

Minister for Family and Community Services

MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN

SENATOR THE HON AMANDA VANSTONE

Mr Barry Wakelin, MP
Chair
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Chair

Barry

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO CAPACITY BUILDING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities. The Family and Community Services Portfolio has a broad range of capacity building initiatives, services and programs which all contribute in some way to the needs and wellbeing of Indigenous people and Indigenous communities.

As a result, the expertise within FaCS and Centrelink on capacity building is substantial. For this reason the approach taken with this submission is to include a conceptual discussion piece, followed by responses to questions identified by HORSCATSIA. More detailed information on relevant programs, case studies and examples are provided in the attachments.

If requested by the Committee to appear at hearings, Departmental officials would be pleased to answer any questions arising from the submission. Please direct any enquiries about this submission to Barry Smith, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Policy and North Australia Officer on 08 8920 8920, or email at barry.smith@facs.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Vanstone

**Submission by
The Department of Family and Community
Services and Centrelink**

to

**The House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Affairs**

**Inquiry into Capacity Building in
Indigenous Communities**

September 2002

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' (HORSCATSIA) inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities has been prepared by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) with input from Centrelink.

Summary of conceptual frameworks

The word 'community' has several meanings and embedded assumptions, and care should be taken with its use to ensure the context is clear. Indigenous communities cannot be assumed to be easily defined or homogenous. 'Community capacity' refers to its mix of knowledge, skills, motivation and resources. This includes, but is not limited to, infrastructure and governance and leadership capacity.

The degree of strength, resilience and adaptability exhibited by a community depends on its internal capacities, which includes the level of different capitals it possesses (economic, physical, natural, human, cultural and social). Social capital is a major contributor to community strength as it underpins the development of the other capitals through enabling collective action, mobilising the resources required, and fostering responsibility and care for others.

Capacity building involves enabling people to determine their own values, goals and priorities, and to act on them. It starts from recognising existing strengths and assets, and aims to develop new skills, knowledge and resources as required to meet community needs and aspirations. Meaningful community participation in the process is essential to building local ownership and control, and to achieving sustainable solutions.

Key actions contributing to building community capacity include developing basic infrastructure, developing local leaders and providing them with adequate resources to undertake local actions, strengthening local networks and relationships, assisting the formation of beneficial business partnerships, enabling learning and skills-building, and strengthening appropriate governance arrangements. Resourcing and accountability practices and processes should also be considered by government agencies engaged in capacity building initiatives.

Summary of responses to Inquiry questions

1. What is good community leadership? How important is it for communities? What qualities do good leaders have? What more needs to be done to support leaders and encourage new ones?

Desirable leadership qualities include an array of traits, skills and knowledge common to effective leaders and managers in public and private sector organisations. Effective community leaders also require the skills and knowledge to influence local public opinion and galvanise local action. Effective Indigenous leaders have the ability to operate biculturally, to represent and reconcile different interests, and enjoy broad community acceptance of their legitimacy as leaders and decision-makers.

Government support can include initiatives that focus on developing individual leaders, including those focused on developing young people as potential future leaders. The latter includes initiatives seeking to encourage the civic engagement of young people and giving them a voice and a role in community affairs.

2. What do Indigenous people think makes a well-run community? What do governments and the wider community expect of well-run communities?

A well-run community requires appropriate governance structures and effective administrators. Such structures need to accommodate the representation of clan groups, traditional owners, elders, women and minority interests. Representatives need to have the confidence and respect of their constituencies, and the traditional authority required to make decisions. There should also be efficient local communication mechanisms to enable governing bodies to let local people know about their deliberations and decisions, and to enable local people to participate in governance issues.

FaCS considers that a well-run community should feature administrators who make fair, impartial and transparent decisions, that there are checks and balances in place to prevent abuses of power, that there are mechanisms enabling citizens to participate in governance matters, and appropriate dispute resolution processes. However, FaCS recognises that melding western administrative culture with the strong Indigenous value accorded to family obligation and traditional ways of making decisions can be problematic.

3. How important is community capacity building to the communities themselves? How do Indigenous people believe their communities can be strengthened (in urban as well as regional and remote areas?)

It is highly likely that most ordinary Indigenous people, like most non-Indigenous people, are not familiar with the term “community capacity building.” However, numerous reports, speeches and articles by Indigenous people do indicate that they understand the need for effective Indigenous leadership at all levels, consider that self-governance is critical to addressing their problems and building sustainable futures, recognise that they face a range of pressing issues and need to develop their capacities to address them, and want government agencies to support their efforts appropriately.

In addition, the kinds of project proposals submitted to FaCS indicate some commonality across the country regarding Indigenous people’s views of ways to strengthen their families and communities. These include:

- provision of essential infrastructure;
- leadership development and strengthening governance structures and administrative skills;
- projects seeking to empower and build the capacity of women to take the lead in addressing local issues;
- projects focused on addressing youth issues and building leadership capacity;
- projects focused on increasing participation in education and training for all age groups;
- projects seeking to involve men in taking responsibility for family violence and substance abuse issues;
- projects addressing health issues;
- maintaining, promoting, and transmitting Indigenous culture from one generation to the next;
- projects building financial literacy and focused on economic development; and

- projects that involve local people in environmental health and caring for country activities.

Most proposals aim to do these things in ways that enable local people to build their capacities and take responsibility for carrying them out themselves.

4. How best can community and regional organisations do business and make decisions in traditional ways while meeting wider governance and accountability standards? What can governments do to help more Indigenous organisations remain, stable, well-managed and successful?

FaCS and Centrelink note various examples of Indigenous organisations attempting to blend traditional ways of operating with meeting wider governance and accountability standards but is unable to make informed comment on their success or otherwise.

Government actions that may assist Indigenous organisations to remain stable and well-managed include:

- longer-term funding cycles and adequate recurrent funding for some organisations delivering on-going necessary services;
- resources for training in strategic planning, financial management, board or committee responsibilities, marketing and communications, staff supervision and development, succession planning, understanding of participatory development processes, evaluation techniques, business development, organisational structures (eg, co-operatives, companies);
- streamlining accountability requirements and reporting burdens;
- improving government agency coordination in doing business with Indigenous organisations;
- recognising that small organisations dominated by one clan group can experience great difficulties catering for the needs of all local clan groups; and
- increasing the internal capacity of government agencies to build relationships with Indigenous organisations, to respond in timely ways, and to understand and accommodate local circumstances and cultural differences.

5. How successful are regional structures of Indigenous governance? Should there be fewer community based organisations and more regional ones? Or are there other and better structures of governance?

FaCS has little direct or hard evidence about the effectiveness of regional structures of Indigenous governance, but is aware that regional structures can be problematic. For example, some Indigenous regional bodies may lack sufficient representation of the interests of women, old people, people with disabilities, and young people. There can also be competition between regional representatives for scarce resources for their own communities, which can leave those with the weakest representatives without a fair share.

FaCS and Centrelink do not consider that community-based organisations should necessarily be replaced with regional ones, nor that governance is necessarily best performed on a regional basis. Clan groupings, geographical boundaries, different interests, distance, and inadequate transport and communications infrastructure can make fair and effective regional decision-making difficult to achieve. Regional bodies can be a good way of dealing with common issues, enabling better resource-sharing, providing economies of scale, and developing regional approaches to regional

issues. However, every community needs some sort of local structure that enables participation in local as well as regional governance matters, and a variety of local organisations to cater for various interests and needs. The most effective balance of regional and/or local governance will vary from community to community.

6. What additional skills and resources do community members and organisations think they need in order to run their communities more effectively?

FaCS' experience in funding community-based self-help initiatives indicates that the range of skills and resource needs expressed by Indigenous communities include:

- strategic planning and financial management skills;
- understanding of the Australian economy and governance system;
- leadership skills and resources;
- program management and service delivery skills, including human resource management;
- financial literacy, including budgeting skills and consumer protection information;
- capital funds for housing and community buildings and facilities;
- communications infrastructure and capacity to use communication equipment;
- on-ground community development and facilitation workers;
- adequate resources and skills to enable services such as welfare, childcare, education, health and legal services to be delivered by local people in culturally appropriate ways;
- transport solutions; and
- various trade skills and entrepreneurial skills.

7. How well are governments coordinating their work at the community and regional level? Does it make a difference?

FaCS and Centrelink are members of many inter-agency groups at the national and state levels aimed at improving coordination and cooperation in relation to specific issues, with varying degrees of success. FaCS' is also participating in the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Indigenous Community Capacity Pilots [ICCP], which requires close cooperation and coordination between government agencies, and whole-of-government responsiveness to community issues in each pilot location.

While there is increasing evidence of inter-agency cooperation at the community and regional level, it is also evident that these attempts need to be strengthened and difficulties pertaining to funding partnerships overcome.

Difficulties include Departments having differing priorities, structures and constraints, which vary over time and appear to make coordination problematic even where there is a high level of commitment. Lack of continuity of officer membership in inter-agency forums can also inhibit achievements.

FaCS will continue to work in cooperation with other Commonwealth Departments, across portfolios and at all levels of government (including at the local community and regional level), to achieve outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Where possible 'whole of government' approaches will be developed and implemented e.g. the ICCPs. There are many examples of community projects with several agencies contributing program funds (mostly requiring separate contracts between the community organisation and each agency).

8. To what extent are governments and their agencies building genuine partnerships with Indigenous groups? Are these partnerships leading to better services and improvements in communities?

FaCS recognises that governments, communities and business need to share responsibility for addressing Indigenous disadvantage and is committed to building productive partnerships to do so.

There are many examples of successful partnership initiatives between government agencies, Indigenous organisations and the private sector with positive outcomes for Indigenous communities. However, there are a number of issues relating to government's capacity to develop genuine partnering relationships as distinct from funder/grantee relationships.

Important issues include clarifying the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each of the partners in a partnership, and agreeing on cooperative ways of working, including coordination and communication mechanisms.

The capacity of government officers to successfully partner with and engage with Indigenous communities will directly correlate with their level of communication and facilitation skills, understanding of cultural differences and particular local issues, ability to afford the time and travel when it best suits communities, capacity to respond appropriately and in timely ways, and continuity of officers' engagement.

A practical question that arises for government is how to frame funding agreements, including ones that might involve funding from several government agencies and perhaps the private sector too, in ways that better reflect the equality inherent in a true partnering relationship, reduce any unnecessary burdens that multiple accountability may place on the community partners, and accommodate cultural differences and preferences.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen government's community service delivery policy move away from traditional responses, such as competitively structured grants programs and large injections of funds. It is now recognised that effective initiatives need a strong element of community engagement and require community-driven development and delivery to help communities build strength and capacity to respond to local issues and to create and exploit opportunities.

In Australia, a number of State and Commonwealth programs are attempting to use 'bottom-up' and capacity-building approaches to strengthening communities. Government efforts in comprehensive community-building both here and overseas share a general approach to locational development and the alleviation of the effects of poverty, characterised by four crucial elements (Chaskin et al, 1997):

- A focus on geographical communities, including disadvantaged areas in cities;
- Provision of support for a process of strategic planning based on the recognition of community assets and available resources as well as needs;
- Community participation in governance, planning and implementation of development activities at the local level; and
- A focus on comprehensive development, including an attempt to integrate economic, physical and human development activities.

The Commonwealth Grants Commission suggests that the success of service outcomes by Indigenous communities is largely dependent on the investment by governments in community capacity, stating that:

The relationship between capacity building and the achievement of service outcomes needs to be recognised in funding decisions. The success of programs will be compromised if funding is not provided to invest in community capacity building ... building community capacity, especially developing the capacity of Indigenous organisations and communities to manage service delivery, is a crucial step in ensuring that Indigenous people play a central role in decision making and more effective use of funds. (2001)

Underpinning social policy developments within the FaCS portfolio is a focus on encouraging self-reliance through prevention, early intervention, capacity building, participation and partnerships involving individuals, governments, businesses and community organisations. Australians Working Together (welfare reform initiatives) and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy are two major vehicles for giving effect to these concepts and building individual, family and community capacities (see Attachment A for more details).

Community capacity building in the context of welfare reform is seen as a way of providing more opportunities for social and economic participation and thus contributing to reducing reliance on income support and reducing the number of jobless families. Government has indicated that its priorities for taking this forward include a need for better integration of relevant policies across portfolios, addressing regional barriers to social and economic participation, and finding innovative approaches to increasing economic participation in highly disadvantaged communities/regions.

FaCS is currently working on a strategic framework to progress this work. The draft framework has identified a number of key principles that might be relevant in developing an approach.

1. **Sustainability** is an overriding principle as it links community development in welfare reform with the government's broader community development policies. Solutions to address community and regional disadvantage must be sustainable in the long term, with the goal of creating sustainable communities and employment outcomes. Sustainability is not listed as a primary issue for consideration in the Inquiry and this may be appropriate given the diversity of Indigenous communities and the likely support needs in each community. However, the need for a sustainable economic base has been raised by many Indigenous leaders and is likely to come forward in the Inquiry.
2. A second major principle in the welfare reform context is that generating opportunities for **social and economic participation** is critical to community capacity building, especially for the most disadvantaged communities. Indigenous community views on this issue could be explored further to determine its relevance to a well run community and the importance to capacity building to the communities themselves. The Australians Working Together (AWT) package sought to create better links between the participation opportunities provided by Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and mainstream employment in appropriate labour markets and there is scope for further developing that linkage.
3. Comments received in the community consultations on the AWT package suggest the need for a **place-based approach** to community and regional issues. Uniform national policies must be complemented by solutions tailored to the specific needs and opportunities of individual communities and regions. The AWT package followed this approach in the Community Participation Agreement measure for Indigenous communities, and the current COAG Secretaries' Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilots (ICCP) on Indigenous issues is at the cutting edge of place-based policy (see further information under Issue 7). The logic of this approach requires a recognition that Indigenous communities themselves are diverse and should not be stereotyped in developing new policy approaches.
4. A fourth key principle emerging in the welfare reform context is that improving participation opportunities is a **shared responsibility of government, communities themselves, and business**. The Inquiry issues appear to envisage partnerships between government and communities, but do not expressly refer to business as a partner. There are some interesting current examples of private companies working to address Indigenous disadvantage. The Committee could consider the role of business in capacity building for Indigenous communities.

In the context of welfare reform, there is a recognition that the most sustainable solutions stem from empowering communities to take control of their future by building up, and building on, their own assets and strengths. The "asset based" approach to community development suggests that communities do best if they leverage off their strengths rather than see themselves wholly in terms of issues and problems requiring assistance from outside. There is scope for considering these perspectives in the Inquiry's key issues, with their references to decision making, governance, partnership and the need for additional skills and resources to allow community members and organisations to run their communities more effectively.

There is scope for Government to focus its approach to community policy by capitalising on the lessons learned through current policies and programs to achieve better prioritisation of Government spending and better outcomes. The Inquiry will

address this issue through the perspectives of partnership and coordination of the work of governments at the community and regional level. Other frames of reference being brought to bear on this issue in the welfare reform context include best practice, both local, and the need for Government to recognise the limits to its capacity for effective action as well as its scope.

Finally, FaCS has been looking at how to identify the most disadvantaged communities and whether we need special approaches to helping them. Many Indigenous communities and many mixed communities/regions with significant Indigenous populations are likely to fall into this category, whatever the precise methodology developed to identify them and we will need to tailor strategies to take account of Indigenous needs and strengths. Prioritisation may also be an issue for the Inquiry if it is the case that Indigenous communities are not all equally disadvantaged or disadvantaged in the same ways.

The first two sections of this submission provide a discussion of the conceptual frameworks around community capacity, and the principles and processes conducive to building community capacity. The third section answers the Inquiry's questions, including brief examples of FaCS/Centrelink actions and initiatives relevant to each issue discussed. The Attachments outline in more detail some of the other current FaCS and Centrelink activities related to capacity building.

SECTION ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Defining “community”?

In general terms, ‘community’ refers to a group of individuals with a shared sense of membership or belonging, a sense of solidarity and significance (Clark 1981). There is a range of types of communities that fit this definition including:

- ‘communities of location’ – geographical communities such as suburbs, rural towns, regions and discrete remote Indigenous communities;
- ‘communities of interest’ such as political associations, Indigenous corporations and kinship/clan groups, sporting teams, rural residents, disability or women’s groups, and virtual communities accessed through the internet; and
- workplace communities, such as companies, NGOs and Departments, which tend to be a mix of communities of interest and location.

Smith (1994) notes that an individual can be a member of any and all of these types of communities at the same time and that each of them can have different levels of communal strength. In communities of location, there is a variety of social groups with differing interests and perspectives, and it cannot be assumed that even the smallest of them is homogenous or shares common values and aspirations or is connected in a solidarity - significance sense.

Defining what constitutes a community and who is a member of ‘the community’ and entitled to participate in local actions and decisions can be problematic, especially in geographical communities where cultural groupings and state or local government boundaries overlap (eg. as in central Australia) and/or those with highly mobile or seasonal populations. In some remote Indigenous communities, non-Indigenous residents may not be regarded as legitimate members of ‘the community’. Where several clan groups have been forced to co-locate, the traditional owners may not regard the others as legitimate community members, or they may all regard themselves as separate communities of interest.

In urban areas, Indigenous ‘communities’ can be difficult to identify as Indigenous people are more dispersed through the general population. In fact, there may not be a ‘community’ as such, but rather a loose network of family and organisational affiliations.

In this submission, ‘community’ is generally used in the sense of a community of location, especially when referring to discrete Indigenous communities.

Defining community capacity

Community capacity refers to the mix of skills, knowledge, resources and commitment to act that a community can draw upon to grasp or create opportunities and address local issues. For communities to achieve the outcomes they desire, they need the capacity to act. The level of community capacity depends upon the quantum or level of assets, resources and skills that a community can draw on to grasp opportunities and address local problems. The Aspen Institute (1996) and Hughes and Black (2001) define the key elements of community capacity as:

- *commitment*: the community-wide will to act, based on a shared awareness of problems, opportunities and workable solutions;
- *resources*: financial, natural and human assets and the means to deploy them intelligently and fairly;
- *knowledge*: having the information or guidelines that will ensure the best use of these resources; and

- *skills*: including the talents, expertise and governance structures and processes of individuals and organisations that can be drawn upon to address problems and capitalise on opportunities.

Communities, and individuals and groups within communities, differ in their overall levels of capacity. It is important to assess the existing levels of capacity as well as the limits of that capacity when designing appropriate processes and developing new actions. Where possible, development processes should include opportunities for local stakeholders to build capacity while engaged in the process itself. For example, instead of employing a consultant to design and administer a survey, local stakeholders are assisted to design, administer and analyse their own survey.

The degree of community capacity is directly related to the assets of an individual or group and the assets of the social and economic environment. An individual may have a high level of skills and motivation (human capital) but these will not benefit the community if there are no opportunities for the individual to use them. To make the most of human capital then, social capital, physical and economic capital (such as infrastructure and financial resources) and environmental capital (local natural resources) also need to be present. Sustainability depends on the interactions of all these forms of capital.

Defining community strength

Hughes and Black (2001) define community strength as the extent to which resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance both individual and collective well-being in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility.

In practical terms, community strength is characterised by features that communities might have or hope to achieve, including:

- strong leadership;
- strong and productive networks within and with other communities;
- the ability to build on existing assets and resources (human, social, economic and environmental);
- a 'can do' spirit and optimism about the future (creating opportunities);
- the ability to grasp opportunities that come their way;
- a sense of 'belonging' to the community among its members; and
- the ability to embrace change and take responsibility for local outcomes. (Kenyon & Black, 2001)

An additional feature of strong communities of location seems to be their ability to acknowledge and accommodate diversity. Communities that have these characteristics exhibit a certain vitality, energy and spirit. How communities remain vital in the face of the challenges of large and on-going economic and social change depends on the ability of local people to anticipate change, refocus thinking from problems to opportunities, mobilise people to harness resources and act collectively, communicate widely, think strategically and make informed decisions.

A strong community is also a sustainable community. The Community Foundation Service (www.tcfrichmond.org) notes that in a sustainable community, families exercise responsibility for themselves, neighbours share a vested commitment to their common home, citizens influence events affecting the quality of their lives and the community as a whole values and cares for its children. These characteristics, and a strong behavioural norm of reciprocity, enable the community to develop and sustain itself in the medium to long term. However, these characteristics can also be

found in economically declining or struggling communities, suggesting that sustainability in the sense of on-going ability to provide for intergenerational self-reliance and economic prosperity involves more than wide-spread civic engagement and norms of reciprocity and responsibility.

In a strong community (where reciprocity is valued) people care for each other's interests. Reciprocity in this sense is not about what is expressed in formal legal or business rules, it is about a recognition that looking after others is not just a good thing in itself, but is also about looking after the long term interests of the individual and the community. That is, the individual provides a service to others, or acts to benefit others, in the general expectation that this kindness may be returned by someone at some undefined time in the future. (Onyx and Bullen, 1997).

In Australian Indigenous society, reciprocity tends to be characterised by strong kinship obligations and resource-sharing, effectively contributing to the survival of Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. However, there are many instances today of these norms being distorted by individuals who exploit them for their own interests, by making demands on relatives without regard for the capacity or well-being of the giver to meet those demands, or without intention to return the favour in the future.

Community strength is not the same as community capacity – community capacity refers to the mix of knowledge, skills, resources and commitment to act in a variety of spheres. This includes, but is not limited to, governance and leadership capacity. Building capacity contributes to community strength.

Community development

Community development work is committed to the idea that people can and should take more responsibility for identifying their own needs and managing their own welfare, resources, and directions. It takes place amongst groups of people ('communities') who share some common identity based on a common ethnic background, locality, issue or disadvantage and involves attempts by these groups to take control of aspects of their lives through developing and sharing resources, social interaction and participation, self-help and mutual support activities. Community development work takes place in both communities of location and communities of interest.

Besides local empowerment and local self-determination, other values inherent in community development work include:

- a focus on social justice;
- voluntary collective action; and an
- acknowledgment of diversity.

Community development may be distinguished from traditional welfare and social work by its focus on changing the situation rather than taking an individually-focused ameliorative approach which tries to help 'clients' adapt to their situation. It requires devolving power to the lowest level possible, consistent with effective governance of the affairs in question, which implies accompanying structural and institutional changes, and the deepening of democratic politics to ensure meaningful participation.

Community development approaches usually emphasise the importance of comprehensive community-based visioning and planning, which can take a long time to complete. Although time constraints can apply to any community, development

work at the community level can take longer in Indigenous communities because of distance, language and education barriers, the severity of the local issues being dealt with (including competing interests), and the higher priority accorded to family obligations and cultural matters. In contention with these constraints is the fact that governments work in different timeframes and are not always able to fit their administrative requirements and processes to community timeframes. When a plan or proposal is finally produced requiring some government action, bureaucracies often find it difficult to respond quickly, thus stifling community momentum and motivation.

Some community development practitioners express reservations about external agencies (eg. governments) imposing or demanding that a geographic community undergo a community-based planning exercise. In Australia it is noted that this has generally only been asked of Indigenous communities. Past attempts to stimulate systematic community or regional planning have relied on using planning models developed and imposed by bureaucracies. This has at times resulted in insufficient flexibility to take account of the variety and complexity of local circumstances.

Some of the pitfalls include:

- Assuming that Indigenous communities are geographically bounded and socially cohesive, with democratically elected leadership legitimately representing 'the community';
- Government agencies lacking the skills, sensitivity or knowledge about Indigenous cultures and circumstances required to provide necessary and appropriate support;
- Inability to deal with competing agendas between agencies, sectors or groupings within each community, and between community and government agencies;
- Emphasising performance indicators measuring inputs and quantifiable outcomes (such as infrastructure built, levels of education completed, crime statistics) rather than outcomes Indigenous people considered relevant and beneficial;
- Emphasising service delivery and physical infrastructure rather than community needs which may involve greater consideration of Aboriginality and self-determination;
- Policy or paradigm muddles between the bureaucracy's emphasis on legalism and control and the community's need for empowerment, control and self-determination. (eg. See Evaluation of DEET-ATSIC planning pilot, conducted 1991-1995, cited in Dillon, 2000)

Another difficulty arises with the notion that local people can always generate effective local solutions if given the opportunity. Although local people often do have the best information about local needs and issues, they may be limited in understanding causes and generating viable solutions, especially if there is low educational achievement and restricted exposure to other ideas and experiences. There is also a risk of simplistic solutions being proposed by the majority or the powerbrokers in the community, without due regard for minority interests and impacts, or for solutions that conflict with norms and values held by the wider population. There is also a view that some problems impacting at the local level may only be properly addressed at a regional, state and national level.

Social capital

One concept that has been generating considerable interest in a number of international developments, social policy and health policy arenas is the notion of social capital and its role in economic development and sustainability, safe and healthy communities, and social cohesion. Social capital is generally accepted to mean social relationships of mutual benefit characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity. These interpersonal relationships “lubricate cooperative action among both citizens and their institutions.” (Putnam, 1993)

In essence, social capital refers to the qualities of interpersonal relationships, and the degrees of connection these provide within and between groups of people. Several authors assert that essential elements of social capital include:

- trust;
- a reciprocal respect for others and a positive regard for difference;
- a willingness to participate cooperatively in shared enterprises for mutual and/or community benefit; and
- time and the capacity to engage with fellow citizens (eg. Cox, 1995; Putnam, 1993).

Without a degree of social capital, cooperation in collective action cannot occur, and access to the information and opportunities that arise from connections to others is severely limited. Engaging in collective action for mutual or community benefit also tends to increase social capital, through increasing understanding and trust (Cox, 1995). Processes that generate social capital contribute significantly to the capacity of people to access and utilise resources for individual and collective benefit. Such processes, which are crucial to inclusion and participation in networks, can also contribute to greater social cohesion and lower levels of social problems. These effects result from strengthening a sense of identity and belonging, and from empowering people to take preventative action as well as developing their capacity to resolve their own problems.

A number of authors suggest that a weakening of social capital underlies community fragmentation and decline. Although external conditions may impose hardships, communities with strong levels of social capital are much more resilient than those in similar economic circumstances with weak levels of social capital, and better able to maximise local assets and resources creatively and collectively in responding to adversity.

The literature on social capital identifies the importance of bonding ties and bridging ties. Bonding ties are present in family groups, in work teams, footy teams, clubs or other small groups with common interests, identities or family backgrounds. Bridging ties are those that connect members of a group to a different group. A third type of link is that between groups and institutions in the private, public and non-government sectors. While bonding ties are the easiest to establish and maintain, the research indicates that bridging ties and links with institutions are critical for maximising dynamic social relations through increasing access to social support, information and opportunities for economic growth (eg. Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

There is a growing body of research on how social capital and interpersonal connections with others is related to child welfare, to health outcomes, to levels of community safety, and to protection against involvement in criminal activity or substance abuse (eg. Kawachi, 1998). For example, a health study looking at people with heart disease found that when the condition and medical treatment received

were similar, it was the extent of the person's involvement in social networks and activities that made the critical difference in their life expectancy (Lomas, 1998).

Studies of social networks indicate how the support they can provide protects children and families from the negative impact of poverty and marginalisation (eg. Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Sarason et al, 1990). Jack & Jordan study (1999) presents evidence that children's welfare is primarily related to the level of social capital in their communities.

Some studies show clearly that in certain conditions, social capital can translate into economic capital, by enabling people to access employment opportunities and work cooperatively on business ventures. Investment in social capital can also eventually translate into economic benefits by reducing outlays on health and welfare support services and the justice system (Knack & Keefer, 1997; Gauntlett et al, 2001).

Social capital is also seen as underpinning the development of other kinds of capital, such as physical, economic, human, environmental and cultural capital. The links between the different kinds of capitals and the elements of community capacity are clear: Physical, environmental and economic capital are related to resources, human and cultural capital are related to knowledge and skills, and the commitment to act collectively is related to social capital.

Processes that build on existing good social relations, and seek to extend such relations, can exponentially increase the pace of development across all the capitals. While there is clearly a link between social capital and economic prosperity, some authors go so far as to argue that strong economies are an *effect* of strong civil society, rather than a cause. For example, Putnam's study (1993) of regional governance in Italy over two decades noted the correlation between economic performance and prosperity, levels of social capital and civic engagement, administrative competence and democratic governance. He concluded that high levels of social capital and civic engagement are a prerequisite for good democratic governance and economic dynamism.

The implication of the work on social capital is that Indigenous extended family and clan groups provide a natural base for bonding ties, but that enabling more bridging ties to other groups, other communities and institutions would assist in building self-reliance. It also indicates that recognition should be given to the potential multiplier effects of social participation in terms of its contribution to social cohesion and economic development, and that more attention needs to be paid to building relationships based on trust and cooperation between government agencies and Indigenous family and community groups.

Further research is required on the dynamics and linkages between social capital and economic decline or growth, to what extent valid indicators of social capital and community strength are culturally determined, and how government intervention, programs and services impact on social capital and civic engagement.

Summary

The word 'community' has several meanings and embedded assumptions, and care should be taken with its use to ensure the context is clear. Indigenous communities cannot be assumed to be easily defined or homogenous. Community capacity refers to its mix of knowledge, skills, motivation and resources. The degree of strength, resilience and adaptability exhibited by a community depends on its internal capacities, which include the level of different capitals it possesses (economic, physical, natural, human, cultural and social). Social capital is a major contributor to community strength as it underpins the development of the other capitals through enabling collective action and fostering care for others.

Community development approaches can be effective in building community capacity, based on the idea that people can and should take more responsibility for identifying their own needs and managing their own welfare, resources, and directions. However, there are a number of potential difficulties to keep in mind if undertaking community-wide planning processes.

The following section describes principles and processes regarded as conducive to building community capacity, highlights key building blocks of community strength, and includes some of the issues relevant to capacity building in the Indigenous context.

SECTION 2: BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

What is capacity building?

'Capacity building' is a term now fairly prevalently used by governments in Australia and overseas and is usually applied in the context of addressing disadvantaged communities. While the term might seem to reflect a new fad, the concept itself is not new and has much in common with the community development paradigms of thirty years ago. It is also a term sometimes applied in managerial approaches to public administration.

These two broad approaches to capacity-building differ in that the public administration approach emphasises strengthening communities' capacity to benefit from government programs through leadership development and management training, while community development approaches seek to empower communities to take effective control of their own issues and futures, and emphasise strengthening local governance and community participation in policy-making and implementation.

FaCS considers that a synthesis of these two approaches is necessary, together with building government agencies' capacities to apply them more effectively.

In capacity building, supporting communities to take control of their own development is a continuous process of actions towards enabling people, through information, discussion and training, to upgrade their ability to learn, know, analyse and understand their situation and their problems, to change perceptions and behaviour as appropriate, and to be effective advocates and mobilisers of social change (Schuftan, 1996).

Definitions of capacity building have the following notions in common:

- the building of sustainable skills, structures and resources;
 - seeking to multiply the health and well-being gains many times over;
 - development that allows people to define and achieve objectives; and
 - the capacity to determine one's own values and priorities and act on these.
- (Fitzgerald, 2000)

The issue of sustainability is critical to capacity building. One issue affecting viability and sustainability is that of continuity of process leaders. For example, since community planning and implementation processes can take several years, there are inevitably changes in process leaders (in communities, in assisting agencies or consultant groups, and in funding bodies) during this period that impact on momentum, direction and relationships.

Sustainability strategies for new local initiatives must therefore be built into the development phase. This includes developing strategies to ensure continuity of effective leadership/management and staffing in all the organisations involved, and continuity of volunteer involvement (if applicable). Where external skills are used, this may include skills transfers to local people to ensure that an initiative can continue beyond any external involvement. It may also include strategies for meeting any future need for funds, such as the development of income-generating enterprises.

Time-limited pilot projects in particular pose dilemmas for sustainability. Pilot projects are a useful method of testing new ideas, which can lead to broader policy changes and new programs, and benefits for the communities in which they are

undertaken. However, withdrawal at the end of a pilot phase might not enable positive outcomes to continue.

Often community organisations participate in the pilot in the hope that by proving their effectiveness, they will become self-sustaining, have positioned themselves effectively for future opportunities, or at least have contributed to improvements or opportunities for themselves and/or other organisations and communities.

Principles and processes

There is no one model for building community capacity, but a number of practitioners around the world suggest principles or guiding frameworks. For example, Kingsley et al (1997) have listed eight capacity building principles that have been developed and adopted by the National Community Building Network in the USA. These principles:

- integrate community development and human services strategies;
- forge partnerships through collaboration;
- build on community strengths;
- start from local conditions;
- foster broad community participation;
- require racial equity;
- value cultural strengths; and
- support families and children.

In Australia, a similar set of principles was developed in October 2000 by members of Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable. The Roundtable was an initiative of the Minister for Department of Family and Community Services and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, to provide strategic advice on addressing problems faced by Indigenous families and communities. The Roundtable brought together senior Indigenous and community leaders, and business, academic and church representatives to map out a way forward for the Commonwealth government. The Roundtable's principles for actions they considered intrinsic to addressing issues in Indigenous communities were:

- delivery of government programs should be on a strategic and coordinated whole-of-government basis;
- Indigenous people themselves should have a central role in the design, planning and delivery of services;
- targeting the needs of children and young people, particularly in the areas of leadership training, self-esteem building, awareness of one's culture and family and anti-violence training; and
- encouraging self-reliance and sustainable social and economic development.

Putting these principles into effect requires:

- flexibility in program administration;
- the development of regional approaches, particularly collaboration between industry, Indigenous organisations, other non-government organisations, churches and the broader Australian community;
- recognition of the importance of Indigenous cultural values and spirituality, and encouragement of pride in Indigenous history and traditions;
- supporting Indigenous people to take responsibility for shaping a better life for future generations;
- building on the existing strengths and assets of Indigenous people; and
- sustainable economic growth.

Two of these principles are described in more detail below:

Building on existing community strengths

Much community planning, and the way that program funding is allocated by governments, focuses on needs and deficiencies. For example, a community might be surveyed or consulted, or census data mined and analysed, to discover what all 'the problems' are. A picture of a community emerges from statistics such as crime rates, unemployment rates, number of sole parents, incidences of child abuse or substance abuse, morbidity and mortality rates, etc. However, such analyses and characterisations of communities by needs and deficiencies omit a significant part of the picture, and contribute to a negative view of such communities by both their residents and outsiders.

In all cultures, people and communities are much more than the sum of their problems - people have interests, passions, skills and abilities. All geographical communities have people, physical and natural assets, equipment, local organisations and institutions. While looking at deficits is important, it is even more critical to look at assets – what is already there that can be harnessed or linked to maximise synergies and support local problem-solving and self-help action.

Community development techniques include mapping the strengths or assets of a community as well as identifying its issues and problems. Strengths or assets mapping entails collecting information on the human capital in a given geographic community, its physical infrastructure and equipment, its social infrastructure (local groups and organisations), and economic capital (including businesses). The information can then be used for a variety of purposes, such as contributing to community planning, linking people with common interests, finding gaps in services, sparking new community actions and enterprises, and identifying better uses for existing community resources. (eg. See Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, for discussion of a strengths approach and useful strengths/assets mapping tools.)

Fostering community participation

Participatory community-driven development involves stakeholders in sharing the development and control of initiatives that affect them, including having input into decision-making and resource use. Stakeholders can include local leaders, organisations and groups, local governance authorities, local businesses, regional bodies, interested residents and the particular target group at which an initiative may be directed.

Building community capacity can take many forms along a continuum from attendance at meetings to collective political action. Too frequent meetings may have a frustrating effect if there is no progress through concrete actions. Participating in consultations organised by governments where this is the only form of engagement, may be perceived as not as strong as a true partnership process with equality in decision-making power.

Findings from empirical studies strongly suggest that participation can be a source of psychological empowerment activity for the individuals engaged in it only if it involves personal contribution to the collective action. Moreover, community participation processes that include developing a form of critical consciousness appear to be most effective at improving psychological empowerment (Le Bosse et al, 1998/99). Mere consultation is insufficient for this purpose.

The goals of community-driven development processes are to respond to local needs by facilitating collective action, building problem-solving skills, and promoting ownership and care of local assets. Participatory processes are a key building block

for achieving these objectives, and for ensuring that communities are in control of planning, implementation, operation, maintenance and evaluation of development projects. Participatory processes include effective information dissemination, spaces for discussion and debate, and strategies for ensuring widespread inclusion of stakeholders. There is a strong evidence-base from a variety of community development initiatives, including initiatives in developing countries, that participatory processes are most effective in achieving sustainable solutions (eg. see Le Bosse et al, 1998/99).

The challenges when seeking to be inclusive during a consultation or development process include: how to identify appropriate participants, how to ensure all who should participate have the opportunity to do so, how to ensure all views are fairly considered, how to reconcile the views of different factions and interests, and whether they have the capacity (knowledge, skills, motivation) to participate meaningfully and usefully.

Basic infrastructure needs

Developing community capacity includes targeting some basic building blocks of community strength. The following comments relate particularly to remote communities. **Physical infrastructure** such as houses and buildings for administration, community services and commercial uses are one element - inadequate or overcrowded housing contributes to social problems and ill-health, and affects the capacity of individuals to participate in social and economic activities. It also affects school attendance rates and scholastic achievement.

Inadequate or insufficient buildings for services like health clinics, childcare centres, libraries, women's centres and aged care, or for commercial enterprises or interest group activities, are a barrier to collective action and the establishment of new services and community initiatives. This is especially marked where a community wishes to employ external specialists to assist but has no capacity to house them locally. Capacity building programs should recognise these limitations and consider capital grants where justified and appropriate.

Another essential building block of community strength is **communications infrastructure**. Without the ability to communicate externally, access to information, services, goods, other ideas and assistance, and economic opportunities are severely hampered. Communications infrastructure includes private telephones, video-conferencing facilities, internet access, and broadcasting facilities. Resourcing communications infrastructure includes building the capacity of local people to use the equipment effectively, and also includes developing intra-community communication mechanisms. Too often, the only means of local people finding out what their governance authority is doing, what new initiatives are happening and what services are available, is by word of mouth or through community newsletters written in English. Where there is a low level of English literacy and a population of more than a few hundred, this is not conducive to encouraging broad participation in the life of the community.

Appropriate, legitimate and effective **governance structures** are another key element of basic community infrastructure. Simply imposing mainstream local government structures and responsibilities is problematic. Indigenous culture and tradition strongly affects how local people prefer to organise decision-making and carry out those decisions. (See further discussion in the next Section, under Issue 2). One of the problems Indigenous community councils face is that often the range of responsibilities they are expected to take on can be far in excess of the

responsibilities taken on by mainstream local governments, and without the local revenue-raising capacity enjoyed by mainstream local governments. Thus they are often required to manage welfare delivery, social, employment, training, law and order and health programs on top of local government responsibilities such as road maintenance, rubbish collection and environmental, cultural and economic development programs.

Another basic building block is **financial literacy and access to banking services**, without which the ability to engage in the modern economy and develop self-reliance is severely hampered.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, in its report titled *Regional Banking Services – Money Too Far Away* (1998) endorsed the National Farmers' Federation submission that:

Access to financial services is an essential requirement for participation in modern society. All consumers need mechanisms for storing and saving money and for receiving and making payments to third parties. In this sense, basic banking services have much in common with central utilities such as electricity, gas and water.

Individuals without access to banking services are therefore at an economic disadvantage. Without the ability to save, individuals are denied a range of economic opportunities and, in particular, the opportunity to break out of the "poverty trap" (Stegman, 1999). Studying the "unbanked" in the USA, Stegman notes that:

Banking status has profound implications for long-term family self-sufficiency. In 1998, for example, the median value of all assets held by unbanked families was just \$US2,300 compared with \$US136,000 for all banked families (Stegman, 2001:23)

Governments in Australia and elsewhere have begun to recognise that the ability of low-income groups to save and create an asset base has a number of positive benefits to society. The McClure report on welfare reform (2001:29) identified the importance of generating a savings regime as a means of escaping the poverty trap. Those without access to a savings account are unable to save for a house deposit or other purposes. Families that do not maintain savings often have poor or non-existent credit ratings or debt-to-income ratios that exclude them from mainstream forms of credit. Such households have no financial margin for safety, and even temporary disruptions in family income or unforeseen expenditures can create serious hardship (Smith, 2001).

Many Indigenous families have difficulty generating savings and accessing affordable credit even with ostensible access to banking services. Reasons can include poor financial literacy, cultural values and practices such as demand sharing, and service delivery difficulties affecting Indigenous access.

The lack of access to banking services encourages people to rely on informal alternatives, such as cashing income support or wages cheques through non-regulated services such as stores, taxi-drivers, community councils and hawkers, which, together with poor financial literacy, increases vulnerability to exploitative practices.

Westbury commented in his 1999 study considering issues in the delivery of banking and financial services to remote Indigenous communities:

The issue of Indigenous people's access to, and understanding of, banking and other financial services lies at the heart of their ability to participate in the cash economy, thereby improving their general quality of life, and in the longer term, assisting in the reduction of welfare dependence.

Access to, and efficient use of, financial services therefore underpins the ability to participate in the social and economic life of the community and the larger economy. It also underpins the ability to 'get ahead' rather than merely 'get by'. Accumulation of assets and moving to self-reliance are impossible without such access.

Asset-building is an emerging theme in community revitalisation (eg. see Page-Adams & Sherraden, 1997). The term is sometimes used to encompass all potential resources in a community – not just financial resources, but also the talents and skills of individuals, organisational capacity, political connections, buildings and facilities, etc. In this broad sense, the term appears to be interchangeable with 'capacity-building.'

FaCS is already taking a range of actions to address these issues (eg. Cape York Family Income Management Project, increasing use of Centrepay – see Attachment A, pp 45 for further details), and is exploring further initiatives such as:

- extending the provision of financial literacy education (including consumer education) and budgeting skills;
- developing and enhancing money management tools such as Centrepay and weekly payments; and
- ways of providing basic banking services in remote areas through partnerships and innovative technologies.

Resourcing issues

It is important to manage resourcing issues effectively in the context of government resourcing of community services and initiatives. Issues identified from evaluations and reports include:

- There are not many government funding programs that include capital funding for community buildings or worker accommodation. This can hamper remote communities wishing to deliver new programs and services, especially where external skills are needed to help in start-up phases.
- Funding programs each have their own reporting and accountability requirements, and government agencies find it difficult to meld them in such a way that an organisation only has to deal with one lead agency and provide consolidated reports that would satisfy all relevant agencies. It is often difficult for communities to meet the various reporting and accountability requirements of multiple agencies.
- Resources from government usually depend on the nature of the request by communities. It is not unusual for projects to vary from small projects funded for discrete activities over short periods to large projects that involve significant community involvement and are funded over a number of years. This can place community groups in uncertainty and can make it more difficult to secure committed workers. It can also lead to workers focusing on trying to secure the next year's funding rather than focusing on core business.
- Resources allocated for local salaries are usually the minimum possible, so that local services often only have one key paid worker. This can lead to worker burn-out or project failure, especially in isolated settings or where the worker is expected to cover a large geographical area.

- In Indigenous communities, CDEP places are often used to employ local people in various government-funded community projects and services, and sometimes supplementary wages are provided to top up CDEP wages. While there are instances where this is appropriate, such as where the project includes building the capacity of CDEP workers, or is planned to generate self-sustaining income to pay full wages, too often essential services in Indigenous communities are recurrently funded on the basis of continuing to employ CDEP workers.
- Many funding programs employ a competitive application or tendering process. Small groups, new groups, and those in remote areas have difficulty finding out what funding might be available and they may lack sufficient capacity to write a competitive application. This can be especially problematic for Indigenous groups or communities trying to access mainstream funding programs, as their capacity to mobilise collectively may be impeded by local fragmentation and social dysfunction, and they face language and other access barriers. Competitive tendering processes have been criticised by many in the community sector for also discouraging collaboration and cooperation at the local level.

Summary

Capacity building involves enabling people to determine their own values, goals and priorities, and to act on them. It starts from recognising existing strengths and assets, and aims to develop new skills, knowledge and resources as required to meet community needs and aspirations. Meaningful community participation in the process is essential to building local ownership and control, and to achieving sustainable solutions.

Key actions contributing to building community capacity include developing basic infrastructure, developing local leaders and providing them with adequate resources to undertake local actions, strengthening local networks and relationships, assisting the formation of business partnerships, enabling learning and skills-building, and strengthening appropriate governance arrangements. Government agencies engaged in capacity building initiatives should also take care to establish appropriate and manageable resourcing and accountability practices and processes.

SECTION THREE: ISSUES RAISED BY HORSCATSIA FOR CONSIDERATION

ISSUE 1: What is good community leadership? How important is it for communities? What qualities do good leaders have? What more needs to be done to support leaders and encourage new ones?

Leadership theories broadly distinguish between trait approaches, behavioural approaches, and situational (or contingency) approaches. The trait approach attempts to identify personal or psychological characteristics of leaders, the behavioural approach looks at what leaders do - the behaviours leaders use that sets them apart from others - and the situational approach strives to identify the characteristics of a situation that allow one leader to be more effective than another. In considering the question of 'good community leadership', all three approaches need to be considered.

Research on the traits and skills commonly associated with leader effectiveness produce lists such as the following (amalgamation of lists from various studies on aspects of leaderships – eg. Yukl, 1981; Ghiselli, 1971; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973):

TRAITS	SKILLS
Adaptable to situations	Conceptually skilled
Alert to social environments	Diplomatic and tactful
Ambitious and achievement-oriented	Fluent in speaking
Assertive	Knowledgeable about task/issue at hand
Cooperative	Organisation skills
Decisive	Administrative ability
Intelligent	Socially skilled
Desire to influence others	Supervisory ability
Energetic (high activity level)	Ability to take the initiative
Persistent	Politically astute
Self-confident	Entrepreneurial
Tolerant of stress	Ability to identify and exploit opportunities
Willing to assume responsibility	Facilitative ability
Self-assured	Ability to solve problems
Persuasive	Ability manage or resolve conflict
Creative	Ability to adapt and be flexible
Tolerance for ambiguity	
Concern for people	

There are a number of other qualities that could be added, but it is highly unlikely that any one person regarded as being an effective leader would possess them all, and having many of these qualities does not guarantee that leaders are heading in desired directions.

Situational approaches to leadership recognise that the unique characteristics of a given situation may require different leadership styles, and the ability to switch styles as appropriate. Four different styles of leadership (identified by House & Mitchell, 1974) are:

Supportive: Involves concern for the well-being and development of the team. Good for situations where empowering and developing team members to learn and take control themselves is important.

Directive: Tells people what to do, sets rules and procedures. Good for responding to crises when there is no time for explanation or coaching people to make their own decisions.

Participative: Involves others in decision-making and implementation. Good for building stakeholder commitment and maximizing group intellectual resources.

Achievement-oriented: Sets challenging goals and emphasises excellence in performance. Can be good for sustaining motivation, but not if goals are too difficult to achieve, and not if people dimensions are neglected.

The qualities and behaviours described above apply to leadership in general, but effective Indigenous leaders have the additional quality of being able to operate bi-culturally. No community in Australia, however remote, can avoid interactions with mainstream culture and governments, and good leaders need to understand the mainstream culture as well as their own in order to negotiate from a position of strength and steer their communities to a future that successfully adapts traditional culture to contemporary circumstances. The leadership challenge, as expressed by Joe Ross from the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre, is to guide the evolution of Indigenous culture to accommodate change, to be sustainable and to accommodate two vastly different cultures.

In applying the above concepts of good leadership in the Indigenous community context, the issue of legitimacy is relevant. Unlike work situations where a leader is appointed to a position after a selection process, community leaders may or may not have undergone a selection or election process, and may or may not hold a particular office or authority position. A person taking on a local leadership role must have local legitimacy - the respect, trust and authority of the community - to be effective. One of the problems with western-style democratic election processes is that they do not necessarily coincide with traditional ways of designating leaders and decision-makers, and governments should recognise that elected officials may not always be the real leaders and therefore 'power-brokers' in a community.

Indigenous community leaders can include elected representatives, elders, traditional owners, community group committee members, members of regional bodies such as Land Councils and ATSIC's Regional Councils, members of government advisory bodies, managers of services and enterprises, members of the local religious communities and churches, and informal leaders comprising people with influence derived from their personal attributes, experience and interests. Examples of the latter can range from prominent commentators and activists, to leaders of local interest groups, people who have the ability to galvanise collective debate and action on particular issues, and those respected individuals to whom people turn to for advice and support.

Effective local leadership is essential to any community, but this alone is insufficient to guarantee a more cohesive and prosperous community. Putnam's 1993 study of regional governance in Italy over two decades found that those communities which exhibited a more collaborative, trusting and power sharing relationship with government were also those which scored highly in measures of social capital and economic opportunities. However, the reverse was true in 'uncivic' communities – poor community cohesion and lack of empowerment led to a dependence on hierarchy; community members relied on rational command and control decision making by government; and government control perpetuated low levels of participation and empowerment.

A community high in social capital tends to produce more effective leaders, administrators and institutions. Paying attention to generating social capital and supporting leadership development and good governance is important in order to promote a virtuous circle rather than a vicious circle.

There is potentially a looming leadership crisis in many remote communities, as the older, often mission-educated people are replaced by a younger generation. There are insufficient young people being groomed to take up leadership roles. There has been improvement in education, participation rates and achievement in urban Indigenous communities. For remote communities however, the record has been poor, with low attendance rates in primary school, and negligible attendance and achievement in secondary and tertiary education. This has created a significant proportion of young people in remote communities with low skills or capabilities to take up the challenges of community governance and leadership in the future.

Even now the number of capable leaders in a community is often inadequate for dealing effectively with the vast range of critical local problems. This can put inordinate pressure on a few individuals to be across a number of complex issues and services and contributes to 'burn-out'.

The extent and depth of the pressures and problems faced by some Indigenous families can also make additional demands on local leaders that are generally not experienced by local leaders in mainstream communities. Limited participation of residents in local activities is often a result of these situations as people concentrate on dealing with their complex personal circumstances. Addressing critical issues such as family violence, poor health, poverty, gambling and housing needs will help to increase capacity to participate in civic matters, community initiatives and economic activity.

Initiatives that seek to strengthen civic and educational engagement and achievement would appear critical to the future leadership of Indigenous communities. In several Indigenous communities, Youth Councils and alternative education models aimed at post-primary age and young adults are being tried (eg. Tiwi Islands Youth Council, Wadeye's Kardu Kigay educational facility for young men, Irrkerlantye's community school, and projects providing childcare at high schools for young mothers). Evidence from a range of youth-focused initiatives shows that enabling youth participation in civic matters and project design, management and implementation can be a powerful way of building the self-esteem, confidence and skills necessary for taking a leadership role in the future.

Further effort is required to address the low rates of participation of Indigenous youth in education and training, especially in remote areas. This could include altering curricula and teaching methods to make schools more attractive, interesting and relevant to Indigenous youth, providing alternatives to full-time schooling such as a combination of work experience, traineeships, CDEP, involvement in community development projects and formal schooling in particular subjects, and perhaps delivered outside the regular school setting. Particular efforts should be made to re-engage young people who drop out of school in the primary years. There could be a case for developing youth-focused CDEP-type schemes that include an element of formal schooling, and allows under 16 year olds to participate.

FaCS continues to be concerned about Indigenous young people aged 16 to 18 years who are not in school, training, CDEP or work, and not receiving any income support, thus requiring families and community organisations to provide for their

support needs. FaCS continues to seek ways to work with individuals and communities to improve this situation and minimise other possibly related social impacts e.g. juvenile offending rates.

Example of FaCS action:

FaCS encourages leadership development through the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* (the Strategy). The Strategy recognises that critical issues around leadership that need to be considered are the:

- facilitation of further debate by Indigenous communities about the definitions of eldership and leadership in their communities to see how people view elders and what they think leadership qualities are;
- mentoring of young Indigenous people; and
- assurance that Indigenous people at the local level play a part in the process of self-definition, that is, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves define their community, its distinctive features and history.

By providing potential community leaders with opportunities to develop their skills the Strategy aims to build stronger, more self-reliant communities. One example of projects funded under the Strategy's *Potential Leaders in Local Communities* initiative, is targetted at non-traditional leaders, such as women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and young people:

- The *Australian Indigenous Leadership Program* (\$400,000 over 3 years), supports Indigenous men and women who are active in their communities to complete certificate-level, accredited leadership training. The courses, located in regional Australia, are expected to involve up to 120 participants. An important aspect of the program involves on-going mentoring supported by course sponsors and presenters.

ISSUE 2 : What do Indigenous people think makes a well-run community? What do governments and the wider community expect of well-run communities?

FaCS and Centrelink are not aware of any definitive research on what Indigenous people consider makes a well-run community, but there is a growing body of evidence and research on the factors relating to community strength (see earlier section on community strength), which include having strong leaders.

The evidence we have to date suggests that in the first instance, a well-run community requires appropriate governance structures and effective administrators. Such structures need to accommodate the representation of clan groups, traditional owners, elders and women, and representatives need to have the confidence and respect of their constituencies, and the traditional authority required to make decisions. There should also be efficient local communication mechanisms to enable governing bodies to let local people know about their deliberations and decisions, and to enable local people to participate in governance issues.

One of the difficulties with transposing mainstream local government structures into discrete Indigenous communities is that western style democracy may not sit well with traditional ways of making decisions. For example, democratic processes usually require the election of leaders via voting. The assumption is that those elected will represent their particular constituency (clan group, geographical area or interest group). However, those elected may not have the traditional authority to

represent anyone, while those holding traditional authority may not be listened to by external powers because they have not been elected.

Democratic decision-making processes are often adversarial, where votes are taken for or against often opposing propositions. Generally Indigenous people (particularly women) may be more comfortable with non-adversarial systems of decision-making, ones that emphasise discussion rather than debate, and consensus rather than majority votes.

Elected community councils can experience difficulties trying to balance traditional authority, customary law and values, and decision-making processes with the mainstream culture's legislative and accountability frameworks. For example, the need for equitable constituent representation, political leadership, and the ability to undertake councillor functions appropriately can present challenges to Indigenous communities.

Another problem is that elected local councillors may not necessarily have the skills or knowledge required to make sound governance decisions, and must place heavy reliance on paid, usually non-Indigenous, administrators. While there are some excellent town clerks, this is not always the case if local councillors lack the capacity to select and supervise a suitable town clerk.

This issue can also affect community organisations other than local councils, as many consider they need to employ skilled outsiders to assist them – if they are not experienced employers, or do not have the capacity to manage employees well, they risk over-reliance on the worker which can lead to them being in control in name only. Overseas studies describe the pitfalls of governments paternalistically sending in professional developers to fix local problems, who then dominate or manipulate local decision-making. (See for example Botes & van Rensburg, 2000.)

FaCS considers that more could be done to build the governance capacities of local councils to foster emerging traditional/culture-based governance structures, to support councils and community organisations through selection processes of key personnel. It would also be prudent to ensure that there are checks and balances in place to prevent misuses of power, and that residents have the capacity and access to fair mechanisms for challenging decisions or taking action against unscrupulous or incompetent personnel.

Good governance and administration depends not only on the management abilities of local councils and administrators, but also on having appropriate resources, the means to mobilise them, the capacity to encompass the interests and needs of minorities, the ability to identify and meet local needs, and deal with conflict and issues effectively. A well-run community is also sustainable for the next generations.

A crucial element of effective local governance is for decision-making authority and control over resources to be devolved to the local level wherever possible. While this is the preferred approach, there have been difficulties in Indigenous communities where this has been attempted due to:

- difficulty developing an appropriate community governance authority with the legitimacy and ability to act on behalf of the whole community;
- the fact that such local bodies may be unable or unwilling to act in the disinterested way valued by non-Indigenous administrative cultures (ie. nepotism is frowned upon by western cultures, but may be a valid and expected expression of the high cultural value placed upon familial obligations); and

- the administrative obligations associated with local governance bodies, especially if they have funding agreements with a number of different government agencies.

In addition, there have been in the past a number of administrative constraints making it difficult to relinquish authority and control to communities, such as:

- wanting to deal with organisations rather than those who are not members of a formal organisation, in some cases insisting on creating new local incorporated bodies to deal with (even though incorporation laws may be inconsistent with Indigenous values and preferred ways of operating); and
- established budget cycles, program guidelines and accountability requirements, including legislated financial accountabilities.

However, there are now a number of national initiatives that are addressing these constraints on communities, and are demonstrating a commitment by all governments to better cooperation and coordination (see comments and examples in Issue 7).

Example of FaCS action:

From a FaCS portfolio perspective, indicators of a well-run community or community strength are those which capture the extent to which resources and processes (including relationships, networks and governance arrangements) maintain and enhance both individual and collective well-being in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility.

FaCS engaged the University of Queensland to start to develop and test some of these indicators in six communities, one of which is Indigenous - the remote community of Wadeye, Northern Territory. Fieldwork in the Wadeye community revealed that the concepts of 'trust' and 'reciprocity' taken from standard literature on social capital are valid concepts and understood in Indigenous communities. Other values, which were held in high regard by community members of Wadeye included:

- taking ownership of problems;
- respect;
- belief in yourself and what you can do (self capacity);
- kindness and motherly love; and
- concern for community members.

'Kinship' was seen as the social "glue" that facilitates the sharing of these values.

There were several examples of ways the local Wadeye community were taking ownership of problems and developing their capacity for local governance. For example, they have developed Thamarrurr, a revival of the traditional regional governance body that has representatives from all clan groups, with equal numbers of male and female representatives to act as the local council.

The fieldwork in Wadeye showed that the community had a well-developed sense of their strengths, perceiving that many aspects of their lifestyle are culturally enriching and spiritually sustaining. Against this background, the community identified problems in relation to household overcrowded and inadequate housing, lack of opportunities for young people, the impact of alcohol and drug use, family violence, health issues, and availability of affordable fresh food.

This initial work highlighted the need for further identification and analysis of the factors which Indigenous communities view as important indicators of their community strength.

ISSUE 3: How important is community capacity building to the communities themselves? How do Indigenous people believe their communities can be strengthened (in urban as well as regional and remote areas?)

The importance of capacity building to communities from FaCS' perspective has been discussed in the first two sections of this submission. FaCS has no reliable research that can answer these questions on behalf of Indigenous people. It is highly likely that most ordinary Indigenous people, like most non-Indigenous people, are not familiar with the term "community capacity building."

However, numerous reports, speeches and articles by Indigenous people do indicate that they understand the need for effective Indigenous leadership at all levels, consider that self-governance is critical to addressing their problems and building sustainable futures, recognise that they face a range of pressing issues and need to develop their capacities to address them, and want government agencies to support their efforts appropriately.

In addition, the many interactions that FaCS and Centrelink officers have with Indigenous people and community groups, and the kinds of project proposals submitted to FaCS, indicate some commonality across the country regarding their views of ways to strengthen their families and communities. These include:

- requests for funds for essential infrastructure and to build the capacities of local people to undertake construction work and to use any new equipment (including communications equipment);
- projects aimed at leadership development and strengthening governance structures and administrative skills;
- cultural maintenance, promotion and transmission projects;
- projects seeking to empower and build the capacity of women to take the lead in addressing local issues (eg, older women teaching younger women parenting skills, health care and nutrition, gathering bush tucker and use of traditional medicines, women's night patrols, operating children's safe houses);
- projects seeking to instill a sense of identity, cultural pride and responsibility in youth (eg, elders teaching young people about cultural matters and addressing substance issues, various community cultural events, establishment of youth councils or advisory groups);
- projects seeking to encourage school attendance and build skills through linking attendance to participation in enjoyable and/or educative activities, or through encouraging greater involvement of parents and elders in school-based activities;
- projects focusing on addressing youth issues such as offending behaviour and substance abuse, and the lack of appropriate education and training opportunities;
- projects seeking to involve men in taking responsibility for family violence and substance abuse issues;
- projects attempting to increase adult engagement in training to build skills for available and potential local jobs;
- projects targeting increasing access to affordable healthy food and addressing other health issues;
- projects building financial literacy and assisting the development of various small business ideas and broader regional economic development initiatives; and

- projects that involve local people in environmental health and caring for country activities.

Most proposals aim to these things in ways that enable local people to build their capacities and take responsibility for carrying them out themselves.

Examples of FaCS ACTION

FaCS' *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* provides funding to community organisations for a variety of capacity building and family and community strengthening initiatives. See Attachment A, pp 44 for further details, examples of funded projects, and other FaCS and Centrelink initiatives with capacity-building and strengthening elements.

ISSUE 4: How best can community and regional organisations do business and make decisions in traditional ways while meeting wider governance and accountability standards? What can governments do to help more Indigenous organisations remain, stable, well-managed and successful?

The example in Wadeye mentioned under Issue 2 above illustrates that some communities are developing governance structures and processes in ways that are consistent with traditional forms of governance. The Tiwi Assembly and the Torres Strait Regional Authority are two other examples. However, FaCS and Centrelink are unable to make informed comment on their success in blending such operations with wider governance and accountability standards.

Government actions that can assist Indigenous organisations develop their internal capacity include:

- longer-term funding cycles and consideration of funding for organisations delivering on-going necessary services;
- resources for training in strategic planning, financial management, board or committee responsibilities, marketing and communications, staff supervision and development, succession planning, understanding of participatory development processes, evaluation techniques, business development, organisational structures (eg, co-operatives, companies);
- streamlining administrative and reporting requirements;
- improving government agency coordination in doing business with Indigenous organisations;
- recognising the particular difficulties of small communities and organisations e.g. that small organisations dominated by one clan group can experience great difficulties catering for the needs of all local clan groups; and
- increasing the internal capacity of government agencies to build relationships with Indigenous organisations, to respond in timely ways, and to understand local circumstances and cultural differences.

Example of FaCS action:

FaCS is participating in the COAG's Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilots and several other government coordination initiatives (see examples listed under Issue 7). These include considering how to streamline reporting burdens without compromising accountability standards. FaCS is also funding a range of projects and community services that include building local management capacities.

ISSUE 5: How successful are regional structures of Indigenous governance? Should there be fewer community based organisations and more regional ones? Or are there other and better structures of governance?

FaCS has little direct or hard evidence about the effectiveness of regional structures of Indigenous governance, but is aware that in the WA Central and Western Deserts, Kimberley and all of Cape York, there is wide spread support to continue the process of pursuing regional agreements. FaCS is also aware that regional structures can be problematic. For example, FaCS is aware of criticisms of some Indigenous regional bodies regarding a lack of sufficient representation of the interests of women, old people, people with disabilities, and young people. There can also be competition between regional representatives for scarce resources for their own communities, which can leave those with the weakest representatives without a fair share. There are also examples of regional bodies whose members are not openly elected, and these can suffer from accusations of self-interest or non-representation.

One of the issues confronting the Queensland Cape York Partnerships initiative is how to ensure each community's interests and preferences are legitimately and effectively represented at community negotiation tables.

FaCS and Centrelink do not consider that community-based organisations should necessarily be replaced with regional ones, nor that governance is necessarily best performed on a regional basis. Clan groupings, geographical boundaries, different interests, distance, and inadequate transport and communications infrastructure can make fair and effective regional decision-making difficult to achieve. Every community needs some sort of local structure that enables participation in local as well as regional governance matters. Every community also needs a variety of local organisations to cater for various interests and needs. However, regional bodies can be a good way of dealing with common issues, enabling better resource-sharing, providing economies of scale, and developing regional approaches to regional issues.

ISSUE 6: What additional skills and resources do community members and organisations think they need in order to run their communities more effectively?

The Community Research Project of the former Department of Social Security, the *Family Community Network Initiative* and Indigenous projects funded under FaCS' *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* indicate that the range of skills and resource needs expressed by Indigenous communities include:

- strategic planning and financial management skills;
- understanding of Australian economy and governance system;
- leadership skills and resources;

- program management and service delivery skills, including human resource management;
- financial literacy, including budgeting skills and consumer protection information
- capital funds for housing and community buildings and facilities (where possible);
- communications infrastructure, including the ability to produce and broadcast local news programs (radio or television) in local languages, and more video-conferencing facilities;
- access to the internet and training in PC use;
- on-ground community development and facilitation workers;
- resources and skills to enable services such as welfare, childcare, education, health and legal services to be delivered by local people in culturally appropriate ways (where possible);
- transport solutions;
- various trade skills such as electricians, plumbers, painters, carpenters, stockmen, butchers, bakers, mechanics, etc; and
- entrepreneurial skills and start-up capital for new enterprises.

Example of FaCS ACTION

FaCS recognises that some community organisations lack the skills or administrative structures required to manage programs and assets adequately. One area where FaCS has responded to this need is in the development of a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) for Indigenous Community Housing Management.

The NSDS is a nationally coordinated strategy to address issues of access, portability, and consistency in training and skill development. It addresses the housing management skill needs of all personnel, including paid and unpaid housing workers, managers, tenants and boards of management through training in:

- planning and budgeting for housing activities;
- employment of housing staff;
- property management of housing stock, including organising repairs and maintenance;
- tenancy management; and
- administration of the housing business.

Skill development achieved through this project will not only improve the management of housing assets and tenancies at a community level, it will also:

- enhance long-term viability of Indigenous organisations;
- increase potential for self-sufficiency for communities;
- increase effective involvement and engagement of community members in managing their own affairs; and
- increase opportunities for employment, both within communities and beyond.

ISSUE 7: How well are governments coordinating their work at the community and regional level? Does it make a difference?

FaCS is not aware of any studies or evaluations of the extent to which governments are coordinating their work at the community or regional levels. The FaCS State Office Network certainly engages with departmental counterparts in State and other Commonwealth agencies, and there are many examples of community initiatives and national programs being implemented with the support and cooperation of several agencies working together. Many Centrelink staff in regional offices are also actively engaged in local agency coordinating networks.

However, while there is increasing anecdotal evidence of inter-agency cooperation at the community and regional level, it is also evident that these attempts need to be strengthened and difficulties pertaining to funding partnerships overcome. Such difficulties include developing funding agreements that reflect a partnering relationship, streamlining funding agreements so that several funding agencies can use a single agreement with a community organisation, and developing ways of sharing developmental field staff, pooling program and personnel resources.

In NSW, there are some good examples of governments coordinating their work, such as through regional inter-agency groups and place managers, and many examples nationally of inter-agency forums focused on specific issues. However, each Department has differing priorities, structures and constraints that vary over time and appear to make coordination problematic even where there is a high level of commitment.

FaCS will continue to work in cooperation with other Commonwealth Departments, across portfolios and at all levels of government (including at the local community and regional level), to achieve outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Where possible 'whole of government' approaches will be developed and implemented e.g. the ICCPs. There are many examples of community projects with several agencies contributing program funds (mostly requiring separate contracts between the community organisation and each agency).

Examples of FaCS ACTION:

FaCS is working closely with other Commonwealth agencies at all levels, including DOTARS, DEWR, Centrelink and ATSIC to ensure that welfare reform measures are being implemented in a coordinated way. FaCS State Office staff who have responsibility for communicating with the community about welfare reform are engaging community organisations and other government agencies in local level community forums.

FaCS is also participating in the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilots (ICCP). The ICCP, to be applied initially in up to ten communities and regions, aims to better coordinate services and programs between and within the three levels of government, local and regional organisations, and service delivery agencies. FaCS is the lead agency for the pilot in Wadeye, Northern Territory (subject to announcement) which involves coordinating the engagement of the three levels of government with the community.

This whole-of-government approach will consider the integration of education, health, employment, parenting, cultural and justice initiatives across three priority areas of developing leadership, reviewing and re-engineering programs, and developing economic independence. This initiative is being driven by a Commonwealth Secretaries Group, which is supported by the ICCP Taskforce. More information on this initiative should be sought from the Taskforce.

Other examples of FaCS involvement in inter-agency coordination initiatives include:

- The FaCS Western Australian State Office and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations coordinating an inter-agency forum for planning and supporting the Ngaanyatjarra Central Desert region.
- FaCS Western Australian State Office coordination of an inter-agency group looking at enhanced collaboration in planning and delivery of Indigenous family and community capacity building services/approaches.

- The Western Australian Department of Community Development (formerly Family and Children's Services) and WA Health are undertaking mapping of all projects, and the WA Dept of Indigenous Affairs are coordinating a mapping and needs analysis of Indigenous services and issues in the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder in the Goldfields.
- FaCS Queensland State Office and the Queensland Department of Families collaborating in a mapping exercise of services in Cape York.
- FaCS, other Commonwealth agencies, Northern Territory agencies, Land Councils and ATSIC Regional Councils participating over the past two years in the Territory's Aboriginal Economic Development Focus Group, and a smaller inter-agency coordinating group focused on Wadeye.
- FaCS convening an Indigenous Working Group established by the cross-portfolio Task Force on Child Development, Health and Well Being to progress a joined-up approach to delivering programs and services with an early childhood focus for Indigenous communities. This includes sharing information and learnings about research, programs and activities as well as looking for opportunities to collaborate more effectively in program design and delivery.
- FaCS working with all State and Territory Governments through a working party of the Commonwealth State Community Services Ministers Advisory Council to progress the welfare reform participation agenda and identify specific opportunities for collaboration in disadvantaged regions.

ISSUE 8: To what extent are governments and their agencies building genuine partnerships with Indigenous groups? Are these partnerships leading to better services and improvements in communities?

Given the multiplicity of services directed towards Indigenous issues, and the recognition that governments alone cannot solve community problems, FaCS considers it critical to facilitate partnerships that bring Indigenous people together with other levels of government and the corporate sector to increase program coordination and flexibility, and achieve better outcomes.

Partnerships can range from a relationship between one government agency and a family or small community organisation, to a regional partnership on the scale of the Cape York initiative, to one that encompasses national organisations. Although there is a strong desire by governments around Australia to work in partnership with communities, further consideration is needed of what this actually means and how this aim is put into practice.

'Partnerships' is a term that tends to be rather loosely used - in some cases the term is used to describe any relationship between two or more parties. A partnership is not the same as a purchaser/provider relationship or a philanthropist/beneficiary relationship. It is also different from a funder/grantee relationship.

The key elements that distinguish a 'partnership' relationship from other kinds of relationships include:

- shared goals;
- shared risk;
- shared power;
- shared work and contributions; and that
- all parties benefit.

In this sense, many relationships between governments and Indigenous groups are not partnerships at all. Although a partnership implies equality, this does not mean that all elements need to be equally shared. It is possible to construct workable partnerships with different levels of contribution from each of the parties and different responsibilities. The idea of equality applies most to power-sharing such that all parties negotiate and agree on their various roles, responsibilities and contributions, and each can hold the others to account fairly. The Cape York Partnerships initiative instigated by Cape York leaders and the Queensland Government is one example of cooperation between government and communities to develop structures and processes to give effect to a partnering relationship at the regional level, one that can also accommodate the specific needs of each community in the region.

One of the problems for governments and development agencies is identifying the most appropriate local people to engage with in developing partnerships, or indeed for any consultative or participatory process. Such people may not always be the elected local councillors. It is often easier to engage with the most visible, vocal, linguistically competent, or more educated people in a community, which can leave out the voices and perspectives of the less powerful. This can lead to the strong influence by certain interest groups, and increased potential for local conflict, as well as leading to some groups being reluctant to engage with government or development workers.

The capacity of government officers to successfully partner with and engage with Indigenous communities will directly correlate with their level of communication and facilitation skills, understanding of cultural differences and particular local issues, ability to afford the time and travel when it best suits communities, capacity to respond appropriately and in timely ways, and continuity of officers' engagement.

Important issues include clarifying the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each of the partners in a partnership, agreeing on cooperative ways of working, including coordination and communication mechanisms, and the balance of power between all players. A practical question that arises for government is how to frame funding agreements, including ones that might involve funding from several government agencies and perhaps the private sector too, in ways that better reflect the equality inherent in a true partnering relationship, reduce unnecessary administrative requirements on the community partners, and value cultural differences and preferences.

However, despite the issues described above, there are many examples of successful partnership initiatives between government agencies, Indigenous organisations and the private sector with highly positive outcomes for Indigenous communities.

Examples of FaCS ACTION

Partnership is a key principle in the Government's welfare reform agenda which is based on the concept of shared responsibility between Governments at all levels, communities, business and individuals.

FaCS' recognition of the importance of partnerships in the Indigenous context is reflected in its support for the 'shared responsibility' framework of COAG's Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilots Initiative and FaCS' recently released *Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*. The Statement of Commitment document commits the Department to tackle the entrenched social and economic disadvantages that continue to be faced by many

Indigenous Australians in a new way - through working in close partnership with government, community organisations, Indigenous communities and their representatives. The Department recognises that better outcomes are likely to be achieved for Indigenous people through a partnership approach.

FaCS' principles underpinning the development of partnerships include:

- partnerships will be formed on the basis of honest, respectful and equal relations between the partners, informed by the best available information;
- engagement of government agencies with communities will be in a collaborative and cooperative manner, working towards a whole-of-government approach where appropriate, and will employ simplified reporting and accountability arrangements; and
- government intervention should emphasise a facilitative, enabling role rather than being directive, and aim to achieve improvements in individual, family or community functioning.

One partnership example is the development of Indigenous Housing Agreements with each State and Territory Government to improve the coordination of housing assistance to Indigenous communities. The agreements provide a framework for governments and Indigenous housing authorities to share responsibility and work together to improve and simplify the planning, coordination and delivery of Indigenous-specific housing. The agreements provide for actual and notional pooling of housing funds, joint strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of programs under the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP), administered by FaCS and the Community Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP) administered by ATSIC. Interagency collaboration and effective partnerships at the regional level are occurring in a number of jurisdictions under the auspices of these agreements.

CONCLUSION

The FaCS vision (*Towards a fair and cohesive Australian society*), its strategic outcomes (*Stronger Families, Stronger Communities, and Economic and Social Participation*) and its key strategies (*Prevention through capacity building and early intervention; Promoting independence, choice and self-reliance; and Maintaining a strong and sustainable social safety net*) apply to all Australians but have a special resonance in relation to the needs of Indigenous families and communities. FaCS' outcomes ensure the flexibility to address the diversity of issues facing Indigenous people and to deliver services that best suit local needs. The outcomes also acknowledge that a range of programs can contribute to an outcome and that a single program can contribute to several outcomes.

A major public policy challenge for governments is to find and promote a better balance between individual and community interests so that social and economic opportunities for all can flourish and be sustained. Promoting the notion of community responsibility as a companion to individual social responsibility is a sensible and essential notion underpinning social policy today.

There is a growing recognition by governments of the value and effectiveness of capacity building approaches and participatory processes in promoting, regenerating, and sustaining the social capital necessary for good governance, economic development and social cohesion. There is also an acknowledgment that the best solutions to social issues will involve governments working cooperatively with one another, and with business and the community. There is now a recognition that the best approaches build on individual and community strengths and capacities, that

even the most disadvantaged communities have some strengths and capacities, and an understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all prescription to follow.

The Government's welfare reform agenda, which underpins its whole approach to social welfare, defines building stronger individuals, families and communities as a key objective, and social partnerships as a key strategy for achieving that objective. The regional dimension to this and the need to give special attention to highly disadvantaged communities and regions, among which Indigenous communities are disproportionately represented, is a major priority for current policy work in FaCS and other relevant agencies.

For government to support the use and growth of social capital and community capacity requires not just structural adjustments, but fundamental organisational change and better relationships with communities. It also requires changes to processes such as policy development to be more inclusive and collaborative, and changes to how funding agreements and other types of contracts with community organisations are developed, framed and managed.

Developing true partnering relationships requires time, skills and effort. Agencies have to secure the internal resources required to enable relationship development and the provision of the right level of support. Agencies also need to balance this requirement against their on-going duty to keep on delivering essential services. In partnership with Indigenous communities, agencies and the communities need to continue to identify and address or accommodate the systemic issues that currently inhibit the capacity and initiative of Indigenous communities.

The research and experiences outlined in this submission suggest that governments could develop a dual service delivery and capacity building facilitation role. This might require learning new attitudes as partners, not just as service providers, and developing internal capacity, including skills as facilitators and enablers. However, this dual role can pose a dilemma in that public agencies fulfil several roles – regulation, delivery of specific services, research, advice, and enforcement. Agencies are also accountable to the government and ultimately through the Minister to Parliament. Some of these roles can make it difficult for agencies to develop trust and confidence with communities and to achieve a measure of real power sharing. For example, there can be a clash between the agencies regulatory and facilitative roles. By not doing the facilitative role it means continuing to risk perpetuating “a dependency masked by service” (Cavaye, 2000). This issue requires further consideration of how to balance roles in a way that best supports community control and capacity building without lowering accountability standards.

This submission outlines a framework to guide government agencies in attempts to build community strength and capacity with integrity and respect for the people involved. Some critics have commented that notions of community participation and empowerment can be used to argue for greater reliance on voluntary organisations in order to allow withdrawal of needed health and social services (eg. Binney & Estes, 1988). Also, critics have charged that community initiatives are a convenient panacea for exercising a stabilising effect in society, concentrating on local-level planning at the expense of recognising broader social issues such as power and control (Casswell, 2001). COAG's 'shared responsibility' framework and the government's social coalition promoting business and community partnerships both risk being subject to this kind of critique.

The conceptual frameworks around capacity building have inherent values such as equality and local control that imply a change in government's role from that of

director/provider to one of facilitator/supporter. In some cases, communities may not want, or be ready for, engagement with government agencies in this way, nor are government agencies necessarily ready to undertake a facilitative role.

Despite these cautions, there appears to be growing acknowledgment that a focus on achieving social and economic outcomes without employing empowering and capacity-building processes will prove ineffectual and unsustainable, if not detrimental to the communities concerned.

WHAT IS FACS DOING?

Australians Working Together (AWT)

The \$1.7 billion AWT package announced May 2001 provides new funding for employment and community services to expand and improve the assistance available to Australian's looking for work. Extra help will be provided for parents, mature age people, Indigenous Australians and people with disabilities. From July 2002 new requirements will apply to working age people receiving income support payments. Taking account of their individual circumstances, working age people receiving income support payment will be required to take opportunities available to help them become job-ready and better able to take part in Australia's economic and community life.

Community Participation Agreements (CPA)

Under the AWT package, \$32.2 million was allocated over four years until 2005 to fund up to 94 Community Participation Agreements in remote Indigenous communities. Community Participation Agreements allow Indigenous communities to identify practical ways people can contribute to their communities and families. Building the capacity of communities and individuals is an essential part of sustaining the mutual obligation framework for income support recipients that participate in a CPA and has the potential to build better links between Indigenous communities, Governments and non-government organisations.

ATSIC has been tasked by Government to develop this initiative in cooperation with the FaCS and Centrelink. The initiative also has the potential to draw on input from a number of other government and non-government organisations.

CPA Principles

The key principles underpinning Community Participation Agreements are that they:

- are community owned and driven;
- allow communities to identify a range of activities that contribute constructively to community life;
- increase self-reliance through social and economic involvement in community activities;
- address the debilitating aspects of the welfare system, while promoting the developmental opportunities of participation;
- support appropriate community decision-making structures;
- support innovative and flexible arrangements to address community needs;
- bring government and communities together; and
- promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and culture.

CPAs will operate in remote communities where income support recipients are currently exempted from the activity test due to the limited labour market available. Under this initiative, communities will develop a range of activities in which income support recipients can participate. Activities can include leadership and governance activities, and cultural strengthening and cultural transmission activities, but principally they are tailored to each community's specific needs and opportunities. A fundamental principle of CPAs is that participation by individuals represents a contribution to the community.

Communities vary greatly and therefore, flexibility is built into this approach allowing communities to select from:

- Simple to complex CPAs depending on the existing governance and leadership structures within the community; and
- Voluntary or compulsory individualised agreements depending on the needs of the community.

There are also opportunities for communities to have direct input on CPA policy through a phased 'action learning' approach. Action learning involves working with communities throughout the establishment phase to identify emerging issues and where possible, address these concerns as well as further refine the policy on implementation strategies.

Other AWT measures which complement CPAs

AWT aims to increase economic participation and social engagement, while maintaining an effective social safety net. Three other Indigenous specific measures aim to improve support for Indigenous people: Indigenous Employment Centres, Remote Area Servicing Centres and Increased Education and Training Assistance. In addition, a number of mainstream measures will also provide intensive assistance for Indigenous customers. (See What is Centrelink Doing at Attachment B for more detail on AWT initiatives).

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

The *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* (the Strategy) provides an additional \$144 m over 02-03 and 03-04 for prevention and early intervention programs for families and communities with particular benefits for those at risk of social, economic or geographical isolation. To achieve this, the Strategy aims to bring people together in partnerships to develop local projects that will help families and communities become stronger. These partnerships can be made up of different levels of government, service providers, community organisations, businesses and others involved in family and community issues. Through these partnerships, the Strategy helps create an environment that provides individuals and families with opportunities to participate in community life. It builds on the concept that strong communities generate more opportunities for their members. It gives communities and their members the chance to think about their own local issues and what approaches they can put in place to deal with them. A major emphasis of the Strategy is that prevention and early intervention in family and community issues is much more effective than dealing with crises, or situations where behaviours or patterns have become entrenched.

The Strategy moves away from the traditional government approach of developing and implementing top down services for families and communities. It recognises that an important role for government is as a broker or facilitator not always a service purchaser or provider and that effective support for families and communities requires 'bottom-up' development and delivery. It encourages innovation and cooperation and it only engages with family and community projects that demonstrate strong community support.

For families, the Strategy takes a strengths-based approach to focusing on the needs of families with young children, enhancing family relationships and balancing work and family. For communities, the Strategy supports strong leadership, building skills and knowledge, partnerships and the valuable contribution of volunteers.

The Strategy has been developed on a strong platform of existing evidence about what works and what doesn't work in helping families and communities prosper. These elements draw on Australian and overseas research that shows that prevention and early intervention programs and capacity building approaches are effective long-term responses to many social issues. The Strategy also commits to adding to the evidence base around practical ways to strengthen families and communities and to gauge the effectiveness of various interventions.

Simply put, the Strategy recognises that for families and communities to achieve the outcomes they desire, they need the capacity to act. This level of capacity comes from the assets, resources and skills that individuals, families and communities can draw upon to deal with their issues, adapt to change and identify and develop opportunities. The Strategy aims to help build this capacity in families and communities. Importantly, it recognises that in many cases, the *process* for helping to build capacity (such as encouraging networks and collaboration) is often as important as the resulting products.

This capacity building approach is particularly relevant to families and communities in rural and remote areas, including Indigenous communities. About 50% of approved projects are in these areas and more than 20% directly benefit Indigenous communities. The flexibility of the Strategy's initiatives across a range of areas such as, child care, parenting skills and playgroups, makes it ideally suited for integrating family services and making the best use of existing resources no matter where people are located.

A CASE STUDY OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Cape York Family Income Management (FIM) Project (funded under the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*)

This project, centred in Aurukun, Coen and Mossman Gorge, is the product of several years of discussion and development by Cape York people, and is one in a raft of linked initiatives they are undertaking to address critical needs and issues in Cape York.

Commonwealth government interest in the concept of Family Income Management was sparked by Noel Pearson's analysis of the deleterious effects of passive welfare dependency on his people in Cape York, which he asserts has contributed to a distortion of the Indigenous norm of reciprocity (Pearson, 1999) and to the prevalence of chronic social problems such as substance abuse, ill-health and violence. He identified two of the fundamental barriers to Indigenous people in remote communities engaging in the broader economy as ineffective money management, and lack of access to, and/or capacity to use, financial services and products.

The ability to budget well, especially if on a low income, is critical to family well-being. Equally, access to financial services and products is essential if people are to build economic capital and prosper rather than merely subsist. The FIM project involves working with household or clan groups to maximise the use of their total income to meet their self-identified needs and aspirations.

However, the FIM project is about much more than improving budgeting skills and access to loans for living standards improvements and economic development purposes - the way in which the project is being carried out is expected to have social benefits as well, through building on, or reinvigorating, the social capital and strong bonds that underlie the traditional cultural practice of responsible resource-sharing and the cultural value accorded to kinship obligations.

Evidence from evaluations of financial counselling services indicates that financial stability often results in reducing the stresses that contribute to substance abuse and family violence. It is hoped that the FIM project, together with other strategies being developed to directly tackle these issues, will have a similar effect in the trial communities.

Development of the project to funding agreement stage entailed substantial discussion, work and negotiation over the last two years by and with Indigenous Cape York leaders and people in the three trial communities. An independent study after the first development phase confirmed the high level of community support for, and desire to participate in, the project. Specifically, it aims to:

- develop the capacity of individuals and families to effectively manage income to achieve improved living standards;
- through engaging interested family groups in income management processes, assist participants to identify and discharge responsibilities to each other and to their communities;
- investigate and develop group purchasing arrangements to source and provide access to quality, affordable household goods and services and small business plant and equipment, including transport and communications;
- provide information and recommendations to FaCS, ATSIC and Centrelink relevant to improving service delivery in remote Aboriginal communities and relevant to replicating the project elsewhere if it proves successful.

Expected outcomes include:

- increased capacity for the efficient use of individual and group resources;
- improved household amenity achieved through the ability to access and purchase a wider range of goods and services;
- revitalised sense of personal responsibility to self, family, and community;
- improved ability to mediate/negotiate conflict;
- improved personal/family relationships;
- increased capacity and motivation to engage in worthwhile activities that contribute to individual, family, clan, and community amenity; and
- increased capacity and motivation to participate in education, training, and work.

The project is scheduled to run to March 2004, with the flexibility to continue beyond that time if circumstances warrant it and sufficient resources are available. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary, and family groups are self-defined. Skilled community resource workers in each site will help interested individuals and family groups to improve their budgeting skills, and to understand and make best use of available financial services, including the new Credit Union planned for Cape York.

Each participating family group will be assisted to negotiate an agreement amongst themselves detailing their preferred method of income management and financial plans. Agreements may also contain behavioural expectations if the group desires, and will include relevant contingencies such as how to deal with non-compliance, mobility or changes in group formation or circumstances. The community resource workers will also refer participants to other relevant services as required.

The resource workers will be assisted by eighteen locally-appointed family facilitators. Skills transfer to local family facilitators to enable continuation of project activities after the funding period is an essential aim. If possible, family facilitators will have the opportunity to undertake accredited training in mediation, budget counselling and community development, as well as provided with information about Centrelink entitlements, consumer protection, child protection, family violence, substance abuse, and other relevant topics as desired and feasible.

Developing system supports to enable direct deductions from income sources to desired accounts or authorities forms an integral part of the project. This requires working closely with ATSI's Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) administrators, Centrelink, FaCS and relevant financial institutions.

Successful money management is expected to result in increased demand for certain consumer goods and for financial services such as investment and loans facilities. The project will seek to improve participants' access to consumer goods at the best possible price through bulk buying or other negotiations with retailers. Investigating the feasibility and desirability of setting up a group buying mechanism is included as a project activity.

The FIM project is using an action learning approach requiring regular participant reflection and review, and enabling participants to make adjustments according to lessons learnt and changes in local circumstances. Six-monthly progress reports and a final report will document processes and outcomes, and make recommendations pertinent to the project's transferability to other communities. Materials developed for use in skills development and community education sessions will accompany progress reports. The Australian Institute of Family Studies will assist with the action research elements of the project.

Project support and oversight is provided by a FIM Working Group comprised initially of representatives from the three participating communities, the project manager employed by Aurukun Shire Council, the Cape York Partnerships Office, and ex-officio representatives from FaCS, ATSIC, Centrelink and Queensland's Department of the Premier and Cabinet. In addition, Westpac are providing skilled staff to assist the project in whatever capacity is required and feasible. Some Westpac staff worked in the three communities late in 2001, developing information products and budgeting tools, and there have been two more rounds of secondee placements so far this year.

Each participating trial community has a local reference group comprising local family facilitators, the resource worker, community organisation representatives, and other interested participants, ensuring representation from all clan groups. The project management arrangements are an attempt to put into practice a working partnership philosophy – one in which decision-making rights and responsibilities are firmly with the community representatives, and where the government agency representatives fulfil support roles. A related point is that the funding agreement was written to accommodate as far as possible organic development within the project, by enabling participants to initiate variations in project activities, decisions and spending in response to changes in circumstances and experiential learning.

Early implementation issues include the difficulty of recruiting suitable experienced personnel willing to live in a remote Indigenous community, including underestimating the salary packages required to attract quality personnel, and negotiating the right relationships and roles between government and community representatives - an evolving process that requires patience and willingness to listen, learn and change.

Capacity-building principles are inherent in the project's methodology. Local family facilitators will undergo specific skills development and relevant training, and participating family groups will be assisted to improve their capacity for managing income and improving family functioning. Project direction and management decisions remain firmly under the control of the three lead local organisations, and the action learning approach will also help build the FIM Working Group's and each local reference groups' capacities to perform these roles effectively. The project and its administrative and contractual arrangements are as much a learning exercise for the government members of the Working Group as for the community members.

Although the resource workers have only been employed for less than two months, there is already a high take-up rate with about 80 individuals or small groups actively saving for various purposes, and many others undergoing financial assessment in preparation for budget planning. Numbers are expected to triple over the next month as Centrelink contracts are being finalised to enable income support recipients to participate. These early successes can only encourage greater participation and further efforts to maximise outcomes from managing family incomes as a group.

The FIM project is one of several initiatives that FaCS is funding to address the priority issue of improving Indigenous financial literacy, and improving access to, and effective use of, financial services. This project is also a working example of collaborative policy development in that it involves recognising and trusting in the knowledge and abilities of local people, and supporting them in carrying out and evaluating their ideas, so that their experiences can inform government policy and benefit other communities.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER THE STRATEGY

Revamping the Ramingining Women's Centre

Ramingining is a remote Aboriginal community located in northeast Arnhem Land. It is situated about 500 km east of Darwin and has a population of about 700 people, with a further 180 people living in surrounding areas.

The Challenge

Indigenous women in the Ramingining community were faced with a need for training and services that could help them to meet their own needs and those of local families in areas ranging from laundry and meals through to arts and craft activities. While some facilities were available, local families and individuals were finding it difficult to access the information and help they required.

The Solution

While a Women's Centre did exist, it had been under-used in the past. There were simply insufficient resources to provide the types of services from the centre that would benefit women in the community. With funding provided from the Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support initiative under the Strategy, the Ramingining Community Council was able to appoint a Women's Centre Coordinator.

The Coordinator works with the community to identify their needs and the services they require. Identifying their needs in such a small community has been relatively easy, especially as there are strong family networks able to distribute and gather information informally by word-of-mouth. The coordinator liaises with the steering committee of Indigenous women, which oversees the Centre's operation to ensure that the services developed are easily accessible through the Centre. An integral part of the Centre's functioning is the ongoing support of the local women employed through the CDEP.

The services that are offered through the centre include:

- Meals on Wheels;
- women's cultural initiatives;
- sewing lessons and selling of clothing;
- activities for young mothers;
- working closely with the local health clinic on initiatives; and
- coin-operated laundry.

The Coordinator's role is very much a hands-on one, with personal involvement in programs ranging from participation in the Meals on Wheels right through to organising driving lessons.

Lajamanu Horse Sports Project

The community

The Warlpiri people who live in the northern part of the Tanami Desert enjoy a very social, strongly traditional lifestyle. Spread over 55,000 square kilometres, 20 outstations together with the community of Lajamanu have a population of about 800. Lajamanu has its own Town Council and the outstations come under the jurisdiction of Wulainj Homeland Council Aboriginal Corporation. In Lajamanu, about 60 per cent of the population is aged under 24.

The challenge

For many in Lajamanu, school is not a very attractive proposition. Of the 200 or so school-aged children, only about half attend classes on a regular basis. How to convince kids that going to school is a good thing is a community challenge. Lajamanu is a 'dry' community and there are no problems with substance abuse, but the young people can get into mischief out of boredom. The boys all play football and the girls play basketball, but there is little else for them to do.

The solution

Through the Lajamanu Horse Sports Project, the Wulainj Aboriginal Corporation is offering children an incentive. It is a simple concept. If the children want to ride the horses they have to attend school.

The project was initially funded through a Northern Territory Police initiative called 'NT Safe', and last year received a grant from the Strategy. Its purpose has been two-fold: firstly to encourage attendance at school and secondly, to provide a pre-court juvenile diversion activity. Police or other agencies can divert young offenders or those deemed to be 'at-risk' to the program.

The project is based on 150 acres about 4kms out of town, fenced off into paddocks. Project participants have constructed watering points and troughs, horse yards and cattle yards and have recently completed building a mini rodeo arena. They are also hoping to find the funds to build an all-weather shelter for the saddlery equipment and feed storage.

One of the conditions of the project was that those who wanted to ride the horses had to help with the construction work. The spin-off from this has been that the young people respect the facility. The project manager reports "We've had no trouble out there at all - in fact, among a certain age group it really seems to have helped stabilise their behaviour, so the whole community is better off."

While the Horse Sports Project is open to all ages and is largely about having fun, it also fulfils an educational purpose, inspired by the fact that in years gone by Walpiri men were noted for their horsemanship and often worked as stockmen. Part of the aim of this project is to reintroduce those skills, in the hope that it might lead to future employment on some of the surrounding cattle stations. The project manager, an experienced stockman, has also been teaching participants about fencing and land management, with some help from the NT Rural College. "At the end of the day they'll be able to get a certificate which should help them find a job, and the beauty of it is they'll be working on their own land."

One of the principles employed by the project is that providing incentives is far more effective than applying coercion. As the project manager remarks, "You cannot force

people to do things - if you want to achieve something you have to make it enjoyable. And don't just ask a person to do a certain job, show them how to do it and work alongside them."

Yuelamu's Community Unity' Project

The Community

The Indigenous community of Yuelamu lies in the Tanami Desert, 280 kms north west of Alice Springs. Yuelamu, comprising a central community and five outstations, is home to 320 people. More than 70% of the residents are under the age of 30 years. While the range of job opportunities is limited, Yuelamu does have a well-supported CDEP.

In 2001, Yuelamu was presented with a Northern Territory Better Practice in Local Government Award, in 'Special Recognition for Improvement of Community Well-being'. The local AFL team, Central Anmatjere, has recently become the pride of the community, having been named as one of the top football teams in the Country Region and invited to play in the major Alice Springs competition.

The Challenge

One of Yuelamu's greatest assets is the strength of its community leadership – a committed council, effective support staff and a strong group of elders who have helped Yuelamu to remain completely free of the destructive pastime of 'petrol sniffing', a major cause of health and social problems in many Central Australian communities. However, twelve months ago alcohol abuse was beginning to get out of hand in Yuelamu and a corresponding increase in domestic violence and petty crime prompted community leaders to take serious action.

The Solution

To tackle the problem, the Community Council, together with other influential community representatives initiated a project called 'Community Unity'. Essentially the project had two aims, firstly to curb the drinking and bad behaviour and, secondly to develop more recreational, social and cultural activities.

With the nearest police station 70kms away at Yuendumu, and callouts occurring as frequently as two to three times a week, the community decided to set up its own Night Patrol. Operational rules were decided at a community meeting and endorsed by the Council, and police officers took part in training five local 'patrollers'.

Yuelamu's CDEP coordinator reports "The Night Patrol has been going since February 2001 and it's been wonderful – the whole community has benefited. The incidence of domestic violence, break and enter, hooning around in cars and other alcohol-related problems has dropped dramatically. In fact, in the past two months we've had only one police callout."

In tandem with the Night Patrol, the Community Unity Project oversees activities at the Yuelamu Recreation Hall. The major emphasis is on young men and women looking after the youth of the community. There are two pool tables, TVs, videos and computers. With the introduction of broadband two-way satellite in March, the Project intends to provide internet access as well and believes this will be popular with youth.

The Council also operates the Yuelamu After School Program, which offers supervised sporting activities. Since these programs started, local observers report that children are engaging less in undesirable activities.

The CDEP coordinator states "This whole Community Unity Project has made everyone a lot happier, and if the Night Patrol is working well then we find everything works well – our work rate has improved, the wives are a lot happier, everyone is sleeping better, the CDEP is functioning more efficiently and attendance at school is up."

DISABILITY

National Indigenous Disability Network

On 3 December 1999, the Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (ATSIC) jointly announced the formation of a Working Party to provide advice to the Government on establishing a National Indigenous Disability Network (NIDN).

The major aim of the proposed NIDN is to raise awareness within Indigenous communities about disability issues and to facilitate the exchange of information about programs, both Government and non-Government, that are available to support Indigenous people with disabilities.

Two key priorities for the establishment of NIDN are that a national conference, planned for November 2002, be held to discuss Indigenous disability issues and identify a structure for a permanent NIDN and an Internet site be established to facilitate the exchange of information on Indigenous disability issues. The national conference will be preceded and informed by a series of discussions amongst Indigenous communities in each State and Territory.

FaCS has developed a Memorandum of Understanding with ATSIC (FaCS \$60,000 and ATSIC \$56,000) to support the Interim NIDN progress its activities. ATSIC has primary responsibility for this project with support from FaCS.

The Buddy Program

This program is a joint initiative of FaCS's Disability Employment Assistance program and ATSIC's CDEP scheme. It aims to build the capacities of Indigenous people with disabilities to undertake employment through a CDEP placement. It involves matching an Indigenous unemployed person with a person with a disability as a buddy or co-worker, training the buddy and CDEP managers in disability employment and carer support, and providing funding for necessary workplace modifications. The project also aims to build the capacities of participating Indigenous communities to eventually deliver a fully-funded FaCS Disability Employment Assistance program.

Each community aims to engage ten pairs of participants, led by a full-time coordinator within each community's CDEP scheme. The project employs an action learning methodology, monitored jointly by ATSIC and FaCS.

The program advances *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* and welfare reform policy objectives in remote Indigenous communities by providing opportunities, guidance and program assistance to increase the economic and social participation of Indigenous people with disabilities.

Project locations:

- Maningrida NT (population 1500, plus 750 in 33 out-stations): Maningrida CDEP, managed by the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, has around 520 participants who undertake most of the local government functions for the town, plus operate a number of enterprises around tourism, fishing, crocodile hunting, buffalo hunting and other projects.
- Kunbarlluninja and Jabiru, NT: The Bininj people are the predominant group in these two communities. The communities share a Town Clerk and a Coordinator of both their CDEPs. Jabiru CDEP is well established and successfully operates numerous programs, including food preparation, trade training, a night patrol program, horticulture program and other projects. The Kunbarlluninja CDEP, Arrguluk, is comparatively less advanced but there are more people with disabilities in Kunbarlluninja.
- Punmu, Parngurr, Kunawarritji and Jigalong, WA: Western desert communities east of Port Hedland: These communities of nomadic people have very little access to any programs or facilities. Community populations vary but are around 200 each. Each community has a CDEP managed by the Western Desert Puntukurnuparna Aboriginal Corporation in Port Hedland.

Progress to date:

Participants with disabilities, buddies and coordinators have been recruited in some sites, and training is underway for all participants, including employers. Some placements have commenced in workplaces such as Centrelink, a nursery and a mud brick making venture.

Early indications are that once participants are comfortable in their roles, they place less reliance on the buddies and the employer is happy to provide any on-going support required. Communities see the program as having a positive effect on people with disabilities, and the participants have a sense of pride in what they are doing and now see themselves as contributing to the community.

Indigenous Disabilities Employment Strategy

FaCS is committed to developing a more strategic approach to increasing the social and economic participation of Indigenous people with disabilities nationally, and is working on an Indigenous Disabilities Employment Strategy. This includes consideration of a range of models other than the Buddy Program, taking into account needs, circumstances, barriers, locational and cultural factors, and trialling these in rural, remote and urban areas.

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

During 2000-01 FaCS, in partnership with Centrelink, has been testing an approach based on intra-family reciprocity with volunteer Indigenous families in several states. The **Extended Family Care Program** offers flexible payment arrangements for Indigenous families to help build community capacity.

Current Situation

Current administrative procedures are such that Family Tax Benefit (FTB) is directed to a notional primary carer and customers are required to advise Centrelink when a formal change of care occurs so that payment is redirected to a new carer. Procedures do not recognise the concept of shared child raising that occurs in many Indigenous extended family groups or that children move frequently between carers with no single primary carer. As a result it is difficult for such children to receive continuing benefit from FTB. This can lead to poor outcomes for children who often live with relatives receiving no FTB, and who have little other financial capacity. Some carers are reluctant to claim FTB as this can lead to family disputes and violence.

Extended Family Care Approach

The approach involves relatives forming care groups that agree to pass on or share family payments they receive, or goods in lieu, to the person with the current care of each child. The approach recognises and emphasises the purpose of FTB assistance and uses intra family decision-making as a basis for ensuring children derive beneficial outcomes from FTB. The approach is an excellent example of community capacity building because it builds on the strengths and bonds that families and communities share.

Evaluation of Pilots

Evaluation of the pilots found that over 90% of participants found the approach positive or very positive:

- FTB was more appropriately used on children's needs/costs as care groups took greater responsibility for ensuring FTB resources followed children as they moved between carers;
- children in the pilot benefited from improved financial and emotional outcomes and there was improved family unity with fewer family disputes;
- results also suggest that benefits flowed onto the wider community in the form of increased empowerment for individuals, particularly women, reduced disputes over money, and increased community capacity for autonomous problem solving;
- the role and process of facilitating and brokering family agreements was found to be an important factor that contributed to the success of the approach in some families and is an important consideration for the wider implementation of the approach;
- results suggest that more flexible payment arrangements for other FaCS payments, introduced as part of this model, could also be beneficial for Indigenous customers.

YOUNG INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

FaCS administers several youth programs relevant to building genuine partnerships with Indigenous groups. The most relevant programs are Simple Service Solutions, Reconnect, Youth Activities Services/Family Liaison Workers (YAS/FLW), the “Strengthening and Supporting Families Coping With Illicit Drug Use” measure and the First Australians Business (FAB).

Other youth initiatives, such as the Mentor Marketplace, On Track Youth Leadership and the Transition to Independent Living Allowance, which will be implemented in the near future, are also likely to provide new opportunities for capacity building with Indigenous communities.

Simple service solutions

Government consultations with the youth sector indicate that governments need to more effectively link services for young people, and ensure that young people are able to access the help that they need. Disadvantaged young people especially require more effectively coordinated, holistic assistance.

In response to these consultations, FaCS is implementing "Simple Service Solutions". This approach enables young people to access the information, advice and support they need in a timely and coordinated way. As part of Simple Service Solutions, FaCS is also examining opportunities for simplifying contractual and reporting requirements for organisations that are funded to deliver youth services. This approach is intended to ensure that support services have more opportunity to focus on their main goal of helping young people to move towards independence.

FaCS has also started processes to improve linkages in services for young people administered by other Commonwealth agencies. Simple Service Solutions has already received high level endorsement from the Commonwealth interdepartmental Secretaries' Advisory Group on youth issues. FaCS has subsequently been meeting with other key Commonwealth agencies to identify regions that could serve as "geographic starting points". FaCS is particularly committed to ensuring that Simple Service Solutions is appropriately linked to other "whole of government" strategies within the Commonwealth such as the the COAG Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilots.

Simple Service Solutions will build on lessons learnt from the Innovative and Collaborative Youth Servicing pilots (ICYS) being funded by the Commonwealth. ICYS pilots are intended to shift the focus away from service delivery and towards achieving outcomes for young people by improving government coordination and community responses through integrated service delivery at the local level. Some of the ICYS pilots are specifically targeted to Indigenous communities, including pilots in Alice Springs, Goondiwindi, Adelaide, Brisbane, Rockhampton and the Tiwi Islands.

Reconnect

Reconnect is a community based early intervention and support program for young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. The objective of the program is to improve the level of engagement of these young people with family, work, education, training and community.

Youth Activities Services/Family Liaison Workers (YAS/FLW)

The YAS program provides a range of diverse, challenging, creative and structured activities to young people aged 11 to 16 outside school hours. It operates in conjunction with the FLW program that supports young people and their families to deal with issues affecting their well being through positive professional and practical support and guidance.

Reconnect and YAS/FLW services work in partnership with Indigenous communities and local Indigenous community organisations. There are number of features of these programs that assist in making these services responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities. They emphasise flexibility, early intervention, a holistic approach to working with young people and their families, responsiveness to local community needs and an emphasis on achieving outcomes rather than focussing on processes.

FaCS is helping to build the capacity of community organisations to ensure that the local needs of the young Indigenous people and their families are integrated into the Reconnect and YAS/FLW services that they are deliver. It is also clear that mentoring between organisations has become a recent development with Reconnect services. These factors demonstrate that innovation and best practice are advancing in spite of accountability and funding constraints that would usually limit flexibility.

Reconnect services operate across Australia in locations with high populations of Indigenous people, such as Broome, Penrith, Mt Druitt (Mimili Mates), Alice Springs (the Gap Youth Centre Aboriginal Corporation), Alice Springs rural and remote (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Inc), Canberra (Gugan Galwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation), Coonabarabran/Coonamble (Coonabarabran Local Aboriginal Land Council), Rockhampton (Fitzroy Basin Elders Committee) and Murgon/Cherbourg (Barambah Aboriginal Community Care Agency).

Most YAS/FLW are located in rural and remote Indigenous communities. In Thursday Island the programs and activities are designed around the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The *Report of Youth Activities Services and Family Liaison Worker Good Practice Forums* indicates that there are a number of YAS/FLW services that operate effectively for young Indigenous people and their communities. For example:

- Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs have established a range of programs for young Indigenous people that have brought some stability and safety into their lives;
- Meekatherra YAS (800 kms north east of Perth) has a community development approach which assists in addressing family violence.

National Illicit Drug Strategy

The Commonwealth, through FaCS, funds State and Territory Governments to implement the “Strengthening and Supporting Families Coping With Illicit Drug Use” measure under the National Illicit Drug Strategy. This program provides support, education and other services to the families of young people coping with illicit drug use.

A number of programs focus on helping Indigenous community members and their families cope with illicit drug use. The ‘Families Coping With Drug Use in Remote Communities’ program operating in the Northern Territory, for example, aims to develop interventions that can be applied in remote Aboriginal communities by families, individuals and community organisations. In South Australia, the ‘Aboriginal Kinship’ program develops a kinship network for each participating family, as a critical part in addressing the needs of families with a young person coping with illicit drug use.

First Australians Business (FAB)

Jointly funded by FaCS, ATSIC, DEWR and The Body Shop, FAB is a non-profit organisation, established to provide business related mentoring to young Indigenous entrepreneurs aged between 18 and 35. Mentoring typically applies to those who would like to establish or expand a business or who are facing challenges with existing businesses. FAB mentors volunteer to work with Indigenous young people and have experience in either business management or are skilled in a specific industry.

Through this program young Indigenous entrepreneurs are producing contemporary Indigenous products in the arts, music and cultural education for others who are forging an Indigenous perspective in areas as diverse as an employment agency and a multimedia communications company. FAB also conducts an annual Enterprise Development Workshop (EDW). EDW brings together young Indigenous people from Australia and Commonwealth nations in the South Pacific region to provide them with basic training in establishing and maintaining small business enterprises in their communities.

Mentor Marketplace

Mentor Marketplace involves helping young people stay connected to family, education, training and the workplace. Young people are encouraged to realise their full potential by:

- connecting them to the working world and the concept of lifelong learning;
- stimulating a mentoring culture in business, schools and communities;
- “kick starting” mentoring projects in higher risk schools and communities; and
- engaging them in skill sharing and peer mentoring opportunities.

In 2002-03, an aim of Mentor Marketplace will be to assist disadvantaged groups, such as Indigenous young people and young people in regional and rural areas.

The On Track Youth Leadership Initiative

Commencing 2002-03, On Track targets young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in regional and rural areas. This initiative fosters youth leadership training and opportunities as well as encourages community participation and the enhancement of young people’s self esteem.

HOUSING

Fixing Houses For Better Health 2

The main priority of this project is the maintenance of a safe and healthy living environment for Indigenous community members. In achieving this, Indigenous communities will develop the skills to manage and maintain their own houses. The initiative is consistent with housing Ministers' objective in "Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010" of achieving safe healthy and sustainable housing for Indigenous people.

Community members are benefiting from being employed on these projects by receiving training and being given a housing maintenance kit so they can continue to undertake ongoing maintenance.

The Fixing Houses for Better Health 2 project will assess 1500 houses in rural and remote Indigenous communities over a three year period and fix the essential housing components (health hardware) for safety and health such as taps, showers, toilets and electrical fittings.

The approach has a safety and health focus and is underpinned by the philosophy of 'no survey without service'. It involves a team of people, including Indigenous community representatives and licensed tradespeople, conducting a 200 point check (including all health hardware items) on each house in a community. The equipment must have design and installation characteristics that allow it to function and to maintain or improve health status. For example, in a water supply system, this will include both the bore pump and the basin plug.

The team fixes health hardware items during the survey. Critical health hardware items relating to electrical safety, water and waste removal are given priority. Items that cannot be repaired or replaced immediately are fixed by the tradespeople at a later date.

A second survey is conducted six months later to ensure that all the work has been done satisfactorily, and all critical health hardware is functioning.

NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY INDIGENOUS PROJECTS

FaCS supports a range of information, research, and prevention strategies that support the development of capacity building for homeless people or at risk of homelessness, as follows:

Developing a Strategic direction to prevent Indigenous Homelessness

- Indigenous Families Pilot (Centacare SA): The project explores methods to provide parenting information and support to families with high and complex needs in rural areas. The project commenced in August 2001. Due for completion in November 2002. The project is a joint initiative between NHS and Childcare. \$160,072.
- Indigenous Safe-houses Pilot (QLD) Twelve months research conducted in partnership with the Queensland Department of Families looks into the future directions of safe-houses for women and children in remote Aboriginal communities. Start March 2002. Completion March 2003. \$100,000.

- Transitional Lifestyle Project (Adelaide Central Community Health Service SA): This project is providing support in an action research context for traditional living aboriginal families moving to metropolitan areas to prevent homelessness. The project commenced in November 2001. Completion: November 2002 \$99,308
- National Analysis of Strategies used to Respond to Indigenous Itinerants Aboriginal Environments Research Centre Paul Memmott and Associates A study on local strategies being implemented in response to Indigenous itinerant people moving from one area to another. The study identifies issues impacting on the health well being of the itinerants and the strength of responses, from a range of perspectives (their own, local council, and other community stakeholders). The new project funding will add to the existing study expanding it to Perth, Adelaide, Port Augusta, Melbourne and Sydney. A report has been prepared on the first phase of the study. The second phase will be reported on as part of this project. Start June 2002; completion November 2002. \$20,000.

Developing information and education tools for young people

- Waarvah Pierson Services QLD This project will target young people at risk of homelessness who have high truancy rates or contact with the Juvenile Justice system or care and protection system. The project will develop culturally appropriate homelessness prevention information through twelve months action research providing cultural field activities, support, community links and cultural networks. The project will produce a final report, a documented resource and project evaluation, and a guide to good practice supporting small Indigenous organisations in disadvantaged communities. Start May 2002 . Completion December 2003. \$110,000.

Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots

In the 2001 budget the Commonwealth committed around \$5 million over 3 years towards a new initiative, the *Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot (FHPP)*. The Program aims to prevent families from becoming homeless. Both Centrelink and community organisations are funded through the FHPP and will work together to ensure the delivery of prevention and early intervention services to families at risk of homelessness. Centrelink social workers will work to identify families at risk of homelessness and link them to relevant income support. Community organisations will deliver support services to help these families stabilise their housing, economic, social and community circumstances. The pilot service located in South Australia will be targeted to Indigenous families.

WHAT IS CENTRELINK DOING?

Underpinning the *Statement of Centrelink's Commitment to Reconciliation* (see Appendix 1) there are two key strategic documents, which drive Centrelink Indigenous servicing strategies, which are founded on the principles of community capacity building.

These are:

- Centrelink's Indigenous Servicing Strategy 2001-2004 (see Appendix 2); and
- Centrelink's Indigenous Employees Action Plan 2001-2004.

Centrelink's Indigenous Servicing Strategy 2001-2004 was developed following customer feedback and a series of consultations. It is based on two key themes with corresponding goals and strategies.

- What Centrelink will do to improve service delivery;
 - . improve services access and information;
 - . create opportunities to increase social and economic well-being;
 - . work to build stronger families and communities;
- How Centrelink will improve service delivery;
 - . value cultural awareness and shared purpose;
 - . commit to partnership and holistic solutions;
 - . influence policy processes and link service delivery innovation across government.

IMPROVE SERVICES ACCESS AND INFORMATION

Centrelink is committed to improving Indigenous peoples access and the quality of services to rural, regional and remote Australia, as outlined in a number of key service delivery strategies below.

Remote Area Service Centres (RASCs)

Centrelink was provided with \$9 million over 4 years in 2001/02 to establish 12 Remote Area Service Centres (RASCs) under the *Australian's Working Together* Budget Package. Implementation of this Budget initiative is well underway; the first three sites will be Napranum (Queensland); Laverton; and Halls Creek (Western Australia) communities. The remaining nine sites will be identified through business analysis conducted by Centrelink across all regions in remote Australia, taking into consideration the following issues:

- linkages with the Centrelink Agent network, i.e. hub and spoke model;
- strategic location of the community, i.e. natural regional servicing centre;
- language/cultural relationships and alliances;
- physical and telecommunications infrastructure;
- transport arrangements; and
- community governance.

Integrated Centrelink Agent and Access Point Servicing Model

Centrelink administers the Community Agent Program (CAP) which is specifically targeted to assist Indigenous customers. Under these arrangements, Centrelink contracts host organisations to deliver Centrelink services in areas remote from a Centrelink Customer

Service Centre (CSC). In 2001, Centrelink conducted a review of CAP, taking into account issues raised at the Federal, State, Local Government and community level about the operations of the Program. A number of recommendations were put forward to Government to improve access and the quality of service delivery to Indigenous customers and communities. On 1 July 2002, Centrelink commenced implementation of the Integrated Centrelink Agent and Access Point Servicing Model. The model provides three service channels:

1	Access Point	Self help facilities to assist customers transact necessary business with Centrelink; information products; telephone facilities with dedicated Call Centre links; facsimile and photocopy facilities for forwarding documentation to parent Customer Service Centre (CSCs) for processing.
2	Agent (Basic)	In addition to self help facilities, an Agent provides a face to face brokerage service to the community including: responding to basic customer inquiries and providing assistance, guidance and/or referral to specialist and other staff; identifying possible payment type/s for customers; and accepting claim forms and other documentation required by Centrelink.
3	Agent (Standard)	In addition to the services provided by an Agent (Basic) an Agent (Standard) responds to more complex inquiries and offers a more comprehensive service.

An integrated model will also:

- provide equity in service delivery arrangement, regardless of location;
- align service delivery expectations to client agency business agreements and Centrelink service delivery strategies;
- establish a set of national program standards (e.g. remuneration, training, equipment etc);
- align service delivery strategy with other Federal and State Government agencies, e.g. Rural Transaction Centres (RTCs) and WA Telecentres;
- consolidate Centrelink's network of Access Points and Agents (over 430 locations);
- streamline the array of contractual and administrative support required by Centrelink staff; and
- provide a clearer framework that will enable greater understanding by Centrelink staff of the roles of functions of Centrelink Agents and Access Points thereby raising customer awareness.

The five key changes at the community level contributing to building local capacity are:

- an increase in remuneration arrangements – 40% average increase in the hourly fee arrangement, and over double the previous contribution to administrative expenses;
- development and implementation of a national training package and support tools for Centrelink Agents, with operational national accredited learning opportunities for individuals performing services;
- development and establishment of a national telecommunication standard, i.e. where possible, Centrelink Agents will be provided with phone, fax and internet facilities; whilst Centrelink Access Points will be provided with phone and fax facilities; Development and provision of a national standard of IT and office equipment; i.e. Centrelink Agents will be provided with PC, photocopier and fax equipment; whilst Centrelink Access Points will be provided with photocopier and fax equipment;

- development and provision of a national suite of specifically targeted communication/promotion products.

Implementation of the new arrangements is expected to be finalised by the end of September 2002.

Footprints Magazine

Research and feedback from Indigenous customers indicated they wanted to see 'something positive'. After further consultation, including with Centrelink staff, a magazine has been specifically developed for Indigenous people and communities. *Footprints* shows that through its partnerships with communities and the work being done by Indigenous staff, that there are many success stories and that Centrelink is an organisation that can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people move forward. Articles provide information about people and initiatives from a diversity of age groups, talents and communities. *Footprints* give communities an opportunity to promote their achievements. In each edition there are some regular inclusions:

- profiles on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and their achievements;
- *Behind the Desk* – an opportunity to meet one of Centrelink's staff members from across the country and seek what working at Centrelink means to them.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Australian's Working Together (AWT)

Under the 2001/02 AWT Budget initiative, there are a number of measures aimed at increasing the social and economic participation of Indigenous customers in receipt of an income support payment.

- Better Assessment;
- Helping Parents Return to Work; and
- Community Participation Agreements

The *Better Assessment* measure will commence on 1 September 2002, and will help to improve opportunities for Indigenous customers in receipt of Newstart Allowance (NSA) and Youth Allowance (YA) who are not required to meet activity test requirements due to personal obstacles or who are prison release customers.

They will now be required to have an intensive assessment after their new claim interview with a Personal Adviser who will assist identify any obstacles to community and workforce engagement. For those assessed as 'high risk', an individualised 'participation plan' will then be developed jointly with the customer, to address these obstacles. Such as access to support services such as child care, health, domestic violence support, financial and/or housing assistance and relationship counselling.

On average, it is anticipated that customers will require at least two follow up interviews; however it is expected that 32% of customers will require up to four interviews.

The *Helping Parents Return to Work* measure comprises of a number of initiatives that will be progressively implemented from July 2002 until July 2003. These are:

July 2002	New Transition to Work Program.
September 2002	Participation Pack, available at new claim and PA interviews.

September 2002	Additional places in disability employment services and voluntary work opportunities.
September 2002	Annual interviews for Parenting Payment recipients with youngest child aged 12-15.
July 2003	Annual interviews for Parenting Payment recipients whose youngest child is aged 6-11 and part time activity requirements for Parenting Payment recipients with youngest child aged 13-15.

The Parenting measure will provide more intensive support and assistance for customers in receipt of Parenting Payment to help them prepare to return to work, and to help them access services to acquire or improve their work skills. Involvement of a Personal Advisers will be dependent on the age of the youngest child.

Centrelink's new Personal Adviser (PAs) service aims to increase the social and economic participation of customers through assisting them to identify goals and develop participation plans, and referring them to other services as required.

Centrelink also has a role in developing and implementing the *Community Participation Agreements* measure (previously discussed in Attachment A, pp 42) which may include provision of PAs to participating communities.

In addition Centrelink is working in partnership with other agencies to develop a strategy to further increase social and economic participation of remote Indigenous customers. This strategy will be based upon building relationships with Indigenous communities and identifying appropriate options for participation.

WORK TO BUILD STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Centrelink is committed to working to build stronger families and communities. Four recent practical examples that demonstrate this are detailed below.

Review of Family and Domestic Violence Strategy

Research has shown that Indigenous people are 4.6 times more likely to be a victim of violent crime than non-Indigenous people. Three quarters of those Indigenous people are women. The research also shows that Indigenous women in rural and remote areas are 45 times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than women non-Indigenous in metropolitan areas and 1.5 times more likely than Indigenous women in metropolitan areas. A Queensland report into domestic violence among Indigenous people found that dispossession, cultural fragmentation and marginalisation had contributed to the current violent situations many Indigenous people find themselves in. It is for these reasons, that Centrelink is conducting a review of its Family and Domestic Violence Servicing Strategy to ensure it meets the needs of Indigenous customers and communities. This work is expected to be completed by December 2002.

Traditional child rearing practices of Torres Strait Islanders

Traditional child rearing practices of Torres Strait Islander people include the permanent transfer of a child or children from one family to another. This is generally by mutual consent between the parties concerned, however the child/ren may not necessarily be aware of the arrangements. The practice is widespread throughout Torres Strait Island society, both in the Torres Straits and on mainland Australia. This cultural practice does not necessarily fit within western adoption practices. Centrelink is currently addressing

related customer service issues, through the provision of staff tools that support traditional child rearing practices and impacts on the families.

Centrepay

Centrepay allows Centrelink customers to voluntarily have regular amounts for expenses such as rent, gas, water, or electricity deducted from their social security payments for remittance direct to service providers. This service has experienced major growth over the last year. Currently 60,000 customers use Centrepay. By the end of 2002-03, Centrelink anticipates this number will double. Centrelink is committed to promoting the use of this facility as it can play a vital role for many customers by assisting them to manage their finances as well as safeguarding them from potential debt, evictions and legal problems.

Centrepay is a particularly important service for Indigenous community housing organisations as it provides them with increased regular rental income streams which can be used to improve housing maintenance. Centrepay also provides opportunities for customers to access other life management services such as nutrition programs, payment of fines or the purchase of essential white goods.

As at 28 June 2002, there were 491 Indigenous Community Housing Organisations registered with Centrepay, and 13,446 customers having deductions under the following categories:

- Indigenous community housing: 9,400 customers;
- Indigenous Funeral Benefit Fund: 3,879 customers;
- Indigenous Housing Loan: 9 customers; and
- Indigenous Short Term Hostels: 158 customers.

Greater promotion of the benefits of Centrepay has resulted in increased incomes for the Cherbourg Community Council in Brisbane, which has meant stable accommodation for those Indigenous families and increased revenue for the Council which can be put back into the community. In Cherbourg, a partnership approach with the Palm Island Aboriginal Corporation (PIAC) resulted in a take-up rate of almost 100% with most tenants acknowledging the benefits of the services. The Council's monthly rental income increased from \$3,000 to \$31,000. PIAC achievement was formally recognised by the Queensland State Government and Auditor-General.

In Touch

In North Victoria, Centrelink formed a partnership with Link Up Victoria in early 2002 to assist Indigenous customers access members of families who have had difficulty contacting them. Reunification of family members can be sought through Centrelink's *In Touch* program, or through Link Up Victoria direct. This partnership provides improved promotion and increased access for Indigenous customers to this service. Whilst it is only early days and a small number of Indigenous customers have been referred, there has been a high success rate, approximately 86%. These reunifications have reinforced Centrelink's commitment to reconciliation and improved outcomes for Indigenous customers and their families by increasing their emotional health and well-being and cultural connections.

VALUE, CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SHARED PURPOSE

Indigenous Employees Action Plan 2001-2004

Underpinning Centrelink's *Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation*, the *Indigenous Employees Action Plan* (IEAP) has been developed to meet Centrelink's responsibilities as an employer and to provide employment opportunities for Indigenous people. The IEAP affirms the fundamental importance of reconciliation for a community which values diversity and the contribution of all people. As an employer Centrelink values its Indigenous employees and is committed to:

- providing greater employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians, reflecting the Indigenous customer profile in our staffing levels;
- ensuring Indigenous employees receive appropriate support;
- assisting Indigenous employees to fulfill their career goals through the provision of development and learning opportunities; and
- increasing our understanding of the identify and experiences of Indigenous Australians and reflecting this awareness in our internal and external service delivery.

The IEAP implements actions to support Centrelink's commitments and it plays a key role in ensuring that equity is achieved for Indigenous employees by:

- promoting acceptance that Indigenous Australians have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community;
- identifying and removing barriers in employment and career development;
- eliminating discriminatory practices as an employer, colleague or manager; and
- ensuring local plans, strategies and actions are developed so that planning and service delivery takes into account the needs of Indigenous Australians.

These actions are measured by aspects of employment, learning, servicing and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Centrelinks' *Indigenous Customers are Everyone's Customers* theme. This theme has been widely accepted within Centrelink, and encourages all staff to work proactively to meet the servicing needs, through greater understanding of Indigenous customers and their communities.

Cultural Awareness Training

Centrelink is also building cultural awareness into Centrelink's leadership model, development and performance assessment processes. In Centrelink's Central and Northern Queensland office, an Indigenous Leadership Development Program has been developed to improve career advancement prospects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. The key elements of the program are:

- increasing confidence and self-esteem through public speaking;
- understanding what it is to be an Indigenous leader in a bureaucracy;
- input and reflection on what leadership means;
- clarification of leadership roles and expectations;
- practical leadership skills through understanding people management practices;
- sharing of perspectives and experience with senior (Indigenous) Centrelink team leaders;
- projects relevant to these learnings and area business priorities to be conducted between blocks one and two with a senior team leader acting as coaches; and
- shared learnings through project presentation.

The target group is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at the APS 3-6 level. This means potential and new team leaders, although experienced team leaders would not be excluded. Participants are invited to nominate on the basis that they are interested in and

have the potential to develop their leadership capabilities. The Indigenous leadership development program attempts to provide course participants with a mixture of theory, information, opportunities, knowledge and skills in an environment conducive to Indigenous learning styles. It is also an opportunity for course participants to build networks and share experiences with peers and senior staff.

COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS AND HOLISTIC SOLUTIONS

Centrelink is committed to assisting Indigenous communities build their capacity to manage change and sustain community-led development.

Maningrida and Palm Island Remote Service Delivery Pilots

The Maningrida and Palm Island remote service delivery pilots arose out of a need by Centrelink to:

- establish strong relationships with the individual communities and their leaders, so that Centrelink could contribute more effectively to local community strategies;
- improve access and quality of Centrelink service delivery; and
- assist communities to develop capacity and connect with key Government agendas, in particular, social welfare reform.

Centrelink is separately evaluating the two remote service delivery pilots to provide an assessment of the impact and effectiveness of these pilot arrangements in meeting business requirements and the needs of customers in remote Indigenous communities.

Similar examples of innovative remote service delivery pilots are being conducted in Cherbourg, Tangentyere and Yarrabah communities. Further details on the Palm Island and Yarrabah remote service delivery pilots is at Appendix 3.

Indigenous Value Creation Workshops

In striving to further understand the needs and expectations of Indigenous customers, Centrelink has designed a specific Value Creation Workshop (VCW). These workshops are an avenue for Centrelink to increase the diversity of customer feedback, in a culturally appropriate format using small group discussions to tease out important issues. The workshops identify what Indigenous customers see as barriers to accessing or understanding Centrelink services. The Indigenous VCWs are conducted by trained Indigenous facilitators, and include local CSC staff. In Brisbane, the VCWs resulted in a network of Indigenous Customer Contact Officers being introduced in the metropolitan offices because customers advised that they wanted to deal with people they know.


INFLUENCE POLICY PROCESSES AND LINK SERVICE DELIVERY INNOVATION ACROSS GOVERNMENT/S

Community Service Register

A community services web-based register is being developed by Centrelink. The register will hold detailed information on local services such as community support and resource agencies. Initially the register will be used by Centrelink staff, including the newly established Personal Advisers, to link customers with local service providers who can help with activities like training, volunteering or other community support. Eventually the community service register will be available to other agencies and to customers via the internet. Service types to be listed include the following:

Education/Training	Housing	Personal Support
Family/Children	Transport	Clubs/Groups
Health	Disability	Carer
Volunteer	Financial Stability	Emergency Relief
Employment	Legal	

CENTRELINK'S STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION



STATEMENT OF CENTRELINK'S COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

Departments and other Agencies to achieve integrated services which improve economic and social outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Centrelink is committed to making a difference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through responsive high quality government services and opportunities.

Centrelink affirms the fundamental importance of reconciliation for a community which values diversity and the contribution of all people. For Centrelink, reconciliation means working with our people, Indigenous customers and their communities to deliver improved outcomes for Indigenous people.

Centrelink recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians, with unique cultures, languages and the spiritual relationships to the land and seas.

Centrelink acknowledges the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and commits to working with Indigenous Australians to achieve:

A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all; and
 works at the coalface for essential reconciliation.

Centrelink acknowledges the diversity and differences within and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

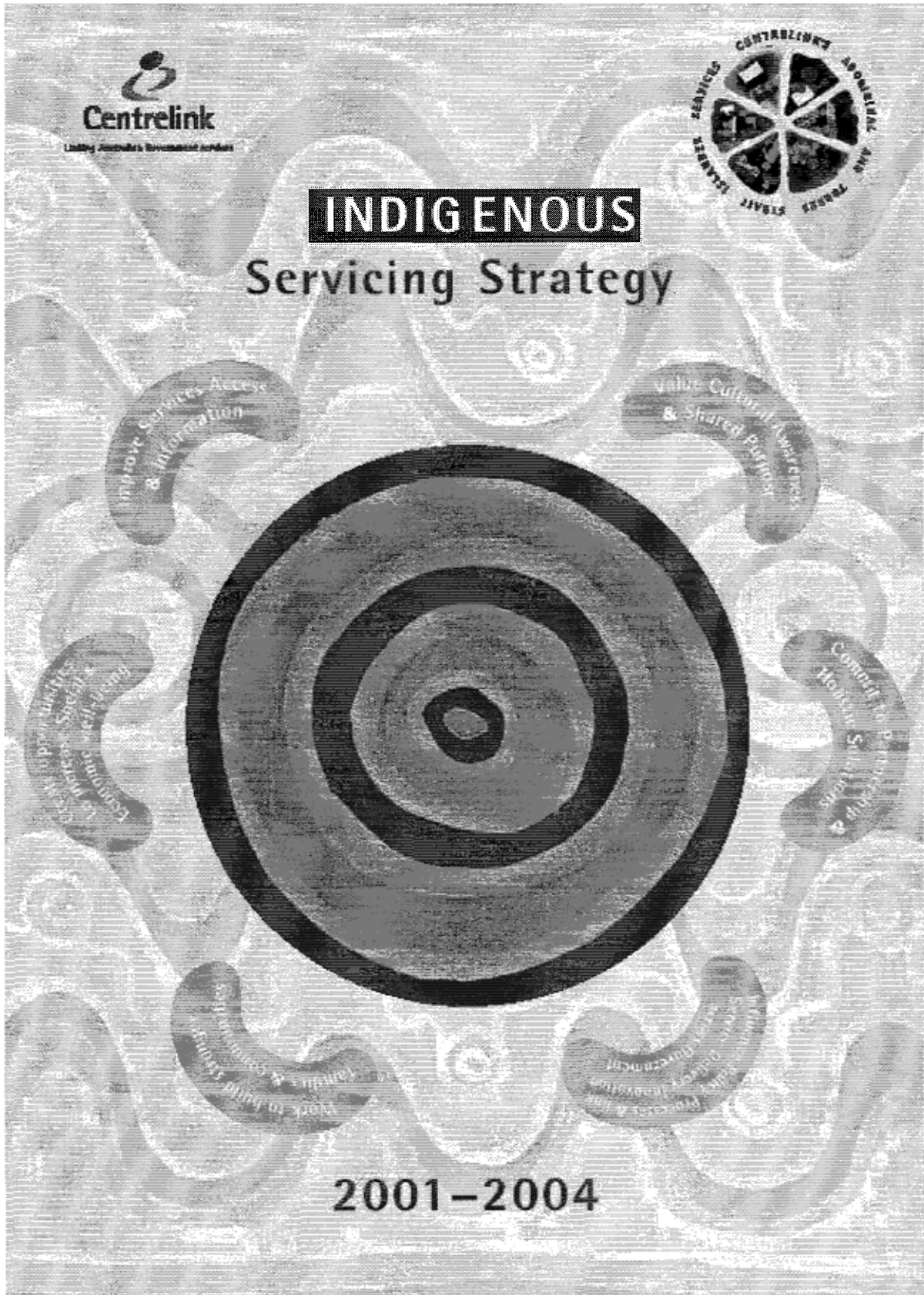
For Indigenous Australians and their communities Centrelink is committed to:

- Acknowledge and overcome the barriers faced by Indigenous Australians in accessing Centrelink services. We will develop partnerships with Indigenous communities and agencies to improve the design, delivery and access to Centrelink services.
- Improve access to employment, education and training.
- Increase the satisfaction of Indigenous Australians with Centrelink services.
- Ensuring an Indigenous voice in developing Centrelink services, and encouraging the active involvement of our Indigenous employees in shaping future directions.

As an employer Centrelink values its Indigenous employees and is committed to:

- Providing greater employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians, reflecting the Indigenous customer profile in our staffing levels.
- Ensuring Indigenous employees receive appropriate support.
- Assisting Indigenous employees to fulfil their career goals through the provision of development and learning opportunities.
- Increasing our understanding of the identity and experiences of Indigenous Australians and reflecting this awareness in our internal relationships and external service delivery.

CENTRELINK'S INDIGENOUS SERVICING STRATEGY 2001-2004



Indigenous Servicing Goals and Strategies

Improve services, access and information for Indigenous customers and communities

- Develop and implement an integrated Centrelink Agent and Access Point Servicing Model to align community and client agency needs.
- Enhance Centrelink's communication strategy to underpin Centrelink's Indigenous Servicing Strategy.
- Assess service needs in Indigenous service delivery.
- Enhance Centrelink's Indigenous Call Centre Strategy.
- Embed Indigenous Servicing Strategy into Centrelink's strategic operational directions.

Create opportunities for Indigenous customers and communities to increase social and economic well-being

- Work to improve cash and financial management services.
- Contribute to the implementation of 'Australia's Working Together' 2001/02 Budget initiatives in partnership with FaCS, DEWR/SB, DETYA and ATSI.
- Work to build community capacity and local employment.
- Identify and share best practice.
- Improve banking and financial services.

Work with Indigenous communities to build stronger families and communities

- Enhance linkages with FaCS strengthening families initiatives.
- Explore options for alternative funding sources.
- Review Centrelink's Indigenous Youth Strategy.
- Review Centrelink's Domestic and Family Violence Strategy.
- Contribute to better school retention.

Value cultural awareness and shared purpose

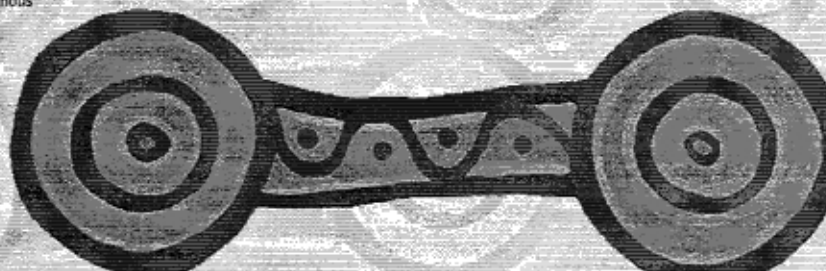
- Develop and implement a Centrelink Indigenous Employee Action Plan.
- Build cultural awareness into Centrelink leadership model, development and performance assessment processes.
- Harness Centrelink capacity by focusing on the theme that 'Indigenous customers are everyone's customers'.

Commit to partnerships and holistic solutions for Indigenous customers and communities

- Work with client agencies and Indigenous Communities to identify Business Development opportunities.
- Build strong partnerships with Indigenous communities and stakeholders.
- Develop partnerships with Federal, State, Local, Non-Government and private sectors.

Influence policy processes and link service delivery innovation across Government for Indigenous customers and communities

- Build strategic intelligence and analysis.
- Support client agencies and others in Indigenous policy development and review.
- Communicate success of Centrelink's Indigenous Services.
- Build community IT access and capability.
- Build funding base for Centrelink's Indigenous Servicing Strategy in partnership with client agencies.



CENTRELINK PALM ISLAND AND YARRABAH SERVICE DELIVERY PILOTS

Palm Island Remote Service Delivery Pilots

In our work improving services to the Palm Island community, Centrelink had three major objectives:

Firstly, we wanted to establish a stronger relationship with the community and its leaders so that Centrelink could contribute more effectively to the community's strategies for:

- developing its own solutions to deal with local problems;
- integrating and coordinating services to the community from all tiers of Government;
- early intervention and prevention; and
- generating real jobs.

Secondly, on a service delivery level Centrelink wanted to ensure that the community had access to the full range of services and that those services are delivered in ways that respond to the specific needs of the Palm Island community. The focus of our effort was delivering not only a basic level of service but on moving toward services which offer real value to the community and its efforts to increase social and economic participation.

Thirdly, Centrelink wanted to assist the community to develop the capacity to connect with key government agendas, in particular, social welfare reform. There is potential for the Palm Island vision document to become the basis of a community Mutual Obligation plan.

A critical aspect of Centrelink's involvement with the community is about working within the framework of the Palm Island Vision document. Three years ago the community initiated the development of a Palm Island Vision Document based on extensive consultations with key stakeholders and community residents. The Palm Island Indigenous Council (PIAC) released the final document in 2000 with the view that it should form the basis for all ongoing negotiations with government and non-government service delivery agencies.

Due to Centrelink's involvement in the Vision Document community consultation process, important insights were obtained into the community's needs from a service delivery perspective. In subsequent discussions with Centrelink, PIAC representatives have expressed a keenness to progress elements of the welfare reform agenda to rebuild their community, with a particular interest in developing a community level mutual obligation plan consisting of activities that support specific elements of their Vision Document.

Phased Implementation of Services

The development of Centrelink on-site services to Palm Island residents consists of two phases.

1. Consolidation of on-site services comparable to those provided in other small Centrelink offices. This includes improving the use of facilities such as Centrepay and by working in partnership with other service providers to secure better outcomes for individual customers. For example, staff have been working closely with TAFE and families of at-risk young people to link them to educational opportunities at the TAFE campus on Palm Island. The key to progress has been

the time and care that our staff and management have taken to build relationships with key stakeholders in the community.

2. Building on the first phase by integrating the views and preferences of community leaders regarding welfare reform issues into new initiatives aimed at increasing social and economic participation. The relationships developed on the ground and outcomes achieved to date greatly enhances our future capacity to work in partnership with the community to achieve government policy and sustainable community outcomes.

Next Steps

- Further discussions, negotiations and partnerships with the community focused on identifying and capitalising on opportunities that support the community's Vision Plan, and the key themes in welfare reform, such as developing community application of mutual obligation.
- Utilise membership on a regional forum of government service providers and PIAC representatives to strategically progress an integrated approach to service delivery or partnership opportunities with the community. One example is that, based on Centrelink's successful experience in employing local people to deliver on-site services, Centrelink is now in the early stages of developing a workforce planning concept with other forum members to fully explore this option on a broader scale.
- Develop internal capability and profile of the Palm Island and Townsville CSC's to reflect the type of services to be delivered in this environment.

Yarrabah Innovative Service Delivery Pilot

The decision to implement an innovative service delivery model for Yarrabah is seen as an important step in working with the community to support government welfare reform initiatives. Yarrabah has a large Centrelink customer base and also one of the largest CDEP's nationwide.

The aim of the project was to 'establish a small Centrelink office in Yarrabah to provide access to basic services, and with the capacity to work in partnership with the community and key stakeholders to develop integrated servicing solutions to address Indigenous customer needs and community priorities'.

Yarrabah is a large Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) community 45 minutes drive from Cairns. There is no public transport, which causes difficulties for a number of local people requiring services outside of Yarrabah. There are limited employment opportunities in Yarrabah with the major employer being the Council, and small numbers employed by other agencies such as Education, Health, Centrelink and local Aboriginal organisations. Yarrabah's unemployed income support recipients are not exempt from the activity test and have access to the Job Network coverage through two providers conducting a regular outreach service. The population is between 3,200 and 3,500 people, with a housing stock of 280. There are two CDEP programs with approximately 920 participants and in January 2002, there were 2,187 customers in receipt of Centrelink payments and services.

The project was planned in four stages:

1. benchmarking exercise;
2. emphasis on community and stakeholder engagement;
3. establishment of a full servicing profile; and
4. maintenance of ongoing agreements, including future options.

An important element of the project is 'community and key stakeholder engagement' and from the outset high importance was placed on ensuring the community is kept informed and involved in all activities. Particular care was taken to engage relevant key stakeholders and community where activities impacted directly on people.

A comprehensive benchmarking strategy was put in place to assess the services and customers needs and to establish a 'benchmark' from which to take the services forward. While the dominant feature of the review was based on improving access to Centrelink payments and services, other elements included a strong focus on improving local knowledge of Centrelink's services, payments and rules.

The office is planned to open late in 2002 and future work will include an emphasis on debt prevention, working in partnership with community and key stakeholders to influence social and economic participation, integration of broader Centrelink services including Social Worker services and implementation of the AWT strategies.

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