



# Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort

## (Our Children, Our Heart) Project



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### Stakeholder Information

#### Three priority areas

In addition to the two diagrams, the community consultations highlighted 3 main priority areas of concern to the community. These are:

- 1 The impact of child removal;
- 2 The importance of education across the early years (early childhood education and care and early schooling); and
- 3 The lack of housing security for many Aboriginal families.

#### Preliminary recommendations

In terms of raising strong, solid Koolunga, the things that the community have asked for include:

- ▶ Provision of culturally appropriate early childhood education and care (childcare) and early schooling (kindy/pre-school, early school years) that is honouring and respectful of culture, identity and Aboriginal knowledge, and ways of learning.
- ▶ A child protection system that is attuned and responsive to the specific needs of Aboriginal children and their families.
- ▶ Adequate Aboriginal representation and input into the development of WA housing policy so as to deliver appropriate and fit for purpose housing design and allocation.
- ▶ More support services designed around the needs of Aboriginal families (parenting programs, life skills programs including financial literacy/budgeting,

transport, advocacy, housing assistance, Aboriginal education assistants and liaison officers within schools).

- ▶ Systems that support rather than punish parents and work with families (including extended family) to prevent removal of children or ensure they are placed with an Aboriginal family.
- ▶ Programs and services designed to meet the particular needs of grandparents caring for children.
- ▶ Acknowledgement of the strengths of an Aboriginal child and their cultural differences and what these contribute to the knowledge and learning of all children.

#### Next Steps for the project

Translation of the research via engagement with stakeholders including Aboriginal community controlled organisations, service providers and policy makers is a critical aspect of the project and will be a major focus in 2018.

One of the key tasks is to assist those working with Aboriginal families to develop a deeper understanding of, and explore possible solutions to, the areas of need in Aboriginal early childhood development. One of the key goals is to identify relevant organisations and agencies that are interested in working directly with the project's nine Elder Co-Researchers to revise their policies, services and work practices including developing a deeper understanding of Aboriginal values that are relevant to parenting and early childhood development.

#### Project Aims

**Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort** (Our Children Our Heart) is a five year (2016-2020) project working with the Aboriginal community(s) of Perth to improve outcomes for young Aboriginal children and their families. The project is focused on identifying the foundations for raising strong and solid Koolunga – the values, priorities and beliefs around child rearing and the factors considered critical to raising healthy, confident and resilient children.

#### Project setting

The project is being conducted in the Perth metropolitan area which forms part of Nyoongar country, specifically the Wadjuk Boodja (country) which is one of the 14 Nyoongar clan regions in the south-west of WA. While the project is focused on Nyoongar perspectives, it is worth noting that around one third of WA's Aboriginal population lives in the Perth metropolitan area, not all of whom identify as Nyoongar. For the purposes of this project, the metropolitan area is being approached as four regions: South East (Belmont to Armadale), North East (Midland/Swan Area), North West (Perth City to Two Rocks), and South West (Fremantle to Rockingham). This was a decision taken by the 51 Elders who attended the project's inaugural Perth-wide Elders meeting in 2016.

#### Project Elders

The project is led by a group of nine Elder Co-Researchers who provide cultural advice and direction to the project team on all aspects of the research, analysis, engagement, dissemination and translation processes. The Elder Co-researchers are accountable to the broader Perth Aboriginal community and more specifically, have a cultural responsibility to secure a better future for all Aboriginal children.

The Elder Co-Researchers work together with the project team to:

- ▶ Guide the setting of the project's research priorities.
- ▶ Bring their cultural knowledge, wisdom, professional skills and expertise to the project.
- ▶ Ensure that the project is relevant to the local Aboriginal community's needs, and that the research process is rigorous and culturally safe.

The nine Elder Co-Researchers are: Aunty Millie Penny, Uncle Albert McNamara, Aunty Charmaine Pell, Uncle Allan Kickett Snr, Aunty Muriel Bowie, Aunty Oriel Green, Kerry Hunt, Aunty Doris Hill, and Uncle Sealin Garlett.



Aunty Muriel Bowie



Uncle Allan Kickett Snr



Uncle Albert McNamara



Aunty Oriel Green



Aunty Millie Penny



Aunty Doris Hill



Aunty Charmaine Pell



Kerry Hunt



Rev Sealin Garlett

#### Background

The large gaps between the health, mental health and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are well documented. These disparities are evident from the earliest stages of life, persist across the life-course, and have significant social, personal and economic costs that necessitate a response. Healthy development in early childhood, particularly during the years before school, has a strong influence on a range of later life outcomes that are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It underpins many subsequent outcomes including mental health and social functioning, scholastic achievement and high school completion, emotional and behavioural problems, and health behaviours. International research has found that development in the years before school (assessed by measures of school readiness for example) is a good predictor of a range of outcomes in later life.

#### Project Team

The Project Team is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the project and consists of:

- ▶ Dr Brad Farrant (Researcher);
- ▶ Carol Michie (Project Officer);
- ▶ Dr Clair Scrine (Researcher).

#### The project is also supported by

- ▶ Dr Michael Wright,
- ▶ Professor Stephen Zubrick,
- ▶ Professor Cheryl Kickett-Tucker,
- ▶ Dr Carrington Shepherd and
- ▶ Mr Glenn Pearson.

This group has overall responsibility for driving the vision of the project and the delivery of the project outcomes.



If you would like more information or to become involved in the project please get in touch with:

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While evidence suggests that a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children continue to be assessed as developmentally vulnerable in early childhood, the figures are not able to inform us of why this is the case. Rather, these measures assess these children against a set of understandings that are derived from a mainstream Western framework that reflects the values, capacities and expectations of that culture which in turn may be significantly different to that held by Aboriginal people. The available evidence indicates that there is a relative absence of an Aboriginal worldview across mainstream early childhood measuring and reporting frameworks, policy and program design, and resource and service allocation. This results in an ongoing sense of cultural disconnect and inappropriateness of services which means that there is limited access of relevant and needed services by Aboriginal families. Currently much early child development policy, program and service design fails to understand or recognise the different ways Aboriginal families raise their children. A lack of knowledge or recognition of the differing values and priorities among Aboriginal families has, and continues to, seriously undermine trust in mainstream services, including schools, and has contributed to successive program and policy failure.

In order to recognise and respect Aboriginal culture, while simultaneously closing the gap in early childhood development, a culturally appropriate fit between the values, needs and expectations of Aboriginal parents, children and families and the resources and services that are available to them is required.

The Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort project is working alongside members of the Perth Aboriginal community to establish an evidence base on the values and priorities of the largely Nyoongar Aboriginal community of urban Perth with regard to Aboriginal child development. One of the objectives is to work with relevant stakeholders to translate the research findings into culturally safe and empowering policies and practices.

### Progress to date

#### Community consultation

The first stage of the project involved the initial engagement with Aboriginal Elders including the inaugural Perth-wide Elders meeting in 2016. The second stage has involved developing a better understanding of early childhood development and child rearing values and

beliefs from Aboriginal perspectives. There have been a number of discussions with the community(s) to talk about the important things that make Aboriginal children strong, protect young Aboriginal children, and what is needed to better support Aboriginal children and their families. The primary focus of this work has been engagement with parents, grandparents and family members of Aboriginal children in Perth. This engagement began with a community forum in each of the four regions and seven focus groups across the four regions, including a dedicated men's group involving participants of mixed ages. In total the forums and focus groups involved 138 participants, ranging in age from 18 through to over 80 years of age.

#### 1 Community Forums

The community forums took place between November 2016 and April 2017. The objective was to provide an opportunity for members of the communities across each of the four Perth metropolitan regions to engage in a meaningful discussion about early child development issues including: school readiness, language development, health and wellbeing, social and emotional development. The forums focused on the role of family, kinship and community in children's lives and development as well as parents' and families' values and practices about raising their children. Aboriginal Elders, parents and other community members were all encouraged to attend and share their views, experiences and opinions regarding these issues.

The 4 community forums were held at –

- ▶ Champion Centre, Seville Grove (3/11/2016)
- ▶ Herb Graham Rec Centre, Mirrabooka (23/3/2017)
- ▶ Altone Park Leisure Centre, Beechboro (29/3/2017)
- ▶ Jandakot Hall, South Lake (6/04/2017)

#### 2 Focus Groups

The focus groups were designed to attract the participation of younger parents as well as other members of the communities who may not have been able to attend one of the forums or felt more comfortable in a smaller sized group.

The 7 focus groups were held at:

- ▶ Wadjak Centre, Balga (1/06/2017)
- ▶ Mums & Bubs program, Champion Centre, Seville Grove (13/06/2017)

- ▶ Save the Children Playgroup, Champion Centre, Seville Grove (28/06/2017)
- ▶ Kindilinks, Hilton Primary School (29/06/2017)
- ▶ Armadale Men's Shed (23/8/2017)
- ▶ Langford Aboriginal Association (24/08/2017)
- ▶ Kindilinks, Mooditj Nyoongar Community College (1/09/2017)

#### Perth-wide Elders meetings

On 19th May 2016, a meeting of 51 Perth Elders was hosted at the Wollaston Conference Centre, (Mount Claremont). The objective of the meeting was to provide an overview of the project including its goals and expected outcomes, introduce key members of the research team, determine a suitable name for the project, explain the role of the Elder Co-Researcher group, and to seek expressions of interest for joining the group. Endorsement for the project was sought and given at this meeting.

The second annual meeting of Elders from across the Perth metropolitan region was hosted on the 17th of October 2017. This was attended by 60 Elders who endorsed the project's activities to date and gave a clear message of the need for the project team to begin working closely with service providers and community organisations to bring about the changes to policy and practice that the community has identified.

#### Key Findings

At the community forums and focus groups a number of common themes and issues were raised by participants. The following diagram presents the key factors that people identified as critical for raising strong and solid Koolunga. The diagram is an important reflection of the strengths and positive values of Nyoongar/Aboriginal ways of raising children.

People also talked about many things that get in the way of raising strong, solid Koolunga. The second diagram includes the main issues raised as those that many Aboriginal families have to deal with and that often prevent children and their families being strong and solid.

### Acknowledging our ways of raising strong, solid Koolunga



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

