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Indigenous Families and the Welfare System: Two Community Case Studies

Edited by D.E. Smith

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Indigenous Families and the Welfare System:

Two Community Case Studies

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Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University, Canberra

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Foreword

Australia is currently reassessing the relationship between all Australians and the welfare state. Given the low overall socioeconomic status of Indigenous families, a function of numerous factors including historic legacy, cultural difference, and location, it appears likely that many will remain welfare-dependent for many years. How to deal with Indigenous families and their diversity of circumstances in an equitable way will continue to be a critical challenge for government. At the same time as the Federal Government is implementing a potentially significant reformulation of welfare policy and service delivery, there is little accurate information on the extent of Indigenous people's reliance on welfare or its qualitative impacts on families and communities. It remains questionable whether the Federal Government's new initiatives, under the broad policy rubric of 'mutual obligation' are applicable to the diverse circumstances and needs of Indigenous Australian families.

This monograph reports on the first year of community-based research by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU), sponsored financially in large part by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS). The research objective is to identify, at the community level, the particular factors influencing Indigenous families' access to, and receipt of, welfare income transfers paid for the care of their children, and the potential implications for appropriate policy and service delivery.

A groundbreaking and highly original aspect of this project is the intention that research will be carried out over a four-year period, with repeat visits made to households in the participating communities. A statistical analysis of administrative and census data is combined with detailed community-based survey information, providing an important means to evaluate and draw out key issues for national policy and regional service delivery. The research is being undertaken by a small multidisciplinary team of anthropologists and economists from CAEPR, the Division of Management and Technology at the University of Canberra, and the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, ANU.

This monograph provides a very important research benchmark and demonstrates that, even at the baseline initial stage, the project is already providing valuable insights into the dynamic and culturally-based aspects of Indigenous people's interaction with the welfare system. It should be of enormous immediate value to policy makers, service delivery agencies, Indigenous community organisations, and researchers. The timing of this research output is impeccable and a little fortuitous: the Reference Group on Welfare Reform has just published its final report for all Australians, and this report based on primary data collection and analysis concerning a particular 'at risk' section of the total population immediately follows.

Professor Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR

Canberra
September 2000

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The CAEPR project research team would especially like to thank the following people for their constructive comment, technical advice, and for sharing their expertise: Ian Boyson, Barry Smith, Cordelia Hull, Stacey Rippon, Bob Griffiths, and Terry Kapeen from the Indigenous Policy Unit of DFACS; Jane Whyte and her staff including Peter Scott from the Centrelink regional office in Alice Springs; Robin Noble and staff from the Centrelink regional office in Cairns; Michelle Gunasekera, Jo Page, and Delilah McGillivray from Centrelink Canberra; Neil Mulherrin and staff from Centrelink's 'Knowledge Team'; Robyn Seth-Purdie and her staff from DFACS National Family Strategies Unit.

A lengthy process of consultation and editing has been undertaken during which draft versions of this monograph have been constructively and critically commented on by a number of officers in DFACS and Centrelink. We are also indebted to colleagues within CAEPR including Neil Westbury, Jon Altman, John Taylor and Will Sanders, and to external readers including Nicolas Peterson, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, and Beverley Sibthorpe, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, who have generously read and extensively commented on the draft text. Tony Auld provided invaluable statistical and research assistance to the project in 1999, as did Zaeen Khan with the collation of tables from Centrelink administrative data. Hilary Bek and Frances Morphy have greatly assisted the final production with their considerable editing skills.

Executive summary

Australia is currently at a transition in its treatment, through the welfare system, of all Australians. Given their historic and ongoing economic disadvantage, many Indigenous families and their children are likely to have a long-term dependency on welfare income. Their wellbeing will continue to be a critical challenge for government.

This monograph presents data from the first year of a longitudinal community-based research project conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University. It has been commissioned and part-funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS).

The community-based quantitative and qualitative research identifies a range of factors influencing delivery of, and access to, welfare transfers to Indigenous families for the care of their children (focusing on Parenting Payment and Family Allowances). The implications of these factors for welfare policy and service delivery are highlighted at the community, regional, and national levels.

The research data and conclusions suggest that policy frameworks and service-delivery strategies need to achieve a difficult balance between the criteria of:

- cultural relevance;
- individual and family entitlement rights;
- equitable access and delivery standards;
- community development;
- administrative workability and cost efficiency; and
- securing enhanced service and economic outcomes for Indigenous customers on the ground.

While some attempts have been made to tailor policy and service delivery to Indigenous people, a 'one-size-fits-all' model continues to predominate and impacts negatively on Indigenous families. Welfare service-delivery is less effective and outcomes reduced when administrative guidelines, service-delivery criteria, and policy objectives fail adequately to represent Indigenous realities on the ground.

The research indicates that the recognition of cultural diversity by policy and service delivery frameworks is a cost-effective strategy for implementing a more equitable standard of service delivery, and improving program outcomes for Indigenous families and their households. But there are important limits on the type of differences which can (or should) be accommodated within service guidelines and policy frameworks, and there are also underlying cultural commonalities which need to be recognised.

A range of targeted initiatives to improve welfare service delivery and outcomes for Indigenous families with children are proposed. These would need to be piloted in suitable Centrelink regions, and include:

- the development of more decentralised Centrelink service delivery at the regional level, with more discretionary regional customisation of services;
- the establishment of welfare service transaction centres (WSTCs) in key regional communities to facilitate coordination of services on the ground;
- the establishment in major regional communities of welfare administrative databases and the upgrading of technology and electronic networking to regional Centrelink offices;
- the review, substantial reform, and enhanced support of the Community Agent Program;
- the development of strategies to improve communication and information flow to Indigenous welfare recipients, including a more streamlined application process, a simplified remote area claim form, and recognition of no-correspondence clients;
- the development of more flexible mechanisms for delivering payments which accommodate extended family child-care arrangements and include development of a Kids' Care Card;
- the provision of early intervention assistance to youth, young parents, and sole parent families immediately upon their entry into the welfare system;
- the development of an Indigenous component of the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program for sole parents;
- the review of factors affecting sole parents' access to, and levels of, maintenance money, including the inclusion and recording of an Indigenous identifier in the Child Support Agency databases; and
- assessment of the actual costs (activity and use-based) involved in Centrelink delivering an equitable standard of service to Indigenous customers.

These proposed service delivery initiatives will require support from DFACS through adoption of culturally-informed policy frameworks and guidelines. The policy initiatives recommended in this monograph include:

- the formulation of an Indigenous Welfare Policy and Indigenous Mutual Obligation Strategy that reflect the areas of commonality, as well as the diversity of circumstances, of Indigenous welfare recipients;
- the development of a more streamlined and integrated welfare payment structure based on a flat-rate payment calculated at 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings, with supplementary payments for certain life-event factors, and participation support incentives;

- the formulation of policy responses to address the growing demands upon service delivery that will arise from Indigenous young parents with families, and from youth and children at risk of inter-generational welfare dependence;
- a revitalised role for Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) organisations to assist in the development of regional frameworks for mutual obligation agreements, and the provision of work experience and training to sole parents and young welfare recipients; and
- the development of partnerships between Centrelink, DFACS, Indigenous communities, and their regional organisations to ensure more culturally-informed, coordinated, and effective service delivery on the ground for Indigenous welfare recipients.

The recommendations set out in this monograph are, in general terms, consistent with the key policy principles of equity, simplicity, transparency, and sustainability established by the Federal Government to guide the implementation of its welfare reform agenda (Commonwealth of Australia 1999; Newman 1999a, 1999b). However, the research findings highlight the need for new approaches in welfare policy and service delivery that reflect the realities of the day-to-day lives of Indigenous families. The conclusions presented in this monograph suggest that in the two participating communities existing levels of welfare dependence amongst Indigenous families with children are not only inter-generational, but are likely to worsen owing to demographic factors alone. Given the similar socioeconomic characteristics evident between these and other Indigenous communities noted in much of CAEPR's existing research, this conclusion is likely to have wider ramifications. While the need for a fresh approach to securing improved outcomes should include the recognition of the Government's stated principles, the research presented here indicates that such principles need to be applied in ways that are not only culturally informed, but positively improve the domestic circumstances and meet the needs of Indigenous families and their children.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANU	The Australian National University
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Staff and Parents Association (Kuranda School, Queensland)
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BRACS	Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects (scheme)
CGC	Commonwealth Grants Commission
CSA	Child Support Agency
CSC	Customer Service Centre (Centrelink)
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEWRSB	Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
DFACS	Department of Family and Community Services
DHAC	Department of Health and Aged Care
FTI	Family Tax Initiative
IPU	The Indigenous Policy Unit of DFACS
JET	Jobs, Education and Training (program)
NSA	New Start Allowance
NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
RVT	Remote Visiting Team
WSTC	Welfare Service Transaction Centre

1. The project research and policy context

Diane Smith

The research project: Terms of reference and objectives

Australia is currently at a transition point in its welfare treatment of all Australians. Given their historic and current economic disadvantage and residential location, many Indigenous families are likely to remain dependent on welfare in the long term, and their wellbeing will continue to be a critical challenge for government. As the Federal Government initiates a potentially significant reformulation of welfare policy and service delivery for all Australians, there is little accurate information available on the nature of Indigenous reliance on welfare or its qualitative impacts on families and communities.

This monograph reports on the first year of ongoing community-based research conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU), and part-funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS).¹ The broad research objective is to identify, at the community level, the factors influencing the service delivery of welfare income transfers paid by government to Indigenous families for the care of their children (focusing on Parenting Payment and Family Allowance, as defined in Appendix 1), and to draw out the implications of these for family welfare policy and service delivery. In the public policy arena of Indigenous welfare, the project represents an important collaboration between a government department and a university-based research team, being community-based, longitudinal, multi-disciplinary and cross-departmental (involving consultation with both DFACS and regional Centrelink offices).

Cognisant of the rapid changes occurring in welfare policy and programs, CAEPR favoured a research agenda that could be carried out over a three to four year period during which particular households in two participating Indigenous communities—Kuranda in north Queensland and Yuendumu in Central Australia—would be revisited each year. The research aims to obtain fine-grained community-level qualitative and quantitative data by conducting interviews and administering a questionnaire at the household level. The validity and relevance of the household-level data have been enhanced by the component of research involving interviews with Indigenous community organisations and regional government service deliverers to identify the range of relevant views, and by the analysis of 1996 Census and Centrelink administrative data to provide a regional and national context.

The CAEPR project team developed, in consultation with DFACS, a set of research objectives aimed at investigating, at the household level in each community:

- the household and family organisational structures and composition;
- the nature of the household welfare economy based on the sources of incomes of the individual members;

- key cultural parameters of child care;
- patterns of mobility of children and their parents;
- the impact of that mobility on child care and the delivery of welfare payments for the care of children;
- the wider availability of services to Indigenous families, focusing on those relevant to the welfare and care of children; and
- the household members' own perceptions of local Centrelink service delivery and other issues relevant to their family's wellbeing.

The broad project objective is to carry out community-based research that can be used to 'ground-truth' and draw out key implications for national and regional-level policy and service delivery. This monograph provides a research benchmark for subsequent survey years, and insights into the dynamic and culturally-based aspects of Indigenous people's interaction with the welfare system.

An overview of Indigenous welfare dependence

It was only as recently as the mid 1960s that Indigenous Australians were legislatively included in the provisions of the social security system on the same basis as other Australians (Altman and Sanders 1995).² But even then, and up until the late 1970s, welfare payments to many 'eligible' Indigenous people, especially those living on reserve lands, continued to be made to third parties on their behalf. By the 1980s, all Indigenous Australians were treated as eligible for all social security payments, including unemployment benefits; though it is argued there continues to be an under-coverage (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) 2000). In 1974, the Australian Commission of Inquiry into Poverty reported an Indigenous poverty rate of 48 per cent of the poverty line compared to a national rate of 12 per cent (Brown et al. 1974; Henderson 1975).³ Since then, it has been argued, any decline in the Indigenous poverty rate is primarily the result of increases in the proportion of low-income non-Indigenous people (Altman and Hunter 1998; Ross and Mikalauskas 1996).

The progressive uptake of welfare income by Indigenous Australians is such that in the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 1994, approximately 55 per cent stated that they received some form of government welfare payment as their main source of income. Fisk (1985) reported similar rates in the mid 1980s. The ABS reports that amongst the wider Australian population, 13 per cent of households receive their primary income from welfare (Altman and Hunter 1998). Many Indigenous Australians have become long-term dependents on social security income, to the extent that there is now considerable government concern about their growing levels of 'welfare dependence' and about the inter-generational nature of that dependence. The current high rate of welfare dependence is a direct corollary of factors including the Indigenous population's geographic diversity and locational disadvantage, the persistently high levels of absolute and relative economic

disadvantage evident across all indicators, and the historical legacy of economic marginalisation and poor infrastructure in many communities (Altman and Hunter 1998; Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b; Schwab 1999; Taylor and Hunter 1998).

In addition, the increase in Indigenous population growth over the last decade owing to a combination of comparatively high fertility, an increased willingness to identify, and improving accuracy of the census enumeration (Gray 1998; Ross 1999) has resulted in a substantial relative increase in the total number of Indigenous households (an increase of 25% compared to 9% amongst other households); and a dramatic increase in the Indigenous working-age population. Demographically, while the broader Australian population is aging, the Indigenous population continues to exhibit a youthful profile (having a median age of 20 years compared to 34 years for all Australians) and the number of young people moving into the ages where they form families is increasing rapidly.

From a social policy perspective, these factors combined with the impact of continuing high levels of parental mortality, the poor health of children, and past government assimilation and child-removal policies have placed many Indigenous families and their wellbeing under enormous pressure (Commonwealth of Australia 1997; Daly and Smith 1996, 1999; Gray, Trompf, and Houston 1991). Any future policy goals and service strategies developed by government for alleviating their welfare dependence will have to grapple with these critical demographic trends and socioeconomic factors.

Indigenous leaders are also increasingly critical of the debilitating effects of entrenched welfare dependence in their communities. One leader has recently characterised welfare as a 'gammon' economy, constituting an economic relationship with the state that disempowers Indigenous people, undermines traditional economic activities, entrenches a dysfunctional welfare mentality, and leads to an abrogation of responsibility by both governments and Indigenous groups.⁴

While escaping welfare dependence and reasserting Indigenous economic empowerment are stated to be important goals by government and Indigenous people alike, the attainment of a basic citizenship entitlement after decades of exclusion represents a major social justice achievement of the last two decades. Access to social security income will continue to constitute, for many Indigenous people, a critical source of base-level reliable income in regions where they continue to remain economically marginalised (Altman and Sanders 1995; ATSIC 2000). For many families in such regions it also operates as income support to maintain cultural autonomy and independence (for example, on remote outstations). On the other hand, when combined with the interplay of factors summarised above, long-term dependence on welfare seems to have become, for many families, a debilitating poverty trap.

If effective strategies are to be developed to address both the level and qualitative experience of welfare dependence, an important preliminary step would be to critically evaluate the extent to which government policy and service delivery models are applicable to the diverse circumstances and needs of Indigenous people.

Welfare reform: The emerging policy agenda

In 1998, following re-election, the Coalition Federal Government commenced implementation of a potentially significant reformulation of the social security system based on the policy concept of a 'social coalition' between individuals, community, government, and business to secure three main social policy outcomes: 'stronger families, stronger communities, and economic and social participation' (Commonwealth of Australia 1999; DFACS 2000; Newman 1999a, 1999b).

To date, the Australian social security system has been based on the social assistance model rather than the social insurance model; income payments are not based on prior contributions (such as 'benefits insurance' in the USA), nor are they limited in duration. The broad objectives of income transfers range widely, but include supporting living standards, reducing inequality, income redistribution, social integration, and administrative feasibility (Barr 1999). Within government's concept of a social coalition, the receipt of income transfers is viewed as a short-term amelioration of economic disadvantage; as a staging post in the process of getting individuals back into the labour force.

In the welfare reform context, the family—and the nuclear family in particular—is viewed by the Federal Government as a central socioeconomic arrangement that must be actively supported through specific strategies and resources. A 'national families strategy' has now been developed and launched as a policy framework for existing and newly-funded programs, focusing on the perceived life transitions of families and their differing needs during those stages (DFACS 2000; Newman 1999a, 1999b).

Foremost amongst the imperatives underlying government's 'social coalition' to strengthen families and community is its desire to 'address the problem of welfare dependency' by moving beyond reliance on income support to 'self-sufficiency' (Newman 1999a: 6–7). The objective of overcoming welfare dependence and maintaining an 'adequate safety net' is to be secured by developing initiatives and strategies of four broad kinds: long-term prevention; early intervention; improved incentives for self-reliance; and active assistance to help people get off welfare (Newman 1999a: 9).

Government has developed six key policy principles to underpin its welfare reform agenda. These are:

- maintaining equity, simplicity, transparency, and sustainability;
- establishing better incentives for people receiving social security payments so that work, education, and training are rewarded;
- creating greater opportunities for people to increase self-reliance and capacity-building, rather than providing a passive safety net;
- expecting people on income support to help themselves and contribute to society through increased social and economic participation in a framework of mutual obligation;

- providing choices and support for individuals and families with more tailored assistance that focuses on prevention and early intervention; and
- maintaining the Government's approach to fiscal policy (Newman 1999a, 1999b).

These social policy principles are encapsulated by the concept of 'mutual obligation', which is being adapted by the Federal Government as a broad policy framework under which welfare recipients are characterised as having 'both the right and the obligation to share in the benefits of economic and employment growth and to participate in their communities to the full extent of their capacity' (Newman 1999a: 6; Rodgers and Powlay 1995; Rodgers and Wilson 1998). It requires that all unemployed people receiving financial support from government should 'strive to improve their chances of getting a job and actively look for work and give something back to the community that supports them' (Newman 1999a: 4). Under this social contract, dependency has been cast as an economic and social obstacle to the new reform objectives of the Government which sees itself as an arbiter of how individual responsibility to overcome 'passive' dependence upon welfare assistance should be defined and met (Newman 1999a, 1999b). This poses particular challenges and difficulties in a cross-cultural context where populations are heterogeneous.

Welfare reform: The institutional and service delivery context

In October 1998, DFACS was created as a single agency to give effect to the Federal Government's welfare reform agenda.⁵ The Department coordinates financial assistance programs, policy, and funding. It also operates as a purchaser of services, in particular from Centrelink, via a Business Partnership Agreement signed on 1 July 1999 for the delivery of government welfare programs worth \$43 billion annually. The agreement specifically ties the services which Centrelink provides to the outcomes that DFACS must deliver for government. At an institutional level, these new arrangements effectively mean that DFACS operates as the policy formulation, monitoring, and funding agency, while Centrelink operates as the separate service delivery agent.

Centrelink was established in 1998 by government as a one-stop-shop to deliver services purchased under Business Agreements with a range of government departments including DFACS, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), the Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC), and the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) amongst others. An important Centrelink service initiative in 1999 has been its development of a 'life events' model which aims to provide a tailored and more comprehensive one-to-one service to individual customers based upon their particular life circumstances and needs (Centrelink 1999: 39–40). Centrelink has also developed Centrepay, a facility that enables its customers to have voluntary deductions taken from their welfare income for direct remittance to a third party organisation as full or part payment for ongoing expenses (such as rent). The service incurs a fee of \$0.95 per transaction and deductions can be made up to a total comprising 60 per cent of the total benefit (Westbury 1999: 14).

In terms of welfare service delivery to families, the Government states that 'raising children, especially young children, is an important and valuable role' (Newman 1999a: 20). Parenting Payment Single is described as income support (that includes the previous Sole Parent Pension) paid to a parent who is on a low income and is the sole or primary carer of their children, in recognition of that role. Child-rearing is stated to be a form of mutual obligation in itself, but only a temporary one: 'Parenting Payment doesn't last forever and the best approach to long term security is getting a job' (Newman 1999a: 7). Access to 'quality child care' has been identified as being vital to the choices all families make about caring for their children, and to parents' capacity to participate in paid employment (Newman 1999a: 7, 11; Commonwealth of Australia 1999: 182–92). The NATSIS survey found that this was a significant problem for Indigenous women in all locations, who cited lack of available child care and other family responsibilities as the main reason they were not looking for work (ABS–CAEPR 1996: 57–9).

Further reform to the delivery of family assistance payments will be initiated by the creation of the Family Assistance Office to deliver a Family Tax Benefit to consolidate 12 different types of family assistance payments, including Family Allowance Payments, into three payment types. Legislative changes made in November 1999 also mean that Indigenous participants in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme will be incorporated into the administrative purview of Centrelink. A wider range of persons receiving income support payments from Centrelink (for example, those receiving Parenting Payments, and Disability and Aged Pensions) will be able to participate in the scheme under specified arrangements with Centrelink related to their welfare payments. Under the arrangement, CDEP participants will become eligible for social security concessions such as rent assistance, pharmaceutical allowance, and health care cards, and will be able to participate in the Jobs, Education, and Training (JET) program. The receipt of CDEP wages by pensioners will reduce their pension dollar for dollar.

To facilitate the proposed institutional and welfare service delivery initiatives in the area of family support and delivery of income payments such as Family Allowance and Parenting Payments, the Government has raised a number of matters with DFACS as requiring further policy consideration, including:

- possible options for improving the provision of information and advice to family members at key stages of the life cycle;
- possible options for creating incentives for family members to participate in some form of appropriate economic or community activity;
- the scope for increasing participation of people receiving Parenting Payment in the JET program;
- the scope for improving incentives to take up work when parenting responsibilities allow; and
- the potential for improving assistance to people on Parenting Payment to take up paid work or vocational education and training.

Welfare reform: Implications for Indigenous Australians

The establishment of DFACS and Centrelink arguably presents a strategic opportunity to develop a more focused government-wide approach to the development and delivery of social policy (Newman 1999a, 1999b). However, it is not yet clear how the new policy frameworks and service delivery models will be applied to Indigenous people dependent upon welfare transfers. The underlying premise seems to be that Indigenous Australians have access to viable labour markets and paid employment, and that work-relevant training and education programs are available to them. In fact, the 1994 NATSIS survey reported that a substantial proportion of unemployed Indigenous men and women (42% and 33% respectively, and especially those in remote, rural, and 'other urban' areas) cited the fact of there being 'no jobs at all' and 'no jobs in the local area' as the main difficulty in finding work (ABS–CAEPR 1996: 57–8).

As Sen (1992) has noted, human diversity is no secondary complication to the objective of securing equality; it is fundamental. Much of CAEPR's research over the last decade demonstrates that the cultural and locational diversity of Indigenous Australians are critical factors determining their engagement with the mainstream labour market and the welfare system. Combined with the impacts of inter-generational poverty, these characteristics have profound implications for how welfare is provided and for whether the Government's welfare reform agenda will be relevant to the diversity of Indigenous circumstances.

In preliminary response, DFACS has noted that the 'complex and unique needs' of Indigenous Australians demand a 'collaborative approach' to the development of policy responses, with a particular emphasis needing to be placed on 'cultural appropriateness and locational issues' (Commonwealth of Australia 1999). To these factors must be added the entrenched structural, historical, demographic, socioeconomic, and health impediments referred to above. DFACS sees the key to achieving policy outcomes in the Indigenous welfare arena as resting on the capacity to develop 'seamless connections across government programs and services that respond to priorities as identified by communities' (Commonwealth of Australia 1999: 72). The creation of such connections, whether it be between levels of government, or by government with Indigenous agencies and communities, has long been a seemingly unobtainable goal in Indigenous affairs. But it is one that should continue to lie at the heart of any welfare reform agenda.

The substantial agenda for change being initiated by government, coupled with the recognition by DFACS and Centrelink of the diversity of Indigenous needs, raises some fundamental questions which require further consideration before macro-policy frameworks and service delivery models can be applied to Indigenous Australians. In particular:

- what do the terms 'family' and 'household' mean in Indigenous societies;
- what might make for 'strong' Indigenous families and communities;
- what are the roles and responsibilities of adults for the care of children;

- what is the nature and extent of 'welfare dependence' at the family, household, and community level;
- what does the policy of 'mutual obligation' mean for Indigenous families and their communities;
- should mutual obligation apply to family members in receipt of welfare income for the care of children, and if so, what might constitute 'appropriate forms' of economic or community activity to satisfy such a condition;
- what incentives and training would assist parents (especially sole parents) in the transition from welfare dependence to paid employment; and
- how will cultural and geographic diversity influence the answers to these questions and determine policy effectiveness and service delivery?

Many of these questions, of course, are equally relevant to other Australians. Underlying them is a fundamental dilemma for government, policy makers, and Indigenous families and their communities; namely, the extent to which government can realistically be expected and effectively hope to respond to the cultural dynamics and diversity of Indigenous life. Is it possible for the welfare state to develop more effective service delivery and policies on the basis of cultural realities, without succumbing to highly interventionist social engineering? If the answer is yes, what might be the central social arrangements of Indigenous family life that are relevant to formulating suitable policy and service delivery? In implementing such 'culturally informed' policy and service delivery, is it possible for enhanced economic wellbeing for families to be realised in a practical form that goes beyond political rhetoric and managerial clichés? What might be the policy criteria for developing better models of service delivery to achieve such outcomes? While it is not within the ambit of one research project to consider all these questions, the research analyses and conclusions presented in subsequent chapters highlight a number of matters that are directly relevant to them.

The structure of the monograph

The Executive Summary at the beginning of the monograph presents an overview of the major research conclusions and recommendations. The research data and analyses are presented in such a way that conclusions, implications, and recommendations are progressively developed. The contents of the chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 2 outlines the methodology, key concepts, and operational definitions employed to conduct community-based field research and statistical analyses;
- Chapter 3 presents the detailed ethnographic research and the analysis of questionnaire data from the Kuranda community case study, along with a consideration of specific policy and service delivery implications arising from the study;

- Chapter 4 presents the detailed ethnographic research and the analysis of questionnaire data from the Yuendumu community case study, along with a consideration of specific policy and service delivery implications arising from the study;
- Chapter 5 presents a comparative summary analysis of the key similarities and differences between the two community case studies, as a basis for drawing out broader implications for policy and service delivery;
- Chapter 6 places the case-study chapters in a wider context, using aggregate data from the Census and Centrelink administrative data;
- Chapter 7 presents the major policy implications and recommendations arising from the research, and the regional and national implications;
- Chapter 8 presents the major service delivery implications and recommendations arising from the research, and the regional and national implications.

2. Research methodology

Anne Daly and Diane Smith

Key research objectives and parameters

The broad aim of the research project is to investigate the factors influencing the service delivery of welfare income transfers paid by government to Indigenous families for the care of their children, focusing on Family Allowance and Parenting Payments.⁶ In order to achieve this, the project will analyse data collected from detailed community case-study research over a period of three to four years. This will involve ongoing fieldwork in two participating communities—Kuranda in north Queensland and Yuendumu in Central Australia. This chapter outlines the methodology used in undertaking the first year of community fieldwork and conducting the statistical analysis.

Over the period from late 1998 to early 1999, a series of regular planning meetings were held by the project researchers, some of which included input from the Indigenous Policy Unit of DFACS. The CAEPR project team developed a set of key research objectives, as outlined in the previous chapter (p. 1).

The project used a mix of research techniques in each community to obtain these data, including informal focus groups, interviews with the staff of community organisations and regional agencies, participant observation, elicitation of household genealogies, and the repeat administration of household questionnaires via a key reference person. The success of the field-based case studies has been contingent on gaining the cooperation of key individuals and organisations in the communities, and the permission of the people to be interviewed. As this is planned to be a longitudinal study, we decided to adopt a questionnaire approach as the primary interviewing tool, in order to facilitate comparisons between individual respondents, and between the case-study communities in their totality. Some of the practical issues raised by the choice of a questionnaire-based methodology are discussed below.

Aggregate census and administrative data have been analysed in order to put the community case studies into a wider regional and national context. While the aggregate data do not offer the detail available from fieldwork, they present standard information which facilitates an assessment of how representative the case studies are. Our aim was therefore to use broadly similar definitions to those applied by the ABS and Centrelink as our baseline operational definitions for the case studies, but to expand upon those wherever possible in order to more fully capture Indigenous family and household realities.

Our intention has been to obtain culturally informed and accurate empirical data at the community level, to situate these within a regional service delivery context, and then an even wider administrative and census data context, in order to progressively draw out the implications for national policy and service delivery. By developing this multifaceted methodological approach, it is hoped that the research findings and analyses will be robust

and relevant to the development of more effective and informed policy frameworks and service delivery models. These research objectives and community parameters have generated complex issues of methodology which have required key definitional, conceptual and practical matters to be addressed. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

Definitional and conceptual issues

In conducting interview-based cross-cultural research, it is important to consider the concepts being used and their application to, and interpretation by, the people being interviewed. Terms such as 'family', 'household', 'parent', 'primary care giver' and 'sole parent' can have different meanings in different cultures. While it was important to record accurately the reality of these terms for the Indigenous people interviewed, we were also keen to collect data in a way which made comparisons with official (census and administrative) data possible, and that would be relevant to policy formulation and service delivery.

The ABS (1991: 60) defines a 'household' in the national population census as 'a group of people who reside and eat together (in a single dwelling)...[who form] a single unit in the sense that they have common housekeeping arrangements i.e. they have some common provision for food and other essentials of living.' Persons living in the same dwelling, but with separate catering arrangements, can therefore be classified as separate households. However, the identification of a household, thus defined, can be problematic where people are living in improvised dwellings, sharing domestic resources across dwellings, or are highly mobile (Finlayson 1989, 1991, 1995a; Gray 1987; Martin and Taylor 1995; Smith 1980, 1991a, 1991b, 1992a; Taylor 1996a, 1996b).

The concept of a 'usual resident' who lives at a particular address for six months or more is used by the ABS to define household membership. In a highly mobile population, where people move between a number of home bases, this definition becomes difficult to apply. The ABS concepts of 'visitors' and 'absentees' also become problematic. For people who have 'no usual address', the ABS codes the dwelling in which they reside on census night as their 'usual address', thereby conceptually immobilising people who may in fact be extremely mobile.

Another important social grouping is the 'family'. The family is defined by the ABS as 'a group of related individuals where at least one person is aged 15 years or over' (ABS 1991: 47). For the ABS, the nuclear family of parents and children is taken as the base around which all family types are constructed, and other families within the household are placed in relation to this 'primary family'. Accordingly, if there are more than three family types in a household, the adults in any additional families are 'disbanded' as a family type, reclassified as related individuals, and assigned to the 'primary' family. The ABS definition of marriage includes both legal and de facto relationships, and the definition of parenting includes both biological parenting and a degree of social parenting (for example adoption, legal and customary fostering, and step-parenting).

The census data provide an invaluable source of information for comparing outcomes for the Indigenous population with those for other Australians. However, the census is a 'snap shot' view of the Australian population which tends to ignore the social fluidity of many Indigenous households, to truncate extended family relationships, and create artificial family boundaries. Accordingly, we have broadened the definitions of 'household' and 'family' used in the case studies, with the aim of reflecting these features of Indigenous life.

For the project, the term 'household' was given a set of nested operational definitions to capture the basic temporal and spatial factors involved in household formation and operation. 'Household' was minimally defined as 'the group of two or more related or unrelated people who resided in the same dwelling the night previous to the questionnaire interview, who regard themselves as a household, and who make common provisions for food and other essentials for living'. This definition is similar to the ABS census definition except it recognises the Indigenous view of 'visitors' as household members. 'Visitors' were recorded on household genealogies, classified as 'usual residents' and their income included in estimates of household income.

In Yuendumu, an important expansion of the project's baseline definition included capturing a temporal dimension by recording 'all those people who stayed at the same location for one night or more over the previous two weeks'. This definitional expansion was possible because more detailed observation was conducted in Yuendumu. There the project researcher was able to record data on total number, average, and actual flows of persons who stayed overnight for particular households over a fortnightly period (see Ch. 4). The 'household' group within a dwelling was further divided into those groups who shared food, allowing the identification of separate households within one dwelling and across kin-linked dwellings. This provided a more complex and dynamic picture of actual household composition and short-term developmental cycles. Additionally, in both community studies, the extent of mobility (within and out of their community) was recorded for each key adult and their children in the four weeks preceding the administration of the questionnaire.

The case studies also used more flexible definitions of 'family'. The full range of extended family relationships in a household were identified, with no attempt to disband families (in the manner of the ABS) where there were more than three family types in a household. Parenting was also more broadly defined than in official data collections, to reflect the reality of child-care arrangements and to allow for the possibility that adult carers of children may change over time. At the time of the survey, in order to qualify for Parenting Payment Single, a person must have had the child in their care for at least a year.⁷

Our definitions focus on what was actually happening at the time of the interview. So for example, a mother looking after her child after an absence of some years would be considered a sole parent for the purposes of this survey, even if her child had, until recently, been in the care of other relatives. That is, the project definition of sole parenting was based on information received at the time of the interview, as opposed to social security criteria which require that a specified period of care is undertaken prior to qualifying for a Parenting Payment Single payment.

Questionnaire development and implementation

The questionnaire used in the community case studies was developed over a period of eight months and was compiled in consultation with staff from DFACS, Centrelink, other interested organisations in the two communities, and academic colleagues. One of the ongoing tensions involved in its development was the desire to elucidate the maximum amount of information from respondents on a wide range of topics, and the realisation that they had limited time available for answering our questions and could easily refuse an interview if asked to answer a lengthy questionnaire.

An initial questionnaire was developed and trialed in a pilot study in Kuranda in February 1999 (see Finlayson and Auld (1999) for a fuller description). The pilot was particularly valuable in focusing attention on key issues for further research. It also identified culturally-based factors which needed to be taken into account in the conduct of research, such as locating interviewees, the nature of kinship relations and family circumstances to be expected, broad issues of mobility, the cultural assumptions underlying certain parts of the questionnaire, and issues relevant to developing more effective interviewing techniques. The preliminary findings from Kuranda were supported by field testing in Yuendumu and the apparent cultural differences between the two communities accommodated in the questionnaire format and wording.

The final questionnaire was modified to address these issues and is included at Appendix 2. The questionnaire was used as a standardised interviewing reference for the topics to be discussed with each respondent, rather than being formally delivered. Given the difficulties in locating and interviewing all the individuals living in a household, it was decided to focus on gaining responses from a 'key reference person'. This placed a limitation on the range of questions to which we could expect reliable answers. For example, the key reference person was unlikely to have accurate knowledge of the fortnightly total income of each individual in the household, or their expenditure habits, though the majority were aware of the sources of income received by other household members.

The topics covered in the interview with each key reference person included the child-care arrangements for children within the household and those residing elsewhere, patterns of recent mobility, the experience of the respondent with their local Centrelink office and agents, the use of other community facilities such as health and education, income sources for household members and their employment status, and their views about a range of family issues (see Appendix 2). The final questionnaire was administered to key reference persons in a combined total of 58 households, covering a total of 418 household members comprising 226 adults and 192 children.⁸

In conjunction with each questionnaire interview, project researchers elicited a genealogy covering all members of the household. This enabled the accurate identification of familial structures and kin connections between household members. The household genealogies were also subsequently used as 'social maps' to record diagrammatically child-care arrangements and sources of household welfare income (see Figs 3.1–3 in Ch. 3).

The case studies: Selection and fieldwork issues

The Indigenous Policy Unit (IPU) of DFACS indicated they wanted field research carried out at the community level for a number of reasons. The Unit had recently conducted a series of regional workshops with Indigenous organisations and government officers which emphasised that Indigenous family structures and child-care arrangements were different from those of other Australian families (see Finlayson and Auld 1999). A series of CAEPR research papers had also highlighted the policy and service delivery challenges posed by the ongoing socioeconomic disadvantage of Indigenous families, noting that improvements would need to be based upon the analysis of data gathered at the level of households (Daly and Smith 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Finlayson and Auld 1999). The IPU was keen to review the policy framework and ongoing effectiveness of welfare service delivery to Indigenous families with children in the light of accurate, culturally-informed research conducted in communities over a period of time.

Two communities were selected for inclusion as the case study components of the research project. These were Yuendumu, a discrete, remote, and predominantly Aboriginal settlement of about 900 people some four hours' drive to the north-west of Alice Springs in Central Australia; and Kuranda, a small rural hinterland town in north Queensland with an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population of about 700 people, a thirty-minute drive from the urban and tourist centre of Cairns.

The two communities were selected for a range of reasons. First, geographical location and community type are linked to Indigenous economic status, with those in rural and remote areas experiencing substantial economic disadvantage and difficulties with service delivery. These two communities offered a contrast between the remote and rural town situations. They afforded a potentially different set of socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic variables thought to be relevant to policy and service delivery.

There was also a simple pragmatic reason for selecting the two communities: particular project researchers have long-standing anthropological research involvement with the communities and an overall familiarity with their residents and circumstances (Finlayson with Kuranda, and Musharbash with Yuendumu). This familiarity was seen as an essential precondition to conducting interviews with people about private family matters.

Resource and time constraints limited the choice of case studies to two, so that there is no comparative urban case study. There are well-documented differences in the socioeconomic profile of Indigenous families and households residing in urban, rural and remote areas, but there are also many similarities. Furthermore, the term 'urban' itself covers a wide range of residential locations and socioeconomic profiles, and the differences between urban communities and Indigenous communities in other geographic locations is not always clear-cut (see Smith 1995, 1996).

A 'one-size-fits-all' policy and program approach is suitable neither across the broad categories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous welfare recipients nor as an overall approach to differently located Indigenous welfare recipients. The research conclusions and recommendations presented here may be applicable to urban welfare recipients, but they

cannot simply be extrapolated to urban locations. The preferred approach would be to conduct similar research, possibly in an urban context, to test the relevance of issues and recommendations. Similarly, no Torres Strait Islander community was included because of resource constraints.⁹ There are similar caveats on the extrapolation of these research findings and recommendations to Islander families.

The case studies: Negotiating research access

The first major goal was to negotiate with local Indigenous organisations to obtain their cooperation and permission to conduct the field research. In Kuranda this was carried out informally during the course of conducting the pilot, through a series of discussions with community organisations. In Yuendumu, the process was more formalised and involved seeking and obtaining the written permission of the Yuendumu Aboriginal Community Council (no such community-level Aboriginal Council operates in Kuranda).

A number of initiatives were taken to ensure the communities were reasonably informed, in advance, about the nature of the project. Coordinators for the community case studies (Finlayson for Kuranda and Musharbash for Yuendumu) spent time in each location discussing the scope and objectives of the project with key regional agencies such as Centrelink and ATSIC, and with local community organisations and their staff.

A pamphlet describing the scope and conduct of the research project, the conditions for maintaining individual confidentiality, and providing contact details for project researchers was widely circulated to inform community members and organisations. All individual-level data obtained from each questionnaire are kept confidential by the project. Individual respondents were assured of this before each interview and their verbal permission obtained before proceeding.

Local Indigenous people from each community were employed to assist in the dissemination of information about the project; to work with project researchers to secure a broad sample of respondents; to facilitate the level of trust needed to secure permission from potential interviewees; and to facilitate the appropriate conduct of interviews. The employment of members from each community as research facilitators was invaluable to the conduct of field research, especially to locating and gaining the permission of interviewees.¹⁰

As Finlayson and Auld (1999: 20) note regarding the Kuranda pilot, the research carried out for the community case studies represents one of the few times that comparative information on children and their families has been systematically obtained via questionnaires, in relation to welfare. The first phase of Kuranda fieldwork was coordinated by Finlayson and carried out by Finlayson, Daly, and Smith over a combined period of four weeks in June–July 1999. This intensive approach was necessary because the project researchers only had a limited period of time available for fieldwork.

By contrast, Musharbash, a doctoral anthropology student, had already been residing with families in the Yuendumu community for over 18 months. She conducted questionnaire interviews, working with local Indigenous facilitators, over a longer four-month period.

Important additional information on aspects of mobility and child-care was also obtained from her ongoing discussions with household members. Those insights were not available to the Kuranda interviewers owing to their shorter period of fieldwork. However, the Yuendumu data do confirm similarly detailed ethnographic findings from intensive anthropological field research carried out over a period of 18 months by Finlayson in Kuranda some 14 years ago, on the same issues of household composition and welfare (see Finlayson 1991). The community level field data also support broader census analyses reported by Daly and Smith on these issues (1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999).

Sampling issues

A number of factors influenced the approach to sampling taken in the project. Highly mobile and socially fluid populations are notoriously difficult to survey (Martin and Taylor 1995; Smith 1991a, 1991b, 1992a; Taylor 1996a). At a broad level, it is difficult to ensure in surveys that the people interviewed are representative of the population, and that data obtained for possible use in developing policy and service delivery are relevant to it. The underlying assumptions about the definition, composition and structure of families and households have to be critically evaluated. At a practical level, the problem can be as basic as needing to develop operational definitions that are relevant both to Indigenous people and policy makers. The proposed longitudinal nature of the CAEPR project adds a potential complication to the sampling process when respondents are highly mobile. Difficulties may be encountered in subsequent years of the survey in relocating individual household members and reproducing the initial sample over time.

The selection process for respondents was based on the local knowledge of the Indigenous project facilitators and the two key project researchers with long-term familiarity with the communities, as well as on the suggestions of local residents. To that extent, there may have been some sampling bias introduced as a result of a 'familiarity effect'. To ameliorate this, project researchers sought to secure a wide selection of family types and a spread of ages among the respondents, and to interview respondents from each of the main residential 'camps' and villages in each community.

Very few of those approached refused to participate or were unable to complete the questionnaire. In Kuranda, one questionnaire was deemed invalid as the respondent fell ill and it remained incomplete. In Yuendumu, one young 17 year old mother was asked to participate but was said to be too shy to do so. The extremely high positive response rate in both communities was due in major part to the employment of local people as project facilitators, and also to people's interest in the topic under discussion.

In general, sample sizes for any survey research that seeks to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data are necessarily small.¹¹ For the Kuranda data analysed in Chapter 3, a total of 28 interviews were conducted with key reference persons as respondents for 28 households having a total of 180 members. For Yuendumu, the data analysed in Chapter 4 are derived from interviews with key respondents covering 30 households whose members live in 22 houses, having a total of 238 members.

A very general indication of the representativeness of the project survey samples at the household level can be gained by comparing the sample totals to the 1996 Census data on total households in the two communities. At the 1996 Census, Kuranda had an Indigenous population of 203 with approximately 28 households.¹² If the average number of persons per dwelling in Kuranda in 1996 (5.6 persons) is used to construct a broad ABS equivalent of household, there were a total of 36 Indigenous households in Kuranda. Taking this latter figure, coverage by the project's 1999 household sample was approximately 78 per cent of the 1996 total Indigenous households in Kuranda. A similar exercise for Yuendumu, for which the 1996 Census reported 75 households, suggests a very approximate coverage by the 1999 project sample of around 40 per cent of the total Indigenous households in Yuendumu in 1996. These are, of course, very broad indicators of representativeness of the household samples given the likely growth of the Indigenous population in both communities between 1996 and 1999.

The two sets of household samples are not statistically random, but arguably are broadly representative. By virtue of the project focus, there was an inevitable sampling of persons receiving welfare entitlements, and a bias towards women, who are the majority of recipients for child-related payments. However, as Daly's analysis of Centrelink administrative data in Chapter 6 indicates, women are by far the higher proportion of Indigenous recipients compared to men, across the range of all welfare payment areas. This may partly be explained by the fact that the CDEP scheme is not classified as a welfare payment, and has a higher proportion of Indigenous men as participants (both communities have such schemes). Even so, the focus of the survey sample on women replicates their national predominance as welfare recipients.

The project research objectives also required a focus on parents or other carers with at least one child under 16 years of age and, therefore, excluded households with no children resident and households with no recipients of Centrelink payments. Those in full-time employment were also under-represented, as might have been people who are constantly mobile.

However, Musharbash notes that households with no children present and no recipients of Centrelink payments are rare at Yuendumu. It is likely then that the 30 households sampled in that community constitute a fairly accurate representation of both type and composition. In Table 2.1, Musharbash provides comparative data for the distribution of types of welfare payments in her research sample, and for the Yuendumu population as a whole (as reported by Centrelink) for a fortnight in October 1999. The comparison tends to suggest a broad degree of representativeness in the Yuendumu sample. The earlier field research in Kuranda by Finlayson (1991) supports a similar conclusion for that community.

The under-representation in the Yuendumu sample of Pension Payments, and over-representation in Family Allowance, can be put down to the project's choice of respondents—mothers and carers of children—which implies an omission of households without children. These latter households would be found in some of the women's camps which are largely occupied by pensioners. The under-representation of Parenting Payment is assumed to be due to a non-recognition of the distinction between the two payment types among the respondents to the questionnaire.

Table 2.1 The distribution of welfare payments: A comparison between the questionnaire sample and Centrelink administrative data: Yuendumu, 1999

Type of payment	Sample (%) ^a	Total population (%) ^b
Pension	15	25
Newstart	46	41
Family Allowance	37	28
Parenting Payments	2	6
Total	100	100

Notes: a. Musharbash questionnaire sample, Yuendumu, July–October 1999;

b. Centrelink aggregate data for the total Yuendumu population, October 1999.

The sample may also have missed ‘mixed spouse’ couples in households (that is, couples having an Indigenous and non-Indigenous spouse). Such couples appear to be rare in Yuendumu and Kuranda. At a national level, ‘mixed spouse’ households tend to exhibit higher comparative levels of income and employment compared to households where both spouses are Indigenous (Gray 1998). The question of whether ‘mixed spouse’ Indigenous households exhibit different levels of reliance upon welfare, rates of mobility, or different domestic economies may be an important research issue, but is outside the parameters of this project.

Overall then, the sample is intentionally skewed towards female welfare recipients, households with children, and Indigenous spouses. However, given the extent of Indigenous reliance upon welfare in both communities suggested by Centrelink aggregate data (see Ch. 6), and given that the households sampled included members participating in the CDEP scheme, the sample is broadly representative of the Indigenous population in both communities.

Interviewing techniques and coverage

Project researchers employed a number of anthropological interviewing and fieldwork techniques to ensure the cross-cultural validity and accuracy of the survey research. For example, the recording of household genealogies was an invaluable tool, allowing family structures, household social boundaries, and the nature of kin relationships between members to be accurately identified. The process of eliciting genealogies also acted as a familiar point of conversation and a means of leading respondents into the fuller questionnaire.

Previous fieldwork experience of the project team members suggested that a possible limitation to the validity of questionnaire data elicited would be the tendency of people to provide the answer they think people want to hear (see also Finlayson and Auld 1999; Martin and Taylor 1995). Project interviewers tested possible leading and misleading questions during the pilot phase, sometimes reframed additional questions during the main

interviewing phase, and posed some opinion questions indirectly. Open-ended questions and prompts were used following certain set questions, to enable respondents to talk more spontaneously. In general though, the approach adopted was to make questions as direct, culturally relevant, and straightforward as possible.

Previous experience also suggested that interviews with individuals would commonly be conducted with household members coming and going, all contributing their views. This proved to be the case. Interviews were conducted in people's homes and in public areas such as cafes, halls, and offices, and always with relations, friends, and children nearby.

The social pool of people contributing as additional *de facto* 'respondents' to each questionnaire were included in the interview process, and their comments and views recorded as additional notes against the relevant question. When wide-ranging discussions were carried out within this pool of people, these were treated as impromptu 'focus groups' and researchers kept note of the issues raised and views expressed. The recording of the household genealogy meant that researchers were often able to pinpoint the relationship between these additional commentators and the key respondent. This approach is one more commonly employed as a standard interviewing tool in anthropological fieldwork, and is positively oriented to socially embedded and constructed Indigenous modes of communication where the individual cannot be effectively 'quarantined' for the purposes of eliciting information.

In addition to the administration of the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with a wide range of service deliverers in Kuranda, Cairns, Yuendumu, and Alice Springs. In Yuendumu interviews were conducted with staff in all community organisations and agencies with a service delivery role relevant to children, including the youth services manager (Mt Theo program), the youth services development coordinator, the school, local police, the Warlpiri Media and Warlukurlangu Aboriginal Artists Association, the social club, the child-care centre, the health clinic and women's centre, the local missionary, the Council housing unit, and the Yuendumu Centrelink agent office.

A five-day 'work-experience' placement was also negotiated for Musharbash with the manager of the Centrelink Customer Service Centre (CSC) in Alice Springs. At the CSC, Musharbash was able to conduct informal interviews with Centrelink staff and management, and 'sit in' with staff in different work areas of the office (mainly at the front reception desk and in the Family Payments Section). This provided an extremely valuable 'fieldwork' component to the Yuendumu research, enabling the researcher to experience, first-hand, a range of service delivery and policy issues from the perspective of Centrelink staff and management. It also afforded a practical reality-check on the feasibility of implementing possible recommendations.

In Kuranda and Cairns interviews were carried out with senior officers from the Centrelink CSC, ATSIC, and the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Cairns. In Kuranda, interviews were conducted with local service deliverers including Ngoonbi Housing Cooperative, the manager, the administrator and some participants of the local CDEP organisation, staff from the CDEP-run cafe and hardware store, and the local bank—where a project researcher also carried out a short observation of activity on the day welfare cheques were delivered.¹³

Analysis of the questionnaire data

Over a five-month period following the field research, all questionnaires were fully proofed and cross-checked, and data from both community studies were extracted and collated onto tabulated data sheets. While data from the Kuranda questionnaires were processed in this way at the completion of the fieldwork period, those from Yuendumu were periodically sent to Canberra where data were progressively checked. This produced a better question response rate for the Yuendumu questionnaires: the gaps were systematically clarified by the project researcher, who was still resident in the community.

Considerable attention was given by the project team to discussing the comparative implications and rich detail of the responses. Each household questionnaire contained a combination of both quantitative and qualitative information, including lengthy notes on discussions and opinions, and genealogical information. Household genealogies were computerised and subsequently used to 'map' key data concerning each member's main source of income (see Chs 3 and 4). From the genealogies, project researchers were able to identify the kin connections between members of the household, so that familial relationships were clearly evident. The genealogies were also invaluable for subsequently 'mapping' the parental and other child-care arrangements reported in the questionnaires.

For the Kuranda case study, Daly and Smith examined each household genealogy and attempted to construct main family types according to standard ABS classifications. It was apparent that in the great majority of cases, household members were close kin relations. The sheer complexity of the extended family relationships present in the majority of households in both communities defied, indeed defeated, any neat categorisation or artificial disaggregation according to ABS census definitions of family type. People who might have been classified by ABS procedures as 'visitors' to households were invariably close kin or friends, and were classified by respondents as being household members, not visitors. For the purposes of this research analysis, and with the support of respondents' own culturally-based assessments of the issue, 'visitors' are classified as 'usual residents' (see Chs 3 and 4).

Community data for Yuendumu were analysed and written up by Musharbash, and those for Kuranda by Daly, Smith, and Finlayson. In Chapter 5 we set out apparent areas of ethnographic similarity and difference evident between the two communities at this initial stage of the project, and consider their implications for policy and service delivery.

Analysis of census and administrative data

An analysis of 1996 Census and Centrelink administrative data for the two case studies are presented in Chapter 6 to enable comparisons between the communities and with wider Australian aggregates. Obviously, the range of issues covered by these data are much narrower than those covered in the case studies, but the statistical data present a comparative regional and national benchmark for the case study results.

The major problems associated with the use of census data on Indigenous families and households have been commented on elsewhere (Daly and Smith 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999;

Jones 1996; Martin and Taylor 1995; Smith 1992a). They centre, as we have noted, on the issue of trying to fit dynamic Indigenous household developmental cycles and complex family formations into fairly rigid census definitions. The census is therefore useful as an important source of baseline information on key comparative indicators, but only for certain aspects of family and household life.

The administrative data presented in Chapter 6 were collected by Centrelink and processed by the 'Knowledge Team' at DFACS. Aggregate regional and national level Centrelink data on family-oriented welfare payments were made available to the project team in a complex computing exercise. Administrative data are collected for the purpose of administering programs which may change over time, and do not always cover the particular issues of interest to a researcher.¹⁴ An important issue in this context is the use of the Indigenous identifier in administrative databases (Altman 1992; Altman and Taylor 1996). Indigenous people can choose whether or not to identify when applying to Centrelink for income support. Those recognised as Indigenous in the administrative data are likely therefore to be an under-representation of the number of Centrelink clients who are Indigenous.¹⁵

Lessons for future project methodology

There are important lessons to be learned from the first year of project research. The adoption of a multifaceted methodology has worked well in the field and generated robust research data. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data obtained has enabled particular aspects of Indigenous family life and household organisation to be described in some detail, on the basis of which relevant policy and service delivery options could be proposed. But the analysis of such a combination of data is complex and time consuming.

Careful attention has been paid to establishing the linkages between community level data and their possible policy and service implications at the regional and national levels. The advantage of the proposed longitudinal nature of the survey is that it will enable project researchers to continue to evaluate not only the impact on families of the rapid changes occurring in welfare program and policy at the macro level, but also the validity and relevance of the findings and recommendations made in this monograph.

The use of a questionnaire as a standardised framework for the conduct of household interviews gave a necessary structure and facilitated comparison of the two communities. At the same time, the decision to administer the questionnaire in as flexible a manner as possible, and to record open-ended discussion of topics, meant the questionnaire interviews also had a more natural flow and energy. This flexibility is also necessary in view of the need to update annually the project questionnaire in light of ongoing changes being made to policy frameworks and program structure in the context of government welfare reform. A shorter baseline questionnaire will be retained for the second year of household interviewing in 2000 to facilitate longitudinal comparison of key topics. At the same time, particular issues that have been highlighted by the initial phase of survey research (such as the circumstances and family roles of young people, young parents and

the aged, and the overlap between the operation of the CDEP scheme and participation in other welfare programs) will be followed up in more detail over subsequent years.

The level of mobility reported in the two communities is not unusual and may make the tracking of some individuals interviewed in 1999 difficult over subsequent years. Mobility is clearly an important factor in the formation and developmental cycles of households, and raises important conceptual and fieldwork issues. For example, in such circumstances what will validly constitute the 'same' household from one year to the next? Should project researchers try to relocate the same full set of household members wherever they subsequently reside? Should the original key reference person from the dwelling be relocated and used to regenerate a household (by including the potentially new set of members with whom they are residing)? Should researchers return to the same physical dwelling and interview a different key reference person if necessary? Given one project focus is on the impact of service delivery and policy on the children of families, should the children of the household be tracked over time rather than the adults? Or should a combination of these approaches be adopted?

For future years of the survey, the decision has been made to employ a composite approach. Firstly, if at all possible, the same key reference person will be located and interviewed about their current household. Secondly, if the dwelling in which they are residing is different to that of the previous year, project researchers will also re-visit the original dwelling (where relevant) and interview a new key reference person. This should mean that the original stage one sample of key reference persons will be retained, and a supplementary sample added in the second year by inclusion of some new key reference persons. Questions will also be asked about the current residence of children in the previous year's household.

Finally, on the basis of the first year of research, it is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of community organisational support and individual cooperation for the success of the project. The input of the Indigenous project facilitators working with project researchers was crucial in gaining that acceptance, and they will continue to play a critical role in helping to relocate individuals and provide feedback to and from the communities.

3. The Kuranda community case study

Julie Finlayson, Anne Daly, and Diane Smith

Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data about the effectiveness and appropriateness of policy frameworks and the delivery of welfare services and income payments to families with children in Kuranda, north Queensland. The fieldwork and survey methodology used in the case studies have been described in Chapter 2 (see also Finlayson and Auld 1999). The first main phase of fieldwork was carried out in Kuranda over June and July 1999 by Finlayson, Daly, and Smith. The data discussed below come from key reference persons for 28 households, having a total of 180 members.

In the first half of this chapter, we present the key research findings obtained from the questionnaires and interviews. The data have been organised into seven topics:

- household and family structures and operation;
- the impact of mobility on families and households;
- household economies;
- the cultural parameters of parenting and child-care;
- Centrelink service delivery;
- other service delivery issues; and
- parents' own views about the main issues facing their children and families.

The analysis of these data reveals important socioeconomic characteristics of the sampled Kuranda families and the households in which they reside. It also provides a mechanism for testing current policy directions, and a basis for developing options with the potential to enhance community and regional service delivery. These implications and possible strategic initiatives are drawn out in the second half of the chapter. A short concluding section summarises these ideas for future action.

The Kuranda Indigenous community

Kuranda is a popular tourist destination located north-west of Cairns at the end of 26 kilometres of winding road cut into the Macalister Ranges. At the 1996 Census, the township had a population of 623, with seasonal and tourist-based variations. The Indigenous community in Kuranda totalled 203 persons, with some living in the township itself but a larger proportion dispersed across a number of small outlying residential areas including Mantaka, Kowrowah, Koah, and Mona Mona, a former Seventh Day Adventist mission. Some of these villages can only be reached by four-wheel drive vehicle at certain times of the year (see Finlayson 1991; Finlayson and Auld 1999).

All the Indigenous families in Kuranda are historically linked to the former Mona Mona mission where the majority of the older generation were born and raised. From 1913, until it closed in 1962, the mission provided limited services to its residents. Once it was officially disbanded, former residents were expected to ensure their own access to mainstream services in the regional towns of Kuranda, Mareeba, and Cairns. Residents who continued to live outside Kuranda in the small villages mentioned above have only gained access to services such as reticulated sewerage and water, council garbage collections, and electricity from the mid 1980s (see Bottoms 1999; Finlayson 1991; Henry 1999). The survey research attempted to sample a reasonable cross-section of persons from the dispersed villages which comprise what we are referring to here as the Kuranda Indigenous 'community'.

Indigenous people in Kuranda and Yuendumu have different historical experiences of colonisation and display different current forms of articulation with the Australian economy (see Ch. 4 and also Finlayson 1991, 1995b; Holden and Duffin 1998; Meggitt 1962; Middleton and Francis 1976; Peterson 1977). Hence, this case study affords a potentially different set of social, economic, cultural, geographic and structural variables to those reported by Musharbash for Yuendumu in Chapter 4, and highlights some different service delivery issues. However, as the comparison of the two communities presented in Chapter 5 indicates, amidst this diversity there are also important commonalities in Indigenous family life and household organisation.

The research findings

Families and households

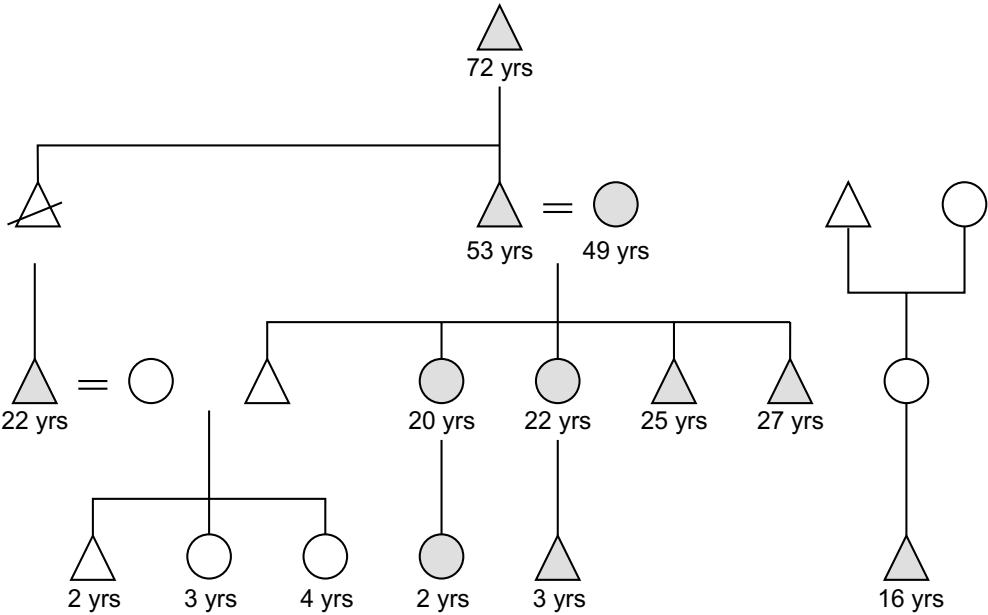
A number of features characterise the Indigenous households sampled in the Kuranda community. The genealogies for 28 households covered by the questionnaire confirm a key characteristic noted for Indigenous households in general: they are compositionally complex, with multiple generations, a large number of residents, a high ratio of young people and children to older household members, and large numbers of kin-related regular 'visitors' (see Daly and Smith 1996, 1999; Finlayson 1991; Martin 1993).






The Kuranda households display a youthful demographic profile. Of a total 180 household members, 43 per cent were children under 16 years of age and 57 per cent were adults. The 28 households were fairly evenly split between males and females (averaging 3.03 males and 3.2 females per household). The households had an average of 6.4 persons per dwelling (comprising 3.6 adults and 2.8 children per household). This is a significant decrease from the 11.2 per cent estimated from the earlier pilot which was upwardly skewed as a result of the inclusion of two large households of 20 and 13 persons, but is closer to the somewhat lower 1996 Census figure of 5.6 persons per dwelling for the Kuranda area reported by Daly in Chapter 6. The Kuranda average is twice the national Indigenous average of 3.7 persons, and three times higher than the national non-Indigenous average of 2.7 persons per household. By both Indigenous and non-Indigenous indicators, Kuranda households are unequivocally overcrowded.

The sheer complexity of family relationships present in the majority of sampled households defies (indeed defeats) any neat categorisation according to standard census or program definitions of family types. Of the 28 households, 57 per cent had three or more generations of related kin present (7% had four generational levels) and 36 per cent had two generations. Only 7 per cent consisted of single generation sets of kin-related members. No households had only unrelated members or single persons.

The complex nature of the extended kin relationships comprising the familial structures within Kuranda households is shown in Fig. 3.1 which depicts one household genealogy demonstrating the extended kin connections between members. The genealogy shows that the household of 11 core members consists of four generations of male (represented by triangles) and female (represented by circles) kin. The household has the youthful age profile of most of the Kuranda Indigenous sample, having an average age of 24 years (adults and children in residence are marked in grey). There is only one couple in residence, but a number of sole parents spread across the generations. One of the sole parents is absent

Fig. 3.1 Household 22 genealogy: Age and gender



Age and gender summary		
 male	 female	 deceased
 resident	 non-resident	= couple
Total persons:	11	7 males in residence
Adults:	9	4 females in residence
Children:	2	Average age: 24.82 years

though her child is in residence; other sole parents are in residence with their children. A number of the adult members are siblings.

In the total Kuranda sample, only three households could be said to contain anything approximating a nuclear family of a couple and their biological offspring. The majority of those households that had two generations were in fact comprised of a wide range of kin-related family members including parents and adult children, grandparents with their grandchildren (but no parents of the children), actual first-cousins (that is, the children of siblings), and adult siblings residing together with their children. The latter category of family—perhaps most aptly classified as an ‘adult sibling-set family’—constituted just over 60 per cent of family arrangements in the sampled households.

Sole parents figured predominantly in the family structures evident within the households—either by their presence or absence. In the 28 households there was a combined total of 26 sole parents in residence with their children, as well as an additional 15 *absent* sole parents whose children were in residence and being cared for by other relations. Of the households surveyed, 82 per cent had either a sole parent in residence, or an absent sole parent whose children were resident, or in some cases both. Moreover, 29 per cent of the households had two or more generations of sole parents present, often consisting of mother and daughter pairs of sole parents. In one household there was a male sole parent.

Mobility and its impact

Much has been written about the rate and forms of mobility evident amongst the Indigenous population (see Martin and Taylor 1995; Taylor 1998; Taylor and Bell 1996, 1999) and the possible impacts of ‘visitors’ on family and household economies (see Daly and Smith 1995, 1997a; Finlayson 1991; Smith 1991b). The Kuranda study provides an important empirical elaboration on the existing ethnographic and statistical research; namely, a core of people in Kuranda households appear to be residentially stable. At the time they were interviewed, Kuranda key reference persons had been living in the same dwelling for an average of 7.3 years.

While both adult and child members of households have a network of other residences in the Kuranda area between which they move (59% of respondents stated there were other places in Kuranda where they sometimes stayed, and 58% had done so in the past four weeks), there remains a core of adults who maintain very stable ‘home bases’ (or usual residences) in the midst of the more short-term mobility of others. It is more accurate to characterise households in Kuranda as having a stable ‘core’ of household members with other more transient members having other ‘home bases’ or ‘usual residences’ to which they move for shorter (e.g. on weekends or ‘for a holiday’) or for longer periods of time.

Some people clearly move more frequently than others; some prefer to move as little as possible. Frequent movers could more appropriately be classified (as indeed they are locally regarded) as being visiting ‘usual residents’ with multiple ‘home bases’, rather than simply as ‘visitors’. This presents a complex picture of short-term mobility and its potential impacts on household composition and income levels. This contemporary picture appears

to have changed very little from the detailed residential cycles of Kuranda households described in 1985 by Finlayson (1991). She was able to document the longer-term consequences (over 18 months of direct recording) of mobility, reporting dynamic developmental cycles where households expanded and contracted with the flow of transient members, and fragmented and reformed.

All respondents reported that when they did move to other locations they stayed with close relations, and over 90 per cent of respondents said they moved for social reasons, including the need to for a change and to visit family and children (to 'have a break' or 'a bit of a holiday'), and also because of tensions between family members. There is then a well-defined kin-based network underlying mobility, creating a circuit within the Kuranda community between the township itself and Mona Mona, Kowrowah, Koah, Mantaka, Cairns, and Mareeba.

Kuranda household members nevertheless appear to draw a notional boundary in their own minds with regard to Cairns. Respondents repeatedly stated they preferred not to stay overnight in Cairns, but to 'go down' to the town in order to access necessary services, do shopping and visit relations, and return to Kuranda the same day. Some 23 per cent had stayed overnight in Cairns during the four weeks prior to the interview and, following the local Kuranda pattern, they stayed with close kin.

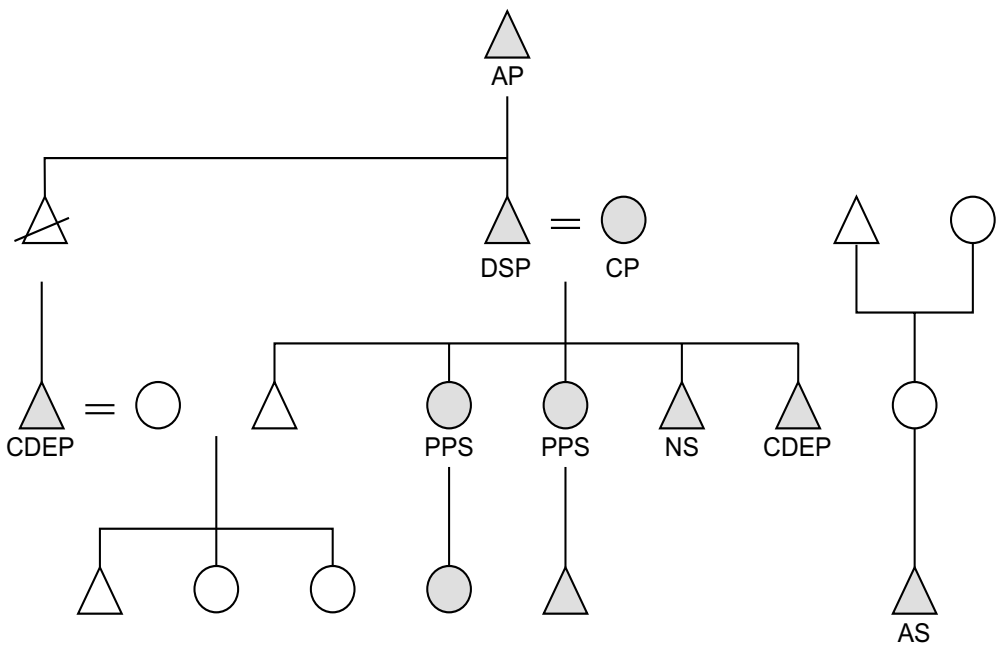
Though the most frequent reason stated by respondents for short-term mobility is a social one, mobility for some adults and their children between the dispersed Kuranda residential communities was, in part at least, also prompted by their lack of (and need for) housing, food, and other resources when they fell on hard times, or when money ran out during the cycle of fortnightly welfare payments. The combined effect of mobility and reliance on welfare creates specific economic difficulties for some families and their households.

The domestic economies of households

The survey results suggest that families and their children in Kuranda live primarily in households with welfare-based domestic economies. In the 28 households, a total of 96 welfare-related payments were received. Of those total payments, 47 per cent were Family Allowance and Parenting Payments (some with rent assistance, and child disability payments included). An additional 18 per cent consisted of Aged, Carer and Invalid Pension payment types; and 5 per cent were Newstart unemployment payments. A further 20 per cent was CDEP—and thus welfare-linked—income.

CDEP payments are closely related to their welfare based equivalents in Kuranda. If these payments are classified as welfare income, rather than as employment wages, then there were only three non-CDEP wage earners among the 102 adults in the sample of Kuranda households. If CDEP is classified as employment, and the income payment as a wage, then 20 per cent of household sources of income recorded for all adults in the households could be said to have come from 'employment' wages. While the CDEP scheme appears to be making an important income contribution to Kuranda household economies, CDEP wages are invariably closely tagged to their equivalent welfare payments, which means participants fall in the low-income bracket.

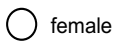
Fig. 3.2 Household 22 genealogy: Estimated sources of income per fortnight



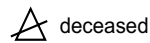
Key



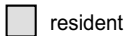
male



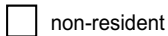
female



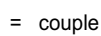
deceased



resident



non-resident



= couple

PPP Parenting Payment Partnered
PPS Parenting Payment Single
AP Age Pension
DSP Disability Support Pension
CDEP Community Development
Employment Project

FPA Family Payment Allowance
FTP Family Tax Payment
AS Abstudy
NS Newstart
CP Carer Payment

Source of income

Payment type	No. of people receiving	Amount per fortnight (\$)
Social security		
Parenting Payment Single	2	725.40
Disability Support Pension	1	305.90
Carer Payment	1	305.90
Family Payment Allowance/ Family Tax Payment	2	198.90
Abstudy	1	265.39
Newstart	1	265.19
Community Development Employment Project	2	720.00
Total		\$2785.78

In either case, the Kuranda households interviewed are overwhelmingly welfare-dependent, with 100 per cent having at least one adult in residence receiving a welfare payment. The majority of households have a number of adults receiving different forms of welfare payment, as is evident from Fig. 3.2.

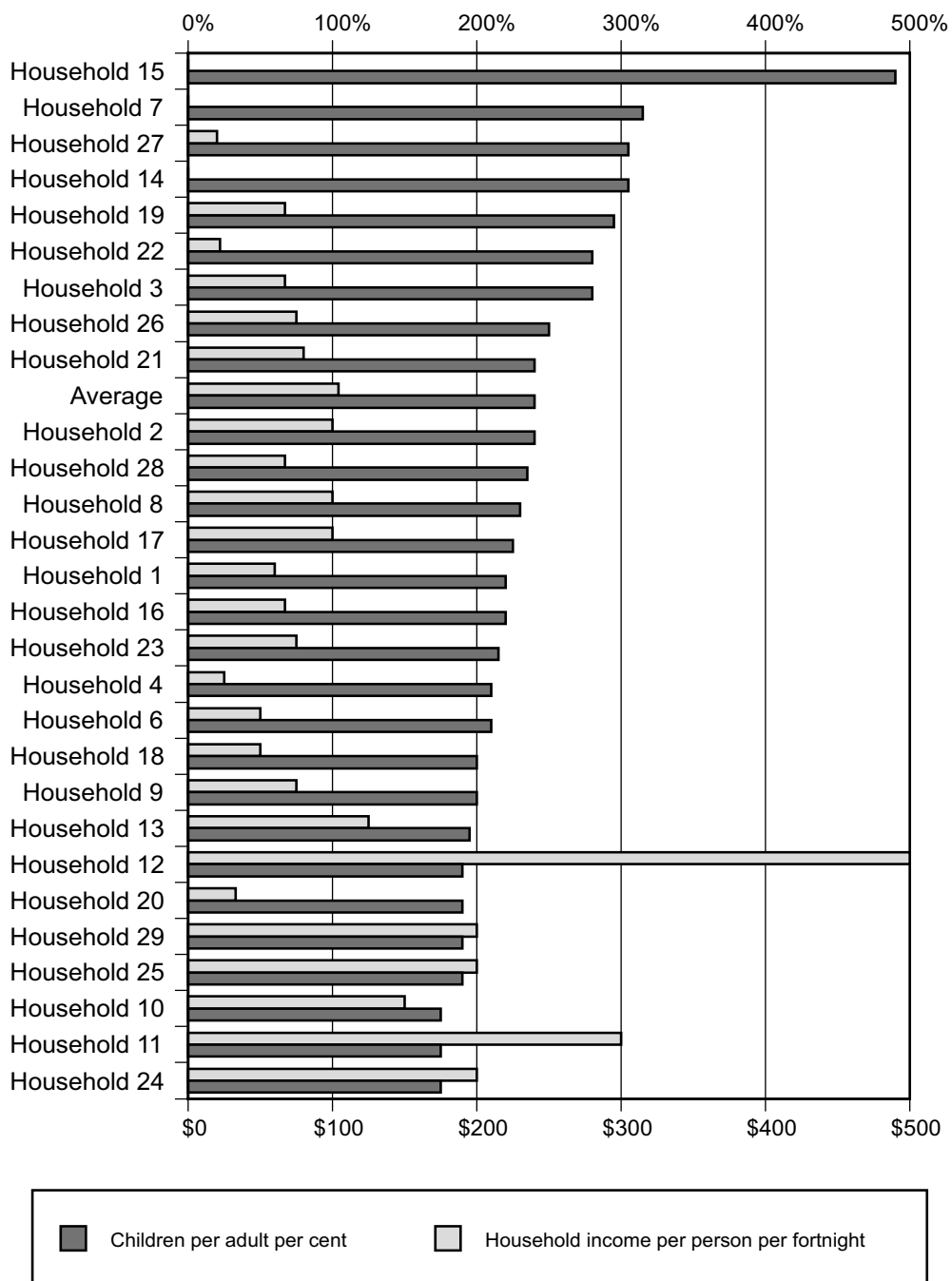
It proved difficult to get an accurate measure of net income because a large number of respondents have deductions taken out of their welfare payments for rent, electricity, groceries, loan repayments, and other such items. These services afford valuable budgeting assistance to families. People were aware of the cash they received in-hand, but it was harder to identify their gross or net (after tax) income. In order to develop a broader picture of household total income, the sources of income for each adult member of the household (including dependent students) were identified via information recorded on the questionnaire from each household's key reference person. Each member's welfare or CDEP income entitlement (as opposed to actual received income) was then estimated on the basis of standardised Centrelink entitlement rates and standard CDEP participant rates. Family circumstances and number and age of dependants were also been taken into account (in line with Centrelink practice) in making these hypothetical estimates of entitlements. Generally, we have used the upper limits of income entitlements. Each individual's 'entitlement incomes' have then been combined in order to discuss total household income levels.

Fig. 3.2 shows one such Kuranda household genealogy with the sources of income and related estimates of income for various adult members mapped onto it. Fig. 3.3 presents the household income per person per fortnight for the 28 Kuranda households, indicating the great majority receive under \$300 per fortnight and 40 per cent receive under \$200 per person. Fig. 3.3 also indicates the ratio of dependent children to adults in each of the sampled households (for example, 200% represents two children to every adult in the household).

An important related issue for Kuranda families is employment. The research suggests that Indigenous access to mainstream employment in the town is limited. About half of the respondents had paid work, but the great majority of these were working under the CDEP scheme (see also Fig. 3.2). The work included gardening, cleaning, art and craft production, office administration, and educational work. Three-quarters of the respondents were working between one and 15 hours per week. Full-time employment was a rarity, accounting for only one respondent. Our sample was deliberately focused on those who used Centrelink services and therefore may under-represent full-time workers. Nevertheless, the general impression is that full-time employment is unusual and that people are primarily reliant upon the CDEP scheme or the Tjapukai Cultural Park (formerly the Tjapukai Dance Theatre and now located in Cairns) for work opportunities (Finlayson 1995b; Holden and Duffin 1998). A fuller understanding of the underlying reasons for this is a critical issue for future research.

Not only are the Kuranda households heavily dependent upon the fortnightly cycle of welfare payments, but many are also reliant upon micro-credit in the form of the 'advances' offered by Centrelink to welfare recipients. Centrelink is able to offer its clients up to \$500

**Fig. 3.3 Household income and percentage ratio of children per adult:
Kuranda questionnaire sample data, 1999**



as an advance on their future receipt of welfare payments. This advance is interest-free and must be paid back over a period of six months via deductions from the recipient's future fortnightly payments. Sixty-one per cent of respondents stated they had obtained such advances against their future welfare payments, mainly to pay for food, larger bills (such as electricity and phone), to purchase whitegoods, or to pay for such things as holidays to Cairns or church books and camps for their children.

An important advantage of such advances identified by respondents is that they can usually be obtained quickly over the counter and in cash. While there are restrictions on obtaining such advances—only one can be obtained per individual over a 12 month period—a number of people within a single household took advantage of the loans. Over the period of a year it is likely that someone in a household would be making use of such additional welfare money or repaying it.

Reliance upon this micro-credit facility indicates the real difficulties that people on welfare have in saving for basic domestic needs and regular bills. It also suggests that family members and their households are being further entrenched in poverty by becoming locked into a process of 'borrowing' against their current welfare payments, with the end result that they receive lower future payments over the time required to pay off their debt to Centrelink. The end result may be to simply put them under further economic pressure. On the other hand, given the reported cultural and economic barriers to saving within Indigenous households (see also Ch. 4 and Peterson 1993; Schwab 1995; Westbury 1999), it is not surprising that this Centrelink micro-credit facility is regarded very positively by respondents and plays an important economic role within welfare-dependent household domestic economies.

Interestingly, this Centrelink small 'advance' facility is only one source of local micro-credit and 'institutional saving' that people rely upon. When asked who they would go to first if they needed to obtain a large amount of money (over \$250), 41 per cent of responses (multiple responses were given by some respondents) indicated the respondent would ask the local CDEP organisation or an Indigenous organisation such as Ngoonbi Housing Cooperative, and 28 per cent stated they would ask Centrelink.

Like Centrelink, the local CDEP organisation offers participants a deduction facility by which they arrange to pay regular bills such as rent and electricity. Respondents who are CDEP participants noted they could request advances of small amounts of money from the CDEP organisation against their next fortnight's wages (though not at the level of the Centrelink advance). They can also operate a 'book-down' system at the local CDEP cafe and hardware shop, enabling them to accumulate and regularly pay accounts for the purchase of daily foodstuffs and small capital goods.

While only 10 per cent of respondents said they would go to family—perhaps an indication of the lack of ready cash available in welfare-dependent families—the majority also noted that they gave financial assistance to other family members to help meet the costs of domestic bills and rearing children. Interestingly, 13 per cent stated they would try to use their own savings. A very small 3 per cent of respondents stated they would approach a bank.

There appears to be a well-established network of support operating within families from the Kuranda Aboriginal community. Local sources of micro-credit provided by local community organisations and Centrelink are regularly activated by them. But the Indigenous social and economic support network is firmly constrained by the limits of a welfare-dependent economy where unexpected financial demands (such as paying a large telephone or electricity bill, or looking after a suddenly increased number of dependent children or adults) can create a crisis situation for households.

Parents, carers, and child-care arrangements

In the 28 households, 43 per cent of residents were children under the age of 16 years, indicating a high level of childhood dependency burden on adult members who are themselves overwhelmingly reliant on social security income or CDEP.

We have already seen that the mainstream policy concept of the nuclear family as the societal norm for family structure and child care is not applicable to Kuranda.¹⁶ The compositional complexity of families within households is paralleled by equally complex child-care arrangements. But such arrangements are not socially haphazard. Only 43 per cent of children in the surveyed households had both biological parents present and looking after them. The significant representation of sole parents in the households is reflected in the fact that over 56 per cent of children have sole parents (either present in the household, or absent).

In the absence of sole parents, the primary carer of their children in the majority of cases (64%) is a person from the grandparental generation: either biological grandmother or grandfather (from either the maternal or paternal side), or other relations of that generation. The carer may also be a sibling of the child's parents. In some cases children are split between relations: some stay with the mother and others reside elsewhere. Like adults, some children have a circuit of usual 'home bases' between which they move.

Senior women, and especially aged mothers and grandmothers, are frequently mentioned by respondents as the key carers for the children of their younger female kin. These older women retain an important mothering role—for other people's children—long past their own reproductive years. In many of the Kuranda household genealogies, such women form the focus of female kin networks of mutual support, assuming key social and economic responsibilities within households and providing domestic stability for many extended families. Since the majority of these senior women are themselves reliant on welfare income, these additional caring roles can become financially burdensome. The pivotal role of senior women echoes findings by other researchers and confirms earlier results from broad census analyses of family socioeconomic status (see Daly and Smith 1966 for a review of this literature).

If faced with an emergency and the need to find someone to look after their children for a short time during the day, 81 per cent of respondents stated they would ask a relation. The remainder stated that their children would be at school in such circumstances or were old enough to look after themselves. When an emergency situation required longer periods away from home, respondents indicated the same reliance upon close kin for assistance.

Over one-third stated that relations in another household regularly helped them to 'look after' their children.

This network of what we could call 'extended primary care' for children that operates across households is paralleled by an extended network of economic support. The payment of domestic costs for food and clothing for children was stated to most regularly be met by the parent and other primary carers who are relatives. Over 50 per cent of respondents stated that someone else regularly helped them pay for food and clothing for their children, and in all cases this was a close relation.

Seventy-five per cent of households had children other than their own biological children residing and being cared for by people other than the biological parents. As noted above, the term 'visitor' in Kuranda child-care arrangements is not an analytically useful term. The concept of 'usual resident' fits more closely to how people view children and adults who come and go. This can include those children who have been in the care of family members for long periods of time (for some this was in excess of two years), as well as those children who come to stay on a regular, but short-term basis (for example every weekend) and even for those who stay intermittently. These children are all family, not 'visitors'.

The range of reasons for having other children resident in the household included the absence of the mother (25%), the children staying to have a 'holiday' or temporary visit (25%), because of housing problems, as a result of fostering, and 'growing up' arrangements (10% each), for school reasons (5%), and because parents were working elsewhere. In these circumstances, the costs of caring for the children are met by a range of people potentially including the parents, grandparents, adult siblings of the parents and other relatives—with these carers residing both inside and outside the household. Not surprisingly, over one-third of respondents (36%) stated there were other children outside of their own households whom they also looked after, as well as those within their household.

It is clear from the surveyed households that some children are very mobile, travelling both with their parents and with others on a circuit of usual home bases. When people do travel they often tend to take their children with them (82%). When they do not take their children, other members of their family look after them. Fifty per cent of children were said to have other places they sometimes stayed, and when it was not the actual respondent looking after them in those other places (10% of cases) it was other relatives (90%), and often older female kin.

This elaborate network of flexible arrangements for shared child care clearly reflects the mobility of parents, grandparents, and of the children themselves. Such networks of extended family carers constitute an enormous reservoir of social support for the care and socialisation of children in Kuranda. In other words, in situations where there is a high rate of sole parenthood, where family structures reflect the frequent break-up of adult relationships, and high adult morbidity and mortality, and where ongoing welfare dependence is the norm, there is invariably an aged grandparent or adult sibling of a parent who can be relied upon to look after the children.

Among those with children of pre-school age, only one respondent stated they had used formal child-care in the recent past (for reasons of work, and for two days per week at the local mainstream child-care organisation). That arrangement had to be terminated when the child-care centre closed down. However, there are acknowledged disadvantages in having to rely upon family for child care. For example, some children may fall through the support network and become marginalised in their receipt of care and therefore be at risk (see also Finlayson 1991; Martin 1993; Smith 1980).

Parents also find their employment options constrained by some of these child-care arrangements. This may be the case when other family carers are themselves reliant upon welfare and cannot afford to help out, or when the actual parent of the child, though absent, does not contribute money for their care. Furthermore, it is not the case that other relations are always available to assume child-care responsibilities when needed on a regular basis; for example, one respondent stated she had quit her participation in the local CDEP scheme because she could not organise stable ongoing child care amongst her relations. Indigenous child-care arrangements in Kuranda operate on the basis of fluidity, flexibility and changing circumstances, not regularity.

The majority of children in the Kuranda households are living with, and being cared for, by adults who are dependent on welfare payments or CDEP welfare-equivalent income. When asked about arrangements for the receipt of the Family Allowance and Parenting Payments, 94 per cent of adult respondents (who were female) stated they received the payments for their own children; the remaining going to the father (in 2 cases).

Eighty per cent of key reference persons stated they use the payments provided for the care of children (primarily Family Allowance and Parenting Payments) to purchase food, and an additional 16 per cent used it to pay domestic bills such as rent and electricity, to purchase clothing, books, and other such things for their children. The remaining 4 per cent passed the money on to other kin who were helping to care for their children. When asked hypothetically who should receive the Family Allowance payment, 60 per cent of respondents (all but 2 were caring for children) said the carer of the child and 40 per cent said the actual mother should receive the payment. For Parenting Payment the response was similar: 63 per cent stated the carer should receive the payment and 37 per cent the mother.

The emphasis placed by the majority of respondents on the actual carer being the most appropriate recipient of welfare payments provided for the care of children, fits with the observed level of absent parents in households and with the high rate of grandparental and other kin regularly caring for children other than their own. Interestingly, 60 per cent of respondents had not made use of the Centrelink facility in Cairns to formally arrange to have such alternative carers receive the welfare payment provided for their children. Amongst the 40 per cent of respondents who stated they had used the facility, the great majority of those (82%) said the arrangement had worked.

For those people who stated that they had not sought to formalise alternative payment arrangements with Centrelink, over two-thirds said they preferred to use their own informal arrangements for sharing costs between the actual parent and carer, and that they

did not want to create friction within families by going to Centrelink. Another one-third stated that the biological mother had returned to care for the child and so they had no need to initiate such an formalised arrangement. Over one-quarter of respondents stated that when they received their fortnightly Family or Parenting payments they were 'humbled', or pressured, by other adults to give their 'kids' money' to them.

Maintenance money

An important aspect of income support for children unrelated to welfare payments, is the payment of what Kuranda people refer to as 'maintenance money'. Some 40 per cent of respondents knew about these payments, but had not heard of the Child Support Agency (CSA) at all.¹⁷ Of those respondents to whom such specific payments might be applicable (11 out of 28), only 27 per cent said they received such money and 86 per cent reported that the other parent of their children did not give them any money or other resources to help look after their children.

Since July 1999, non-custodial parents have been obliged to contribute a minimum of \$260 child support per annum (\$5 per week), and this has included those on welfare income support and CDEP wages. Indigenous sole parents can apply for an exemption from the mandatory requirement to seek child-support maintenance from the other parent, and appear to be over-represented among such exemptions (Daly and Smith 1997b: 17).

It was stated by the Kuranda respondents that getting maintenance money is a problem in that some 'fathers do not pay' and try to 'avoid the responsibility', and that others had 'no money', were in jail, or had left the area. One respondent claimed that her ex-partner had left his job in order to avoid the payment of maintenance money. Given the high rates of male unemployment and low levels of income related to welfare reliance and participation on the CDEP scheme, it is likely that Kuranda men who are non-custodial parents and paying maintenance income would be doing so at the minimal support level. There was an evident reluctance on the part of respondents to get involved in family 'fights' and 'trouble' by actively following up the matter of maintenance directly with Centrelink (i.e. the CSA).

The average value of child-support payments per child nationally was estimated at \$53 per week in 1999 (Commonwealth of Australia 1999: 63). In welfare reliant and other low-income Indigenous households in Kuranda, the children of separated parents will clearly be disadvantaged by the inability or unwillingness of the non-carer parent to contribute to the cost of caring for children. Interestingly, when asked how such monies should be collected, 54 per cent said Centrelink, and another 36 per cent said a local Aboriginal organisation should assume the responsibility. Only 9 per cent thought the matter should be worked out between the separated parents themselves.

Centrelink service delivery

The people interviewed in Kuranda were generally well informed about Centrelink and the main services it provided, especially with respect to pensions and benefits. The majority knew where their closest office was and had been there recently to deal with a

range of issues. About half said they had been to the Smithfield Office in the few weeks preceding their interview.¹⁸ There were some specific difficulties reported in accessing the Centrelink office. These centred on lack of transport, and problems with phone access and dealing with the automatic phone system.

Responses to the question about the operation of a local Centrelink agent in Kuranda produced much less clear responses. About one-third of the respondents said there was no Centrelink agent in Kuranda—and this is correct. Owing to lack of funding there is no agent in the community. Centrelink makes use of staff at the Ngoonbi Housing Cooperative who work in an honorary capacity to distribute Centrelink forms and provide advice. Some respondents were clearly confused, and thought the honorary Ngoonbi worker was a Centrelink agent. Centrelink has installed a telephone/fax/printer and a self-help area at the Cooperative, with forms and literature to assist people. There is also now also a direct-dial phone to the Centrelink Call Centre. At the time of the survey research, a Centrelink officer from Cairns visited Kuranda on a six-weekly basis.

A significant group of respondents had never made use of the Ngoonbi honorary staff or the visiting Centrelink staff, preferring to deal with the Smithfield office. Older people said they chose to use the assistance available at the Cooperative to help them with forms and correspondence, rather than travel down to Cairns. Some respondents were unaware of when the Centrelink officer visited.

The overall impression was of a positive view of Centrelink service delivery. Although 43 per cent said they had faced difficulties in filling in forms and understanding important letters, these matters on the whole had been sorted out with the help of the Ngoonbi staff, other people in the community, and Cairns Centrelink staff. Although respondents would have preferred more Aboriginal staff at the Centrelink office in Cairns, they were on the whole satisfied with the information provided and the way Indigenous people were dealt with. When asked how Centrelink could improve its service to people in Kuranda, the most common answer was by setting up an office in the township, or by Cairns Centrelink staff undertaking more frequent and longer visits.

While Centrelink has been successful in fulfilling its function as the new agency providing pensions and benefits to Indigenous people in Kuranda, it has been less successful in informing them about the new packaging of various payments, and about other services provided by the organisation. In the context of this survey, the most significant result was the almost total lack of knowledge about and participation in the Jobs, Education and training (JET) scheme. Eighty-four per cent of respondents said they had never heard of the JET scheme. Of those who had, not one respondent had participated in a JET course. Given the large numbers of sole parents not in any employment (other than CDEP), this lack of knowledge about, and participation in, the JET scheme needs to be urgently addressed.

Other service delivery issues

Housing is a critical issue for Indigenous people in Kuranda. The average number of people resident in the households interviewed was 6.4, with the largest household consisting of

11 inhabitants and the smallest of two.¹⁹ Twenty-five of the 28 households were renting their houses, and only one was an owner-occupied house. The remaining two households were currently living rent free at Mona Mona.²⁰ The Centre for Appropriate Technology in Cairns is involved in developing a staged plan for the property's future development and planning workshops with Mona Mona residents and the wider Kuranda Indigenous community.

The Ngoonbi Housing Cooperative has recently emphasised rent collection as a method for generating revenue for the maintenance of the housing stock. Some respondents in the survey had rent payments automatically deducted from their CDEP or welfare payments by the relevant agency. The average rent payment for the households was \$100.60 per week. However, not all Kuranda residents live in accommodation supplied by Ngoonbi Housing Cooperative. The Queensland State Government owns and rents housing stock to Indigenous people in Kuranda, and at the outlying village communities of Mantaka, Kowrowah, Top Kowrowah, and Speewah.

The houses of respondents all had running water, a toilet, and a bathroom or shower. Three were without electricity. The majority had a television, VCR, refrigerator, stove, and washing machine, but less than half had a telephone. Some people also noted they had difficulties paying large telephone bills with the result that phone services were periodically cut. Some had phones which could only be used for receiving calls, but not for making them. Many of the houses were located in smaller settlements outside Kuranda so the fact that only ten households claimed access to a car, which often was reported to be not working, is a significant factor in people's ability to access facilities in Kuranda itself, let alone Cairns.

When asked about other essential services needed by Indigenous families in Kuranda, respondents emphasised health, sport, recreation, and youth services. The existing medical services appear to be adequate and only a few families (five respondents) faced difficulties in getting their children to medical help. Educational services were also accessible. Most respondents used the bus to get their children to school each day. They were aware of the Aboriginal Student Staff and Parents Association (ASSPA) operating at the Kuranda school and the local Principal works hard to encourage participation in the association. For example, barbecues are held to encourage parents to attend meetings of ASSPA and the school reported a good turnout. A number of concerns were expressed by respondents with respect to teenagers in the town. The major service issue raised is the limited sport and recreational facilities available for them.

Another perspective on the important issues for Kuranda families was gained from our interviews with service providers in the areas of health, education, housing, and the CDEP scheme. The staff we spoke to in these organisations highlighted the following major problems for Indigenous families in Kuranda and surrounding villages: inadequate housing, poor health, low school attendance, family welfare payments often not following children who are highly mobile, and the fortnightly 'boom and bust' cycle associated with dependence on welfare income.

Our interviews with staff from these organisations focused on issues that were most directly related to DFACS policy and Centrelink delivery of services; that is, we did not pursue the issues of housing and health in great detail, though they are obviously important. Nevertheless, a number of respondents identified the specific problem of younger families obtaining access to housing.

Staff from each agency and department we spoke to had particular proposals for changes they thought would improve the delivery of services to children and their families. The idea of a shared-care arrangement—where the money for a particular child could be given to a range of carefully identified carers—was supported by some. But a number of others argued that this would possibly generate greater conflict within families. One interviewee from a community organisation argued that the best people to ensure that ‘kids’ money’ went to the current carer of a child was for an Indigenous community organisation to be given the job of allocating the allowance on a fortnightly basis.

Some people from the local primary school suggested that, following the Abstudy model, payment of ‘kids’ money’ could be conditional on school attendance. An alternative suggestion was that part of the money could be paid directly to the school to support their breakfast and lunch programs and to cover other school-related expenses. A further suggestion related to the need for specific training for young Indigenous parents. It was suggested that attending a parenting course could be recognised as an ‘activity test’ for receipt of their welfare benefit. It was also argued that the current situation would be improved if the people ‘really’ responsible for the children were given formal guardianship.

Most suggestions emphasised the need for a process to be developed where receipt of the welfare income payments for the care of children could be more effectively directed at the actual care arrangements occurring on the ground. Some respondents and other people interviewed emphasised that if such a process were to be established it should be attuned to, and support, the flexibility characterising Indigenous child-care arrangements.

Parents’ perspectives on the main challenges

When asked what they considered to be the main problems facing Kuranda parents in looking after children, respondents invariably provided multiple answers. The main issue identified was alcohol and drugs—both in respect to adults and younger people (50% of respondents thought this was a problem for the community). Over 40 per cent of respondents identified as another major problem the fact that young people ‘do not listen to their elders and their parents’. Respondents also identified the lack of availability of particular services and infrastructure for Indigenous families, including lack of recreation for younger adults and children (25% of respondents identified this issue); the need for more and better education for their children and for parents (21%); and the need for more and better housing (18%).

Some respondents identified parenting and lifestyle issues as difficult challenges. These issues included: parents neglecting their children (especially mentioned in association with the problem of alcohol—11%); the incidence of violence and crime in the community (11%); gambling (7%); and parents’ lack of budgeting and parenting skills (7%). It is

interesting that only one respondent identified unemployment as a major problem for young parents, and no respondents specifically identified their reliance on welfare as a problem in itself.

When asked what were the main problems facing young parents in Kuranda, a slightly different focus was evident in the multiple responses. Approximately 51 per cent of responses focused on the lack of parenting skills of young mothers and fathers. This was raised in conjunction with the fact that they were too young to be starting off families; that too many young women were becoming sole parents; and that they, as well as other young couples, remained economically dependent upon their own parents. A number of the responses identified the lack of housing for young parents in the Kuranda area, forcing them to remain living with their own parents or adult siblings and creating overcrowding and unwelcome conflict between family members. Some 7 per cent of responses identified lack of education as a problem for young parents, holding them back from getting better jobs and income. In turn, 4 per cent identified unemployment of young parents as a problem.

When asked to describe what kind of future they thought their children would have in Kuranda, over 50 per cent gave a negative response, commenting that there was ‘nothing—no future’ in Kuranda for people, especially young people. One-third of respondents had a positive view of the future for their children, commenting that people had a strong attachment to the community and their families. They identified positively the work opportunities with the Tjapukai Cultural Park and potential opportunities for Indigenous artists through the tourist industry. Some 12 per cent were equivocal.

Conclusions and implications for policy and service delivery

Centrelink service delivery

The Kuranda research raises a number of regionally-specific issues for service delivery, but also highlights matters that have wider implications for national service delivery and policy frameworks. These are drawn out more fully in the following sections of this chapter.

The case study strongly suggests the need for a systematic review of welfare policy and strategies for the delivery of payments to Indigenous Australian families with children. The Kuranda research has identified specific aspects of family life, patterns of child care, household domestic economies, and living arrangements that cannot easily be accommodated within conventional welfare policy and service delivery guidelines and concepts.

The Centrelink regional office in Cairns has developed a service delivery profile that meets with a very positive evaluation from the majority of Kuranda respondents. The regional office as a whole has clearly attempted to deliver its schedule of welfare payments flexibly to Indigenous families, and to customise its services to suit the needs of families residing in a variety of different geographic locations in the Area North region. Critical comment focused primarily on Kuranda people’s need for more information—and more simply

written and communicated information—about the variety of Centrelink services and new payment packages that might suit their particular life stage and circumstances.

The respondents advocated an increase in the number of Indigenous staff, and especially more frequent visits over a longer period of time by Centrelink officers to Kuranda and surrounding communities. The research suggests that while the Ngoonbi staff working in an honorary capacity for Centrelink perform an invaluable role in assisting people with forms, correspondence and advice, this role could be made much more effective by providing a full-time Centrelink agent in Kuranda with relevant training, and by a more frequent and widely advertised visiting schedule from Cairns office staff.

These service issues are fairly basic in one sense—they are primarily to do with improving communication. Their implementation should be fairly straightforward and would have a beneficial impact on service outcomes for Kuranda families. However, all the suggestions proposed by respondents have resource implications for Centrelink. Servicing remote, rural, and geographically dispersed Indigenous communities is not cheap. The Centrelink regional office in Cairns will require additional resources (both staff and funding) in order to respond to the need, strongly expressed by Indigenous families in Kuranda, for more effective communication and a greater level of service contact time. This need may well be common to many other Indigenous communities in the Cape York Peninsula region.

Certainly the research conducted at Kuranda suggests that a comprehensive assessment needs to be carried out by DFACS and Centrelink of the actual costs of delivering welfare-related services to Indigenous clients, especially those in remote and rural areas. (See also similar issues raised in Yuendumu reported in Ch. 4, and the discussion on issues related to costing the provision of services to Indigenous customers in Ch. 7.)

If the Centrelink office in Cairns is to develop more effective and integrated approaches to delivering welfare services to Indigenous families with children, it is arguable that it will need to be accurately informed about the cultural parameters of Indigenous family life and household organisation in its region. It will then need to be able to customise services and strategies in a flexible manner in order to respond to local cultural, economic and geographic realities; and develop and implement regionally-appropriate program guidelines.

However, it must also be acknowledged that there are some aspects of Indigenous family life which service delivery can never hope to respond to adequately; they are simply not amenable to intervention by the welfare state (extremely high levels of short-term mobility amongst young people is probably one such factor; demand sharing is another). While such characteristics are culturally-based within Indigenous society, they may not easily be integrated into the 'culture' of program administration or service delivery. Indeed, to attempt such an integration might constitute an unwarranted intrusion and create unintended adverse impacts for families. The types of policy and service delivery frameworks needed to facilitate regional customisation, that are culturally informed and administratively realistic, are canvassed more fully in the concluding chapters (7 and 8).

Family and household structures

Welfare policy that is oriented primarily to the 'individual' and to the 'nuclear family' will be less effective in its outcomes for Indigenous people than one based on a recognition that each Indigenous person is firmly situated within an open-ended set of family relationships. The Kuranda research shows that the family unit plays a fundamental role in economic survival and cultural identity. But even that broad understanding will not suffice as a premise for the design of policy and service delivery.

The structure of Kuranda households and the extended family formations which comprise them cannot readily be fitted within standard program definitions and certainly not into a neat nuclear family model. Kuranda households are large and characterised by complex multi-generational, multi-family compositions. The networks of economic and social support operating between family members (both within and across households) means that families extend beyond particular physical dwellings.

It is the extended family structure which forms the basis for an Indigenous 'welfare' network, providing individuals with a place to stay when they fall on hard times, giving support to young families, to children when their parents leave them to the care of older relations, and when the fortnightly welfare or CDEP money runs out. In the context of high levels of welfare dependence in Kuranda, these networks represent a central social arrangement, constituting a form of social or cultural capital that makes an invaluable contribution to the socioeconomic wellbeing of families, their children, and the households in which they live.

But these social networks are essentially welfare-based and can easily be overburdened with demands that cannot be met. Housing is limited and subject to overcrowding, leading in turn to internal conflict and stress on the housing stock itself. Households break up and reform. Economic stress can be quickly exacerbated by the mobility of household members.

The coming and going of usual residents can have significant effect on the economic viability of families and the particular households in which they live, and the financial burden is not always equitably distributed. Core members (especially older people in receipt of stable pensions) may become burdened by demands on their limited welfare income, and suffer a diminished capacity to budget and save. None of these factors are conducive to stable patterns of child care, or to people's sustained participation in education, training, or employment.

The research at Kuranda suggests welfare policy needs to address the actual circumstances of Indigenous families and should focus on the extended family within a household framework, (and include all visitors as 'usual residents'). The Kuranda research also shows conclusively that sole parents and their children are key units within extended family households (as a result of either the presence or the absence of the parent). Areas of identified strength needing service delivery and policy support include the Indigenous social networks and distributed child-care arrangements operating within extended family households, and the role of key senior women within such arrangements.

Sole parent families

Standard administrative definitions of a 'sole parent family' do not accommodate the complex social structures within which all Kuranda sole parents are to be found. Indeed, on the basis of the Kuranda case study, one has to question the extent to which the term 'sole' applies adequately at all. While it may reflect an individual's separated parental status, it does not reflect their social, residential, or domestic arrangements.

Sole parents in Kuranda are to be found in extended family households where a number of other adults are either unemployed, on CDEP, or on aged or disability pensions, and where dependent children other than their own are also residing. In some instances there is more than one generation of sole parents in the same household. Service deliverers will need to respond to sole parent 'households', not simply sole parent 'families'. There are considerable economic and social benefits for both the parents and their children arising from these family residential arrangements. The parents are not necessarily as isolated as non-Indigenous sole parents appear to be, and can demand support and financial assistance from their relations towards the costs of caring for their children. Government also reaps the benefits of this Indigenous social capital.

Sole parenthood is not a transitory life stage for many women in Kuranda. Rather it is a re-cycling status that a woman might leave and re-enter throughout her life. Furthermore, the responsibilities of sole parenthood can be passed on by young mothers to their own parents—that is, to the child's grandparents—who are called upon to assume primary caring duties for their daughters' children. Many of these older women are themselves separated from their own spouses, or widowed, and so effectively become aged 'sole grandparents' or 'sole aunts'. Given these on-the-ground realities, policy and service delivery would be better modelled around the notion of 'serial sole parenthood' as a key life cycle status for many Indigenous women.

Maintenance money and welfare income

The Kuranda study indicates that issues affecting access to maintenance money need to be further investigated for Indigenous sole parent families. Low levels of male earnings, and high rates of unemployment, male incarceration rates, women's 'shame' at identifying fathers, and fear of conflict being generated within families by bringing in government scrutiny all mean that many women are not securing access to maintenance money and are largely unaware of recent institutional changes in the administration of such income.

Given the high rates of childhood dependency, and the low employment levels amongst Indigenous sole parents (see Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b), they are clearly disadvantaged compared to their female counterparts in the mainstream. There is an equity issue to be addressed in ensuring that Indigenous female sole parents do not continue to be financially disadvantaged in the face of the high rates of unemployment and of incarceration of male non-custodial parents. While the payment of maintenance money is not a welfare policy issue per se, there is arguably a case for providing Indigenous sole parents with some form of supplement to raise their income up to the equivalent average level of combined welfare and maintenance income received by their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Such a supplement could be provided in a number of ways. For example, it could be provided annually by the CSA, or alternatively via an annual Centrelink payment, in the form of a tax credit. Such a credit would be based upon an assessment of each Indigenous sole parent's actual annual income relative to a national combined welfare-maintenance total income benchmark derived from other sole parents. Lest such a payment be characterised as undermining government policy aimed at increasing family responsibility and members' transition from welfare to work, receipt could be tagged to participation by the custodial parent in an identified form of training or work experience during the course of the year. Further consideration of this matter would be greatly facilitated by the inclusion (and active recording) of an Indigenous identifier in CSA administrative databases, to enable more accurate estimates of the number of Indigenous sole parents in receipt of maintenance, and so assist comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous sole parent levels of maintenance-related income.

Caring for kids

Kuranda households operate on the basis a social distribution of 'parenting' where responsibilities extend across a number of close kin. This distribution of child-care responsibilities within extended families is part of wider kin-based networks of domestic support and 'demand sharing' within Kuranda (see also Finlayson 1991). The cultural mechanism of demand sharing, by which cash, resources, and other forms of practical assistance are exchanged and redistributed within and across households, is well established in Indigenous communities (Finlayson 1991; Peterson 1993; Smith 1991b), and is based as much on a strategic calculation of reciprocity as on altruism (Schwab 1995). In Kuranda, the normative cultural principles of sharing and reciprocity are crucial to a variety of child-care arrangements and to family wellbeing.

The burden of 'distributed' parenting often falls upon aged grandmothers, and also, though to a lesser extent, upon aged grandfathers and the adult siblings of sole and young parents. 'Grannies' in particular are assuming long-term 'mothering' responsibility for their grandchildren and other children. This role is positively valued in Kuranda, but is under great pressure owing to the high dependency burden in households and the levels of welfare dependence and low incomes.

Children in economically vulnerable families, especially sole parent families, may frequently change their residential location as their care is rotated around a circuit of close kin. The flow of 'parenting' is dynamic and does not necessarily follow a predictable pattern—though children will usually be cared for by a known range of carers. The care may be for shorter or longer periods of time, may be erratic and crisis driven, or it may occur according to a regular arrangement. The adults within this network of social parents could all effectively be classified as 'primary carers' or 'extended family carers' and should be recognised as such by service deliverers.

The periods of 'parenting' time undertaken by such carers may not be as consecutively stable as six or 12 months, but will nevertheless be considerable in accumulated time. The arrangement may have substantial impact upon the carers' financial status and the

economic viability of the households in which children reside. When a major source of welfare income is associated with payments made for the care of children, then their mobility will be a critical factor in the ebb and flow of household income, especially if the payments do not follow the changing residence of the children. This will be even more so if carers providing frequent, short-term child care, do not have access to the welfare payment allocated for that child's care, and are ineligible themselves for Family Allowance. This was identified as a problem by a number of female respondents who are carers of other people's children.

However, the Kuranda research also indicates a disjunction between respondents' stated hypothetical preference (for payments to go to the carer) and their actual behaviour (for the distribution of income to be sorted out within families without recourse to external government supervision). The causes for this disjunction are apparent in the statements of some kin: they do not want to identify changes in care situations to Centrelink because they do not want to cause fights within families or 'trouble' for the daughter or granddaughter who is the biological sole parent. The wider set of primary carers for a child, who are receiving an aged or disabled pension or CDEP wage, will simply try to 'make do' on their own welfare income. Centrelink has attempted to respond actively to this pattern of Indigenous child-care when informed, often by phone, of a change in child-care arrangements. In general though, it appears that alternative carers are receiving very little by way of government recognition or support.

An important conclusion of the Kuranda research is that the families overall, and particular members in them, are experiencing substantial caring burdens for children and that multiple generations of older women are assuming long-term caring roles which may disadvantage them economically. The incompatibility between current welfare policy and program guidelines, and the dynamic practices of Indigenous child-care may well be putting children (especially those of sole parents) and their carers at great risk.

The research indicates that welfare payments provided for the care of children do need—as a matter of urgency—to be more effectively targeted to the actual carer of the child, not simply to the biological parent or to a long-term social parent. But a critical issue for Centrelink is the extent to which service delivery is able to respond to levels of high mobility, to extended family formations and dynamic patterns of child care. The immense value and contribution of Indigenous child-care arrangements is their very flexibility and dynamism in the face of poverty. These arrangements need to be supported, not put under further pressure.

It has been suggested elsewhere that one possible approach would be to attach the payments provided for the care of children more closely to the child (Daly and Smith 1997b: 17). But can this be practically achieved by service delivery, in a way that will not be intrusive or create unintended negative impacts upon families? The recommendation made by Musharbash (see Ch. 4) in regard to the establishment of a 'Kids' Care Card' may have many advantages for both families and service deliverers. A Kid's Care Card would be particularly suited to a community such as Kuranda, and could indeed be piloted there.

Issues for youth

The research has identified that Indigenous youth in the Kuranda community is poorly serviced across a range of areas. Respondents pointed to a number of problems facing young adults, including the lack of support services, child care, and adequate housing for young parents with children; the lack of employment opportunities (other than CDEP) for young people immediately leaving school; the absence of sporting and recreational facilities for them; and the threats posed to them by alcohol and substance abuse, family violence, and crime. The impression is that many young people are adrift, with little hope of an economically secure future.

These are not necessarily service areas where Centrelink has the primary, or even a partial, service role. Greater coordination on the ground between government departments is necessary if they are to be addressed effectively. These matters are also raised by respondents at Yuendumu, and it is likely they are needs common to young people in many Indigenous communities (see Ch. 4).

One attempt to achieve just such a coordinated approach to service delivery for families was a community-based initiative at Kowrowah. There the local community had established a building to operate as a service ‘transaction centre’—as a point of contact between themselves and a wide range of government service providers. Considerable use was made of the centre by service deliverers and by community people (including families, youth, and the aged), until the lack of recurrent funding forced its closure.

Given the identified role for DFACS (outlined in Ch. 1) in developing a more holistic policy approach to family-related services, there is arguably considerable potential for it to actively promote more coordinated service delivery to Indigenous families and youth. Such an approach could be usefully piloted at the regional office level in conjunction with Centrelink and Indigenous community organisations. A community-run services transaction centre which could be co-funded and used by a combination of government agencies and departments (including full-time and visiting officers) could constitute such a pilot.

From welfare to work

Indigenous household economies in Kuranda are primarily based on welfare and CDEP. Without targeted and appropriate policy and service delivery intervention, they are likely to remain so. While the focus of the research project is not on employment policy and programs, an important matter highlighted by respondents is the apparent lack of local employment opportunities within the community. Given the relatively robust tourist-based local economy, it is unclear why there is not greater Indigenous participation in mainstream employment, other than the Tjapukai Cultural Park which is now located in Cairns.

The lack of local mainstream employment in the town may reflect reluctance on the part of local employers—though a number of respondents noted that racism was not a major issue in Kuranda. It may be that the new private providers of employment services under the Commonwealth Government’s Jobsearch and Newstart initiatives are not providing

an adequate service to Indigenous people who are unemployed. It may be that the local CDEP organisation has inadequate funds to purchase or provide the necessary training for its participants so they can move off the scheme and into local mainstream employment.

A combination of issues are likely to be involved in restricting the movement of Kuranda people from welfare to work. Though it is outside the parameters of the project, the research reinforces the need for these issues to be comprehensively assessed at the community level. A national welfare policy which emphasises fulfilment of mutual obligation through participation in training and education, and which is founded on the transition from welfare to work, will have little positive impact in a location such as Kuranda if these opportunities are not available to Indigenous people.

The research also showed that the lack of training and child care available locally to sole parents is perceived as a factor contributing to their low level of employment. People are reluctant to move away from their own community and families to look for work elsewhere. An important research result is that the JET scheme does not appear to be working for Indigenous sole parents; nor is the 'capacity-building' approach which is at the basis of mutual obligation. We have suggested elsewhere that there may be a greater potential role for CDEP organisations in providing such targeted training and work experience for sole parents (See Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b).

At the local level, Centrelink could conduct a pilot in Kuranda to fund the local CDEP organisation to provide a range of targeted services to sole parents and youth. This might include the local provision of an Indigenous component of the JET scheme to sole parents, where the CDEP organisation could operate as purchaser-provider not only for its participants who are sole parents, but for all Indigenous sole parents in the region. In conjunction with this, CDEP could be funded to conduct a skills audit and training needs analysis with sole parents and youth, and to develop training modules for them. Additionally, CDEP could develop, with Centrelink, an agreed broad framework for use with sole parents and youth, defining an agreed training or work experience 'contract' as fulfilment of any 'mutual obligation' requirement. CDEP organisations are not the only potential providers of a JET component at the community level, though they are advantaged in that many of them already have sole parents as participants. The critical issues for any organisation would be the making of linkages into the public and private sectors of the wider community in order to facilitate a range of training and work experiences.

An Indigenous social network of child care operates in Kuranda, but it is not oriented to the demands of regular work hours, and it is not funded to be so. The Kuranda research indicates that lack of child care is seen by some respondents as a disincentive to working—if work were available. It is recommended that a local Indigenous organisation (for example, a CDEP or other community organisation) be funded to pilot the operation of an Indigenously-staffed child-care service that would be accessible to all Kuranda Indigenous families. For people on welfare or participating in the CDEP scheme, such child care should be substantially subsidised (preferably free). The employment of senior Indigenous women as child-care workers in a CDEP funded child-care service would enhance its operation,

fulfil any mutual obligations they might potentially be expected to assume, make positive use of the parenting and family skills they possess, and reward them financially for their work.

Summary of recommended targeted initiatives

The Kuranda research highlights many issues similar to those reported for Yuendumu in the following chapter, but there are also important differences. These issues of commonality and difference, and their implications for service delivery and policy, will be summarised in Chapter 5.

The Kuranda research suggests there are a number of key areas where refinements can be made to local and regional service delivery. It also raises wider implications about the policy frameworks needed to ensure the delivery of more effective and informed services, so that better outcomes may be achieved for Indigenous families with children. These are canvassed in the concluding chapters, 7 and 8.

Many of the recommendations are straightforward and easily achievable. Others may require a more fundamental rethinking of national policy, in order to better target the particular characteristics and needs of Indigenous families in different locations. Some proposals will require enhanced funding and resources, and a number should first be piloted. Some outcomes will be secured only if they are based on a coordinated approach, across departments, to service delivery—both at the national and regional levels.

The Kuranda research therefore highlights the need for the strategic interventions and initiatives listed below.

1. There is a demonstrated need for more simply written, accessible, and easily communicated information about the rapidly changing range of payment packages, and the range of services available to suit the specific life circumstances of individuals and their families.
2. The demand from Indigenous customers for greater face-to-face service interaction could be met by increased visiting schedules from regional Centrelink staff to the local community and its outlying villages, and by providing a local Community Agent in the town.
3. A comparative assessment of the actual costs to Centrelink of delivering an equitable level of services to Indigenous families, compared to other Centrelink clients in this region, would provide the basis for an adequate funding model for service delivery in regions with large and dispersed Indigenous populations.
4. A Centrelink service delivery model at the regional level should be accurately informed about the cultural parameters of Indigenous family life and household organisation. The model should optimise the flexible customisation of services and strategies in order to respond to local cultural, economic, and geographic realities; and enable the development and implementation of regionally-appropriate program guidelines.

5. There is a need for policy frameworks that recognise explicitly:
 - the normative status of the extended family as the fundamental social, economic, and cultural unit;
 - socially distributed parenting;
 - sole parent households with multiple sole parents in residence, not simply isolated sole parent families;
 - serial or recycling sole parenthood as a key life-stage event for many women;
 - the role of senior women in domestic life and child care;
 - shared and flexible child-care arrangements; and
 - the valuable social capital generated by the Indigenous networks of support and demand-sharing of resources.
6. Identified areas of threat to the wellbeing of families and children within the community require targeted service delivery and policy consideration, and include:
 - the recycling status of sole parenthood within families;
 - the excessive burden of care assumed by some older women for children;
 - inexperienced young parents;
 - children in receipt of marginal or erratic care;
 - inadequate housing for young families;
 - lack of training and employment opportunities for youth and sole parents;
 - lack of services and facilities for youth;
 - risks from substance abuse, family violence and crime; and
 - the impact of absent fathers.
7. High rates of mobility of children and their parents, together with socially distributed parenting and kin networks of shared child-care, indicate a need to consider options for the more flexible delivery of welfare payments to the actual carers of children. These should be developed in a manner that is not intrusive and does not create unintended negative impacts upon families.
8. Issues of access to maintenance money or other equivalent forms of income supplement for sole parents need to be comprehensively investigated. The implementation and recording of an Indigenous identifier in the CSA administrative database could facilitate more effective evaluation of these matters.
9. Indigenous sole parents may need a supplementary payment to bring their welfare income to a level comparable to other sole parents. Such a payment could be provided by a variety of means, including as a tax credit or as a payment related to undertaking training or work experience.

10. The failure of the JET scheme to service Indigenous sole parents in Kuranda, and the lack of local training and employment opportunities, indicate the need for an alternative Indigenous training and work experience program. This could be piloted by the local CDEP organisation if it were funded to:
 - deliver such a program on a purchaser-provider basis;
 - conduct a skills and training audit of sole parents and youth;
 - develop an agreed framework for the implementation of any mutual obligation required of welfare recipients in families; and
 - provide a local Indigenous child-care facility to sole parents.
11. The research indicates the need for greater coordination between government agencies concerned with the delivery of welfare-related services to Indigenous families—on the ground, at the community level.

4. The Yuendumu community case study

Yasmine Musharbash

Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative data about the effectiveness and appropriateness of policy frameworks and the delivery of welfare services and income payments to families with children in the remote community of Yuendumu, Central Australia. In the first half of the chapter, the research findings obtained from the questionnaires and other interviews with local organisations are presented. These have been organised around a number of key topics including the welfare economy at Yuendumu, household structure and composition, access to resources, housing availability and quality, housing and mobility, visiting patterns, child health and nutrition, children's daily activities and relationships, children and money, child-care arrangements, and Centrelink regional service delivery. The conclusions and implications of the data for policy and service delivery are identified in the second half of the chapter, and possible strategic initiatives are also proposed.

The methodology and survey techniques used in the Yuendumu fieldwork are described in detail in Chapter 2.²¹ The case study was carried out over a period of three months in the second half of 1999 during the author's anthropological doctoral fieldwork at Yuendumu. At that stage, she had been living with some of the interviewed households for up to a year carrying out research into mobility, kinship systems, family structures, financial networks, the structure and fluidity of household composition, and how these relate to social security payments on an everyday basis. Qualitative and quantitative fieldwork data acquired through participant observation therefore directly informed the case study and were invaluable in expanding and contextualising the questionnaire results.

In total, 30 questionnaire interviews were conducted, gaining data for 30 households whose members live in 22 houses. There were 238 individuals in total, comprising 123 adults and 115 children. All those interviewed were women, recipients of Centrelink payments, and either mothers or guardians of at least one child. Households with no children resident or with no recipients of Centrelink payments were excluded from the sample.

The community of Yuendumu

Yuendumu is located approximately 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs. It lies two kilometres off the Tanami Road which connects it to Alice Springs (with 150 kms of sealed and 140 kms of unsealed road) and Halls Creek (unsealed). Established in 1946 as a government ration station (Meggitt 1962), Yuendumu has an airstrip which is accessed by a mail-plane service twice weekly, the Royal Flying Doctor Service as required, and various other air services.

The Yuendumu population is very fluid in size and composition. The 1996 Census reported 725 people for Yuendumu and its outstations (606 Indigenous and 119 non-Indigenous). The Health Centre Population Screening List (Yuendumu Health Profile 1999) reported a total population of 930 residents at October 1997. In 1999, the number of non-Indigenous residents ranged between 50 and 100 persons. The main languages spoken at Yuendumu are Warlpiri and English. The community is built around what is locally referred to as 'the Park' where many of the offices are located, with living quarters extending in the four cardinal directions and named East Camp, South Camp, West Camp, and North Camp.

Yuendumu has a range of local facilities in the areas of education and communication: an adult education facility, a school with a total of 200 children, a Broadcasting for Aboriginal Remote Community Scheme (BRACS), Tanami Network and Video Conferencing, and the Warlpiri Media Association which operates a joint program with the school to train children in radio broadcasting. It offers timeslots for children's radio shows, supports the school with language resources, and employs teenage trainees in radio broadcasting and camera work; as well as co-financing and producing Manyu-Wana videos.²² The community boasts a thriving local arts industry operating out of the Warlukurlangu Aboriginal Artists Association which concentrates on elderly painters (but provides children with boards and paints on request so they can learn to paint), and Yurrampi Crafts.

Other services include a Centrelink agent's office, a Baptist church and missionary house, a CDEP office, a child-care centre licensed for 22 children, and an Old People's Program. The Mt Theo Petrol Sniffer Program operates a successful substance abuse program with one manager based at Yuendumu and Indigenous staff at Mt Theo outstation about 150 kilometres from Yuendumu, where petrol-sniffing children are taken to be looked after (Stojanovski 1999). A women's centre facilitates a 'night patrol' jointly with the school and the community health clinic.²³ A Youth Centre Program is coordinated by a Youth Development Officer employed through the Commonwealth Department of Health and supported by CDEP staff. This program provides activities for teenagers, including sports and entertainment, to keep them away from petrol-sniffing. It works closely with the Mt Theo Petrol Sniffer Program.

The Yuendumu Health Clinic monitors the growth and wellbeing of infants and young children and is open to all residents of Yuendumu.²⁴ It employs a District Medical Officer, four Remote Nurses, two trainee nurses, six Aboriginal Health Workers, and flies in a general practitioner and other specialists on a regular basis. The Yuendumu Social Club and Store provides food packs for babies;²⁵ makes donations to the youth centre and to visits to traditional lands; and operates an 'envelope system' which many people use to put money aside for their children who can pick up \$5 at recess or lunch.²⁶

The community also has a small number of offices and agencies including a post office, Council offices with guest house and workshop, a police station in which the police work closely with the Mt Theo Petrol Sniffer Program, the Yuendumu Mining Company and Store, a Central Land Council office, a BMX track (unfortunately located near a main road, the police station, and one of the mourning camps, and away from living quarters), three football ovals and four basketball courts.

The research findings

The welfare economy at Yuendumu

There are a number of well-documented parameters which differentiate remote communities like Yuendumu from the wider Australian community. Remote communities are largely artificial, having come into existence as a result of direct government or mission action. On this basis alone, their socioeconomic infrastructure and economies differ greatly from that of other Australian communities. The process of their historical incorporation into the welfare system is also vastly different to that of other Australian communities (Altman and Sanders 1995).

In the early 1970s and 1980s, researchers at Yuendumu documented the low uptake of welfare payments, with extremely low levels of cash income, a high proportion of expenditure on basic foodstuffs at locally high prices, and the development of a welfare related ‘feast and famine’ cycle—all somewhat ameliorated by people’s continuing subsistence food collection activities (Anderson 1976; Middleton and Francis 1976; Peterson 1977; Young 1981, 1984; Young and Doohan 1989). In October 1997, 547 people out of a total population of 750–930 received payments from Centrelink. It is important to note that the total number of residents includes a non-Indigenous population ranging between 50 and 100 who are, almost exclusively, paid employees and therefore unlikely to receive Centrelink payments.

Centrelink payments are calculated to provide for basic income support and financial needs. Yuendumu (like many other remote communities) lacks a viable mainstream labour market, and its population is characterised by an extremely high rate of reliance upon welfare payments. Given the high cost of food and other basic domestic goods at the local store, and other family characteristics discussed below, it is likely that many people live close to, or below, the poverty line (see Altman and Hunter 1998; Hunter 1999). The income sources for the Yuendumu households interviewed are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Income sources for total persons (aged 16 years and above) in sample household population: Yuendumu, 1999

Income source	Persons	% of sample
Newstart	61	33.5
Family Allowance	49	26.9
Age Pension	14	7.6
Abstudy	4	2.2
Parenting Payments	3	1.6
Invalid Pension	2	1.1
Carers Pension	2	1.1
Sickness Benefit	2	1.1
CDEP employment	27	18.8
Wages (other)	18	9.8
Total	182	100.0

Only 10 per cent of respondents are wage earners. If CDEP is included, this figure rises to 29 per cent. The questionnaire data did not obtain information on individuals' irregular receipt of income from royalty benefits or the sales of art. Income sources set out in Table 4.1 suggest that the domestic economies of some families in Yuendumu are overwhelmingly welfare-based. This has significant implications for the socioeconomic status of families and influences their savings and expenditure patterns, and lifestyle.

Respondents reported that people expended 80 per cent of their welfare payment on food and the remaining 20 per cent on other domestic goods. There are some differences evident in this broad Yuendumu expenditure pattern compared with the Kuranda study. Whereas the Kuranda pilot and subsequent research highlighted a basic expenditure alternative for respondents between clothing items, domestic accounts, and basic food necessities, in Yuendumu families appear to be more constrained by limited supply to the food expenditure option (see Finlayson and Auld 1999 and Ch. 3).

In Yuendumu, the demand to meet immediate needs is so pressing that welfare cheques are usually spent as soon as they are cashed. This exacerbates the 'feast and famine' cycle associated with the fortnightly payment of low welfare incomes. Through informal discussions and by observation over a 12 month period, the author confirmed respondents' comments that on 'payday you spend it all, maybe \$100 or \$200 on shopping [essentials], tea, flour, meat, soap'. Any remaining income is used to repay money borrowed during the previous week, or to give money to people who will receive their payments in the following week. Cash, as well as food and other commodities, flows along well-established but highly variable lines of sharing networks. To 'bank' with each other in this way is a key survival strategy.

There are several issues underlying this situation. First, welfare payments are calculated as basic income support. In Yuendumu there is little chance for people to save and most make no attempt to do so. Second, the Indigenous population of Yuendumu, like those of many other remote communities (see Westbury 1999), lacks access to and experience in institutional banking systems, and hence relies upon alternative mechanisms run through the local shop or other community organisations.

Third, the local Indigenous form of 'banking' with each other is a critical cultural and economic strategy that both relies upon and cements social relations. There are social, economic, and cultural pressures on people to spend all their money as soon as it becomes available. Attempts to save are regarded as selfish and stingy, and regarded as an affront to basic social rules. Not to share means to ignore and sever social ties. Nevertheless, people do develop strategies to keep some level of personal control over their cash, though they are not always effective.

Although the percentage of recipients of Centrelink payments at Yuendumu seems high compared to mainstream Australia, the research reveals that there is in fact an under-coverage in certain payment types. Discussions with Centrelink CSC staff confirms this could be significant for certain payments. On the basis of respondents' statements and the overall payment profile, it appears that people receive a less differentiated range of payments than do the respondents in Kuranda. Informal discussions in the community

also suggest that a number of people are largely unaware both of the variety of existing types of payments and of their potential entitlement to payments.

Centrelink has a number of differently labelled welfare payment types relevant to families with children, and some of these are undergoing substantial changes in their packaging. However, at Yuendumu, people have their own way of classifying welfare payments and conceptually lump Centrelink entitlements into three broad types:

1. 'kids money'—a term used by Yuendumu people to refer collectively to any kind of welfare payment to do with the care of children and which includes, for them, both Family Allowance and Parenting Payments;
2. 'UB'—which is Newstart; and
3. 'pension' money—a term used to cover all pensions, excluding what used to be referred to as the Sole Parent 'pension'.

The frequent changes in welfare payment packaging and terminology is confusing to recipients at Yuendumu. A point in case is the Parenting Payments: 2 per cent of respondents were aware of receiving them, whereas 6 per cent of the Yuendumu population actually received such a payment from Centrelink in October 1999.²⁷ Many recipients of Parenting Payment conceive of it as a type of Family Allowance payment, while others who might be notionally entitled to the payment are not aware of its existence and have not applied for it.

Household structure and composition

Indigenous households are fluid and hard to define (Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Finlayson 1991, 1995a; Martin 1993; Martin and Taylor 1995; Sansom 1980; Smith 1991b; Smith and Daly 1996). As noted in Chapter 2, there are conceptual and definitional problems with the notion of the 'household' as used by the ABS. Official definitions in administrative guidelines serve to immobilise and make static the dynamic social and socioeconomic realities of Aboriginal household and family structures. In the Yuendumu case study, a nested set of household operational definitions were used, as outlined in Chapter 2.

The questionnaire used the concept of 'household' as a unit to refer to all residents staying overnight at the same physical dwelling. However, this broad approach does not capture the complex realities of contemporary circumstances at Yuendumu and many other Indigenous communities. Because there was opportunity for detailed observation during the Yuendumu case study, this larger group of people has been divided, when possible, into smaller groups who share food with each other. On the one hand, this allowed for multiple 'households' within one dwelling. But on the other, it neglected other significant qualities by fixing the household both in a temporal sense and in a spatial sense.

Household composition can change daily at Yuendumu and, more often than not, households extend over the boundaries of a single dwelling. To some extent, this fluidity became manifest in the questionnaires themselves. For example, some individuals turned

up in different households recorded on different questionnaires administered over the same week. To give an example:

Case study 1

A, a 15 year old girl, appears in questionnaire #10 (as individual 1.1), #22 (as individual 1.5), and in #23 (as individual 1.1). These households are located in three different areas of Yuendumu, one in South Camp, one in East Camp, and one in West Camp. In household #10, A was staying with her mother and siblings; in household #22 she was staying with a friend of hers, and both of them were visiting relatives in that household for a few days. In household #23 she was staying with her classificatory grandmother to whom her mother had given her in an adoption relationship when she was a little girl.²⁸ As grandmother is also the person who receives the Family Allowance payment for A.

The questionnaire data do not disclose the dynamics underlying this mobility. Children and young people are highly mobile both within the community as well as between a network of communities. This level of mobility puts in question the concept of household defined by delineating the group of people who are 'members' residing at one place at one point in time, and suggests that an 'individual-centric' view should be adopted. The latter gives the option of exploring the character of the networks of people and places accessed by individuals in their everyday lives. Another possible methodological approach is to use a place of residence as a constant and observe the mobility patterns and flows in and out of it.

As noted in Chapter 2, a combination of these two methodological approaches will probably reveal most about the dynamic aspects of household composition and the domestic relationships within them. Such an approach has been used in this case study. Over the 18 month fieldwork period the author had the opportunity to take regular censuses of particular households over extended periods. Table 4.2 shows census data for one fortnight for a particular four-bedroom house.

The data in Table 4.2 indicate an average of 21.9 persons staying at the house per night—13.7 adults (16 years and older) and 6.8 children. The range was between 16 and 25 persons. However, the author was also able to record the identity of actual individuals who slept there over the full fortnight period. Over the fortnight there were a total of 27 different adults and 15 different children sleeping at the house; that is, a total of 42 different persons. Moreover, a 'core' of 11 persons (seven adults and four children) slept at the house for the whole two-week period. Taking account of this flow of people allows a much more complex picture of actual household composition to emerge. These high rates of mobility, 'visitation', and flows through particular dwellings have substantial negative implications for the viability of household domestic economies and welfare service delivery and policy.

A number of key factors underlie the process of the mobility referred to above. They include access to resources, the availability and quality of housing, overcrowding, family conflict, the impact of death, and 'visiting' patterns. Many overlap in their operation as causal factors and as outcomes, serving to further compound the need or desire to be mobile.

Table 4.2 **Changes in composition of members at one house over one fortnight:**
Yuendumu, 1999

Residents	No. of adults	No. of children	Total
Night 1	15	6	21
Night 2	14	6	20
Night 3	11	5	16
Night 4	11	6	17
Night 5	16	6	22
Night 6	15	6	21
Night 7	16	7	23
Night 8	17	7	24
Night 9	16	9	25
Night 10	16	7	23
Night 11	17	7	24
Night 12	15	7	22
Night 13	17	8	25
Night 14	16	7	23
Average per night	13.7	6.8	21.9

Access to cash and other resources

In the anthropological literature, the term ‘demand sharing’ is used to describe important cultural practices relating to resource distribution in Aboriginal Australia (Martin 1993; Myers 1976, 1982; Peterson 1993, 1997; Sansom 1978, 1982, 1988; Schwab 1995). Resources like money, food, and clothes are seen not only as personal possessions, but also as social capital, because to have them has clear social entailments. Not only is there a cultural imperative to share, but the existence of resources allows others to ask for them or to demand a share in them.

To be able to demand things of someone means that one is close to that person. Responding to and making demands are ways of establishing, sustaining, substantiating, and reproducing social relationships. On the other hand, refusing outright when in possession of what is asked for is not socially acceptable. Unwillingness to share is interpreted as an affront against the person who asked and annuls a relationship, potentially causing friction and fights. The practice of ‘demand sharing’ requires people to be skilled negotiators on an everyday basis.

Case study 2

B, an old lady in her seventies, receives her pension cheques at Mt Allan, a community about 40 kilometres east of Yuendumu.²⁹ She spends long periods at Yuendumu, but also at Mt Allan community and at Mt Wedge outstation. Receiving her pension at Mt Allan when living at Yuendumu does not pose a problem; quite to the contrary, it is advantageous. As she can only go to Mt Allan when a lift becomes available, her movements are quite unpredictable, meaning that at Mt Allan none of her relatives

know when she will come. This means B is approached for money and food only by those relatives who happen to be in the shop at the time she is there. Moreover, on her return to Yuendumu, she can claim to have spent her entire money at Mt Allan and thus is able to keep small sums of money for emergencies.

When at Mt Allan, B picks up her cheque and spends the money in the following way. She buys staple provisions for a fortnight; that is, tins of flour, sugar and tea, and enough dripping as well as some other food, including bread, biscuits, tinned meat, soft drinks, fresh meat, fruit and vegetables, and shampoo and detergent. Usually she obtains at least one 'large' item, like a blanket, a towel, a dress, or some crockery. The rest of the money she distributes to the driver, and to any relatives she chances to meet at the shop; knowing that she will receive little sums of money in return from these people. When back at Yuendumu, B shares the perishable foods with the people she resides with, knowing that she has enough staples for the rest of the two-week period and can rely on the others to share their perishable food with her when they get their social security money.

Individual mobility has to do with resources and their accessibility. The anthropological debate around 'demand sharing' stresses the mutual interdependence between mobility and domestic financial factors. In other words, 'demand sharing' acts as a major redistributive force underlying the dynamics of the short-term 'boom and bust', or 'prosperity and poverty' developmental cycles of Indigenous households. People move between households in an attempt to maintain economic viability. The addition of personnel to a household may either strain or improve the financial status quo. Failing to achieve such viability, households will break up and members disperse to other existing households, starting the cycle anew.

The availability and quality of housing

Another important factor influencing the rate and impact of mobility upon households is that houses are a scarce resource at Yuendumu. In October 1999, the author counted 131 occupied houses in the community.³⁰ These are available to a population of 750–930. Approximately one-third of these houses are allocated to non-Indigenous residents, which exacerbates the overcrowding in Indigenous houses. The questionnaire sample comprised a total of 238 persons living in a total of 22 dwellings, that is, an average of 10.8 persons per dwelling. These dwellings vary greatly in quality, with an average of 2.4 bedrooms per dwelling. All houses had hot or cold tap water in working order. All but one had electricity as well as at least one working shower and toilet.³¹ Eighty-six per cent had a working stove, 82 per cent a fridge, 50 per cent a washing machine and 9 per cent a telephone.

Yuendumu Council, through the Yuendumu Housing Association, has a building program that was erecting 16 new houses in 1999 with another five to be built in 2000. It is also introducing a rent system where every adult resident will be expected to pay a flat rate of \$20 a fortnight. The proposal is that people who receive social security payments will have this amount deducted via Centrelink's Centre Pay facility, and that others will have deductions made directly from their CDEP or employment wages. Yuendumu Council plans

to use the money for maintenance of the houses: it is currently renovating four derelict houses and has plans to renovate more in the future. The Social Club uses some of its profits to purchase washing machines which are distributed to houses that lack them.

The shortage of houses plays an important role as a triggering factor for mobility in a number of ways: through overcrowding, via conflict and the death of residents, and through visiting patterns. These are further discussed below.

Housing and mobility

Overcrowding causes friction and tensions and, as the case studies below indicate, may motivate people to move.

Case study 3

Household #1 comprising a 43 year old woman, her mother, and five of her children (four of them adopted) had moved to house #1 a few days before the interview was conducted because the house they stayed at before had become very crowded and fights broke out.

Case study 4

Part of household #26, that is a 24 year old woman, her husband, and their three children, were the original occupants of house #1, but had moved to house #20 because in the meantime their own house had become too crowded and they were waiting for people to disperse again so they could move back.

Case study 5

One of the households resident in house #10, comprising four women all aged over 60 years and one of their daughters, moved to house #10 because the house they stayed at before became too crowded and they were asked to leave. They tried to stay at other houses as well, but kept returning to house #10 often for substantial periods.

Another reason why people move to other houses is that the places they stay at, or are close to, for periods of time might turn into violent or very noisy environments because of fights and drinking.

Case study 6

Household #8, comprising a 24 year old woman, her three children and her husband, as well as three members of household #23, that is two women aged 55 and 60+ and their six year old grandson moved to houses #7 and #10 respectively because of a fight that broke out at the house they used to share.

Housing mobility is also strongly influenced by cultural factors. When a death occurs at Yuendumu, the house where the deceased person used to live needs to be vacated by everyone. Depending on the importance of the deceased and the cause of death, houses might have to be avoided for anything between two weeks and a number of years. The residents of such a house, after a period of mourning in 'sorry camps', disperse to different houses according to their own kin networks, often not returning to the original house.

Visiting patterns

There are conceptual and definitional dilemmas with the term 'visitor' when applied to remote Aboriginal Australia (see also Chs 2 and 3). The ABS (1996: 226) defines 'visitors' as people who normally reside elsewhere, and excludes them from household and family classification; that is, a visitor is taken to mean a person who stays at somebody else's house like a guest. The inadequacies of this operational definition have been critically discussed by Smith (1991b, 1992a) and Smith and Daly (1996).

At Yuendumu, to 'visit' someone contrasts with to 'stop' somewhere, the former being an activity that does not extend to overnight stays and the latter having no time restrictions.³² In other words, by stopping somewhere overnight one is no longer a visitor. Moreover, once a person stops at a place, it becomes exceedingly hard to distinguish the new arrival from people who have resided there longer, on the basis of rights and access to resources and space. 'Visitors' are not an addition to an already existing household, but an integral part of it, sharing the same rights and duties. Newcomers do not ask 'permission' to stop at a certain place, nor are they expected to. They usually arrive without prior announcement and integrate themselves into existing households or form their own units, depending on numbers and relationships. These processes of integration are aided by the fact that 'visitors' are usually actual biological kin or close classificatory relatives.

Indigenous kinship systems encompass the entire population. Not only do large extended and inter-related families exist, but Indigenous kinship systems are classificatory; that is, relationships are formulated in terms of kinship, whether biological ties exist or not. On the most general level this means that everyone can claim to be related to everybody else. Granting this, the significant question is why do people 'stop' with some individuals and not with others? The household genealogies taken for each questionnaire provide a partial answer, since they provide data on how all members of a certain household, at a certain point, are related to each other.

However, the genealogies do not shed any light on where and with whom people 'stop' at other times, or how they are related to those individuals. Why does an individual 'stop' with one sister and not another, or with a cousin and not a sister? These choices are determined by the life histories and friendships which underpin the creation of ego-centric personal networks. These personal networks are maintained, among other things, by the practice of 'demand sharing' and have a substantial impact upon household structures and domestic economies.

The Yuendumu case study indicates that 'visitors' are more accurately defined as 'usual residents', and that some usual residents often use a number of home bases. Accordingly, people who would fall into the category of 'visitor' according to the ABS definition have been treated as full household members in line with the conceptual realities prevailing at Yuendumu (see also Ch. 3). 'Stopping' with other people and having people stop with you is an everyday occurrence; it happens continuously at both inter- and intra-community levels.

Case study 7

Individual 1.0 of house #21, a 27 year old woman with two children aged four and 11, moved to Yuendumu a few months ago. She had grown up in Alice Springs and Yuendumu, then lived for long periods first at Nyirrpi and at Kintore, and then moved back to Yuendumu in 1999. There, she moves between houses #10 and #21, staying with her grandmother in the former and with her uncle in the latter.

Case study 8

Individual 1.4 of house #15 and individual 1.0 of household #9 stay for extended periods at house #10 with their grandmother and classificatory mother respectively, when their husbands are absent.

Case study 9

Individual 1.0 of household #12 is a 42 year old woman looking after four children: her adopted daughter, now aged 17; her sister's son, aged one, her ex-husband's wife's son, aged ten; and another classificatory son, aged 11. None of these stay with her all the time. The adopted daughter stays with her infrequently and usually not for longer than a week at a time. Her sister's son stays with her most of the time unless her sister (his mother) comes visiting from Lajamanu and stays in a different house to them, which is when he moves between the two houses. The other two boys stay with her for months at a time and then return for equally long visits back to their mothers at Willowra and Mungkana respectively. Each of the children leaves and reappears at intervals.

Children in particular have many places to 'stop' at. On one morning the project researcher was leaving for Alice Springs, she tried to pick up a 12-year-old girl who had asked for a lift. She was not at the two places where the researcher knew she stayed, so the girl's sister led the researcher to another five houses across all parts of Yuendumu where the girl had relatives with whom she 'stopped' on a regular basis. Children, but also adults, have these networks of places and people which they access frequently. Mobility in this sense is an essential part of the lived reality at Yuendumu for many Indigenous residents, including children.

Of the respondents, 87 per cent answered that they take their children with them when they stay somewhere else. The implication is that children do a lot of travelling with their parents or guardians. This includes overnight and longer trips, as well as day trips. Children are taken along when people visit relatives in other communities or in Alice Springs; they are taken when people travel for 'sorry business' (death related ceremonies); or to community sport weekends. Children also accompany adults on hunting trips. From these experiences children gain, from an early age, knowledge about people, places, and their country. In other words, travelling not only takes up a large part of children's lives, but constitutes a crucial socialisation and education process.

In the questionnaire sample, 63 per cent of respondents answered that there are other places they stopped at apart from the one they were at the time. However, long-term

fieldwork data and participant observation suggest this proportion is higher. In fact, some respondents well known to the author had to be 'reminded' of other places they also 'stopped' at; this is so much of an everyday occurrence that people forget to mention it.

The factors outlined here, including access to resources, shortage of houses, conflict, death, and the phenomenon of 'stopping' all contribute to high rates of mobility between households, and a resulting fluidity of household membership in Yuendumu. While demand sharing and networks of resource distribution can act to ameliorate financial and food shortages, these rates of mobility can also exacerbate stress on individuals' savings and expenditure capacities, and contribute to stress on physical housing infrastructure and other capital items. These key factors have considerable implications for the delivery of welfare services, especially those oriented to children, and important implications for the formation of appropriate policy frameworks for such service delivery.

Child health and nutrition

While the project research did not focus on health, a number of issues were raised with the researcher which have a direct relevance to the wellbeing of children and families. Yuendumu has a very youthful population. According to the 1996 Census, 32 per cent of its Indigenous population was 14 years of age or younger. It also has one of the highest rates of births to young mothers in Australia with 29 per cent of first births being to women under 18 years (Yuendumu Health Profile 1999). The health and nutrition of children in the community are affected by a range of factors. Poor physical maturation in children has been noted in the past as a problem with 21 per cent of all children (see also Middleton and Francis 1976).

A 1997 nutritionist's report concluded that food at Yuendumu is not significantly more expensive than at Alice Springs, with food for a 'family' at Alice Springs costing \$252 and at Yuendumu \$299 per fortnight (Grieve et al. 1997a, 1997b). However, there are a number of problems associated with this assessment. First, it does not account for affordability; for people reliant on welfare even \$50 is a significant sum. Second, the 'model' family type used as a benchmark in both examples comprised a grandmother aged 60, a man aged 35, a woman aged 33, two boys aged 14 and four, and a girl aged nine. This family model is not valid for Yuendumu. As described above, household units (taken as the basic food-sharing unit within houses) are not only much larger than this family model, but also much more fluid.

Third, the food basket is calculated on a hypothetical 'healthy balance', comprising bread and cereal, fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy products, in descending order of quantity. This does not represent actual food expenditure and consumption realities at Yuendumu where, in the long-term experience of the author, the staple diet comprises meat, damper, tea, and sugar. Cereal, fruit, vegetables, and particularly dairy products, play a much less important role. In fact, vegetables constitute what people refer to as a 'nothing week' food, as opposed to more highly valued meat which is bought and consumed in large quantities during 'pension week'. Many people also complained about the fact that clothes and other things for children are either not available or are overpriced at Yuendumu.

Children's daily life and activities

When asked what kinds of things families need in Yuendumu that are not already available, or that could be improved upon, an overwhelming response was the need for children's activities. Among the items most commonly suggested were a swimming pool, playgrounds, parks, an improved youth and recreation hall, and additional youth programs. The Youth Services Manager emphasised that 'there are 250 kids in Yuendumu, from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds at high risk of substance abuse and unemployment. In mainstream society if you work with kids like that you do it in small groups of ten to 20 kids for two youth workers. Here, there are two of us.' This is a critical service and policy issue and, in many respects, goes beyond the immediate service and funding responsibilities of Centrelink to wider policy issues (see Ch. 8).

There are 200 children enrolled for pre-school, primary, post-primary and secondary study (to Year 10 by correspondence). School operates from 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., with a half-hour break at recess and a one-hour break for lunch. The school has 39 staff including 15 teachers, five of whom are Indigenous. It offers a bus pick-up service through the School Home Liaison Officer, self-financed lunches for children for \$2 per day, and an annual 'country visit' where, over a week, children are taught in family groups on their traditional country by their elders. School attendance is estimated to be approximately 70 per cent per day, with an 85–95 per cent attendance during the course of a week (pers. comm. Yuendumu School Principal). This is high by Northern Territory standards (see Collins 1999).

The Yuendumu Child-Care Centre is the first licensed child-care facility in a remote community in Central Australia, and is fully subsidised by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government Health Departments. It is licensed for 22 children and has an average of 14–16 children per day. The centre operates from 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and offers lunch at a cost of \$2 per day. Of the questionnaire sample, 40 per cent have used the centre at least once, with 50 per cent of those using it 'sometimes', 8 per cent use it once a week and 33 per cent use it every day. The centre employs one director, funded by Commonwealth and Northern Territory Health, as well as a supervisor and staff employed through CDEP, some of whom are undertaking Batchelor College degrees in 'early childhood and child-care'.

The Youth Centre Program offers football and basketball (also at night) and runs the Youth Centre where a variety of entertainment such as pool tables, Playstation video games, and videos are available. It runs occasional concerts and a disco up to three nights a week until 2.00 a.m., where hamburgers and soft drinks are sold to raise money. In summer, both the school and the Youth Program organise swimming trips to nearby waterholes or creeks.

Relationships between adults and children, and between children

The high value placed on individual autonomy among adults at Yuendumu also extends to children. Both socially and individually, children are considered to be 'boss for themselves' and adults very rarely infringe on that assumption (see also Finlayson, 1989,

1991; Martin 1993; Myers 1976, 1986; Smith 1980). Respondents' answers to the question 'Who is boss for your kids in your place?' appear to contradict this observation. In 63 per cent of cases it was said to be the respondent; in 13 per cent of cases the respondent and their partner; in 3 per cent it was the respondent and other relative; and other relatives were cited in 13 per cent of cases (there was a 7% no response rate). However, the question came in a block of questions that were concerned with who looks after children and pays for their food and clothes.

Children spend a great deal of time doing what they feel like, whether this be going to school, watching TV, or roaming about with their friends. They spend most of their time each day with a group of their age mates, often only showing up at 'home'—which may vary from one meal to the next—at meal times, and then disappearing again to play. Up until the age of ten or 11 this seems to be very satisfactory for most, but children from that age onwards are at a high risk of substance abuse and complain about 'being bored.'

Child-care arrangements

Respondents had a range of kin relationships to the children they looked after in the households at the time of the interview: 60 per cent were mothers who looked after their actual biological children; 17 per cent were mothers looking after both actual and adopted children; and 3 per cent were mothers looking after adopted children only. Twenty per cent had one or more of the following relationships to the children they looked after: actual mother's mother; actual father's mother; adopted mother, adopted father's mother; actual father's father's sister; and adopted mother's mother.

Of these women, 70 per cent were co-residing with their husbands, and 10 per cent were in polygamous marriages. Almost one-third of women interviewed were single. More than half of the households in the sample (57 per cent) were made up of three generations; 23 per cent of two generations; and 20 per cent of four generations.

Children and money

There are no organisations at Yuendumu, apart from Centrelink, providing financial support to families with children, apart from the CDEP scheme. As noted above, when asked who usually pays for food and clothes for their children, respondents invariably nominated either themselves, or themselves and other close relatives. Furthermore, in accordance with the tenet that everyone is 'boss for themselves', there is a general conviction that 'kids money' (Family Allowance) 'belongs' to the individual children. Concern was voiced by a number of respondents about the fact that 'individual' sums were 'lumped' together into one cheque, making it hard for people to work out exactly what amount of money 'belonged' to which child. In general discussions, it was suggested by some people that each child's money should be sent to a separate account with the parent or other carer having a key card which has the child's name on it. This, people affirmed, would also make mobility easier to deal with.

It is not recommended here that children should be able to spend or directly receive the bulk of the welfare income paid for their care, but respondents clearly wished for a more

flexible way of receiving welfare payments in order to accommodate the mobility of specific children. Moreover, the money is usually spent by adults on children's behalf, and often according to the adults' wishes. This even refers to parts of Family Allowance money given to others. For example:

Case Study 11

C, the grandmother of D (11 years old), picked up the cheque with his Family Allowance money and went shopping for food. Most of the money left she deposited in an envelope at the Social Club Store for D so he could spend \$5 every day at lunchtime and then she gave the remaining \$20 to E, who did not have any money that week, later declaring: 'D helped E and gave her \$20. She will pay him back next week.'

When asked if they had ever asked Centrelink to have family money redirected to another person, 47 per cent of respondents indicated they had. This encompasses parents who gave their children and 'their kids money' to other people to 'look after', and people who 'looked after' somebody else's children and received the FA for them. Some 78 per cent of those respondents said that the arrangement had worked. One respondent for whom it did not work had difficulties transferring the money back to the original arrangement after she started looking after her own children again; and some others complained about 'the money never coming'.³³

Although just under half of the respondents apparently make use of the Centrelink option to transfer payments when child-care arrangements change, slightly more do not. The main reasons include a distaste for the administrative process involved, especially if the change of care encompasses a time span less than six months or so, and a concern about causing trouble and embarrassment within families when asking a former carer to transfer the payments. A suggested mechanism for addressing some of these concerns and the service delivery issues related to children's mobility is discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

The Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs

There are three avenues open to the Yuendumu population to get in contact with Centrelink: via the Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs; the Centrelink Agents Office at Yuendumu, or by contacting the Centrelink Call Centre (at Darwin) via phone.

The Centrelink CSC is located in the heart of Alice Springs in a well-appointed office whose reception area has been altered to accommodate large flows of people and create a relaxed atmosphere. There are a total of 60 staff employed at the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek CSCs. Their service area (a component of Centrelink's 'Area North') extends into South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia, and caters for Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, and approximately 74 remote Indigenous communities. Of all its Central Australian customers, Centrelink estimates that between 70 and 80 per cent are Indigenous, and that 95 per cent of its customer contact is Indigenous (pers. com. Centrelink CSC). In other

words, Indigenous customers not only represent the highest proportion of Centrelink's customer base, but also a comparatively higher service workload per person.

The major difficulties cited by respondents in contacting Centrelink were lack of availability and poor transport, and lack of access to phones in their own community. In Yuendumu there is a blue phone in the office of the Women's Centre and a gold phone at the Council office, a pay phone at the Social Club Store, and a local public phone which is often out of order. All other organisations and workplaces as well as houses occupied by non-Indigenous residents have phones, access to which, however, is restricted. Only two houses in the questionnaire sample had a phone.

For people at Yuendumu, travelling to Alice Springs takes a minimum of four hours and lifts are much sought after. Of the houses making up the questionnaire sample 54 per cent had a car, though this does not mean that everyone living in that house necessarily has access to it. At Yuendumu, 40 per cent of people interviewed went to see the Centrelink CSC at Alice Springs in 1999, whereas 55 per cent of the Kuranda sample went to their CSCs in Cairns, Mareeba and Smithfield.

Lack of transport, however, does not seem to be the only reason restraining the Yuendumu population from accessing services from the Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs. Table 4.3 shows the comparison between Alice Springs and Cairns of respondents' levels of satisfaction with Centrelink service delivery in the main office.

While both community case studies reported very similar levels of respondents' satisfaction with the respect given to them by Centrelink staff; there were lower levels of satisfaction expressed by the Yuendumu sample in respect to all other areas of service. The time taken to be seen by a Centrelink staff member in particular was repeatedly raised by people in informal discussions.

A number of issues are at play here. Not only are lifts to town often hard to obtain, but town visits are also a very busy time, involving a number of people. A visit to town is made up of shopping and visiting, and organising it is complex as most second-hand shops and town camps where relatives live, as well as the Alice Springs Detention Centre and Hospital, are not within walking distance. 'Dropping in' at the Centrelink Regional Office often includes a wait at the reception area, or an appointment to see someone later that day or the next. The latter arrangement, in particular, causes frustration for many Yuendumu respondents who may not find it easy to return owing to transportation and other difficulties.

The Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs is very much aware of these service issues. Such 'drop-in' patterns by Indigenous people from over 70 communities can in fact create substantial customer flow management problems. The CSC has recently initiated a major organisational and staffing restructure in order to increase the numbers of staff at reception, as well as streamline the procedures. Reception staff are now able to deal with a number of different requests, such as processing review forms and loan applications. More complex issues are dealt with by 'walk-ins' to staff who are specialists in the relevant payment area.

Table 4.3 **Comparative levels of respondents' satisfaction with Centrelink CSC:**
Yuendumu and Kuranda, 1999

How satisfied are you with each?	Satisfied %	Mixed feelings %	Dissatisfied %	Don't know %
<i>Time it takes to see someone in the office</i>				
Yuendumu	22	11	67	0
Kuranda	64	11	11	14
<i>The number of staff attending the front desk</i>				
Yuendumu	11	4	85	0
Kuranda	54	7	18	21
<i>The number of Aboriginal staff at the office</i>				
Yuendumu	7	19	74	0
Kuranda	54	11	18	18
<i>The respect he/she is given as a person</i>				
Yuendumu	74	22	0	4
Kuranda	79	11	0	11
<i>The understanding of Aboriginal culture</i>				
Yuendumu	26	11	52	11
Kuranda	64	4	11	21
<i>Provision of service when English is a difficulty</i>				
Yuendumu	15	4	81	0
Kuranda	50	7	7	36
<i>The quality of information provided</i>				
Yuendumu	59	7	33	0
Kuranda	75	7	7	11
<i>How they deal with Aboriginal people at the office</i>				
Yuendumu	56	19	15	11
Kuranda	71	14	0	14
<i>Average (%)</i>				
Yuendumu	34	12	51	3
Kuranda	64	9	9	18

Source: Questionnaire data, Yuendumu and Kuranda, 1999.

It is recognised by management at the Alice Springs CSC that the relatively new Centrelink initiative of service-by-appointment is not working well for Indigenous people (including those from Yuendumu) because of the practical difficulties they have in keeping appointments. Management is attempting to customise the mode of service delivery in the reception area in order to cope with the practical realities created by the needs of Indigenous customers. For example, the innovative idea of 'walk-ins' has been implemented. In cases where previously an appointment might have been arranged and missed, reception staff are now able to refer customers to specialist staff immediately, if time slots are available. While this seems to work most of the time, when large numbers of remote community customers arrive at the office at the same time (a regular occurrence), or large time allotments are taken up by individual appointments, then lengthy waiting periods can still apply. The CSC is also trialing 'bush lanes' whereby large influxes of customers from remote communities can be fast-tracked in a more streamlined manner by reception staff.

The level of dissatisfaction with the provision of services when English is a difficulty contrasts sharply with Kuranda: 81 per cent of the Yuendumu sample complained about this compared to 7 per cent of the Kuranda sample. One immediate explanation for this difference is that the Kuranda respondents have English as their first language. Literacy levels in English are often poor or non-existent for people at Yuendumu and this has a direct impact on their ability to access services confidently (see Collins 1999: 31–46, 117–40 for a discussion of this issue in the Northern Territory).

This issue goes deeper than a perceived communication problem with CSC staff at reception. It means people have severe difficulties filling out Centrelink forms, understanding correspondence sent to them, and finding out about the different options Centrelink has to offer. More than half of all respondents (57%) said they had difficulties applying for their benefits. Of those who did not, half added that it was easy 'because Centrelink staff filled out the form', meaning that without such help they would not have been able to apply. Language and literacy difficulties, complicated forms, and lack of knowledge about various facilities constitute serious obstacles to Indigenous people gaining equitable access to Centrelink services. Most Yuendumu residents do not access Centrelink's phone service due to language difficulties and frustration with recorded messages. However, there was one respondent who dealt with Centrelink exclusively via the phone.

Such difficulties are compounded by demographic, geographic, and culturally-based factors such as mobility described above. The Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs currently delivers a range of welfare services to Indigenous customers in the face of substantial difficulties. There are substantial cost factors involved in providing even the most basic service delivery to Indigenous people in the Central Australian region—let alone an appropriate and customised one.

It is not surprising that the Centrelink's Area North region accounts for one-third of all Centrelink's welfare payments issued by cheque across the country,³⁴ and that approximately 90 per cent of those cheque recipients are Indigenous clients (Westbury

1999). Centrelink faces significantly higher service costs as a result of maintaining payments by cheque as opposed to electronic transfer (\$0.75 per issue versus \$0.02 per transfer), and CSC staff undertake an increased administrative workload as a result of having to redirect and reissue cheques for highly mobile Indigenous welfare recipients. Additional administrative costs are also associated with the time spent by CSC staff in issuing the 'proof of identities' needed, on a daily basis, by Indigenous customers in order to have their cheques cashed at local banks in Alice Springs (Westbury 1999).

In the Yuendumu questionnaire sample, it was apparent that people with bank accounts and key cards had much less trouble receiving their payments than those relying on cheques. There is a need for more local education about the progressive introduction of electronic transfers for Indigenous welfare recipients by Centrelink (Westbury 1999).

Centrelink offers customers the facility of an interest-free advance as a form of loan (between \$250 and \$500) which they acquit out of their payments for the following six months. The advance can only be applied for once every 12 months and is available to customers who receive Age, Disability, Widow, Mature Age, Carer, or Wife Pensions, Youth Allowance, Newstart, Parenting Single Allowances and Abstudy. Inquiries at Centrelink in Alice Springs confirmed that the maximum amount of \$500 is applied for by all Indigenous customers and that they usually come to Alice Springs to apply for a loan. Though technically they can apply from their home community, when the application is made across the CSC counter, customers can obtain the loan as a cheque payment or have it directly credited into a bank account which is most readily accessed in town.

All Yuendumu respondents who had used the loan facility from Centrelink had applied for, and received it, at the Alice Springs CSC. At Yuendumu, 30 per cent have used the service at least once, with the purposes being for food, clothes, Christmas, funeral, 'money ran out', bedding, or furniture. It appears that most respondents at Yuendumu are under the misapprehension that these advances must be applied for in Alice Springs exclusively.

The Yuendumu Community Agents Office

Yuendumu has four Centrelink community agents working at the local Centrelink Agents Office, all of whom are Indigenous and some of whom are very enthusiastic about their area of responsibility. Many other remote communities have only one or two agents; some only have 'contacts'. These people do the same work as an agent except they operate in an honorary capacity and with less supervision and support. In general, agents are expected to provide current information to people about the range of Centrelink payments and services available, and to act as a local contact point for Centrelink by assisting people to apply for welfare payments and with relevant ongoing correspondence.

At Yuendumu only 33 per cent of respondents felt the agent had been able to help them. In fact they were less satisfied with their local agent than they were with the level of service they received in town (over all, 53% of respondents were satisfied with the help received from the Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs). Moreover, half the respondents who had used a local agent were satisfied solely because they had been to the office to pick up their cheques and had received it; surely the most basic of service outcomes.

The Yuendumu research strongly suggests that the operation of the Centrelink Agents Offices needs to be reviewed and restructured, especially in the context of Centrelink's overall approach to delivering welfare services to communities. All respondents felt that Centrelink staff from Alice Springs should visit more often to help service the community, including having such staff live in the community. All respondents thought that application forms should be made easier. More than 90 per cent wanted more Aboriginal staff working as agents in the community. Most thought that better training and supervision of agents was urgently required.

Centrelink agents are primarily Indigenous. Agents are not employed directly under contract to Centrelink. They are not chosen by Centrelink, but are nominated by community councils. There is no mandatory induction program or ongoing training made available to them, although a voluntary annual workshop is run by Centrelink. Until recently, Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs operated Remote Visiting Teams (RVTs) which were staffed primarily by Aboriginal Liaison Officers whose duties included the support of agents.³⁵ Because of the large region to be covered by Centrelink service in Central Australia, and its limited staff and resources, the RVTs had tended to spend most of their time in the communities informing agents about the changes to payments and data collection. As a result, minimal resources and time were left to provide more thorough training to the agents, or face-to-face contact with individual clients in the communities.

Recently, changes have been introduced at the Alice Springs CSC to incorporate the RVTs more effectively into the wider office procedures and structure, rather than leaving them to operate in a largely independent fashion. At the same time, the position of Aboriginal Liaison Officer has been nationally redefined as Indigenous Customer Service Officer. The object of these changes within the Alice Springs CSC is to facilitate the participation of a larger number of staff in scheduled community visits, thereby expanding the work experience and skills of these employees. At the same time, Indigenous staff who were previously exclusively allocated to fieldwork will be able to upgrade their understanding of current administrative requirements and changes in program guidelines.

Complaints about the lack of effectiveness of Centrelink agents in Yuendumu were made by respondents on two accounts. The first is perhaps more of a cultural issue. Some respondents at Yuendumu chose not to use the agents as it is felt they treat people to whom they are closely related preferentially, and ignore others. To counter this, it was suggested that more agents should be engaged directly as Centrelink employees, and that perhaps some non-Indigenous staff should also work in the office. The second area of complaint originated from respondents' opinion that the agents are not properly trained. In particular, these complaints referred to the delays encountered between making their application for a payment, and its first consideration by Alice Springs CSC. The perception is that forms filled out by agents are regularly sent back to the community because some information or signature is lacking.

The lack of a workable 'notification' system in the community for cases like this frustrates both recipients and agents: recipients complain that the agents 'sit on those forms and don't fax them, while we don't have any money', and agents feel that local people do not

come and see them when problems arise. The agents regularly put up lists at places like the Social Club of the names of people who have to sign their forms. However, not everyone responds to these lists. In fact, due to poor literacy skills or mobility many people do not even see them. The end result is a pile-up of incorrectly filled out forms and of unanswered correspondence, all sitting in the agent's office.

Conclusions and implications for policy and service delivery

Broad parameters for policy and service delivery

Management and staff in the DFACS IPU in Canberra and the Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs are aware of the issue of cultural difference in remote Indigenous communities and the potential impact of that difference upon service delivery. There nevertheless remains an inherent tension between that understanding and the objective of providing an equitable and effective standard of service to all Australians.

This research highlights areas where Centrelink service delivery might be made more effective and more suitable to the needs of remote Indigenous community populations such as those at Yuendumu. However, the specific recommendations arising from this particular case study need to be carefully assessed against two broader dilemmas. First, how far can policy facilitate flexibility in service delivery and incorporate culturally-based needs? Second, at what point does a bureaucratic response to culturally-based needs turn into unnecessary intervention in private family and individual concerns? In considering possible options, the critical questions will be: what can *realistically* be done to improve service delivery on the ground; and how can policy frameworks be developed which facilitate effective delivery and secure more enhanced outcomes?

A further predicament lies in the ongoing pressure for Centrelink to be the linking agency for a number of new government programs and policy initiatives aimed at getting people *off* welfare into work. The transition from welfare to work will be a potentially critical issue for Indigenous Australians in the coming decade. However, one of the key conclusions of the Yuendumu research is that some people are still not aware of their basic entitlements and others are not receiving them. In other words, there is much work still to do to inform people about their entitlements and actually get some of them *onto* the appropriate form of welfare payment. The welfare safety net is not yet fully in place.

A decentralised service delivery model

The service delivery issues outlined in this chapter indicate the need for greater and more effective organisational decentralisation than currently exists in the Centrelink CSC region. Decentralisation could be based upon population distribution and types of clients—for example, remote community customers, town-based long-term unemployed, town-based fringe-dwellers—but minimally would need to address the different factors affecting town-based service delivery and the remote communities of the region.

In respect to town-based or town-visiting Indigenous customers, it is recommended that Centrelink establish a service 'shop-front' in the offices of a key Indigenous organisation

in Alice Springs. Such a shop-front could advertise the availability of specialist staff in Indigenous service issues, and of language interpreters. It could be staffed by CSC employees or a contracted Agent, who would be rotated between the shop-front and the main CSC office in order that their working knowledge of programs be kept up to date. The shop-front could, in effect, operate as a town-based Service Transaction Centre (see below).

For remote community welfare recipients, a service delivery model developed along similar lines to the outstation model is recommended as the preferred form of organisational decentralisation (see Altman et al. 1998 for an evaluation of outstation development trends). That is, a major community would act as a satellite Centrelink service provider for its own residents and a sub-set of other nearby communities. Such a community would operate a Welfare Service Transaction Centre (WSTC) and be linked administratively to the Alice Springs CSC via the development and operation of a community welfare database. Agents under contract to Centrelink, or other Centrelink staff residing in the community, would operate the WSTC and receive supervision, program support, field visits, and a rotation of staff from the Centrelink regional CSC.

The first step in such a satellite form of decentralisation would be to divide the Centrelink Central Australian service area into sub-regional areas. Possible diseconomies of scale will mean that there should be a limited number of such sub-regions. Each sub-region would have a major community nominated to operate a Centrelink satellite office; that is, to act as the point of administrative contact for surrounding smaller communities and outstations. For example, permanent Centrelink staff located at Yuendumu could be responsible for servicing Willowra, Mt Allan, Laramba, Nyirripi, and all outstations in between.

A sub-region should be staffed with trained staff, responsible initially for supervising and assisting in the training of contracted Community Agents, as well as actively servicing the region. Qualified staff might be enticed to work in such locations by being employed under Remote Community Contracts (referred to below), and by the fact that periods spent in a community could regularly be interspersed by rotation to the main CSC office.

Such decentralisation implies a degree of organisational restructuring and some staff reassignment. It would require policy facilitation and funding, and proactive changes within Centrelink. The potential advantages include increasing the effectiveness of service delivery by targeting residents in their own communities rather than in town; the acquisition by Centrelink of more accurate knowledge of community circumstances and individual needs; more accurate assessments of people's entitlements; a more efficient response to their changing life circumstances; less administrative workload associated with the decreased need for proof of identity, cheque reissuing, breach rate surveillance, and debt recovery; and greater cost efficiencies for the Centrelink CSC as staff contact time and administrative workload are reduced.

The form of decentralisation suggested here would provide an enhanced capacity for the Centrelink CSC to customise service delivery across the region to ensure more effective outcomes on the ground. It would also enable Centrelink to negotiate workable mutual obligation arrangements with individuals that realistically accommodate their personal,

community and family circumstances, and their level of mobility. The approach also has the advantage that it could be progressively implemented and evaluated by being piloted in town as a shop-front, and as a trial WSTC in a remote community which could then be upgraded to a satellite office (see below).

Welfare Service Transaction Centres

Like many remote communities, Yuendumu is visited on a daily basis by officers from numerous levels of government, often delivering overlapping services and requiring similar kinds of information; but invariably with little (if any) coordination of schedules or objectives. Many of these visits are related to welfare service issues.

Centrelink in Alice Springs should consider piloting the establishment of a remote WSTC at Yuendumu to facilitate the coordinated delivery of welfare and other related government services.

Such a WSTC could be housed in the office of a community organisation and its operation facilitated by Centrelink in collaboration with the Community Council and other local organisations. Such a Centre would afford key government departments the opportunity to have agents or staff in residence, or provide a central facility where their officers could make scheduled contact with the community and make relevant information available. A WSTC would not only provide the physical structure from which government officers could carry out their business, but would enable them to liaise actively with each other, develop a better understanding of the community and its residents' circumstances, and how these might realistically be addressed on the ground.

From the community perspective, a WSTC would create a single 'shop-front' from which people could find out information on a range of related welfare services offered by different departments and agencies. Residents could meet with government officers according to a publicised visiting schedule, and obtain key welfare services on a face-to-face basis (e.g. assessments could be made of 'life-event' welfare entitlements and other welfare-related needs, applications could be filled in and approved, reviews could be made of entitlement status, and related administrative procedures could be carried out).

Establishing and maintaining a WSTC would prove to be cost-effective if jointly financed by key agencies. The difficulties in cross-agency cooperation, and in determining lines of authority and accountability have militated against such joint departmental financial and service collaboration in the past. However, this is precisely the kind of 'seamless connection' that government asserts is the key to achieving policy outcomes in the Indigenous welfare arena (Commonwealth of Australia 1999: 72).

Enhancing the operation of Community Agents

The research suggests that the operation of the Centrelink Community Agents Program in Yuendumu is far from satisfactory: in some instances it creates cost inefficiencies for Centrelink and a poor level of service to customers. By implication, the overall roles and

responsibilities of Community Agents need to be systematically reconsidered. The following suggestions are offered.

Changes are urgently needed to the current system of recruitment of agents. In place of being nominated by senior administrators from community councils, there should be an application-driven process where Centrelink selects the most qualified person for the job.

The employment status of agents needs to be upgraded so they become directly employed as members of Centrelink staff, and are required to fulfil specified duties in accordance with particular responsibilities. Such agents may, or may not be, local Indigenous people from the community, and could include Centrelink staff who wish to work in a community setting for a period of time. Agents should be encouraged to have, or acquire, an understanding of local family issues.

The most effective way of proceeding would be for Centrelink to develop a 'Remote Community Agent or Staff Contract' which outlines an agent's contractual duties. Such contracted agents should be linked into the Centrelink CSC organisational and administrative structure through the establishment of formalised mentoring and supervision mechanisms. They should also be required to undertake, on an annual basis, short periods of work experience rotation in the CSC office. This rotation could be conducted as a short-term exchange, with a CSC staff member carrying out an equivalent placement in the community office. In this way the knowledge and skills of agents could periodically be upgraded, and the CSC staff could enhance their understanding of local circumstances.

The duty statement of a Remote Community Agent under contract to Centrelink should emphasise their role as a one-to-one case worker with responsibility for eliciting from each client relevant life-stage information upon which their welfare entitlements can be properly assessed, managing related data and documents, and assuming a key role in the effective delivery of services and the provision of accurate information to customers and the Centrelink CSC. By having the status of a contractual employee, agents would have the authority to operate the community welfare database referred to below.

The problem of attracting experienced and skilled staff to remote communities is familiar, and perennial. The employment conditions and performance of agents in communities could be improved by the implementation of a range of initiatives by Centrelink, in conjunction with local community councils. Community agents clearly need improved and regular training. The packaging of welfare payments is currently undergoing rapid change. Community agents need to be kept up to date on such changes if they are to assist welfare recipients with accurate information. The development of a Community Agent Training Module should be piloted in the Alice Springs region by the Centrelink CSC; possibly as a cooperative project between Centrelink and the Batchelor or Centralian College. The design of a course, possibly framed as a component of a degree in administration, and with a specific focus on Centrelink-related skills and welfare service delivery, is strongly recommended.

In conjunction with a training package, Centrelink should develop an electronic manual of administrative procedures and payment guidelines for the use of agents. This 'Agent's Manual' should be easy to follow, upgraded as guidelines change, and tackle the practical realities of service delivery in remote areas. It could be developed by Centrelink staff in cooperation with external experts.

Information and technology needs

People at Yuendumu are daily faced with the need to understand and respond to correspondence from various government agencies about welfare matters, and the need to provide documents such as Tax File Numbers and proofs of identity. At Yuendumu, some employers provide storage space and administrative assistance to their employees in respect to such documentation, but this is only available to a small part of the population. Maintaining and providing such documentation causes great frustration—both for people themselves and for Centrelink staff who are involved in substantial additional workload when having to reproduce, or confirm the status of, various welfare documents.

For this reason Centrelink should consider piloting in Yuendumu or elsewhere the establishment of a community 'welfare data management system'. Such a data system should be computer-based and contain the relevant welfare information for all persons in the community or sub-region receiving Centrelink payments. Data privacy requirements would need to be maintained in a manner standard for all other Centrelink data systems, and mechanisms developed for regularly updating data. The data system should be operated by either the local community agent—employed as a Centrelink contract staff member—or by a permanent Centrelink staff member.

The establishment of a community welfare data management system, and training of a local agent in its operation, could beneficially assist Indigenous welfare recipients to deal with many of the documentation and correspondence problems noted in this report of research. The performance of agents as trained local managers of relevant Centrelink welfare data could improve service outcomes for clients in Yuendumu and surrounding communities. A community welfare data system could be housed in the WSTC referred to above.

Centrelink should also equip agents with computers that are networked into the CSC administrative system. This would allow agents and local community staff to access local-only Centrelink data and related computer programs, aiding in the more efficient completion and electronic submission of forms. Currently, computer programs are being designed by the CSC in Alice Springs to greatly simplify the application process. These programs work on the basis of 'life event models' which reverse the standard application process. Customers are not expected to know about which payments they are entitled to, rather Centrelink staff will evaluate their notional entitlements by looking at key current life events for each person.

This suggested approach has the capacity to overcome three main problems: it could greatly reduce the number of incompletely or incorrectly filled out forms (the main reason for delays in payments to Yuendumu) and thereby constitute a cost saving; it will help address the apparent under-coverage of particular payment types; and Indigenous people's receipt

of welfare will be based on a more accurate assessment of their particular life circumstances instead of being dependent upon presuppositions about their individual level of knowledge.

Communication and access to services

Developing strategies to educate remote community populations about their service options and welfare entitlements remains a continuing challenge for Centrelink. As noted above, the Alice Springs CSC has implemented a number of service innovations. The research findings reported here suggest that further initiatives could be piloted to address the problems encountered by Indigenous people as a result of their low levels of literacy and proficiency in English.

The Yuendumu research indicates that many people are unaware of past and recent changes to the payment structure, and of their basic entitlements. It is recommended that Centrelink develop a public education media campaign (including local language segments) with advertising aired on regional Indigenous television and radio outlets, to explain the continuing changes in welfare payment packaging and program guidelines. Centrelink could trial the production of such advertising in Yuendumu which has a well-established media unit producing professional educational videos that have been aired on mainstream television.

The current service delivery emphasis on written and often complex correspondence jeopardises the basic rights of some Indigenous customers. It is recommended that Centrelink consider piloting in the Central Australian region a service mechanism based on the recognition of what Sanders (1999) refers to as the 'no correspondence' client. This service strategy would operate on the basis that Centrelink CSC staff, community agents, or the customers themselves would nominate individuals as needing such a classification. A low level of literacy, difficulties with responding to correspondence and filling out forms, high levels of mobility, and poor access to reliable postal services would all be relevant criteria for such a classification.

The client would then be targeted for more intensive face-to-face consultation and communication of key Centrelink decisions and information. Community agents acting in the revitalised role described above would be especially suited to operate as case workers for these clients and to apply life event and review arrangements. Customers at remote communities such as Yuendumu would also be more easily and efficiently dealt with in their own communities, by a community agent. Arguably, such a strategy is potentially cost-effective for Centrelink: less correspondence would have to be sent out and fewer incorrect forms would be returned.

As an adjunct to this, the Centrelink CSC should investigate the level of customer satisfaction with increasing the presence of Indigenous staff at the main office reception desk (particularly in 'bush lanes'), and entertain the possibility of having some Indigenous-language speakers amongst Indigenous staff to assist customers for whom English is a second language.

The introduction of a 'remote area claim form' for use with Indigenous customers receiving Family Allowance and Parenting Payments should be considered. Such a form would enhance the quality of service provided to remote customers. It would assist in overcoming some literacy difficulties encountered with current modes of correspondence and application forms, and result in the obtaining of more accurate information. It would also be cost effective because it would lessen the administrative workload.

A 'remote area claim form' is envisioned as a single form which could be used for both remote and town-based customers. It could be trialed in the Central Australian region, but may be more widely applicable. The form would be based on (and support) the life-events model currently being developed within Centrelink. Instead of filling out different claim forms for different potential entitlements, a remote community customer would give his or her details to Centrelink once only and then receive a comprehensive evaluation of their entitlements, calculated on the information provided until notification of change. Once a claim is lodged further action would only need to be taken if a key life event took place (e.g. a birth, death, or change in marital or child-care circumstances).

The current Carers' Statement Trial

The research shows conclusively that Indigenous children and their parents in Yuendumu are highly mobile both within the community and across a network of regional communities, outstations, and towns. Children also move independently of their parents and of each other, so that siblings may reside at different locations, under the care of different classes of 'parents' and other carers. A key finding of the research, and one strongly endorsed by respondents, is the need for a workable solution to delivering family-related welfare payments that accommodates Indigenous patterns of child care and the high rates of mobility of children and their parents, in a manner that does not interfere with the flexibility of culturally-based practices.

DFACS and Centrelink have already developed and are implementing a Carers' Statement Trial in response to such calls for greater flexibility in the delivery of family-oriented welfare payments. The Statement will be implemented and evaluated in 2000 as a pilot comprising 200 volunteer Centrelink Indigenous customers with an estimated total of 600 Family Allowance children. Under the trial, the current recipients of Family Allowance and Parenting Payments will meet with their own families and a Centrelink Indigenous Services Officer to agree upon a self-nominated set of carers for a particular child.

The objective is for the 'care group' to agree amongst themselves to try to equitably share welfare income paid in respect of a child, when different members of the group undertake periods of care for the child. It will be the responsibility of participants in the group to decide how money is shared when a child's carer changes. The pilot envisages that participants will pass money to other carers by hand rather than using more formal processes. It is hoped that money passed over will be at least the amount of Family Allowance received for the child, or an amount approximate to that.

The immense social value of Indigenous child-care arrangements is their very flexibility and dynamism in the face of poverty. The proposed trial attempts to respond to this by

developing a flexible mechanism by which families might meet with an Indigenous Centrelink staff member to discuss how welfare money can more effectively be redistributed within the care group. Clearly, Centrelink Indigenous Services Officers will play a critical role in supporting these informal agreements and decision-making processes. The key role of such Indigenous officers should also be evaluated as part of the trial. Given the high rates of short-term mobility documented in this community case study, it may be that the trial will secure more effective outcomes with more residentially stable families and this factor could be monitored during its conduct.

A Kids' Care Card

An alternative option might also facilitate the accommodation of Centrelink service delivery with high rates of mobility and shared child-care. It is recommended that DFACS and Centrelink trial the use of a 'Kids' Care Card'. The card would function as a re-useable debit card into which Centrelink would deposit the relevant welfare payments attributable to a child (for example, including Family Allowance and components of Parenting Payment Single). Additional maintenance money paid by a separated parent for the care of a child could also be attached to such a card. Each individual child would be allocated a card (but not be the authorised signatory) and that card would have a set number of 'designated carers' as signatories.

The designated carers would be agreed upon within the child's family. The card could 'travel' with a child as it goes between those carers, or alternatively, it could be housed at a community agency where it would be accessible to all signatories when the child is in their care, for example at the Centrelink Agent's office, or the local store (as is often the case with other individual welfare payments), or it could be housed for safe-keeping at a newly established Centrelink WSTC.

This option would require considerable development and a number of administrative issues would need to be resolved, though many of these would be similar to those being dealt with under the Carers' Statement Trial. The proposal for a Kids' Care Card potentially affords a service mechanism attuned to the actual dynamic practices of Indigenous child-care. It would operate regardless of the duration of changed arrangements, without need for distinctions between classes of carers, and without the assumption that a primary carer will pass on cash to other carers. The card could travel with the child, or be available in a central location for direct access by a designated signatory carer when the child is in their care.

Such a card system could reduce the daily administrative workload now being undertaken by Centrelink in responding to frequent and sometimes fraught requests for changes of recipient, and to corresponding complaints about the wrong person receiving welfare money for children. It would not be based on hypothetical arrangements for the future care of children. As with the Carers' Statement Trial, a Kids' Care Card would have to be piloted with a range of customers.

Issues for children and youth

The respondents were greatly concerned about the lack of activities for children and youth, many of whom are clearly 'at risk'. Respondents saw a need to increase the variety, options, and opportunities open to children and teenagers.

The research identified the need for enhanced program and funding support of youth workers in the community. This could be facilitated through a sponsored CDEP pilot project, possibly involving the training of local community workers at the Centralian or Batchelor Colleges. A potential policy contribution in this area would be to facilitate the development of training and work experience schemes to operate in remote communities such as Yuendumu for youth (and youth workers), under the framework of the mutual obligation strategy. This would entail identifying options and broad principles which are agreed to at the community level. Youth participation in such community-directed training and work experience could be coordinated under the auspices of local CDEP organisations—which effectively already operate as mutual obligation arrangements.

Yuendumu respondents pointed to the need to improve and maintain the existing recreational facilities, and generally upgrade their community environment for families and their children. This is, at heart, a community issue and should be able to be facilitated via local organisations. Once again, effectiveness entails a greater degree of coordination between levels of government.

At the same time, respondents expressed concerns about the purely recreational focus of many existing youth activities. While recreational activities are vital, a number of people suggested there was a need to develop more formal programs of activities that would add to young people's skill base. Suggestions included outreach and work experience programs that teach practical skills, such as mechanics courses, cattle work, horse riding skills, a bike workshop, and activities that stimulate an engagement with the social and natural environment.

Many of these service delivery issues are clearly outside the immediate responsibility of Centrelink. However, they highlight the interrelationships between recreation, infrastructure, education, training and employment services, and welfare service delivery. The research suggests an urgent need for greater coordination between the community and government departments in the welfare arena. The suggestions made by respondents also highlight the need for the development of a policy framework that would actively facilitate such interdepartmental and cross-program coordination.

The cost of Centrelink service delivery

The Yuendumu case study research suggests there are a number of difficulties encountered in delivering even a standardised level of service to Indigenous people in Yuendumu; these probably hold true for the region as a whole, and include:

- the demographic structure of the Indigenous population;
- the different families types and household structures represented;

- social factors such as low levels of literacy and poor health;
- the physical environment, which makes transport, access, and communication more expensive;
- the dispersed spatial distribution of the population;
- remote community economic circumstances, including high levels of unemployment and lack of mainstream labour markets; and
- culturally-specific patterns of child care and mobility that differ substantially from those seen in the wider population.

Given these variables, the cost per capita is likely to be higher for providing the same level of service to an Indigenous customer, than it is for other customers in the region. Limits on funding available to the Centrelink CSC create inherent tensions between staffing needs in different sections of the office; between field visitation schedules and the needs of main office administration; between the need for greater face-to-face contact time with welfare recipients and the need for standardised administrative procedures; and between different kinds of clients with differing needs.

The cost-related characteristics need to be comprehensively assessed in order that adequate levels of funding can be made available for the Centrelink CSC in Alice Springs to provide an equitable and appropriate level of service to its Indigenous customers. This matter is canvassed more fully in Chapter 7.

Summary of targeted initiatives

The case study has raised a number of key cultural, social, economic, geographic and demographic factors affecting the effective and appropriate delivery of Centrelink services at the regional and community level. These have implications for wider welfare service delivery models and for policy frameworks which might facilitate improved delivery and outcomes for Indigenous families with children.

A number of options and recommendations have been proposed for targeted initiatives, some of which could be piloted in the Central Australian region.

1. A more decentralised model could be developed for the Centrelink CSC organisational structure and service delivery in Central Australia to facilitate the more effective delivery of, and equitable access to, services that are tailored to the regional Indigenous population distribution, the client types, and their particular circumstances. Consideration of economies and diseconomies of scale will need to inform the extent of decentralisation sought. The advantages of greater decentralisation include:
 - more accurate 'life-event' and entitlement assessments;
 - more effective one-to-one contact by local Centrelink officers with customers within their own communities;
 - enhanced knowledge of individual and community needs and circumstances;

- more effective local delivery of services and payments;
 - the negotiation of workable 'mutual obligation agreements' at the individual and community levels which realistically accommodate local circumstances; and
 - cost efficiencies associated with reduced CSC workload, burden of identity proofs, and reissuing of cheques.
2. In conjunction with greater decentralisation, a service shop front should be established in Alice Springs in the offices of a key Indigenous organisation, with staff who are specialists in Indigenous service issues.
 3. Across the region, service delivery could be decentralised on the basis of selected major communities acting as satellite Centrelink service providers for their residents and the nearby sub-regional set of communities. These satellites would be administratively linked to the CSC and managed by Centrelink staff on rotation, or by a contracted Centrelink Community Agent.
 4. A pilot should be developed for the establishment within a major regional community of a WSTC, coordinated by Centrelink, to facilitate greater coordinated delivery on the ground of welfare and other related government and community services. The establishment and maintenance of the WSTC could be jointly financed by key agencies.
 5. The role and responsibilities of Centrelink Community Agents needs to be systemically reviewed. An application-driven selection process should be established, with agents employed directly by Centrelink under a remote community contract specifying duties including:
 - facilitating the application process;
 - dealing with 'no correspondence' clients (see below);
 - assessing life events and entitlements; and
 - managing local administrative databases.

Agents should be supervised, mentored provided with regular training, provided with electronic program manuals and updates of changes, and work on a rotation with CSC town staff.

6. Centrelink should pilot the establishment in a main regional community of an electronic welfare data management system networked in to the regional CSC, and containing sub-regional welfare recipient data. It should be housed in a WSTC, and managed by a local staff member or contracted agent to maintain privacy.
7. Enhanced public education and communication are needed to adequately inform Indigenous welfare recipients of the rapid changes taking place in the service and payment system. The program could include:
 - the production of language videos aired on regional Indigenous television and radio;

- the recognition of the need to classify and assist 'no correspondence' clients;
 - an evaluation of the effectiveness and potential of 'bush lanes' in the Alice Springs CSC; and
 - the development and use of a remote area claim form administered on the basis of the 'life events' model.
8. There is a need for more effective mechanisms for the equitable and flexible delivery of income payment to follow the changing care of children, with one option being the development and piloting of a Centrelink re-useable debit Kids' Care Card.
 9. There is a need for more enhanced program and service delivery support to youth at risk, including the provision of local training and work experience relevant to community economic circumstances.
 10. There are significant regional difficulties or disabilities facing Centrelink CSC in delivering even a standardised level of service—let alone a more appropriate and decentralised one. The comparative activity-based cost per capita of service delivery should be comprehensively assessed to enable adequate funding levels for providing welfare services to Indigenous people in diverse regional circumstances.

The Yuendumu research highlights many issues similar to those reported for Kuranda in the previous chapter, but there are also important differences. These issues of commonality and difference, and their implications for service delivery and policy, are summarised in the following chapter.

5. Kuranda and Yuendumu: Comparative conclusions

Diane Smith

Introduction

The case study research conducted in a remote community and a rural town has identified a number of service delivery and policy issues which need to be addressed. Some issues are specific to one or other community and its regional service delivery context. Others have implications for broader policy formulation and optimal service delivery models. In this chapter the main research conclusions arising from Yuendumu and Kuranda are compared in terms of the key factors influencing the effective and appropriate delivery of welfare income transfers to Indigenous families for the care of their children. The aim of the comparison is to draw out further the implications for enhancing Indigenous family welfare policy and service delivery, before moving to identify recommendations in Chapters 7 and 8.

It is evident that there are some key differences between the sampled households in the two communities, but the families and their households also share a number of important underlying commonalities. An understanding both of differences and of commonalities is needed to inform the development of targeted policy and service delivery initiatives that will address the issues identified by the research.

Kuranda and Yuendumu: Comparative locational issues

Yuendumu is a remote and discrete community on Aboriginal-owned land, with the attendant difficulties in gaining access to distant mainstream services, and with a high cost of living in certain areas. Kuranda, by comparison, is a rural hinterland community with apparently reasonable access to a nearby major urban centre. However, the dispersed and occasionally inaccessible location of outlying smaller ‘villages’ around Kuranda, and the lack of transportation, mean that Indigenous families also face obstacles to accessing centrally located mainstream services. In addition, Kuranda respondents’ stated reluctance to travel to Cairns and stay overnight (especially amongst older people) appears to make that urban service centre less ‘accessible’ from their perspective, than Alice Springs is for people at Yuendumu.

Yuendumu and Kuranda people share a heavy reliance upon the community Centrelink agents (Yuendumu) and community honorary workers and visiting Centrelink staff (Kuranda). However, Kuranda’s proximity to Cairns makes it more accessible than Yuendumu to visiting Centrelink staff.

For both regional Centrelink CSC offices, the cost of providing services to Indigenous customers would undoubtedly be higher than to non-Indigenous customers. Both offices

have to deliver regional services to Indigenous communities where people are widely dispersed and have varying degrees of literacy, where clients often reside in small outlying camps and villages, and where there is high short-term mobility around circuits of regional locations.

The welfare economy of families and their households

It proved difficult in both Yuendumu and Kuranda to obtain accurate measures of income. This is a familiar problem in surveying Indigenous populations (see Daly and Smith 1996; Smith 1991a, 1991b, 1992a). In both communities it was due to large numbers of people having deductions made for bills, 'bookdown' at local stores, and the fact that many welfare recipients immediately lend money to other people.

As an estimated measure based on sources of income, welfare payments (such as Family Allowance and Parenting Payment) made to family members for the care of children constitute the core component of income for the sample of families and the households in which they reside. Furthermore, while total household incomes on occasion appear to be reasonably high (see Ch. 3 and Fig. 3.3), there are numerous dependent children in most households, and the level of household income is erratic owing to the high rates of members' mobility and corresponding flows through houses.

In the context of the Australian social security system, 'welfare dependency' can be broadly defined as a circumstance where a person is reliant for all or a major amount of their necessary financial support and aid upon public welfare transfers. In both study locations, a majority of parents and their children live in households with welfare-based economies, in which the adults are highly reliant on a variety of welfare transfers. The concept of dependence on welfare is applicable, therefore, not only to individual recipients, but also to entire families and the households in which they reside. The effect, in both communities, is to create welfare-based household domestic economies that are economically debilitating and perpetuated from one generation to the next.

The research suggests that, for many family members in both Yuendumu and Kuranda, the transition over time is from one form of welfare payment to another; for example, from Parenting Payment, to Unemployment Benefit (or perhaps sideways to the CDEP scheme), to Aged or Disabled Pension. To that extent, individuals and their families are more accurately defined as experiencing 'recycling welfare dependence'. The community-based analyses presented in the previous two chapters suggest that in Yuendumu and Kuranda the children of parents dependent on welfare face a likely future of long-term welfare dependency.

Welfare-based expenditure and saving patterns

While the research did not attempt to investigate the detailed nature of family expenditure and savings, a number of issues were raised about these matters in the context of family reliance on welfare payments. Respondents in both communities are aware of the purpose of welfare payments made for their children, stating that such income was largely spent

on basic necessities for children including food, clothing, consumer durables, domestic bills, books, and 'holidays'. It appears that respondents in Yuendumu spent a greater proportion of their cash on foodstuffs than those at Kuranda, but overall expenditure patterns in both samples are directed to the immediate purchase of basic domestic goods and, in Yuendumu, are also limited by the high local costs of many of those items.

Respondents in both communities are locked into a fortnightly pattern of immediate and shared consumption of basic foodstuffs and domestic goods, leaving them with little capacity to save from one pay period to the next. Also common were various forms of 'bookdown' arrangements to purchase food and other goods at local stores, and use of CDEP organisations and Centrelink to organise deductions for the payment of regular bills (from wages and welfare income respectively). These deduction mechanisms operate as an effective means of budgeting—a form of *de facto* saving—for many of the welfare recipients in both samples.

Both communities make active use of the Centrelink facility for obtaining advances against future welfare income; Kuranda respondents apparently at a higher rate than those in Yuendumu. While these 'loans' are viewed extremely positively by respondents and clearly play an important financial role, they nevertheless highlight the vulnerability of families where domestic bills and changes in household membership can trigger economic crisis. The result is that welfare recipients become locked into borrowing against the provision of their future low levels of welfare income.

The Indigenous networks of family support

Respondents in both communities identified their own extended family networks as a critical source of social and financial support. Shared child-care arrangements are an essential and valued feature of such support networks. Household members in both places also rely on these networks for lending and subsequent borrowing of money and other resources, using them as a form of 'banking' to help ameliorate the impact of the fortnightly 'feast and famine' welfare cycle. The majority of respondents in both communities stated they relied on other members of their family to help them with the costs of caring for their own children.

These Indigenous networks for the redistribution of cash and the sharing of domestic costs and child care constitute an important form of 'social capital' for families in both communities. Governments themselves also reap the benefits by way of subsidy to service costs through the operation in communities of extended family networks of support and the performance of higher rates of voluntary work in community organisations and child care (Smith and Roach 1996). However, in the context of high rates of mobility, high rates of childhood dependency, and low levels of personal income, these family networks are susceptible to adverse burdens of care and sharing which becomes excessively 'demand' driven. Certain individuals (such as older women and men on stable pension incomes) may be called upon to assume financial, domestic, and child-care responsibilities that are significantly beyond their means.

The coverage and understanding of the welfare payment system

There was some confusion amongst respondents about the nature and operation of the welfare payment structure, though this was markedly less true of Kuranda, where better knowledge was reflected in the higher satisfaction rating given by Kuranda people to the delivery of services by the Cairns CSC and local agent. The greater apparent levels of dissatisfaction and confusion in Yuendumu were reflected in a poor take-up of some types of welfare payment. A critical factor underlying this difference is that Kuranda respondents appear to have higher levels of literacy and greater confidence in speaking English than the respondents in the Yuendumu sample. In Yuendumu a number of respondents spoke English poorly or not at all and, as demonstrated by census data analysed in Chapter 6, this is in marked contrast to Kuranda and the national picture for Indigenous Australians. This difference was in turn reflected in the Kuranda respondents' more active and confident dealings with departmental staff and their better understanding of administrative procedures.

Respondents in both communities identified similar issues for enhancing the delivery of services and payment structure, including the need for:

- more regular and longer visits by Centrelink staff (including the option of having staff reside in communities);
- specified roles and responsibilities for community agents, in conjunction with more effective training and supervision;
- more simply written and communicated information about Centrelink services and the rapidly changing payment structures;
- more direct assistance with gaining access to benefits and services to suit particular life stages and family circumstances;
- alternative methods of communication other than written correspondence, including more one-to-one contact by Centrelink staff and the use of local Indigenous media outlets to convey information;
- an increased Indigenous staff presence at reception desks; and,
- the provision of a single, more streamlined payment system.

The issue of gaining more face-to-face contact with Centrelink staff at the community level was a high priority for all respondents. The critical question is how to implement this in a way which is cost-effective and does not increase uncoordinated and excessive visiting schedules. The enhanced operation of community agents would greatly assist the delivery of services at the community level, as would better coordinated and well-publicised visiting schedules by different departmental staff (see also similar comments by Sanders 1999: 125–6).

Family and household structures and organisation

In both Yuendumu and Kuranda, the extended family is the structural norm. The extended family formations that were recorded do not easily fit into Centrelink program guidelines and administrative definitions, or into DFACS policy frameworks primarily based on the nuclear family model.

The concept of 'family' based upon this extended formation is a central and abiding socioeconomic construct, and a key component of individual identity in both communities. It is the extended family which forms the basis of the network of economically linked households, and is the source of social and financial support for parents and children. But it is a network that operates under considerable duress and it can be quickly overburdened with demands.

In both communities, respondents live in compositionally complex households with larger numbers of residents than the national average for the total Australian population (10.8 persons and 6.4 persons per household in Yuendumu and Kuranda respectively). Households invariably contain a number of multi-generational families, and have a high proportion of dependent children and sole parents in residence. Many household members are highly mobile transients, making use of a number of home bases, and gravitating around a more stable residential core of members.

An important difference between the two communities is that the core household members seem to be less mobile in Kuranda than in Yuendumu, and their mobility ranges over a smaller geographic circuit. At one extreme, the rate of mobility of household members is such that over a fortnightly period in Yuendumu, the flow of different individuals through a certain dwelling was almost double the average persons in residence per night. The concept of 'visitor' is inappropriate in both community situations; all newcomers become full household members upon residence, either making a contribution, or demanding access, to household resources.

In both communities, the research reveals a complex picture of changing household composition and dynamic developmental cycles of expansion, contraction, disintegration and reformation. These cycles are linked to the high flow of members on a daily, weekly and fortnightly basis. In both communities, dependence on low levels of welfare income, combined with high levels of childhood dependency and the mobility of some family members, can have a dramatic impact on the economic viability of families and the stability of their households. This, in turn, has significant ramifications for the effectiveness of service delivery.

Children, parenting, and child care

The complexity of extended family formations and household developmental cycles is matched by equally complex child-care arrangements. Many children live in households where there is only one, or no, biological parent present. Children are viewed as autonomous beings and can be extremely mobile, travelling between a set of usual home bases within and across different communities. Children travel with and without their

parents and other siblings and this flow is often unpredictable. A difficulty arises within extended family care groups when the welfare income associated with a child does not follow their changing residence.

Administrative guidelines and definitions of 'parenting', 'primary carer' and 'sole parenthood' do not easily encompass Indigenous realities. In both communities, 'parenting' roles and responsibilities are widely distributed across a range of kin of all ages. These kin-defined parents are in varying kinds of kin relationship with the children: their classification depends upon the particular kinship system in which they are embedded. All could be defined as the primary carers for specific children for periods of time that might be short or long term.

When the primary care of children is directly related, as an administrative criteria, to the delivery of welfare payments to an identified primary carer, there can easily be a mismatch between administrative requirements and the extended parental care of Indigenous children. Furthermore, the mobility of children can have a significant impact on the economic viability of households in which they reside; especially if welfare payments do not follow their changing residence and care-givers.

Less than half the respondents in either Yuendumu or Kuranda stated they had made use of the facility offered by Centrelink to redirect payments to another person by notifying the office of changes in the primary care arrangements for particular children. Such a change of recipient is made if the periods of care are for a stipulated period of six months or longer. But a high proportion of respondents expressed reluctance to formally initiate such a change of recipient, on the basis that the administrative system could not accommodate rapidly changing child-care arrangements and that it generated conflict in families.

Shared child care is an essential feature of family support in these communities, but it is a form of social capital operating under pressure as a result of the extent of the burden of care, levels of mobility, and the limits of welfare income. The result is that some children receive erratic or marginal care at best, and may have to 'hunt' for meals and a place to sleep at different households. Excessive burdens of care may also place aged carers in a financially vulnerable position. This is especially the case if they do not receive any share of the welfare income paid to the primary carer when they are in fact caring for the latter's children. This inevitably means that aged carers carry the cost of caring for children out of their existing welfare income (often pension) which is not calculated on the basis of undertaking such a responsibility.

While 'sole' might appropriately reflect a person's separated parental status, in an Indigenous community it does not reflect their social, residential or domestic arrangements. Indigenous sole parent families at Yuendumu and Kuranda do not live in households by themselves, and in many households there are multiple sole parents in residence (often mother and daughter pairs, and sets of adult siblings). There are also 'sole grannies' who are continuing to be primary care-givers for other relations' children. Sole parenthood, then, is not a transitory life cycle stage for many women, but reappears later in their life when they may be called upon to provide the primary care for children of younger female relations.

In general, respondents in both communities are largely unaware of the recent changes to the organisational operation and delivery of maintenance money by the Child Support Agency (CSA). Many Indigenous women are exempted by the CSA from the mandatory administrative requirement to obtain such income support (Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b). These exemptions are granted to respond positively to difficulties that might arise for the parent and family in having to formally seek an order for such income. However, the end financial result of such exemptions, combined with the inability of non-custodial fathers to pay maintenance (or their contribution only at low token levels), is that Indigenous sole parents are disadvantaged in their overall level of income compared to non-Indigenous sole parents.

In view of the high proportion of Indigenous female sole parent families and female-headed households, a key issue highlighted by the community-based research (and requiring more detailed investigation), is the nature of the role and responsibility of fathers in family life. While there are noticeable exceptions in both communities (e.g. older men), men often seemed to be peripheral to family domestic arrangements and the care of children; that is, until such time as the welfare payments provided for families are received each fortnight (see also Finlayson 1991).

Youth and the welfare system

The research indicates that, in both communities, young adults in families are poorly serviced across a range of areas, and are overwhelmingly perceived by respondents to be at risk from boredom, substance abuse, domestic violence, and crime. Respondents identified similar problems confronting young people, including the lack of intensive assistance services and case-worker support; the lack of adequate housing for young parents; few recreational facilities and skills-based activity programs; and the lack of employment and of sustained vocational training opportunities within their community.

The impression given by many respondents is that their youth are adrift, with little hope of an economically secure or meaningful future. The focus of concern seems to have extended beyond the 'stolen' generation issue, to the 'lost' generation of youth today. Unless targeted and early intervention is made available to young people in these communities, they will not only remain 'lost' to their families and culture, they will become the next generation of life-long welfare recipients. Many of these issues are outside the service role of Centrelink, but would benefit from greater policy and service coordination on the ground.

Families, work, and welfare

The research concludes that individuals, whole families, and households in both communities are locked into a form of recycling welfare dependence. Without relevant skills, training, work experience opportunities, or employment, people are unlikely to make the transition out of welfare.

At the same time, the research indicates that, in both communities, access to full-time wage employment is extremely limited. This is more the case in Yuendumu than in Kuranda, where some people are employed in the local tourist-based dance theatre located in Cairns. The significant employers in both communities are the CDEP scheme organisations.

Given the apparently robust tourism economy in Kuranda, and the seemingly sophisticated communication skills of many local Indigenous people interviewed, it is not immediately obvious why they cannot secure employment. In Yuendumu, one is tempted to cite the commonly mentioned cause of a non-existent labour market. However, it is apparent that there is in fact a small local labour market with employment generating wages in that community. The problem there for Indigenous people who might want full-time local work is that they lack relevant skills and work experience, and also that the great majority of paid jobs are, for a number of complex reasons, filled by non-Indigenous residents.

While people in both communities are highly mobile, it is primarily within a local circuit—within and between particular communities. It is unlikely that people in either community would be willing to move from their families and home bases in order to take up employment in either Alice Springs or Cairns. In other words, the transition out of welfare—if it can be made—will have to be made locally by individuals undertaking forms of employment and training needed, and able to be sustained within, their own communities. This may need to be addressed by an expansion of the CDEP scheme or the creation and funding of other locally sustainable employment and training programs.

In this context, a key research finding is that the JET scheme which focuses on assisting sole parents in making a transition from welfare to work, is virtually unknown in both communities. Earlier evaluations of JET by the then Department of Social Security indicate that those persons participating in a program were more likely to have higher earnings than other sole parents, and confirmed a similar conclusion to the current research, that Indigenous sole parents are either not seeking or not securing access to the program (Silkstone and Peard 1996). The lack of participation by Indigenous sole parents in the JET program puts them at a financial disadvantage relative to other sole parents, and highlights the need for a tailored Indigenous component of JET (Daly and Smith 1997a).

Other service delivery issues

The research identified a number of wider service delivery issues affecting the wellbeing of families and their children at the community level. However, many of these lie outside the responsibility of Centrelink, and by implication, turn the spotlight on the need for greater coordination of welfare-related services on the ground. Respondents uniformly identified health, youth housing, employment and training, recreational programs, and youth-workers, as essential services and infrastructure facilities needed by families.

In Kuranda, the emphasis was on young parents needing to secure access to housing. In Yuendumu, there is an overall shortage of housing for all families. Given the number of people residing in households in both communities, and the extent of mobility and flows through dwellings, the physical stress on housing and infrastructure is evident and there

is an identified need for ongoing maintenance. The problems of inadequate and overcrowded housing are linked to increased conflict within families and in some cases to the fragmentation of households.

It is clear that in both communities there is a lack of coordination on the ground between different government agencies and departments in their delivery of services oriented to the general welfare of families. In Kuranda a local group had successfully operated its own service transaction centre to coordinate access to, and delivery of, a range of government services. This centre was forced to close because of lack of recurrent funding, but offers a potential model for how interdepartmental and agency coordination could be initiated in communities.

Family views about the future

Indigenous residents in both communities identified a very similar range of family strengths including:

- their own networks of economic support and resource redistribution which are critical to the wellbeing of families and children;
- the social distribution of parenting and shared child care operating within and across extended family households; and
- the key role of senior women in maintaining the domestic viability of families and caring for children.

Conversely, respondents identified a longer and similar list of threats to the wellbeing of their families and children including:

- the adverse social and economic impacts of large overcrowded households where adults are predominantly dependent on low incomes;
- the excessive burdens placed on aged carers of children;
- the growing number of young families headed by inexperienced parents;
- the high proportion of sole parent families;
- the recycling of sole parenthood within families;
- the impact of fathers being absent from socialisation of their children;
- children receiving marginalised care;
- the erratic and low level (often lack) of maintenance income;
- poor health, and the problems for families of members' substance abuse;
- youth at risk from boredom, violence, and crime;
- inadequate housing;
- the impacts on families of disaffected youth; and

- the lack of local employment and training.

Interestingly, in neither location did people identify their reliance on welfare income as a 'problem'.

Diversity and commonalties: Conclusions for service delivery and policy

The nature and extent of welfare dependence experienced by Indigenous families in the sampled households appears to be both quantitatively and qualitatively different to that of other Australian households (see also Ch. 6). While other Australians may experience low levels of employment and income and inadequate housing, they are unlikely to face the combined impacts of poor levels of health, low levels of education, large household and family size, high rates of mobility, dynamic household developmental cycles, and high childhood dependency burdens that are present in the communities of Yuendumu and Kuranda and elsewhere (see also Altman and Hunter 1998).

At the same time, the research suggests that the lived experience of welfare dependence is likely to be qualitatively different for Indigenous households in these communities. They can fall back upon culturally-based behaviours, values, and systems to assist them smooth over adverse impacts associated with low levels of income, income inequality between households, lack of savings, and difficulties in accessing services. Arguably, welfare service delivery is less effective and outcomes reduced when administrative guidelines, program criteria, and policy objectives do not adequately represent the Indigenous realities on the ground as described by this research.

There is a range of economic and social indicators which demonstrate the relative levels of difference both between Indigenous and other Australians, and within the Indigenous population itself. It is frequently asserted that government policy makers and service deliverers should make greater efforts to accommodate these differences and cultural factors. At a more mundane level, this research suggests that the recognition of cultural diversity within policy and service delivery frameworks is also likely to be a cost-effective strategy for implementing a more equitable standard of delivery of services, and for enhancing program outcomes. But there are important limits on the range and type of factors which can (or should) be accommodated within service guidelines and policy frameworks. It is also important to recognise that, in the midst of dealing with diversity within the Indigenous population, there are equally important areas of internal commonality which should not be ignored.

The research presented in the previous two chapters and presented in a comparative way here suggests there are certain key differences between two communities (of type and degree) in respect to:

- the differential location and distribution of their populations;
- the supply-side characteristics of customers (such as different proficiency in English and literacy levels, different uptake of payment types);
- their rates and geographic range of mobility;

- the nature of their interaction with service deliverers;
- the factors affecting their ability to access services outside their communities;
- their levels of satisfaction with service delivery and preferences for improvements; and
- the nature and operation of the local economies within which they reside.

The research also indicates that there are number of fundamental commonalities underlying family life and household domestic organisation in the two communities. Importantly, despite the differences noted above, there is a similarly high level of welfare dependence in both. Other shared characteristics include the following:

- the concept of 'family' based on the extended family formation is the central and abiding social and economic construct, and a key component of individual identity;
- the extended family forms the basis for critical economic networks between linked households, for the economic support for parents and children, for the redistribution of cash and other domestic resources, and for the amelioration of low and erratic levels of family and household incomes;
- in the context of welfare dependence and poverty, this network also operates under considerable duress and can be overburdened with demands, so that some people (and especially children) can fall through the safety net of care;
- individual members of families pass through various life stages of being a welfare recipient which can be characterised as 'recycling welfare dependence';
- entire families and their households have entrenched welfare-based economies;
- sole parents and their children are key social and economic units within extended family households where there are often multiple generations of related sole parents in residence;
- sole parenthood is a social as well as a biological fact and constitutes a serial status which many women re-enter throughout their life, with the result that households also contain aging women who effectively continue to operate as sole carers for the children of other relations;
- parenting is socially distributed across a wide range of kin who may assume primary care of children for short and longer periods of time;
- fathers (and particularly young fathers) often appear to be absent from family domestic arrangements and marginal to the financial support of their children;
- family members, including children, are mobile across a geographic circuit and reside in a number of usual home bases; children can be extremely mobile, travelling with or without their parents and siblings;
- the flow of extended primary care of children is dynamic and often unpredictable; and

- a youthful demographic profile suggests that an Indigenous 'baby-boomers' generation is being created, where young families are being formed and headed by young unemployed couples or sole parents.

In the light of these areas of diversity and commonality, the critical issues arising for Centrelink service delivery and DFACS policy formulation are:

1. what can be done on the ground to deliver more culturally-informed services that are also administratively workable, cost-effective and act to enhance outcomes; and
2. what might be the content of, and criteria for, policy frameworks to actively facilitate that combination of objectives.

Recommendations in response to these broad questions are canvassed more fully in Chapters 7 and 8.

6. A statistical overview of the two case-study communities

Anne Daly and Tony Auld

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to place the case-study chapters in a wider context, using aggregate data from the census and Centrelink administrative data collections. The picture presented here highlights some key similarities and differences between Kuranda and Yuendumu, reflecting their historical and geographical circumstances. These differences have important implications for policy and for service delivery.

Many of the features of these comparisons have already been commented on in other discussions of the economic status of Indigenous Australian families and households (Daly and Smith 1996, 1999). The purpose here is to highlight the Kuranda and Yuendumu results using the Australian aggregate data as a benchmark. The results based on census data illustrate some of the difficulties faced by census collectors in placing the reality of Indigenous domestic arrangements within census operational definitions. The household arrangements are not always easily translated into census concepts (see Ch. 2, and Daly and Smith 1996 for a fuller discussion of issues related to the application of census definitions to Indigenous families and households). Another issue is the high rate of non-response to some of the questions in particular locations which raises questions about the representativeness of the collected data.

The statistical comparisons presented here are designed to provide two benchmarks. The first comparison is between the indicators for Indigenous people in Kuranda and Yuendumu, and the national Indigenous figures. This will give some indication of how representative the results from the case studies may be for developing policy at the national level. The second comparison is between Indigenous and other Australians in each of these locations. This comparison is important for several reasons. It highlights the similarities and differences between Indigenous people and others in the same location. This may have important implications for service delivery. For example, if the non-Indigenous population is highly educated and the Indigenous population is not, information about changes in the delivery of welfare services needs to be presented in different ways to the two groups. Where a letter may suffice for educated people, it will be less effective for people with minimal literacy skills.

The comparison between Indigenous and other people in these two locations, particularly at Yuendumu, is between groups living in very different circumstances. The non-Indigenous people in Yuendumu have mainly come from elsewhere to work there, but the Indigenous people are 'locals'. While the labour market may be restricted at Yuendumu, the fact that there are jobs there, currently occupied by non-Indigenous people, suggests that in the long term there is a possibility for more Indigenous employment in Yuendumu

than is currently observed. The comparison between Indigenous and other Australians in a particular location standardises for their current location in a way that comparisons between Indigenous Australians at Yuendumu and Kuranda and the national figures for all Australians does not.

Population, families, and children

The Australian Indigenous population is on average younger than the rest of the Australian population. Table 6.1 shows that this is also true for the Indigenous populations of Kuranda and Yuendumu, although to a lesser extent. About one-third of the Indigenous population in these two places was less than 15 years old, a much higher proportion than among the non-Indigenous population. Offsetting this was the much smaller share of the Indigenous populations who were over 65 years of age.

Table 6.1 **Age distribution of population for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996**

Age (yrs)	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	Australia	Kuranda	Yuendumu	Australia	Kuranda	Yuendumu
	% (1)	% (2)	% (3)	% (4)	% (5)	% (6)
0–14	40.1	34.5	31.8	21.3	16.4	22.3
15–44	46.8	51.2	46.8	45.5	48.8	54.5
45–64	10.4	10.3	16.1	21.2	24.3	18.2
65+	2.6	3.9	5.3	11.9	10.5	5.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	352,970	203	607	16,874,456	420	121

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

There are also important differences between Indigenous and other Australians in the types of families in which they live. At a national level, Indigenous families were more likely to be one-parent families and to include children than is the case for other Australian families (Table 6.2, cols 1 and 2). One-parent families were particularly significant in Kuranda, where they accounted for about one-third of Indigenous families.

The share of non-Indigenous families in Kuranda who were sole parent families was also higher than the national average (Table 6.2, cols 3 and 4). In contrast, the 1996 Census recorded a slightly smaller percentage of one-parent families in the total of Indigenous families at Yuendumu. About half the Indigenous families in Yuendumu were couple families with children, the largest share in any category.

**Table 6.2 Family type for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian families:
Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996**

Family type	Australia		Kuranda		Yuendumu	
	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.
	% (1)	% (2)	% (3)	% (4)	% (5)	% (6)
Couple:						
with children	49.4	49.6	55.9	39.3	51.2	38.5
without children	18.4	34.5	11.8	33.3	20.8	61.5
Total couples	67.9	84.0	67.6	72.6	72.0	100.0
One parent	29.6	14.2	32.4	24.8	25.6	0.0
Other family	2.6	1.8	0.0	2.6	2.4	0.0
Total families (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total no. of families	88,366	4,567,553	34	117	125	13

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

Table 6.3 shows that among all females, the median number of children ever born did not differ greatly between Indigenous and other Australian females (col. 6), but in each age category Indigenous females had given birth to more children. There were however, larger differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Kuranda and Yuendumu. The median Indigenous female in Kuranda and Yuendumu had given birth to more children than her non-Indigenous counterpart.

Table 6.3 Median number of children ever born for Indigenous and non-Indigenous females: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996

	Age of mother (years)					Total
	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55 +	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
Australia						
Indigenous	0.6	2.5	3.3	3.8	4.7	2.4
Non-Indigenous	0.6	1.4	2.6	2.8	3.1	2.3
Kuranda						
Indigenous	1.0	3.0	3.0	1.0	6.1	2.4
Non-Indigenous	0.7	1.0	2.0	2.1	4.1	1.8
Yuendumu						
Indigenous	1.7	2.4	4.1	3.9	2.5	2.8
Non-Indigenous	0.5	0.7	3.1	2.1	3.1	1.4

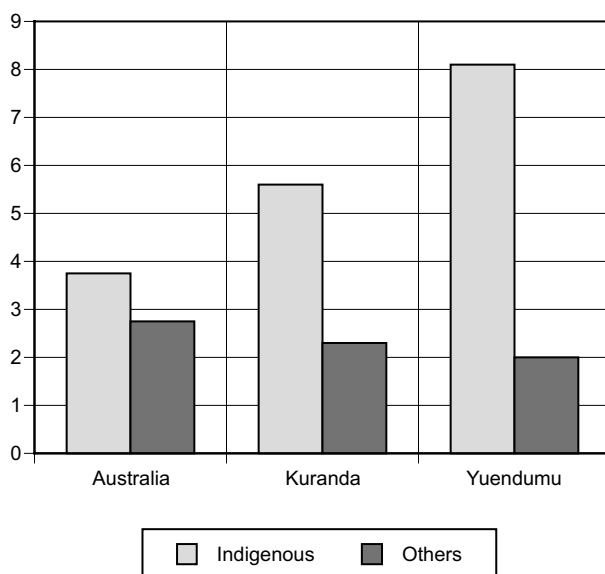
Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

The particular problems associated with young motherhood, identified in the two case studies, are reflected in the census data. The data for Kuranda and Yuendumu show more births for 15–24 year old Indigenous females than the Australian Indigenous figure and more births than among their non-Indigenous counterparts. The differences were also quite marked among the 25–34 year old females in each location.

Housing and tenure type

There were more people living in the average Indigenous dwelling than in the average non-Indigenous dwelling. This was true at the national level for each of the categories of dwellings identified in Fig. 6.1, and the contrast was even greater for Kuranda and Yuendumu. The average Indigenous dwelling in Kuranda had 5.6 people living there compared with 2.3 for the non-Indigenous dwellings. In Yuendumu the difference was even greater, with 8.1 people per Indigenous dwelling and 2.0 per non-Indigenous dwelling.

Fig. 6.1 Average number of persons per dwelling, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996



Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

These larger numbers in part reflect the fact that it was more common for two or three Indigenous families to share a dwelling and there were fewer lone person households (Table 6.4). Once again, these tendencies were particularly pronounced in Kuranda and Yuendumu. In each of these locations, no lone person dwellings were recorded among the Indigenous population while lone person households accounted for 29 per cent of non-Indigenous households in Kuranda and 42 per cent in Yuendumu. Eighteen per cent of Indigenous dwellings had more than one family living in them in Kuranda, as did 52 per cent of dwellings in Yuendumu (Table 6.5, cols 3 and 5).

Table 6.4 Number of families per dwelling: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996.

Household type	Australia		Kuranda		Yuendumu	
	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.
	%	%	%	%	%	%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Family households:						
Two families	5.1	1.1	17.9	1.9	38.7	0.0
Three families	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.3	0.0
Total	86.6	76.0	100.0	71.0	100.0	57.7
Non-family households:						
Lone person	13.4	24.0	0.0	29.0	0.0	42.3
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of dwellings	94,931	5,920,884	28	162	75	26

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

Education

Tables 6.5–7 present some interesting contrasts between Kuranda and Yuendumu in terms of education levels and English language ability. According to the 1996 Census, most Indigenous Australians speak only English, and a small percentage (3.3 per cent) are described as speaking English ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’ (Table 6.5). In Kuranda, the percentage who spoke only English was even larger than the national average, 98 per cent. The data for Yuendumu tell a very different story which has important implications for service delivery. According to the census, only 2.5 per cent of Indigenous people spoke only English and 71 per cent were reported to speak English ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’.

These differences in English language proficiency may be partially related to the differences in age on leaving school between the two communities. Table 6.6 shows the generally recognised fact that Indigenous people tend to leave school at a younger age than other Australians (cols 1 and 2).

Indigenous people in Kuranda were more likely to have stayed at school until the age of 17 or over than Indigenous Australians nationally, but in Yuendumu it was unusual for an Indigenous person to have stayed at school past the age of 16 years (Table 6.6). While Indigenous people in Kuranda had completed less schooling on average than their non-Indigenous counterparts, the gap was much smaller than in Yuendumu. These differences may have important implications for service delivery in Yuendumu where an assumption of widespread functional literacy in English may be inappropriate.

Very few Indigenous people in either of these locations had a post-secondary qualification (see Table 6.7). However, given responses to the census question on age at leaving school, it appears likely that some of those in Kuranda whose qualifications were ‘not stated’ were in fact qualified at this level.³⁶

Table 6.5 English language proficiency, Indigenous Australians aged 5 years and over: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996

	Australia %	Kuranda %	Yuendumu %
Language proficiency:	(1)	(2)	(3)
English only	85.2	98.2	2.5
Indigenous language & English ^a	11.5	1.8	26.3
Limited/no English ^b	3.3	0.0	71.2
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total no.	281,787	165	486

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

- Notes: a. Answered that they spoke English well or very well.
b. Answered that they spoke English not well or not at all.

Table 6.6 Age on leaving school for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996

Age	Australia		Kuranda		Yuendumu	
	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.
	% (1)	% (2)	% (3)	% (4)	% (5)	% (6)
15 years and under	44.2	35.7	42.0	29.3	20.4	22.1
16 years	22.9	20.3	17.9	20.4	58.1	19.8
17 years	13.9	20.9	16.1	21.9	7.9	33.7
18–19yrs	9.2	17.2	13.4	24.6	5.7	20.9
Still at school	6.7	5.1	10.7	3.0	7.9	3.5
Never attended school	3.1	0.7	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total no.	191,012	12,665,060	112	338	265	86

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

Table 6.7 Highest qualification held for Indigenous and other Australians aged 15 years and over: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996

Qualification held	Australia		Kuranda		Yuendumu	
	Indigenous (1)	Non-Indig. (2)	Indigenous (3)	Non-Indig. (4)	Indigenous (5)	Non-Indig. (6)
University degree ^a	2.3	12.0	0.0	13.4	1.8	46.4
Diploma ^b	2.5	7.0	0.0	10.8	2.4	9.6
Vocational ^c	7.4	15.5	0.0	15.1	0.0	9.5
Not qualified	87.7	65.5	100.0	60.6	95.9	34.5
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total no.	184,036	11,981,250	110	297	338	84

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

- Notes: a. University degrees includes all post-graduate degrees and diplomas and bachelors degrees.
b. Diploma includes undergraduate diploma and associate diploma.
c. Vocational includes skilled and basic vocational qualifications.

Labour force status

Table 6.8 contrasts the labour force status of Indigenous people in Yuendumu and Kuranda. The unemployment rate was well below the national average, at 4 per cent in Yuendumu and 15 per cent in Kuranda compared with a national Indigenous average of 23 per cent. However, this result is probably partially attributable to the large proportion of Indigenous people in these two communities who were considered to be outside the labour force: 54 per cent in Kuranda and 77 per cent in Yuendumu. The census data have not recorded any CDEP workers for Kuranda where there is in fact an active CDEP scheme in operation, and it is not clear in which category those working on the CDEP scheme have been recorded. The Yuendumu count probably also underestimates the number of CDEP participants, given the small percentage of males recorded by the census as employed in CDEP.

Among males, there was a sharp contrast between Indigenous and other Australians in the proportion who were in employment in both Kuranda and Yuendumu. Employment was the major activity for non-Indigenous males in these two locations, while Indigenous males were more likely to be outside the labour force in Yuendumu than in employment. They were equally likely to be outside the labour force as in employment in Kuranda. The labour market which does exist in these two communities operates very differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous males.

There were also significant differences in the share of females in employment among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in both Yuendumu and Kuranda. Only 32 per cent of Indigenous females in Kuranda and 18 per cent in Yuendumu were in employment compared with 60 per cent and 79 per cent respectively of non-Indigenous females. The majority of Indigenous females were outside the labour force.

Table 6.8 Labour force status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, 15 years and over: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996

	Australia		Kuranda		Yuendumu	
	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.
	%	%	%	%	%	%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Males						
In the labour force						
Employed: CDEP ^a	7.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0
Employed: Other ^b	40.2	65.1	46.4	61.6	24.4	79.2
Unemployed	15.7	7.0	7.2	9.1	1.8	6.3
Total (%)	63.8	72.0	53.6	70.7	28.0	85.4
Not in the labour force	36.2	28.0	46.4	29.3	72.0	14.6
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unemployment rate ^c	0.25	0.10	0.14	0.13	0.14	0.07
Total (no.)	96,438	6,452,730	69	164	164	48
Females						
In the labour force						
Employed: CDEP ^a	4.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Employed: Other ^b	29.7	49.3	31.7	59.9	18.4	78.6
Unemployed	8.6	4.4	6.7	6.6	0.0	0.0
Total (%)	42.6	53.7	38.3	66.5	18.4	78.6
Not in the labour force	57.4	46.3	61.7	33.5	81.6	21.4
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Unemployment rate ^c	0.20	0.08	0.17	0.10	0.0	0.0
Total (no.)	105,651	6,711,156	60	182	212	42

Table 6.8 Labour force status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, 15 years and over: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996 (continued)

	Australia		Kuranda		Yuendumu	
	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.	Indigenous	Non-Indig.
	%	%	%	%	%	%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Persons						
In the labour force						
Employed: CDEP ^a	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0
Employed: Other ^b	34.7	57.0	39.5	60.7	21.0	78.9
Unemployed	12.0	5.6	7.0	7.8	0.8	3.3
Total (%)	52.7	62.7	46.5	68.5	22.6	82.2
Not in the labour force	47.3	37.3	53.5	31.5	77.4	17.8
Unemployment rate ^c	0.23	0.09	0.15	0.11	0.04	0.04
Total (no.)	202,089	13,163,886	129	346	376	90

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

- Notes: a. Community Development Employment Projects scheme.
b. CDEP data were collected in the Census for the first time in 1996. As no specific question was asked to determine CDEP employment, these data should be interpreted cautiously: their reliability is variable.
c. Includes all other employed persons.

Family and household income

The final table (6.9) of census-based data relates to family and household incomes. At the national level, median family income for Indigenous Australians was 69 per cent of the median for other Australians. Given the larger family size for Indigenous families, this means fewer resources per individual. In Kuranda, the median Indigenous family had an income close to that of their non-Indigenous counterparts. This reflected, however, the low income among non-Indigenous people in Kuranda. In Yuendumu, the ratio was close to the national average.

The second line of Table 6.9 relates to household incomes. According to census data, median Indigenous household incomes in Kuranda were higher than for their non-Indigenous counterparts. This reflects the larger number of people in an Indigenous household (see Fig. 6.1). In Yuendumu, however, the much larger number of people in an Indigenous household was not sufficient to raise median household income for Indigenous households above that of their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Table 6.9 Median incomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous families and households: Australia, Kuranda, Yuendumu, 1996

	Australia			Kuranda			Yuendumu		
	Indig.	Other	Ratio	Indig.	Other	Ratio	Indig.	Other	Ratio
	(1)	(2)	1/2 (3)	(4)	(5)	4/5 (6)	(7)	(8)	7/8 (9)
Family	\$512.4	\$742.0	0.69	\$685.3	\$706.1	0.97	\$699.5	\$1033.0	0.68
Household	\$540.3	\$631.7	0.86	\$789.1	\$563.0	1.40	\$999.0	\$1024.9	0.97
Average no. per dwelling	3.7	2.7		5.6	2.3		8.1	2.0	

Source: ABS Population Census 1996.

Aggregate data on income support

The following tables (6.10–12) present results derived from Centrelink administrative data for Indigenous and other Australians. When applying for income support, Centrelink clients are given the option of identifying as being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and it is on the basis of this choice that people are included in the Indigenous or non-Indigenous totals.

A comparison of Centrelink data with that from other sources suggests that there is some under-counting of Indigenous Australians, particularly among some groups. This may reflect the significance of Indigenous status for different pensions and benefits. For example, there are no particular benefits attached to Indigenous aged pensioners so individuals may be less inclined to identify than in the case of an application for a New Start Allowance where Indigenous people may be eligible for special assistance.

Table 6.10 presents a breakdown of the share in total payments by the types of benefits received for Indigenous and other Australians for 1999, for postcodes 0872 (Yuendumu) and 4872 (Kuranda). The results are calculated as the percentage of the total, both males and females, who fall into each category for Indigenous and other Australians. It is possible for one person to be receiving more than one payment, for example Parenting Payment Single (PPS) and Family Allowance (FPG and FPM) and in this table they will be counted twice. The table shows that females are more likely to be in receipt of a payment than are males. The results highlight the importance of family payments (both FPG and FPM) in the total for Indigenous people. There is also a striking contrast between the importance of the Age Pension for non-Indigenous Australians, particularly females, and Indigenous Australians.

There are some interesting differences between the national figures and those for Kuranda and Yuendumu. Disability pensions (DSP) accounted for 21 per cent of all benefits for Indigenous people in Kuranda compared with the Australian and Yuendumu shares of 3 per cent each. The Family Tax Payment accounted for over one-third of all benefits for

Table 6.10 Proportion of recipients of income support by benefit and pension type: Australia, Yuendumu, and Kuranda, 1999

Benefit ^b	Australia						Postcode 0872 ^a (Yuendumu)						Postcode 4872 ^a (Kuranda)					
	Indigenous			Non-Indig.			Indigenous			Non-Indig.			Indigenous			Non-Indig.		
	Female	Male	%	Female	Male	%	Female	Male	%	Female	Male	%	Female	Male	%	Female	Male	%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
AGE	2.46	1.32	17.08	9.77	8.40	4.26	3.80	1.60	1.76	1.94	11.94	9.31						
CDA	1.21	0.05	1.55	0.04	0.44		0.24		0.53	0.00	0.51	0.02						
DSP	3.26	4.69	3.08	5.60	2.90	3.30	0.65	2.67	20.99	4.41	2.55	6.12						
FPG	25.18	1.76	13.27	0.69	16.30	2.13	55.64	3.21	22.05	1.41	17.79	1.26						
FPM	3.91	0.13	12.90	0.29	4.09	0.16	6.53	0.18	2.29	0.00	9.21	0.20						
FTA	23.40	1.49	13.31	0.65	35.35	0.96	7.19	0.42	18.87	1.41	17.35	1.22						
NSA	2.86	5.98	1.97	4.18	4.68	0.63	0.36	0.53	1.06	3.35	2.00	3.30						
PPP	6.69	0.27	9.33	0.45	6.25	1.03	12.77	2.14	7.41	0.00	8.56	1.06						
PPS	14.09	1.23	5.47	0.37	8.89	0.23	1.96	0.12	11.29	1.23	6.95	0.67						
Total %	100.00 (col.1+2)		100.00 (col.3+4)		100.00 (col.5+6)		100.00 (col.7+8)		100.00 (col.9+10)		100.00 (col.11+12)							

Source: Centrelink data.

Notes: a. Postcode-level data include wider geographic areas than those covered by the Yuendumu and Kuranda community profiles in the census.

b. The abbreviations in the table are for the following pensions and benefits: Age = Age Pension; CDA = Child Disability Allowance; DSP = Disability Pension; FPG = Family Payment (greater than minimum); FPM = Family Payment (minimum); FTA = Family Tax Payment; NSA = New Start Allowance; PPP = Parenting Payment Partnered; PPS = Parenting Payment Single.

Indigenous people in Yuendumu, well above the share in the Australian total of 25 per cent for males and females combined. In both Yuendumu and Kuranda the share of benefits going to Indigenous males in the form of New Start Allowance (NSA) was much lower than the Australian share, reflecting the importance of the CDEP scheme in each of these locations. This was also true for each of the age breakdowns, those aged 15–29 years and 30–59 years.

The duration of individuals' receipt of benefits was concentrated in the '12 months and over' category for most categories of benefit for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The exception was for NSA where about half the recipients had been on the benefit for more than 12 months. The other, shorter, durations of benefit receipt were associated with new types of benefit. This is because Centrelink re-estimates an individual's duration of receipt of a benefit from the commencement of any newly introduced benefit type (including each time the name of a benefit changes).

Tables 6.11 and 6.12 relate to alternative sources of income for those on welfare benefits. In most categories, non-Indigenous Australians were more likely to have additional sources of income than Indigenous Australians. This was particularly in evidence for recipients of NSA. The largest difference between Indigenous people and their non-Indigenous counterparts was among male recipients of NSA in Kuranda where over half of non-Indigenous male recipients had additional income to their welfare income compared with 10.5 per cent of Indigenous males. A very small percentage of all Parenting Payment Single recipients were recorded as having other income sources.

The average additional income received by pension and benefit type is presented in Table 6.12. For the age and disability pensions the incomes are annual figures, and for the benefits they are fortnightly figures. They show males typically having a higher additional income than females in the same benefit type, and non-Indigenous people typically with a higher income than Indigenous people in the same group.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter has presented data from the 1996 Census and Centrelink administrative data relating to the economic and welfare status of Indigenous Australian families and households in Kuranda and Yuendumu. The results show similarities between these particular locations and the national aggregates. Indigenous Australians tend to live in larger households, have more children, be less educated, and have lower family and household incomes than their non-Indigenous counterparts. There are, however, some interesting differences between Kuranda and Yuendumu which confirm the household questionnaire data summarised in Chapter 5, and which have important implications for policy and service delivery. Among these are the larger number of people per Indigenous dwelling in Yuendumu, and the much lower level of English proficiency. The implications of these issues for policy and service delivery will be discussed further in the concluding chapters.

Table 6.11 Share of benefit and pension recipients with income other than welfare income: Australia, Yuendumu, and Kuranda postcodes, 1999

Benefit	Females		Males	
	Non Indig. %	Indigenous %	Non Indig. %	Indigenous %
Australia				
Age	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
CDA	7.5	9.0	10.5	8.2
DSP	4.9	2.4	4.4	2.1
FPG	14.6	8.5	13.2	8.7
FPM	2.9	6.6	5.9	9.4
FTA	17.2	10.0	16.6	11.0
NSA	35.4	9.5	25.7	8.5
PPP	4.1	2.0	6.5	3.4
PPS	1.2	0.6	0.9	1.6
Yuendumu postcode				
Age	3.1	2.5	7.4	2.2
CDA	n/a	0.0	0.0	0.0
DSP	25.0	4.1	2.9	1.9
FPG	7.6	3.9	0.0	5.6
FPM	4.5	7.4	0.0	14.3
FTA	11.6	4.8	0.0	9.8
NSA	0.0	1.5	44.4	17.2
PPP	1.9	1.1	0.0	0.0
PPS	0.0	0.3	0.0	10.0
Kuranda postcode				
Age	1.3	10.0	1.5	0.0
CDA	3.8	0.0	0.0	n/a
DSP	1.5	0.0	1.9	0.0
FPG	14.5	4.8	6.3	12.5
FPM	2.8	15.4	0.0	n/a
FTA	16.1	6.5	8.1	12.5
NSA	51.0	33.3	55.4	10.5
PPP	6.2	4.8	1.9	n/a
PPS	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Centrelink data.

Table 6.12 Average income from additional income sources for recipients of pensions and benefits: Australia, Yuendumu, and Kuranda postcodes, 1999

Benefit	Females		Males	
	Non Indig. \$	Indigenous \$	Non Indig. \$	Indigenous \$
Australia				
Age	8600	9939	8017	11,214
CDA	406	307	681	199
DSP	8338	5517	9254	11,440
FPG	403	429	515	374
FPM	762	490	960	651
FTA	447	448	567	394
NSA	394	365	502	545
PPP	154	268	249	191
PPS	273	294	456	343
Yuendumu postcode				
Age	1325	4757	15432	7796
CDA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
DSP	14340	3509	6765	9378
FPG	261	359	0	162
FPM	807	687	0	273
FTA	401	400	0	176
NSA	0	175	231	273
PPP	30	394	0	0
PPS	0	110	0	173
Kuranda postcode				
Age	2756	2956	5724	0
CDA	113	0	0	n/a
DSP	4626	0	3604	0
FPG	280	188	128	468
FPM	280	188	128	468
FTA	323	236	103	468
NSA	212	143	597	95
PPP	212	143	597	95
PPS	163	0	0	0

Source: Centrelink data.

7. Service delivery issues: Key implications and initiatives

Diane Smith

Introduction

The community-based research has identified a number of factors and issues relevant to enhancing the delivery of services to Indigenous families with children. This chapter draws out the key implications of the research findings for Centrelink service delivery at the regional and national levels, and summarises the range of possible initiatives discussed in earlier chapters. These have relevance for remote and rural communities and should be piloted. The research project has not included an urban community and the relevance of implications and initiatives discussed here would need to be assessed through further research in such a location.

Overall, the research concludes there will be a major dilemma for Centrelink and DFACS in attempting to implement government services and policy which increasingly emphasise getting people *off* welfare into paid employment. The transition from welfare to work undoubtedly continues to be a critical social policy issue for Indigenous Australians and government. However, the community research presented here reports that some people are still not aware of their basic welfare entitlements, or of the availability of adjunct services. Ironically, there remains much work still to do in informing people about their basic entitlement rights; in actually getting some of them *on to* appropriate welfare payments. The dilemma for service deliverers and policy makers can be starkly expressed in terms of opposing pressures—to get people off welfare into work, at the same time as needing to enhance their equitable access to welfare. The dilemma in many remote and rural regions, where there are no viable or accessible labour markets, is that once on welfare Indigenous welfare recipients are then unlikely to make any permanent transition into work.

A continuing critical issue for Centrelink then, at both national and regional levels, will be how to improve welfare service delivery and outcomes for people on the ground, in the context of these pressures. This research suggests Centrelink service delivery should attempt to progressively pilot and adopt strategies to facilitate the implementation of more culturally-informed delivery mechanisms. These strategies will need to be based on both the diversity of circumstances amongst Indigenous families, and on their underlying common characteristics as described in this research. But the research also suggests that these strategies be tempered by the need for workable, feasible, and coordinated service delivery. For example, a number of the issues noted by the research as impacting on its service delivery lie outside of Centrelink's immediate area of responsibility and will require a holistic and coordinated approach across government agencies.

At the two regional office levels, it is clear that Centrelink is already making important attempts to secure more effective outcomes by tailoring service delivery to the needs and circumstances of their Indigenous customers. If such progress is to continue, this research suggests, further strategies will need to be developed which achieve a difficult balance between criteria of:

- cultural relevance;
- individual and family entitlement rights;
- equitable access and delivery standards;
- overall community development needs;
- administrative workability and cost efficiency; and
- securing enhanced service and economic outcomes for Indigenous customers on the ground.

Key options and recommendations with respect to the above service delivery issues are outlined below. Many will require the parallel facilitation of specific policy frameworks, and these are canvassed in Chapter 8.

Structured decentralisation of service delivery

One lesson arising from the research is that a single service delivery style under one umbrella policy framework (the 'one size fits all' approach) will not suit all Indigenous welfare clients. If Centrelink is to develop more effective and integrated approaches to delivering welfare services to Indigenous families with children, a service delivery model is needed which actively facilitates the capacity of regional service deliverers to customise services and strategies flexibly in order to respond to local cultural, economic, and geographic realities.

At the regional level of this research, Centrelink CSCs have been attempting to customise service delivery to improve outcomes for Indigenous clients. Sanders (1999) has noted that regional Centrelink offices in other regions likewise attempt to implement program guidelines and criteria in a way that is suited to differing local Indigenous circumstances. The community research presented here suggests that this Centrelink capacity to tailor or customise service delivery is critical for Indigenous clients whose locational, social, cultural, and economic characteristics necessitate different service delivery responses. The research conclusions suggest that more substantial refinements may be needed to facilitate such responsive service delivery.

The service delivery issues raised in this monograph indicate the need for greater organisational decentralisation at the regional level than currently exists in Centrelink (see also Sanders 1999: 124–6: his investigation of breach rates led him to suggest similar options). A model for decentralisation would most appropriately be focused on the regional level, based on organisational devolution of service delivery to a sub-regional level. An operational model for decentralisation would minimally need to address the different

factors influencing town-based, outlying hinterland, and remote community service delivery, including the geographic distribution of the welfare client base; the distribution of payment uptake amongst clients; and customers' broad characteristics (such as their broad demographic profile, literacy and English-speaking levels).

For more effective delivery of services to remote community customers, a sub-regional organisational structure could be developed along similar lines to those that have developed over time for Indigenous outstations; that is, a major regional community would act as a Centrelink service provider for its own residents as well as for a specified sub-regional group of other surrounding communities (see Altman et al. 1998 for an evaluation of outstation development trends). That community would operate as a satellite office linked administratively to a Centrelink regional CSC via its own welfare community database, and receive supervision, program support, field visits, and a rotation of staff from the regional CSC. The model being advocated does not mean that every community would have its own Centrelink structure; rather decentralisation would be established on the basis of identifying major sub-regional geographic areas that would support efficiencies of scale and localised delivery of services.

The advantage of the model is that decentralisation could be progressively implemented, with services organisationally devolved to satellite community offices in a structured way across a region, and with satellite offices linked administratively back to a central regional office that would retain management and program authority. Cost disadvantages associated with diseconomies of small scale would need to be tempered by establishing limits to the extent of decentralisation and by selecting major communities to service a sub-set of others. Proposals for the piloting of a structured decentralisation model have been put forward in Chapter 3 for the Central Australian region, but the model may have wider potential for application in other Centrelink regions.

Decentralisation implies a degree of organisational restructuring and staff reassignment. An integral component of the model will be the need to substantially reform and upgrade the operation of the existing Community Agent Program used by Centrelink (see below). Sub-regional satellite offices could be staffed either by CSC officers on rotation or local community agents. The model would also require DFACS policy facilitation and up-front investment, but the potential benefits could include:

- more effective delivery of services to remote community populations;
- the acquisition of more accurate knowledge of Indigenous community and individual client circumstances;
- more accurate and up-to-date assessments of customer entitlements;
- more effective evaluation of customers' changing life circumstances for payment purposes;
- a lower administrative workload associated with the decreased need for proof of identity, cheque reissuing, breach-rate surveillance, debt recovery; and
- potential cost efficiencies for Centrelink.

The recommended model of decentralisation broadly outlined here emphasises the need for Centrelink regional offices to be able to customise service delivery to achieve more equitable and effective outcomes. This discretionary customisation could include a capacity for regional Centrelink CSCs, in conjunction with staff from satellite community offices, to negotiate frameworks for mutual obligation agreements. These frameworks could operate as regional and community benchmarks for the consistent and appropriate application of any new mutual obligation guidelines, within which individual circumstances and requirements should be carefully negotiated.

Welfare Service Transaction Centres and the coordination of service delivery

The research findings at the community level consistently identify the continuing failure of government at all levels to coordinate the delivery of welfare related services to Indigenous people. This problem of coordination is not new. It is one specifically identified by DFACS as a key imperative whereby the 'complex and unique needs' of Indigenous Australians demand a 'collaborative approach' to the development of 'seamless connections across government programs and services that respond to priorities as identified by communities' (Commonwealth of Australia 1999: 72). The creation of such seamless connections, whether they be between levels of government, or between government and Indigenous agencies and communities, has long been a seemingly unobtainable goal in Indigenous affairs. Nevertheless, it should continue to lie at the heart of any welfare reform agenda.

The research findings presented in this monograph suggest one option with considerable potential in this area; namely, the trial establishment of Welfare Service Transaction Centres (WSTCs) in selected communities. The purpose of a WSTC would be to provide a base for a wide range of government departments delivering welfare-related services, giving them the opportunity to have agents or staff on location, or a base from which to make regular scheduled visits. It would not only provide the physical location from which visiting officers could perform their business, but would enable them to liaise actively with each other at the community level, as well as build up a better understanding of individual customers and their community circumstances. A WSTC would preferably be housed in the offices of a community organisation and operate under joint community and Centrelink management.

From the community perspective, a WSTC would provide a single service 'window' from which residents could obtain a wide range of assistance and information. Centrelink could provide key service transactions and support through the WSTC, including:

- the conduct of interviews to assess life-event factors for entitlements;
- the assessment and review of entitlements;
- assistance to customers in applying for payments and dealing with correspondence;
- negotiation of community-wide and individual mutual obligation agreements; and
- the assessment of other welfare-related service needs such as training, child care, aged care support etc.

The cost of establishing and maintaining a community WSTC could be jointly funded by local community councils and relevant government departments including Centrelink and DFACS. This initiative would be entirely consistent with the Federal Government's recent call for a greater level of coordination in the delivery of welfare services to Indigenous Australians (Commonwealth of Australia 1999). There is also the opportunity to link this proposal with new government program initiatives and funding: for example via the Government's recently launched 'Stronger Families and Communities Strategy' and its component 'Local Solutions to Local Problems Program' which affords the possibility of securing funding to 'convert unused buildings into community facilities' (Commonwealth of Australia 2000). Another potential linkage could be made with a recent government program initiative which has provided up to \$70 million over a five-year period to establish up to 500 Rural Transaction Centres in rural areas (Westbury 1999).

These Rural Transaction Centres will provide services such as personal banking, elements of business banking, postal services, Medicare claims, and phone and fax facilities. Later services to be added include Job Network, Internet, and Centrelink. It is envisaged that local communities will run these centres themselves, or as a small business. The program started to be phased in during 1999, with \$3 million for capital and maintenance to enable start up.

It is recommended that DFACS and Centrelink facilitate piloting the establishment of a WSTC with a remote and rural community, with the objective of securing and testing improved coordination of service delivery and outcomes on the ground.

Community-level service delivery: The role of agents

The research conclusions suggest that the Centrelink community agent system as it currently operates is flawed, creating potential cost inefficiencies for Centrelink and delivering a sub-standard level of service to Indigenous customers. It is recommended that the Community Agents program be comprehensively reviewed (see also Sanders 1999).

To work effectively, major changes need to be made to the recruitment, training, supervision, and employment of agents. Possible options for reform highlighted by this research include:

- replacing the current procedure, whereby agents are nominated by local community councils, with an application and interview-driven process where Centrelink selects the most qualified person for the job;
- upgrading the employment status of agents so they become directly employed under contract as Centrelink staff;
- providing agents with specified duties and supervision in accordance with formalised responsibilities outlined in a community contract; and
- providing agents with periodic training and updates on payment and administrative changes, and with work experience rotation into their regional CSC office.

For this purpose, one option would be for Centrelink to develop and pilot an Agent Training Module, possibly as a cooperative project in a region with local training providers and community organisations. In conjunction with this, Centrelink could also develop a written and electronic Agent's Manual of administrative procedures and guidelines which should be easy to follow, be periodically upgraded as administrative changes occur, and tackle the realities of service delivery in remote areas.

The duties of a community agent under contract to Centrelink could emphasise their role as a community welfare case-worker; with responsibility to:

- elicit the relevant information needed to implement Centrelink's new life-events approach to servicing, by which people's welfare entitlements can be properly assessed;
- audit the extent of coverage of payments in the community;
- assist clients with the application and review processes;
- manage welfare-related databases and documents;
- assume key responsibility for the effective local delivery of services within the community; and
- provide accurate program and service information to customers and the Centrelink CSC.

The new life-events customer service model already being adopted by Centrelink has the capacity to overcome some of the problematic areas for Indigenous customers identified by this research. First, it could reduce the number of incompletely or incorrectly filled out forms and thereby deliver a more efficient service to customers as well as a cost saving to Centrelink. Second, it will help address the apparent under-coverage of particular payment types. Third, Indigenous people's receipt of their welfare entitlements will be based on a more accurate assessment of their actual life circumstances instead of presupposing what type of payment they should be receiving. Properly trained community agents could play a key role in facilitating this procedure at the local level.

Community-level service delivery: Information and technology

There are constant demands upon Indigenous welfare recipients to understand and respond to complex correspondence from various government agencies about welfare-related matters, to provide documents, and to substantiate their identification. This causes great frustration for them and for Centrelink staff involved in the additional workload of reproducing or confirming the status of various welfare documents.

Arguably, there are cost efficiencies and short and long term benefits to be gained by developing more effective information, technology, and communication strategies at the community level. The research has raised a number of possible options to facilitate this:

- Centrelink should consider piloting the establishment of a community 'welfare data management system'. The database should be computer-based and contain the relevant data for all local welfare recipients. Privacy criteria should be maintained in a manner standard for other Centrelink data systems, and technology should be regularly updated. Such a data system could be operated either by contracted community agents or by a permanent Centrelink staff member residing in the community.
- Centrelink needs to equip community agents' offices with computers and network them into its CSC administrative system with the relevant mechanisms for ensuring confidentiality of information employed in all Centrelink data systems. This would allow agents, who should be employed as Centrelink staff (see above), to access main administrative databases, aiding the more efficient completion of forms and correspondence.

Community-level service delivery: Ongoing communication

The development and implementation of public education strategies to inform remote community populations about their welfare service options and entitlements remains a continuing challenge for Centrelink and DFACS.

The differences evident between the capacities and skills of respondents in the two community studies indicate that levels of competence in English and of literacy, complicated forms and correspondence, and lack of knowledge about various payment options are critical factors determining the extent to which Indigenous people are able to secure an equitable level of access to Centrelink services. Difficulties are compounded by the demographic, geographic, and culturally-based factors described in this research. Many people are still unaware of recent changes to payments.

It is important that further initiatives are piloted to address the very real problems encountered by some Indigenous customers as a result of their low levels of literacy and proficiency in English. Explanation of the continuing changes in welfare payment packaging and program guidelines would be greatly enhanced if Centrelink developed a media advertising campaign (including locally relevant language segments) to be aired on regional Indigenous media outlets.

The research also indicates that the application process needs to be streamlined for Indigenous clients by the introduction of a less complex, 'all-in-one' claim form. Such a single claim form could be trialed for use with both remote and town-based rural and remote customers.

The form could be based on (and support) the life-events model currently being developed within Centrelink. Instead of filling out different claim forms for different potential entitlements, a customer would give his or her details to Centrelink at an initial interview where a remote area claim would be compiled. A comprehensive evaluation of their entitlement and intensive assistance needs, assessed on the information provided, could then be made by Centrelink. Once such a claim is lodged and activated, further action

would only need to be taken if there was a life-event change (for example, a birth or death, or a transition to employment).

Clearly these event notifications would be more easily obtained at the community level. Such a form would enhance the quality of service provided to remote and rural Indigenous customers, overcome the substantial literacy difficulties encountered by some with current Centrelink application forms and correspondence, and be more cost effective due to minimising associated CSC administrative workloads.

In the interests of promoting more culturally-informed and equitable access to service delivery, and arguably more effective outcomes, Centrelink needs to formulate and implement a framework for the administrative recognition of 'no correspondence' Indigenous clients (see also arguments presented by Sanders 1999).

This service strategy would operate on the basis either of Indigenous customers self-nominating that they want to be classed as a 'no correspondence' client, or by negotiation with a Centrelink agent or staff member. Such a classification would be accorded on the basis of customer characteristics including a low level of literacy, stated difficulties in responding to correspondence and filling out forms, high levels of mobility, and the unreliable postal services operating in many remote communities. As a result of such a classification, a client would be targeted for more intensive face-to-face consultation and communication by staff and agents about key Centrelink decisions and information that directly affect them.

Targeting payments for the care of children: A Kids' Care Card

A key finding of the case study research, and one strongly endorsed by respondents, is the need for DFACS and Centrelink to develop and trial workable solutions to delivering family-related welfare payments that accommodate Indigenous patterns of child-care and the high rates of mobility of children and their parents.

The research also indicates that such a solution should not interfere with the flexibility, dynamism and valued contribution of culturally-based child-care practices. One possible mechanism is for DFACS and Centrelink to trial the development of what is referred to as a 'Kids' Care Card'.

A Kids' Care Card would target a specific child and function as a debit card into which Centrelink would deposit the relevant welfare payments attributable to that child (for example, Family Allowance and components of Parenting Payment Single or a restructured single payment). Each card would have a set number of designated primary carers for a child listed as signatories who could operate the card account. The designated carers would be agreed upon within the child's family. The card would not be operable by a child, though conceivably it could travel with a child as it goes between family carers. Alternatively, it could be safely housed at a community agency where it would be accessible to all signatories when the child is in their care. This is a practice already adopted by many people for other cards and welfare income.

The Kids' Care Card proposed here offers a service delivery mechanism attuned to the dynamic practices of Indigenous child-care. It is not based on hypothetical arrangements for the future care of children. Another advantage from the perspective of both Centrelink and Indigenous customers is that it would require less direct intervention into family affairs by Centrelink. It would operate regardless of the duration of changed arrangements and without distinction needing to be made between classes of carers. Such a card system could arguably also reduce Centrelink's current daily administrative workload in responding to frequent and sometimes vexatious requests for changes of recipient, and to subsequent family complaints about such changes. The option would need to be piloted at the community level.

The service delivery needs of youth and young families

The Indigenous communities surveyed in the research exhibit the same youthful age profiles and high levels of childhood dependency burdens as does the national Indigenous population. This demographic profile will have ramifications over the next decade with the result that younger families, headed by young parents, will continue to form rapidly (Daly and Smith 1995; Gray 1998; Tesfaghiorghis and Gray 1991).

This Indigenous 'baby-boomers' explosion has substantial implications: young families and their children will place increasing demands on welfare service delivery and programs over the forthcoming decade. Improved outcomes in the education, employment, and training of young people, and of young parents in particular, will be a critical factor not only in their own economic wellbeing but also for the children in these young families. If there is a pressure point at which service delivery and policy could most effectively be targeted in order to stem the creation of succeeding generations of Indigenous welfare-dependent recipients, it is young parents.

Not surprisingly, great concern has been expressed by respondents in both communities about the current and future wellbeing of their children and youth. The research identified a particular expressed need for:

- enhanced program and funding support in the areas of housing for young parents and their families;
- improved access to employment and training for young people in their own communities;
- youth workers to provide intensive assistance to young people at the community level; and
- recreational facilities and skills-based activity programs.

A number of these issues are beyond the immediate service responsibilities of Centrelink; others are not. Many are, at heart, community issues that need to be facilitated via local Indigenous organisations. But both DFACS and Centrelink could play an important role in supporting the more effective targeting of services to youth at the regional and

community levels. Again, this implies a greater degree of coordination between levels of government than currently exists.

Constructing an Indigenous component of JET

At the community level, the research evidence points to the failure of the JET program to serve the needs of Indigenous sole parents, to the point that few respondents had even heard of it, let alone participated in a JET-initiated activity.

Indigenous sole parents are the majority of parental types amongst Indigenous families and are substantially disadvantaged (Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b). They will not succeed in overcoming the significant barriers to their transition from welfare to any kind of employment, training, or other form of work, without intensive and early assistance. This assistance needs to be made available from the point at which they first become welfare recipients.

It is recommended that Centrelink develop and pilot an Indigenous component to the JET scheme at the local community level that would be provided via Indigenous organisations (for example, through CDEP organisations or other community-based agencies). These organisations should be provided with funding to operate JET equivalents of training, employment, and work experience to sole parents, in their own communities.

The cost of delivering welfare services to Indigenous families

The research concludes that there are significant difficulties or 'disabilities' encountered by Centrelink regional offices in delivering an equitable and effective standard level of service to Indigenous customers. As a result of such disabilities, the cost per capita is higher for providing the same standard of service to an Indigenous customer as to other Centrelink customers.

Centrelink regional offices need to provide services to Indigenous customers on the basis of 'capacity equalisation'; that is, they must have the financial and human resources capacity to provide services to Indigenous customers at the same standard as that provided to all other customers (where 'standard' equals a national average per capita for a particular service expenditure function). This is the same notion of fiscal capacity equalisation that the Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC) applies to its determination of relativities used to establish the level of general revenue grants provided by the Commonwealth to the State and Territory Governments. Those equalised grants are designed to provide them with an expenditure capacity to deliver a relatively equitable standard of service to their citizens (Smith 1992b). The CGC concept underlying capacity fiscal equalisation is that of 'equality in diversity'; a notion which is very pertinent to the issue of providing and costing equitable service delivery to Indigenous welfare recipients.

There are a number of disability factors which the CGC has identified as having a 'large effect' on the relative capacity of State Governments to provide an equal standard of services to their citizens. The CGC measures such disabilities in order to equalise the differing expenditure

needs of government. Primarily, these disability factors reflect the effects of different characteristics of a client population on the demand for services, and the cost of each unit of service provided. The factors include age, sex, income status, socioeconomic background, English fluency, regional location, service delivery and administrative scale, 'Aboriginality', and a specific 'Aboriginal Community Services' factor which covers the disabilities attached to providing essential services to Indigenous communities. In other words, Aboriginality is used as an additional weight for a State Government's expenditure need, over and above the additional cost disabilities referred to above.

The Queensland, Western Australian and Northern Territory Governments all routinely argue in their submissions to the CGC 'that Indigenous people have use and cost patterns different from non-Indigenous people' (CGC 1999: 76). In many service areas, the CGC estimates that there is an additional expenditure need as a result of the extra cost disabilities associated with providing government services to Indigenous people. In 1999 it recognised, for the first time, the additional costs associated with the provision of family and child welfare services by State and Territory Governments to Indigenous people in remote areas.

The CGC has also accepted that these effects are not uniform, but vary according to the type of service and differences in the characteristics listed above. For this reason, it has routinely applied higher weights to servicing Indigenous people and to those residing in remote and rural areas, where it considers they use services at rates different from those of the rest of the population, or the cost of providing a unit of service to an Indigenous person differs from the cost for the same service to others.

In the context of the present research, similar disabilities have been noted as affecting the expenditure needs of Centrelink regional offices, creating additional costs of delivering welfare services to Indigenous people. These disabilities include:

- the demographic structure of the Indigenous population in both regions (in particular its youthful profile, younger families, larger family size, higher childhood dependency burden, and larger household sizes);
- the different families types represented compared to the wider population (including the larger proportion of sole parent and extended families, and multi-family households);
- social factors (such as low levels of literacy and fluency in English, and poor health);
- the physical environment (including remoteness, which makes transportation, access, and communication more expensive);
- the spatial distribution of the Indigenous population;
- the administrative and service delivery scale;
- the economic environment (high levels of unemployment, low levels of participation in the labour force, low levels of income, and a lack of viable mainstream labour markets); and
- culturally-based patterns of child care and mobility.

A systematic assessment (activity and use-based) of the actual cost disabilities faced by the Cairns and Alice Springs CSC should be carried out, and used as a context in which to evaluate the adequacy of existing funding models to deliver effective services and outcomes to Indigenous families. The corollary of this proposal is that an equitable funding model that takes such disabilities into account should be used by Centrelink nation-wide. The CGC is currently conducting an Indigenous Funding Inquiry (CGC 2000) for the Commonwealth Government which aims to identify and measure the relative needs of Indigenous people in different regions for key services. The findings of this Inquiry may have general relevance to the issues facing Centrelink.

8. Policy issues: Key implications and initiatives

Diane Smith

Introduction

The community-based research has identified a number of factors and issues relevant to enhancing policy formulation in order to improve the delivery of services to Indigenous families with children. This chapter draws out the implications for future policy development, and summarises the range of possible initiatives discussed in earlier chapters. These have relevance for remote and rural communities and should be piloted.

The Federal Government has outlined 'key principles' to 'provide rigour for policymakers' in implementing its current welfare reform agenda. They include:

- maintaining equity, simplicity, transparency, and sustainability;
- establishing better incentives for people receiving social security payments so that work, education, and training are rewarded;
- creating greater opportunities for people to increase self-reliance and capacity-building, rather than simply providing a passive safety net;
- expecting people on income support to help themselves and contribute to society through increased social and economic participation in a framework of mutual obligation; and
- providing choices and support for individuals and families with more tailored assistance that focuses on prevention and early intervention (Newman 1999a, 1999b).

These policy principles for welfare reform need to be systematically considered by DFACS and Centrelink in terms of their implications for tailoring welfare reform for Indigenous families.

Welfare: 'Gammon economy' or safety net entitlement?

It was only as recently as the mid 1960s that Indigenous Australians were legislatively included into the provisions of the social security system on the same bases as other Australians (Altman and Sanders 1995). In 1973, the Australian Commission of Inquiry into Poverty reported an Indigenous poverty rate of 48 per cent compared to a national rate of 12 per cent (Brown et al. 1974; Henderson 1975). Today the Indigenous uptake of welfare income is such that the NATSIS conducted in 1994 reported that approximately 55 per cent of Indigenous respondents received their primary income from welfare. This compared with 13 per cent of other Australian households who received a welfare income (Altman and Hunter 1998). The baseline community research presented here adds another layer to this picture, providing a quantitative and qualitative description of the extent and experience of reliance on welfare at the family and household level in a remote and a rural community.

Many Indigenous Australians, especially those residing in remote communities lacking any mainstream labour markets, have become long-term dependents on social security income and there is now considerable concern about their growing levels of welfare dependence. Indigenous leaders are increasingly critical of the debilitating effects of entrenched welfare dependence in their communities. One leader has recently characterised welfare as a 'gammon economy' based on an economic relationship with the state, and argued that it undermines Indigenous law and values, disrupts traditional economic activities, entrenches a dysfunctional welfare mentality, and leads to an abrogation of responsibility by both government and Indigenous groups (Pearson 1999).

While escaping welfare dependence and reasserting Indigenous economic independence are important goals, it has been noted by others that having attained a basic citizenship entitlement after decades of individual exclusion represents a major social justice achievement of the last two decades (ATSIC 2000; Altman and Hunter 1998; Altman and Sanders 1995). For very many Indigenous people, their individual access to social security income constitutes a crucial safety net, a source of base-level reliable income in regions where they either continue to remain economically marginalised or where no viable mainstream labour market operates.

The economic reality is that given their historic and ongoing economic disadvantage, many Indigenous families are likely to remain long-term dependents on welfare. The policy reality is that receipt of welfare is both a form of entrenched dependence related to poverty entrapment from which it is difficult for the Indigenous population to escape, *and* a citizenship entitlement that provides a valued base-level income for many. The experience for many Indigenous families is probably that these economic imperatives operate simultaneously.

In the context of the current substantial reformulation of the welfare system for all Australians, the challenge for policy makers will be to facilitate both ends of the spectrum: to ensure Indigenous families obtain access to welfare services and income based upon their entitlement rights and needs, and also to assist those seeking to use their receipt of welfare as a form of participation support to effect a transition from welfare to work. The critical question is whether the Federal Government's macro welfare policy and service delivery models have sufficiently adapted to the circumstances and particular needs of Indigenous people, and whether they will ameliorate the adverse impacts of welfare dependence without undermining individual economic entitlements.

An Indigenous Family Welfare Policy

The broad objective of the baseline research described in this monograph is to identify, at the community level, the factors influencing the service delivery of welfare income transfers paid by government to Indigenous families for the care of their children (focusing on Parenting Payment and Family Allowances), and to draw out the implications of these for welfare policy and service delivery. An initial DFACS concern that partially prompted the research is whether welfare income paid for the support and care of children is in fact being used for that purpose and being directed to the right person.

Our research indicates that family carers in both communities are experiencing difficulties in this regard, but are ambivalent about the extent to which government should intervene to address the problem. The research suggests that more effective mechanisms are needed to target welfare payments to Indigenous families and the actual carers of children, but that any options need to be carefully piloted and evaluated. The research also indicates there is a lack of informed understanding by many families about the nature of the benefits payment structure and associated welfare services that might assist them. More appropriate policy frameworks are needed to facilitate delivery of services and secure improved outcomes in these areas.

National welfare policy is currently oriented primarily to the individual recipient and their relevant eligibility characteristics, and to the nuclear family model as the societal norm. A central finding of the research is that this model fails to address the reality that, for Indigenous people, the extended family structure is the fundamental socioeconomic norm, and that each person operates within an intricate web of wider relations. The research indicates that it is not simply individuals and nuclear families who are welfare dependent, but entire extended families and their households.

To facilitate improved service delivery and outcomes on the ground, an Indigenous Family Welfare Policy is needed to address the particular circumstances of Indigenous families, in terms both of the key areas of diversity and of the underlying commonalities outlined in Chapter 5. This policy would comprise an important and much-needed contribution to the *Strong Families, Strong Communities* national policy developed for all Australians which, as it stands, lacks any substantive component relevant to the actual characteristics and needs of Indigenous families (DFACS 2000).

An Indigenous Family Welfare Policy could target key areas identified by this research for support (and summarised in Ch. 5) including the social capital generated by extended family support networks; sole parents and sole parent households; the social distribution of parenting and extended family child-care arrangements; aged carers and the key domestic role of senior women; children who are at risk of marginal care; and youth and young parent families at risk.

A national policy framework with related strategic objectives for Indigenous families could be developed by DFACS in collaboration with Centrelink, ATSIC, and key regional Indigenous organisations.

Culturally-informed policy

It is regularly asserted that government service deliverers and policy makers should make greater efforts to accommodate Indigenous cultural life and diversity. The research presented here suggests that there are very real benefits—social and economic—that could be gained by making welfare policy more applicable to the actual circumstances of Indigenous families, that is, by making policy more culturally informed. The research has identified some key social arrangements within families that might be appropriately accommodated by service delivery, and conceptually incorporated within policy frameworks. Proposals for reform could be piloted at the community level.

But the research conclusions suggest policy frameworks need to be informed not only about key areas of diversity, but also by the fundamental areas of commonality underlying Indigenous family and household structures and key domestic and child-care arrangements. The research has attempted to identify some of these key areas (see summary in Ch. 5). At the same time, the research also suggests that policy (and related service delivery) reform needs to be realistic and administratively workable, and that its formulators need to be alive to the pitfalls of social engineering.

Policy makers and Indigenous people alike need to accept that there are some aspects of family life which policy and service delivery cannot hope to fully respond to; they are simply not amenable to intervention by the state. The high rates of short-term mobility amongst youth, children, and their parents is probably one area where intrusive program intervention will fail. The more dynamic aspects of extended child-care arrangements and internal resource redistribution (borrowing and lending) within extended families will also not be easily accommodated within program guidelines and criteria. To that extent, while Indigenous social and economic structures may be 'appropriate' within their culture, they are not necessarily easily or appropriately integrated into the 'culture' of policy and service delivery. Indeed, integration of this kind may well be an unwelcome intrusion, creating unintended and adverse impacts for families.

In pursuing the twin goals of culturally-informed and realistic policy for Indigenous families without unnecessary interference in family life, both DFACS and Centrelink will need to achieve the same difficult balance between criteria of:

- cultural relevance;
- individual and family entitlement rights;
- equitable access and delivery standards;
- community development;
- administrative workability and cost efficiency; and
- securing enhanced service and economic outcomes for Indigenous customers on the ground.

The formulation of a national Indigenous Family Welfare Policy should be informed by the above set of criteria. By being more culturally informed, policy can aim to create the administrative 'space' within which Indigenous families can operate to maintain flexibility and choice, and within which regional service deliverers can customise programs to achieve improved outcomes on the ground.

An Indigenous mutual rights and obligations strategy

'Mutual obligation' has recently been adopted by the Federal Government as a key policy principle under which welfare recipients are characterised as having 'both the right and the obligation to share in the benefits of economic and employment growth and to participate in their communities to the full extent of their capacity' (Newman 1999b: 6).

It requires that all unemployed people receiving financial support from government should 'strive to improve their chances of getting a job and actively look for work and give something back to the community that supports them' (Newman 1999b: 4). Under this framework government sees itself as an arbiter of how individual responsibility to overcome 'passive' welfare dependence should be defined and fulfilled. This poses particular challenges and difficulties in a cross-cultural context.

The research conclusions raise key questions for government and Indigenous welfare recipients. How will mutual obligation operate for Indigenous welfare recipients? Will it cover all classes of recipient in all locations? At what social level will it be applied—individual, family or community? What will constitute the fulfilment of mutual obligation? Will it add value to service delivery objectives and improve outcomes for people? To what extent will individuals, families, and their communities be consulted about its content and local application?

A number of general principles can be extrapolated from the research conclusions to address these issues.

1. If it is to add value and enhance outcomes, then the concept of mutual obligation must be broadly and flexibly defined in order to be realistically applied in the diverse locations in which welfare recipients reside, particularly in those regions where there is no mainstream labour market, or one that is highly restricted.
2. Program requirements which insist on activity-based testing (for example, having looked for employment in the last week) as a mutual obligation condition for the continued payment of welfare income will be inappropriate and counterproductive in regions where the significant structural impediments facing Indigenous people mean that paid employment is not available to them.
3. There will be some classes of Indigenous welfare recipients for whom the mutual obligation requirement will be inappropriate; for example, aged and disabled pensioners. Then there are others who are already undertaking work within their own communities, for example via subsistence activities, voluntary work in local organisations, caring for the aged, working with youth at risk, teaching culture in schools, and caring for children. Aggregate available national data indicate that a higher proportion of Indigenous people, especially welfare recipients, perform voluntary work within their community than do other Australians (Smith and Roach 1996).
4. On the same basis as has already been accepted and implemented within CDEP scheme organisations, the concept of 'work' and employment must be broadly defined for the purposes of satisfying the administrative requirement for mutual obligation. Work for that purpose should include the range of community development and cultural activities undertaken by many welfare recipients (see above).
5. Implementation of mutual obligation, when it is appropriate, will need to accommodate the intricate social conjunctions between individual, family, and community levels of rights and responsibilities. These will affect the capacity of welfare recipients to participate in and fulfil mutual obligation conditions. While personal autonomy is

highly valued by adults and children, each individual is also linked to a web of wider family relations across households and communities (Martin 1993; Myers 1986). These relationships are underwritten by reciprocal rights and responsibilities given effect through demand sharing (Peterson 1993).

Whilst there is no automatic alignment between community priorities and those of individual residents, many Indigenous people increasingly identify with particular communities and with specific service organisations operating there. In other words, focusing on the individual level oversimplifies a complex situation; there will be personal, family, and community elements involved in any mutual obligation contract.

6. Just as their own mechanism of demand sharing is perceived as a reciprocal exchange relationship by Indigenous people, so too will they expect there to be a two-way quality to the government's mutual obligation policy. An Indigenous Mutual Rights and Obligations Strategy will need to be developed to spell out exactly what obligation will be owed by government in its delivery of welfare payments and related services to Indigenous welfare clients. Arguably such obligations could include a commitment by government to provide:
 - the sustained coordination of policy and service delivery between levels of government;
 - more effective delivery of appropriate services;
 - adequate infrastructure and program funding support at the community level; and
 - opportunities for employment, training, and enterprise development at the local level within communities.

Presumably there is no reason why specified government commitments on these matters should not be locked into negotiated mutual obligation agreements—either at the individual or community levels.

7. The type and level of obligation that will be applicable (or not applicable) to Indigenous welfare recipients should be systematically set out through the formulation of guidelines for an Indigenous Mutual Rights and Obligations Strategy to operate as a national framework. Such a strategy would clearly define the rights of individual recipients as well as their potential obligations by establishing the broad limits of activity-testing and participation support requirements, and creating administrative guidelines to provide consistency and equality in its implementation by regional Centrelink offices and individual staff. Without such policy guidelines and safeguards there is a concern that mutual obligation would translate, in administrative practice, into a form of welfare enterprise bargaining in which Indigenous recipients would be at a disadvantage, and their rights potentially jeopardised.

A framework of this kind would facilitate the customised tailoring and implementation of mutual obligation on the ground. One approach to customising implementation would be for Centrelink regional CSC offices to negotiate and develop a regional framework for mutual obligation with key regional Indigenous organisations. Such a

negotiated regional framework could then be used by staff and welfare recipients to tailor individual arrangements.

One means of facilitating the practical implementation of mutual obligation agreements is by way of local Indigenous community organisations (such as a CDEP organisation, regional outstation resource agency, or progress association). These organisations could act as local or regional representatives on behalf of welfare recipients, to ensure that the obligations are within each individual's capacity to perform, relevant to their actual life circumstances, and locally available as options. They could also facilitate, where appropriate, the potential for mutual obligation to add value in terms of wider community development objectives.

Streamlining the welfare payment structure

Australia's income support system is complex and currently subject to potentially significant review and changes to program guidelines, eligibility criteria, and payment packaging. The research presented here confirms that many people at the community level find the payment system extremely confusing and are unaware of a number of these recent changes, to the extent that some have failed to secure access to payments and services to which they might be entitled.

A more simplified payment structure is needed for Indigenous families to facilitate delivery and access, reduce the complexity of the application process, reduce workforce disincentives, and expand flexibility and choice. As it stands, the complexity of the system does not encourage informed choice and access. This recommendation is not new to the social policy arena and has been recently proposed again for all Australians in the context of the Federal Government's current welfare reform agenda (Australian Council of Social Services 1999, 2000; see also ATSIC 2000).

A single amalgamated payment structure needs to be developed for Indigenous welfare recipients which focuses on each individual's actual circumstances. Such an amalgamated payment structure:

- could apply a single baseline flat rate reckoned on at least 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings;
- could be assessed for each person on the basis of Centrelink's newly developed life-events customer service model; and
- could adopt 'above-baseline' supplement rates of pay related to a set of factors such as age, disability, carer responsibilities (for children or other adults), and so on.

In conjunction with the proposed implementation of mutual obligation, a single payment structure could be enhanced by the availability of supplementary payments for undertaking specific participation activities such as work experience or vocational training, and when making the transition to work. For example, in respect to where a transition from welfare to paid employment has been made, a twelve-month Work Incentive Payment could be provided to Indigenous welfare recipients to assist with costs such as child-care, transportation, and clothing involved in that transition.

A single flat-rate payment structure, combined with a supplement structure, could have considerable advantages both for service deliverers and Indigenous families. It has the potential to improve outcomes for individuals; to facilitate flexibility to suit the diverse circumstances reported here; to assist in reducing the significant administrative costs associated with the currently complex and overlapping payment structure; and to be easily integrated into Centrelink's new life-event approach at the same time as providing incentives for people to undertake training or gain employment where available.

Welfare policy for Indigenous sole parent families

As a proportion of total Indigenous family types, sole parent families are more than double the proportion of sole parent families amongst non-Indigenous family types (28 per cent compared to 12 per cent) (Daly and Smith 1997b). The research presented here indicates that sole parents play important roles in the domestic economies of their extended families and households—whether because of their presence (often in multiple generations of related sole parents) or by their absence (leaving others to look after their children).

However, for a number of complex reasons dealt with in Chapters 4 and 5, Indigenous women are not securing access to maintenance payments for the care of their children from the non-custodial parent at the same rate as other Australian sole parents. At the same time, there appears to be a lack of information amongst Indigenous families about recent institutional changes made to the operation of the CSA, which delivers these payments.

Given their low levels of combined income from welfare and maintenance compared to other sole parents, high rates of Indigenous male unemployment and incarceration, and the high childhood dependency burdens in their households, Indigenous sole parents are clearly disadvantaged compared to their mainstream female counterparts. For these reasons, sole parents should be targeted to receive a Sole Parent Income Supplement payment that would serve to bring their total income up to the equivalent average level of combined income currently received by their counterparts.

There are a variety of ways such a payment could be delivered. It could be provided annually, either by the CSA or by Centrelink, as a top-up payment in the form of a tax credit. It could be assessed on the basis of each sole parent's actual annual income (of combined welfare and maintenance), relative to that received by their counterparts nationally. Alternatively, payment of a supplement could be framed as participation support to the parent when undertaking an identified form of JET or equivalent community-based training and work experience during the year. This should include participation in a CDEP work project, training program, or voluntary community work.

Further consideration of these matters would be greatly facilitated by the inclusion and recording of an Indigenous identifier in CSA administrative databases, to enable more accurate comparative assessments to be made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous sole parents' maintenance-related income. For these reasons it is also recommended that the range of issues affecting Indigenous sole parents' access to maintenance money be further investigated.

Welfare policy for children and youth

A key finding of the community case-study research, and one strongly endorsed by respondents, is the need for DFACS and Centrelink to develop more workable mechanisms for delivering family-related welfare payments for the care of children. The immense social value and contribution of Indigenous shared parenting and extended family child-care arrangements comes from their very flexibility and dynamism in the face of poverty. Our research indicates that this Indigenous form of family social capital is in need of targeted support. However, the research findings also indicate that such a solution should not interfere with the flexibility and dynamism of culturally-based child-care practices. Some options that meet these requirements have been presented in Chapter 7.

For Indigenous families, the impact of the historical process referred to as the 'stolen generation' is being compounded by the debilitating impacts on youth of boredom, unemployment, substance abuse, and violence. The community research suggests that youth may be poorly served across a range of service areas. Respondents in both communities identified an urgent need for adequate housing for young parents and their families; community-based vocational training and employment opportunities; recreational facilities; and enhanced program and funding support for youth workers at the community level.

The youthful Indigenous demographic profile and related rapid formation of young families implies a growing future demand on service delivery and a potentially expanding rate of welfare dependence amongst young unemployed parents. This situation suggests the need for targeted policy support to this group before they enter the welfare system.

Indigenous families, welfare, and work

Improved outcomes in shifting Indigenous Australians from welfare to work will not be secured until work, employment, work experience, and vocational training opportunities can be made more widely available to them in the communities and regions in which they live.

While the focus of this research project is not on Indigenous employment policy and program matters per se, the lack of local employment (other than CDEP) was raised as an important issue by respondents in both communities. The underlying causal factors need to be systematically investigated at the community level. While these are likely to be fundamentally structural and locational in nature, the research suggests a range of possible additional factors, including:

- a reluctance on the part of local employers to offer employment;
- a reluctance on the part of Indigenous people to undertake the paid employment that might be available;
- the fact that individuals lack the necessary experience and skills to match them to available jobs;

- new private providers of the government employment services are not adequately providing a service to unemployed Indigenous people; and
- local CDEP organisations lack an adequate funding base and expertise to assist people to move off work projects into paid local employment (where it is available).

Given the structural and economic factors discussed here, it is clearly unrealistic for government to expect Indigenous people to participate in the paid mainstream employment in communities where there is no labour market, no vocational training locally available to them, or where there are substantial restrictions on their access to local jobs.

In such a context, it is important that a reformed welfare system does not become a labour market program pure and simple. The reality for many Indigenous people in remote and rural communities is that they will not make the transition to full-time paid employment in the mainstream labour market. They may, however, make a transition into what could be termed the local 'community development' labour market. The CDEP scheme constitutes one important component of such a labour market; voluntary work in community projects, child care, and cultural activities represent other components. These areas of work could be recognised by policy as meaningful labour contributions to community and regional economies.

An important research result is that the JET scheme is simply not working for Indigenous sole parents; indeed it is relatively unknown to the majority in our case studies. It has been suggested elsewhere that there is a role for CDEP organisations to play in providing training and work experience for sole parents (see Daly and Smith 1997a, 1997b). While it is acknowledged that there is considerable room for improvement in the outcomes of the CDEP scheme, a number of CDEP organisations are well-placed to be funded to provide a community-level equivalent of JET, not only to their own participants who are sole parents, but to other Indigenous sole parents in their communities. Local CDEP or other community-based organisations could also be funded to pilot the operation of child-care services which could be accessible to all Indigenous families, not simply to CDEP participants.

In many communities, the CDEP scheme offers the only opportunity for Indigenous welfare recipients to undertake employment and gain work experience. As a result of recent legislative changes, CDEP organisations will be able to accept a wider range of welfare recipients as participants, including sole parents, and the aged and disabled. The welfare-oriented role and responsibilities of these organisations could widen accordingly.

A number of recommendations have been made above which signal the potential for a revitalised role for CDEP organisations in delivering aspects of welfare-related services. To be more effective in both their current and possible roles in these areas, CDEP organisations will need enhanced funding support to overcome past organisational difficulties, and to encourage them to develop family-oriented strategies in their work and training projects.

DFACS, Centrelink, and Indigenous people: The need for new partnerships

The results of the research lead to the conclusion that at the Indigenous community level there continues to be a lack of interdepartmental coordination of government policy objectives and service delivery. This failure hinders the achievement of improved outcomes for Indigenous welfare recipients.

The research findings indicate a number of areas where refinements can be made to service delivery and policy that will assist in achieving better outcomes for Indigenous families with children. Many of our recommendations rely on common sense and are achievable. Others require more fundamental rethinking of policy, in order to develop the policy 'space' to address the particular circumstances and needs of Indigenous families. Some will require the investment of funding and resources to secure longer-term cost efficiencies and improved outcomes, and a number should first be piloted. But most importantly, the success of targeted initiatives recommended here will be dependent on a more actively coordinated, streamlined approach across government and departments, both at the national and regional levels.

There is increasing pressure on government to show improved outcomes, to deliver welfare services in a more culturally-informed manner, and to do so in a partnership with Indigenous communities at the local level. The research suggests there is a need not simply for greater consultation with Indigenous people and their representative community and regional organisations, but for more effective negotiation of 'welfare partnerships' with them. Such partnerships in the welfare policy arena could be effectively facilitated, at the regional and national levels, by DFACS in conjunction with departments such as Centrelink and ATSIC. Partnerships could include the joint negotiation of mutual obligation frameworks and service delivery agreements with communities and their organisations.

Notes

1. The research is being conducted by a small multi-disciplinary team, including anthropologists Diane Smith (CAEPR, ANU), Julie Finlayson (formerly of CAEPR), and Yasmine Musharbash (Department of Archaeology and Anthropology Department, ANU); economist Anne Daly (the Division of Management and Technology, University of Canberra); and during 1998–99, a statistical research officer Tony Auld (CAEPR).
2. Until that time, Indigenous Australians had been excluded from the receipt of social security income payments by various legislative provisions which enabled only persons especially ‘exempted’ from the statutory provisions to be recipients (by reason of their ‘character, standard of intelligence and social development’ and excluded all so-called ‘nomadic and primitive’ groups (Altman and Sanders 1995)).
3. The Henderson poverty line included a measurement of the family income units within households which were ‘very poor’ (below the calculated national poverty line) and those who were ‘rather poor’ (between 100 and 120 per cent of the poverty line).
4. ‘Gammon’ is a term used by Indigenous people to refer to communication styles and behaviour that lack authenticity and substance, ranging from those that are hypothetical or nonsensical, to those involving a deceitful pretence.
5. DFACS was formed out of the former Department of Social Security; the Childcare Assistance and Services, Family Services, Crises Assistance, Partnership, and Disability Services areas of the former Department of Health and Family Services; the Family Relationships area of the Attorney-General’s Department; and the Child Support Agency, formerly part of the Australian Taxation Office.
6. These payment terms were in use when fieldwork was first conducted in Yuendumu and Kuranda in the second half of 1999. Significant reform to the packaging of these family assistance payments has been initiated in 2000 by the creation of the Family Assistance Office to deliver a Family Tax Benefit and the consolidation of 12 different types of family assistance payments including Family Allowance Payments into three payment types.
7. Parenting Payment Single is a new payment that replaced the Sole Parent Pension and Parenting Allowance from 20 March 1998 (see also Appendix 1).
8. For the purposes of the community research with families receiving family assistance payments, the project defined an adult as being 16 years and older, in line with Centrelink criteria for the termination of such payments to parents.
9. A separate CAEPR research project on employment and career issues is being conducted by Arthur (1999) with Torres Strait Islander youth, and is part-funded by DFACS.
10. In Yuendumu, Ms Musharbash worked with Ms Alma Nangala Robertson and Ms Eric Napurrurla Ross. In Kuranda, the three project researchers worked with Ms Michelle Collins.

11. As Hoinville and Jowell (1978: 17) note, because of the differences in analysing and absorbing qualitative information, it is rare for more than 50 in-depth interviews or 12 group discussions to be undertaken in a survey.
12. In the 1996 Census, the ABS developed a new Indigenous statistical geography based on ATSI regions with smaller subdivisions into Indigenous areas and then discrete locations within them. The data for Kuranda–Mareeba is at the Indigenous Area level, as is that for Yuendumu.
13. During the pilot phase executed some four months previously, Finlayson and Daly also interviewed staff from the Kuranda Primary School, the Queensland Community Health outreach workers for Kuranda and Cairns, the Queensland Tropical Health Injuries Unit, the ATSI Regional Council's Women's Officer, and staff from Apunipima Cape York Health Council (Finlayson and Auld 1999: 37).
14. DFACS has recently developed a Research and Evaluation Program which actively seeks to commission independent external research regarding the linkages between income support and family and community services, as well as to invest in research analysis of its own administrative databases and to conduct customer surveys and additional longitudinal research projects. DFACS now regularly reports on these research products in a series of Digests and Research Fact Sheets.
15. Specifically, for some Centrelink income benefit types the administrative counts of Indigenous recipients seems to be reasonably good; in other benefit types the count appears to be less reliable (Daly and Hawke 1994; Daly and Smith 1997b: 25).
16. Indeed, it is not the norm for the wider non-Indigenous population. In the 1996 census, only half of total Australian family types were partnered families (Daly and Smith 1999: 7).
17. As set out under the child support legislation, the CSA coordinates the assessment and administration of the level of financial support for children which a parent must contribute to the custodial parent once they are separated. The extent of CSA involvement extends from providing information on the payment system, through to the calculation, registration, and collection of child support monies. The CSA has little comprehensive data on its Indigenous clients and is unable to quantify the extent to which the scheme is providing coverage of this group. The CSA became part of DFACS when it transferred from the Australian Taxation Office in October 1998 and in December a new electronic registration process for assessment applications was established by Centrelink to improve the transfer of customer data to CSA.
18. Smithfield is a new suburban Centrelink office opened in Cairns.
19. The Kuranda pilot reported a range between five and 20 persons (Finlayson and Auld 1999).
20. Ngonbi Cooperative is currently developing plans to charge rent at Mona Mona after work has been completed for the renovation of various houses and the infrastructure.

21. Big thank yous are due to many people in many places. At Yuendumu, I would like to thank *yapa-patu Yurntumu-wardingi*, the residents of Yuendumu, for helping me with my research, especially my field assistants Erica Napurrurla Ross and Alma Nangala Robertson and all those people who most generously shared their time with me for interviews and discussions. I would also like to thank the Yuendumu Council for permission to conduct this research. And most of all, thank you everyone *ngurrangka ngajuku*, in my camp, for teaching me about yapa way. At Alice Springs, I am obliged to Jane Whyte, manager of the Centrelink CSC, for her ongoing support and invaluable advice, and to Scott Peters at Centrelink for all the time he took to explain, illustrate, and look up data. Thank you also to staff at the CSC reception and Family Payments Sections for letting me look over their shoulders while they were working. On Thursday Island, I am indebted to Kevin Murphy for most generously sharing his house and friendship while I was writing up the first draft. In Canberra, many thanks to Nicolas Peterson for his support throughout this project and my fieldwork, and for his valuable comments on various drafts of this chapter. Thank you also to Anne Daly, Tony Auld and Julie Finlayson for their comments. Most of all, thank you very much to Di Smith who guided me through the project, always took my collect calls, and was most supportive whether in Canberra, Alice Springs, Yuendumu or Murrumbateman.
22. Manyu-wana is a Warlpiri equivalent of Sesame Street, aiming to teach basic numeracy and literacy skills as well as Warlpiri stories to children, in Warlpiri.
23. This is funded by Northern Territory Health Services.
24. In 1998, 500 out of 930 people were on the Yuendumu Chronic Disease Register. Yuendumu also has alarmingly high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, with the most affected age group being 15–30 year olds (Yuendumu Health Profile 1999).
25. It does this on request from the clinic, when staff are concerned about the nutrition of particular infants. These food packs are paid for by the parent.
26. This is the closest approximation to a bank at Yuendumu. The system operates on the basis of people leaving money in envelopes which are placed in tins: a blue tin for children's money and a red one for adults. Each person using the system has an envelope with their name on it and there is a maximum daily limit of \$20 for adults and two payments of \$5 for children. There is no book-up available anywhere at Yuendumu (apart from an occasional \$10 emergency book-up for food at the Mining shop). The Social Club also has an EFTPOS facility where up to \$200 per day can be taken out for a fee of \$1 per transaction.
27. Aggregate Yuendumu welfare payment data provided by Centrelink CSC, Alice Springs.
28. It is a very common practice for young mothers in Yuendumu to give one or more of their children to an older close female relative 'to look after and grow up'.

29. A number of Yuendumu residents receive their Centrelink cheques at other communities.
30. This number does not include temporary structures. At Yuendumu there are also a number of non-occupied or derelict houses as well as informally constructed housing of corrugated iron. Occupied houses vary greatly in size and quality. About half are brick houses and the others are tin; many only have one or two bedrooms but houses with five or six bedrooms also exist. The questionnaire sample showed an average of 2.38 bedrooms per house.
31. At Yuendumu, houses with Indigenous residents are provided with electricity meters which operate through 'power tickets'. These tickets are available for \$5, \$10 and \$20 from the Social Club and Mining stores.
32. For example, questions 4.38–4.45 (see Appendix 2) referring to visitors were found to be problematic in that it did not seem clear to respondents what was meant by 'visitor'. Many people who would conventionally fall into this category from a European point of view, are not so classified at Yuendumu. When respondents were asked 'how about visiting?' as a prompt in question 3.7 ('Why do you stop in town?') the answer usually was 'yes, hospital and prison', meaning that one *visits* people who are in hospital or prison as opposed to *seeing* family with whom one stops. Moreover, at house #10 which shows great fluctuation in resident composition, it was futile to try establish who was visiting and who was not: in the view of the respondents 'they all stop here'.
33. The same point applies to the application for any other social security payments. Frequently, Centrelink returns forms because they lack vital information like signatures. Often, this is mistakenly interpreted by respondents to constitute a failure of their application, and so they take no further steps to clarify the matter or obtain the payment.
34. The so-called Area North region for Centrelink service delivery comprises the Northern Territory, parts of northern South Australia, the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and the northern regions of Queensland.
35. Until 1999, the Centrelink CSC at Alice Springs had approximately 13 staff on RVTs and four cars to service the remote areas. The teams operated according to a schedule of field visits which, given the number and dispersed nature of communities and limited staff and resources, meant that the RVT service was reactive rather than proactive. Also, the teams were not effectively integrated into the administrative operations of the main office, creating a gap between the field activities and outcomes, exacerbated by the often rapidly changing program and administrative requirements faced by the main office.
36. The total numbers in Tables 6.6 and 6.7 exclude the 'not stated' category of answers to the respective census questions. As the numbers of respondents in the 'not stated' category differed for these questions, the total numbers in the tables therefore also differ.

Appendix 1: Glossary of explanatory payment terms for use with survey questionnaire

Parenting Payment

Parenting Payment is a new payment that replaced Sole Parent Pension and Parenting Allowance from 20 March 1998. Parenting Payment recognises a person's responsibility for caring for children—irrespective of their marital status.

Family Allowance

Family allowance is money to help you raise your children. It is paid to the parent caring for the children, usually the mother. Certain income and assets limits apply.

Youth Allowance

Youth Allowance is a simple payment scheme for young people, whether you are studying, training, or looking for work. Youth Allowance replaces a number of payments, including Youth Training Allowance, Newstart, and Sickness Allowance for under 21s, AUSTUDY for under 25s and Family Allowance for some secondary students.

Newstart Allowance

Newstart ensures that people who are unemployed receive an adequate level of income and participate in activities designed to assist their employment prospects.

Guardian Allowance

Guardian Allowance is paid as part of Family Allowance to low income sole parents with dependent children because of the extra costs of raising children on their own.

Large Family Supplement

Large Family Supplement is paid as part of Family Allowance to help with the cost of raising a large family.

Childcare Assistance

Childcare Assistance is a subsidy paid by the government to approved child care services to reduce your child care fees.

Childcare Rebate

Childcare Rebate is paid by Medicare to help meet your child care costs if you and your partner are working, looking for work, studying or training. You must pay the first \$19.50 of your total weekly child care costs. You can then claim a rebate of either 20 per cent or 30 per cent of the remainder after deducting any Childcare Assistance or other financial assistance you receive, depending on your family income.

Family Tax Payment

The Government's Family Tax Initiative (FTI) provides more money to most families with children—both couples and sole parents. Families can get FTI by paying less tax or as a regular payment, depending on their income. FTI is on top of any Family Allowances you already get. It is not taxed and it does not have an assets test. Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office are working together to deliver FTI to Australian families.

Child Maintenance money (Child Support)

If the parents of a child do not live together, one parent usually has day-to-day care of the child. Normally, that parent also gets child support payments from the other parent. Child Support is also called maintenance. Child Support is paid by the parent who does not live with the child to the parent who does.

Disability Support Pension

Sometimes older people, profoundly disabled children, and people with disabilities living at home need full-time care and attention. Carer Payment is an income support payment for carers who, because of the demands of their caring role, are unable to support themselves through work. From 1 July 1997 Carer Pension is called Carer Payment.

Age pension

The age pension is a safety net for those who are not able to fully provide for themselves in retirement. It is paid so people that have reached retirement age have adequate income.

Sickness benefit

If you can't work full-time because of a serious, 'long-term' health problem or disability, you may be eligible for Disability Support Pension. 'Long-term' means for two years or more (including permanently). Full-time work means work that is for at least 30 hours a week, at award wages.

Abstudy

Abstudy is the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme. Abstudy helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who want to stay at school or go on to further studies. Abstudy is available for students at school and in post secondary study and provides a range of allowances, some of which are income tested.

Child Disability Allowance

Child Disability Allowance provides assistance to parents and guardians who care for a child with a disability at home. It is free of income and assets tests and is not taxed.

Rent Assistance

Rent Assistance gives extra help to people who pay rent to private landlords.

JET

Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program is a voluntary scheme which helps those receiving: Parenting Payment Single (sole parents); benefit level Parenting Payment Partnered; Widow B Pension; Widow Allowance; Carer Payment; Partner Allowance; Special Benefit (i.e. those who do not qualify for Parenting Payment (single) because they are not residentially qualified) to find work or improve their work skills through education or training. JET can also help with child care.

Child Support Agency (CSA)

Parents are responsible for the financial support of their children. As set out in the law, it is the CSA's job to help make sure that children get a proper level of financial support from their parents when the parents are separated. The amount of CSA involvement depends on the situation. It can range from simply giving out information, through to the CSA taking on the calculation, registration, and collection of child support.

ASSPA

Aboriginal Student Staff and Parents Association (Kuranda School, Queensland) (APPSA)

Appendix 2: Unformatted questionnaires (individual key reference person and dwelling) administered in Kuranda and Yuendumu, 1999

Individual key reference person questionnaire

- 1.1 Can you tell me how many people are currently living in this house and how they are related? [Elicit household genealogy.]
- 2.1 What does Centrelink do?
- 2.2 Where is your closest Centrelink office?
- 2.3 Is there a Centrelink agent or representative working (in Kuranda/Yuendumu)?
- 2.4 Do you currently receive any income from the following government payments? [For each received:] What is the payment for?
 - 2.4.a Family allowance (minimum)
 - 2.4.b Family allowance (more than minimum)
 - 2.4.c Parenting Payment
 - 2.4.d Large family supplement
 - 2.4.e Guardian Allowance
 - 2.4.f Orphan Pension
 - 2.4.g Childcare Rebate
 - 2.4.h Invalid pension
 - 2.4.i Age pension
 - 2.4.j Carer's pension
 - 2.4.k Sickness benefit
 - 2.4.l Abstudy
 - 2.4.m Child disability allowance
 - 2.4.n Rent assistance
 - 2.4.o CDEP
 - 2.4.p Unemployment benefit (Jobsearch/Newstart)
 - 2.4.q None
 - 2.4.r Wages
- 2.5 [If the person is not receiving Family Allowance or Parenting Payment:] Why aren't you receiving either of these payments?
- 2.6 [If the person is receiving Family Allowance or Parenting Payment:] What do you use that money for?
- 2.7 When was the last time you visited the Centrelink office (in Cairns/Alice Springs)?

- 2.8 Why did you go there?
- 2.9 Were they able to help you? (How?/Why not?)
- 2.10 When was the last time you visited the Centrelink agent (in Kuranda/Yuendumu)?
- 2.11 Why did you go there?
- 2.12 Was the agent able to help you? (How?/Why not?)
- 2.13 Do you have any difficulties getting in contact with the Centrelink office (in Cairns/Alice Springs)?
- 2.14 How easy/difficult was it to apply for the benefit/pension in the first place?
- 2.15 What sort of things might make it easier for people to get the forms and apply for benefits?
- 2.16 Have you had any troubles recently in getting your payment?
- 2.17 How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of Centrelink's service and operation?
 - 2.17.a The time it takes to see someone in the office
 - 2.17.b The number of staff attending the front desk to serve people
 - 2.17.c The number of Aboriginal staff at the office
 - 2.17.d The quality of the service provided
 - 2.17.e The respect he/she given as a person
 - 2.17.f The understanding of Aboriginal culture
 - 2.17.g Provision of service when English is a difficulty
 - 2.17.h The quality of the information provided
 - 2.17.i How they deal with Aboriginal people at the office
 - 2.17.j Other
- 2.18 How could the Centrelink service to Aboriginal people in Kuranda/Yuendumu be improved? [Tick box: visit more often/faster service at the front desk/have more Aboriginal staff/understand Aboriginal culture better/easier forms to fill out/explain information to people/other]
- 2.19 Are you using any other Centrelink services at the moment?
- 2.20 Have you ever used the loan service available from Centrelink (where you can get your benefit money in advance as a loan to be repaid)?
- 2.21 Are there any other local organisations in your community which help you financially with your kids and family?
- 2.22 [If Yes:] What sort of things do they do to help?
- 3.1 How long have you been living in this house/camp?
- 3.2 Are there other places that you stop at in Kuranda/Yuendumu?

- 3.3 Are you related to anyone in those places?
 - 3.4 Why do you stop at those other places?
 - 3.5 Are there other places you stop at in town (Alice/Cairns)?
 - 3.6 Are you related to anyone in those places?
 - 3.7 Why do you stop in town?
 - 3.8 How many other places have you lived at in the last four weeks?
 - 3.9 Do you take your kids with you when you stay over somewhere else?
 - 3.10 If you don't take your kids, who looks after them?
 - 3.11 Have you been to other places beside Alice/Cairns in the last four weeks?
-
- 4.1 How many of your kids are staying here with you at the moment?
 - 4.2 Do they stay here most of the time?
 - 4.3 Are there other places they sometimes stay (Kuranda/Yuendumu)?
 - 4.4 Who looks after them in that other place?
 - 4.5 Are there other places they sometimes stay (Cairns/Alice)?
 - 4.6 Who are the main people who usually 'look after' them here each day?
 - 4.7 Does anyone else from another house/camp regularly look after your kids?
 - 4.8 Who is the 'boss' for your kids in your place?
 - 4.9 Who usually pays for food and clothing for your kids?
 - 4.10 Does anyone else regularly help pay for food and clothing for your kids?
 - 4.11 Who gets the Family Allowance for your kids?
 - 4.12 Who gets the Parenting Payment for your kids?
 - 4.13 Do other people ever get either of these payments by arrangement with you?
 - 4.14 Are any of your kids staying somewhere else at the moment?
 - 4.15 [If Yes: Identify children with Identification Number]
 - 4.16 [If Yes: Location of those other places (town)]
 - 4.17 Who 'looks after' them there?
 - 4.18 How long have they been stopping there?
 - 4.19 Why do they stay there?
 - 4.20 Who gets the Family Allowance for those kids?

- 4.21 Who gets the Parenting Payment for those kids?
- 4.22 How many other kids are staying here at the moment?
- 4.23 Do they usually stay here?
- 4.24 [If No:] Where do they usually stay?
- 4.25 How long have they been staying here?
- 4.26 Why are they staying here?
- 4.27 Do they have a parent living here with them ?
- 4.28 Who are the main people who usually 'look after' them here each day?
- 4.29 Does anyone else in this place regularly look after these kids?
- 4.30 Who is the 'boss' for those other kids in this place?
- 4.31 Who usually pays for food and clothing for those kids?
- 4.32 Does anyone else regularly help pay for food and clothing for those kids?
- 4.33 Who gets the Family Allowance for those kids?
- 4.44 Who gets the Parenting Payment for those kids?
- 4.45 Apart from the kids in this house now, are there any other kids you look after?
- 4.46 If you had an emergency or an appointment for a short time during the day who could you get to look after your kids?
- 4.47 If you had to go away for a couple of nights and couldn't take your kids with you, who would look after them?

- 5.1 What are the essential services that Aboriginal families need in Kuranda/ Yuendumu?
- 5.2 Are any of these services currently available?
- 5.3 How do the children get to school each day?
- 5.4 Do you have any difficulties in getting your children to school?
- 5.5 Do you know about ASSPA and how it operates in your community school?
- 5.6 Where do you take your kids to get medical attention?
- 5.7 Do you have any difficulties in getting your children to a doctor or medical centre?
- 5.8 Do you have a Medicare Card for you and your child?
- 5.9 Who keeps the card?
- 5.10 Do you use any formal (paid) child care during the day?

- 5.11 [If Yes:] What type?
 - 5.12 Why do you use it?
 - 5.13 How often do you use it?
 - 5.14 How much does it cost?
 - 5.15 Do you have any difficulties in getting your child to child care?
 - 5.16 Do you get a Child-Care Rebate for this child?
-
- 6.1 Who do you think should get the Family Allowance money given by the government for looking after kids?
 - 6.2 Who do you think should get the Parenting Payment money given by the government for looking after kids?
 - 6.3 When kids stay a lot with someone else beside the parent, people can ask Centrelink to have the family money go to that other person – have you tried this?
 - 6.4 [If Yes:] Did the arrangement work? Were there any problems?
 - 6.5 [If No:] Why not?
 - 6.6 When these types of kid money come to you, do you get humbugged by other adults to give money to them?
 - 6.7 Have you heard of the Child Support Agency (CSA) and what it does?
 - 6.8 If you are (or have been) a sole parent, do you receive Child Support Payment ('maintenance money') from the other parent for your children?
 - 6.9 If you are (or have been) a Sole Parent, does the other parent ever give you any money (regularly or occasionally) to help look after/support your children?
 - 6.10 What kinds of problems do Aboriginal parents have with that 'maintenance money' business?
 - 6.11 Who should collect this maintenance money?
 - 6.12 If you suddenly needed a large amount of money now (e.g. over \$250 to pay some very big bills), who would you go to first, to get the money from?
 - 6.13 What do you think are some of the main problems Aboriginal parents have in looking after kids these days in Kuranda/Yuendumu?
 - 6.14 What are some of the main problems facing young mothers and fathers in Kuranda/Yuendumu?
 - 6.15 What sort of future do you think your kids will have in Kuranda/Yuendumu?

- 7.1 Do you know about this JET training scheme run by Centrelink and have you ever done any course through the JET scheme?
- 7.2 [If Yes: Describe course, outcomes, the person's evaluation etc.]
- 8.1 Last week did you have a paid job of any kind?
- 8.2 What kind of work do you do in that job?
- 8.3 Who do you work for?
- 8.4 How many hours per week do you work?
- 8.5 When you are working, where do your kids go and who looks after them?
- 8.6 What is your weekly gross income (before tax is taken out) from that job?
- 8.7 Are you having any deductions taken out of your money at the moment?
- 8.8 What is your weekly 'take home' income (after tax is taken out) from that job?
- 8.9 [If no job:] At any time during the last four weeks have you been looking for work?

Household Questionnaire

To be filled in by interviewer with assistance from Key Reference Person or any responsible adult.

Household Identification Number:

- 1.1 Number of persons living in the household
- 1.2 Individual Identification Numbers: 001, 002, 003 etc.
- 1.3 Describe the type of dwelling: house (comment), flat unit or apartment (comment), caravan or cabin (comment), improvised dwelling (comment), other (comment)
- 1.4 Mark the box which best describes this dwelling (rented (comment), fully owned (comment), being bought (comment), house occupied – no fee (comment), improvised – no rent (comment), other (comment))
- 1.5 If rented, from whom? (private landlord, employer-government, real estate agent, Department of Housing, Aboriginal organisation, family member, employer-other (describe), other (describe))
- 1.6 How much does your household pay for this dwelling? (per week)
- 1.7 Does the house have (electricity, tap water/hot water, heating, bathroom/shower, toilet inside/outside, bedrooms (how many), beds (how many), other (swags), TV/VCR, fridge, stove, radio, telephone, washing machine, car)?
- 1.8 Are these in working order?
- 1.9 Is there a communal ablutions/shower block: (Y/N)

- 1.10 Who mainly pays the power bills in the house? (Describe actual relationship and method of payment)
- 1.11 Who mainly pays the rent bills in the house? (Describe actual relationship and method of payment)
- 1.12 Does anyone outside the house help to pay for bills? (Describe)

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Given their historic and ongoing position of economic disadvantage, many Indigenous families have a long-term dependency on welfare, and their wellbeing will continue to be a critical challenge for government and Indigenous organisations. This monograph presents data from the first year of a longitudinal field-based research project carried out in two Indigenous communities – Kuranda in rural north Queensland, and Yuendumu in remote Central Australia.

The research is designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data that identify the range of factors influencing the delivery of, and access to, welfare transfers to Indigenous families for the care of their children (focusing on Parenting Payment and Family Allowance). The implications of these factors for welfare policy and service delivery are highlighted at the community, regional, and national levels.

The monograph sets out recommendations for fine-tuning welfare policy and service delivery that are consistent with the key principles of equity, simplicity, transparency, and sustainability established by the Federal Government as criteria for the implementation of its welfare reform agenda. However, the findings also highlight the need for new approaches in welfare policy and service delivery that reflect the realities of the day-to-day lives of Indigenous families, and that would directly improve their economic circumstances.

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