Finding our feet
First findings from *Footprints in Time*
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For more information please contact the Footprints in Time team on the free-call number 1800 106 235.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are warned that this booklet may include photos of deceased persons.

Images on front cover.
From left: Shania Teece
Jasmine, Jamaka, Jason and Jyi Newman
Kalillie Douglas
Declan Edwards
Charles and Zoe Sabatino
Finding our feet

First findings from *Footprints in Time*
This booklet has been prepared to provide community feedback from the first wave of *Footprints in Time*, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), undertaken by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

We would like to thank the parents and families who continue to participate in the *Footprints in Time* study. By allowing us to be part of your child’s life, we will learn what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up strong. We are committed to a study that is transparent, respectful and appropriate.

Special thanks go to members of the LSIC Steering Committee who have provided expert advice to assist in the study’s development. Many of the members gave their time freely outside of committee meetings and their support to the FaHCSIA research team has been genuinely and greatly appreciated.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the research team who is out there knocking on doors and getting to know you and your family and collecting data.

Behind this data are true, living stories, showing the commitment parents and families have to grow up their children strong. As the years go by and we continue to interview *Footprints in Time* families, we will develop a clear picture of how the children are growing up.

There is enormous support for *Footprints in Time* across our study sites and a great deal of interest in the data from policy makers, researchers, service delivery agencies, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Ethics approval for this study has been obtained through the Department of Health and Ageing’s Ethics Committee, and state and territory Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs).

Permission has been granted for the reproduction of all photographs and quotes contained in this booklet.
Foreword by the Chair, Professor Mick Dodson

Every child deserves a chance at happiness and the opportunity to realise their potential for a fulfilling and useful life. We all know that children need more than just a roof over their heads – love, understanding and encouragement are just as important.

Footprints in Time, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, looks at the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the ways their culture keeps them strong and healthy. We know that how people feel about themselves, whether they feel valued and respected has a whole lot to do with how they handle problems.

Our kids have to see that they are stronger and smarter than this society has so far given them credit for. We need to help them cultivate an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity that is strong and smart. We all need to recognise that children’s sense of themselves as Aboriginal people – who they are and where they come from – is of both practical and spiritual value. In bestowing identity we also bestow dignity.

There are plenty of examples of Indigenous success; we just have to recognise it and replicate it. We have to see evidence of success as points of light all around us and join them up to create a universe of opportunity for our children. These results from the first wave of Footprints in Time data provide more points of light. I hope you find them useful.

Professor Mick Dodson AM
Chair
LSIC Steering Committee
September 2009

Mick Dodson
Introduction

This booklet provides a summary of just some of the material we have collected in the first year of *Footprints in Time*: the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children. In the first year of the study, we asked parents about their health, their child’s health, what languages they speak, how they like to spend their time and the role of culture and community in their children’s lives. This is the first time such a longitudinal study has been conducted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in so many locations across Australia.

Getting the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – good health, learning at school, participating in their community, being safe and happy – requires understanding of all the factors that influence their lives as they grow up, such as their family, their communities, their culture, and the use and effectiveness of services. The information gathered through *Footprints in Time* will assist governments, communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to better understand these factors.

What is *Footprints in Time*?

*Footprints in Time* is a study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies aged between 6 and 18 months, and children aged 3½ to 4½ years old, in different parts of Australia. The study started collecting data in April 2008.

*Footprints in Time* children will be visited each year to find out how they are going and what is happening in their lives. In this way, we will better understand what impacts on children’s lives over time and how children can be best supported to grow up strong and resilient.
Which communities are included in the study?

In 2008, our study families were living in cities, regional country centres, and more remote towns and outstations. The *Footprints in Time* study sites are:

- Western Sydney (New South Wales) Campbelltown to Riverstone
- Dubbo (New South Wales)
- South Coast (New South Wales) from Eden to Kiama
- Brisbane, Ipswich, Logan, Inala, Gold Coast (Queensland)
- Mount Isa, Mornington, Doomadgee, Normanton, Cloncurry (Queensland)
- Torres Strait Islands – Thursday, Hammond, Horn, Badu and Moa Islands and the Northern Peninsula Area (Queensland)
- Darwin, Katherine, Galiwinku (Northern Territory)
- Alice Springs, Hermannsburg (Northern Territory)
- Derby, Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, One Arm Point (Western Australia)
- Greater Shepparton (Victoria) incorporating regions between Wangaratta, Seymour, Cobram and Barmah
- Adelaide, Port Augusta (South Australia).

Figure 1: *Footprints in Time* sample distribution, Parent 1 interviews
Who’s yarning and what about?

In the first year of *Footprints in Time*, the parents\(^1\) and carers\(^2\) of 1,687 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were interviewed between April 2008 and February 2009 in eleven sites around Australia. Most parents we interviewed were mums (93% or 1,565). A small group of dads (39) was interviewed as the primary care-giver, representing 2% of the total number of parents and carers interviewed. A small number of other carers, mainly grandparents, was also interviewed.

Just over half of the parents interviewed (52% or 877) were aged between 21 and 30 years and one third (551) were aged between 31 and 40 years.

Our *Footprints in Time* children were made up of 860 boys (51%) and 827 girls (49%). Most children were identified by their parents as Aboriginal (1,474 or 88%). A smaller number of children (109) were Torres Strait Islander. This represented six per cent of the children in the study. Six per cent of children (104) were identified by their parents as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of parents and their partners are shown at Table 1.

In 95 per cent of cases, the study child was the son or daughter of the parent being interviewed. In three per cent of cases (50 children) the study child was a grandchild of the person interviewed. The remaining two per cent of children (22) were related to the person interviewed in some other way.

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1 We refer to the parent interviewed as ‘Parent 1’
2 While a small number of carers (grandparents, aunts, uncles) were interviewed, the term ‘parent’, ‘mums’ and ‘dads’ will be used throughout this booklet.

Image above: Nardia, Casey and Maddison Stovell
Below: Hunter Smith
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Status of Parent 1 Interviewed (total 1661)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSI</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both</td>
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<td>13%</td>
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<table>
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<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSI</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>23%</td>
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Almost half of the parents (49% or 825) interviewed had four household members or less living in the home. Almost two thirds (64%) of our study children have between one and three other children living in the household. Only 13 per cent of households have four or more other children. Almost one quarter (23%) of study children were the only child living in the household. Of all Footprints in Time children, 29 per cent had brothers or sisters (including half or step brothers and sisters) living elsewhere.

Parental health

Most Footprints in Time parents (89%) reported their health as excellent, very good or good. A small number (100) reported some form of ear problem (6%) or eye problem (5% or 83 parents). The majority of parents (72%) interviewed reported they did not have any health problems that made it difficult to look after the study child.

Image above: Markell Brown
Below: Akasha Combo
Footprints in Time mums – what you told us about your health and pregnancy care

Mothers or caregivers were asked about the pregnancy and birth of the study child. In total, 1,594 responded. Mums were asked where they obtained information or advice about pregnancy or giving birth. A mix of sources was reported. Almost a third of mums reported getting advice about pregnancy from their mothers and/or aunties. Other family members and friends were reported as a source of information by 21 per cent of mums. Aboriginal medical services were reported as a source of information about pregnancy and giving birth by 30 per cent of mums. Almost 38 per cent also reported using other service providers as a source of information. Doctors and midwives were the most commonly consulted, whether in Aboriginal medical services or in other service providers.

Mums with babies in the study (906) were asked about whether they had check-ups during their pregnancy. Almost all of them (97% or 875) reported having check-ups during pregnancy, with most of these mums (95%) having at least one check-up every two months.

All mums were asked about any health problems they had during pregnancy. Low iron levels/anaemia was reported as the most frequent problem during pregnancy, with 168 mums (11%) reporting this. Just over half of all mums (53%) reported taking iron supplements during their pregnancy.

Of all mums interviewed, 17 per cent (278 mums) reported they suffered or ‘probably suffered’ from ‘baby blues’ or post-natal depression for at least a month after the study child’s birth. Thirty nine per cent of these mums (108) reported that they received some form of treatment for this condition. Thirty-three per cent (93 mums) reported receiving no treatment, while an additional 22 per cent (60 mums) reported their condition as not diagnosed by a doctor or nurse.
Half of the mums (50% or 749) told us that they smoked during pregnancy. Of those, 51 per cent smoked less while they were pregnant than before they were pregnant. Less than one quarter of mums (22% or 337) drank alcohol during pregnancy. However, the majority of these mums (79%) drank less while pregnant.
How healthy are *Footprints in Time* children?

Almost all parents (97% or 1,628) said their children are in excellent, very good or good health. The main health condition for children reported by parents related to ear problems (20% or 338 children affected).

The most common ear problem was ‘runny ears’ which included glue ear, tropical ear or ear infection. In six per cent of cases, parents reported children having eye problems (105 children), half of which were eye infections such as conjunctivitis. Chest infections such as bronchitis, pneumonia and flu were reported in 15 per cent of cases (256 children) and asthma was reported in 13 per cent of cases (214 children).

Asked about tooth brushing, parents reported over half of the children with teeth (57%) brushed at least once a day.
What do *Footprints in Time* children eat?

All parents were asked about breastfeeding history. Over three quarters (80%) of *Footprints in Time* children were breastfed. Of these 21 per cent (or 280 children) were still being breastfed at the time of interview. The main reasons for stopping breastfeeding were ‘no milk or not enough milk’ (29% or 281); the child was old enough to stop (16% or 158) or the child self-weaned (14% or 141).

Parents were asked about the types of food and drinks their child had throughout the day before the interview.

Most of the older children (96% or 674) ate breakfast. Of these, the majority ate cereal for breakfast (72% or 522 children). Half (50% or 363) of the older children were reported as eating bread and almost one third (31% or 225 children) ate fresh fruit in the morning. Sandwiches were the most common food eaten for lunch. This was reported for over half of the children (57% or 411 children). Unprocessed meat, cooked vegetables and pasta were most common for the evening meal.

For the older children the most commonly reported drinks throughout the day were water, fruit juice and plain milk.

Over a third (34%) of all study children go to bed with a bottle or feeder cup. The most common drink for these children was milk (46%) or formula (36%).

Nearly half (48% or 349 children) have bush tucker in their diet including bush fruits, berries and vegetables, native meats and various seafood and shellfish.

“I just think that they need to be taught more about the Aboriginal culture and bush tucker, all those sort of things.”
“When (his dad and his brother) are fixing stuff downstairs, like the mowers and bikes, he is right in there amongst it, with the tools, running off with his tools. Just follows them, and copies them. We take him to the library to get playschool computer programs. Loves it. And the kids play area downstairs at the library...he goes mad, squealing, yelling. And he loves reading books, bringing the books home.”

“He loves to play football...he is just constantly football, football, football. If it’s not football it’s wrestling. And he loves his horses, goes to feed the horses with poppy quite a bit. Just recently, one of his poppy’s horses had a foal, so... he was getting all happy and laughing because it was trying to stand up and falling back down and then it got up and the legs were real jelly. He was like yeah carrying on because he’s full of energy as it is... he thought it was great.”

Jedda Hill

Tyler Nye Parsons

How do Footprints in Time children spend their time?

Parents were asked about the sorts of activities they undertook with their children the week before interview. Parents reported children as busy with many different types of activities. In almost all cases (99%), Parent 1 spent the most time with the study child. Most children (93% or 1449) went shopping with their mums. About eighty per cent or more of children participated in indoor and outdoor activities with mum. Over three quarters of children (1286) had mum or a family member read them a book. Two thirds of children (1131 children) also had stories which were not from a book told to them by their mum or other family members. In most cases (93% or for 1564 children) mum or a family member also played music, sang songs, danced or did other musical activities with their children. Computers and computer games were played by less than a third of the children (29% or 486). Dads also did these things with children, but to a lesser extent. Dads spent about half the time that mothers did with their children, doing things such as swimming, walking outdoors, playing and musical activities.
What do you enjoy doing with study child?

“I love sitting down and drawing with her; love taking her to the park and playing outside and trying to make up bonding one on one time with her because she was taken away from me at birth and so I’m trying to spend as much time with her now.”

“Everything I do I love doing with her.”

“Playing, singing, take him for walk, reading book to him, yarning.”

“Sitting down yarning, talking, telling him stories, taking him bush, taking him fishing.”

“Reading his books and playing out with the ball and dancing to the Wiggles.”

What does study child enjoy doing with you?

“Fight with me, kiss me, pull my hair and love me up.”

“Be everywhere I am, follow me around, help with cleaning, she likes it when I nurse her to sleep, just that togetherness she likes doing everything with me, she loves playing peek a boo – everyday.”

‘The dishes, making beds, folding clothes.”

“Going for walks, sits on my shoulder when we go up town and out bush.”

“Listening to music, likes dancing, starting to learn how to write her name, talking about school.”

“Tormenting Nan, jumping on trampoline, ratting through drawers.”
Strong souls, strong families

The majority of parents (84% or 1423) described their family as a strong family which ‘always’ or ‘most times’ help each other. Ninety one per cent of parents ‘always’ or ‘most times’ describe themselves as a ‘good son or daughter’ to their families. Two thirds of parents reported they understood and knew ‘lots’ or a ‘fair bit’ about their family, history and culture.

Almost three quarters of parents interviewed had people praise them for something they were good at ‘always’ or ‘most times’.

About half of all the children’s grandparents (49% or 823) provide care for them when parents cannot be there. When parents needed advice, about two thirds said they ask family and friends. Eighty eight per cent reported that when they are sad or upset, they have a person that they could talk to. Eighty-three per cent of parents reported they had an older person looking out for them ‘always’ or ‘most times.’ Eighty one per cent of parents reported that they ‘always’ or ‘most times’ get used to big changes in their lives fairly quickly. High numbers of parents (84% or 1,418) described themselves as being able to ‘always’ or ‘most times’ laugh and make a joke.

“With us, my sisters they are like other parents to her. We don’t say cousins, we say sisters – that’s her aunties. It’s the blackfella way.”

Nayellie Tamwoy with Grandma, Eileen See Kee

Tahvania Woodman and sister Patrice, and three cousins
On culture and identity

Parents identified their children with a wide variety of tribes, language groups, clans and country. Some families have strong links to ethnic groups overseas, especially Pacific Island groups, such as Maori and Tongan, but also including European, Asian and African communities.

Many parents named tribal and language groups. A number of families identified physical locations rather than tribal names, such as particular islands, towns and natural landmarks like gorges or rivers. Some parents mentioned particular clan names or animals, particularly those in the Torres Strait and in other remote areas.

Only a small number of parents referred to large regional group names such as Koori when describing their child’s cultural identity. It was not uncommon for parents to list several tribal groups or clans.

The largest groups represented in *Footprints in Time* were Wiradjuri, Arrernte, Yorta Yorta and Gamilaraay.
Culture is important in growing up strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children strong. Parents reported doing a number of different things with their children to make sure they were strong in their culture.

Over two thirds of parents (67% or 1,122) took their child to an Indigenous cultural event, ceremony or sorry business. Over half of parents (55% or 932) interviewed, reported their child had a connection to country or place, and over half of parents (56% or 906) identified their child with a tribal group, language group or clan.

Almost half of parents (44% or 728) reported that they taught their child traditional arts like painting, dance, singing and making ceremonial dress, and almost half of parents (41% or 680) reported that they teach their child traditional practices like collecting food or hunting.

When asked what it is about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture that will help their children grow up stronger, many parents identified family strength and connectedness as being important, as well as the sense of belonging that they have to their community, culture and the land.

Also significant was knowing who they were and where they came from, knowledge about their culture and their history, and a sense of pride and respect for their cultural identity, their elders and their family.

Debah and Methirma Fauid

Djakapurra Beatty
“During NAIDOC week… my eldest daughter chose to talk about her culture… I told her teacher my daughter was a descendant and kind of said to them that they should have given the kids a bit of cultural awareness about the place. …when the teacher did say that my daughter was a descendant from that area, most of the kids wouldn’t believe it because her skin is white and they didn’t believe that she was even Aboriginal (laughing).”

“He’s proud to be Aboriginal and he is proud to come from Cherbourg. He tells everyone: I’m a Wakka Wakka boy.”

“Knowing who she is and being proud of who she is. Know who her mob is as this is gives her a sense of belonging.”

“…being proud of her background, knowledge of who she is and where her family has come from.”

“Respect for and from his elders, respect for himself and strong family unit for support and help.”

“Family, identifying and acknowledging Aboriginal history and being accepted and acknowledged as Aboriginal.”

“Positive things like getting Aboriginal lawyers and doctors. There’s nothing that should set us back from being up there. I had one kid ask me why we’re second best - I said we’re not.”

“Knowing his people, culture, heritage and traditional ways.”

“Aboriginal culture, family history belonging to country.”

“Bush tucker, learning about hunting, land, reading about Aboriginal Australia.”

“Sense of identity, knowing about her culture, help her feel confident, she will grow up being empowered knowing about it.”
What languages do parents and children speak?

Figure 3: Number of parents and children speaking a traditional Indigenous language or a Creole.

Approximately 20 per cent of parents speak one or more traditional Indigenous languages. Eighteen per cent of parents in the survey speak two languages and some parents (8%) speak three or more languages. Altogether our

Footprints in Time families speak more than 100 different languages! Almost all parents (95%) speak English.

Around 15 per cent of children and babies are learning to speak two languages, and a further four per cent are learning between three and eight languages.

Jayquan Waia
Of the older group of children, 82 per cent speak English as their main language, over 14 per cent speak an Indigenous language as their main language, and over three per cent speak both an Indigenous language and English equally well. The most commonly spoken languages by children are English, Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole), Kriol, Kalaw Lagaw Ya (Torres Strait), Djambarrpuyngu, Arrernte and Ngarrindjeri. Eight children know sign language and 35 children speak foreign languages, including Spanish, Maori, Italian, Tongan, Greek and Indonesian.
Safe communities

Just over half (53% or 896 parents) said their community or neighbourhood is ‘very safe’ or ‘quite safe’. An additional 31 per cent describe safety in their community as ‘okay’.

Parents’ hopes for their children

All parents wanted the best for their children. Parents most wanted their children to receive a good education and have the opportunity for a good career as well as being healthy, happy, independent and successful. Parents’ wishes for their children also included that they feel safe in their community, and be financially and emotionally secure.

Most parents (63% or 1,052) think their community or neighbourhood is a ‘good’ or ‘very good’ place for little children. An additional 24 per cent rated their community as ‘okay’ for little children. Seventy two per cent of parents reported that there were ‘some’, ‘a few’ or ‘lots’ of good places for kids to play in their neighbourhood.

“I want my kids to grow up (with) … old-fashioned morals, standards.”

Taig Bullaman

Zahdein Pearson-Bowie

It was also important for children to have a strong sense of cultural identity, pride in their cultural background, to have a good sense of right and wrong – and to be a good person. Here’s what many parents identified as their main hopes for their children.
“Be happy, learn his culture, get a good education and get a good job.”

“Good education so he can have an opportunity to do what ever he wants.”

“…having a choice in life, having her own thoughts, making her own decisions, and learning from herself.”

“To grow up knowing right from wrong, to know who his family is and where he comes from.”

“…learn both way Yolngu and Balanda.”

Next steps

Our research team is out in the field conducting Wave 2 interviews until November 2009. They are also collecting stories from families and communities to provide an overall view of the lives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

Wave 3 is being piloted in Brisbane, Wagga Wagga and Mount Isa in September 2009. Interviews are expected to start in March 2010.

We will continue to report findings to communities and study families about what we have learned. Each year, we will go back to the same families to see how their children are doing.