supports that he needs around him to make the right choices. Ty knows he'll grow up strong by being educated, having his family's support, being respectful, getting a good job, and knowing culture.



Kids like Ty show what's important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing – strong connections. These connections can be to culture, language, family, community, Country, and Ancestors. Today, not every child can easily stay connected in all these ways – but families still find ways to keep those connections strong.



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 to where they live, Layla's visited by the time she's nine months old, creating a link to her people and Country. In the time before Layla starts school, she's learning about culture by yarning, learning stories, and speaking the language of her Mob. This learning's important for Layla's mum, who is proud of the identity and culture that she and Layla share with their Mob. By the time Layla's a teenager, her mum's greatest wish is for her to be happy and healthy. Layla herself looks forward to being strong, independent, knowing her Country, language, and culture.

Allira is a Torres Strait Islander girl living with her family in a large city far away from the Torres Strait. When Allira's young, her family knows distance won't stop Allira growing up strong – so long as she knows who she is, where she comes from, and how she can be part of her community. Living far from the Torres Strait, Allira's family realises connections to culture will depend on opportunities through places like school and community groups – so her Dad starts taking Allira to shows and exhibits to teach her about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Through family, Allira learns about her clan and the stories that connect her. By the time she's a teenager, Allira and her family know that being far from Country is no barrier to growing up strong as a part of her family and her culture.

Kids like Allira, Layla, and Ty show how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures stay strong today. Some families have had to adapt and get creative to help their kids stay connected to what keeps them feeling strong and well. Even when life is really hard, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people stay strong by staying connected.

Growing up strong through culture

These stories share some common messages, backed up by information from over 1,700 *Footprints* kids. They show what's important for kids in early childhood, before they start school.



Three in four kids had **attended an Indigenous cultural event** in early childhood.



Two in three kids were talked about by their parent as having a **connection to Country or place** in early childhood.



One in two children **learnt traditional arts, painting, or dance**.



Two in three of kids **identified with their Mob (Nation or language group)** in early childhood.



One in two children **engaged in traditional practices, such as fishing or hunting**.



One in four of kids **spoke an Indigenous language** in early childhood.

These things were shared more by kids living in outer regional and remote areas than by kids living in big cities or nearby towns.

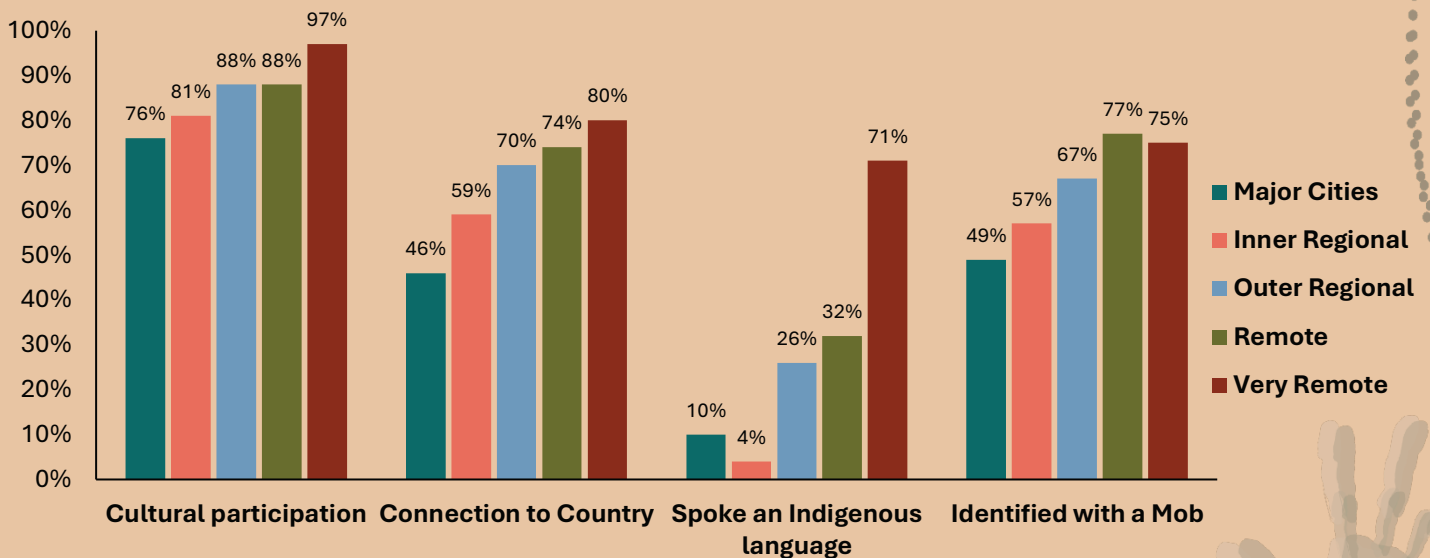
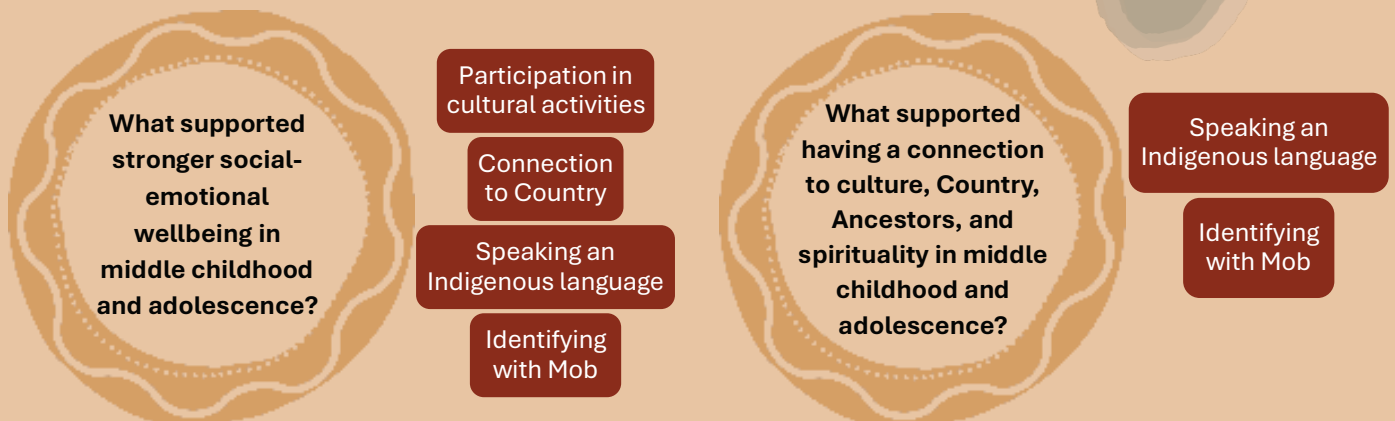


Figure 1. Percentage of kids whose parents said they were connected to culture in different ways during early childhood, depending on where they lived.

These connections matter. The *Footprints in Time* data show that kids who have strong connections in early childhood were more likely to feel strong and well as they grew older.



This shows that early connections to culture, language, Country, and Mob help kids grow up strong in their feelings and wellbeing.

Parents' Social Support and Wellbeing



Nearly half of parents (47%) said they could ask family and friends for parenting advice in the years before their child started **school**.

When parents felt well during their child's early years, it was linked to better outcomes for their kids as they grew up – in early childhood, middle childhood, and in their teenage years.

In families where this parent advice seeking was more common, the following things were also more likely:

Kids were really interested and involved in school during their last two years of primary school.

Kids showed strong skills in the classroom and were good at managing their emotions in the first two years of primary school.

Kids had good academic achievement on Year 5 and Year 9 literacy and numeracy tests.

Kids were good at managing their emotion during middle childhood.

As they grew up, kids had strong:

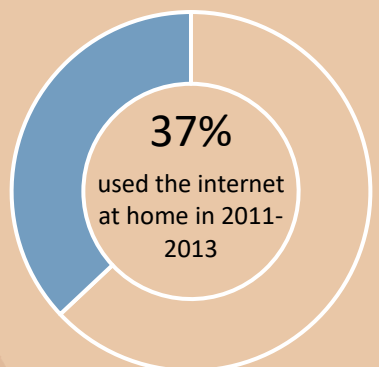
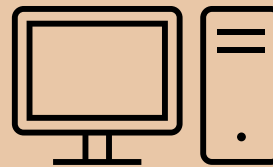
- connection to mind and emotions
- connection to community, and
- connection to culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirituality.

- Kids had better overall health before school, in the early school years, and in middle childhood.
- They knew more words, and had better reading and writing skills before starting school.
- They better understood what they read in the early school years.
- They were better at staying focused, managing emotions, and working well in the classroom during early school.
- They were more interested and involved in school during middle childhood and the teenage years.

- Kids had fewer social and emotional problems as they got older.
- They felt less stress and worry during middle childhood and in their teenage years.

Using digital technologies

Parents in the study shared information about their kids using digital technology (like computers and smartphones) when they were little, back in 2011 or 2013. At that time, about 1 in 3 kids (37%) were using the internet at home. This was different depending on where families lived – using the internet at home was more typical of kids in major cities.



Major Cities



Very Remote Regions



Having early and safe access to technology was important. The data showed that kids who used the internet when they were young:

- felt more confident using technology as they got older
- felt safer online as teenagers, and
- used their phones for more things in middle childhood and adolescence.

What does growing up strong mean to you?

From your descriptions of how you understand growing up strong, Wiradjuri researcher Jessa Rogers crafted poems – using your words – so that people can learn from your stories.

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.

Your early drawings of family and kin

Early in the study, your drawings of family showed strong family and kinship connections – like parents, brothers and sisters, Elders, aunties, uncles, community members, and sometimes your home and pets, too.



What needs to happen?

The stories you and other families shared show what's needed when you're young to grow up as strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Based on what you told us, we are telling governments, schools, and others that we need to:

- Give more chances for kids and families to join cultural activities like art and dance, and learn about Mob and Country before starting school. These could be run by community groups, early learning centres, museums, or galleries, and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Bring more Indigenous language programs into early childhood centres, and primary and high schools.
- Have early learning centres and schools work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to create chances for kids to share and celebrate their identity in class.
- Make sure all families have access to safe, affordable internet and digital technology, no matter where they live.

Thank you!

Those of you who have been participated as kids (now adults) and family have now been part of *Footprints in Time* for almost two decades. Thank you for sharing your stories for such a long time. What you've told us will keep helping governments, schools, workplaces, and others understand what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids need to grow up strong into adulthood. We are very thankful to all *Footprints in Time* families for continuing to share your voices and stories.

Please see the full Report for detail on the study findings: Rogers J., Ekberg S, Ritchie T, Carpendale EJ, Williams KE, Berthelsen D, Piltz LM, & Laurens KR. (2025). *Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) Early Childhood Report*. Queensland University of Technology. <https://doi.org.10.5204/rep.eprints.259312>



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