



## Acknowledging our ways of raising strong, solid Koolunga

### Culture

- A strong connection to culture is considered a source of strength and pride.
- Learning and access to and experience of cultural knowledge and kinship.
- Understanding recent history and hearing stories from Elders about their lives and the missions.

*“we have to make our kids so proud of who they are and the colour they are and what their culture is so that when they do go to kindy or to school they are able to stand up.” [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

### Language

- Learning Noongar language (parents questioned why are kids learning Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese but not Noongar?).

*“Learn the language; you know, language is slipping now, so that they can speak another language. And we have to teach them that because of their language and because of their colour they are not dumb. They have got another language.” [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

*“Curriculum needs to include Aboriginal culture, language and history for all kids to learn and generate more understanding. Why are Australian students learning Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese when they don’t learn Noongar?” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

*“Parents want their children to learn language – this is really important. It is important that kids have access to language and that any words are passed on from a young age. It is a disservice that we teach kids other languages but not their own.” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

### Connection to country

- Having access to activities that are connected to the bush/country.

*“when you are out on country there is that connection and it does help you with your family.” [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2016]*

### Strong Identity

- Importance of identity, culture and family/kinship network to a child’s sense of self and belonging, pride, confidence and learning.
- Importance of kids strengthening their Noongar/Aboriginal identity through increased cultural knowledge.
- Building and strengthening children’s self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence and resilience through positive language and encouragement, supporting and fostering their dreams and aspirations, and good role modelling – including when dealing with discrimination and racism.

*“if we raise them to be proud of being a Nyoongar, show them all the good things there is, our kids will survive; they will survive.” [Participant, Mirrabooka Community Forum, 2017]*

### Respect and acknowledgement of Aboriginal ways

- Recognition and understanding of the importance and value of Aboriginal knowledge and ways of learning.





- Importance of two way learning for children with equal respect paid to Aboriginal values and child rearing practices.

*"I would love to one day be able to see our culture respected for its wisdom and its knowledge and for our history and for other people to become involved as well." [Participant, Men's Focus Group, 2017]*

### Health and Wellbeing

- Children's health is inclusive of their physical, social and emotional wellbeing which in turn is considered intimately connected to their sense of belonging and connection to community, culture and country.

*"a solid family, a healthy solid family, healthy physically, socially, mentally, a good school. I said good food, fitness, fresh air, friends, all the F words, sport, put sport in there." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]*

### Community

- Aboriginal community is seen as providing children with a sense of belonging, connection and relationships based on common experiences.

*"There is also a strength of being present in our community, about being connected." [Participant, Men's Focus Group, 2017]*

### Strong fathers and male role models

- The importance of having strong, loving fathers and other male role models.

*"having nothing but love, just being surrounded by love from mum and dad from a young age, and to be able to smother my little ones with love just so they are not lost, that is one of the main areas that I want to focus on as being a father is how do I be a father and how do I love my little ones and how do I smother my little ones with so much love? That is the main little thing that I sort of try and live around, is how do I smother my kids with love and make sure that they feel love so that they don't feel like they are disconnected or anything." [Participant, Men's Focus Group, 2017]*

*"the importance of a strong male role model in the family" [Participant, Men's Focus Group, 2017]*

*"No matter what we go through we still have to be a role model for our kids." [Participant, South Lake Community Forum, 2017]*

### Strong mothers and female role models

- Strong mothers and grandmothers are acknowledged for their critical roles in supporting and holding families.
- The importance of other female role models.

*"the best teacher in the child's life is generally the mother or the grandmother, one that is there for them. And that is where a lot of the teaching has got to start, you know." [Participant, Mirrabooka Community Forum, 2017]*

*"Role models help. You know, when you have got a good role model for them to look up to, it makes them aspire to do better." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]*





## Family and Kinship

- The role of the extended family network in a child's life was highly valued by parents. Family was considered important to children's development, learning and access to and experience of cultural knowledge and kinship.
- Aboriginal families provide children with a large network of people who care about them. This gives kids a sense of belonging and security. It also means kids socialise from a very young age and can learn from their cousins, nephews and nieces.

*"there is nothing stronger than being with family. Everything that you want to learn about your culture, respect, even how to be a decent person, it is passed down from generation to generation. So you have to yourself want to stay connected to your family." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]*

*"There are a lot of things that are so important even from birth, and that comes from the family. The family has to be the key. That is the number one, is the family. It is the family that has to do all the things we would like children to be at when they turn six, and without the families, you know, then nobody else can do it." [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

*"Strength is family – close networks and big networks that surround children and provide a lot of love and support." [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

## Elders

- Respect for Elders.
- Elders having a valued role in education settings from early childhood education and care onwards.

*"if universities can bring in an elder one day a week for adult students—well, they are 18 or 17 or whatever they are, upwards—to give them support and encouragement, why can't schools do that, you know?" [Participant, Pilot Community Forum, 2016]*

*"Culture is connected to learning to respect your elders, connection to the bush, being proud of our ancestors and proud of who we were, and then rebuilding yourself for the new, contemporary way to be a Nyoongar." [Participant, Pilot Community Forum, 2016]*

## Living in 2 worlds

- Aboriginal kids learn how to live in 2 worlds from a young age.
- Importance of educational and other settings recognising that Aboriginal kids exist in two worlds and bring important but different strengths from their Aboriginal world.

*"People need to understand there are different ways of living at home and there is a difference in how Noongar families operate. For many Aboriginal families there are always a lot of people around, children socialise from a young age and this is a strength for Aboriginal kids." [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]*

*"School environment is so different for Aboriginal children – they have to "code switch" because life at home is very different to what is expected, even at kindy." [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

*"Parents are best helping their children survive in 2 worlds especially so they can do well at school – but this shouldn't mean they lose their sense of identity and pride in their identity." [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]*





## Sharing and caring for your mob

- Sharing is a real strength of Aboriginal culture and is taught to children from a young age.
- Important that education and other settings recognise that sharing is an important component of Aboriginal culture.

*“Aboriginal people value sharing, being generous, looking after each other within your family but also the wider community. We teach this to our kids from a young age – especially the importance of sharing. We share food, money, breastfeeding each other’s kids.” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

*“my son came home telling me that the teacher said that he wasn’t allowed to share with the other little Nyoongar kids. I said, ‘You tell that teacher we did that all our lives and we are never going to stop. One blackfella will never see another blackfella go hungry.’” [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

## Education

- Children attending school and getting an education was important to all parents involved in the focus groups.
- Importance of parental engagement with kid’s early learning.
- Culturally appropriate early childhood education and care that is honouring and respectful.
- Parents attached great importance to schools being an environment where Aboriginal children’s identity and culture are recognised, respected and valued.
- The kindy years are recognised by parents as critical to two way learning for all children and developing understanding and respect for cultural differences.
- Need for Noongar Language teachers, more AIEOs, and respect and understanding about Aboriginal family life across all schools.
- Noongar culture and history from Aboriginal perspectives being taught as part of the curriculum from Kindy onwards (not just token NAIDOC days)
- Importance of kids having access to bush activities.
- Elders and other Aboriginal people (own mob) having a valued role in education settings.

*“Education is about equipping for life, equipping as an Indigenous person, equipping them as role models, parents, as older siblings of the family”. [Participant, South Lakes Community Forum, 2017]*

*“once they get there and they feel comfortable, then you see the same families coming again, and then the kids, you know. That sort of filters down to the kids and then they want to continue to come. And then they have got siblings in the school as well, so that makes it a lot easier.” [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]*

*“Education is critical for our kids but in both cultures. We can use white education to strengthen Aboriginal culture.” [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]*

## Trust

- Provision of culturally appropriate early childhood and family services rebuilds trust with children, parents and other family members.

*“We got to teach our kids how to live in 2 worlds. It’s about learning to trust.” [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]*

## Children feeling safe, secure and loved

- Hearing and feeling love, through words, actions and emotional care (nurture).
- Having routine, structure, good food and sleep, discipline and boundaries.





*“Our kids they need to be safe and loved and nurtured. By nurturing, their mum is there for them telling them that she loves them and making the kids feel proud, you know, any little thing that they do, rewarding them with a little hug or a smile, something like that, trying not to focus too much on the negatives.” [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

#### **Independence**

- Parents value independence and freedom in children from a young age. Older cousins and the wider kinship network play an important role in teaching kids to be independent.

*“There is a sense of freedom in Aboriginal families and ways of parenting that are unique and provide a carefree environment for children.” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

## **Things that get in the way of raising strong, solid Koolunga**

#### **Racism**

- Kids experiencing shame about their identity because of their internalisation of negative stereotypes and either experiencing racism themselves or exposed to a family member/s experience of racism.

*“racism, even though it might not be directed at the little one, you know, they are so switched on and seeing that harmful interaction for their parent or whoever, it can still hurt them, you know”. [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

#### **Increasing rates of child removal**

- Presence of DCP in too many families’ lives – and not enough help and support for those who really need it.
- Inappropriate child-protection placements.
- Extent to which grandparents are having to be primary care givers – both formally and informally.
- Grandparents having to become primary caregivers without sufficient support.
- Lack of programs and services designed to meet the particular needs of grandparents caring for children.
- The impact of increasing rates of child removal and inappropriate placements on family functioning, sibling relationships, children’s connection to culture and family.
- Lack of systems that support rather than punish parents and work with families (including extended family) to prevent removal of children or have them placed with an Aboriginal family.
- Fear of child removal is negatively impacting on many parents’ decisions and behaviour with their children, including not accessing health services and other support in case they are judged or reported.
- Fear of child removal is intergenerational because of both historical and contemporary practices

*“Have you ever gone into a DCP arena? So you have got about 10 social workers, and the mother is on her own. She is powerless because these people are bullies”. [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

*“My six are the only six out of thirty-three grandchildren that are not in DCP”. [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016].*





## Impact of colonisation and previous child removal policies

- The impact of a loss of culture on kids and teenagers strong sense of self and pride and life choices.
- The impact of history (stolen generations, missions) on families and parents – intergenerational trauma and grief.

*“previous government policies made a huge impact on our families, being separated, and the majority of the children placed in homes, they have missed out on that love and nurturing from the family. So when they become parents, they are unable to pass that onto their children and so it just flows on down through the families.”*  
[Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016].

*“You can still see the impact of colonisation and the stolen generations today– drugs/alcohol abuse, homelessness, trauma, kids running the streets of the city at night. Also impacts on young parents and the next generation. It has a ripple effect like a stone thrown into the water.”* [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]

## Drugs, alcohol and violence

- Too much exposure of young children to drugs, excessive alcohol use and violence.
- The damaging impact of drugs, alcohol and violence on parents’ ability to cope and positively parent, and on children’s safety, security, access to daily needs and development.
- Children in households where these issues are a factor are described as living in crisis, chaos, neglect.

*“Some of the things that stop parents being parents, not so much being a good parent but being parents and, you know, supporting their children in their everyday life is alcohol and drugs.”* [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

## Lack of culturally appropriate services

- Lack of support services designed around the needs of Aboriginal families (need for appropriate parenting/caring programs, life skills programs including financial literacy/budgeting, advocacy, housing assistance).
- Lack of support in accessing health services for kids – especially ear and speech related services which impact on kids’ ability to learn.
- Lack of culturally appropriate early childhood education and care (childcare) and early schooling (kindy/pre-school/early school years) that are honouring and respectful of culture, identity and Aboriginal child rearing practices.
- Poor recognition or acknowledgement of the strengths of an Aboriginal child and their cultural differences and what these contribute to the knowledge and learning of all children.
- Need for more Aboriginal teachers, education assistants and liaison officers within schools.
- Inability of many children and families to participate in cultural activities, get out of the suburbs and be healthy and active together.
- An ongoing and deep seated lack of trust in services, workers, schools, kindy and playgroups.
- The negative impact of a school environment on a child’s experience of school, ongoing attendance and engagement with the school.

*“A shitload of money that goes into all that taking kids away, and put some of that into keeping families together, you know. If mum needs help, okay, let’s organise that. If dad needs help with these kids, let’s get some help.”*  
[Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

*“when they get to primary school, because they haven’t gone through that early childhood, they start to fall behind in the educational areas, but they are still years ahead, leaps and bounds, socially than their little wadjella*





counterparts. So they sort of start to fall behind and then they don't want to go to school because they can't keep up, so, you know, there is a whole lot of things that need to be in place for our children to grow up strong." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum 2017]

"That distrust. It is still the same with hospitals; the same with police. The distrust is there, so we have got to break through that barrier, not break through it, break it down, shoot it to pieces, if we have to, and take back ownership of our lives and our children's lives and our grandchildren's lives. And if that means going to school then we have got to make that school fit us as well, you know, not just for every other child out there, but it has got to fit our child as well." [Participant, Mirrabooka Community Forum, 2017]

## Parental disengagement

- Parental disengagement with children's early learning, education and/or school.
  - The impact of poor experiences with early childhood education and care and school environments on parents' attitude to and engagement with the school.
- Lack of experience and capacity among many young parents to meet the needs of babies and young children.
- Parents not taking time to engage in cultural, social and physical activities with their children.

"it is about the history of Aboriginal people and the policies of the days where if you sent your child to school, they weren't seen again. They were taken. So there is a bad impression of schools, that fear factor as well, half of those kids going to school and never being seen again. So the history of education is still within our families." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]

"So if mum is not feeling up to getting up, well, she is not going to make that effort to, you know, look after herself first and then put her kid in kindy. She is going to think 'it is better to keep them at home with me, so that nobody knows what is happening in my life; I'll keep it in the vicinity of my house', which makes them isolated and it doesn't help." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]

## Poverty

- Impact of poverty on family functioning.

"Poverty and just huge amounts of stress that don't leave a lot of emotional and mental space to be able to give what they would want to." [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

"I know there are some that are not doing the right thing, they are self-medicating or whatever, but the majority are just quite poor and they are poor because of the system that doesn't allow us to employ." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]

"Money is one of the biggest obstacles, especially with grandmothers raising their grandchildren today," [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

"are they going to be shocked when we say 'That kid probably didn't have a feed, didn't have breakfast, doesn't have school clothes ready, they had 20 kids at their house last night'? Are they going to understand that?" [Participant, LAA focus group, 2017]

## Loss of respect

- The loss of respect and teaching of respect – including teaching children self-respect.
- Loss of respect between parents and children, between and within families and in particular toward Elders. This loss is seen as a reflection of many negatives of contemporary society (lack of parental responsibility





and discipline and boundaries for children, loss of recognition of authority structures within family and community).

- Loss of respect contributes to family feuding, Elder abuse, and some children's behavioural issues at home and at school. It is also described in terms that suggest a break down in an important cultural tradition or foundation of family and community functioning.

*"I think that is one thing that is pretty much dying these days, the young kids' respect for the elders and parents, and that is a big thing that follows on with them at school or wherever in the community" [Participant, South Lake Community Forum, 2017]*

*"There is a loss of respect for Elders from a young age now. This used to be taught but has stopped – even when kids are taken on camp – it is just the fun stuff – not their obligations and responsibilities." [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]*

### Life stressors

- Stress affects peoples' ability to cope, parent effectively, support their children's needs and engage with their children. This stress is perceived as associated with a multitude of factors/life events (poverty, housing, racism, discrimination, trauma and grief).

*"Even though the love is there, you know, sometimes the families struggle to show that love because of all the stuff that they are going through. Sometimes, you know, we skip that point. We skip over the parents who are struggling and we put these expectations on them that they should be good parents, and they are good parents but they are struggling. They are struggling. And so we are not putting in that support system to help those families cope, so the kiddies see there is a better life, you know, and there is a better future for them and they will want to do the good things in life." [Participant, Mirrabooka Community Forum, 2017]*

### Housing

- Lack of appropriate housing.
- Lack of opportunities for home ownership on their own country.
- Impact of discriminatory housing policies on family functioning.

*"one of the things that our families need is safe, stable and secure accommodation. It is really hard to work with families when they mightn't have their own home, so you can't do that ongoing support to the family. As soon as they fall behind in their rent or damage is done to the house, you know, they are being evicted by Homeswest. So that has a big impact on our families." [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

### Stress on parents

- The pervasive impact of stress on parents – their ability to cope, parent effectively, support their children's needs and engage with their children.
- The extent to which grandparents are having to be primary care givers – both formally and informally, leading to stress and burn-out.

*"mum and dad have got all these pressures and, you know, might not have the coping skills to get through whatever challenges they have got, grief and loss, all the big stuff" [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]*

*"when you talk about the grannies looking after those three kids, and their other families' three kids, and another three, so the impact on that grandparent with things like toilet paper, tea bags, bread, milk, butter and petrol, and that's not even talking about their mental state, you know. They have got no respite, none whatsoever. There is nothing there." [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum, 2017]*

