

# Overview

One of the main focuses of the Closing the Gap Agenda is the importance of early education both in terms of participation and achievement. It is well documented that in comparison with Australian children in general, Indigenous children have lower levels of school attendance and poor educational outcomes. Yet not all Indigenous children do poorly. This report concentrates on identifying what works to produce positive outcomes and what difficulties need to be overcome in order to produce more positive outcomes for all Indigenous children.

Previous reports have shown that primary carers of *Footprints in Time* children value education as an important step for a better future for their children. This report discusses the high levels of support they are providing in their children's early schooling through connections with the schools and encouragement through learning activities. Parental engagement with school is shown to have a positive association with higher literacy scores. Schools are also providing assistance with programs to ensure Indigenous children feel comfortable in the school environment. Most children are encouraged to attend school and the most common reason for absence is illness of the child.

However, non-attendance is also shown to be associated with financial stress. This, as with many indicators of disadvantage, is more prevalent among families with Indigenous children. The number of major life events that Indigenous children experience, often as a result of disadvantage, is much higher than for non-Indigenous children and this is associated with greater social and emotional difficulties, which science is now showing may have detrimental long-term effects on physiological development.<sup>1</sup>

What is overwhelmingly apparent from the data is that like parents everywhere, the parents of the *Footprints in Time* children want their children to be happy and successful. The emphasis placed on Indigenous heritage may vary between parents but the desired outcome is the same.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Shonkoff, J & Garner, A 2012, 'The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress', *Paediatrics*, vol. 129, no. 1, pp. 232–46.