

**Three years on: Indigenous
families and the welfare system,
the Kuranda community case study**

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	iv
Summary	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	1
Research methodology	1
Survey and sampling issues	2
Household, houses and family	4
Mobility: the key dimensions	5
Mobility networks and flows in Kuranda	7
Child and youth mobility	9
The impact of mobility on child-care and the delivery of welfare payments	10
The Kuranda welfare and CDEP-based economy	12
Youth in welfare and work	14
Implications for welfare policy formulation	16
Conclusions and key recommendations	18
Notes	20
References	21

Figures

Fig. 1. Genealogy for household 07, Kuranda, 1999, 2000 and 2001	6
Fig. 2. The mobility of nine children, Kuranda, 1999–2001	11

Tables

Table 1. Movement in and out of the sampled households between the 2000 and 2001 Kuranda surveys	8
Table 2. Sources of income for Indigenous adults, Kuranda, 1999, 2000 and 2001	13

Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Abstudy	Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme
ANU	The Australian National University
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
DFACS	Department of Family and Community Services
IEC	Indigenous Employment Centre
JET	Jobs, Education and Training
YWPEP	Youth Work Preparation and Employment Program

Summary

This discussion paper presents the results from the third and final year of the Kuranda community case study for the project on the delivery of appropriate welfare services and policies to Indigenous families. Core recommendations and conclusions from the project as a whole are also discussed.

Three years of survey data now allow a comparison of sources of household income. Indigenous families and households in the community remain highly dependent on income support from welfare benefits and pensions, and from the CDEP scheme. The research also points to Abstudy payments as playing an important part in family domestic economies.

One of the key issues highlighted for service delivery and policy consideration is the complexity of patterns of residential mobility of Indigenous adults and children in Kuranda. Taking into consideration all the people surveyed in 2000 and 2001, one out of every two persons had moved into or out of the household sample. Over half of those people were children, or young adults aged 17–25 years.

Importantly, the existence of a non-mobile core of household members—usually older people on secure pensions—is identified as a point of domestic stability for children and youth. Child-care is an extended family, rather than a household-centred activity, and the mobility of children and youth is an expression of extended family networks. The key role played by older women in the care of children is emphasised once again.

The results raise several important issues for policy and service delivery. The fact that child-care is family-based rather than household-based needs to be recognised in the delivery of welfare services to children and in policy frameworks. Many children have multiple carers who are in need of financial support for the period in which they are responsible for a child. There needs to be flexibility in the service arrangements so that the relevant family payments are going to the person actually caring for a child.

The three survey waves have identified an important characteristic of young adults: there appears to be no transition for this group from school into mainstream local employment. The main transition is, in fact, into early dependence on welfare or CDEP payments. If inter-generational welfare dependence is to be short-circuited, there needs to be immediate targeted policy and program support for this age group, preferably before they enter the welfare system. It is proposed that a Youth Work Preparation and Employment Program be piloted, focusing on young CDEP participants and school leavers. The program would be delivered by local CDEP organisations with the objective of creating a detour around early dependence on welfare and CDEP incomes, by mentoring the transition of young adults into local work experience and mainstream employment.

Indigenous people in Kuranda who have participated in the three-year survey are expecting to see some response, on the ground, from government as a result of their ongoing participation in identifying key service delivery factors and their family needs. The paper emphasises the need for a holistic and realistic approach to delivering assistance to families with children. With feedback from respondents, the paper reinforces some of the core recommendations made in Smith (2000) and Henry and Daly (2001), including the need to:

- pilot a mechanism for the development of a 'Kid's Care Card';
- provide additional assistance to people who care for children on a daily basis, via adjustments to the Child Care Benefit scheme;
- reform the role of Centrelink Indigenous agents;
- establish decentralised welfare transaction centres and updated Centrelink information technology in key remote Indigenous communities;
- adapt the JET scheme for greater effectiveness with Indigenous welfare recipients; and
- formulate a relevant mutual obligation strategy for Indigenous welfare recipients.

Acknowledgments

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The Kuranda survey participants, who commented on earlier project research publications, contributed significantly to the development of the survey tool in 2001. We thank them for their generosity in taking time to respond to our questions and for sharing their views with us. We would also like to thank Ngoonbi Housing Co-operative for allowing us to use their conference room for a focus group discussion.

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Introduction

This paper reports on the third and final year of field research undertaken in Kuranda as part of a longer-term study on Indigenous families and their interaction with the Australian social security system in two Indigenous communities.¹ The terms of reference, objectives and methodology of the overall research project are discussed in detail in Smith (2000), and further methodological and conceptual refinements developed in the context of the second survey are described in Henry and Daly (2001). The research objective of the project is to identify the factors (including family and household structures, child-care arrangements, mobility and sources of income) influencing the delivery of welfare income by government to Indigenous families for the care of their children, and to draw out the implications of those factors for families, welfare policy and service delivery (Smith 2000: 1).

In this final project report we emphasise the key conclusions arising from the three years of survey research in Kuranda, while focusing on data from the third survey that elaborate on the patterns of family mobility and child-care, and the circumstances of youth in the community. One of the key issues highlighted for service delivery and policy consideration in the first and second surveys is the complexity of patterns of residential mobility of Indigenous adults and children in Kuranda (see Finlayson et al. 2000: 25–52; Henry & Daly 2001). With the advantage of three consecutive years of data from Kuranda, the project can now make a more compelling assessment of the impact of mobility, especially in respect to children and young adults. The paper describes the social and cultural factors that influence the patterns of both mobility and child-care. The entrenched welfare and CDEP-based economy of Indigenous people in Kuranda is further elaborated through a comparison of data on sources of income across the three survey years.

An important issue raised by respondents in all three surveys is the situation of young adults in the community. In this final report we consider the circumstances of these young adults with regard to welfare policy and service delivery, and propose a program initiative for increasing their economic participation that is based on providing a detour around their early dependence on welfare and CDEP incomes, into local mainstream employment.

Research methodology

The aim of the project across the three surveys has been to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data, using a mix of methods including:

- informal focus group discussions;
- the repeat administration of a questionnaire via face-to-face interviews with key individuals (key reference persons) from each household; and
- the use of anthropological techniques such as participant observation and the elicitation of genealogies for each household.

This methodological mix was designed to explore the social and culturally-based arrangements of Indigenous people that are relevant to developing culturally-informed and workable welfare policy and service delivery.

In response to findings of the original pilot it was decided that certain information about all members of a household could only be obtained via a questionnaire from one key reference person. This person could be any adult person living in the house, either male or female (see Daly & Smith 2000: 11–24; Finlayson & Auld 1999). For the third survey the questionnaire was adapted to a shorter form covering a set of core questions from earlier surveys about household membership, sources of household income, shared child-care arrangements, the common provision of financial support in households, aspects of parents' and children's mobility, and work status.

The third and final phase of the Kuranda fieldwork was carried out in November 2001 by Henry and Smith over a five-day period using this much shortened questionnaire. Over the three years of the survey, a number of initiatives have been taken to gain and maintain consent from respondents, and to provide updated information about research outcomes (see Henry & Daly 2001; Musharbash 2000, 2001; Smith 2000). Project researchers have worked with the assistance of local Indigenous facilitators who introduced the project interviewers to potential new respondents, helped explain the nature of the research, and acted as translators during each interview. At each successive survey, respondents have been very keen to discuss the research outcomes, and questioned the extent to which these are being taken into account by government service deliverers and policy makers.

The strengths and limitations of the project methodology have been discussed in detail in previous publications (see Daly & Smith 2000: 11–24; Henry & Daly 2001). The longitudinal nature of the project overcomes some of the limitations of the questionnaire approach in that it adds a time dimension to the study. In the face of high rates of mobility, the advantage appears to lie in providing a more accurate picture of the key dimensions of changing household formations. The trade-off for collecting both types of data is that while they each provide supplementary evidence in support of the other, the amount of qualitative detail is circumscribed by the short time-frame for data collection. However, given this methodological caveat, the ethnographic information obtained during the surveys offers a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which different cultural and socioeconomic factors combine to shape social welfare policy outcomes (see also Schneider 2001: 709; Smith 2001). The methodological mix enables a more fine-grained analysis for informing policy solutions than would otherwise be possible.

Survey and sampling issues

A number of the issues involved in surveying and sampling a highly mobile Indigenous population have been discussed in detail in the earlier project publications (see also Hunter & Smith 2000).² CAEPR project researchers have

adopted a 'social relational' methodological approach. Each social pool of people making contributions to questions was treated as an impromptu 'focus group' and included as part of the interview process, with the contributors' comments and views recorded as qualitative data.

Geographically mobile populations are notoriously difficult to survey, especially in a cross-cultural context. In broad terms, it is difficult to ensure that respondents are representative of the underlying population, that they can be subsequently relocated, and that data obtained are relevant to them. It was not feasible, in the light of high rates of mobility of some individuals, to track all the original set of household members—many have changed households over time. To include them, and their new households, would have exponentially expanded the pool of respondents and their households to unmanageable proportions. The project focus has therefore been on tracking the original sample of key reference persons and eliciting information on changes to their respective households at each subsequent survey.

The employment of local Indigenous facilitators played an extremely important role in relocating respondents from the previous year, and making contact with possible new respondents. New key reference people were not randomly selected, but were chosen by the Indigenous facilitators and researchers, so as to specifically add more households with children and young adults to the sample. This 'familiarity effect' skewed the sample towards particular members of the community. To ameliorate this, project researchers and Indigenous facilitators sought to secure a wide spread in family types, in ages of key reference persons, and in respondents from the major residential locations around Kuranda. The final sample in each year is not statistically random. Rather, it focuses on a select sample of welfare recipients (primarily female) who care for children and young adults.

Sample sizes for surveys that combine qualitative and quantitative data are necessarily small (Hoinville et al. 1978). In 1999, 28 structured interviews were conducted in Kuranda with key reference people, whose households held a total of 182 household members (106 adults and 76 children). In the 2000 survey, six of the original key reference people were unavailable for repeat interviews. Therefore, six new people were interviewed as a supplement in order to maintain a similar sample size to that of 1999. In 2000, 28 households with a total of 179 members (105 adults and 74 children) were surveyed. Of those total members, 108 persons (66 adults and 42 children) were the same as in the 1999 survey.

In the third and final survey of 2001, key reference people from 3 of the 2000 households were unavailable for repeat interviewing. However, three key reference people from 1999 who were not available for interview in 2000 were again available, and returned to the survey in 2001. In addition, a family who had been boarding in one of the households of the 2000 survey had moved to a new house in 2001, and their separate household was added to the 2001 survey. Thus a total of 29 key reference people and their households were covered in 2001. These households had a total of 202 members (comprising 117 adults and 85 children).

Of that total, 136 household members (75%) were the same as the original members from the first survey in 1999. Overall, between the first and third survey waves, 23 (82%) of key reference persons were the same.

Household, houses and family

The genealogies elicited for the 29 Kuranda households confirm some centrally important characteristics that have been reported for Indigenous households in general: namely, they are compositionally complex with multiple generations, have a large number of residents, a high ratio of young people and children to older household members, and high rates of mobility. Research analyses from all three survey waves pinpoint mobility as an important factor in determining household composition and formation.

At a practical level, high mobility rates lead to complex household developmental cycles (see Henry & Daly 2001; Hunter & Smith 2000; Musharbash 2001; Smith 2000). At a conceptual level, surveying a mobile population raises the problem of how to secure an operational definition of an Indigenous household which can be easily measured by questionnaires, but which also reflects the realities of Indigenous family and community life.

The definitions of 'family' and 'household' have been refined across the survey waves in light of these issues. Although the concepts of 'household' and 'house' need to be distinguished, since in many cultural contexts they do not empirically coincide, the project took its minimal operational definition of household to be a group of two or more related or unrelated people who usually reside in the same dwelling, who regard themselves as a household, and who make common provisions for food and other essentials for living (Daly & Smith 2000: 13).

However, the need for a nested and expanded definitional approach became apparent from the time of the first survey. The great majority of household members residing in each house are close kin. For the purposes of analysis, and in accordance with respondents' own cultural categories of membership, people whom the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines as 'visitors' were classified as 'usual residents', and therefore members of the household, and were included for the purposes of membership and sources of income. Our operational definition of household thereby expanded beyond that of the ABS (1998). This approach has been maintained in subsequent surveys, and refined in 2000 when Henry and Daly (2001: 5) identified the need to distinguish a class of 'boarders' with household membership.

The complexity of family relationships present in the majority of surveyed households defies any neat categorisation according to standard census definitions of family types (see also Daly & Smith 1996; Morphy forthcoming). Of the 29 households, 52 per cent had three or more generations of related kin present (13% had four generational levels) and 35 per cent had two generations. There were no households with single-generation sets of kin-related members,

and no households had only unrelated members or single persons. The complex nature of the extended kin structures within Kuranda households is shown in Fig. 1 (overleaf), which depicts one household genealogy across the three survey waves. Like all others in Kuranda, that particular family has kin connections which extend out to other houses.

Overall, the survey data identifies important linkages between child-care arrangements and extended family formations in the community. Households in Kuranda are integrated into wider socioeconomic and kinship networks, or 'families', whose members are distributed beyond the physical boundaries of houses and their resident households. In the cultural context of Kuranda, the primary care-groups for children, the aged and youth are extended family-centred, not household-centred. A more 'extended family' model of socioeconomic life would result in more appropriate and effective delivery of welfare payments for the care of children.

Mobility: the key dimensions

Mobility is a multifaceted phenomenon. Its major dimensions are conventionally said to include:

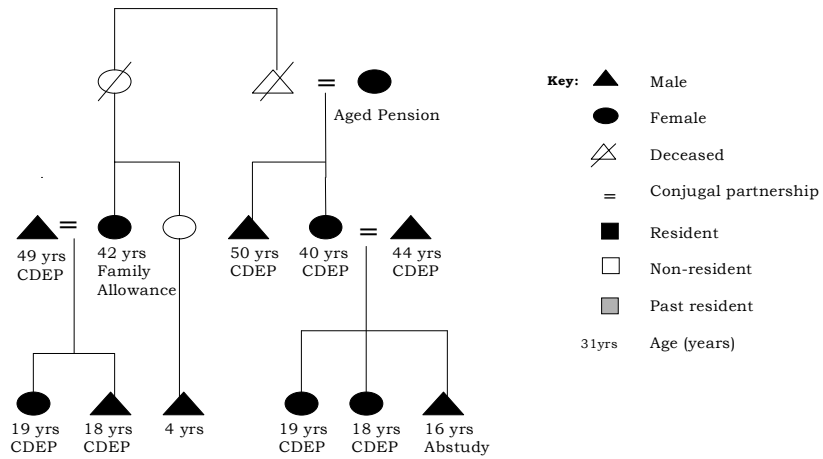
- the propensity to move;
- the nature of residential change (including the distance and length of time of movements);
- the pattern of flows and networks;
- redistributive outcomes (ranging from long-term migration to short-term circular movements); and
- mobility 'careers' (the spatio-temporal sequence of an individual's movements over a lifetime) (Taylor & Bell 1996a).

Research on these dimensions of Indigenous population mobility remains largely unsystematic, spatially restricted, and more qualitative than quantitative—relying, as it does, primarily on ethnographic case studies (Taylor & Bell 1996a). However, in their more recent conceptual and census-based analyses, Taylor and Bell have explored the broad determinants, dynamics and impacts of Indigenous mobility, and reported that Indigenous people are as spatially mobile as other Australians, and undoubtedly more mobile in respect to particular short-term circular movements, and at certain ages (Taylor & Bell 1996a, 1996b).

The Kuranda study provides an important empirical elaboration on the existing ethnographic and statistical research on mobility. In particular, the data over three survey waves enable a preliminary analysis of the propensity to move; the nature of residential change; the pattern of flows and networks; and redistributive outcomes. For the purposes of this study, the focus has been on the movement of adults and children from one house to another, and within and out of the local area.

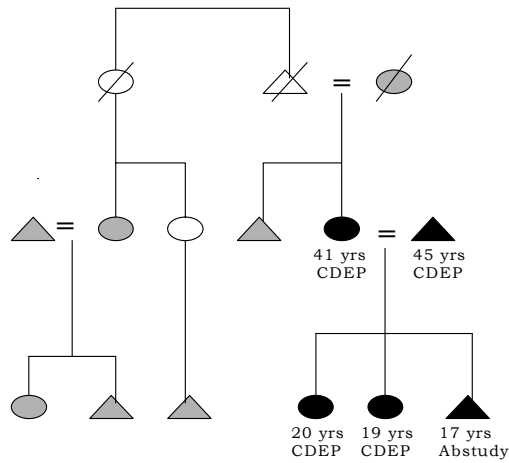
Fig. 1. Genealogy for household 07, Kuranda, 1999, 2000 and 2001

a) 1999



Age and gender summary of household:
 6 females in residence
 6 males in residence
 Total persons: 12
 Adults: 10
 Children: 2

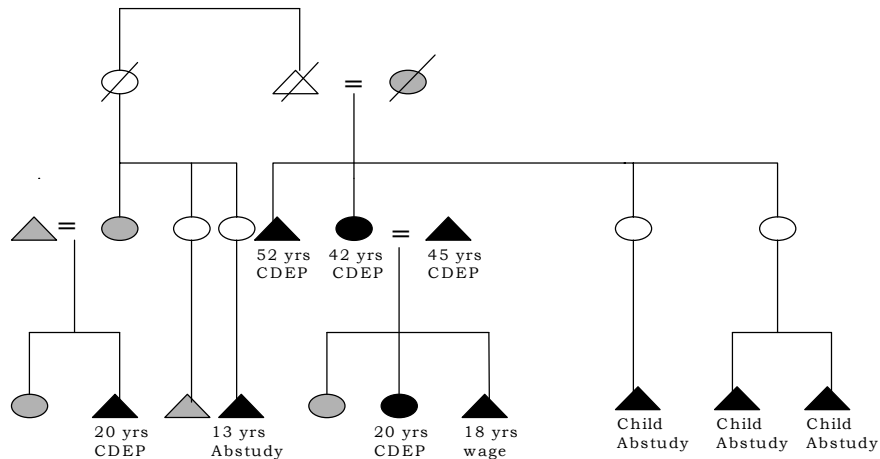
b) 2000



Age and gender summary of household:
 3 females in residence
 2 males in residence
 Total persons: 5
 Adults: 5
 Children: 0

Fig. 1. continued

c) 2001

**Age and gender summary of household:**

2 females in residence
 8 males in residence
 Total persons: 10
 Adults: 6
 Children: 4

Mobility networks and flows in Kuranda

The Kuranda surveys report localised networks of movement characterised by a high incidence of mainly circular or short-distance mobility. For example, few people moved outside the Kuranda area (defined as Kuranda and the outlying settlements at Mantaka, Kowrowa, Mona Mona, and Koah). Of those who did, most moved to neighbouring urban centres (Cairns and Mareeba). Between 1999 and 2000, only five people moved further afield (two to Perth and three to Armidale). Three of these had returned by the time of the 2001 survey. Between 2000 and 2001, five more people moved (a family of three moved to Brisbane, and two single men moved: one to the Gold Coast and the other to Nambour).

According to Taylor (1996: 159), a 'recurring theme in the literature in indigenous population mobility is the recognition of circuits of population movement between places which combine to form functional regions'. He notes that this pattern of mobility typically reflects 'localised linkages between sets of urban and rural localities'. The Kuranda survey provides evidence of localised linkages between the outlying settlements of Mantaka, Kowrowa, Koah, and Mona Mona and Kuranda town itself, as well as linkages between these places and the nearest urban centres of Cairns and Mareeba. Movement to households in these urban centres tends to be short-term, for the purpose of accessing services. People are

generally reluctant to move outside the Kuranda area; they want to stay near close kin (Finlayson et al. 2000: 92; Henry & Daly 2001: 12). For example, one young woman in the survey, who upon completing high school was offered a place at James Cook University, did not take up the offer because it meant moving to Townsville. She is now working in the CDEP program.

In 2001, out of the 179 survey participants from the previous survey year, 24 individuals were no longer part of the sample. Of the remaining 155, 107 people were still living in the same house, while 48 individuals (28 adults and 20 children), or 27 per cent, had moved from one place of residence to another by the time of the 2001 survey. Some of these had moved to households within the survey and others to households outside our survey sample. In addition, 59 new people (34 adults and 25 children) who had not been part of the 2000 survey, had moved into the ongoing sample of households by the time those were re-surveyed in 2001.

As Table 1 indicates, taking into consideration all the people surveyed in 2000 and 2001 (222 persons), a total of 107 (62 adults and 45 children) had moved (either into houses outside the survey, between houses in the survey, or from houses outside the survey). In other words, one out of every two persons had moved.

Table 1. Movement in and out of the sampled households between the 2000 and 2001 Kuranda surveys

Adults (26 years and over)	47
Youth (17–25 years)	15
Children (16 years and under) ^a	45
Total movers	107

Note: a. For the purposes of the three surveys, the definition of 'child' was taken to be a person aged 16 years and under, in accord with standard criteria used by the social security system to determine eligibility for a range of welfare payments.

In the midst of this substantial degree of mobility, there exists, nevertheless, a critical core of stability for families. Of the initial sample of 182 household members in 1999, 103 (57%) continued in the survey in 2001. Of those, 83 people were in the same house at the time of the 2000 survey; and 70 were still in the same house in 2001. In other words, of those persons present in the sample over the entire three survey waves, 37 per cent remained living in the same house.

Of the initial 182 survey members in 1999, 67 people (41 adults and 26 children) had moved from one house to another by the time of the 2000 survey—some to other houses within the survey, and others to houses that were not part of the survey. In addition, 23 new people (17 adults and 6 children) who had not been part of the survey in 1999, had moved into the households resurveyed in 2000. Therefore, taking into consideration all the people surveyed in 1999 and 2000 (i.e. 177), a total of 90 people had moved (either into houses outside the survey, between houses in the survey, or from houses outside the survey).

Child and youth mobility

The mobility of children and young adults is not an ad hoc phenomenon. A comparative analysis of data over three surveys enables some conclusions to be made regarding the relationship between child-care arrangements and mobility in the Kuranda area. Child-care is an extended family-centred rather than a household-centred activity, and the mobility of children and youth is an expression of extended family networks. The 2001 survey data also allows further consideration of the significance of youth mobility, and the implications of the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Of the 20 children in the 2000 sample who moved out of houses between 2000 and 2001, eight moved to other houses in our survey. Twenty-five children from houses outside the survey had moved into survey houses at the 2001 survey. Almost half of these moved with their primary carer or carers. Thirteen children moved alone, including one from Brisbane and three from Armidale. In all these cases the children moved to households within their kinship network.

Of the 28 adults in the 2000 sample who had moved from one house to another by the time of the 2001 survey, 11 were young people between 17 and 25 years old. A further 15 young people (aged 17–25 years) moved into the survey in 2001 from households outside the survey sample. In other words, 56 per cent of all movers in 2000 and 2001 (out and in) were children and youth aged 25 years and under.

Contributory factors to this pattern of age-related mobility include a cultural emphasis on individual autonomy from a young age, as well as the fact that few young adults in Kuranda have access to their own rental accommodation. During interviews, as in previous survey years, people raised the shortage of housing as a key concern. Henry and Daly (2001: 11) and Finlayson et al. (2000: 38–9) had already stressed this issue, and had argued that historical and social factors concerning the availability and allocation of housing for Kuranda Indigenous people have a continuing impact on mobility patterns.

The research data from three survey waves identify a centrally important Indigenous social arrangement: people utilise extensive kin networks that exist beyond the walls of their own houses and emphasise, as a cultural fact, that they 'live extendedly' by moving around a network of linked households and sharing their resources accordingly. However, this culturally-based preference does *not* require that they have to—nor does it mean that they want to—live in overcrowded housing.

The project research reports the frequent occurrence of multi-generational households. Henry and Daly (2001) have emphasised that although cultural factors, such as connection to country and kinship relatedness, play a significant part in the explanation of these complex Indigenous household structures, the prevalence of multi-generational households residing in the same dwelling should not be read simply as an Indigenous cultural preference. Such households are also a response to poverty and destitution, and a general shortage of housing in

the Kuranda area. The 2001 surveyed households had an average of 6.9 persons per dwelling—close to twice the 1996 Census national Indigenous average of 3.7 persons, and 2.5 times higher than the national non-Indigenous average of 2.7 persons per household. According to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ‘indicators’, Kuranda households are overcrowded.

Children and young adults tend to move around an established network of houses in the Kuranda area, where they have related kin. A number of key reference people referred to young co-residents as ‘coming and going’ (e.g. ‘X is not here every day. He comes and goes’). As children reach the age at which their Abstudy is paid into their own accounts, or they leave school and have access to other welfare payments (such as Youth Allowance), or CDEP and occasionally other wages, they achieve a degree of financial autonomy. Moreover, they are not required to contribute a set amount from their Abstudy to assist in meeting the costs of the household in which they reside. Rather they are expected to give money and resources on a ‘demand sharing’ basis. To a certain extent this may contribute to their freedom of movement.

Another important influence on local mobility patterns and flows is the historical association (since resettlement from Mona Mona mission) of particular families with different locales in the Kuranda area, as well as their traditional connection to other places such as Mareeba. Individuals (particularly younger people) move back and forth between the houses of kin in these outlying settlements and the houses of kin in Kuranda township, or to the urban centres of Cairns and Mareeba.

The impact of mobility on child-care and the delivery of welfare payments

The project survey, taken as a whole, confirms that mobility in Kuranda is a reflection of the existence of an elaborate network of social support, as well as an expression of individual autonomy. But mobility of some children also appears to be a reflection of their marginal status and vulnerability. During the 2001 survey interviews, a number of key respondents expressed concern about children in the community who ‘did the rounds’ and were ‘not properly cared for’. Although none of the children who were in our survey appeared to be in this category, the problem was a frequent topic of discussion.

Henry and Daly (2001: 13, Fig. 3) illustrated the movement of the nine children who had moved alone between 1999 and 2000. Fig. 2 (opposite) shows the movement of those same children between the 2000 and 2001 survey. Of the nine children, six had moved yet again. Three children who had previously moved to Armidale to their mother’s mother’s sister’s daughter’s (MMZD) household, had returned to the care of their mother’s mother (MM). Two children who had moved from their mother’s (M) to their father’s (F) household, had returned to their M’s. One child who had moved from the household of her mother’s mother’s father’s sister (MMFZ) to that of her mother’s mother’s sister (MMZ), had moved yet again

to the household of her MM. In this case, the welfare payments were transferred each time to the new primary carer (i.e. from MMFZ to MMZ to MM). In some other cases they were not.

Fig. 2. The mobility of nine children, Kuranda, 1999–2001

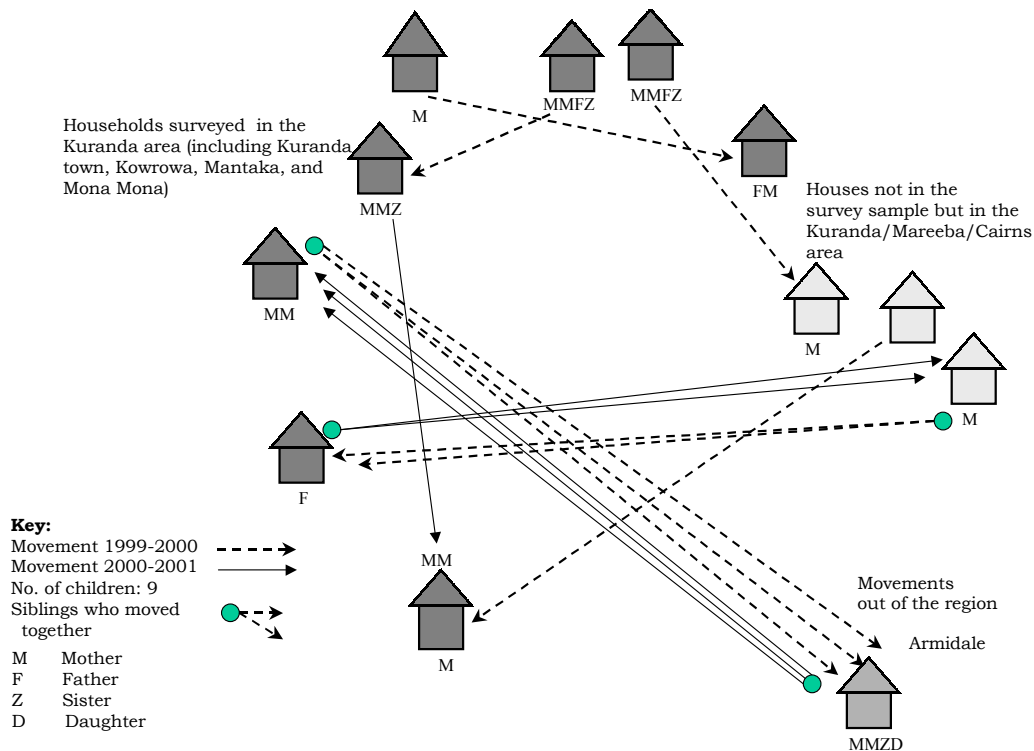


Fig. 2 presents a snapshot of the extent of certain children's mobility through different houses between surveys. Respondents emphasised to the researchers that this annual snapshot of high mobility rates mirrors the mobility of some children on a day-to-day and weekly basis. A number of respondents in the 2001 survey regularly looked after children on a 'day care', or 'after school', basis. At least ten children in the 2001 survey were regularly looked after in this way. These care arrangements involve additional costs for the person carrying out the day-care; these costs are currently not supported by any welfare program assistance or payment.

Policy makers and Indigenous clients alike need to accept that there are some aspects of family life to which policy and service delivery cannot hope to respond fully; they are not easily amenable to intervention by the state. High rates of daily and weekly mobility appear to be cases in point. Nevertheless, carers of young children and youth are incurring additional costs and domestic burdens which

need some form of targeted support. Over the course of the project, a number of recommendations have been proposed to assist in addressing some of the reported burdens of shared child-care. Musharbash (2000) and Finlayson et al. (2000) proposed the development of a 'Kid's Care Card'. Henry and Daly (2001) recommended that additional assistance be provided to people who care for children on a daily basis, via adjustments to the Child Care Benefit scheme.³ Both of these options are worth investigating and should be piloted at the community level.

The Kuranda welfare and CDEP-based economy

In the context of the Australian social security system, 'welfare dependency' can be broadly defined as a circumstance where a person relies for all or a major amount of their necessary financial support and aid upon public welfare transfers. The results of the third survey in Kuranda confirm conclusively the picture developed over the previous surveys in 1999 and 2000; there is an entrenched and high level of welfare dependence among Indigenous people in the community, albeit a dependence where the heaviest burdens are shared amongst family members. Families and their children in Kuranda live primarily in households with welfare-based domestic economies. As in previous years, 100 per cent of the households surveyed have at least one adult receiving a welfare payment; the majority have several adults in receipt of a range of payments. The concept of dependence on welfare is applicable, therefore, not only to individual recipients, but to entire households and wider extended families.

The low levels of income entailed in this dependence become obvious when sources of income are considered. Table 2 presents the sources of income for all the adults included in the three survey waves. Over the period 1999–2001, a number of national program reforms were made to the packaging and structure of welfare payments.⁴ As a result, the initial questionnaire from 1999 was updated to accommodate new payments types for the 2000 and 2001 surveys (Henry & Daly 2001: 3).

Table 2 creates comparability between the three survey years by classifying Family Allowance payments in 1999 as approximately equivalent to the Family Tax Benefit. At the time of the first survey it was reported that respondents were largely uninformed about the changes and still referred to payments according to their earlier nomenclature (Finlayson et al. 2000: 38; Smith 2000: 88). Needless to say, families at Kuranda are still confused and largely uninformed about the latest changes to payment packaging.

Overwhelmingly, Indigenous children in Kuranda live in families with welfare-based domestic economies. The major employer of Indigenous people in Kuranda appears to be the CDEP scheme—in 2001 just less than one-third (31%) of the income sources for adult household members were CDEP wages. Over half of the remaining sources of income for household members (51%) are from welfare

pensions and benefits; with Abstudy and wages comprising the remaining income (6% and 12% respectively).

Table 2. Sources of income for Indigenous adults, Kuranda, 1999, 2000 and 2001

Income source	Share of total sources (%)		
	1999	2000	2001
CDEP	34	36	31
Parenting Payment	13	11	14
Family Tax Benefit	23	19	22
Newstart	6	6	6
Disability Pension	6	7	3
Age Pension	7	4	3
Carers	2	4	2
Youth Allowance	1	1	1
Wage	4	6	12
Abstudy	3	6	6
Total (%)	100	100	100
No. of sources ^a	129	132	147
No. of households	28	28	29
No. of adults	103	105	111

Note a. Some people have more than one source of income, so the number of income sources exceeds the number of individuals. Some adults had no independent source of income.

CDEP payments are closely linked to their welfare-based equivalents in Kuranda. If these payments are classified as a form of welfare income rather than employment wages, then approximately 85 per cent of the total surveyed household members in 2001 could be classed as being dependent on some form of welfare payments as their main source of income.

The most apparent difference over the survey years is in respect to the proportion of income sources coming from wages, with an apparently significant increase, from 4 to 12 per cent, between the 1999 and 2001 surveys. Of the 2001 wages component, 30 per cent represents new wage sources for people who were in the second wave survey; another 30 per cent consists of continuing wage sources for existing people in both the 2000 and the 2001 surveys; while approximately 40 per cent are 'new' wages for new people entering the survey for the first time in 2001.

The great majority of all employed adults worked part-time; only two people were in full-time employment. Adults were in a range of jobs including cleaning, art and craft work, working with the railways, national parks, or the shire council, working as health and teaching assistants, or as Tjapukai dancers.⁵

An important source of income for households is Abstudy. In addition to Abstudy income received by adults (presented in Table 2), there is a larger component of Abstudy income which accrues to children under 16 years. In 2001, for example, there were 20 children aged 16 years and under in receipt of such income,

compared to the seven adults. If these sources of income were included in Table 2, then Abstudy would proportionally increase from 6 to 16 per cent of all sources of income from the surveyed households in 2001. The two earlier survey waves revealed that similarly high levels of Abstudy income accrued to children in 1999 and 2000.

While Abstudy payments for persons over 16 years are paid directly into their account, for children under 16 years it is paid to their responsible parent. This source of income makes an important contribution (through demand sharing mechanisms) to Kuranda domestic economies. Over three-quarters of respondents reported that persons receiving Abstudy within their households made a regular contribution from their payment to help with such things as clothing and food, in addition to their school needs.

Youth in welfare and work

The surveyed Kuranda households display a youthful demographic profile. Of a total 202 household members in 2001, 42 per cent were children under 16 years of age, and 30 per cent of adults were young people aged between 17 and 25 years. The problems besetting Indigenous youth in Kuranda have emerged as matters deserving urgent policy and service attention. The third survey reinforces the findings of the previous two, regarding the extent of concern amongst respondents about the negative impacts on families of the boredom, unemployment and substance abuse prevalent among young adults (see Henry & Daly 2001: 15; Smith 2000: 119).

The research overall suggests that Indigenous youth are poorly served across a range of service areas. Reports from both previous surveys conclude that adults are locked into a form of recycling welfare dependence (Henry & Daly 2001: 14–17; Finlayson et al. 2000: 29–34; Smith 2000: 92) from which they are unlikely to escape unless they are provided the necessary training and opportunities for work experience. This is particularly the case for young adults. In 2001, respondents continued to identify an urgent need for community-based vocational training and employment opportunities for young adults.

The youthful Indigenous demographic profile and related rapid formation of young families in Kuranda suggests a growing future demand on service delivery and a potentially expanding rate of welfare dependence amongst young unemployed parents and school leavers. This adds weight to the arguments in favour of immediate targeted policy support for this group, before they enter the welfare system.

The problem of how to effect the transition from welfare to employment and, in particular, from school into employment is a matter of mainstream policy concern. A number of new mainstream programs have been initiated to facilitate such transitions for welfare recipients. However, there is little information available on such transitions among young Indigenous adults (see Arthur & David-Petero 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

The three survey waves provide some insight, albeit based on a small sample, into the type and incidence of transitions available to young people in Kuranda, as measured by source of income. For the 32 examples of people aged 17–25 years who were present over two, or all three, survey waves, the lack of any transition appears to be the defining status for at least half. Ten young adults on CDEP stayed on the program over the three surveys; and seven on Abstudy stayed on that form of income assistance. For the remainder (11 persons) who transferred from one source of income to another, the major exits were from Abstudy to welfare or CDEP payments; from the CDEP to Abstudy or back to welfare payments; or from welfare to the CDEP scheme. In other words, these young people are already recycling through various forms of welfare. Only four young adults exited from welfare or Abstudy onto a waged source of income.

The data reinforce comments, repeatedly made by respondents, that the main transition for young school leavers in the community is into either the CDEP scheme or the welfare system. Of those respondents who indicated they were CDEP participants, 36 per cent were people aged 25 years and under, and a number of those were recent school leavers. For young Indigenous school leavers in Kuranda, the local CDEP scheme seems to be the first point of entry into any work environment. A number of respondents express concern about young adults taking the CDEP pathway, suggesting it could become a dead-end street for them. Parents are keen to see their children leave high school and enter into the local labour market where they might develop employment skills in local businesses, establish a career path, and gain a better wage. If young adults are not to become permanent participants in either the CDEP scheme or the welfare system, then they must be targeted with policy and service support immediately upon leaving school—and preferably while still at school.

A number of recent policy changes have been made in the CDEP scheme, including the creation of closer administrative ties to the social security system, and a growing emphasis on promoting the scheme as a ‘half-way house’ to encourage participants to exit into the mainstream labour market. At the same time, there appears to be a growing demarcation in policy and program initiatives between remote and non-remote CDEP organisations. One potentially important initiative is the piloting of Work Preparation Trials in tandem with the running of Indigenous Employment Centres (IECs) by urban CDEP organisations (Champion 2002). This initiative is intended to increase the placement of participants in mainstream full-time employment. Under the IEC program, CDEP organisations will be funded to identify local employment opportunities, to provide selected participants with relevant skills and training, and to case-manage their transition into full employment.

In its recent submission to the Productivity Commission’s review of the Job Network program, ATSIC notes that, in December 2000, there were only four Indigenous-owned employment service providers and only 12 Indigenous specialist providers nationally (ATSIC 2001). ATSIC recommends that the ‘employment services market must recognise the importance of specialised support for Indigenous job seekers, and that Indigenous specialist providers

should be supported in tendering for contracts in the employment services market' (2001: 3). CDEP organisations in many communities are the primary local providers of specialised employment support for Indigenous people. Where there are viable local labour markets, there is considerable potential for CDEP organisations to assist participants to move out of the scheme into mainstream employment. The IEC program is one such initiative. There is a major service gap in respect to a similar support service for Indigenous youth. Local CDEP organisations in tandem with the IEC program could play an important role in addressing this gap.

Given the critical need identified by this project and other research and inquiries, it is recommended that a specialised Indigenous Youth Work Preparation and Employment Program (YWPEP) be developed and piloted at Kuranda, for potentially wider implementation. The YWPEP should be delivered by local CDEP organisations to young CDEP participants, but should also specifically target young school leavers before they enter the welfare system. There is obvious potential for YWPEP to be delivered as an identified component in conjunction with IECs.

The objective of a YWPEP would be for a local CDEP organisation to provide young participants and school leavers with personalised work preparation and employment support, to facilitate their more rapid entry into the local labour market. The program should operate under an agreed timetable—for example with each person receiving a 12 to 18-month structured period of training, mentoring and work experience, with the view to their making a graduated progression into full-time work. It may be possible to place some school leavers quickly into work experience and then employment, in contrast to the prospects facing young adults who have been in receipt of welfare or a CDEP payment, and who have therefore been out of full-time employment for some time.

The three years of survey research strongly indicate that young adults quickly enter into the welfare system or the CDEP scheme. They are mobile within a local circuit of extended family, and are reluctant to travel away for training or employment. There are very few programs which target their work and employment needs *within the community*. The aim of the YWPEP would be to identify locally available training, work experience, and local employment opportunities in which young adults can be mentored. In rural towns such as Kuranda there are substantial opportunities for young Indigenous people to make the transition into local employment; but invariably there is no specialist support to facilitate that process. CDEP organisations would need to be additionally funded to operate the YWPEP.

Implications for welfare policy formulation

In the context of the first field survey in 1999, Smith (2000) discussed the implications for Indigenous Australians of the substantial agenda for welfare reform then being mooted by the federal government (see Commonwealth of

Australia 2000; McClure 2000). In 2002, that reform agenda is being implemented under the policy framework launched in the July 2001 Budget by the federal government, and referred to as *Australians Working Together: Helping People to Move Forward*.

Of notable influence in developing the new direction of welfare reform has been the federal government's commissioned review and report, *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society* (McClure 2000). The McClure Report advocated a radical overhaul of the social security system, but gave inadequate attention to welfare reform as it concerns Indigenous people. It recommended in respect to Indigenous Australians:

- that innovations be trialed in welfare service delivery in consultation with communities;
- that the new policy concept of mutual obligation would require consultation at the local level to ensure that the requirements and their application strengthen existing family and community structures;
- that the CDEP scheme satisfied the program need for mutual obligation; and
- that activity-test breaching should be reduced by fostering community involvement, providing better recognition of individual circumstances, and ensuring that sanctions are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs of the community.

In its response to the McClure Report in late 2000, the federal government, via the Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS), announced that:

A fundamentally new approach is needed to increase the social and economic participation of Indigenous people ... Under this approach, community-based providers of welfare services ... will have a key role in the whole gamut of welfare reform—policy advice, programme design, programme implementation and service delivery (Commonwealth of Australia 2000: 8, 10–11).

The issue now at hand is how to transform this call for policy innovation into service delivery practice. It is routinely asserted that government service deliverers and policy makers should make greater efforts to accommodate Indigenous cultural life—in both its diversity and its commonalities. The project research at Kuranda concludes that there are very real social and economic benefits to be gained by making welfare policy relevant to the actual circumstances of Indigenous families (in particular to extended families); that is, by making policy more *culturally informed*. To that end, this and other project papers identify key social arrangements within families that might be appropriately responded to by service deliverers, and conceptually incorporated within policy frameworks.

But the research also highlights some aspects of Indigenous family life to which welfare policy (and related service delivery) cannot hope to respond fully. 'Culturally-informed' policy needs to be realistic and administratively workable. On the basis of that premise, an *enabling* welfare policy framework is needed that creates the administrative 'space' within which Indigenous families can maintain

cultural flexibility and choice, and where regional service deliverers can customise programs in order to improve outcomes for families and their children.

In the context of a rapidly changing social security policy environment, and given the current project's focus on the circumstances of Indigenous families and their children, a fundamental concern of the research team is how culturally-informed service delivery and an enabling policy framework can be developed for Indigenous families, while avoiding the imposition of an interventionist social security regime.

Conclusions and key recommendations

Over three survey waves, the Kuranda research has highlighted the need for a strategic reformulation of welfare policy and service delivery for Indigenous families with children. The final survey reinforces key recommendations that have been previously made.

The families surveyed are overwhelmingly welfare-dependent, but they also operate within a robust system of local kin-based support networks which help to alleviate some of the worst economic burdens associated with that dependence. High rates of mobility among children, young adults and some parents have been identified as a key determinant in the formation of complex household developmental cycles, and vulnerable domestic economies which are under pressure from the frequent coming and goings of household members. But the mobility of children and young adults also appears to be a mechanism which helps to spread the economic burden amongst the extended family. The existence of a non-mobile core of household members—usually older people on secure pensions—also acts as a point of domestic stability for children and youth.

In the light of these factors, a number of recommendations have been proposed and subsequently refined over the course of the project. Overall, the project research has demonstrated the need for more simply written, accessible, and frequently communicated information about the changing range of welfare payment packages available to families. It has been suggested that the Centrelink service delivery model at the regional level needs to be more regionally decentralised, and more accurately informed about the cultural parameters of family life and household organisation. The core parameters identified by the research, and confirmed by the wider ethnographic literature, include:

- the normative status of the extended family as the fundamental social, economic, and cultural unit;
- the importance of the social distribution of parenting and child-care, especially across extended families;
- the key role of residentially stable senior women in family life, domestic economies and child-care;
- the importance of flexible child-care arrangements; and

- the valuable social capital that is generated by the Indigenous networks of support and 'demand sharing' of resources.

However, the project research has also identified areas of potential threat to the wellbeing of families and their children which require targeted service delivery and policy consideration. These include:

- the recycling of young women through a form of 'sole parenthood' where fathers are frequently absent and young mothers rely heavily on female kin networks for support;⁶
- the heavy burden of care for younger children being undertaken by some older women;
- inexperienced young parents, and inadequate housing for young families;
- the risks to children who are receiving marginal or erratic care;
- the lack of training and employment opportunities for young adults and school leavers; and
- the lack of services and facilities for youth.

The combined impacts of these cultural and socioeconomic factors suggests the urgent need for a more flexible delivery of welfare payments to the carers of children. High rates of daily and weekly mobility are unlikely to be modified by formalised intervention on the part of the welfare bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the predominantly female carers of young children and youth are incurring additional costs and domestic burdens which are not currently being met by the social security system, and which do require mechanisms for delivering flexible, targeted support.

Over the course of the project, a number of recommendations have been proposed to assist in addressing family circumstances that require a sensitive response. The recommendations are based on delivering family-related welfare payments in a way that:

- recognises Indigenous patterns of child-care;
- does not interfere with the flexibility of those arrangements; and
- affords a degree of accommodation, in the method of service delivery, to the high rates of mobility of children and their parents.

Finlayson et al. (2000) and Musharbash (2000, 2001) proposed a mechanism for the development of a 'Kid's Care Card' as well as making several other recommendations. These concerned the need to review and reform the role of Centrelink Indigenous agents; to adapt the JET scheme for greater effectiveness with Indigenous welfare recipients; to develop welfare transaction centres and update Centrelink information technology in key remote communities; and to formulate a relevant mutual obligation strategy for Indigenous welfare recipients. Henry and Daly (2001) recommended that additional assistance be provided to people who care for children on a daily basis, via adjustments to the Child Care

Benefit scheme—and the third survey reinforces the importance of that recommendation.

The third survey has identified an important characteristic of young adults: the apparent absence of any transition from school into mainstream local employment. The main transition is, in fact, into early dependence on welfare or CDEP payments. If inter-generational welfare dependence is to be short-circuited, there needs to be immediate targeted policy and program support for this age group, preferably before they enter the welfare system. This paper has accordingly recommended the development of a Youth Work Experience and Employment Program in order to facilitate a more effective transition for young adults from school into employment rather than into welfare, to be delivered by local Indigenous providers. These options urgently need to be considered by government and piloted at the community level.

The research objective of the project has been to identify the culturally-based factors influencing the delivery of welfare income by government to Indigenous families for the care of their children, and to draw out the implications of those factors for families, welfare policy and service delivery. Indigenous people in Kuranda who have participated in the three-year survey are expecting to see some response on the ground from government as a result of their ongoing participation in identifying those factors and their own needs. It is unlikely they will want to continue to be involved in ongoing research of this kind without seeing some noticeable improvement in service delivery and policy support. The onus is now firmly on government and its relevant departments to give systematic consideration to the range of recommendations made throughout the project, and to act in response.

Notes

1. The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU) has conducted the study, with part funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS). The second year of survey research has been reported by Henry and Daly for Kuranda (2001) and Musharbash for Yuendumu (2001), and the first year's survey findings for both communities were comprehensively reported in CAEPR Research Monograph No. 17, *Indigenous Families and the Welfare System* (Smith 2000), which provides the research baseline for the project.
2. At a fundamental level, the characteristics of mobile populations raise important questions about the appropriateness of 'methodological individualism'—the dominant paradigm of many modern social science disciplines. In a cross-cultural setting where applied research is being conducted, there is an inherent limitation to this paradigm. The elicitation of information from separate individuals needs to be contextualised against particular Indigenous cultural considerations; for example, interviewing techniques must accommodate the social dynamics and the cultural principles surrounding information exchange (Finlayson & Auld 1999; Martin & Taylor 1995; Smith 2001).

3. Whether particular individuals actually provide such child-care can be assessed by the Indigenous community itself. Particular women are well recognised as regular and reliable carers of children within the community, and a local system of voluntary registration based on such recognition could be devised.
4. For example, at the time of the first survey, the Parenting Payment was a new payment that replaced the Sole Parent Pension and Parenting Allowance (as from 20 March 1998). It recognised a person's responsibility for caring for children irrespective of marital status. Family Allowance still existed and was income tested. By the time the second survey was carried out in 2000, further packaging changes had been made. In particular, the Family Allowance and other assistance payments were restructured into the Family Tax Benefit A and B (the former to help families with the cost of raising children, and income tested; the latter giving extra assistance to single income families including sole parents, and also income tested).
5. The Tjapukai Cultural Park (formerly the Tjapukai Dance Theatre based in Kuranda) is now located in Cairns. It operates as a major cultural tourism attraction, and a small number of Indigenous residents of Kuranda work there as dance performers and artists. The Cultural Park also purchases arts and crafts from Kuranda CDEP participants.
6. Indeed, women who are classified as 'sole parents' under Centrelink and DFACS administrative criteria and policy are not necessarily the 'sole' parents of their children. Rather they reside with extended family members, and the parenting and care of their children are shared by close female kin (see discussion in Smith 2000: 89–91).

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