Aboriginal Child Poverty

CHILD POVERTY POLICY REVIEW 2

Christine Choo

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Sponsored by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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Foreword

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) is the umbrella organisation of all Aboriginal and Islander child care agencies (AICCAs or ACCAs) in Australia. Since the late 1970s, our member agencies have been involved in providing services for Aboriginal and Islander children and their families. These services include youth services, vacation programs, family support services, a "link-up" service, foster care, adoption and counselling. We are not child-care centres in the conventional sense of the term; neither are we merely fostering and adoption agencies, as some would like to believe.

There have been many studies done about Aboriginal people. This one is unique because it has involved those whom it professes to speak on behalf of and about. Many aspects of Aboriginal and Islander child poverty defined in this report will leave an indelible impression upon the reader. In our day-to-day work AICCAs and ACCAs encounter all the problems that have been highlighted in this report.

When we undertook this survey we did not expect to produce an exhaustive account of the precise state of impoverishment of our families and children. Due to constraints of time and resources, it had to be a general introductory look at the situation. The partnership we undertook also meant compromising. This was a cost we were willing to pay in order to achieve for the report an impact we would not have had without the name of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. This underlines another facet of poverty that has perhaps not been fully emphasised in the report: the powerlessness and voicelessness of those in poverty. Part of the syndrome of poverty is not being listened to.

There are many things in this report we have known for years, but have not been able to express in a form comprehensible to the powers that be. The poverty of our community—the oppression—has meant that we even have to fight for the right to speak on behalf of ourselves. The "experts" usurp even the last remaining birthright of any person, the right and ability to define oneself. Of course, we have, over the years, regained some of the ground we lost many years ago, by acting as a community and as a people united by our Aboriginality and our oppression. We have acted

politically and have made advances. This report must therefore be seen in this context. No matter what the aims of others, we have always had our own agenda, which at times has coincided with that of others. There can be no other way, because no one has shown the concern about our people that we have for ourselves.

Our organisation has one single-minded purpose: that of improving the lot of our children and our families. We did not get involved in this partnership with the Brotherhood because we felt we did not know about the problems that affect our children; it is precisely because we did know that we did it. We needed to tell other people that, in spite of all the changes in Aboriginal affairs, our children are still suffering poverty and injustice.

It now remains for us to use this report for the benefit of our children. Reports, after all, do not change things. Only people do.

In concluding, I would like to acknowledge the role played by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Christine Choo, in particular. I would also like to thank all the people involved in the production of this report, including all the member organisations of SNAICC who gave of their time and their thoughts.

Brian Butler
Chairman
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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Preface

The Revelations of extreme poverty for Aboriginal Australian children are not new. From the arrival of the first white settlers, the policies of colonial and indigenous governments ensured that Aboriginal children suffered every form of destitution, exploitation, abandonment, slavery, persecution and violence. Sometimes policies were hostile, sometimes unwitting, sometimes they were even well-meaning. But over the past 200 years, policies have deprived Aboriginal children of parents and families; of traditional food and living circumstances; of the education and identity of their indigenous culture; of health, and of their land, the natural Australian environment. And sometimes they have been deprived of their lives.

In the two preceding centuries, many attempts at improving social policy for Australian Aboriginal children have been illusory. For example, many schools for Aboriginal childen in the nineteenth century attempted to "undo" Aboriginal culture and insert European learning. The outcome was confusion and demoralisation for Aboriginal children and their parents and "burn out" by the teachers and service-providers. Schools intending to provide a good education became agents for recruiting and domesticating Aboriginal child labour.

For this reason it is difficult to write history in the midst of it. Yet in the last twenty years improvements have emerged. Aboriginal children go to local schools and join in sporting clubs and church events. Some go to university, some find work in the Public Service or other good jobs, and obtain mortgages. Some reconstruct links with their biological kin, previously shattered by separation policies. The accessibility of Aboriginal culture—art, literature and music in particular—are new reminders of Aboriginal heritage for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

This study details progress yet to be made. The understandings of Aboriginal people about the poverty of their children shows deep concern about material deprivation, but points out that the antecedents of material poverty are cultural and spiritual. The report makes important recommendations: a strategy to attack Aboriginal child poverty based on the views of Aboriginal people; policies that

integrate the resources required with programs to empower Aboriginal parents and communities in the care of their children.

Aboriginal child poverty has been omitted from the Government's strategy on child poverty, despite recent programs. (For example, the Department of Social Security's Support Network for Aboriginal Parents (SNAP) to assist Aboriginal communities to establish and maintain networks of federal and state government services and programs. The Department of Education, Employment and Training's special initiative to ensure that Aboriginal children receive a complete secondary education is also critical.) The Government needs to respond coherently to the disadvantage of Aboriginal children, not with disconnected programs, but with a set of short-term, medium-term and long-term aims. A coherent plan to combat Aboriginal child poverty will consult with Aboriginal people and relevant service agencies in state and local governments and the non-government sector.

At the Brotherhood of St Laurence we have been very pleased to work with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. We regret that we have not understood and advocated for poor Aboriginal children before this. We hope for progress on a subject that reminds us that neither international nor national obligations to our children have been met.

Jan Carter
Director
Social Policy and Research Centre
Brotherhood of St Laurence

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank all those who so generously offered their thoughts and comments on the subject, that is the Poverty of Aboriginal Children, especially the Aboriginal people involved in the network of agencies that comprise SNAICC, and all those involved in Policy and Research at the Brotherhood of St Laurence who gave their time and attention to assist this research.

I wish also to acknowledge the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for their assistance in funding the travel costs incurred in this study.

I would especially like to thank Jan Carter of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Nigel D'Souza of the Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care for their continued interest and encouragement.

Christine Choo

ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AICCA/ACCA	Aboriginal (and Islander) Child Care Agency
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADC	Aboriginal Development Commission
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIDS	auto-immune deficiency syndrome
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
AP	Anangu Pitjantjatjara
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CA ACCA	Central Australia ACCA
CAAC	Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CSOM	chronic suppurative otitis media
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCS	Department of Community Services
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEIR	Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
DSS	Department of Social Security
HBV	hepatitis B
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
QEA	Queensland Electoral Areas
SA ACCA	South Australian ACCA
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
SNAP	Support Network for Aboriginal Parents
STD	sexually transmitted disease(s)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UPK	Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku
VACCA	Victorian ACCA
WA ACCA	Western Australia ACCA

♦ ONE ♦

Introduction

Why discuss Aboriginal child poverty?

Children are our country's most valuable resource, and with increasing clarity we are becoming aware that the nation's children are the victims of poverty and deprivation on a scale not previously acknowledged. Australia, the "lucky country", is an extremely unlucky country for the thousands of children whose families are affected by poverty.

It is acknowledged that the Aboriginal people, the descendants of the indigenous people of this land, are the most deprived in Australian society. In a recent interview published in the *Bulletin* (1988), Mr Gerry Hand, Federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, stated, "I don't think there is a living soul who, if they were constantly going to the places I see, wouldn't be affected by it. I get quite depressed at times. I do."

It is widely acknowledged that on a range of social indicators the Aborigines emerge as the most disadvantaged group in Australia. These indicators include health, housing, education, employment, income and criminal justice. The average life-expectancy at birth is 20 years less than that for other Australians. Infant mortality is nearly three times that of non-Aboriginal children. 32 per cent of Aboriginal children aged 0-9, as against 1.6 per cent of non-Aboriginal children, have some form of trachoma. Aboriginal unemployment is six times the national average. On average, Aborigines earn half the income of other Australians. Aboriginal imprisonment rates are up to twenty times those of other Australians. A large proportion of Aboriginal families live in sub-standard housing or temporary shelter. (DAA Annual Report 1986-87, p.1.)

Australia has been party to the discussions and work that have gone into the preparation of the Draft Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations Working Group and soon to be ratified for adoption at the General Assembly of the United Nations. This Convention recognises and upholds the right of the child to, among other things: life (Article 1), protection against discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or her or his

parents' or legal guardians' race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, family status, ethnic origin, cultural beliefs or practices, property, educational attainment, birth, or any other basis whatever (Article 4); the right to protection from physical and mental abuse and neglect (Article 8); the right of the child to preserve his or her identity without interference (Article 9); the right to "enjoy its own culture, to profess and practice its own religion, or to use its own language" (Article 16); the right to health and medical attention, education, recreation, and personal development; all of which recognise and enhance the child's dignity as a human person. If Australia is to take this Convention seriously, the conditions under which the children of this country are now living must be examined and steps taken to promote the optimum conditions for their development beyond survival.

Aboriginal children are over-represented on all the usual indicators that are used to measure poverty in the community and, therefore can be expected to be disproportionately represented among the 800 000 children who were living in households with income below the Henderson Poverty Line in 1985/86.

Aboriginal children suffer a prior and more serious disadvantage, the consequences of racism, which is deeply embedded in the Australian community. The poverty of Aboriginal children is much more than the relative or even the absolute poverty discussed in the literature, although it encompasses these forms of poverty. Not only are Aboriginal children under-valued and unrecognised by the wider Australian community as people with dignity and worth who have a right to recognition and investment of society's social, emotional and material resources, but they are (Stanner 1979), "disvalued by our conventional European outlook (as the bearers of unique and unrepeatable forms and culture)".

While there have been increasing numbers of reports and studies on specific indicators of poverty among the Aborigines (e.g. health, housing, income), the situation of Aboriginal children in poverty in the 1980s has so far remained unexplored.

This report attempts to develop an appropriate definition of the poverty of Aboriginal children, drawing on the perceptions and reflections gained through consultation with Aboriginal communities in a number of states. As an exploratory study, it aims to describe the poverty of Aboriginal children and families and, in consultation with Aboriginal child care agencies, to make recommendations for strategies that will improve the situation of Aboriginal children in Australia.

"In the long run, the test of whether or not Australia is able to alleviate child poverty will be whether we achieve equality of participation for all Australian children" (McClelland 1988). This is a very serious challenge indeed, especially in relation to poverty among Aboriginal children, as it will entail a change of heart and attitudes within the whole community.

Priority of attention must be given to the children in Australia who suffer the most serious disadvantage in all aspects of their lives. Aboriginal children are the most disadvantaged group in contemporary Australian society. As a result of the history of white occupation of this country, they now suffer exclusion from most mainstream activities and experience severe problems of access and equity. The recently published papers of the Aboriginal Family Demography Study highlight not only the accumulation of disadvantage for Aboriginal children, which starts at birth, but also the extent and scale of the accumulated disadvantage, which is almost universal for Aboriginal children (Gray & Vesper 1989).

Nevertheless, Aboriginal children are deeply valued by their communities. This project shows there is a sense of frustration in Aboriginal communities with the pace at which change is occurring, yet a sense of hope that things will change for the next generation and a determination to participate actively in ensuring that changes will happen.

Julian Burger, in his report prepared for the Anti-Slavery Society, which is based in London, summarises the situation of the Aborigines living in contemporary Australian society (Burger 1988):

> The notion that Australia is divided into two nations is clearly manifested in the comparative living conditions of the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations. While the standard of living of most Australians is one of the highest in the world, that of Aboriginal people is, in the more extreme instances, one of the worst. To see the affluence of the majority of Australians in Sydney, Melbourne and other cities, and then to look at the dilapidation, neglect and squalor in certain encampments in Alice Springs or fringe dwellings a stone's throw away from Perth, is to be shocked at the continuing degeneration resulting from colonisation. In cities such as Perth, whose wealth was almost obscenely flaunted at the recent America's Cup race, or Sydney with its multi-million dollar schemes to build casinos, leisure centres, monorails, harbour tunnels and much more, the citizens are preparing to celebrate the bicentennial of their new country. This rejoicing is for 200 years of conquest, subjugation and exploitation. It is the land so brutally colonised, which has provided and continues to provide the wealth—the wheat, cattle, minerals—upon which non-Aboriginal Australia's present-day prosperity is based. The indigenous people are left as the victims.

Characteristics of the Aboriginal population

In this report the words "Aboriginal" and "Aborigines" refer to people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. This follows the convention of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which adopts the following definition (ABS 1988):

> An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community with which he/she is associated.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population counted at the 1986 Census was 227 645 or 1.43 per cent of the estimated total resident population. This figure was derived from self-enumeration as the declaration of Aborginality was voluntary. The largest number of Aboriginal people live in Queensland, where 61 268 Aboriginal people represent 2.37 per cent of the Queensland population. New South Wales has 59 011 Aboriginal people making up 1.04 per cent of the population. Western Australia's 37 789 Aboriginal people comprise 2.69 per cent of the population. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people form a greater proportion of the total population: 22.44 per cent. (ABS 1988.)

There are three population trends of significance in this study. Firstly, there has been a notable increase in the number of Aboriginal people recorded in the 1986 Census. The greatest increase occurred in Tasmania, with a rise of 149.9 per cent between 1981 and 1986. The numbers in Victoria increased by 108.2 per cent, NSW by 66.9 per cent, the ACT by 58.2 per cent, South Australia by 45.5 per cent, Western Australia by 20.5 per cent, the Northern Territory by 19.4 per cent, and Queensland by 37.1 per cent. It is interesting to note that in the states where the Aboriginal population comprises a larger proportion of the population and where Aborigines are scattered in communities with a more traditional lifestyle (as well as in urban communities)—e.g. Queensland and the Northern Territory—the proportion of people identifying as Aboriginal has not increased as much as in the states where the total numbers are smaller, and where the population is more urban based, such as Tasmania and Victoria (ABS 1988).

Part of the reason for this increase could be attributed to the greater willingness of people to identify as Aboriginal, especially in the urban areas, where contact with Europeans is longest, and where in the past many may not have wanted to acknowledge their identity as Aborigines.

Secondly, the age-structure of the Aboriginal population indicates that the Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. 52.5 per cent of the Aboriginal population are aged under 20 years and only 4.2 per cent are aged over 59

years (see Figures 1 and 2 (a) and (b), Appendix A). However, the survival rate from age 34 onwards declines, and the proportion of older people drops significantly. This could be an outcome of the Census method of collection, as many older people may not have been identified. Alternatively, and perhaps more accurately, this trend may indicate the true state of the morbidity and mortality in the Aboriginal population and the lower life-expectancy of people of Aboriginal descent.

The 1986 Census figures show that the increase in population is occurring at the 0-4 age-group, indicating a more youthful Aboriginal population in the future. This could be occurring for a number of reasons, such as the decline in the infant mortality rate, the increase in numbers of young Aborigines entering the child-bearing age, and improved health services and other support systems for Aboriginal people, which have given them a much better chance of survival (see Table 1, Appendix A).

Thirdly, there is also a greater concentration of Aborigines living in the urban areas: 66 per cent of the Aboriginal population. It is noted that there is an increasing trend towards the urbanisation of the Aboriginal population in all states except in the Northern Territory, where 69 per cent live in rural areas (see Table 2, Appendix A).

Geographical location: rural/urban spread

The Aboriginal community is not homogeneous, although this is a common misconception of many people outside the Aboriginal community. There are significant differences in terms of economy, social functioning and cultural contact with European society, as well as individual and group differences. Fisk, in his economic analysis of what he terms "the Aboriginal sector", groups this sector into four main categories: out-stations, Aboriginal towns, small non-Aboriginal towns, and cities and large towns (Fisk 1985).

The structure of the Aboriginal family is not uniform. It can be seen on a continuum from the traditional Aboriginal family, the elementary family, the close-knit family, the adapting family, through to the completely adjusted family (that is, adjusted to European society). This typology has been suggested by Ronald Berndt (1969) and developed by Jackie Oakley (1987) who warns that these structures are in fact more than

> "alternative family structures" to the "nuclear family structure" which is the dominant family structure of the Australian society . . . At one end you have the traditional family and at the other you have the completely adjusted or new breed of Aboriginal who are similar in lifestyle to that of the "nuclear family" but very Aboriginal in other respects particularly in relation to their identity.

Aboriginal child poverty

The majority of the Aboriginal population, like the non-Aboriginal population of this country, are urban-dwellers. The 1986 Census uses four categories defining urban/rural characteristics of the population:

- *Major urban*: all urban centres with a population of 100 000 or more.
- *Other urban*: all urban centres with a population of 1000 to 99 999, and a particular category of holiday resorts.
- *Rural locality*: all population clusters of 200 to 999 people.
- *Rural balance*: the remainder of the state/territory.

In this report the Aboriginal communities are broadly categorised according to their lifestyle and the location of their communities. The three categories used are:

- *Homelands or out-stations*, where Aboriginal people have gone to settle on their traditional lands in family groups and small communities.
- *Town-camps or fringe-camps*, where Aboriginal people — usually, but not always, in family groups—have settled on the outskirts of towns and other urban areas, in localities that may have been reserves.
- *Towns and other urban areas*, where Aboriginal people have settled into urban areas, and where they are a minority.

This is a useful way to categorise the population as it highlights some of the most important differences and commonalities between Aboriginal communities that come to light in any serious discussion of issues within the Aboriginal population. All three categories are important in the discussion of the poverty of Aboriginal children, as they represent three different groups with lifestyles that are in many ways distinct from each other. The most pressing problems and needs of Aborigines who have chosen to move to their homelands are not necessarily the same as those of the majority of Aborigines, who are city-dwellers. And these are again different from the needs of the town-campers, who are acknowledged as being among the most deprived, because they are not able to identify fully either with those in the homelands or with the urban-dwellers.

The majority of *homelands and out-stations* are located in Central Australia, the Northern Territory, the north of Queensland, and the north-west of Western Australia. They have been defined as "small decentralised communities of close kin established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987, p.7).

The homelands and out-stations movement is very significant in contemporary Aboriginal life as it represents the aspirations of Aborigines to be independent and to be able to express their cultural identity.

Town-campers, or fringe-dwellers as they are sometimes called, usually live outside the boundaries of formal towns (as identified by the Census) but they are drawn to the towns for economic and social reasons, settle in town-camps and former reserves and become dependent on urban-based services. The population in the town-camps is highly mobile and transient. The town-campers with accommodation receive many visitors who very often are homeless relatives and friends. The children in the town-camps grow up experiencing severe health and housing problems, neglect through poverty or, often, as a result of alcoholism.

Urban-dwellers make up the largest proportion of the Aboriginal population. They experience all the negative aspects of urban life compounded by the problems associated with being Aboriginal in Australian society.

♦ TWO ♦

Summary of issues and recommendations

This study, undertaken jointly by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), is the first step in our attempt to describe and understand what the poverty of Aboriginal children means to their families and communities, and to all Australians.

Aboriginal children are, as a group, materially and financially much poorer than non-Aboriginal children because the communities to which they belong are much worse off materially than their non-Aboriginal neighbours. In relation to the poverty of their children, Aboriginal people speak of:

- the loss of their children from their families and communities;
- the resulting loss of identity, loss of spiritual and cultural heritage, loss of contact with the land;
- the loss of dignity and self-respect through oppression over the years;
- lack of access to a reliable supply of good clean water, food, and other essential services in many Aboriginal communities;
- the incidence of alcoholism;
- alcoholism and homelessness, contributing to the incidence of physical and sexual abuse of children;
- the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) among their people, especially their children;
- the very poor health of the children, which affects their long-term life chances;
- the incarceration of their children in institutions and prisons;
- chronic homelessness, which affects the health and education of their children;
- the negative effects of all these on access to employment and income, which keeps the communities and their children in poverty.

The language and perspective of most social research and analysis, which is the language of the dominant white society, are challenged

in this study. It also challenges the deeply ingrained cultural superiority behind the structures and processes that have been adopted in dealing with Aboriginal affairs. By listening more attentively to what Aboriginal people themselves have to say about their own situations, and by finding ways to encourage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to find culturally appropriate ways to deal with these situations, the development of social policy can be enriched and humanised.

> Colonialism has produced a tangled network of tragedies for our people. Our children must be given every opportunity for human and cultural self-advancement. As one Aboriginal mother has written: "As in all other societies, children are vitally important. For us they are our future and hope. We cannot afford to lose our most precious resource. It is necessary that we instil in them a sense of pride in their history and culture, so they too have a chance, like other Australians, of knowing who they are and why."

This statement, made in the paper presented by a SNAICC delegate to the Sixth International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1988, summarises the overriding theme that has emerged from this study of Aboriginal child poverty.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE CONSULTATIONS

The issues that have emerged from the consultations with the various Aboriginal individuals and groups are summarised in this section. An attempt is made to come to an understanding of the poverty of Aboriginal children from an Aboriginal perspective.

The consultations with the Aboriginal communities highlighted a range of issues and indicators relating to child poverty. They also serve to sharpen our understanding of the context of the poverty of Aboriginal children and to re-evaluate our non-Aboriginal interpretation of the situation of Aboriginal children. Through all this material there emerges an acute sense that these are a people who have suffered generations of oppression and degradation, and who still maintain their sense of solidarity with one another. The problems of alcoholism, physical abuse and neglect, as well as the resulting incarceration of young and old, must be considered within the context of this long-term systematic structural oppression and abuse of the Aboriginal people.

There were differences in emphasis from place to place, and each community had its own flavour and characteristic approach to the issues and problems, as much to do with the influence of the politics and ambience of the particular community as its leadership. There was a surprising unity of perception about the causes of the poverty of Aboriginal children. The discussions showed an incisive perception of poverty, its causes and effects. This is, of course, not at all surprising, as all the Aborigines who offered an

opinion had experienced poverty themselves. While giving us access to direct experience, this subjectivity also poses problems, as it is extremely difficult to articulate a position or perception that is so much part of one's own experience. It was easier for people to articulate their considered opinion the farther away they were from the experience of absolute poverty. What this also highlights is the fact that the Aboriginal community as a whole is relatively and absolutely more impoverished than the non-Aboriginal community; almost all Aborigines have experienced poverty themselves or know someone who lives in poverty, however this is defined.

Another important characteristic of most of the discussions was the emphasis placed on a *non-material view of poverty, on issues pertaining to relationships, reciprocal obligations and responsibilities or the breakdown of these relationships, as well as the deeply spiritual link with the environment and each other.* The adults grieved for the actual or metaphorical loss of their children to themselves and to the community. They were saddened by the loss of social order and disintegration of their communities, the loss of identity, self-respect and a sense of control over their own destiny and future. It was clear that poverty was given a much broader definition than the usual definition in the literature.

The poverty of Aboriginal children is seen to be inextricably linked with *the loss of the children to the community through their removal from their families and their communities.* This has, over the last 200 years, resulted in an inestimable loss to the communities of their most valuable resource in economic as well as personal, cultural and social terms. It has also impoverished generations of Aboriginal children of their cultural heritage and identity and contributed to the huge wastage of human resources among Aborigines. Every individual, family and community has a story to tell about such losses.

Related to this great loss and impoverishment is the loss of dignity and self-respect, the result of oppressive structures and practices, which have been the direct consequence of explicit and implicit racism. Aboriginal children have inherited the legacy of social Darwinism[1] (McConnochie 1973), which accompanied the first Europeans to this country and which supported white supremacy above all coloured people. The disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal children today stems from the fact that they are labelled as second-

1. *Social Darwinism* refers to the belief that societies ranged from the most civilised (usually European societies) to the least civilised (usually Aboriginal societies). The British considered Australia when they first arrived to be *terra nullis* because the natives who lived here were considered to be "less than human". The remnants of that view is seen today in the racist attitudes held by some people towards Aborigines.

class citizens, not able to cope with the demands of "civilised" society. Although attempts have been made by successive governments to address some of these inequities, the problem is a difficult and deep-seated one to do with attitudes and ideology.

Material poverty, which can be measured through social indicators such as income, employment, housing, health, education and criminality, is secondary to the more deep-seated deprivation that is the consequence of cultural invasion, racism and oppression. According to these indicators, the Aboriginal community is disproportionately represented among the most disadvantaged in the country. Aboriginal children have the same right to the benefits of living in contemporary Australian society, with access to an acceptable standard of living, adequate accommodation, adequate food, education and training, employment opportunities, safety and protection as all other Australian children. However, these rights, which other Australians take for granted, are given more as a privilege than a right to those members of the Aboriginal community who can prove that they "deserve" such a privilege.

One of the most frequently mentioned problems, which is seen as a major factor contributing to the material, psychological and spiritual poverty of Aboriginal children, is *alcoholism.* Alcoholism is identified as the cause of many evils, including the physical and emotional neglect of children through lack of food, attention, shelter and safety. Although it is true that the child whose mother is drinking is often in the care of another adult in the same family or community, this is not always the case, and therefore the child suffers. Alcohol drains the family and the community of money for essentials such as food, rent, clothing. It also creates problems of overcrowding when relatives congregate to drink, contributing to aggression and physical abuse. (Discussions in Alice Springs, Cairns and Perth.)

Alcoholism and homelessness have been identified across the country as major factors in the physical and sexual abuse of children. Although it was a "big shame" to mention incest and sexual abuse of children, this was seen as the most serious problem within the communities and one that demanded priority of attention. Not only are the adults concerned about the physical consequences of such abuse, but they are equally, if not more, concerned about the long-term effects of this situation. In particular, they express their concern that the children who experience abuse will consider incestuous sexual contact as the norm. (Discussions in Cairns and Alice Springs.)

There has been an alarming increase in the incidence of STD in all states, but especially in some communities in northern

Queensland. The link between incest, sexual abuse and STD (including AIDS), which is present among children in these communities, has led some adults to consider this abuse to be a form of genocide. One of the most disturbing aspects of this situation is the fact that it has taken just 200 short years to bring about a state that can be considered as *anomie*[2] in Durkheim's terms (Durkheim 1951). Communities that in pre-European times had a highly complex and sophisticated system of kinship and relationships are now experiencing the total breakdown of that system to the point where incest may become the norm. This is "big shame" to the Aboriginal communities that now are gathering the courage to name and deal with it. (Discussions in Cairns and Alice Springs.)

It is important to reiterate here that the problems outlined above must be seen in the context of the oppression of the Aboriginal people. They have been and in many ways continue to be an oppressed people as long as the structures of society create barriers to their having equality of access to and participation in the institutions and processes of our society.

There are children in this country who live in communities that do not have access to a *reliable supply of clean water.* These children live in communities to which water has to be carted on a regular basis in 40-gallon diesel drums because there are no wells, dams or piped water. The health risks to adults and children are significant, as the limited supply from one outlet (usually a rubber hose) is shared communally and with the dogs. The Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs provides a service that involves carting water to a number of outlying communities outside the town.[3] The health workers in the town expressed their concern about the long-term effects of the lack of access to clean water on the health of the children. (Interviews with workers at Tangentyere Council, Nganampa Health Council and Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) 27.9.88 and 2.10.88; Nganampa Health Council Health Report 1986.)

2. *Anomie* is the state of low social regulation which is the result of a disintegration or change in the social circumstances of a group. When social situations change suddenly and dramatically or slowly, so that the usual means of social control disappear or fail, individuals and the group find themselves in a situation where there are no new rules for the regulation of society. This places the society and the individual in disarray. Emile Durkheim, in his classic sociological analysis, suggested that suicides are likely to happen more frequently under these conditions.

3. *Tangentyere* is Arrernte for "Together". Tangentyere Council is a community forum through which town-campers make decisions about their lives. The endeavours of Tangentyere can be summarised as the creation of viable homes for a substantial number of Aboriginal people of Central Australia (Tangentyere Council Annual Report 1984/85).

This is a good example of the lack of essential services and facilities, which are taken for granted in contemporary society. Aboriginal children miss out on these facilities, as service providers and government bodies fail to acknowledge the need for such essential services for the communities, often passing the responsibility from one organisation to the next. In the mean time the children suffer.

In all discussions the *health* of children was identified as an area of grave concern to the communities. There was ample anecdotal information describing the appalling health situation of Aboriginal children in spite of the increasing expenditure on health. The estimated expenditure on health by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs/Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) alone (i.e. not including mainstream services used by Aboriginal people) in 1986-87 was $38.133 million. The DAA's Annual Report acknowledges that the health status of Aboriginal people, especially the children, is worse than that of the general community in almost every category, but claims that planning for improvement in health and medical services is hindered by the lack of adequate information about Aboriginal health. (DAA Annual Report 1987.)

Taking Western Australia as an illustration, statistics compiled by the Health Department of Western Australia show that while stillbirth, neonatal mortality and post-neonatal mortality fell between 1976 and 1983, the relative proportions remain high when compared with those of similar sub-groups in the non-Aboriginal population (Holman *et al* 1986 pp.55-61). The situation is similar, if not worse in other Aboriginal communities (DAA Annual Report 1986/87, p. 60; Ngananampa Health Council Inc. 1986).

Aboriginal children are living in conditions that are increasingly putting them at risk of contracting STD, hepatitis B, ear, nose and throat infections, respiratory infections, impairment that is the result of petrol-sniffing and lack of adequate food. Failure to thrive and gastroenteritis are common conditions among Aboriginal children throughout Australia.

Chronic homelessness was mentioned as a major issue and contributing factor to the poverty of the children. Although there are Aboriginal-run housing co-operatives and organisations, the accommodation needs of the Aboriginal communities throughout the country remain at crisis point. The housing boards in each state appear to be unable or unwilling to address the chronic shortage of housing for the Aboriginal communities in their states. This situation affects the range of Aboriginal communities, from the urban-dwellers to the fringe-dwelling people, as well as people in small country towns.

Families with children are forced to live in temporary, cramped accommodation in shared flats and in caravan parks. Very often they move in with relatives in the towns or cities, as the adults seek employment or medical attention for themselves and their children. These overcrowded conditions often lead to physical and sexual abuse of women and children and eventually to the eviction of all the occupants.

These conditions are not conducive to maintaining anywhere near the optimum health, safety and education standards the Aboriginal communities would like for their children. These children live in a state of physical and psychological distress, as they have to grow up with noise and lack of personal space and safety, in addition to the physical discomforts of overcrowding. It is absurd to suggest that Aboriginal people prefer it that way because of their "close relationships". Close social relationship and contact is not the same as forced physical proximity, which indeed can be harmful to social and familial relationships. (Discussions in Alice Springs, Cairns and Perth.)

Another housing-related issue that was raised was the importance of *culturally appropriate housing (i.e. housing appropriate to the lifestyle of the family) and application of technology.* The Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku (UPK) Report was completed in December 1987 as a co-operative initiative of the Nganampa Health Council Inc., South Australia Health Commission and the Aboriginal Health Organisation of South Australia, whose task was to explore the environmental and public health needs of Aboriginal communities in Central Australia (Nganampa Health Council Inc. 1987). This report explored the development of appropriate health hardware for healthy living practices, which can provide useful directions for the development of culturally appropriate accommodation for Aboriginal communities.

Another important factor that is seen to contribute to the poverty of Aboriginal children and their families is access to *employment.* Aboriginal men and women are over-represented among the unemployed (see Table 3 and Figures 3 and 4, Appendix A).

In the June quarter of 1988, *youth unemployment* among Aborigines was disproportionately high. Of all young men between the ages of 15 and 19 who were unemployed and registered for work, 6.16 per cent were Aboriginal youth. In addition, young Aboriginal men are much more likely to remain unemployed for a longer period of time than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. 9.38 per cent of young men unemployed for between nine and twelve months and 9.47 per cent of young men unemployed for more than twelve months were Aborigines. Young men of 20-24 years old are

over-represented in the unemployment figures, following the pattern for the younger men. These men are probably fathers with young families to support. The situation for young women appears to be slightly better. (Communication from the Department of Employment, Education and Training: DEET, Melbourne, August 1988.)

The *dependency on Social Security pensions and benefits as a major source of income* remains high in Aboriginal communities. According to Treadgold (1988, p. 606), in the five-year period 1978-83 the total Social Security payments made to the rural communities surveyed by Fisk (1985) increased by 64 per cent in real terms. In addition, for the period 1976-86, the real median income of Aborigines aged 15 years and over declined, while the real mean income increased negligibly and Aboriginal income per head remained a little more than half the level for Australia as a whole (Treadgold 1988, p. 607.)

The implications of this situation (i.e. the limited income and dependency of the Aboriginal community on Social Security payments) are that the community as a whole is impoverished, and living in circumstances that would be considered unacceptable by the majority of the Australian population. In addition, many Aboriginal people, young and old, are hesitant about approaching the relevant bureaucracies for the assistance for which they may be eligible. This hesitation is due to shyness and lack of confidence and also to their homelessness. These people remain dependent on their relations for food and shelter, a further drain on the resources of the family and community. Children suffer when there is insufficient money to buy food, to pay for clothes and books for school, to pay for school lunches and special excursions.

In all states, people expressed their concern about the circumstances of *grandmothers and older relatives who take on responsibility for the care of young children* whose own mothers are unable to care for them for various reasons (including chronic homelessness and alcoholism). Very often these ageing women have to bring up many grandchildren on their own limited income, usually the invalid or age pension, because the mothers of the children are not willing to transfer Social Security payments to the older women. While such children receive adequate care and a relatively safe environment, they are constantly in danger of being moved to another household.

The consultations also highlighted the *educational disadvantage* experienced by Aboriginal children, which is related not just to lack of money, but more especially to the racist attitudes of staff and peers. Aboriginal study grants provide the financial assistance to

enable young people to continue their education. While parents would like their children to remain in school, they report that their sons and daughters are being discouraged from proceeding beyond the minimum school leaving age because of the hurtful racist comments of staff and peers. (You're dumb. You'd better leave school at 15 and work for the Council like your dad! It's no use staying at school.) Children are discouraged when they see other young people in their community unable to obtain employment. The discrimination against Aborigines in the employment market actively discourages many young people from pursuing a better education. The few who follow through with their education usually have the support of their families and good role models.

However, the retention rates have improved from 9.9 per cent in 1982 to 17 per cent in 1986. The number of Aboriginal students undertaking post-school or tertiary education under the Austudy Scheme rose from 9861 in 1982 to 20 111 in 1986, and the number of qualified Aboriginal teachers increased from 72 in 1979 to over 400 at the beginning of 1987. But the retention rate of Aboriginal year 12 students is still less than half the rate of all students. (DAA Annual Report 1987, p.51.)

In Queensland the community expressed their grave concern about the *rate of incarceration of young Aboriginal people* in high-security institutions and prisons in that state. On release from these institutions, the young people were not assisted with transport back to their communities, but were left to fend for themselves in the city or towns, which were unfamiliar to them, increasing the likelihood of reoffending or becoming homeless. (Discussions in Cairns.)

Throughout these discussions there was a sense of frustration and sadness in the adults who were articulating their perception of the causes of the poverty of their children and what they saw was needed to deal with this situation. One of the persistent frustrations was the problem of gaining access to the funds to undertake projects and programs to address these issues on a long-term basis. For many, the funding processes were too rigid or too bureaucratic to allow for a flexible approach to a specific need. For others, these processes were seen as an extension of paternalism.

THE NATURE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows are detailed recommendations on Land Rights and Identity, Racism, Community Awareness and Cultural Awareness, and so on. These are followed by seven recommendations for immediate action by Commonwealth and state governments. The detailed recommendations emerged through the community con-

sultations, and are brought together under appropriate headings. They are divided into three types:

- statements of *principle*;
- *policies* that are important for governments to develop and promulgate; and
- practical *programs* to deliver services required to deal with Aboriginal child poverty.

Recommendations connected with *research* are included under the policy heading.

The material and financial deprivation of most Aboriginal people has been taken for granted by members of the Aboriginal communities, the researcher and, indeed, the wider community. The recommendations focus on some of the causes and outcomes of this deprivation for Aboriginal children. Although income security, including a guaranteed minimum income, and employment are not specifically mentioned as separate concerns, they *do remain issues.* They therefore need to be tackled as a priority, as they provide the means out of poverty. Obviously, in face-to-face discussions, immediate, pressing, personal problems are paramount.

While it is noted that further research may be necessary in some areas, it is important to ensure that future research must take into account previous studies on the subject. Any new research must be undertaken in partnership with the Aboriginal People.

The Executive of SNAICC wishes to stress the importance and deep significance of their heritage to the Aboriginal people. In particular, there is an urgent need to retrieve this heritage, maintain it, and pass it on to following generations, thereby atoning for some of the crimes and losses of the past.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Land rights and identity

Principles

That the prior right of Aborigines to this land be acknowledged by Commonwealth and state governments and that Commonwealth and state authorities implement affirmative action principles for people of Aboriginal descent.

That Commonwealth and state governments and government departments recognise the importance of linking Aboriginal children with their cultural heritage.

Programs

That the AICCAs and ACCAs and other Aboriginal organisations be given the financial support required to undertake programs that

are aimed at enhancing contact between Aboriginal children and their heritage. Camps in the bush and contact with traditional communities are especially valuable for children from urban centres.

(2) Racism, community education and cultural awareness

Principles

That the Commonwealth and state governments recognise that racism in Australia affects the life chances of Aboriginal children by denying them access to education, employment, services and facilities, and the equity of participation in activities that constitute the fabric of contemporary life in Australia.

Programs

That community education programs be undertaken to combat the racism that is blocking the development of Aboriginal children.

That the positive and successful initiatives undertaken by Aboriginal people be widely publicised throughout the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to affirm the dignity and sense of self-worth of young Aboriginal people and to provide positive role models for them.

That the Commonwealth and state governments commit themselves to educating non-Aboriginal Australians about the culture and values of Aboriginal Australians, particularly about their history and contemporary lifestyles and achievements.

That non-Aboriginal professionals and workers (e.g. schoolteachers, social workers, police men and women) be taught about Aboriginal culture and society through culture awareness programs planned and provided by Aboriginal people or in close collaboration with Aboriginal people.

(3) Water supply

Policy

That the Commonwealth, state and local governments implement a policy of intersectoral collaboration to improve the provision of all basic services to Aboriginal communities.

That the Aboriginal communities be consulted at every stage in planning for and provision of these services.

That research be undertaken into the availability of good, clean water to all Aboriginal communities in the country (with particular emphasis on the impact on the health and well-being of Aboriginal children of the current lack of access to clean water), the cost of provision of water to the communities, and the most appropriate means of ensuring that all communities have access to clean water.

Programs

That Commonwealth and state governments and local government authorities commit themselves to the provision of clean water to all Aboriginal communities.

(4) Food

Principles

That the right of all children to adequate food be acknowledged.

Policy

That the availability of fresh food be given a priority in Aboriginal communities, especially in the remote areas.

Programs

That freight charges for transport of fresh food to these communities be subsidised by state governments.

That Aboriginal communities receive appropriate funding, training and support to ensure that their children are adequately fed. (Activities could include the subsidising of a school meal program, the establishment of a community food store, and education in nutrition and food preparation.)

(5) Shelter

Principle

That the housing needs of Aboriginal people be acknowledged by Commonwealth and state authorities as a matter for urgent consideration.

Policy

That culturally appropriate housing be provided for Aboriginal people and given priority in ongoing discussion between Commonwealth and state housing ministers.

That Aboriginal communities be involved in planning for their own housing needs and be granted sufficient funding to provide for these needs, with priority given to the health, security and protection of Aboriginal children.

(6) Education

Policy

That the issue of racial prejudice in schools and the education system, especially that expressed by staff members, be investigated in each state and steps taken to counteract the situation.

That the special language needs of Aboriginal and Islander children be acknowledged by the education departments.

Programs

That education awareness programs be established to support parents of school-age children so more of those parents will be confident in assisting their children with school work.

That programs be developed, in consultation with the Aboriginal communities, to address the problem of truancy and non-attendance at school.

That the position of Aboriginal teacher aides be introduced into all primary schools with Aboriginal children.

(7) Health

Policy

That research be undertaken into the incidence of STD among Aboriginal children, and that state health authorities commit themselves to addressing this problem as a matter of urgency.

Programs

That the state and Commonwealth health authorities respond to the request for the establishment of Medical Centres/Birthing Centres in remote communities and regional areas with the provision of qualified and culturally sensitive staff to attend to the needs of the communities, to ensure that children are born in their own communities.

That the use of Depo-Provera and sterilisation as a means of contraception without the consent of the woman be examined and steps taken to stop this practice.

(8) Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Policy

That research be undertaken to determine the extent of the problem of alcohol and drug abuse (including substance abuse, such as petrol-sniffing) among Aboriginal children.

That the incidence of alcohol abuse among children, especially in the remote communities, be explored.

Programs

That appropriate Commonwealth and state funding be allocated to institute rehabilitation programs established in consultation with Aboriginal communities and agencies such as the AICCAs and ACCAs and the Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) for children who are addicted to alcohol and drugs.

That funding be provided for the appropriate support and training for Aboriginal streetworkers in all states.

That alcohol and drug education and rehabilitation programs be provided for women, and planned and managed by Aboriginal women.

That funding be provided for programs that will complement the HALT Program (now introduced in a number of communities with the provision of support for families of petrol-sniffers).

That steps be taken to combat the problem through alcohol-awareness campaigns and a rehabilitation program designed for youth.

(9) Physical and Sexual Abuse of Children

Policy

That the incidence of physical and sexual abuse of Aboriginal children and youth be explored.

Programs

That a rape crisis counselling service be established to respond to the special needs of Aboriginal youth.

That the efforts of the Aboriginal organisations to deal with the problem of sexual abuse of Aboriginal children and the increasing incidence of STD in culturally appropriate ways and in consultation with the communities be adequately funded and supported by the state and Commonwealth health authorities.

(10) Domestic Violence

Principle

That the right of the child to a safe environment within his/her own culture be acknowledged and affirmed.

Policy

That Commonwealth and state policies support the work of Aboriginal organisations (such as the AICCAs and ACCAs) that are actively involved in efforts to support and strengthen the functioning of Aboriginal families.

That Aboriginal communities be supported and funded to research the issue of domestic violence, with particular encouragement given to exploring culturally appropriate ways to combat the problem.

That the feasibility of establishing multifunctional community centres in Aboriginal and Islander communities be examined with a view to supporting women and children in the communities.

Programs

That the initiatives already taken by the communities with the support of SNAICC through the Domestic Violence Conference held in

February 1989 be actively supported by Commonwealth and state authorities.

That Aboriginal communities be supported and funded to establish safe houses or places of refuge for women and children wanting to escape from domestic violence and physical and sexual abuse.

(11) Care of Children

Principle

That each Aboriginal child be recognised as having the right to grow up with his/her family and community.

Policy

That Aboriginal communities be given greater control in the decision-making with regard to the lives of their children and the support of their families.

That the role of the AICCAs and ACCAs as Aboriginal community-based providers should be recognised and enhanced through their active involvement in all matters relevant to the well-being of Aboriginal children and their families.

Programs

That the state welfare departments fulfil their statutory obligations in the area of Aboriginal child welfare in a way that recognises their local AICCAs and ACCAs and involves them in this process in order to provide a co-ordinated support service to Aboriginal families and children in need.

That the AICCAs and ACCAs, with the support of the state welfare departments, be actively involved in the recruitment, training and support of Aboriginal foster parents.

(12) Sport and Recreation

Programs

That financial support and encouragement be given to communities to invest in sport and recreation facilities so that children in these communities can develop their sporting abilities, keep occupied, and enhance their sense of self-worth through sport.

That sporting carnivals such as the Annual Basketball Carnival in Carnarvon be actively encouraged and supported by Aboriginal organisations, local government and state authorities.

(13) Criminal Justice

Policy

That the conditions under which children are held on remand in youth detention centres and police watch-houses, and the transport and release arrangements for children from remote com-

munities be reviewed and changed to minimise the unnecessary time spent in the lock-up and the abuse of children who are being detained.

That the practice of detaining children in police lock-ups and watch-houses cease forthwith.

That the provision of adequate legal representation for children and youth appearing in court, especially for their first offence, be made a priority by the state and Commonwealth authorities.

Programs

That in sentencing women with children, alternatives to imprisonment be explored as a matter of priority, bearing in mind the cost to the family and the community of the removal of the mother from her family.

That parents of children and youth be contacted and case plans prepared as quickly as possible to minimise the time spent in detention.

(14) Support for Aboriginal Agencies

Policy

That the importance of developing human resources in Aboriginal communities be acknowledged.

Programs

That funding be provided for the training and support needs of staff of Aboriginal agencies.

That the list of nine priority areas put forward by the agencies that met in Cairns be attended to. That is:

- Increased support for the family unit.
- Community awareness programs targeted to non-Aboriginal Australians showing the achievements of Aboriginal people and showing Aboriginal people with pride in themselves.
- Challenging community values that create false expectations and which make people feel poor and helpless.
- A campaign to educate the Aboriginal community of the incidence of STD and AIDS and that sexual abuse is not normal.
- Encourage the development of Aboriginal leadership in mainstream politics, and within Aboriginal and Islander communities, to enable the identification and naming of the problems and to help communities find solutions.
- Establishment of safe houses, shelters and multifunctional centres.
- Provision of basic facilities, such as water and essential services, for communities where these facilities are not available.
- Adult education.

- Recreation facilities for all Land Trust communities.

Key recommendations for immediate attention by governments

That the following seven key recommendations be given immediate attention by the Commonwealth and state governments.

That the Commonwealth government establish a task force to implement these recommendations so that "by 1990, no child will be living in poverty".

1 That the prior right of Aborigines to this land be acknowledged by Commonwealth and state governments, and that Commonwealth and state authorities implement affirmative action programs for people of Aboriginal descent.

That the Commonwealth government and all state governments work actively towards putting into place legislation to enable the Aboriginal people to obtain Land Rights and the recognition of their cultural heritage and indigenous status. This is seen as a matter needing urgent attention for the healthy development of future generations of Aboriginal children and to rectify the injustices committed in the past.

2 That the Commonwealth and state governments recognise that racism in the Australian community is affecting the life chances of Aboriginal children by preventing their access to education, employment, services and facilities and equity of participation in these activities, which constitute the fabric of contemporary life in Australia.

That the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs in partnership with the appropriate state departments and national Aboriginal organisations establish a Bureau of Community Education to undertake the following tasks:

- make strategic plans for a National Public Awareness Campaign aimed at (a) raising the awareness of all Australians of the history, culture and positive achievements of the Aboriginal people and (b) combating racism;
- undertake the promotion of such a campaign among all Commonwealth and state instrumentalities, non-government organisations, education institutions and religious organisations and churches;
- target the media and public-opinion makers;
- develop innovative and creative ways of improving cross-cultural awareness;
- enhance the ability of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to work together to find culturally appropriate ways to deal with identified problems and issues of concern.

3 That the Commonwealth, state and local governments work towards greater intersectoral collaboration to improve the provision of basic services (especially clean water, sewerage and housing, access roads and other important infrastructure needs) to Aboriginal communities in every state.

That the Aboriginal communities be consulted at every stage in planning for and provision of these services.

That access of Aboriginal children to clean water and good food be ensured through the co-operation of government bodies and Aboriginal communities.

4 That the Department of Social Security (DSS) explore appropriate ways in which inter-familial transfers of pensions and benefits can be put in place to ensure that the primary carer of children at risk, especially the grandmothers in Aboriginal communities, receive the appropriate financial support for the children in their care.

5 That the state departments for Family and Community Services work actively with the AICCAs and ACCAs to provide non-judgmental and culturally appropriate support, assistance and encouragement to Aboriginal families in caring for their children.

That the funding of the AICCAs and ACCAs be reviewed by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services (DCS), and in the light of the expanded role the AICCAs and ACCAs play in response to the needs of children and families in their local communities, the AICCAs and ACCAs be adequately funded for this important role and function.

6 That the Commonwealth and state governments put in place policies to enhance access to employment and participation in the work force by Aboriginal people, as employment is the most direct way out of poverty.

That strategies be actively adopted to reduce barriers to equal employment opportunities, including the attitudes and practices in the government and private sectors and to create new employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

7 That the DSS work to improve the accessibility of Aboriginal people to:

- information about their rights to pensions, benefits and allowances;
- the appropriate pensions, benefits and allowances; and
- counter staff and DSS workers who are appropriately trained and sensitive to the difficulties experienced by Aboriginal people in approaching the DSS.

♦ THREE ♦

The Aboriginal perspective on child poverty

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 200 years Australian Aborigines have experienced the invasion of their country by Europeans. With this invasion came the destruction of their traditions and culture, which had evolved over the previous 40 000 years, a culture that is one of the most ancient and enduring on earth. This culture is based on deeply spiritual values, associated with the maintenance and nurturance of the environment with which each individual and the community as a whole had a very special and sacred relationship (Berndt & Berndt 1988). The highly sophisticated social interaction in that society was based on kinship structures, ordered and controlled through complicated systems of reciprocal relationships and ritual.

It follows then that the world view, as well as the relationships and explanations evolving from that world view, reflect a deep respect for the land and its creatures among which the Aborigines see their place. They are the keepers of the Dreaming, which maintains life. Rose (1987) challenges us to extend our understanding of the meaning of the land to Aborigines beyond what he suggests has emerged as "modern folklore". In his analysis of the economic basis of Aboriginal society he shows that (Rose 1987, p.47):

> as a corrective to the almost exclusive idealist interpretation by non-Aborigines, it is necessary to provide evidence that the Aborigines possessed and possess a fundamentally hard-headed or materialist attitude towards the land.

It is difficult to encapsulate the values of Aboriginal society. Bill Neidjie (Kakadu Man) eloquently expresses their relationship with the land (Neidjie, Davis & Fox 1985, p.46):

> We want goose, we want fish.
> Other men want money.
> Him can make million dollars,
> But only last one year.
> Next year him want another million dollars . . .
> him die.
> Million no good for us.

We need this earth to live because . . .
we'll be dead.
we'll become earth.
This ground and this earth . . .
like brother and mother

CULTURAL SUPERIORITY AND OPPRESSION

Australian Aborigines have been subjected to all forms of oppression, and the story of contact between Europeans and the Aborigines reflects this sad fact (Reynolds 1982, 1987). Aborigines in contemporary Australian society live with this history; their personal and community lives are deeply affected by its consequences. The blatant forms of oppression through conquest gave way to the policy of assimilation, which was premised on the view that the Aborigines were a dying race and that they would be "bred out" (Neville 1947). Children were forcibly removed from their families, their communities were divided and manipulated by the bureaucrats, and their culture and traditional practices destroyed in the name of civilisation and religion. There has evolved a paternalism through the social welfare system, which reinforces dependency (Read nd, Chisholm 1985).

However, it is through "cultural invasion" that the Aboriginal community has suffered the deepest oppression. This has occurred by means of assimilation and education into the European way of life. There has been little or no choice in this matter for generations of Aborigines who have lost contact with their cultural inheritance, and this constitutes oppression. Cultural invasion persists today as the "problems" of the Aborigines are defined in the cultural context and the language of the dominant European perspective. The right of Aborigines to define their own situations and to take the culturally appropriate steps to address these situations is the first important initiative in moving out of oppression.

Despite the serious social handicaps the Aborigines face as a result of their recent history, there are many examples of initiatives and programs that have emerged in local Aboriginal groups. These initiatives are creative approaches to Aboriginal advancement, and seek culturally appropriate methods to deal with the situation in which the Aboriginal people find themselves.

ABORIGINAL, NOT WESTERN, PERSPECTIVES

Unfortunately the language and perspective of most social research and analysis in Australia is the language of the dominant white society. Therefore it is most important, in work such as this one, which attempts to describe the situation of a seriously disadvantaged group within our society, to do everything possible to

present the picture from the consciousness of the disadvantaged group, the Aborigines. It follows, then, that the methods for gathering and sharing information and for developing strategies for change must be culturally appropriate, emerging from Aboriginal consciousness.

This approach creates numerous challenges for non-Aboriginal researchers and the white bureaucracy, which will eventually be involved in implementing the recommendations that emerge from the research. If taken seriously, these challenges could lead to an approach that in the long run may bring greater justice and equity for Aborigines.

Aboriginal people have made self-determination and self-management their priority in terms of the goals they are striving for as communities, as well as the processes adopted to achieve these goals. For this research to be true to its purpose, i.e. consultation with the Aboriginal communities on their perceptions of the poverty of their children, it is important to take the "bottom up" approach. This involves seeking direction from the communities themselves, and challenges many of the assumptions on which the needs-based planning approach ("top-down" approach) favoured by the bureaucrats involved in planning for services and programs are based.

Thus, this research begins from the premise that the opinions of the Aboriginal communities must be actively sought out, listened to and respected. Without this respect and active listening, all externally imposed plans for the communities will fail, because the people themselves are not involved, even ignored, in the provision of services. By engaging in genuine consultation with the Aboriginal communities they will be actively involved in working for change, and this itself will increase self-respect and dignity.

The argument that it is essential to consider Aboriginal child poverty from an Aboriginal perspective poses a fundamental question about the *meaning* of poverty itself. We cannot, in other words, take Western concepts of poverty as given, and assume that they are shared by the Aboriginal people. Western definitions of poverty are essentially concerned with material deprivation and, within this context, acknowledge that the poverty suffered by Aboriginal children is substantially greater than that generally experienced by the non-Aboriginal population in Australia. It is closer in fact to the situation that prevails in many Third World countries. (ACOSS 1988, McClelland 1988, Townsend 1987.)

The papers presented at the Child Poverty Conference held in Melbourne on 8-9 April 1988 provide a clear indication of the direction of the current debate on child poverty in Australia. The focus

is on the income dimensions (Brownlee & King 1988), the nature of the deprivation of children (Whiteford *et al.* 1988, Trethewey 1988), housing (Vipond 1988), labour force issues (Cass 1988), criminality (Presdee 1988), education (Connell & White 1988) and health (Hicks *et al.* 1988). These papers reflect interest in what are considered to be the main factors related to the increase in child poverty, i.e. increase in the number of sole-parent families, unemployment, housing costs, inadequate levels of government payments and wage restraint.

Researchers have acknowledged in passing that the poverty of Aboriginal people has many dimensions not yet articulated in current research on poverty. It is therefore important to examine the nature of the poverty of Aboriginal children in our society, as this could provide another approach when dealing with many aspects of contemporary Australian society.

Aboriginal people do not define poverty solely as financial deprivation. There may be other dimensions, related to the long-term oppression and racism experienced by generations of Aborigines, and experienced in the lives of Aboriginal children today through the fragmentation of the cultural and spiritual values of their parents and ancestors, and these would need to be incorporated for a full account of Aboriginal poverty.

Furthermore, it is misleading to assume that there is likely to be a single Aboriginal perspective. Many such perspectives are possible: those of Aboriginal women, men, the young, the elderly (including tribal elders), children themselves; those of people in the dominant community, which again differs according to age, gender, socio-economic status, cultural background.

For these reasons, therefore, it was decided to approach the question of poverty as an open issue, to ensure that ideas about child poverty and what it encompassed derived from different groups of Aboriginal people themselves and was not diverted from the outset by Western notions. The breadth of the definition that emerged is indicated at the end of this chapter.

IMPLICATIONS FOR METHODOLOGY: DIRECTIONS FROM ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The most valid approach to the issue is to draw on the perspective or "lens" of the Aboriginal communities in considering child poverty within the wider Australian community, and after learning from the strengths and experiences of the Aboriginal communities, to inform and suggest alternative strategies in dealing with child poverty within the wider Australian context. This constitutes a reversal of

the usual process, in which "solutions" to "Aboriginal problems" are proposed from a non-Aboriginal perspective.

The methodology that emerges from this analysis appears simple. The first step is to engage members of the Aboriginal community in defining and describing their perspective on a particular issue, in this case the poverty of their children. The next step is to document this, using their own words and descriptions, and to give this information back to Aboriginal people, preferably the same reference group from which the information is drawn, so that this reference group can reflect on the material and plan further action to bring about change.

Applying this approach to the examination of the poverty of Aboriginal children, it becomes clear that Aboriginal people must be asked for their views on this matter. It is only after this step is taken that the analysis of the situation can occur, drawing on information such as existing research on social indicators and putting this (non-Aboriginal) research in its proper perspective; that is, the Aboriginal perspective. In this way the integrity of the research will be maintained. This approach to working with oppressed people, which has been adopted and practised by the peasants of South America, has provided the basis for the work of Paolo Freire in his book *Pedogogy of the Oppressed* (1972).

Freire suggests that in order to begin the process of liberation, the oppressed must first begin to control their environment, initially by naming the elements within it, including the mechanisms of oppression. It is only after this is done that the oppressed will be empowered to deal with their oppression. Authentic praxis of liberation must involve co-operation and active participation of those who are oppressed in the process of achieving their own freedom. This process of liberation, which is a deeply humanising process, takes the form of Action, followed by Reflection on the action, followed by further Action which is the result of this Reflection.

There were two distinct phases in the gathering of information for this study, both occurring simultaneously and in parallel, each phase affecting the other. They can be correlated with the Action and Reflection phases within Freire's framework.

The first phase involved direct consultation and negotiation with the most appropriate sections of the Aboriginal community in a number of states. It was important that these individuals represented the range of experiences and types of communities, from the bush communities, which are more traditional in their ways, and "fringe-dwellers", who live in fringe-camps outside towns and cities, to urban-dwellers, who have begun to integrate into the dominant

Australian lifestyle. From these discussions emerged the priorities, issues and directions that are important to the Aboriginal communities, providing the framework within which the findings of current literature can be placed.

The second phase involved a review of current literature on the range of indicators of child poverty, particularly in relation to the situation of Aborigines in contemporary Australian society. It was then possible to apply the information gained from the literature to the issues raised in the consultations with the various Aboriginal communities and to confirm these perceptions through further contact with members of the Aboriginal communities.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF ABORIGINAL CHILD POVERTY

For the purposes of this study the term "child" includes anyone between the ages of 0 and 18 years of age. This definition was agreed upon in consultation with the Aboriginal people who provide leadership in the AICCAs and ACCAs in each of the states and nationally.

Aboriginal young people of up to the age of 18 continue to be dependent on their families and communities for support, even if they receive a separate income. Many young people receive no income from any source because of their mobility, illiteracy, their shyness about approaching bureaucracies such as the DSS and the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), and their unfamiliarity with these systems. In its recent review of homeless youth, *Our Homeless Children*, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has defined the dependent child as a person who is under the age of 18, the current age of majority in all Australian jurisdictions (1989 p.7). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child also adopts 18 as the age of majority.

Even more important than the question of the age of the child is the issue of the nature of Aboriginal child poverty. It has already been emphasised that the nature of Aboriginal child poverty, and the way it is experienced, can *only* be expressed by the members of the Aboriginal communities. From early consultations with SNAICC and the AICCAs and ACCAs the breadth of the Aboriginal perspective became clear, and was reinforced in subsequent discussions with the Aboriginal communities. It was felt that any "definition" of Aboriginal child poverty must be a broad one, which encompasses the spiritual and emotional needs of children as well as their physical needs. It must acknowledge the structural inequities that result from the racism that is deeply embedded in the consciousness of contemporary Australian society, which is predominantly European in orientation.

Aboriginal child poverty

The following definition arises from an Aboriginal consciousness of poverty that has been articulated through this research:

- The poverty of Aboriginal children must be considered in the context of the deprivation of the whole Aboriginal community. It includes the spiritual, psychological, emotional and cultural loss that has come with the failure to recognise the Aborigines' prior ownership of this land and the subsequent oppression of the Aboriginal people.
- The breakdown of Aboriginal law, culture and traditions through the structural injustice of white oppression has created a "culture of poverty", further entrenching the deprivation over the last 200 years.
- In recent times, the structural injustice has been manifested and perpetuated in government policies through inequitable funding processes, which ignore self-determination principles and self-management from an Aboriginal perspective, further marginalising and handicapping the Aboriginal community.
- Therefore when we speak of the poverty of Aboriginal children we refer first to poverty that is broader than material poverty, although it includes this material poverty. It is the deprivation that is the consequence of a loss of cultural continuity and identity as a result of dislocation from their spiritual and economic base—the land.
- In terms of the material poverty that is secondary to the loss of culture and identity, Aboriginal children are the most disadvantaged in Australia. Many suffer absolute poverty, comparable with the poverty seen in some Third World countries; poverty defined by the absence of the basic requirements of food, water, shelter, essential to the maintenance of a healthy life.
- In addition to this material poverty is the relative poverty, which Aboriginal children share with many non-Aboriginal children in this country. This poverty is described as the absence of a decent standard of diet, clothing, housing and health care, and in not being able to participate in employment, education, recreation and the family and social activities and relationships that are commonly experienced or accepted by Australians.

♦ FOUR ♦

Indicators of Aboriginal poverty

This chapter outlines some of the results of research on indicators of poverty. Although not exhaustive, it highlights and confirms the magnitude and incidence of the poverty and deprivation of Aboriginal children and supports the points raised in the community consultations. While this may seem to be a repetition of material, it has been included at the specific request of the communities and groups represented in this study.

HEALTH

The reasons for poor infant nutrition are multiple, complex and difficult for white fellas to understand, although the communities' general impoverishment must be a contributing factor. The consequences of poor nutrition are sadly visible. A growth curve which was once pleasingly upwards now levels off, has the occasional dip, sometimes sags precariously. (A survey of children aged 0-4 years in the lands [homelands] in 1984 showed that 24 per cent were malnourished and 3.7 per cent were marasmic.)

The baby who once fought infections (with mother's help) now finds herself weakened and overcome. Diarrhoea illness ("weaning diarrhoea") become common events and often result in a degree of malabsorption and chronic ill-health. Respiratory illnesses supervene, first snotty noses, then pussy ears, then pneumonia. Repeated illnesses lead to poor appetite, which leads to further illnesses and so on into a vicious circle of insidious ill-health.

For the next couple of years this girl will be a constant visitor to the community clinic . . . with dehydration secondary to diarrhoea, or with a "failure-to-thrive" label. She'll have urine tests, as there's a high incidence of hidden urinary infections. She'll have blood tests, as Hepatitis B eventually infects most Anangu, and toxoplaxhosis and cystomeglovirus infections, which are rarities elsewhere, will need to be tested for too, because they do occur in these weakened babies. Occasionally lumbar puncture will be necessary, as meningitis, too, occurs far more frequently than it does in the general Australian community.

. . . Good hygiene is difficult if you don't have access to running water, or if you have no functional toilet. Or if you have no facilities for washing clothes or bedding . . . Any people living in these conditions would become chronically ill, regardless of their race, colour, class or religious beliefs.

Housing in the communities is impractical and a major contributor to ill-health. They are poorly designed, poorly furnished, poorly built and in short supply . . .

> Food storage is such a problem that most families buy their food daily, or even twice daily, if they can afford it . . .
>
> Camp dogs rummage through any exposed food, sleep on the bedding and thereby ably assist in the spread of Hepatitis B, scabies, fleas and other infections.
>
> . . . Then she will probably develop otitis media and the consequent perforated ear-drums with pussy canals. Our last survey here indicated 72 per cent of children 0-4 years old had either one or two perforated ear-drums and all this is happening when children are so actively learning about the world around them, a time when kids are learning to speak and understand. But you can't learn if you can't hear.
>
> . . . But then life has more in store for her. There is syphilis, gonorrhoea and donovanosis that is so prevalent here that very few escape unscathed once adulthood is reached. The children leave childhood illnesses and freedom behind to take up adolescence's then adulthood [*sic*] illnesses and enormous responsibilities. The scars of childhood illnesses remain, to reap their harvest in later life. The young men, if they can avoid the sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol and petrol-sniffing, remain relatively healthy for a while. Young women are more likely to suffer with pelvic infections, urinary infections, anaemia, the complications of pregnancy. So it goes on until middle-age. (De Jonge 1986, pp.27-30.)

Introduction

The health status of Aboriginal children is much worse than that of non-Aboriginal children, a fact acknowledged by the DAA's Annual Report of 1986/87 and other reports.

While Aboriginal health status has improved over recent years, it remains inferior to that of the non-Aboriginal population. Lifestyle diseases are becoming more common. "These health problems, more of a 'lifestyle' nature, reflect the inferior social and economic status of Aborigines within Australian society. As such they are likely to be resistant to the public health approaches aimed at the control of communicable diseases and the avoidance of environmental problems" (Thomson 1984, p.715).

The health status of the children of today will have a direct effect on the Aboriginal population of tomorrow. Dr Klaus De Jonge, who worked for the Nganampa Health Council, describes the constant struggle for survival from birth to death in the outstation country in Central Australia. He refers to the situation as "a typical 'fourth world' setting where the vanquished indigenous population looks like a 'third world' people, but are surrounded by the material wealth of the modern pioneers" (De Jonge 1986, p.27). This situation is also true for the children of fringe-dwellers and for city children.

Infant mortality and life chances

The infant mortality rate for Aboriginal children is twice that for all Australian infants. The rate of 20 per thousand live births during most of the decade prior to 1986 was true for all areas in Australia,

urban and rural (Gray 1988). Mothers who were most at risk were those who had left school early and those who had a low family income (less than $9000 per annum).

Children at greatest risk were those whose mothers were young and had larger than average families, indicating that early and rapid childbearing were high-risk factors in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families.

In Western Australia, Aboriginal mothers have twice as many stillbirths as non-Aboriginal mothers. Neonatal mortality was three times higher for Aborigines than for non-Aborigines, the main cause of neonatal mortality being prematurity. Post-neonatal mortality is 3.2 times higher for Aborigines than non-Aborigines.

In Western Australia, almost 14 per cent of Aboriginal babies died betweee 6 and 12 months, compared with 5.9 per cent for non-Aboriginal infants. Infections due to lifestyle factors contributed to most of these deaths. Poor nutrition, inadequate water supply, bad sanitation and housing conditions contribute to the high infant mortality rate. This report also shows that Aboriginal children are up to 5 kg lighter and 10 cm shorter than their non-Aboriginal school-age peers. Again, environmental factors, including adequacy of diet and chronic ill-health, contribute to this situation. In the long term, as these conditions persist throughout adolescence and adulthood, affecting females of childbearing age, the life chances of the children of these young women are affected by the poor health of their mothers (Holman *et al.* 1986).

The problems of Aboriginal children begin from the time of conception and even before, as many Aboriginal women are in poor health, many suffer infertility due to pelvic infection and other infections. There are STDs among adult Aboriginal women which are a danger to the unborn child. Poor nutrition also affects the life chances of the unborn child, especially in isolated communities and fringe-camps where fresh fruit, vegetables and good meat are not readily available. If the mother continues to drink and smoke during pregnancy, the unborn child is further disadvantaged. After the child is born there are ongoing problems, especially if she is not breastfed.

The Nganampa Health Council serves nine communities and forty established homelands, totalling one-tenth of South Australia, and with a total population of 2500 Anangu (Aborigines of the area) and 400 Aboriginal people. In 1983-84, 23.9 per cent of the children in the 0-4 age-group were undernourished and 3.7 per cent were marasmic (suffering from a severe form of malnutrition). Malnutrition begins in the second half of the first year of life and continues to be marked in the next five years. This physical

deprivation during the most formative years of the children's life must have serious and lasting effects on their life chances. The Council claims that the Anungu suffer one of the highest levels of ill-health in the world (Nganamampa Health Council Inc. 1986).

No child in Australia should be living under such conditions

Gracey & Sullivan (1987), reporting on some preliminary results of their longitudinal study of growth, nutrition and health in children born into several remote Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, show that the babies grew well in their first three months of life, but this growth began to slow down between three and six months. After six months the growth rate declined more rapidly, so that by the time these babies reached their first birthday they were significantly lighter than they should have been. Many of the children were clinically malnourished, this being associated with recurrent chronic infections, such as gastroenteritis, chest infections and intestinal parasites. (Gracey & Sullivan 1987, p.59.)

These authors acknowledge the significance of environmental factors, hygiene and nutrition in the development and growth of Aboriginal children. One basic cause of the malnourishment of Aboriginal children is the lack of nourishing food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products. The problems they identify include:

- poor budgeting skills,
- price differentials of +66 per cent and more for basic food,
- inadequate knowledge about food, nutrition and health,
- income runs out within a few days and food runs short,
- inadequate domestic facilities, e.g. refrigerators,
- social problems, e.g. drunks eating all the food,
- food shortages in community stores,
- food spoilage,
- administrative problems, resulting in loss of income.

Cameron (1984), in his study of the Aboriginal communities of the Murray Valley in Victoria, found that patterns of undernutrition, low birth rate and hospital morbidity in these communities were similar to those in other Aboriginal communities in Australia. However, severe forms of malnutrition were uncommon.

He also reported that the Aboriginal community that experienced the greatest level of self-determination in relation to health, housing and social organisation, enjoyed a better nutritional status than children of a community that had few self-governing processes. *This is a significant observation which strongly supports the impor-*

tance of establishing and funding Aboriginal health services, training of Aboriginal health workers in primary health care and in community education and the establishment of Aboriginal-run nutrition programs.

In a discussion on the infant nutrition in the Aboriginal population Stergoulis (1987) places the poor nutritional health of Aboriginal children within the context of the transition from a nomadic to a sedentary life. "This has resulted in the building of an alien environment, poor socio-economic status, reduced breast-feeding, incorrect bottle feeding, the eradication of traditional bushfoods, without educating or introducing mothers to alternate or more nutritious solid foods" (Stergoulis 1987, p.27).

The change from bushfood, which was rich in proteins and vitamins and low in carbohydrates, to dependence on store foods, which include refined carbohydrates such as flour and sugar, and an increasing dependence on alcohol consumption has affected the health of Aboriginal children, putting their lives at risk. This is true of almost all Aboriginal communities, from urban Redfern to the fringe-camps of Alice Springs and Perth and the communities of peninsular Queensland and the outstations of Central Australia.

Recent research conducted in Yalata in South Australia by Dr Graeme McIntosh is reported in the *Age* (6 May 1989) to show "a situation more commonly found in reports about poverty-stricken Ethiopia than affluent Australia . . . the situation at Yalata [is] 'shameful' and one the Government cannot ignore". This research found that compared with international standards for normal growth, Yalata children between 6 and 13 were a year behind in their body size for age.

Children suffer as a result of poor infant feeding practices, including incorrect bottle feeding, vitamin and mineral deficiencies through lack of the appropriate foods in their diet, gastroenteritis and lactose deficiencies, with secondary effects on the absorption and use of other important elements in their diets, e.g. calcium.

The UPK Review (Nganampa Health Council Inc. *et al.* 1987) documented the state of the essential services, nutrition and community stores in the Anangu Pitjantjara lands and found that the community stores provided the majority of foodstuffs consumed by Anangu. It was found that the store foods provided 30 per cent of recommended complex carbohydrates, 25 per cent of recommended fibre, more than four times the recommended sugar, and three times the recommended fat intake. Intake of vitamins and minerals was inadequate. Salt intake was more than five times the recommended level (pp.64-71).

Contrary to commonly held misconceptions, the study found that there was a general awareness of nutritious foods, and that fresh fruit and vegetables were popular when they were available. Anangu refused to purchase poor quality fruit and vegetables. However the availability of nutritious food in the community food store depended very much on how the store was managed and whether or not the manager was sensitive to the needs and demands of the community (p.65).

The UPK Report also surveyed other environmental and social factors affecting the health and lifestyle of the Anangu and made some thorough recommendations to encourage and facilitate healthier living among the Anangu.

Morbidity

Morbidity among Aboriginal people in general and Aboriginal children in particular is disproportionately higher than in the non-Aboriginal population.

In South Australia the hospitalisation rate of rural Aborigines under 1 year old was between six and seven times and for urban Aborigines twice the admission rate for non-Aborigines (Nganampa Health Council Inc. 1986). In the Northern Territory 38 per cent of hospital admissions were for Aboriginal children, who comprised 32 per cent of the child population in the Northern Territory (Waddell & Dibley 1986).

Western Australian Aboriginal children under 15 years comprised 15 per cent of hospital admissions, while they represented only 4 per cent of the child population. In Western Australia in 1980 the Aboriginal infant admission rate for gastroenteritis was eleven times the non-Aboriginal admission rate, for respiratory tract infections it was more than six times the non-Aboriginal rate, and for other infections it was almost ten times the non-Aboriginal rate (Waddell & Dibley 1986).

Information presented by staff of the Yuddika AICCA in Cairns shows that the rate of paediatric admissions to Cairns Base Hospital for under 10-year-olds during 1988 has increased dramatically in one particular community (Lockhart River), where in April 1988 12 per cent of the children under 10 were in hospital. The admission rate of the under 10s in other communities in peninsular Queensland showed a pattern of fluctuation.

The incidence of STD in children is increasing at an alarming rate in some communities. Although figures are not readily available or accessible for all states, the situation of the Aurukun community in North Queensland can be taken as an indication of this trend. The incidence of STD in children in this community in-

creased by 300 per cent between 1986 and 1987/88, the incidence among girls aged from 10 to 14 years was nearly twice that among boys of the same age. There was one child under 4 years old and two children between 5 and 9 years who suffered STD during 1987/88.

In the Aurukun community the incidence of anaemia, stunting and wasting were also on the increase, especially in 1987. In that year, over 70 per cent of the 6-7-month-olds, over 30 per cent of the 6-9-year-olds and 15 per cent of the 10-14-year-olds were anaemic. The highest incidence of wasting occurred among the 5-9-year-olds with nearly 45 per cent of that age-group; 35-40 per cent of the 10-14-year-olds and 30 per cent of the 1-4-year-olds were wasted (figures presented by the Yuddika AICCA: sources undisclosed).

In Western Australia, 14 per cent of infants and 22 per cent of Aboriginal children were underweight, confirming the persistence of widespread mild to moderate undernutrition in Aboriginal infants and young children. This pattern is reflected in other states (Thomson 1984, Holman *et al.* 1986). The findings of Gracey & Sullivan in their research on children growing up in the Kimberley area in the north-west of Western Australia highlight the link between nutrition and health of children (Gracey & Sullivan 1987).

Another cause of ill-health among Aboriginal people is hepatitis B (HBV), for which there is no cure. It is spread through saliva and blood and sexual contact. Many people are carriers of HBV without being aware that they are carriers. HBV is highly infectious and can be spread by social means. Aboriginal children have a high risk of contracting the disease in the following ways:

- Neonatal: when the virus is passed from a carrier mother to the newborn baby by perinatal spread or through the umbilical cord.
- Social-family spread: when there is a carrier within the close family, and contamination of body fluids and blood occurs, e.g. through the sharing of toothbrushes.
- Sexual spread: HBV is a sexually transmitted disease and spreads easily by this method.

A pilot screening and immunisation program for children under 16 years of age in Wilcannia, NSW, funded by the DAA revealed that up to 90 per cent of Aboriginal children surveyed aged 14-16 had been infected with the virus. 14 per cent of all the Aboriginal children surveyed were active carriers, and prevalence increased with age. Babies born to mothers who are chronic HBV carriers have a 95 per cent chance of contracting HBV at birth. This can be prevented by immunising the children at birth, with a follow-up

booster vaccination in early childhood. (DAA Office circular, September 1988.)

32 per cent of Aboriginal children aged 0-9 years, compared with 1.6 per cent of non-Aboriginal children, have some form of trachoma. Trachoma is a preventable eye disease, which accounts for nearly 85 per cent of blindness among Aboriginal people (Thomson 1984).

The documented incidence of hearing loss among Aboriginal children is higher than 10 per cent, compared with 4.7 per cent in the non-Aboriginal child population, i.e. twice the rate. Otitis media (middle ear infection) occurs in 16.6 per cent of Aboriginal children under 10 years of age, compared with 1.3 per cent of non-Aboriginal children. The incidence of otitis media correlates closely with low socio-economic status and unsatisfactory living conditions (Thomson 1984).

A survey carried out by the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program team in Aparawatatja community in Central Australia in July 1985 showed that 45 per cent of under 11-year-olds had chronic suppurative otitis media (CSOM or runny ears). 85 per cent of the junior primary class were found to have unilateral or bilateral CSOM in a survey conducted in November 1985. Chronic ear infections cause hearing loss, and when it occurs during the critical years of language acquisition and maximum learning ability becomes a barrier to learning and development. Such infections have serious long-term effects on the lives of the children. (Nganampa Health Council Inc. 1986.)

Conclusions

Mortality and morbidity rates among Aboriginal children are alarmingly high and relate directly to poverty and lifestyle factors among the range of communities: urban, fringe, and bush. Too many Aboriginal children are malnourished and, as a consequence, their learning and development are seriously affected.

No child in Australia should suffer the malnutrition now experienced by these Aboriginal children. The current situation is a national disgrace. If respect is to be shown to the Aboriginal communities, concrete steps must be taken to address the loss of children to these communities and loss of potential among the children who do survive, especially through the provision of improved access to nutritious food, to nutrition education, and to health care. The introduction of any programs must be culturally appropriate, determined and provided by the Aboriginal communities themselves.

It is important that:

- both the state and federal governments acknowledge that there are Aboriginal children who suffer severe malnutrition, which affects their growth and potential to participate fully in the life of their community and our society;
- the state and federal governments make a firm commitment of funding to drastically reduce the incidence of malnutrition among Aboriginal children;
- that all steps be taken to ensure that Aboriginal children have access to good nutrition; one immediate step is to subsidise the cost of transporting fresh food to isolated communities;
- health education and nutrition programs, including both adult education programs that are community based and programs aimed at school-aged children, be established as a matter of priority, and that these programs be Aboriginal directed and run, employing as far as possible Aboriginal staff;
- communities be encouraged to operate community food stores as community-directed enterprises, providing opportunity for job creation, training and ongoing employment; these stores could also be the focus for the community-based health education and nutrition programs.

HOUSING

Introduction

Aboriginal people are the most severely deprived group in the Australian population in relation to housing needs (Aboriginal Development Commission 1988). In 1986 nearly 12,500 people (6 per cent of Aboriginal households) lived in impoverished or temporary dwellings compared with 1.4 per cent of all Australians (ABS Census 1986). Children and youth suffer most from the long-term effects of inadequate housing and homelessness.

In discussing the housing needs of Aborigines, it is important to keep the cultural context in perspective. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report *Our Homeless Children* (1989) states:

> Aborigines have repeatedly stressed that, for them, home is wherever a family member extends sustenance, whether emotional or physical.
>
> . . . although the social environment includes families, communities, homelands groups and so on, the 'domestic unit' - that is the household- actually encompasses a wide range of people, spread over a very large geographical area.
>
> Moreover, the extended family network and family obligations and expectations mean that a person even temporarily living with relatives is not 'homeless'.

The cost of providing the additional 16 179 dwellings nationally to meet the demand for adequate accommodation is estimated to be nearly $1300 million.

Housing demand

The greatest demand for housing is in Queensland, where 4715 new dwellings (houses and shelters) are needed; that is, 27.95 per cent of the total Australian and Islander housing need. Next is the Northern Territory with a need for 3515 additional dwellings (21.48 per cent of the national total). New South Wales and Western Australia follow with 3274 (19.61 per cent) and 2565 (17.47 per cent) respectively.

The following table shows the numbers of additional dwellings needed and the proportion of the total need by state:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Accommodation Needs Survey, February 1987

	No of dwellings Houses	Shelters	% of National total
NSW	3 269	5	19.61
Vic.	651	-	3.96
Qld	4 681	34	27.95
WA	2 457	108	17.47
SA	1 357	46	9.23
Tas.	56	-	0.31
NT	3 203	312	21.48
Total	15 674	505	100.00

Source: Aboriginal Development Commission, 1988.

At the 1986 census an estimated 6 per cent of Aboriginal households lived in improvised or sub-standard accommodation, compared with 1.4 per cent of all Australians. The percentage of Aboriginal households who own their own homes or who are purchasing their homes is relatively low, around 26 per cent compared with 70 per cent of all Australians.

70 per cent of Aboriginal people live in rented accommodation. Half of these rent in the public housing sector, from the state housing authority or other government body, the other half rent in the private sector. In the current housing crisis it is those who are tenants in private rental accommodation who pay the highest rents and have least security in their tenancies (ABS 1986 Census).

Living conditions

Overcrowding of accommodation is prevalent in both the public and private sectors. In addition to unsatisfactory living conditions for

the children, overcrowding leads to eviction of all the occupants, creating further homelessness and overcrowding in the homes of other relatives.

The situation described in the *Toomelah Report*, prepared by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1988, is not uncommon in other areas throughout the country:

> There are 40 dwellings in Toomelah accommodating on average more than twelve people each. This level of occupancy is four times the state average of three persons per household. Twenty-two people or more live in several dwellings and there is one three-bedroom household of thirty persons . . . The problems of overcrowding are exacerbated by the very poor standard of most of the houses in Toomelah.

A housing survey undertaken by the QEA (Queensland Electoral A) Aboriginal and Islander Community in Queensland in 1985 highlighted the housing conditions of Aborigines living in parts of Queensland (QEA Aboriginal and Islander Community 1986). This survey showed that:

- home ownership in the general community was four times higher than in the Murri (Queensland Aboriginal) community;
- 70 per cent of Murri households rely on private rental compared with less than 20 per cent in the general community;
- more than 80 per cent of the Murris who rent are forced to rent at the lower end of the rental market, because they are unable to afford higher rents and also as the result of the racial prejudice and lack of understanding by real estate agents and property owners;
- one in eight (12.5 per cent) of Murri households house eight or more people compared to 1 per cent of households in the general community;
- at least 25 per cent of Murri households live in unsatisfactory, bad or very bad dwellings;
- basic living amenities that are taken for granted by the general community are not available in many Murri households:
  - 25 per cent of the Murri households surveyed needed a refrigerator;
  - 15 per cent needed a washing-machine;
  - 20 per cent needed beds or bedding;
  - 9 per cent needed a stove or cooking facilities (although many Murris prefer to cook out of doors, some are forced to do so because of inadequate or faulty facilities).

The UPK study of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara communities and homelands (Nganampa Health Council Inc. *et al.* 1987) highlights the problems and threats to health resulting from the failure of the hardware associated with Western-style houses. In particular, the

waste-disposal systems and poor building standards contribute to the spread of disease.

Not only are the housing conditions and the facilities available to Aboriginal people sub-standard, but Aboriginal people's access to adequate housing is severely limited, even hindered, by their racial and cultural background. A study of Aboriginal people's perception of their basic needs in New South Wales (Hall & Jonas 1985) highlighted this fact and recommended:

> A major barrier to access to the private rental market is racial stereotyping and change in this area can be expected to be longer term. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs should actively promote public awareness and education programs through all branches of the mass media and through the education system to improve the portrayal of what many Aboriginal people see as an inaccurate and unfair image which leads to and perpetuates discrimination against them in the area of housing (p.155).

Housing Supply

The housing problems of Aboriginal people are directly related to their material poverty as individuals and as communities. Housing is a form of wealth that can be acquired and passed on from one generation to the next. Because fewer Aboriginal people have acquired this form of wealth and therefore cannot pass it down to their children, the community itself is materially poorer than non-Aboriginal communities, where this form of wealth-acquisition occurs.

One solution suggested by Alan Gray (1985, 1986) is to increase the funds made available to Aboriginal people, including those on low and fixed incomes (e.g. DSS pensions) and to communities, in the form of housing loans for the purchase of their own homes. Gray argues that funds are better spent in this way, because in the long-run, with the increase in Aboriginal home ownership, the wealth (assets) of the Aboriginal sector will increase. In addition, the value to the community of a rental house owned by an Aboriginal community is much greater than that of a house owned by the state housing authority, where the asset remains in the public sector. Through such borrowings, assets (wealth) can be transferred to the Aboriginal communities.

The majority of the outlay on Aboriginal housing is spent on housing in the public sector (i.e. increasing and maintaining public housing stock), which Gray argues is the most expensive form of housing provided through Commonwealth expenditure. By making funds available for the purchase of homes by Aboriginal families and communities, the next generation of Aborigines will have access to assets and better financial security than they now have.

Culturally appropriate housing

Another very important aspect of the discussion of Aboriginal housing is the availability of culturally appropriate housing options. Opinions on this point vary across Aboriginal communities. There are those who wish to develop housing that reflects and incorporates the cultural and social values of the community, while there are others who want "conventional houses", which are no different from the mainstream housing in the rest of Australia. The availability of these alternatives should not be denied to the communities, as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Each community, whether it is in the bush, town-camp or urban area, should develop for itself the style of housing that is most appropriate to its own needs.

The UPK Report, which was an environmental and public health review of the Anangu and Pitjantjatjara lands (Nganampa Health Council Inc. *et al.* 1987), highlights the need to attend to the appropriateness of housing. "A house is not a house when it is simply an expensive and inappropriate cultural artifact; more importantly, a house is not a house when it is simply a provider of health hardware" (Willis 1987, p.85).

The Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs is an example of an organisation that has been established as a co-operative of the community councils of the town-campers in the Alice Springs area, to cater for the housing and social needs of the communities concerned. The Council is a positive initiative, through which the town-campers can and do provide alternative housing and other services, which are determined by the communities themselves. It states in its first Annual Report:

> Tangentyere Council is attempting something which no other public body in Australia has had the wisdom or courage to try. We are finding a way for the town of Alice Springs to give equal value, in its physical structure, and in its social and cultural life, to Aboriginal and European values. (Tangentyere Council Annual Report 1984/85, p.1.)

The Council is an excellent example of the determination of Aboriginal communities to support each other in their attempt to provide for their particular needs in culturally appropriate ways (Tangentyere Council Annual Reports 1984/85 to present).

Conclusions

Inadequate housing of Aboriginal people is a multifaceted issue, for it *contributes to* the poverty of Aboriginal children, while it at the same time *is the consequence* of that poverty. Shelter is culturally defined not only in the use of living spaces, but also in the number of people living there and how they live there.

Aboriginal children have been inadequately served by the Australian community wherever they suffer the consequences of overcrowding and homelessness. The solutions are within the reach of community members and planners. What is needed is the ability to listen to the Aboriginal communities and to hear what they have to say about their housing needs and the political will to work with the communities to provide for these needs.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, INCOME

Introduction

In this discussion, education, employment and income are brought together, as they are closely linked as both the causes and consequences of the continuing poverty of Aboriginal children. Lack of access to adequate education, which is due to the structural barriers, social and geographical distance, is a contributing factor to the inability of Aboriginal people to fully participate in the work force. Aboriginal people are under-represented in the managerial and professional sectors of the work force and over-represented among the unemployed or not-in-the-work-force, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. Hence the income levels of Aboriginal families and communities remain lower than the Australian mean.

Education

A cultural chasm exists between the child's Aboriginal identity and early childhood and primary schooling. This chasm inevitably claims the student. Identity should be reinforced, strengthened and extended. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education should provide a positive experience which will contribute to the child's total development as an Aborigine. (National Aboriginal Education Committee: NAEC 1985, p.10.)

All people learn to behave in a manner peculiar to their own culture. Implicit in these learnt behaviours are concepts and directional thinking which maintain and promote the individual's home culture. Hence, Aboriginal children bring to primary school all the aims, aspirations and concepts developed within an Aboriginal framework. The framework disallows certain attitudes and behaviours which are implicit in the school day and general environment. This framework will continue to force Aboriginal children into failure situations unless educators begin to articulate its detail. (NAEC 1985, p.13.)

Access to secondary education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is limited mainly because of the lack of relevance which the existing curriculum holds for these students. Once the legal school-leaving age has been reached, only interesting and relevant programs will hold Aboriginal students beyond that point. If these are provided, the retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be improved. There are few incentives to encourage Aboriginal children to remain in school.

Authorities responsible for providing secondary education must encompass the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in secondary schools. For instance, the realistic aims of a rural community may not be met if the curriculum and approach taken are those chosen for

> a densely populated inner city area. Cultures should be maintained, and reinforced. Given the formal structure of secondary education it appears more difficult to accommodate cultural maintenance. (NAEC 1985, p.15)

The level of formal education attained by Aboriginal people is generally much lower than that of the non-Aboriginal population. The report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force highlights the severe educational disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal children. In the compulsory school years, one in eight Aboriginal children aged from 5 to 9 do not go to school or pre-school. One in six children aged from 10 to 15 do not have access to appropriate schooling, and the access to and participation in senior secondary school and beyond is three to five times lower for Aboriginal young people than for the community as a whole. The Task Force states:

> Aboriginal students frequently face discrimination and alienation within schools and other educational institutions, and education is often not delivered in a way which fully meets the needs of Aboriginal people. Racism is the key factor in the alienation Aboriginal people experience within various education institutions. Because of these and other adverse circumstances, the outcomes for Aboriginal people from education are substantially lower than for other Australians. (DEET 1988, p.2.)

The 1981 Census data showed that 11 per cent of Aboriginal people had never attended school compared with less than 1 per cent of the Australian population. Only 4.1 per cent of Aborigines had achieved post-secondary qualifications compared with 24.6 per cent of the Australian population (DAA 1987, p.43).

The education participation rate of Aborigines in school and pre-school educational institutions is critically lower for Aborigines (see Table 4, Appendix A). The state and territory differences in Aboriginal school and TAFE participation rates in 1986 show a marked variation between states (see Table 5, Appendix A). Tables 6 and 7 and Figure 5 (Appendix A) highlight the fact that while Aboriginal participation has increased in the last decade, it still remains significantly lower than the participation of all Australians. The retention of secondary school students doubled between 1976 and 1986.

While there has been a steady increase in the number of Aboriginal people in teacher training courses, there is a particular need for professionally qualified Aborigines in fields that have been identified as being of special significance to Aborigines. These fields include law, medicine, nursing, management and administration, linguistics, anthropology, communications, social work, economics, politics, environmental science and education (NAEC 1986, p.23).

The National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC 1986, p.1) noted that:

- Aborigines remain the most starkly under-represented group in tertiary education in Australia.
- At the end of 1982 there had been 277 Aboriginal graduates and diplomates, including 74 with degrees. Over half of these awards have been in teaching.
- In 1983 fewer than 800 Aborigines were enrolled in higher education award courses; if Aboriginal participation had been at the same rate as the general population there would have been more than 3600 enrolments. Over half the enrolments were in teaching courses and a higher proportion than in the general population was enrolled in associate diploma courses rather than degree courses.
- 69 per cent of Aboriginal students enrolled in award courses in November 1983 were in institutions with enclave support programs, (i.e. programs that give special support to Aboriginal students and take into account their particular learning needs).
- Many of the students at the TAFE level appear to be in part-time "hobby" courses and relatively few are enrolled in certificate courses. Much of the increase in the number of Aboriginal study grants appear to be in "hobby" courses.
- Little work has been done on the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the special measures for Aborigines in tertiary education.

The provision (or lack of provision) of educational services to Aboriginal children has had a history that can be traced to the earliest contact with Europeans, and which parallels the disintegration of the social structure and culture of Aboriginal communities. Education has been one of the most powerful tools of cultural invasion whereby the values of Aboriginal communities have been replaced by non-Aboriginal values.

The question of the provision of culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal children is a vexed one. Aboriginal education must be based on pedagogy (teaching approach and methods) and epistemology (world view) that reflect Aboriginal values. Yet it is at least equally important that Aboriginal children be educated for living in Australia of the twentieth century and that they be equipped to participate fully in the life of the nation through access to employment, recreation and life choices.

In its statement of national policy and national aims NAEC states the value of acknowledging cross-cultural differences and promoting programs for cross-cultural understanding that value the uniqueness of Aboriginal culture (NAEC 1985). The statement also stresses the importance of self-determination and active participation of Aboriginal people in developing education policy and

practice. (See Appendix B for statement on national philosophy and national aims.)

NAEC, in another report, stressed the necessity of Aboriginal self-determination and greater Aboriginal representation and involvement on decision-making bodies on education services for all Australians. "A basic reason for the relatively limited participation and success of Aborigines in education is that decisions continue to be made by non-Aborigines" (NAEC 1986 p.10).

Despite the efforts of bodies such as NAEC, governments, both Commonwealth and state, are moving towards mainstreaming Aboriginal education. The justification for this move is that the Aboriginal retention rates have not improved drastically in spite of the considerable amount of funding that has been allocated to education since the early 1970s. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated considers this to be "a return to the assimilation or 'mission' education . . . and reflects the governments' ethnocentric view of the education process, its outcomes, as well as illustrating a complete lack of understanding or knowledge of Aboriginal lifestyle and aspirations" (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. 1988, p.2).

The educational disadvantage that Aboriginal children suffer stems from their minority status within a predominantly white Australian culture, which has embedded in it strong racist values. In order to reverse this situation of disadvantage it is important to ensure that education that is culturally relevant to the Aborigines reinforces the values and culture of the Aboriginal communities, and, in so doing, improves the confidence and self-esteem of the individual children to enable them to take an active and valued place in Australian society. Aboriginal children, who comprise half the Aboriginal population, should be valued for themselves and for their potential as future contributors to the life of our Australian society. Therefore the task facing educators is a serious one. According to Don Edgar (1986, p. 45):

> The task facing educators working with "the disadvantaged" is not to be fooled by the "disaster image of poverty", nor by the doom and gloom misreadings of research on family background and school achievement. The task is to mount a war on the poverty of spirit that results not only from economic hardship but also from the rejection and disrespect of the system at large. Schools can and should create pockets of resistance, that fight this poverty of spirit by building on the skills and talents that every child and every parent has, by developing the sense of competence that arises from successful mastery and the legitimate exercise of control.

According to the DEET (1988, p. 17):

> The most important objective in developing a policy on Aboriginal education is to achieve equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in participation at all levels of education by the end of the century. Educa-

tion opportunities must be available to all Aboriginal people in a manner that is appropriate to the diverse cultural and social situations in which they live. It is through education that Aboriginal people are going to improve their rate of participation in employment and hence move out of the material poverty in which such a large proportion of the population are trapped.

Employment

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered disproportionate rates of unemployment and a chronic inability to fully participate in the work force. This situation has developed as a result of the history and circumstances of the colonisation of Australia by the British. Since the mid 1970s the decline in the economy and especially the changes in the rural sector have further exacerbated the unemployment and labour force participation of Aboriginal people.

The Australian Government's Aboriginal Employment Development Policy Statement acknowledges that Aboriginal people are the most disadvantaged group in the Australian labour market as:

- only one-third of Aboriginals of working age (15 years and over) are employed, compared with nearly two-thirds of other Australians of working age;
- the Aboriginal employment that does exist is concentrated in lower-skilled and lower-paying jobs that are frequently casual, temporary or seasonal, or jobs that are disappearing from the labour market;
- just over 2 per cent of Aborigines who have jobs are self-employed, compared with the national rate of nearly 15 per cent;
- Aboriginal unemployment is at least five times the national unemployment rate;
- nearly one-third of all Aborigines of working age are dependent on the unemployment benefit for income, six times the national rate;
- the incomes of Aboriginal people are, on average, almost half that of other Australians.

Figure 4 (Appendix A) shows the over-representation of unemployed Aboriginal people registered with the CES at March 1987. In all states except Tasmania, the percentage of Aborigines who were registered with the CES was proportionately more than twice that of all Australians.

The majority (75 per cent) of the Aboriginal population live in other than major urban centres, i.e. other urban centres, rural localities and homelands (Table 2, Appendix A). The Aboriginal population is young, with nearly half the population under 19 years old at the time of the 1986 Census collection (Figures 1 and 2, Appendix A). These demographic factors accentuate the difficulties

Aborigines, especially the young people, experience in participating in the labour force.

In this discussion, *incidence of unemployment* is the term used to indicate the percentage of the population that is unemployed, and the *unemployment rate* refers to the percentage of the labour force which is unemployed.

The CES Review of Aboriginal Unemployed, undertaken by the Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations in 1983 (DEIR 1983), highlighted some of the patterns of unemployment among Aborigines. This survey was based on the records of the CES and therefore is limited to those Aborigines who were registered with the CES at the time. The survey showed that at 6 June 1983, of the 21 029 Aborigines registered with the CES, less than a quarter (23 per cent) were females. The Aborigines were mainly from Queensland (25.4 per cent), New South Wales (24 per cent), the Northern Territory (23.1 per cent) and Western Australia (16.7 per cent), while South Australia (6.2 per cent), Victoria (3.4 per cent), Tasmania (0.9 per cent) and the ACT (0.3 per cent) provided a smaller proportion of the registrants. This distribution reflects the distribution of the Aboriginal population across the states (see Table 8 and Figure 6, Appendix A).

The education levels of Aboriginal registrants was generally low: 3.5 per cent had no formal education and 14.1 per cent had primary school education only. Of the 52.7 per cent who were educated to secondary level, 3.2 per cent had completed year 11 or 12, 17.5 per cent had completed year 10 and the other 32 per cent had completed the lower levels of secondary education only. Only 1.4 per cent had reached tertiary level and in 28.3 per cent of cases the education level was not known.

The registrants surveyed had low level of skill, being mainly in the manual/unskilled area (44.3 per cent), rural (17.7 per cent) and service (13.2 per cent) areas. The majority of women were concentrated in the service, clerical and sales area, while the men were concentrated in the basic manual, rural and trades and construction areas. A high proportion of the sample experienced long periods of unemployment, with 37.5 per cent having been registered for nine months or more.

While there was a substantial flow of Aborigines through the CES, only a small proportion are referred to jobs or placed by the CES. Many allowed their registration to lapse for a variety of possible reasons, including their inability to cope with the bureaucratic requirements of the CES, their mobility or their lack of hope of getting a job. The low rate of placement could be due to

prejudice within the CES in relation to Aboriginal registrants, prejudice within the community and among potential employers, who prefer not to employ Aboriginal people, and the lack of preparedness for participation in the work force.

The Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs (Miller Report 1985), drawing on 1981 Census figures, described the severe education, employment and training disadvantage suffered by Aborigines. Less than 50 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over were participating in the labour force in 1981. The proportion of Aboriginal people aged 15 years or more who were participating in the work force declined from 42 per cent to 36 per cent between 1971 and 1981, while the proportion recorded as unemployed increased three times. Those who were most severely affected were the youth and the older people aged 45 and over (Miller Report 1985, pp.46-50).

At the 1986 Census 32.5 per cent of the Aboriginal population aged from 15 to 65 stated they were employed, 18 per cent said they were unemployed, and 44 per cent were not in the labour force (ABS Table CA0052). The 1986 Census figures also show that 0.9 per cent of the Aboriginal population over the age of 15 have a tertiary qualification and around 3 per cent hold a trade certificate (ABS Table CA0057). Most of the employed Aboriginal males were engaged in labouring and related work, 4 per cent were engaged as managers and administrators, and 4 per cent were working as professionals. The majority of Aboriginal women in the work force were employed in lower-paid occupations, as clerical workers in the service industries and in labouring work (ABS Table CA0062).

Information provided by DEET Central Office show that for the June quarter 1988 Aborigines are over-represented in relation to the percentage of unemployed and waiting for work:

- 6.16 per cent of unemployed males and 4.56 per cent of unemployed females aged 15-19 were Aborigines;
- 9.47 per cent of the unemployed males and 7.46 per cent unemployed females aged 15-19 years without work for twelve months and over were Aborigines, while 9.38 per cent of males and 6.41 per cent of females without work for between nine and twelve months were Aborigines;
- 8.27 per cent of unemployed males aged 20-24 who were without work for more than twelve months were Aborigines,
- 5.71 per cent of all unemployed males and 3.58 per cent of females aged 20-24 years were Aborigines,
- 4.82 per cent of all unemployed males and 3.55 per cent of all unemployed females above the age of 15 were Aborigines.

Aborigines are under-represented in relation to the percentage of those placed in jobs by the CES during the June quarter 1988. Aboriginal people comprised 2.14 per cent of all those placed in employment through the CES. The figure is higher for the country areas (3.88 per cent) than for the metropolitan areas (1.16 per cent).

The link between education and employment becomes apparent when the relationship between employment rates for Aboriginal people and education qualifications is examined. Table 9 (Appendix A) shows that the higher the education level achieved, the more likely the person is to be employed. The employment rate of Aborigines with higher degrees and postgraduate awards is comparable with that of all Australians in that category, 82.4 per cent of Aborigines with higher degrees in 1981 and 83.1 per cent in 1986, compared with 84.6 per cent for all Australians with higher degrees in 1981. The gap widens the lower the level of education.

The official figures for Aboriginal unemployment and participation in the labour force are an underestimate of the true situation, as there is a high incidence of *hidden unemployment*. Many Aboriginal people who are not considered to be in the labour force are interested in gaining meaningful employment, but are not actively seeking employment because of the depressed state of the local labour market or their own sense of hopelessness.

The significance of the differences between Aboriginal unemployment and unemployment in Australia generally is that, proportionately, Aboriginal unemployment is five times higher than unemployment in the general population, and Aboriginal teenagers can expect to experience worse unemployment than teenagers in general. Therefore, given the high incidence of long-term unemployment in the Aboriginal population, Aboriginal young people face a bleak future if they are not sufficiently trained or if they have not completed their education beyond the compulsory school-leaving age. Many young people recognise this fact, and this, together with the other aspects of their lives, including their chronic poverty, the incidence of alcoholism and imprisonment give them little hope of change in their situation.

Ross in his study of Aborigines of rural New South Wales (1987, 1988) examined data on 677 working-age Aborigines from a number of localities in New South Wales between November 1986 and July 1987. Among the causes of Aboriginal unemployment he lists:

- the concentration of Aborigines in the rural areas;
- the loss of access to traditional land, necessitating greater reliance on the formal economic system;

- the loss of employment with white farmers as a result of the decline in agriculture and the trend to greater mechanisation of farming;
- low levels of inherited economic wealth and a high level of reliance on the Social Security net;
- low levels of access to higher levels of formal education and a low level of educational achievement; and
- low levels of job related skills (Ross 1988, p.1).

The results from this study reflect and parallel the national picture of Aboriginal employment or lack of employment:

- 73 per cent of the men and 35 per cent of the women participated in the labour force;
- most of the labour force participants were unemployed;
- the *incidence of unemployment* was 55.8 per cent for males and 23.2 per cent for females;
- 17.7 per cent of males and 12.3 per cent of females were in paid employment;
- 23.3 per cent of employed males and 45.7 per cent of employed females had part-time jobs;
- the *unemployment rate* was 75.9 per cent for males and 65.3 per cent for females (Ross 1988, pp.2-3).

Ross's data also showed that employed Aborigines were usually in jobs with poor employment conditions, low job security and low pay. Of those employed at the time of the survey, only 38 per cent had been employed for the whole of the preceding twelve months. Although the gap between the pay of full-time and part-time employees was small, the conditions of work and job security of full-time workers were much better than for the part-time workers. 44 per cent of full-time workers had worked for the whole of the previous year and another 21 per cent had worked between six and twelve months, whereas only 25 per cent of the part-time workers had worked a full year and another 15 per cent had worked between six and twelve months.

Unemployment rates for young people were 83 per cent for teenage males and 73 per cent for teenage females. The unemployment rate for males aged 21-30 years was 78 per cent.

Ross suggests that "in the absence of access to any alternative sources of income, teenage males remain in the labour force and undertake active job search in order to be eligible for the unemployment benefit rather than in any real hope of finding employment" (Ross 1988, p.9). It is also interesting to note that married people were more likely to be in employment.

Unemployed Aboriginal people in rural New South Wales were more likely to have been unemployed for longer than nine months. Long-term unemployment is a serious problem for Aboriginal people. The survey showed that:

- 75 per cent of the unemployed Aborigines had been without a job for all of the previous year;
- 15 per cent had been unemployed for at least nine months;
- 11 per cent had been unemployed for less than nine months in the previous year;
- 50 per cent had not had a job for at least two years;
- 9 per cent left their last job between one and two years ago;
- 21 per cent had never had a job.

Both Ross's study and the Miller Report point to the development of policies that must improve the participation of the Aboriginal population in the labour market so that they can, in the long run, move out of entrenched poverty. One direction is the development of Aboriginal-run development enterprises that create and sustain employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and communities. More and more Aboriginal people and communities are being encouraged into entrepreneural veritures and self-employment, which will enhance their economic status. But, above all, one of the surest ways out of poverty is through education and appropriate training in job-related skills.

Much more can be done to improve access for Aboriginal people to the information and services within the public sector by giving attention to the ways in which Aboriginal people communicate and use (or fail to use) the existing facilities. Service providers, especially those in positions of primary contact, (e.g. counter officers and employment officers), need to be sensitised to the special needs of Aboriginal people.

The private employment sector must be given greater encouragement to employ Aboriginal people in positions of responsibility, and not just in low-paid, low-status positions, a situation that reflects many of the negative stereotypes still held about Aboriginal people.

The Government has stated that the overall objective of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy is to assist Aboriginal people to achieve broad equity with other Australians in terms of employment and economic status and in a way that is consistent with Aboriginal cultural and social values, recognising the importance of self-determination.

It is hoped that this policy will achieve:

- employment equity with other Australians and increase the proportion of Aboriginal people who are employed from 37 per cent to 60 per cent;
- doubling of the median income of Aborigines, thus achieving income equity;
- equitable participation in all levels of the education system;
- a reduction in the level of welfare dependency to that which is commensurate with other Australians, i.e. unemployment benefit reduced from 30 per cent to 5 per cent of the working-age population (Aboriginal Employment Development Policy: Policy Paper No.1 1987).

The Government has made this commitment to the Aboriginal people. It must be reminded of this commitment and its responsibility to ensure that the policy is implemented, as it will have a lasting impact on the future and life chances of Aboriginal children and youth.

Income

On average, Aboriginal people earn half the income of other Australians and therefore Aboriginal communities as a whole are materially poorer than their non-Aboriginal neighbours. Treadgold (1988) suggests that some of the factors that have been affecting the estimation of mean and median Aboriginal income, including the differences between the income of males and females, have been:

- the decline in the real value of youth and single person unemployment benefits, and other Social Security benefits;
- the increase in the number of young Aboriginal people aged 15 to 19 who comprise the total Aboriginal male unemployed population;
- the increase in the real mean income of Aboriginal females, reflecting the growth in the proportion of unemployed young females who are receiving unemployment benefits;
- the greater availability of Social Security pensions and benefits in remote communities;
- increased duration of periods on unemployment benefit;
- increase in the number of Aboriginal students on Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme and the Aboriginal Study Grant Scheme;
- increased income from royalties and other physical and financial assets;
- increased numbers of Aboriginal people in the higher income brackets, though the numbers in this category are still small.

Figures derived from the 1986 Census show that 56 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over received an income of be-

tween $0 and $9000 annually, 18 per cent received and income of $9001-$15 000, and less than 1 per cent received an income of $32 000 and over (ABS Table CA 0051). Around one-third of Aboriginal households received an household income of less than $15 000 per annum.

Of the Aboriginal people who receive an annual income of $0 to $9000, 58.2 per cent were females and 41.8 per cent males. The distribution reverses and the proportion of women who receive higher incomes decreases steadily until 17.8 per cent of those receiving incomes of $40 000 and over are females and 82.2 per cent are males. Two-thirds of Aborigines aged 15 years and over who were not in the labour force were females, the proportion being similar in most states. The majority of this category received an annual income of less than $15 000. (See Tables 10 and 11, Appendix A).

This point is of interest in the discussion of child poverty as it is the women who usually bear the bulk of the responsibility for the care of children in the community. These figures show that, as a group, Aboriginal women have a lower income than Aboriginal men.

Fisk (1985 pp.104-5) has identified three categories of Aborigines who are not poor in terms of income:

- *the better-off Aborigines* who have relatively high incomes (at the 1986 Census there were 818 Aborigines who stated their income was more than $32 000 per annum, and 337 who stated their income was more than $40 000 per annum);
- *the full-time wage earners* who have access to a regular income;
- *outstation residents* whose income from Social Security benefits or other sources (e.g. royalties) can be supplemented with non-monetary income from hunting, gathering and the production of artefacts. Aborigines living on homelands have little to pay for except consumer goods and equipment to supplement their hunting and gathering activities. Fisk has shown that the imputed value of their income is equivalent to that of urban Aborigines and higher than that of recipients of Social Security pensions and benefits.

From this discussion it becomes obvious that the Aborigines who are financially poorest are those receiving Social Security pensions and benefits, especially the women, who have the responsibility for the care of the children of the community, including the older people who are not employed or who are on age or invalid pensions. This latter category includes the grandmothers in the communities, who also bear the responsibility for the care of the children.

However, income alone should not be taken as the sole determinant of poverty, as other factors, including the inability of

housing assistance to keep pace with the need, the failure (through ignorance, isolation or mobility) of Social Security pensions and benefits to reach those who are entitled to them. Alcohol, drug abuse and gambling, all contribute to the poverty of the individual and the community (Fisk 1985, p.106).

As discussed elsewhere in this report, one of the most insidious causes of poverty among the Aborigines is racism, which is born of ignorance and arrogance.

Every effort must be taken to ensure that all Aborigines who have an entitlement to income security through pensions or benefits from the DSS and other entitlements through other government departments, do receive them. This entails:

- attempting to reach Aborigines in all communities through an improved outreach and communication program;
- improving the training and cross-cultural sensitisation of staff of all departments in the government sector handling Social Security, housing, employment, education and training (an example of initial steps in this area is the Protocol prepared as part of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer Induction Package for use in the DSS);
- adapting programs to cater for the special cultural and social needs of the Aboriginal people;
- training Aboriginal people to prepare them for employment in the government and non-government sectors;
- employing Aboriginal people at all levels to develop and execute all aspects of government programs and schemes.

CHILD PROTECTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Aboriginal children are over-represented in child welfare and juvenile justice institutions. The number of Aboriginal children who are state wards or in the care of the state is also disproportionately high, e.g. in 1987, nearly 40 per cent of children on guardianship orders in Western Australia and 24 per cent of state wards in South Australia were Aboriginal children (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989).

In Western Australia, while 2.7 per cent of the state's population is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background (Census 1986), 77 per cent of the inmate population at the maximum security institution for girls, 53 per cent of the inmates in maximum security for boys, and 62 per cent of those held in remand and detention centres for boys and girls were Aboriginal young people (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989).

Contact with the DCS begins early in most cases, with children considered to be in need of care and protection because of neglect

and/or abuse. Once the DCS becomes involved, the family could receive extensive home-based care or the child removed from the family environment for its own protection. A recent study has shown that in Western Australia nearly a quarter of all child protection cases reported/notified (22.5 per cent) were Aborigines. Of these allegations, 68.2 per cent were found to be substantiated by DCS officers. By comparison, only 45.5 per cent of the reports/notifications involving children of non-Aboriginal or unknown ethnic origin were substantiated. Of the 103 Aboriginal children whose abuse was substantiated, 84 (81.5 per cent) were considered to be at risk or neglected, compared with 51 per cent of non-Aboriginal children. Only 9 (8.7 per cent) of the 103 Aboriginal children were sexually abused compared with 25 per cent of the non-Aboriginal children. These results highlight the fact that Aboriginal children are at higher risk of (being judged as) being neglected or abused (Thorpe 1989).

The report also showed that among the services offered to families of children at risk or where the abuse or neglect has been substantiated, home-based services were offered in 42.5 per cent of the cases. Home-based services included material and practical assistance, i.e. financial assistance, homemaker service, child care and transport, as well as advice, guidance or treatment. It is interesting to note that 24 of the 38 children who came into substitute care after receiving home-based services were Aboriginal children who were considered at risk or neglected. All these children came from remote north-western communities where access to support services was extremely limited. In most cases it was not possible to do more than give warnings through dialect-speaking health and educational personnel who occasionally visited the region. All but one of these children was placed within the kinship network (Thorpe 1989, p.20).

In a ministerial statement to Parliament on Juvenile Justice on December 1987 the Hon. Kay Hallahan, Minister for Community Services, indicated that the incarceration rate of Aboriginal young people into maximum security institutions in Western Australia was 33 times that of non-Aboriginal young people. For the period 1 July 1986 to 30 June 1987, Aboriginal young people comprised 4 per cent of the total youth population of Western Australia, yet they made up:

- 362 of the 975 (37 per cent) children placed under the *guardianship* of the DCS;
- 191 of the 337 (57 per cent) children placed under the *control* of the DCS;
- 75 of the 145 (52 per cent) children placed on *probation*;

- 1053 of the 2537 (42 per cent) of the *population of Longmore*, the maximum security juvenile institution for remand and training in Western Australia.

The situation in Longmore is particularly worrying. In spite of the fact that a very high proportion of the population of Longmore were Aboriginal young people, at June 1987 there was only one Aboriginal person employed on a permanent, full-time basis. Longmore has 57 staff members. Furthermore, Aboriginal young people from the Goldfields, East and West Kimberleys, Murchison and the south-west of the state far outnumbered the non-Aboriginal young people from those areas who were in Longmore. (WA ACCA Report to SNAICC April 1988.)

The situation of youth detention and involvement with the welfare and juvenile justice systems is similar in most states. Many Aboriginal young people who become caught up in the welfare and juvenile justice systems soon slip into the "welfare drift", in which they move into more serious offending behaviour and eventually criminality. Many young people know no other life and end up in prison. Early and repeated encounters with the law have a lasting effect on the life of young Aborigines, in most cases determining how they will be treated by the justice system in the future.

The National Prison Census at June 1986 showed that Aborigines made up 14.5 per cent of the prison population Australia-wide. In proportion to their numbers in the population, Aborigines are ten times over-represented in the prison population. The offences for which Aboriginal people were most likely to be in prison were: offensive behaviour and offences against good order, assault, driving and property-related offences and justice procedures offences (e.g. contempt of court and breach of bonds). Alcohol-related violence is the most significant feature of crime committed by Aborigines. The imprisonment rate of Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal women, has steadily declined over the past five years (Australian Institute of Criminology 1988b).

10 per cent of the Aboriginal deaths in custody were of young people aged 15-19 years, reflecting the vulnerability of Aboriginal young people who are deprived of their liberty (Australian Institute of Criminality 1988*a*).

The impact of the removal of the young people from their own community and family environments has a long-term and damaging effect on the families and communities as well as the young people themselves (Sykes 1985, p. 23):

> I am personally very tired of reading articles and statistics that speak only to the impact of Black criminality on the justice system—the number of Blacks in the prison population, for example. If we were conducting an ex-

ercise motivated by the best interests of the Black community, the manner in which the information is gathered would be very much different. We would measure instead the extent of damage done to the Black community by the incarceration and loss of so many of its people. We would talk about the effect of having one quarter and one fifth of all Black males between the ages of 15 and 30 caught up in the justice system. Prison population statistics are a very crude indicator of the extent of damage being done to the Black community. For every one Black male sitting in prison, there is at least one more, maybe two, outside and in stress because of impending charges and possible conviction; or acting frantic in the Black community trying to get the money together to pay fines; or wandering around unable to take care of his family obligations because, with a criminal record, we cannot make it in an already tight job market.

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Community consultations

This chapter describes the outcomes of the meetings between the researcher and members of the various communities and individuals from Central Australia, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. New South Wales and Tasmania were not included in the consultations because of the limitations of time and funds. In addition, the researcher was specifically invited by the AICCAs and ACCAs of the first named states to discuss Aboriginal child poverty. These outcomes of the discussions are recorded on a state-by-state basis and in summary form. In this way regional patterns, differences and similarities can be identified.

Every attempt was made to record faithfully the feeling and content raised by the interviewees and participants in the discussions. Most of the issues they raised were deeply painful to the individuals and communities. References and additional statistical information included in this section have been provided by the interviewees and are recorded in the context of the discussions in which they were presented.

This chapter is therefore a record of the issues, analyses and recommendations provided by members of the Aboriginal communities that were visited, and not an analysis of the observations of the researcher who visited the communities for an extremely limited period of time. Nevertheless, the limited observations of the researcher confirmed the reports made by the Aboriginal people.

Appendix C lists the individuals, community groups and organisations in each state with whom contact was made. Appendix D outlines the research procedures as well as the process of consultation in each of the states visited by the researcher.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The researcher was based in Western Australia and was in contact with Aboriginal research advisers and the staff of the Western Australia (WA) ACCA. Separate meetings were held with individuals with particular interest and expertise in the area of Aboriginal health and welfare.

The comments provide an indication of the range of problems faced by Aboriginal people throughout the state. In the following section some of the differences between the experiences of the metropolitan Aborigines and those of the Aborigines in the country areas, including the remote communities, are highlighted. Many problems, such as the lack of adequate housing and problems that are a consequence of this, seem to be common throughout the state, while the more remote communities experience the problems related to their geographical isolation.

In discussions in Perth, interviewees highlighted the fact that Aborigines, especially those in the south-west (Nyoongahs), suffer deprivation that is more than just material deprivation. Their deprivation and poverty is related to the loss of their land and their connection to their land. This loss has occurred since white occupancy of Western Australia. There was a strong feeling among those who offered their opinion, including Mr Robert Bropho, a leader of a group of fringe-dwellers, that Aboriginal people need the restoration of Land Rights and the signing of a treaty, which is seen as an important gesture towards reconciliation between white and black Australians.

Interviewees reiterated that generations of Aboriginal children have suffered the loss of their families and the link with their Aboriginal culture and society. They have been disconnected through the deliberate policy of assimilation actively implemented in this state from the turn of the century. "Nyoongahs have a culture, and culture is dynamic. We don't have all the 'assets of our culture', which include land, language, identity, art—the intellectual, cultural and spiritual property. But we can still say we own them psychologically and unconsciously" (Ted Wilks, Director, AMS, Perth).

The researcher was told that throughout Western Australia Aboriginal families experience common problems, such as lack of access to housing, education and employment. Alcohol abuse and gambling affect the children, as these habits limit the amount of money available in the households for essentials such as food, rent, power bills, clothing and requirements for school. Children suffer from a lack of good food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables, not only because of the added expense due to the cartage costs, but also because the money is not there to purchase these essentials. The health of the children suffers; children fail to thrive and become hospitalised.

The removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities by officers of the DCS because these children are considered to be neglected is of concern to the Aboriginal com-

munity in Western Australia. While efforts are being made to keep Aboriginal children within the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal people who were interviewed felt that there is also the responsibility on the part of DCS to give practical support and encouragement to Aboriginal families and individuals to enable them to care for their children themselves.

Almost all those who were interviewed commented that overcrowding, the result of the chronic shortage of adequate housing, places the Aborigines at an immediate disadvantage. Lack of adequate housing plus alcoholism and chronic gambling contribute to the deprivation of Aboriginal children.

Ted Wilks, director of AMS in Perth, pointed out that, in the south-west, Nyoongahs tend not to approach hospitals unless they are very sick. There is a psychological distance, which is as great in its effect as the geographical distance experienced by Aborigines in the north of the state. Many white or non-Aboriginal professionals (e.g. school teachers) lack understanding and empathy, increasing rather than decreasing the psychological distance experienced by the Aborigines. Aboriginal families lack confidence when approaching their children's schools for a number of reasons, including their own lack of education, even though they may be very interested in furthering their children's education.

In the north-west and the more remote areas of the state, environmental conditions such as inadequate water supply, sewerage facilities and building maintenance are a major contributing factor to the incidence of ill-health among the children and the whole community. In the northern parts of the state, children as young as 13, 14 and 15 are suffering from STD. In the Kimberley and Pilbara areas 30-40 per cent of children suffer from severe hearing problems. (Ted Wilks, Director, AMS, Perth.)

Ted Wilks had recently visited a number of communities in the northern part of the state as a member of the National Aboriginal Health Working Party, and he stated that remote Aboriginal communities do not have the same services (such as roads) as other small towns because of the lack of commitment from the local government authorities and state government to provide these services. This is in striking contrast with the provision of such services for new mining towns in the state.

Another problem that directly affects the lives of the children is the lack of recreational opportunities. There are no swimming pools, basketball courts, football grounds in these remote communities. Some remote communities may have table tennis or pool tables. Where some recreation facilities are available, there are limited financial and other support for their upkeep and to en-

courage families and children to use the facilities. Children face discrimination when they attempt to use public recreation facilities.

There is concern that children grow up taking these poor environmental conditions for granted as they know no better. Good models of healthy family living are not easily accessible, and so the experience of children who grow up under these conditions is limited as severe material deprivation becomes the norm. Ted Wilks considers it is vital to take a holistic view of health, which goes beyond the absence of illness. This is what Aboriginal people have not been able to achieve because of the disadvantage they have suffered for generations.

WA ACCA is involved in providing a service to the street kids in Perth. Workers at WA ACCA report that over 50 per cent of the street kids in the city are Aborigines, some as young as 8 and 9 years old. Many of these young children are the victims of the drug and alcohol abuse of their parents and have become abusers themselves. The workers consider that the community needs rehabilitation programs, recreation facilities, a drop-in centre for young Aboriginal street kids, and education for their families, in order to change their lifestyles and to exclude drug and alcohol abuse and chronic gambling. (Leon Feehon, Co-ordinator of WA ACCA.)

The researcher also met with the Western Australian delegates to the Annual General Meeting of SNAICC. These delegates represented various Aboriginal communities in the north-west of the state. In Derby, a major concern has been the provision of adult education, especially for women, offering courses or group work in literacy skills, job preparation and support through a drop-in centre. In Carnarvon, there are problems with the youth and a need for supervised recreation facilities, e.g. blue-light discos. The alcohol abuse among children as young as 12 and 13 years old is said to have led to deaths from alcohol poisoning and alcohol-related violence. The ACCA representative in Carnarvon referred to the fact that under-age drinkers were able to purchase alcohol on licensed premises.

The Carnarvon delegate also said that children are being forced out of the education system because they were "a nuisance" and seen as troublemakers. One positive development in Carnarvon is that young offenders are being given community service orders instead of being sent to institutions such as Longmore in Perth. Some magistrates are imposing a fine on parents instead of punishing the children.

In Geraldton, young offenders are being sent to a station outside Mullewa as an alternative to being sent to a maximum security in-

stitution in Perth. Aboriginal streetworkers are now being employed in the town. The effects of domestic violence on children is also of concern. (Cathy Colbung, AMS, Geraldton.)

An annual event that has a positive impact on the local and statewide Aboriginal community is the Annual Basketball Carnival held in Carnarvon. Basketball teams come from Aboriginal communities throughout the state to participate, and the event is a positive recreational experience for all concerned. It also enhances communication and a sense of belonging between the Aboriginal communities in the state.

Recommendations for Western Australia

1. That the prior right of Aborigines to this land be acknowledged by Commonwealth and state governments and that Commonwealth and state authorities implement affirmative action principles for people of Aboriginal descent.
2. That the Commonwealth, state and local governments work towards greater intersectoral collaboration to improve the provision of basic services (especially water, sewerage and housing) to Aboriginal communities throughout the state.
3. That the Aboriginal communities be consulted at every stage in the planning and provision of these services.
4. That the availability of fresh food be given a priority in Aboriginal communities, especially in the remote areas of the state, and therefore the freight charges for transport of fresh food to these communities be subsidised by the state government.
5. That education awareness programs be established to support parents of school-age children so parents will be more confident in assisting their children in their school work.
6. That non-Aboriginal professionals and workers (e.g. schoolteachers, social workers, police men and women) be taught about Aboriginal culture and society through culture awareness programs planned and provided by Aboriginal people or in close collaboration with Aboriginal people.
7. That financial support and encouragement be given to communities to invest in sport and recreation facilities so that children in these communities can develop their sporting abilities, keep occupied and enhance their sense of self-worth through sport.
8. That sporting carnivals such as the Annual Basketball Carnival be actively encouraged and supported by Aboriginal organisations, local government and state authorities.

9 That research be undertaken to determine the extent of the problem of alcohol and drug abuse among Aboriginal children.

10 That appropriate Commonwealth and state funding be allocated to institute rehabilitation programs established in consultation with Aboriginal communities and agencies such as the ACCAs and the AMSs for children who are addicted to alcohol and drugs.

11 That funding be provided for the appropriate support and training for Aboriginal streetworkers in all parts of the state.

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Alice Springs in Central Australia was suggested as an important point for consultation with a range of Aboriginal communities because it is well located as a national focus for Aboriginal communication and networks. From Alice Springs a range of Aboriginal communities are accessible: the traditional communities, the fringe-dwellers and urban Aborigines. Alice Springs, symbolically at the Centre, also has a community with articulate Aboriginal leadership.

Most of the problems highlighted in Alice Springs are the problems experienced by the fringe-dwellers (town-campers), as they comprise a significant and visible portion of the Aboriginal population. The town-campers are the ones who are caught between, on the one hand, the bush and a more traditional lifestyle and, on the other, the attractions of town life. They have developed their own lifestyle, which is a mixture of bush and town life. They are the ones who suffer most acutely the loss of their traditional lands and lifestyles.

Town-dwelling (urban) Aboriginal people experience similar problems as the town-campers, but their problems do not appear to be as acute as those of the town-campers.

In Alice Springs the researcher met with the staff of the Central Australian ACCA, attended a meeting of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations, met with staff of various organisations, including the Tangentyere Council, Institute of Aboriginal Development, Nganampa Health Council Inc., CAAC, Department of Health and Community Services, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). As time was limited, it was not possible to meet with staff of other agencies, although telephone contact was made with the Central Land Council and the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service.

Alice Springs has a population of approximately 23 000 people of whom 3400 or 14.8 per cent are Aborigines. 35 per cent of the Aboriginal population (1200) live in town-camps on the fringes of the town and the rest (2200) can be considered to be urban-

dwellers, living in Housing Commission houses in town. The Aboriginal population has a lower level of labour force participation and education levels than the non-Aboriginal population. The quality and quantity of housing available to the Aboriginal population is severely limited. Sixty-six town-camp households live in standard dwellings. Town-campers have limited access to basic facilities such as running water and flush toilets. (CA ACCA Report to the National Inquiry into Homeless children conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Homeless Aboriginal Children and Youth in Alice Springs*, prepared by Shirley Watters, 1988.)

The Aboriginal communities in and around Alice Springs (i.e. the town-campers) suffer from acute and chronic poverty. Children living in these communities comprise around 50 per cent of the population. These children are deprived of adequate food, shelter, water, psychological security, safety, an adequate education. Real hunger is experienced by the majority of children in the town-camps, especially in the week prior to pension day.

Homelessness and the lack of adequate housing were identified as a major area of concern by almost all the individuals who were contacted in Alice Springs. Access to adequate housing affected all aspects of the life of the communities and individuals, and therefore it was seen as an issue of significance in the discussion of child poverty.

The CA ACCA Report to the National Inquiry into the Needs of Homeless Children highlights this link:

> The housing needs of the children and youth in Alice Springs are a reflection of the acute housing needs of the entire Aboriginal community and cannot be separated. The housing needs of the Aboriginal community are the product of the social, cultural and economic conditions within which the economy survives. Aboriginal children in Alice Springs will *not* enjoy "special protection from all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation" until the broader issues of racism, structural inequality, recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty and land rights and the payment of just compensation are addressed.

Workers at the Tangentyere Council mentioned the problems faced by the town-campers in Alice Springs, which stem from the poverty of the whole Aboriginal community, most of whose members are dependent on DSS pensions and benefits. The poverty of the community affects the children who grow up in this environment. Access to traditional resources (e.g. bush foods) are limited, employment opportunities are also limited, because of the lack of education and training as well as the overt racism experienced in Alice Springs itself. Of the town-camp population of around 1200 people, about ninety-five (around 8 per cent) of people are

employed, many on a part-time or casual basis and mainly by the Tangentyere Council.

Chronic alcoholism and gambling are reported to be severe problems directly affecting the lives of the children in the camps. Alice Springs is reported to have the highest proportion of liquor licences per head of population in the state. There were sixty-three liquor outlets and a population of around 23 000. When the researcher was in the town there was increasing public debate as to whether extend liquor licences (to facilitate the tourist trade). The town also has the "2 km law" which prohibits public drinking within two kilometres of the nearest liquor outlet. Thus park drinking has become an offence. The criminalising of public drunkenness has enabled the authorities to "clean up" the town for tourists.

The researcher was told that one of the effects of this law on Aboriginal families is that it has increased overcrowding and violence within the town-camps and the town-dwellings as visiting relatives bring alcohol home for consumption. Agency workers are concerned that another serious effect has been the increase in the incidence of physical and sexual abuse, including incest, due to the overcrowded living conditions and the effects of alcohol. In these situations the lives of children are at risk directly through violence, physical and sexual abuse, and indirectly through neglect.

The Annual Report of the Tangentyere Council for 1985/86 (the most recent available at the time of writing) states:

> The health of Alice Springs town campers is disastrous. Poor health costs the government a great deal because it leads to the extensive use of hospital care. To improve town campers' health should be seen by all governments as a wise investment as well as a humane duty. Better health for town campers will come from programs that raise their income and improve the quality of their housing and living environment.
>
> A recent study of Alice Springs Hospital records in the period 1981-86 for Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) showed that Aboriginal children were admitted much more often than European children.The Aboriginal admission rate was four times the European rate in the first year of life, twice for the second year, and five times the admission rate in the third year of life. *Children from the town camps were the sickest sub group in the Aboriginal population, spending twenty-six times the number of days in hospital spent by European children. Thirty-eight per cent of town camp infants have more than four admissions in their first two years. For the sickest of the sick children the first two years of life include an average of 72 days in hospital.* (my emphasis) (p.2)

Among the reasons for the high admission of town-camp children to hospital were poor nutrition, infections due to poor condition of the children, inadequate water supply and poor housing conditions. The Annual Report goes on to describe the condition of the children of the town-camps, which is comparable to the worst

forms of deprivation in Third World countries. Research undertaken in 1979 showed that:

> 35% of children showed stunted growth through chronic under nutrition, and 39% were wasted in condition, a sign of acute under nutrition . . . one in five children was both stunted and wasted from chronic and acute under nutrition. These problems were much more common among boys than girls. With under nutrition went a high degree of infection from various disorders of eyes, ears, respiratory tract and gastrointestinal system. (Children were starving.)
>
> Infections and under nutrition are linked in a vicious cycle. Dr Beck's analysis of camp conditions suggested that the cycle was also associated with low income. Camps varied in their levels of average income, and those with lower incomes had worse rates of infection and under nutrition. There was another cause of sickness as well: a supply of water which was inadequate in quality, quantity or distance from the house. Poor water supply usually meant lack of housing. The physical weaknesses of the camps seemed to be associated with high incidences of skin disorders and respiratory problems.
>
> . . . The lessons for governments should be clear. *The very high cost of fixing up Aboriginal children in hospital is partly the consequence of neglecting town-campers' income and other needs* (including land tenure, the pre-requisite of housing, and water supplies). Restricted servicing by some government departments contributes to problems that other departments must spend a lot of money dealing with . . . One of the reasons for Tangentyere's funding difficulties is that while its services are holistic, recognising the relationship of one town camper problem to another, its funding sources are fragmented and usually unco-ordinated. (my emphasis) (p.2)

Women workers with the Tangentyere Council who are involved in working with the women of the communities state that women are particularly vulnerable within these communities. Some women who are married or in a stable *de facto* situation have limited access to a stable income if their partners do not share their income within the family. Other women, usually grandmothers and older aunts or sisters, often are given responsibility for the care of children. The young mothers of these children are reluctant to transfer the Supporting Parent's Benefit to the older women, who consequently have to raise these children on their own pensions. Some women, both young and elderly, do not receive any income because they are too ashamed or shy to approach the appropriate authorities for their entitlements.

They also indicated that alcohol abuse in women directly affects the children in the following ways:

- Alcohol during pregnancy results in foetal alcohol syndrome, low birth weight, prematurity and stillbirths.
- It causes higher infant mortality.
- It results in deprivation of food and other necessities.

- It leads to neglect of children unless cared for by other adult women within the community.

It was pointed out that alcohol-affected women have limited or no access to rehabilitation services, safe houses and refuges in Alice Springs. There is only one women's refuge in the town, and this is for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are hesitant to use the service because of their shyness in a predominantly white system.

The need for a safe house in each community was also seen as a priority by the Aboriginal people in Alice Springs. A safe house is a place where women and children can go to seek refuge from domestic violence and physical and sexual abuse. The form a safe house will take would depend on the particular needs and nature of the individual community. It may be a custom-built community house designed in close consultation with the women of the community, to be managed by them, or it may be simply the home of a well-respected senior woman of the community, with the provision of additional space, support and back-up services as required. It was felt that each community should be encouraged to determine the most appropriate style for their safe house or refuge.

Besides the provision of safety in time of acute crisis, the safe house could also be the place where women could gather to share their daily lives, senior women sharing with the younger women their skills and experience in all aspects of life from child-care and food preparation to the traditional skills, arts and crafts. The consumption of alcohol and drugs and gambling should be banned on the premises. These houses could provide the basis for a network of places of refuge for women and children in need of support and protection. In this way women can regain some control of their own situations and begin to address some of their identified problems in culturally appropriate ways. The safe houses could also be the centre for rape crisis counselling and the provision of support for the victims of incest, an increasing number of whom are said to be young children. Tangentyere Council has identified the need for locally based places of refuge for women and children and is attempting to establish at least one safe house in a town-camp in Alice Springs.

Women who are employed as family support workers by the Family Support Service run by the CAAC raised a number of important issues in the discussions with the researcher. Their job is to support the families with children who are referred through the CAAC Medical Centre, hospitals and other agencies, including the Department of Health and Community Services. Most of these children are suffering from the effects of poverty, with diagnoses of

gastroenteritis, failure to thrive, eye, ear, nose and throat infections. Most of them live in the town-camps.

The family support workers identified the high cost of living in Alice Springs as one contributing factor to the poverty of the families with children. They said that family members who have sufficient education to obtain and keep employment feel the pressure to maintain two-income households to cope with the rising cost of living. However, most families are on DSS pensions and benefits.

Another pressure identified by the family support workers is the underlying racism in the town, which affects the outlook of the young people especially. While Aboriginal families, especially those living in the town, encourage their young people to continue their education and receive financial assistance to do so, the young people are said to face racial prejudice in school from their peers and their teachers. Parents said their children are not encouraged by teachers to continue their education, and that some have even been told not to bother with school "as you're only good enough to be a council worker like your dad".

The workers stated that children drop out of school when they realise that even if they do complete their education they will have difficulty finding a job because of the racial prejudice among most employers in the town. Workers said there is a feeling of helplessness, especially among the boys. They felt that young people are particularly disadvantaged as they are not eligible for unemployment benefits until they turn 18; many of them are too shy to approach the DSS for their entitlement. Many young people move from one household to another seeking shelter and food. The researcher was told that, in addition, drink and drugs are readily available in the town.

Another concern of the family support workers is the inadequacy of the food supply available for the growing children. The workers reported that most town-campers do not have the storage facilities, such as refrigerators and freezers, for their fresh food. They have to buy their food daily, and many depend on visiting hawkers who are licensed by the local government authority to sell food on town-camps. Much of the food sold by the hawkers is non-nutritious, "rubbish food", consisting of cool drinks, lollies, pre-cooked "take-away" food. One suggestion was that an Aboriginal organisation take on the responsibility of organising and managing a service to the town-camps, selling fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and grocery lines at economical prices. This could be established as a community enterprise with the provision of training for those who wish to enter the field of small business enterprise and retailing.

(An example of such an operation is the Mangari Food Centre in Broome, which is a Community Food Centre run very successfully by the Aboriginal community in the town.)

Another aspect of the poverty of Aboriginal children was highlighted by Betty Pearce, the Aboriginal Women's Officer of the Tangentyere Council. Aboriginal children experience psychological poverty because they are stripped of their self-esteem; they have lost three generations of caregivers from their own cultural background, experience much looser family ties, and find it easy to slip into a habit of dependency. It is important to build up self-esteem of young people and to preserve and encourage the strengthening of the Aboriginal family unit within the town-camps. These are included among the objectives of the Women's Committee of the Tangentyere Council.

The Aboriginal-run Yipirinya School is seen as a positive initiative aimed at building on the traditional values and the languages of the people in the Alice Springs area. The school, which has moved into newly built accommodation, provides bilingual education for Aboriginal children, who are taught by Aboriginal teachers. Not only will the school enhance positive identification and self-esteem among the children, but it will also provide role models for them to follow.

Other positive initiatives in Alice Springs are the very successful development and operation of Aboriginal-run services, such as the Nganampa Health Council Inc., the CAAC, CAAMA and other organisations, many of which have been in operation since the 1970s.

The positive record of Aboriginal self-management is seen as an important way through which the dignity and self-esteem of the Aboriginal people can be enhanced and positive role models provided for the young Aboriginal people.

Staff of the ACCAs in the Northern Territory have indicated that they receive limited support from the state authorities for the work they are doing within their own communities. For example, workers say that in Katherine, which has a large Aboriginal population and many problems, there are very limited services for Aboriginal people. In particular, difficulty is experienced in recruiting Aboriginal caregivers for Aboriginal children who are removed from their own home environments. In Darwin, child-care workers report an increase in demand for a twenty-four-hour service to respond to the needs of the homeless youth and children in families without the usual family networks in the town. They consider that needs of women and children caught in domestic violence will have to be addressed initially by documenting the incidence of domestic violence

and then by funding the establishment of refuges and safe houses and other community-defined ways of dealing with the problem. The workers also attribute the increasing numbers of homeless youth to the incidence of violence and overcrowding in many Aboriginal households.

While the demand for services is increasing, ACCA workers are frustrated because they feel they do not receive sufficient funding to respond to these needs.

Recommendations for Central Australia

1 That the housing needs of Aboriginal people be acknowledged by Commonwealth and state authorities as a matter for urgent consideration, and this matter be given priority in ongoing discussions between the Commonwealth and state housing ministers.

2 That culturally appropriate housing be provided for Aboriginal people.

3 That Aboriginal communities be involved in planning for their own housing needs and be granted sufficient funding to provide for these needs with priority given to the health, security and protection of Aboriginal children.

4 That research be undertaken into the availability of good, clean water to all Aboriginal communities in the country, with particular emphasis on the impact of the current lack of access to clean water on the health and well-being of Aboriginal children, the cost of provision of water to the communities, and the most appropriate means of ensuring that all communities have access to clean water.

5 That Commonwealth and state governments and local government authorities commit themselves to the provision of clean water to all Aboriginal communities.

6 That alcohol and drug education and rehabilitation programs be provided for women, and be planned and managed by Aboriginal women.

7 That Aboriginal communities be supported and funded to research the issue of domestic violence, with particular encouragement given to explore culturally appropriate ways to combat the problem.

8 That the initiatives already taken by the communities with the support of SNAICC through the Domestic Violence Conference held in February 1989 be actively supported by Commonwealth and state authorities.

9 That Aboriginal communities be supported and funded to establish safe houses or places of refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence and physical and sexual abuse.

10 That the right of the child to a safe environment within his/her own culture be acknowledged and supported through the work of Aboriginal organisations, such as the ACCAs, which are actively involved in efforts to support and strengthen the functioning of Aboriginal families.

11 That the right of the child to adequate food be acknowledged, and that Aboriginal communities receive appropriate funding, training and support to ensure that their children are adequately fed. The programs could include the subsidising of school meals, the establishment of a community food store, and education in nutrition and food preparation.

12 That the Commonwealth and state governments recognise that racism in the Australian community is affecting the life chances of Aboriginal children by preventing access to education, employment, services and facilities and equity of participation in activities that constitute the fabric of contemporary life in Australia.

13 That the positive and successful initiatives undertaken by Aboriginal people be widely publicised throughout the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to affirm the sense of dignity and self-worth of young Aboriginal people and to provide positive role models for them.

14 That the issue of racial prejudice in schools and the education system, especially that expressed by staff members, be investigated and an education program be devised.

15 That the Commonwealth and state governments commit themselves to educating non-Aboriginal Australians about the culture and values of Aboriginal Australians, particularly about their history and contemporary lifestyles and achievements.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The researcher spent five days with the South Australian ACCA delegates and the children who attended the SA ACCA Annual Conference and Children's Camp, which was held at Uluru in September 1988. During this time extensive contact was made with the Mutitjulu community, who are the traditional keepers of Uluru. Permission was obtained for the conference meetings to be held at the meeting house in the community. The elders of the community welcomed the children and adults from all parts of South Australia, encouraging their identification with their tribal roots.

The issues and concerns that were expressed and which emerged in the discussions represent the concerns of communities of urban Aborigines, many of whom had lost contact with their traditional roots, as well as concerns of people from more remote desert communities in the homelands closer to Central Australia.

One of the most positive outcomes of this camp and conference identified by the organisers was the positive link made between the Mutitjulu community and the SA ACCA delegates and the children. Both the community leaders and the delegates realised the value of linking Aboriginal children and adults from the cities and towns with the traditional Aboriginal communities. Most of the urban Aborigines had lost contact with their traditional roots through the impact of the policy of assimilation, which caused the loss of generations of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Contact with the traditional communities strengthened the identification of the children with their Aboriginal heritage. This sharing was experienced as a generous gift from the Mutitjulu community to all who attended the camp.

Another benefit of this link, which the adults and children talked about, was the opportunity for the young people to meet with the tribal elders and keepers of the sacred traditions, which further enhanced the identification of the traditional values of respect for the elders and traditions of the community. The meeting between the tribal elders and the children captured the essence of the central point made by the South Australians, i.e. that Aboriginal children must be given the opportunity to experience their dignity and self-respect and one of the most important ways in which this can be achieved is by giving them a sense of pride in their own identity within their families and communities.

In his report to the conference, the Director of SA ACCA stressed the need for all Aboriginal communities to provide mutual support and opportunities to share and learn from each other. The ACCAs need to "help children make links within the Aboriginal community to enable them to gain strength, as they will be the Aboriginal leaders of the future". He challenged "each and every Aboriginal and Islander person to stop in their tracks, and seriously question whether or not we are doing everything within our power to pave the way properly and positively for our children. It saddens me to have to say that we are letting our children down at this point in time, and have been for many years" (Brian Butler, Director SA ACCA, September 1988). This plea is one that can be made of the whole Australian community.

Poverty was described by one of the delegates as:

> the lack of good food, amenities, and resources other Australians take for granted. It also includes the concept of loss of identity, the loss of children to the community and the loss of children who are prevented by "family" from knowing about their Aboriginality. This has meant a loss of identity and the richness of the family network. (Jane Lester, September 1988.)

The adult who made this comment met for the first time another adult at the conference whom she discovered was her aunt. She then found connections with at least ten other people at the camp who were in some way related to her. This was not an isolated incident at the camp.

Another related issue that emerged from the reports of the delegates at the conference was the autonomy of the Aboriginal agencies, especially the ACCAs, in relating with the state welfare authorities. It was noted that the Department for Community Welfare had the ultimate control over children who became wards and, although the ACCAs in South Australia were consulted in the preparation of case plans and often took responsibility for the direction of these plans, some delegates felt that this was not practised uniformly across the state. It was noted that ACCAs in other states had similar experiences.

The need for more community control in decision-making, particularly with regard to the lives of their children and the support of their families was seen as an issue to be acknowledged by the Commonwealth and state governments and departments with responsibilities in this area.

The recruitment, training and support of Aboriginal foster parents was seen as vital for the provision of care for children who had to be removed from their own home environments. In order to prevent the further loss of children from the communities, the delegates considered it important to keep track of the children who have been removed by the Department for Community Welfare and fostered outside their own communities. This was seen as important, because these children need to maintain their links with their own communities in order to preserve their dignity and identity as Aborigines.

Truancy was identified as a problem in some communities, especially the urban communities of the south. Delegates from these communities recognised the value of education. Depriving a child of education was seen as a form of child abuse, because it prevented the child from realising his/her optimum potential. While the primary responsibility was seen to lie in the hands of the parents and families, it was felt that the community leaders should liaise with the police and education authorities to ensure that something is done to keep the children in school and off the streets.

The opinion was expressed that the welfare system has transferred power away from the parents and to the children rather than supporting the parents and families in their efforts to care for their children. For many years the Department for Community Welfare took control of the care of Aboriginal children away from their families and communities, creating further dependency. Aboriginal adults now say they want to take responsibility for their own children and need the co-operation of the state welfare authorities to achieve this.

The delegates from the remote and more traditional communities raised the problem of petrol-sniffing, which was still prevalent in these communities, although the authorities were addressing the problem. Petrol-sniffing was identified as a community problem as it not only reflected the boredom of the young people, but it also threatened the authority of the elders, because addicted petrol-sniffers lost respect for everyone and everything. Besides the physical damage to the young people engaged in this activity, through death, brain damage, developmental delays and stunted growth, which caused personal and family grief and suffering, there was the psychological and social cost to the community in the loss of respect, security and the high incidence of violence.

A number of conference delegates expressed their concern regarding the HALT program, particularly the fact that a large sum of money comprising almost all the available funding in this area has been spent on this program. The need was seen for complementary programs to the HALT program now introduced into a number of communities, through which support could be given to the families of petrol-sniffing children. Again this was seen as a community initiated and managed support system to be placed in the context of child care policy and programs.

Delegates reported that in other remote communities there was a high incidence of alcohol abuse among children and youth, with the resulting deaths through suicide, alcohol poisoning and withdrawal.

SA ACCA has identified the need for rape crisis counselling for young Aboriginal men and women as an issue relevant to the poverty of Aboriginal children. In particular, there is a need for Aboriginal people to be trained as counsellors to assist Aboriginal victims of rape and incest, who may find it easier to relate to people from a similar background. On the more positive side, in discussing the strengths of the Aboriginal people and what they had to offer their children, delegates stressed:

- The spirituality of the Aboriginal people, based on caring for one another.

- Their knowledge and respect for the land, which is there to be used and not abused.
- The deep crying from within in seeking out and linking with other people.
- Their sense of joy.
- The importance of physical contact.

All of these are important to their sense of belonging together as Aborigines.

Recommendations for South Australia

1 That Commonwealth and state governments recognise the importance of linking Aboriginal children with their cultural heritage.

2 That the ACCAs and other Aboriginal organisations be given the financial support to undertake programs aimed at enhancing the contact between Aboriginal children and their heritage, through camps in the bush and contact with traditional communities, especially for children from urban centres.

3 That Aboriginal communities be given greater control in the decision-making with regard to the lives of their children and the support of their families.

4 That the role of the ACCAs as intermediaries in the process be recognised and enhanced through their active involvement of the ACCAs in case conferences and decision-making in relation to children who are entering the care of the state welfare departments.

5 That the state welfare departments take an active role in the prevention of abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children by providing practical support to families in need of assistance, e.g. adequate material assistance, respite care, financial support for short-term foster care, culturally appropriate services and counselling for families in crisis.

6 That the ACCAs in conjunction with the state welfare departments be actively involved in the recruitment, training and support of Aboriginal foster parents.

7 That steps be taken in consultation with the Aboriginal communities to address the problem of truancy and non-attendance at school.

8 That funding be provided for programs that will complement the HALT program now introduced in a number of communities with the provision of support for families of petrol-sniffers.

9 That the incidence of alcohol abuse among children, especially in the remote communities, be investigated and steps be taken to

combat the problem through alcohol-awareness campaigns and a rehabilitation program designed for youth.

10 That the incidence of physical and sexual abuse of Aboriginal children and youth be explored and a rape crisis counselling service be established to respond to the special needs of Aboriginal youth.

QUEENSLAND

The AICCAs in Queensland agreed to meet in Cairns on two days as part of their regular consultation, to share information and discuss the topic of "child poverty". The researcher met with AICCA representatives from Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane on those two days. In addition, workers from Aboriginal agencies and Aboriginal people who were working in the mainstream organisations (e.g. the hospital and the Education Department) were invited to meet at Yuddika Child Care Agency, the AICCA based in Cairns, to share insights and information on child poverty in their communities. The researcher also had the opportunity to meet and informally discuss many issues with various members of the Aboriginal and Islander communities during that visit.

These discussions were very fruitful, as they gave the workers the chance to identify together some of the critical issues facing their communities, particularly in relation to the poverty of their children. The meeting of members of the Cairns Aboriginal and Islander community was also useful, as it was one of the few opportunities these workers had to share their concerns. They planned to have further meetings of a similar nature to continue their discussions and planning. This special meeting was attended by workers from Warringu Women's Shelter, Wuchopperen Medical Service, Hope Vale Council, DAA Cairns, Parramatta Primary School, the Aboriginal Health Program and the hospital.

In Queensland the issues highlighted were those concerning Aboriginal and Islander people from the smaller urban areas and towns, as well as those of the remote communities to the far north and west of the state. These communities are named in the following discussion. There were also many concerns that could be generalised across the state.

The meeting of AICCA representatives highlighted three main issues relating to the poverty of Aboriginal children in Queensland:

- *Criminal justice* and the high rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people, especially the youth.
- The *chronic housing shortage*, resulting in appalling living conditions of Aboriginal families and a high incidence of youth homelessness.

• The *crisis in health* of Aboriginal people.

Queensland has the highest population of Aboriginal people in the country. At the 1986 census there were 61 268 Aboriginal people representing 2.37 per cent of the Queensland population. Although no reliable Queensland data are available, figures published by the Australian Institute of Criminology show that Aborigines represent 14.5 per cent of the national prison population. Aborigines are also ten times over-represented in the prisons in relation to their population (Australian Institute of Criminology 1988*b*).

Figures made available to the researcher at these discussions indicate that at February 1987, the Murri (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) population in prison in Brisbane Men's, Brisbane Women's, Wacol, Palen Creek, Numinbah and Security Patients Hospital comprised 9.3 per cent of the total population in those prisons. 20 per cent of the prisoners in Brisbane Women's Prison were Aborigines. At August 1987, 10.6 per cent of the prison population was Aboriginal and 25.9 per cent of the population of the Women's Prison was Aboriginal. The majority of the women are in prison for their failure to pay fines and debts, a direct consequence of their poverty.

Another interesting indicator from the Townsville prison in North Queensland showed that at May 1988 Aboriginal prisoners comprised a high percentage of those kept in maximum and medium security sections of the prison. In the high security section, 156 of the 274 or nearly 57 per cent were Murris; in the medium security section 73 of the 143 prisoners or 51 per cent were Murris; and in the minimum security section, 5 of the 57 prisoners or 9 per cent of the prisoners were Murris.

The Aboriginal child-care and welfare workers who contributed to the discussions pointed out that the high rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people can be seen as a consequence of their deprivation and poverty. It also contributes to the poverty of the communities, and especially the poverty of the children, who have to be cared for by other members of the community or in institutions when their mothers are imprisoned. The cost to the community of the imprisonment of women is enormous, and includes the provision of support and alternative care for the children in addition to the social cost of the further disruption of the family unit. The AICCAs have been involved in providing support to families of women prisoners and in seeking alternative homes for children of these women.

The staff of the Queensland AICCAs were particularly concerned about the high rate of detention of youth in the state-run detention centres such as Westbrook, John Oxley Youth Centre, Cleaveland

Youth Centre and Carramar House, where more than 50 per cent of the detainees are Murris. Almost all the children in the Cleaveland Youth Centre in Townsville are Murris. When this centre is full, the young people are sent down to Brisbane. Children are sometimes held in the police watch-house when on remand or when they are waiting for transport back to their communities. The AICCAs are concerned about the unnecessary remand and detention of children under these conditions.

The AICCAs reported that the police department and the magistrates determine the remand procedures, the travel arrangements and the frequency of the hearing dates for children and youth who have offended. Often these arrangements result in unnecessarily long delays and detention of young people from remote communities, contributing further to the confusion and disturbance of these young people. On release, many young people, especially those from remote communities, are left to fend for themselves in the city, where they are strangers with no family and friends. It is easy for these young people to slip into a life of crime and transient homelessness. They become street kids.

Another concern of the AICCA workers is the incidence of long-term or continuing remand for children and young people as a result of the lack of proper legal representation, especially for their first offence, and the failure of the Welfare Department to make adequate case plans for these children. In addition, they claim that children on remand are being abused and neglected, little or no contact is made with the families of the children who slip further into the welfare system and suffer institutional abuse.

AICCA staff are concerned about the chronic anxiety and depression they see among the children and young people, which is the consequence of their chronic poverty and deprivation. One disturbing aspect of this deprivation is the incidence of offending behaviour in young people who want to be institutionalised in a detention centre or prison because there they have a warm bed, good meals, clean clothes, recreation activities and the company of their friends and relatives. The conditions on some of the remote communities are said to be so bad that the young people offend to escape them.

Workers are concerned that the chronic homelessness of Aborigines in all areas of Queensland contributes to the poverty of the children. The results of the 1985 QEA Black Community Housing Survey conducted by the Murris of south-east Queensland highlight the appalling living conditions suffered by a significant number of Murris. This survey showed that:

- Home ownership in the general community was four times higher than in the Murri community.
- 71 per cent of Murri households relied on rental accommodation compared with less than 20 per cent in the general community.
- 16 per cent were renting from the Queensland Housing Commission or DCS.
- 55.3 per cent were renting in the private rental market.
- 80 per cent of Murris who rented were forced to rent at the lower end of the rental market.
- There were over eight people living in one in eight Murri households as compared with one in one hundred households in their general community.
- At least 20 per cent of Murri households occupied dwellings that were in an unsatisfactory, bad or very bad condition, with poor plumbing, faulty electrical wiring, a lack of basic living amenities and in a state of disrepair.
- 25 per cent of Murri households needed a refrigerator.
- 15 per cent needed a washing-machine.
- 12.5 per cent households needed beds or bedding.
- 9 per cent needed a stove.

In Cairns, Aboriginal and Islander people were reported to be living in overcrowded conditions in caravans at the local caravan park, where they paid high rents for cramped accommodation. Families with children were renting single rooms, which were let out as flats, in old houses in the town. Here there were severely limited bathroom, toilet and kitchen facilities, all of which had to be shared with other families. These conditions were similar to those found in Third World countries.

Others lived on a camp that was called "The Swamp", as it was located on the mangrove swamp outside the town. Here people lived in makeshift accommodation and tents with no proper sanitation or washing facilities. Many of these people were from the more remote communities, who had come to Cairns to seek employment or for medical attention. Others were Torres Strait Islanders who had come to the Queensland towns to settle.

The researcher was taken to view the accommodation at the caravan park, "The Swamp" and other areas, and is able to confirm the reports of the severe housing problems of the Aboriginal people in Cairns. The appalling housing conditions of Aboriginal people in the town are expected to deteriorate as the cost of housing increases with increasing demand not matched by increasing supply. Aboriginal people are known to be living in similar conditions in

other towns in Queensland where rents in the private rental market are constantly rising because of the increase in demand for housing in these areas.

In the remote communities the issue of culturally appropriate housing (i.e. housing appropriate for the family's lifestyle) and community control is relevant.

Under these poor housing conditions the children suffer acute poverty and lack of privacy and security, and their education and life chances are impaired. These overcrowded conditions, together with alcohol abuse, put children at risk of physical and sexual abuse.

Another major area of concern to workers is the health and life chances of the children. This begins with the health of the mothers and the ante-natal care they receive. Many young women from the remote communities in the north of the state are now brought down to have their babies in the larger towns. They may have to leave other children in their own communities when they come to give birth. In addition many people in the communities and the AICCAs are concerned that the children are not being born on their own land and consequently could suffer a loss of identity. Being born on one's own land is of significance to Aboriginal people, particularly those who are closer to a traditional lifestyle.

Workers state that for many young mothers the towns and hospitals are strange places. Young mothers run away and may appear to be abandoning their children and responsibilities. The presence of male birthing attendants, including male doctors, is something that brings shame to the young mothers. Under these conditions it becomes difficult to follow up the progress of mother and baby.

Concern was expressed by a number of workers about the use of Depo-Provera on women without their knowledge or consent and the increasing incidence of birth by caesarean section, which some Aborigines believe enables the doctors to perform a tubal ligation without the consent of the woman.

The escalating incidence of STD is extremely worrying to all those who attended the discussions. Information produced by the AICCAs showed that in some communities in Queensland over 80 per cent of the population suffer from STD. As the Aboriginal population is a youthful population, with around 50 per cent being minors, the projected incidence among children and young people must be of grave concern. There are reports of children in both primary and seconday school being sexually harassed by older children, and of sexual abuse, including incest, occurring in a number of communities.

Information made available to the researcher indicates that the incidence of STD among children in some Aboriginal communities in Queensland is increasing at an alarming rate, especially among children as young as 10-14 years old. The incidence among young female children is higher than among young males. Figures for one community, the Aurukun community, show that the incidence of anaemia, stunting and wasting has been on the increase since 1986. The life chances of the children and the future of these communities are seriously at risk.

The Yuddika Child Care Agency in Cairns, whose constituency covers the communities in the peninsular area, with a population of 10 972, has begun to identify some of the problems related to the incidence of STD and AIDS in these communities. Yuddika is making contact with the communities to assist them to identify and name the problems and then to explore ways to deal with them that are culturally appropriate. In particular, a male worker is making contact with the men in various communities in order to become involved in educating the men about the consequences of their action as perpetrators of sexual abuse. The aim is to work through men's groups and meetings so as to encourage the men to take responsibility for their actions. It is usually the women who are the victims, and the women who want to take the initiative in changing the situation.

Alcohol and drug abuse is reported to be affecting the young Aboriginal people from the urban areas and the bush. It is said that around 80 per cent of the people in communities in the Land Trust areas are dependent on alcohol. The alcohol problem is present in the "dry" and "wet" communities. However, in the "dry" communities its impact is greater because of the operation of the blackmarket, in which people have been known to pay $10 for a can of beer, $20 for a stubby, and $100 for a flagon of wine. Even where the blackmarket does not operate, the price of alcohol can be very high because of the freight charges. The impact of the expenditure on alcohol on such a scale affects the availability of money for food and other basic necessities for the children of these communities.

The Queensland AICCAs see the need to invest in good training and development of human resources, especially for the Aboriginal agencies and community councils. There is a need for ongoing support for Aboriginal workers in agencies serving the Aboriginal and Islander communities and for Aboriginal workers in the mainstream organisations. This could occur through in-servicing and workshops, with input from experienced trainers as well as on-

going sharing through regular meetings on areas of common concern.

They also recognise the need to go beyond the symptoms of the problems underlying the poverty of Aboriginal children and to address the racism that is blocking the development of Aboriginal children and therefore the future of the Aboriginal communities. The signing of a treaty between the Australian Government and the Aboriginal people is seen as an important symbolic act. The granting of Land Rights to Aboriginal communities is another important step towards recognising Aborigines. The non-Aboriginal community needs to be educated about the Aboriginal people and their history.

The agencies also recognise that the Aboriginal and Islander communities themselves must take responsibility for their own situations and work together to face the enormous problems they are experiencing. However, they need the funds, support and encouragement to undertake the community education programs and ongoing discussions to bring about these changes.

The meeting of Aboriginal workers from agencies in Cairns confirmed the issues raised by the AICCAs and highlighted different aspects of these issues. The meeting became an open forum, enabling the agency representatives to identify the problems relating to the poverty of Aboriginal children and to begin to co-operate in their efforts to address these problems. Those who attended the meeting found it useful in setting the foundation for ongoing work.

The workers in community organisations pointed out that poor housing conditions experienced by the majority of Aboriginal families not only affects the health of children but also hinders their education and school attendance. Many families are reported to move too often for the children to settle in school, others do not send their children to school because they do not have the appropriate clothes or shoes or the right equipment for school. Many children do not receive the supervision or encouragement to do their homework in the overcrowded conditions of their homes. It was reported that up to 45 per cent of the Aboriginal children in the schools in Cairns came from families who lived a transient lifestyle, mainly because of their chronic homelessness.

A letter from Dr D.M. Stevens of the Wuchopperen Medical Service to Yuddika Child Care Agency (5 October 1988) describes the relationship between child poverty, poor levels of nutrition and unsatisfactory housing conditions:

- School sores (staph/streptococcal skin disease)
- Scabies and lice
- Conjunctivitis

- Discharging ears
- Respiratory tract infections, e.g.bronchiolitis pneumonia
- Gastroenteritis.

All of the above can be associated with poor levels of nutrition. Certainly when I have talked to these people they deny that their child has poor nutrition (this is due to pride), but it is obvious due to their weight and general appearance that they have been neglected, whether deliberately or not.

Also having first-hand experience of the houses (e.g. Maranoa Street, Housing Commission out at Brinsmead) where 5 or 6 families live in a two-bedroom house the level of sanitation drops.

The only other point is that Cairns is a boom town, with land prices rising. This leads to increases in Council rents and therefore increase in the cost of living generally.

The Aboriginal and Islander population in Cairns has a high percentage of single-mother families, and many of them have expressed their inability to make ends meet and also their concern for their children and the fact that they are going without proper food and clothes.

Another problem identified by a worker in the education system, which has not as yet received the attention it deserves, is language difficulties experienced by Aboriginal and Islander children whose first language is not English. Aboriginal and Islander children are treated as though English is their mother tongue because they were born in Australia. In fact, many of these children may speak one of the Aboriginal community languages or one of the languages of the Torres Strait Islands, of which there are many, or Creole or Aboriginal English.

The children with language difficulties also experience other difficulties in settling into the school system in an environment that is culturally foreign to them. It was noted that children from migrant communities receive the support through special classes and teachers trained to teach English as a foreign language, but these support facilities are not available to Aboriginal and Islander children, who may have similar language and cultural problems.

It was suggested by the worker who had most experience in the schools that one practical step that could be taken immediately is to introduce Aboriginal teacher aides into schools attended by Aboriginal children. This would be helpful in primary schools. At least one Aboriginal teacher aide in every school is the minimum level of staffing required. The worker suggested that Aboriginal people should be encouraged to become teachers, so that their presence may be felt in the education system and where they can be role models for the young people. Unfortunately, instead of introducing Aboriginal teacher aides to schools, the Education Department has recently abolished the few positions once available.

Another suggestion was the introduction of cross-cultural awareness training for teachers and other professionals in contact with Aboriginal and Islander people in order to improve their understanding of Aboriginal people and as a means to combat racism.

The problem of domestic violence and sexual abuse of children and young people was again raised by the people with whom the researcher met. There are insufficient refuges and safe houses for women and children needing to escape from domestic violence and abuse. This problem was seen as one of great shame to the Aboriginal communities, as it involved family members and the whole community and refers to the sensitive area of relationships. It is significant that the topic was openly identified by the oldest person at the meeting, a respected woman who has a wealth of experience in working with the Aboriginal and Islander communities in Cairns. Once named, the problem could be acknowledged.

Workers stated that sexual abuse was the result of overcrowded conditions, alcoholism and a perceived increase in homosexuality. There is also a direct link between the increase in STD in the young people and children and the incidence of sexual abuse. The biggest concern is that the children who live under these conditions and who are abused in this way will grow up thinking that this behaviour is normal. The meeting expressed the fear that this situation would lead to the further disintegration of Aboriginal society as the laws and community control were breaking down.

The meeting identified the need for support and training for Aboriginal communities in the urban areas and the bush in the following areas:

- Recognising abuse and recognising families and children at risk.
- Counselling for families where abuse has occurred.
- Establishing SCAN committees in each community and provision of training to undertake this role.
- Public education programs on the issue, planned and run by Aboriginal people, using language and symbols that are relevant to the people (and not the language of white professionals).
- Teaching of living skills to young people, including handling sexuality.

Multifunctional community centres (similar to neighbourhood and community centres that operate in the wider community) are seen as a focal point for the location of these community education and support activities. These centres could function as a refuge for women and children in crisis, and as centres for adult literacy programs, the teaching of community languages, arts and crafts, living skills, health and nutrition. It was considered important to

use the skills of Aboriginal people already present within the communities, many of whom do not have the opportunity to use their training and skills once they return to their own communities.

This Cairns meeting also prioritised the recommendations they wished to make in relation to the poverty of Aboriginal children.

1 Increased support for the family unit.

2 Community-awareness programs targeted to non-Aboriginal Australians showing the achievements of Aboriginal people and showing Aboriginal people with pride in themselves.

3 Challenging of community values that create false expectations, and make people feel poor and helpless.

4 A campaign to educate the community about the increasing incidence of STD and AIDS and that sexual abuse is not normal.

5 Encouragement of Aboriginal leadership in mainstream politics, and within the Aboriginal and Islander communities, to enable the identification and naming of problems and to help the communities find solutions.

6 The establishment of safe houses, shelters and multifunctional centres.

7 Provision of basic facilities such as water and essential services for communities where these facilities are not available.

8 Adult education.

9 Recreation facilities for all Land Trust communities.

Recommendations for Queensland

1 That in sentencing women with children, alternatives to imprisonment be explored as a matter of priority, bearing in mind the cost to the family and the community of the removal of the mother from her family.

2 That the conditions under which children are held on remand in youth detention centres and police watch-houses, and the transport and release arrangements for children from remote communities be reviewed to ensure that time spent in the lock-up is kept to a minimum and the abuse of detained children be prevented.

3 That the provision of adequate legal representation for children and youth appearing in court, especially for their first offences, be made a priority by the state and Commonwealth authorities.

4 That parents of children and youth be contacted and case plans prepared as quickly as possible to minimise the time spent in detention.

5 That the housing needs of the Aboriginal people of Queensland be examined by the state housing authority as a matter of priority and that immediate steps be taken to address the housing needs of the Aborigines in this state.

6 That the state and Commonwealth health authorities respond to the request for the establishment of medical centres/birthing centres in remote communities and regional areas with the provision of qualified and culturally sensitive staff to attend to the needs of the communities, to ensure that children are born in their own communities.

7 That the use of Depo-Provera and sterilisation as a means of contraception without the consent of the woman be investigated and steps taken to stop this practice.

8 That research be undertaken into the incidence of STD among Aboriginal children, and that state health authorities commit themselves to addressing this problem as a matter of urgency.

9 That the efforts of the Aboriginal organisations to deal in culturally appropriate ways and in consultation with the communities with the problem of sexual abuse of Aboriginal children and the increasing incidence of STD be adequately funded and supported by the state and Commonwealth health authorities.

10 That the importance of developing human resources in Aboriginal communities be acknowledged and that funding be provided for the training and support needs of staff of Aboriginal agencies.

11 That the community education programs be undertaken to combat the racism that is blocking the development of Aboriginal children.

12 That the special language needs of Aboriginal and Islander children be acknowledged by the Education Department and that the position of Aboriginal teacher aides be introduced into all primary schools with Aboriginal children.

13 That the feasibility of establishing multifunctional community centres in Aboriginal and Islander communities be examined with a view to supporting women and children in the communities.

14 That safe houses and refuges be established in the communities to assist women and children to escape from domestic violence.

15 That the list of nine priority areas put forward by the agencies that met in Cairns (see above) be attended to.

VICTORIA

The brief meeting with the directors of ACCA in Victoria brought up little that was different from what the ACCAs in the other states

had raised. However, this meeting highlighted the special needs of urban Aborigines, most of whom had lost contact with the traditional way of life for generations. They too have the right to identify as Aboriginal people as they still face the problems and deprivations common to Aborigines in contemporary Australia. Urban Aborigines experience the difficulties of gaining access and equity in the areas of employment, housing, health and education. They also experience the impact of racism, which hinders the development of their children.

ACCA in Victoria supports strongly the plea from other states for racism to be challenged through a public awareness campaign and further strongly urges the Commonwealth Government to introduce the treaty and ensure that the states put in place legislation that grants Land Rights to Aboriginal people. This echoes the wishes of the Aborigines in all other states. It is strongly felt that the Aborigines will gain dignity and pride and that the hope for their children lies in the recognition of their prior ownership of this land and their cultural heritage.

♦ SIX ♦

Aboriginal voices

Lena and Doreen (pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the women) are grandmothers caring for their grandchildren at home with limited support in terms of financial or other resources. They belong to two different town-camps situated outside Alice Springs (September 1988) and their stories and situations bear many similarities to the stories of dozens of other women of their age and background.

Lena's story

Lena lives in a cement brick house built by the Tangentyere Council in a town-camp just outside Alice Springs. Before moving into the camp she had cared for and raised her own seven children with the help of her extended family in the bush on the Arunda lands in Central Australia. She recalls moving from camp to camp, and from one mission to another with her family and a camel in order to pick up rations of flour, tea, sugar, tobacco and rice. Those were the days of long ago.

Then Lena began to care for her daughters' children as they had them. There were many reasons for this. The extended family lived together, so it was natural for granny to help with looking after the grandchildren. Her daughters had become unsettled in their ways as the traditional lifestyle had broken down, and they needed their mother's help to cope with childbearing and childrearing. The younger folk had become involved in alcohol consumption, leading to neglect of their children. It seemed natural for Lena to take over the care of the children in these situations.

Sometimes the mothers contributed money for the upkeep of the children out of the Supporting Parent's Benefit and Family Allowance they received. More often than not they were not able to assist financially, as the money was spent on alcohol and other expenses. Sometimes Lena received assistance from "the Welfare", especially in the form of food and food vouchers to tide the family over until the next pension day, for Lena was attempting to raise her grandchildren on her Age Pension. The grandchildren were not considered to be her dependants.

It was difficult for Lena to ask her children for financial help as she knew that they too were battling under stressful circumstances. She was also afraid that if she pressed them for money, or if she asked for the Family Allowance and the dependants' allowance to be transferred to her, the children would be removed from her care by their parents and placed with another member of the extended family network. Lena worried that the children would suffer further neglect. She preferred to care for them herself, even under these difficult circumstances. As the children grew up, sometimes in Lena's care, and sometimes with their own mothers but under the watchful eye of Lena, they came to understand and experience the real support of the extended family and community. The house was usually crowded with children and young people of all ages who chose to stop with their granny. They spent their days in and out of the house, watching TV, playing in the yard, playing with the dogs. And at night they would sleep wherever they could find a spot on makeshift beds and mattresses, especially around granny. There was a sense of belonging to and protection by their grandmother, which she was glad of because there were few joys in living in the town-camp.

The children belonged to the community. There were grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great nieces and nephews, who were related to everyone else in the camp. Although there was very little in the community, the little was always shared. The children moved from one household to another within the camp to fulfil their basic need for food, shelter, protection and care.

Lena's house functions as a safe house for the young people. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue to stop there whenever necessary. She seldom, if ever, refuses them. Lena herself does not drink and discourages drink in her house.

The one thing Lena is worried about is the number of children in the community not attending school. She makes the young children in her care attend the new school built by the Tangentyere Council, the Yipirinya School, where the children are taught an Aboriginal language as their first language and where the emphasis is on Aboriginal culture. The community is proud of this new school as they waited and fought for nearly ten years for the present site and the new building. At this school the children can identify as Aborigines with pride and dignity. Still there are a number of children who do not attend Yipirinya or the local state school. Lena is worried as she remembers the days when children were removed from their families and their communities if they truanted, for the authorities ("the Welfare") considered them to be

neglected children and "in need of care and protection". She is afraid the community will lose these children in the same way.

Lena quietly tells us this story sitting on her mattress in front of her house, speaking in Aboriginal English. A scrawny dog shares the mattress with her, her great-grandchildren play around the yard with their puppy dogs as white children would play with their Cabbagepatch dolls or stuffed toys, taking them in and out of the old car body propped up under the Japanese pepper tree. Lena introduces us to grandchildren, daughters and great-grandchildrden as they pass in and out of the house. It is clear that there are "big mobs" of family inside the house, but we are not invited into this private space.

She has told a little of her story, with dignity, maintaining her space and keeping face as she gently expressed some of the pain of her life. It was a gentle acknowledgment of the situation, no blame or reprimand, just a statement that described the situation, understating the cost to herself and her community. She was at pains to say, "They all right, those kids. They good kids, the kids I grown up."

Doreen's story

Doreen is the only adult in her town-camp who does not drink to excess. The day we visited there were six young men in their late 20s and early 30s sitting in the yard, drinking and listening to the music of the 1960s blaring from a portable radio. They sat there in silence or whispered quiet comments to each other. Under a tree in Doreen's yard were a couple of older blokes, obviously intoxicated, who refused to budge when she called out to them to move along and not to drink in her yard. We had just arrived and Doreen was probably embarrassed by their presence.

She had bought a few snacks from one of the licensed hawkers who services the town-camps: bubblegum, a couple of mandarins, a loaf of bread, milk and lemonade. We sat near a mulberry tree in front of her house. We knew it was pension week as there was money to spend.

Doreen had very dark skin and strong features. She spoke clearly and definitely, obviously drawing on a wealth of experience. She was a very well-respected woman in the community and had been a midwife, delivering many, many babies and supporting their mothers. She now stayed at home caring for her grandchild, Mary's young son, Darryl, who had been removed from his mother as a baby and was until recently fostered in Adelaide. Doreen told of how she had fought and argued with "the Welfare" for the return of Darryl, promising to care for him herself. Mary had been drinking

and could not be trusted to care for 5-year-old Darryl, although she loved the child and saw herself as his mother. Mary and her man, John Brown, had come to live with Doreen now that Darryl was with her.

As we gently questioned her, Doreen talked about how she cared for Darryl. She spent her pension plus the dependant's allowance buying food and clothing for her young charge. This left very little over for anything else. Mary gave her some money regularly out of her pension to pay for some of Darryl's expenses, but Doreen said she would appreciate an equal contribution from John, who never offered a cent. The couple spent all the money they could lay their hands on on drink.

This meant that there was often no money for food or anything else, so the couple would expect Doreen to provide. She often refused because the little she had was for Darryl. The adults sometimes became aggressive and threatened her. There was little she could do, because she was then in physical danger. Doreen was hoping her phone would be fixed by Telecom, as she could then phone the police for protection. There are stories of how the adults break into the locked cupboard where Doreen keeps her precious groceries for Darryl. If the camp dogs are any indicator of the amount of food that is available in these households, they are a sad one—the two mangey dogs were obviously starving. They were so under-nourished they could hardly walk.

Doreen carefully told us what Darryl's favourite food was: Weet-Bix for breakfast, Weet-Bix and honey for another snack or a meal, and, when there was money (on pension day, for example) there was a stew cooked with plenty of vegetables.

When he was sick (suffering from "gutsache", gastro or diarrhoea) she brought him straight away to the medical centre for attention. The doctors in Adelaide all knew him as he had received treatment at the Children's Hospital there (probably for failure to thrive, gastroenteritis, ENT infections). He suffered from chronic ear infections and would need to have grommets inserted to drain his ears. His condition is being constantly monitored by the clinics, and that is why Doreen takes so much care. She wants to keep Darryl at all costs. She has seen how the community's children have been removed to "other lands" in Queensland, Western Australia and the South. This hurts Doreen deeply.

When Doreen was a young woman, she had no family to help her. Both her mother and her father had died, and there were no other family members, no sisters or brothers to turn to for help. She cared for her children herself, carrying her babies close to her as she went about her business as a horsewoman/drover on the

cattle stations. She "grew her daughter up" herself. Doreen is angry that parents drink and neglect their children. She watches these children run from house to house looking for food. Life is unsafe for these children, who end up picking up the wine flagon and following the example of their parents. They come to her place looking for a feed or a bed; she finds it hard to refuse them. The lives of these children are full of violence and neglect. There is a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

Doreen would like some help in caring for Darryl, in the form of relief or home help to assist her with the house cleaning or child minding when she has to attend important meetings, and support when she is sick. At present she receives good support from the Tangentyere Council with help with her washing, one of the services offered to pensioners. She would like to see more support for mothers and grannys with young children. Her boy Darryl will be going to school soon, and this means that she will need support for a little longer to help her cope with the responsibility of caring for him. At present she takes Darryl everywhere with her, as she cannot trust him with anyone else on the camp.

In her opinion, the way out of all this is through education. That is what she would like for young Darryl. Education would give him the opportunity to get a job and hopefully a better life.

The story of a young mother and her children

May (pseudonym) is a 25-year-old woman living in Geraldton, a coastal town north of Perth. May was born in Cue, a small, ex-mining settlement north-east of Perth, and grew up in and around Meekatharra, Mt Magnet, Cue and later Perth. When her parents separated, her mother was allocated a three-bedroom house in Lockridge by Homeswest, the public housing authority in Western Australia.

May left school when she turned 15. School had been a struggle for her, because she had trouble keeping up with the work, and she was always getting into fights with the other kids at school. The constant moving from town to town as the family followed work disrupted her schooling. She could not settle down to study and felt she could never catch up. Her parents never had an education and couldn't help her in the same way as the other kids' parents. They were always arguing and carrying on, so there was no peace and quiet when she tried to do her homework. And when they were not arguing there were big mobs of relations who passed through needing a feed or somewhere to stop for a while.

Then there were the other kids to think about. When her parents were fighting and when her dad came home drunk, she had to look

after the little ones to make sure they were all right. Sometimes she and the others didn't go to school because they were hungry and had nothing to take for lunch. May would be ashamed because the other kids at school would tease them or stare at them and ask them where their lunch was. At other times May and her sisters and brother were ashamed to go to school because they had to wear the same clothes every day. They had no washing-machine and when it was raining they had no clean, dry clothes.

Sometimes in school the other kids would jar her up so much she couldn't stand it and would get into trouble for hitting a kid. May always got into trouble, the white kids never. Her teachers put her outside the class for punishment, so she missed even more teaching. They sent her home, so she missed even more teaching. The kids at school picked on her about everything. It got too much when the teachers also picked on her and her family. Instead of helping, they said she would be no good.

May left school because she felt it was no use trying when everyone made things so difficult. Even if she worked hard and passed her exams, what job could she get? Most of her relations couldn't find a job. There are few jobs for Aboriginal people in the area, and it's getting more difficult every day. Her mother always said she wanted her kids to finish school and get a good job in an office or something, but it was no use. May felt she had let her mother down.

When she was 17 she met Jo, who was from Geraldton. Jo used to visit his granny in Lockridge. May fell pregnant and had her first child in Perth. She and Jo stayed with her mother in Lockridge until the house got too crowded with the other grandchildren and family who also stopped there. She followed Jo to Geraldton and stopped with his relations, different ones from time to time, while they waited for Homeswest to give them a house. They were on the waiting list for three years before they got a house.

In the meantime, May and her *de facto* had their troubles. Jo was mostly unemployed and found it difficult to keep out of trouble, especially when he was with his cousins. They broke up many times, and May would go back to her mum and stay for a few weeks or months, receiving the Supporting Parent's Benefit. Sometimes she would leave her children with her mother while she went back to Jo to try and sort things out. When this happened, her mother was happy to help out, but asked for money for the kids.

May had little money to spare after paying the rent, buying the bus ticket down to Perth and back, buying some tucker and a few clothes. Often they could not afford to pay for the medicines the children needed for their asthma.

When May and Jo were together, Jo was very jealous of her. He would beat her up if he thought she was looking at another man. When we met them they were getting on well and she was expecting her fourth child.

May said she was very worried about the children. Her eldest was 7 and repeating Year 1 in a new school. Her 4-year-old had been sick for months. He was flown to Princess Margaret Hospital for Children in Perth and put in the intensive care unit for a week. He had been getting thinner and weaker and she could not get him to eat anything; there was little in the house for him except Lactogen and Weet-Bix, milk and sugar. She didn't think there was anything seriously wrong with him, so she didn't tell the Community Health Sister anything. But when he had the runs and was vomiting, her aunty made her bring him to the clinic and they flew him straight to Perth. She rings up every other day. They said she nearly lost him. Now she is worried the Welfare will take him away.

What she would like for her children is a good education so that they can have good jobs and a better chance than she had. If only they didn't have to fight so hard for everything that seems to come to others so easily. May is tired of fighting. Sometimes she would like to disappear for ever.

One thing that keeps her going is the thought of a better life for her children. Things have changed a little over the years. She now knows she and her family can go to the Aboriginal Medical Service for treatment or the Aboriginal Legal Service for legal aid. She is proud that these organisations are managed by Aboriginal people and that they provide good jobs for Aboriginal people. This gives her some hope for her children. May hopes there will be better job opportunities for her children than she and Jo had. A good education and a steady job will help her children to have a better life.

An Anangu story

The following story is taken from the Report of Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku, the Review of Environmental and Public Health on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) Lands. It describes living conditions of Aborigines living in communities on the homelands. The story is quoted with annotations (UPK Report 1987, pp.34-5).

The Anangu story was constructed to show how many small factors combine to have a dramatic impact on the day-to-day lives of Anangu living in the larger AP communities. While this is not a complete "model" of all aspects of life on the AP lands, it should indicate the fallacy of considering health, management or environment issues in isolation.

It is late summer and the temperature is 40°C. You are walking home from the community store carrying the food you will eat for dinner, one pack of meat, a packet of sugar, a bag of flour and four cool drinks for your kids. You hope that your youngest child (2 years old) is feeling better since visiting the health clinic this morning. A trip to Alice Springs may be needed? You pass a community meeting and recognise frequent visitors to the community (DAA, ADC, Aboriginal Housing Board advisers) and the Community Council arguing about housing money and what type of houses to build.

In your house yard you see other children playing and all your family outside sitting under two old shade trees. You explain how you spent all your week's leftover money (after food, clothes and petrol) on a cassette tape, which was on special for $9.

Two of the kids are playing in a pool of smelly water near the back of the house and the other two are playing with the dogs under the tap, which is constantly dripping. Two older relatives are starting a fire for dinner in the shelter of a bed frame covered with an old tarpaulin.

You remember the clinic sister's advice, explained to you by the health worker, to wash your 2-year-old child in the evening, so you go into the house and to the bathroom.

There is a bad smell and it is very hot the minute you enter the house. The bathroom floor is covered in water, and the toilet appears to be blocked. One shower tap has fallen off, so you decide to use the basin. It is too small to wash the child in and it is only after you start the washing that you discover there is still no hot water. There is no soap or a towel to dry the child so you use your shirt and make do. You go into the next room to get clean clothes for the child, the sun is streaming in making the room extremely hot and you discover that water seeping from the bathroom has soaked all your bedding and clothes on the floor.

Dinner finished, you set a small fire in the yard and make camp for the night—you have just experienced another average Pitjantjatjara day.

Notes on Anangu Life

1 The UPK study demonstrated that the Anangu adult daily sugar consumption per capita was equal to sixty-six teaspoons of sugar, not including the sugar contained in cool drinks.

2 Nganampa Health Council staff recorded 36,500 clinic attendances during the year 1985 (Nganampa Health Council Annual Report, 1986).

3 Aboriginal children are hospitalised for pneumonia eighty times more commonly than Caucasians.

4 Over a period of three months at Aparawatatja there were 142 separate meetings to discuss internal and external matters.

5 Despite all the discussions of "housing" by Government, Aboriginal agencies and communities, it seems highly improbable that either the funding ($10 million over five years) or organisational infrastructure (design, consultation, contract administration and building supervision) will ever exist to "house" all Anangu living on the Pitjantjatjara lands.

6 80 per cent of Anangu spend on the average 70 per cent of the time outside the "house".

7 The prevalence of mature shade trees over immature shade trees around dwellings would indicate either a lack of recent planting programs associated with houses or poor siting, irrigation and protection of new planting.

8 Personal income research shows that a household of eight has an average income of $393 a week, of which $264 is spent on food ($200), clothes ($50) and fuel ($14). This leaves a weekly disposable income of $129 for each household of $16/person. (Indulkana community Dec.'85—June '85.)

9 The disposal of waste from the living area is perhaps the greatest "housing" failure. Septic tanks and soakage trenches, where they exist, were a particular source of yard pollution.

10 A quarter (25 per cent) of all yard taps were found to be not functioning. In one community this figure was as high as 52 per cent of taps not working. It is important to note that some houses (nomad type) have their only source of local water supplied by an external tap.

11 People *live* outside the house. Of 67 houses surveyed, 103 recently used outside fire areas were recorded. 50 per cent of all houses had more than one fire area. Small wiltjas, bedding or cooking utensils were almost always associated with yard fire areas.

12 One dentist, five doctors, thirteen nursing sisters and thirty-five health workers (sharing twenty-two full-time positions) within Nganampa Health Council are responsible for the delivery of health care across the AP lands.

13 On average, nine people will be using the bathroom facilities of any house. Given that the toilet and washing facilities, and in most cases laundry facilities if they exist, are combined in the one room, the load on the facilities is further increased.

14 57 per cent of all waste services are not working satisfactorily, resulting in foul water collecting within the "house". As only 67 per cent of all windows are able to ventilate, the chances of removing smells are reduced.

15 Poor floor grading, blocked waste pipes and failed flush toilets often render the house uninhabitable when foul water infiltrates other rooms.

16 Poor access to cold water is due to failure of water control points within the "house" rather than lack of mains water supply or reticulation.

17 On average, only 50 per cent of all hot water installations are able to supply hot water. In one community hot water is available to only 21 per cent of installations.

18 The availability of these personal health hardware items is dependent upon store policy and available personal income.

19 The average house has two bedrooms with an average house area of 77 square metres. On the basis of an average of nine people/house on the AP lands, the average suburban Australian house (130 square metres) would accommodate fifteen people.

20 67 per cent of all houses have an orientation that could be considered marginally beneficial. Only 31 per cent of houses have verandahs that would provide *any* benefit to the comfort of the house or outside areas.

21 The inclusion of wet areas in the central core of the house and bathroom floors raised higher than surrounding rooms usually means that any failure of the wet area quickly spreads throughout the "house".

Appendix A

Table 1 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

	Census 1981 (persons)	**Census 1986** (persons)	**Intercensal variation** (%)
NSW	35,367	59,011	+66.9
Vic.	6,057	12,611	+108.2
Qld	44,698	61,268	+37.1
SA	9,825	14,291	+45.5
WA	31,351	37,789	+20.5
Tas.	2,688	6,716	+149.9
NT	29,088	34,739	+19.4
ACT	823	1,220	+48.2
Total	159,897	227,645	+42.4

Source: ABS 1986 census

Table 2 Distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by rural-urban location by State

	Major Urban	%	**Other Urban**	%	**Rural Localities**	%	**Other Rural**	%	**Total**	%
NSW	21,416	(36.30)	27,352	(46.35)	3,075	(5.21)	7,168	(12.14)	59,011	(100)
Vic.	5,986	(47.47)	5,224	(41.42)	229	(1.82)	1,172	(9.29)	12,611	(100)
Qld	11,091	(18.10)	28,788	(46.98)	11,013	(17.98)	10,376	(16.94)	61,268	(100)
SA	5,696	(39.85)	4,580	(32.05)	1,223	(8.56)	2,792	(19.54)	14,291	(100)
WA	8,949	(23.69)	15,775	(41.74)	4,672	(12.36)	8,393	(22.21)	37,789	(100)
Tas.	1,351	(20.12)	3,460	(51.51)	568	(8.46)	1,337	(19.91)	6,716	(100)
NT	-	-	10,700	(30.80)	13,274	(38.21)	10,765	(30.99)	34,739	(100)
ACT	1,048	(85.90)	-	-	-	-	172	(14.10)	1,220	(100)
Total	55,537	(24.40)	95,879	(42.12)	34,054	(14.96)	42,175	(18.52)	227,645	(100)

Source: ABS Census 86 Cat. .No. 2499.0.

Table 3 Aborigines Registered for Employment with the CES, by state; 1971-80, 1983-6

YEAR	NSW	Vic.	Qld	WA	SA	Tas.	NT	Total
1971	951	218	1,070	906	355	30	123	3,653
1972	1,007	269	1,021	1,224	457	23	197	4,198
1973	1,343	283	964	1,268	456	20	163	4,497
1974	1,809	330	2,082	1,840	553	29	439	7,082
1975	2,765	593	2,922	2,121	590	61	1,016	10,068
1976	3,276	700	3,455	2,624	723	61	973	11,812
1977	3,745	698	4,193	2,957	924	78	1,629	14,224
1978	4,161	722	4,683	3,702	984	156	1,823	16,231
1979	3,974	781	4,829	4,068	1,011	118	1,901	16,682
1980	4,515	-*	5,138	4,092	1,146	159	2,570	-*
1983	5,364	937	6,862	3,740	1,456	162	5,056	23,577
1984	5,932	971	7,713	3,727	1,486	195	4,287	24,311
1985	6,519	895	7,713	4,457	1,617	229	4,933	26,363
1986	9,363	1,211	9,438	5,399	1,897	267	8,887	36,462

The figures for 1971-80 comprise all persons who were still registered with the CES at the Friday nearest the end of the month, who claimed when registering that they were not employed, and who were seeking full-time employment, i.e. 35 hours or more per week. They include persons referred to employers, but whose employment was still unconfirmed, and persons who had recently obtained employment without notifiying the CES. All recipients of unemployment benefits are included. The figures do not include those Aborigines who do not have access to the CES or who are not contacted by Vocational Officers of the CES. The regular collection was terminated after March 1981 and resumed in June 1983, continuing to December 1986. NSW figures include the Australian Capital Territory.

* No figures were available due to a ban on collection of statistics.

Source. DEIR; DAA: Aboriginal Statistics, 1986.

Table 4 Education Participation Rates, 1986

Age-group	Aboriginal people (per cent)	All Australians (per cent)
5-9 years (a)	88.2	99.0(b)
10-15 years (a)	83.1	98.3
16-17 years	31.6	74.5
18-20 years	7.5	41.4
21-24 years	4.1	20.4
25+ years	2.7	7.9(c)

(a) The eduation participation rates for those aged 5-9 include school and pre-school participation; for those aged 10-15 years they include school participation only. The rates for all other age-groups show participation in schooling, TAFE and higher education.(b) Estimated.(c) For the age-group 25-64 years only.

Sources: ABS, 1986 Census of Population and Housing; DEET, Education Participation Rates: Australia 1987, Canberra, 1988; DEET: Report of Aboriginal Education Policy *Task Force*, 1988.

Table 5 State and Territory Differences in Aboriginal School and TAFE Participation Rates, 1986

Age group and type of education	State/Territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Total
	%								
Schooling									
5-9 years	89.1	84.5	79.4	82.7	76.4	87.8	71.8	94.2	80.9
10-15 years	84.5	82.8	84.8	82.5	80.2	90.6	78.4	91.5	83.1
16-17 years	27.9	33.2	31.8	23.7	17.1	18.2	23.2	35.4	26.3
TAFE									
16-17 years	6.7	6.2	2.2	8.0	4.8	16.8	1.8	6.3	4.8
18-20 years	6.2	6.6	2.3	6.5	2.8	6.6	2.1	10.1	4.0
21-24 years	3.8	3.0	1.3	4.0	3.0	3.8	1.1	8.5	2.6

Sources: ABS, 1986 Census of Population and Housing; DEET, Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, 1988.

Table 6 Retention of Aboriginal Secondary-School Students(a) Rate Year, 1976-86(b)

Year	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
8	4,226	4,261	4,578	4,825	4,980	4,983	5,182	5,507	5,640	5,700	5,860
9	3,443	3,399	3,573	3,896	4,031	4,378	4,549	4,796	5,073	5,227	5,338
	(80.4)	(83.8)	(85.1)	(83.5)	(87.9)	(91.3)	(92.5)	(92.1)	(92.7)	(93.6)	
10	2,270	2,502	2,601	2,776	3,011	3,360	3,540	3,926	3,970	4,126	4,356
		(61.5)	(65.1)	(65.8)	(69.6)	(71.1)	(78.7)	(76.6)	(74.9)	(77.2)	
11	636	717	789	869	1,012	1,167	1,204	1,536	1,585	1,863	2,046
			(20.6)	(23.8)	(25.5)	(25.0)	(30.8)	(31.8)	(36.0)	(37.2)	
12	177	224	237	300	325	421	454	538	656	744	882
				(7.7)	(9.9)	(9.9)	(11.2)	(13.2)	(14.9)	(17.0)	
Total	10,752	11,103	11,778	12,666	13,359	14,309	14,929	18,954	19,834	20,845	21,345

(a) Retention rate (in brackets) is based on start year of Year 8 cohort.

(b) As at 30 June.

Sources: Commonwealth Department of Education; DAA: Aboriginal Statistics, 1986.

Table 7 Retention of Aboriginal Secondary-School Students(a): Number, Rate, State, Grade, 1981-85(b)

State	Grade 8 in 1981	Grade 9 in 1982	Grade 10 in 1983	Grade 11 in 1984	Grade 12 in 1985	Ret. rate
NSW & ACT	1,421	1,291	1,030	298	140	9.9
Vic.	221	194	172	70	25	11.3
Qld	1,697	1,515	1,411	669	426	25.1
WA	979	844	664	246	60	6.1
SA	278	252	203	148	47	16.9
Tas.	93	104	97	28	15	16.1
NT	294	349	349	126	31	10.5
Total	4,983	4,549	3,926	1,585	744	14.9
Retention rate	100.0	91.3	78.8	31.8	14.9	

(a) Based on number of cohort in Year 8, 1981.

(b) As at 30 June.

Sources. Commonwealth Department of Education; DAA: Aboriginal Statistics, 1986.

Table 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population: 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986 Censuses

	1971	1976	1981	1986	As % total pop. in 1986
NSW (inc. ACT)	23,873	40,450	35 367	59 011	1.04
Vic.	6,371	14,760	6 057	12 611	0.31
Qld	31,922	41,345	44 698	61 268	2.37
WA	22,181	26,126	31 351	37 789	2.69
SA	7,299	10,714	9 825	14 291	1.06
Tas.	671	2,942	2 688	6 716	1.54
NT	23,381	23,751	29 088	34 739	22.44
ACT	255	827	823	1 220	inc. in NSW % above
Total	115,953	160 915	159 897	227 645	1.43

Source. ABS, Census of Population and Housing.

Table 9 Employment Rates for Aboriginal People and Education Qualifications, 1981 and 1986

Level of Qualification	Proportion of people aged 15+ who are employed **All Australians 1981** (per cent)	**Aborigines 1981** (per cent)	**Aborigines 1986** (per cent)
	With post-secondary qualifications		
Higher degree/postgraduate award	84.6	82.4	83.1
Bachelor's degree	83.9	81.1	81.4
Diploma	75.1	74.4	73.4
Trade certificate	80.7	76.7	73.9
Other certificate	71.7	58.7	60.6
Other (a)	65.1	53.6	60.2
Sub-total	77.7	69.3	66.3
	Without post-school qualifications		
No qualifications	54.0	34.5	28.8
Still at school	13.9	8.3	-
Not started	45.6	40.9	22.8
Sub-total	51.2	34.2	27.8
Total	57.6	35.7	31.3

(a) Not classifiable or inadequately described.

Sources. ABS, Census of Population and Housing., 1981 and 1986; DEET, Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force.

Table 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Persons Aged 15+ years: Income by Sex

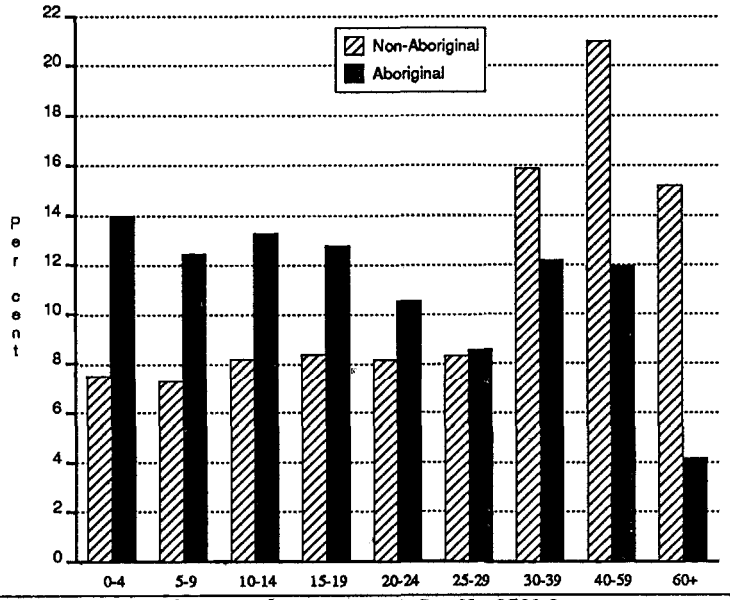
Annual Income -Individual	**Males 15+**	**%**	**Females 15+**	**%**	**Total**
$0-$9000	32,353	(41.8)	45,011	(58.2)	77,364
$9001-$15000	14,402	(56.6)	11,059	(43.4)	25,461
$15001-$22000	8,637	(68.1)	4,045	(31.9)	12,682
$22001-$32000	2,524	(76.6)	770	(23.4)	3,294
$32001-$40000	387	(80.5)	94	(19.5)	481
$40001 and over	277	(82.2)	60	(17.8)	337
Not Stated	7,839	(44.8)	9,675	(55.2)	17,514
Total	66,419	(48.4)	70,714	(51.6)	137,133

Source. ABS 1986 Census: Table CA0051

Table 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Persons Aged 15+ years: Income by Labour Force Status by Sex

	Labour Force Status					
	Employed	**Unemployed**	**Total in Labour Force**	**Not in Labour Force**	**Not Stated**	**Total Aged 15+**
Males						
Income - Individual (annual)						
$0-$9000	4,702	11,133	15,835	15,519	999	32,353
$9001-$15000	9,767	2,478	12,245	1,887	270	14,402
$15001-$22000	7,983	249	8,232	308	97	8,637
$22001-$32000	2,347	60	2,407	84	33	2,524
$32001-$40000	368	4	372	7	8	387
$40001 and over	226	8	234	34	9	277
Not Stated	1,410	1,152	2,562	3,556	1,721	7,839
Total	26,803	15,084	41,887	21,395	3,137	66,419
Females						
Income - individual (annual)						
$0-$9000	5,125	6,863	11,988	31,616	1,407	45,011
$9001-$15000	6,099	589	6,688	4,123	248	11,059
$15001-$22000	3,244	72	3,316	631	98	4,045
$22001-$32000	659	7	666	90	14	770
$32001-$40000	82	1	83	8	3	94
$40001 and over	40	3	43	14	3	60
Not Stated	826	790	1,616	5,975	2,084	9,675
Total	16,075	8,325	24,400	42,457	3,857	70,714
Persons						
Income - individual (annual)						
$0-$9000	9,827	17,996	27,823	47,135	2,406	77,364
$9001-$15000	15,866	3,067	18,933	6,010	518	25,461
$15001-$22000	11,227	321	11,548	939	195	12,682
$22001-$32000	3,006	67	3,073	174	47	3,294
$32001-$40000	450	5	455	15	11	481
$40001 and over	266	11	277	48	12	337
Not Stated	2,236	1,942	4,178	9,531	3,805	17,514
Total	42,878	23,409	66,287	63,852	6,994	137,133

Figure 1 Comparison of Age-Structures Based on 1986 Census



Source: ABS: Australia In Brief, Census 1986, Cat. No. 2501.0

Figure 2a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population: Age-groups 1981 and 1986 Census

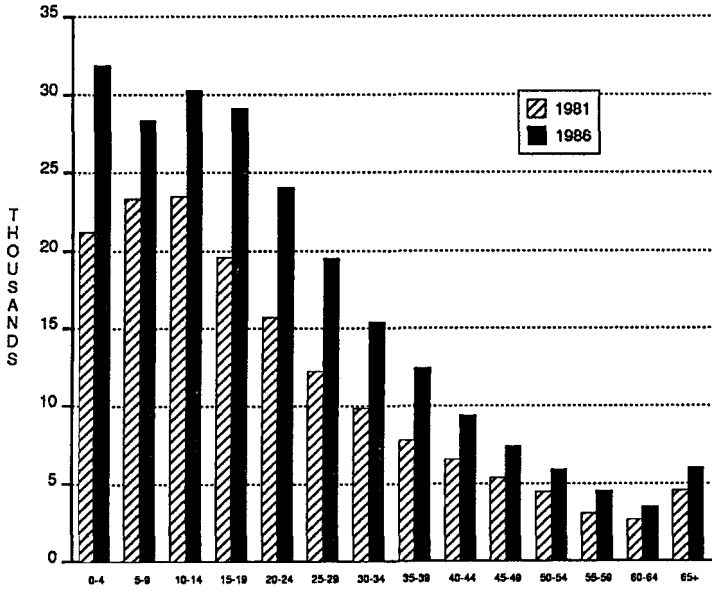
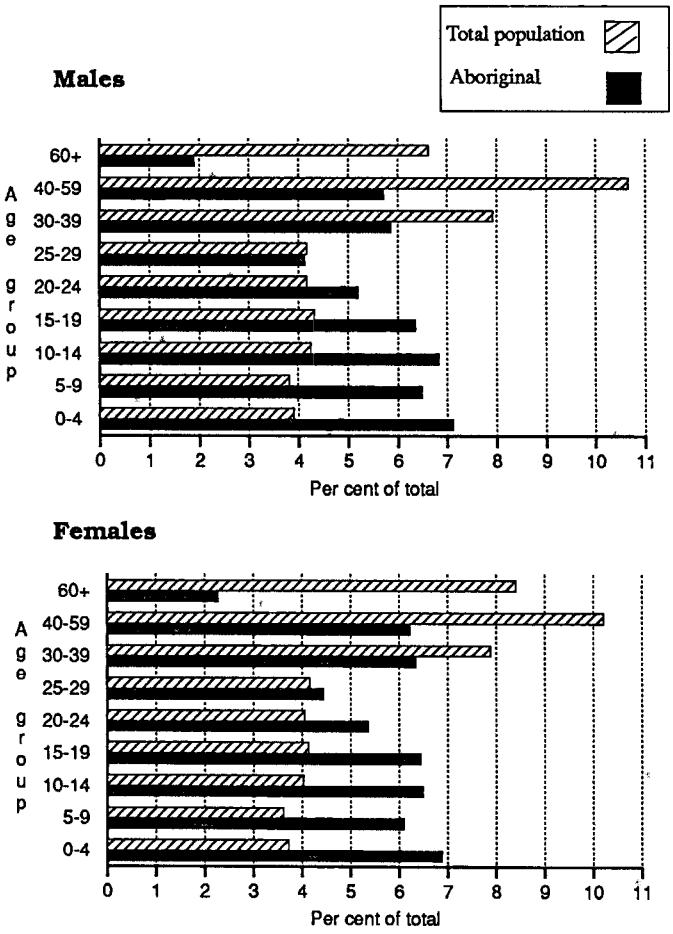
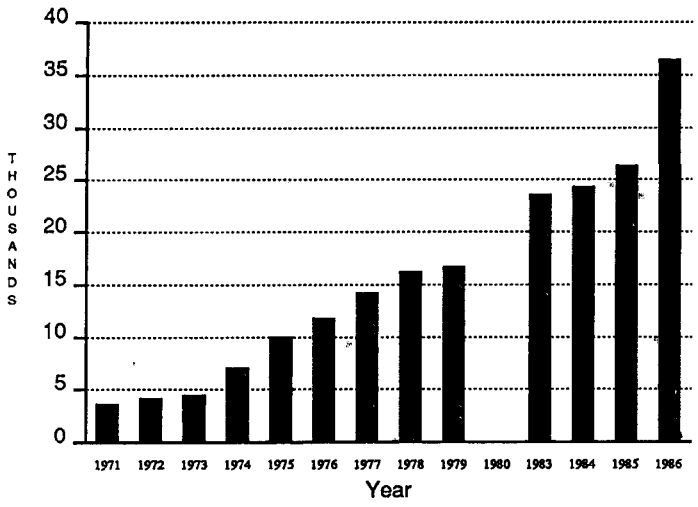


Figure 2b Age-Sex Distribution of Aboriginal Population and Total Population



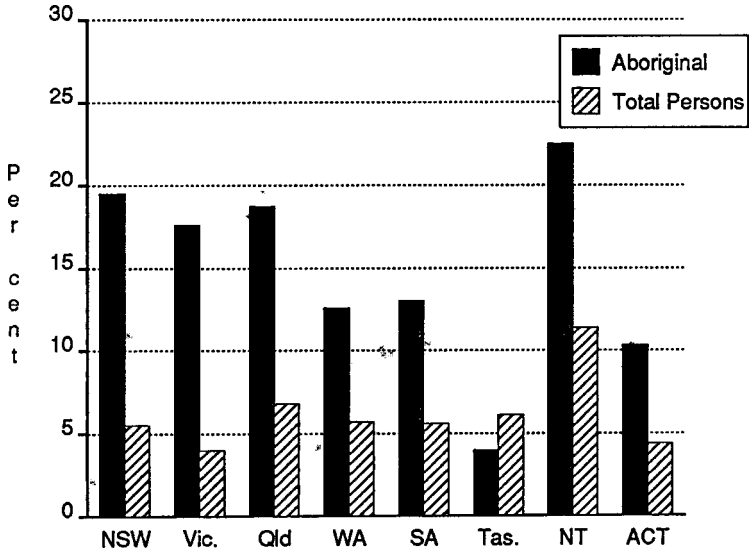
Source. ABS: 1986 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 3 Aborigines Registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service



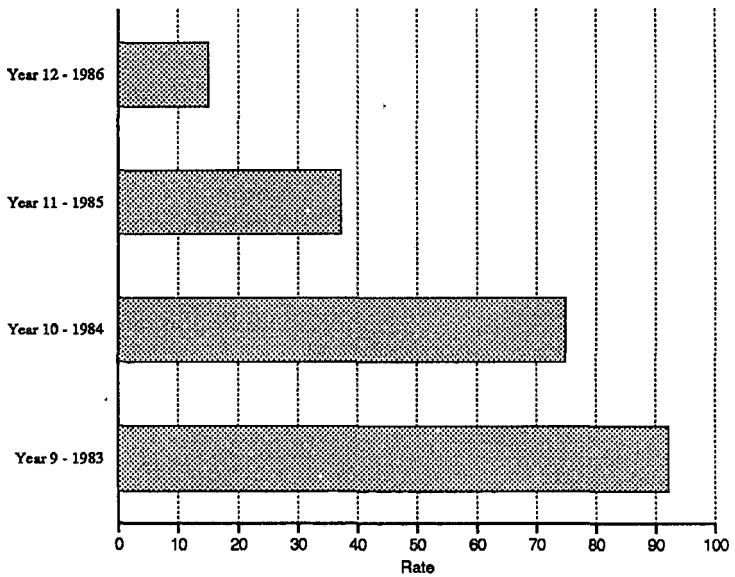
Source. DAA: Aboriginal Statistics, 1986.

Figure 4 Unemployed Persons Registered with CES: Expressed as a Percentaged of Population, March 1987



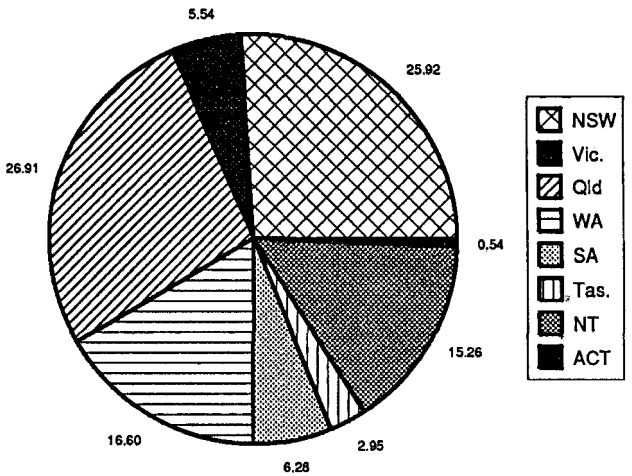
Sources: DEIR; DAA: Annual Report, 1986/87.

Figure 5 Aboriginal Secondary-school Retention Rate



Source. DAA: Aboriginal Statistics, 1986.

Figure 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population 30 June 1986: Percentage by States



Source. DAA: Annual Report 1986/87.

Appendix B

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE—NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND NATIONAL AIMS.

(Source. NAEC (1985): *Philosophy, Aims and Policy Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, AGPS, Canberra. pp.4-5.)

NAEC recognises that there exists a common feeling of "Aboriginality" among all the descendants of the indigenous people of Australia, both traditional and non-traditional. We believe that education for our people must be a process that builds on what we are by recognising and developing our national potential and cultural heritage.

By any acceptable educational standard in Australia today the education of Aboriginal people is seriously inadequate. A major reason for this inadequacy is that the educational theories and processes used in Australia have been developed by and for non-Aboriginal people. They are largely inappropriate for our people. School and further education authorities must develop education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology. Only when this occurs will education for our people be a process that builds on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identity.

In promoting the need for educational processes to work from an Aboriginal world view, we must emphasise the growth of the person as a whole. We further recognise the need for educational processes to develop the academic and technological skills so necessary for our people to take their place in the Australia of today. To be effective, the acquisition of those skills must be in harmony with our own cultural values, identity and choice of lifestyle, whether we reside in urban, traditional community or homeland centres.

NAEC believes that Australia will never develop its true nationhood until it recognises the prior ownership and the culture of its indigenous people and their descendants. We therefore consider it essential that a knowledge of this be given to every Australian. To do this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island studies must become part of the curriculum in early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education. It must be taught with a high level of respect and understanding so that an accurate knowledge of Australian history and indigenous culture can be obtained.

NAEC further contends that a corollary of Aboriginal Studies would be the promoting of programs for cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and respect for the differing cultural viewpoints

held by the peoples of Australia. In so doing the uniqueness of our people becomes the core of such studies, from which will grow a cross-cultural awareness, which is so important in a multicultural Australia.

The development of all or any of the above philosophies dictates that our people must be given the responsibility for planning policies to implement such programs. An integral part of any education policy is the arrangement made for funding and administering the policy. It is essential that our people be involved, and it is to this end that we advocate the development of local, state and national consultative networks to carry out this function.

It is also essential for our people to play a major part in the actual service delivery of the various educational processes. It is therefore imperative that opportunities be created for training and employing Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders so that we can be effectively involved in developing policies and in planning, implementing and delivering services.

NAEC wishes to make very clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The time has come for us to take the major responsibility for its development. Our people's futures are at stake. We cannot be part of this country unless we ensure that education allows us to take our place as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with pride in our own identity and with confidence that we can play our part in Australian society. The NAEC therefore identifies the following aims:

- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education be a process that builds on our cultural heritage and world view.
- That educational programs be developed using Aboriginal learning styles accompanied by an appropriate pedagogy.
- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education lead to personal development and the acquisition of the skills and learning needed for Australia today.
- That Australia as a whole become aware of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and history.
- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies be the core of further cross-cultural studies for a multicultural Australia.
- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be given the responsibility for planning and implementing policies on Aboriginal education.
- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be trained for and be employed in education service delivery.

Appendix C

LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS CONTACTED IN COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

Alice Springs

Central Australian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (CA ACCA)
Heather Shearer, Co-ordinator
Brian White and other staff members

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC)
Medical Service, Dr P. Tait
Family Support Service staff

Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA)
Freda Glynn, Director.

Central Land Council

Combined Aboriginal Organisations of Alice Springs

Department of Health and Community Services
Christine Palmer, Aboriginal Community Worker and other staff members

Institute for Aboriginal Development
Marilyn Davis
Sr Joan Gaskell

Nganampa Health Council Inc.
Maria Thompson, Administrative Secretary
Mary Lehassingnol, Interpreter

Tangentyere Council
Betty Pearce, Aboriginal Women's Officer
Mary Burgess, Community Support
Julie Coghlin, Co-ordinator, Supported Accommodation

South Australia

SA ACCA Forum at Uluru, September 1988
Brian Butler, Marsha McRae, Jane Lester, Edie Carter, Myrtle Bonny, Maureen McCallum, Sarah Mihera, Anita Campbell, Muriel Olsson, Bruce Carter, and other Delegates.

40 Aboriginal children from across SA
Members of the Mimily community in Central Australia,
Staff of the SA ACCA

Queensland

Yuddika Child Care Agency, Cairns
Margaret Ah Kee and Staff

AICCA, Brisbane
Ian Levinge

AICCA, Townsville
Jenny Pryor

Aboriginal Health Program, Cairns
Lucy Cora

Cairns Hospital
Rose Richards

Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Cairns
Kenny Rose

Hope Vally Council
Carole Rosendale

Parramatta Primary School, Cairns
Lyn Peacock

Warringu Women's Shelter, Cairns
Ialie Bosen
Jeanette Singleton
Ada Tillett

Wuchopperen Medical Service, Cairns
Cheryl Williams
Debra Deeval
Dr D.M. Stevens MBBS

Graceland Smallwood, Consultant Health Educator

Margaret Valadian, Consultant Community Development and Training

Victoria

VACCA Directors and Staff
Fay Carter, Chairperson
Peter Rotumah, Program Director
Jenny Cullin, Extended Family Care Co-ordinator
Vera Wigg, Family Support Co-ordinator
Michael Jackomos, Administration Co-ordinator
Phillip Cooper, Director
Kelvin Onus, Director
Ron James,Director
Alf Bamblett

Western Australia
WA ACCA
Robert Eggington, Director and staff
Jackie Oakley, Aboriginal Advisor to the Director, DCS
Ted Wilks, Director, AMS
Dean Collard, Director, Manguri
Robert Bropho, leader of the fringe-dwellers outside Perth

Appendix D

OUTLINE OF RESEARCH PROCESS

Following discussions with the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (SNAICC) was approached to co-sponsor the project, as the national co-ordinating body for the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCA or ACCA) across Australia. The National Executive of SNAICC endorsed the project and its methodology and each state AICCA or ACCA was contacted (through SNAICC) by letter, seeking their cooperation in this project.

The co-sponsorship of the project which entailed the joint partnership between the BSL and the AICCAs and ACCAs (through SNAICC),

- recognised the central role of the AICCAs and ACCAs as agencies with primary concern for the welfare of Aboriginal children;
- facilitated the participation of AICCAs and ACCAs nationally in the project;
- enhanced the credibility of the project with the Aboriginal communities across Australia;
- enhanced the consultation process with Aboriginal communities across Australia;
- improved the quality of information from the "grassroots" giving a more accurate picture of the disadvantages and poverty experienced by Aboriginal children;
- gave Aboriginal communities, through the AICCAs and ACCAs, access to solid information about child poverty to assist them in their planning and lobbying activities;
- enabled Aboriginal communities, through the BSL and SNAICC, to place Aboriginal child poverty on the agenda of the welfare sector and the federal government.

The AICCAs and ACCAs nationally were invited to participate actively in presenting the views of the Aboriginal community on child poverty by considering the following questions and submitting their responses to the researcher by whatever means they considered appropriate:

- How does your agency define child poverty?
- How does your agency describe the circumstances relating to the disadvantage and poverty facing Aboriginal children?
- What solutions would you recommend to deal with the problems of Aboriginal child poverty?

The ACCAs in Western Australia, South Australia, Central Australia and Victoria and the AICCAs in Queensland took an active part in the consultation and information-gathering process. It was more difficult to make contact with the ACCAs in NSW and Tasmania. A list of individuals and agencies who attended meetings or who agreed to be interviewed is appended (Appendix C). The researcher later had the opportunity to attend the SNAICC Annual General Meeting in Canberra in February 1989 to present the draft report and to seek the participation of all representatives present in developing recommendations from the material presented. People from all states except Tasmania attended this gathering.

The Director of WA ACCA and three other Aboriginal people in Western Australia deeply involved in Aboriginal children's issues formed the Aboriginal Research Advisory/Reference Group in Western Australia. This group provided the direction and sounding board for the development of the research and guided the non-Aboriginal researcher throughout the study. The group provided the "thinking space" and discussion in which the methodological and ideological parameters were developed..

The researcher was asked to visit Alice Springs in Central Australia and Cairns in Queensland and had the opportunity to spend a week with the staff and other people involved with the South Australian ACCA at their state forum/school holiday camp held at Uluru. This provided the formal and informal opportunities to listen and obtain the views of a range of Aboriginal people.

At Alice Springs the researcher was introduced by Central Australian ACCA to members of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations at one of their meetings. Further contact was made with these individuals and others closely involved in working with their own people in Alice Springs. Contact was also made with women who were living in poverty and who had the responsibility for the care of children. All these contacts were invaluable as they provided a range of views from service providers as well as other community members. Here it was possible to observe some of the problems relating to communities with close ties with a more traditional lifestyle as well as the fringe-camps, which are characteristic of this town.

The Queensland AICCAs organised two days of meetings at Cairns, chosen for its location central to the peninsular, the islands, the west and Brisbane. On the first day of meetings, representatives of the child-care agencies met with the researcher to discuss their perception of child poverty, issues of concern and problems they dealt with constantly in relation to child poverty. The following day Aboriginal service providers in Cairns met with the re-

searcher to put forward their views. This meeting was very productive, as it helped the community to articulate and name some of its most distressing problems and to begin to formulate ways in which they could deal with these problems as a community. The visit to Cairns highlighted the particular problems of Aboriginal communities in Queensland, especially those relating to health and nutrition, housing and contact with islanders who move to these towns from the Pacific area.

Contact with SA ACCA provided the fullest opportunity to explore the pertinent questions about child poverty at greater depth and in a variety of different situations. This child-care agency is one of the longest established ACCAs in the country. Camping for five days with around forty Aboriginal children who come from difficult family circumstances and many of whom are in foster care provided innumerable situations for discussion and observation. As an observer and guest at this camp the researcher participated at the Annual Forum of SA ACCA, shared in all camp activities. This included contact with the community who are the traditional owners of Uluru and who made the South Australian visitors welcome.

During a brief visit to Melbourne, the researcher attended part of the meeting of the directors of the Victorian ACCA and consulted extensively with the Executive Officer of SNAICC.

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