



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services



# Stepping out

Findings from Wave 5 of *Footprints in Time*  
The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children



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*The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children*

For more information please contact the Footprints in Time team  
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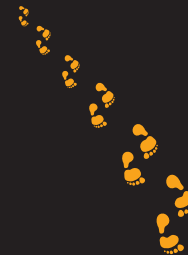
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are warned that this booklet may include photos of deceased persons.

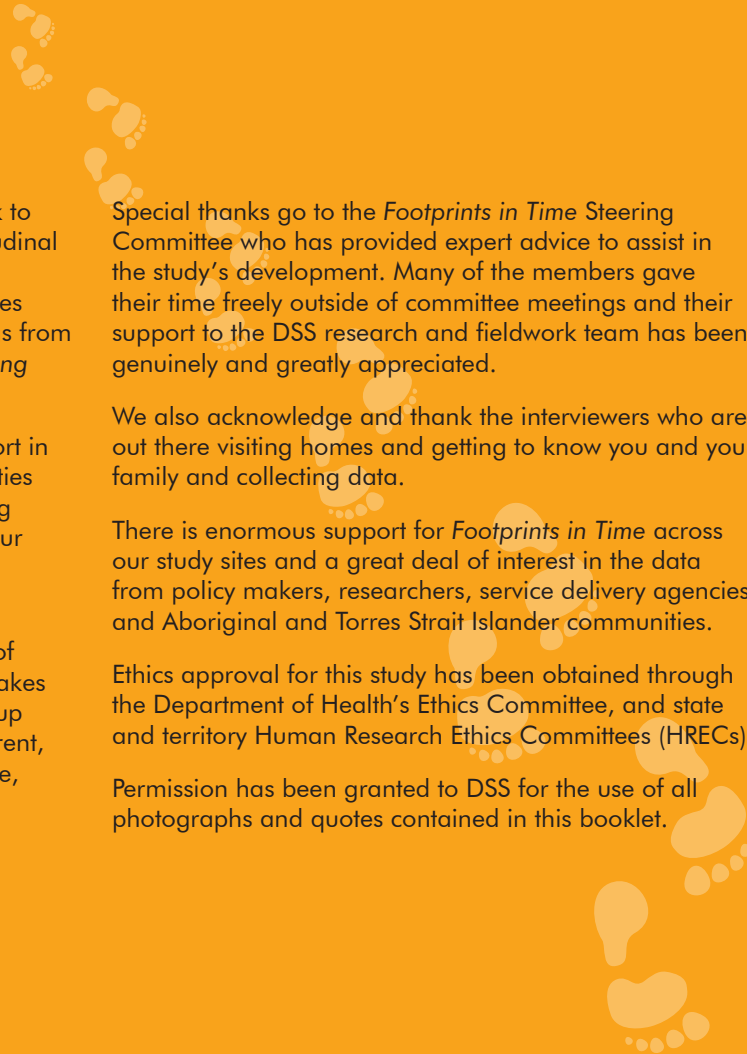
# Stepping out

Findings from Wave 5 of *Footprints in Time*

The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children

The *Footprints in Time* team acknowledges traditional owners across Australia and pays its respects to their Elders past and present.





This booklet is the fourth in a series giving feedback to the community about *Footprints in Time*, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, undertaken by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS). Earlier booklets provided some of the findings from the first four waves of the study. This booklet, *Stepping Out*, looks at the fifth wave of the study.

We acknowledge Traditional Owners for their support in allowing *Footprints in Time* staff access to communities within our study sites. We appreciate their continuing support and local knowledge that have benefitted our staff greatly in working with families in the study.

We also thank the parents and children who stay in the *Footprints in Time* study. Allowing us to be part of your child's life, means we can learn about what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up strong. We are committed to a study that is transparent, respectful and appropriate. Behind this data are true, living stories, showing the commitment parents and families have to grow up their children strong.

Special thanks go to the *Footprints in Time* Steering Committee who has 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 DSS research and fieldwork team has been genuinely and greatly appreciated.

We also acknowledge and thank the interviewers who are out there visiting homes and getting to know you and your family and collecting data.

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's Ethics Committee, and state and territory Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs).

Permission has been granted to DSS for the use of all photographs and quotes contained in this booklet.

## Foreword by the Chair, Professor Mick Dodson

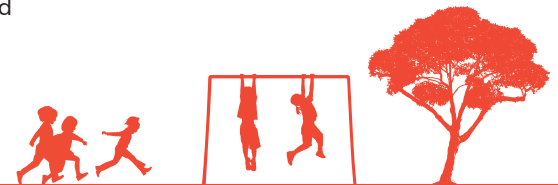
First of all, thank you for taking part in the *Footprints in Time* study.

Another year has passed by and once again *Footprints in Time* families have generously opened their doors to the study's interviewers to share details of their lives and that of their children to the benefit of all Indigenous Australian families. It is proof of the commitment both of the participating families and the *Footprints in Time* interviewers that the number of interviews in Wave 5 has remained high.

This project would not be possible without the support of Indigenous families and communities. Children have to be nurtured and looked after but this does not occur by itself; it happens in the context of family and community. If we wish to ensure Indigenous children are not, for example, disadvantaged when it comes to education, that education must not only provide them with the means to become productive members of society it must also encourage and reinforce their knowledge, strength of connection and appreciation of their cultural heritage. Responses to the question to dads about what they are doing to teach their children about being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander show that this is happening. And I do not find it surprising that so many parents think tolerance and respect is important to teach their children.

Research using *Footprints in Time* has shown that education is something that Indigenous parents value and demand for their children. It is good to see that so many children have a positive attitude to learning and that they are enjoying school. The study shows that attendance at school is important for good learning outcomes.

I hope you enjoy reading this booklet and find the information interesting and useful to you as a parent and as a participant in *Footprints in Time*.



## Introduction

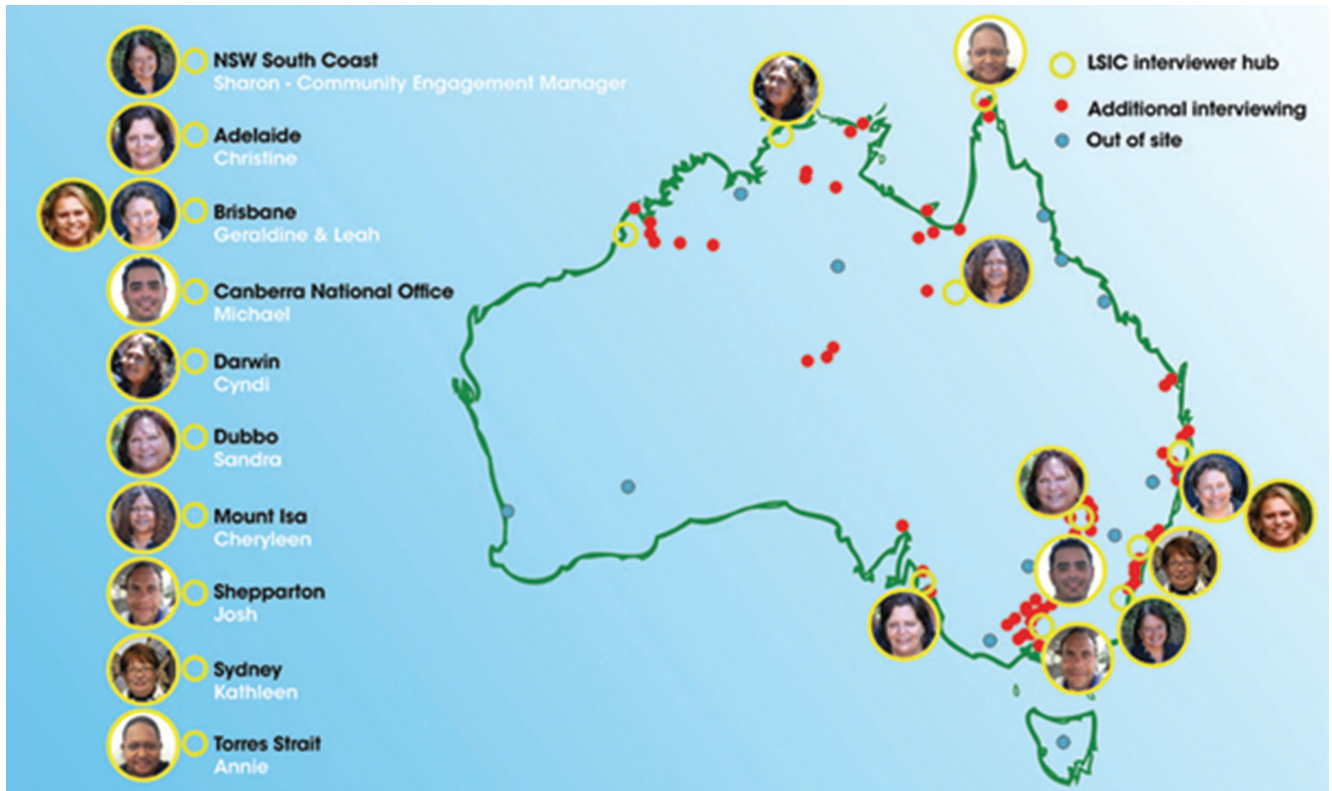
### What is *Footprints in Time*?

*Footprints in Time* is a study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It is the first study in Australia that follows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children over time on a large scale. Nearly 1,700 children and their families started in the study in 2008.

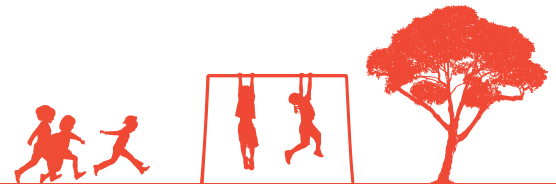
The study follows two groups of children. In 2012, when Wave 5 data was collected, most of the younger children were between 4½ and 6 years old, while the older children were mostly between 7½ and 9 years old.

*Footprints in Time* gathers information about the study children from the children's parents or carers, from their teachers at school and from the children themselves. Most of the information is provided by the child's main carer, who is nearly always the mother; however, the main carer can also be the child's father, grandparent, aunt or uncle, foster parent or another person who knows the child best. Throughout this booklet the word parent means main carer. In 2012, we also asked a number of questions of the children's dads or male carers.

The study was originally located in 11 sites across Australia. The sites are in every state and territory, except Tasmania and the ACT. They are in cities, regional country centres and more remote towns and outstations. However, as time goes by and some of the families move, the study may follow these families into areas which were not part of the original *Footprints in Time* sites.



A map of interviews/sites in 2012





## Wave 5 of Footprints in Time

The fifth wave, or year, of *Footprints in Time* interviews took place in 2012. Some of the families had moved and, although we did our best to contact them, we were not able to reach everyone. We will continue to try and get in touch with the families that we were unable to reach or who did not respond so that we can talk to them in the next wave of interviews.

In Wave 5, we successfully interviewed 1,258 families, compared to almost 1,700 families who took part in the first wave of interviews plus nearly 90 new families who started the study during the second wave of interviews. More than 900 families have taken part in all five waves of the study.

Many of the questions in the fifth wave of interviews were similar to those in the previous wave. We need to repeat these important questions because of the nature of the study – we want to see whether things have changed over time.

We do have some new questions each year. This is because the children are getting older and also to get new information.

Results from some of the new questions in the fifth wave of interviews are reported in this booklet. We hope you will enjoy reading about them.



## Who are the *Footprints in Time* families?

Nine out of ten parents (90%) we interviewed in Wave 5 were mums. A small number of fathers were interviewed as the main carer (2% of all main carers). Other main carers, mostly grandmothers (5%), were also interviewed.





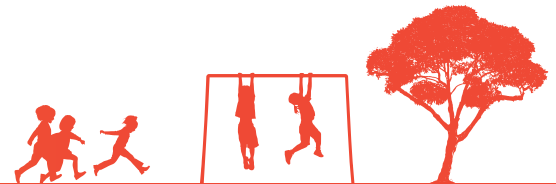
Just under half (48%) of the main carers were aged between 26 and 35 years and around a third (32%) were aged between 36 and 45 years. The majority of parents identified themselves as Aboriginal (900, or 72%). There were 91 (7%) who identified as Torres Strait Islander and a further 47 (4%) who identified as both. The remaining 220 (17%) did not identify as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

In Wave 5 there were 637 boys and 621 girls. Most children were identified by their parents as Aboriginal (1097, or 87%). A smaller number of children (91, or 7%) were Torres Strait Islanders and the remaining 70 (6%) were identified by their parents as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

In addition to interviewing a main carer, we also talked to dads (fathers or men performing a father-like role in a study child's life). In Wave 5, we collected information from 180 dads. Most of these (90%) were the fathers of the children and the partner of the main carer. A few stepfathers and grandfathers also provided information for the dads survey.

The children in *Footprints in Time* live in many kinds of families. More than half of the children (55%) live with two parents. Eight out of ten children (80%) live with a brother or sister and many (37%) have both a brother and a sister. The most common type of family in *Footprints in Time* is a mother and father with one or more children but many families also have other people living with them. Some children have a grandmother, a grandfather or both living with them. Some children also live with their aunts, uncles, cousins or other relatives.

*Footprints in Time* children live in households of as many as 19 people. The average number is five, and nearly six out of ten children (59%) live in families with 4 to 6 people in them.



## Parent's education

Most parents (82%) had finished Year 10 or above with about a third (33%) finishing Year 12. More than half of all parents (57%) have completed a post school educational qualification and some (14%) have a diploma or university degree.

## Speaking language

More than a quarter of the *Footprints in Time* children can speak more than one language. This is very high compared with all Australian children. As well as English, the children speak or are learning Indigenous languages, foreign languages and sign languages.

Many children are using Indigenous languages with their families and in their communities. Some children are growing up speaking an Indigenous language and are now learning English at school. In Wave 5, we asked parents what languages the children are learning at school. One out of ten parents (10%) said that their child was learning an Indigenous language at school. This was more than the number of parents who said their child was learning a foreign language (7%). Children were more likely to be learning an Indigenous language if they were living in country areas and more likely to be learning a foreign language if they were living in town.

## Moving house

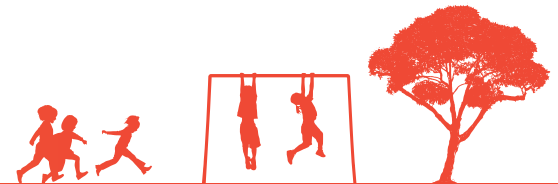
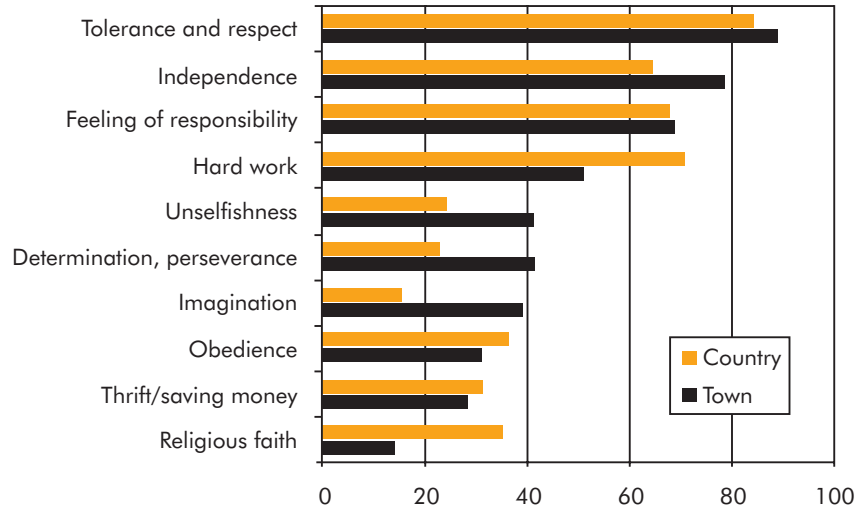
Over the five years that our interviewers have been visiting homes of the *Footprints in Time* families, nearly half (48%) of the children have moved house at least once. Between Waves 4 and 5, just over two out of every ten children (22%) had moved house. Half of these moves (50%) happened for housing-related reasons such as wanting a bigger house or being allocated public housing. Many moves (three out of ten or 30%) happened for family reasons, such as moving to be close to family and friends, or following a relationship breakdown. Moving for family reasons was more common in the country than in town.

## Planning for the future

In Wave 2, we gave parents a list of ten things children could learn at home and asked them to choose the five they thought were especially important. We asked this question again in Wave 5 to see if parents' views have changed over time. The four most common choices remained unchanged: tolerance and respect, independence, feeling of responsibility and hard work. In Wave 2, the fifth most common choice was imagination but in Wave 5 it was unselfishness.

Parents' responses also differed depending on whether the family lived in town or the country. Parents everywhere were most likely to select tolerance and respect as important, but in country areas more parents selected hard work as being important while in town more parents thought independence was important. Religious faith was least likely to be selected by parents in town but was sixth on the list for parents in the country. The chart shows the difference between choices for parents living in town and living in the country.

## What parents want their children to learn, per cent



## Going to school

In 2012, most of the *Footprints in Time* children had taken their first steps towards an education, having started either pre-school or school.

The majority of the older children in the study (93%) were in either Year 2 or Year 3 at school. Nearly eight out of ten (78%) of the younger children were enrolled in preschool or in Pre Year 1, and one in ten children (10%) were in Year 1. Most of the children not enrolled in preschool or school were too young to be going.

Most of the *Footprints in Time* children enjoy school. We asked children in the older group what they thought about going to school, while the parents provided the answers for the younger children. For the younger children, more than nine out of ten (92%) of their parents said that their child looked forward to going to school. Most of the older children agreed that school was fun (368 out of 508, or 72%) and another 94 (19%) thought school was fun sometimes. Around half of the older children (270 out of 500) felt happy about going to school and a further 108 (22%) said they were sometimes happy about going. Nearly eight out of ten (79%) also thought their teacher was nice to them.

More girls said they thought school is fun but this did not make a difference to attendance. Boys were as likely as girls to have attended school every day they were supposed to in the week before interview.

The positive attitudes of the children show in their attendance. More than eight out of ten children (84%) who go to school or preschool went to school every day the school was open in the week before interview. The most common reason for children to be away from school was illness or injury.

Going to school every day is important for children to be able to do well. Data from the teachers shows that children who attended school most of the time (80% or more) had average reading scores 24 points higher than those who were away a lot.



Nearly nine out of ten of the older children (87%) said they like drawing pictures. Boys liked drawing pictures as much as girls.



Around seven out of ten children (74%) said they enjoy writing but girls were more likely to say they liked it than boys.



Reading books is more popular with girls than with boys. Eight out of ten girls (83%) said they enjoy reading books while six out of ten boys (63%) said they enjoy it.

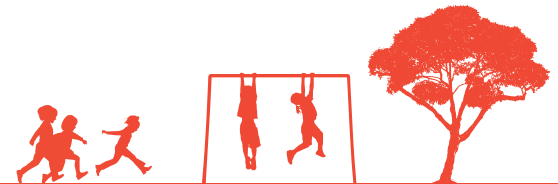


Nearly nine out of ten children (87%) said they enjoyed playing with other children. Slightly more boys than girls said they enjoyed this. Around one in ten children (9%) said they sometimes enjoyed playing with other children.



Singing songs was the least popular activity we asked the children about. Overall, just over half of the children (55%) said they thought it was fun. However, girls were much more likely to say they enjoyed it (nearly seven out of ten or 67%) than boys (four out of ten or 42%).

Eight out of ten girls (80%) said they enjoy maths and number work while nearly seven out of ten boys (65%) said they enjoyed it.





## Learning from Dad

In Wave 5 we asked dads what they were doing to teach their children about being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This learning mostly happens through everyday life, such as being with family, storytelling, and hunting and fishing. Many dads also mentioned attending cultural events. Dads often said they simply talked to the child about their culture and family history and answered questions. Here are some of the things that dads said.



*Tell him about the flags, tell him about animals and stories.*

*Learns from family members. Loves the didgeridoo and likes the boomerang.*

*Go out to the beach and fish, learn language and making spears, and stories.*

*Dancing, take him back to our home country, listen to Dreamtime stories.*

*We practice respect, food gathering and storytelling on a regular basis.*

*Listen to stories, listen to yarns, passing down knowledge of oral history.*



## Children's feelings

We asked the older children in the study how often they feel happy, get scared or worried, feel sad, get angry or mad and feel proud of something they had done. This is how they answered.

### Happy



### Proud



Overall, most children said they felt happy or proud lots of times and only a few said they hardly ever felt happy or proud. Girls were more likely than boys to say that they feel happy most of the time.

### Sad



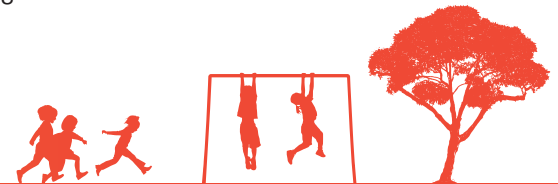
### Worried



### Angry or mad



The majority of the children also said they got worried, sad or angry very rarely or only sometimes. Feeling negative emotions from time to time is completely normal: growing up can be a tough business when you are small and only starting to make sense of the world around you. Having adults who will listen and support you is very important at this age, and most of the older children in our study went on to say that they would go and talk to their parents if they were sad, hurt or if something good had happened.







## Friends...on two feet and four

School is a place for learning but it is also a place for meeting new friends. Sometimes children play with the same group of friends all the time and sometimes they play with lots of different people. We asked parents of the older children about their child's friendship groups. More than seven out of ten parents (71%) said that their child usually plays with the same group of friends and most of these parents thought that the child's friends are a good group of kids.

We asked children in the older group who they go to for help or to talk to in different situations. In most situations children go to their parents or relatives first, but they would also seek help or talk to their friends if something good had happened (15%), if they were sad or upset or if they were being bullied (5%).

Many of the children have animal friends. In Wave 5, children in the younger group told us about their favourite animals and pets. Seven out of ten of the younger children (70%) said they have a pet. These most often were dogs and cats, but also birds, guinea pigs and rabbits. Seven children even had pet snakes! Interestingly, the same number of boys and girls had dogs, but girls were more likely than boys to have cats. Of the 352 children who had a dog as a pet, 105 (30%) also mentioned it as their favourite animal and of the 122 who had a pet cat, 30 (25%) mentioned it as their favourite.



## Child's play

While children now spend much of their day at school there is still plenty of time to play. We asked the older children in the study about their favourite things to do when they were not at school. There are lots of different things the children told us they liked doing, both indoors and outdoors. The most popular indoor activities were playing on the computer and watching television or DVDs. Outside, the children enjoyed ball sports, going to the park, riding bikes, swimming, fishing and trampolining. Many children told us they like doing things with family and friends. Here are some of the things children told us they enjoy.

### What children like doing

*I like going on YouTube and playing with my rabbit.*

*Art, dancing, singing. Play with my brothers, annoying my eldest brother, singing.*

*Playing with friends, playing cops and robbers, playing the PlayStation.*

*Playing with friends all day, swimming, fishing and hunting.*

*Making a cubby house with my friends and playing with my family.*

*Doing my homework, reading, eating healthy food.*

*Going shopping with Mum, playing Uno with Mum, painting and making jewellery, playing with Dad.*

*Play, I surprise my Mum by cleaning up.*

*I like to write songs.*

*I like to design clothes for my Barbie.*





## On being a parent

In Wave 5 we asked parents what they thought was the best thing about being their child's mum or dad. Here are a few of their answers.

*She can be helpful and responsible and pretty self-sufficient. I am very proud of her and everyone always says how polite she is.*

*Getting to look after her and watch her grow, get to watch the little things as she is learning about herself, helping her when she is sad, let her know that I am not Mum but am there to comfort her.*

*When she brings home certificates I know she is doing well in school. She is a positive little girl.*

*All the cuddles and kisses.*

*5 years ago I was not going to have any children. Now I would say that life is not as tense. It opens up a whole new world when you have kids.*

*I love watching her develop with her reading, writing, and her speech. Watching her interacting with her family and friends, I love to see her little personality shine through with the different things she does.*

*I enjoy being with him and teaching him things and listening to his stories, watching and playing sport with him and enjoying his loving personality.*

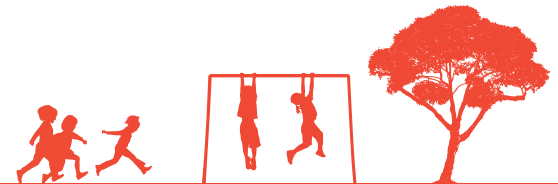
*He is the quiet one out of the mob and he is my little sweetie, very gentle and caring, always wants to be with Mum and doesn't get up to much trouble like the other ones do.*

*Just watching him develop as a child, knowing that he is unique and has his own little qualities, knowing [he] has a good future ahead of him. He is a good kid; he is not difficult at all. You can ask him to do things and he will. He is very disciplined.*

*Just watching him be him, don't need TV, just watch the kids play.*

*How do you put it in words... he makes me laugh, and yeah, he makes me feel important and loved.*

*To know that I have actually helped her and that she has a better life now than what she had before and knowing that I have made a difference.*





## Strong and healthy children

In Wave 5, parents generally reported good health for the *Footprints in Time* children. Just under three quarters of parents (72%) said their children were in excellent or very good health, around a quarter (26%) said their child was in good health and a small number said their child's health was fair.

Just over half of the study parents (56%) reported that their children did not have any health problems in the 12 months before the interview. The most common conditions experienced by the study children in that time were ear infections, asthma, chest infections, colds or hay fever, and skin infections.

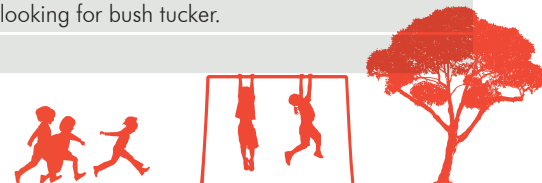
One to two parents out of ten (15%) said that their child had been to hospital in the last 12 months. The most common reason was for dental problems followed by asthma, tonsillitis, and broken or fractured bones.

About seven out of ten children (72%) were brushing their teeth at least once a day and more than six out of ten (64%) parents reported that their child had not experienced any problems with their teeth in the previous 12 months. Nearly half of the children (45%) had seen a dentist in the past year, which is more than in the previous two years. This may be because children are more likely to see a dentist while at school. Overall, more than four out of ten children who had visited a dentist (44%) had visited a school dentist.

## Parents and children have their say

As well as asking the children what activities they like to do when they are not in school, we asked their parents to tell us a couple of things their children enjoy doing. Sometimes the parent's response closely matched that of their child. In other cases the responses were very different.

What the parent said the child enjoyed	What the child said they enjoyed
Collecting caterpillars, riding her bike, jumping on the trampoline, playing with the pets.	Artwork, playing outside, watching TV.
He enjoys playing tools, fixing bike and things, he is a little Mr Fixit, riding motor bikes, playing football.	Go motor bike riding.
He likes writing, the outdoors. And eating, he loves eating.	Play the PlayStation, go fishing, jump on the trampoline, play with the Lego, go to my aunty and uncle's house. I like reading my book, I like talking about Ned Kelly.
She loves going outside and playing with her dog, jumping on the trampoline, playing on the swings, playing with her friends.	Play with the dog, playing at the park, and swimming.
Playing with her sisters and cousins, going to school.	Sleeping.
Playing with her Barbie dolls, drawing pictures, playing outside, build things out of scraps in the back yard.	Play the computer, sleeping in.
Us reading to him, playing outside and anything to do with animals, he is an outside person.	Playing at home with my toys.
Playing with friends and playing with the baby, playing games on X-Box and Game Boy.	Drawing sharks.
Camping, fishing, sugar bag hunting for all kinds of bush tucker, likes being out bush, he gets really excited when he goes out bush.	Playing with family and friends, watching DVDs, jumping on the trampoline, going looking for bush tucker.
Painting her nails, dressing up, singing and dancing.	Drawing.







## Where to from here?

*Footprints in Time* is being used by policy makers and researchers to build understanding of the lives of Indigenous children and their families so that good policies and practices can be implemented for strong and healthy futures for all Indigenous children.

Over 165 researchers are using or have used *Footprints in Time* data for interesting and important projects like:

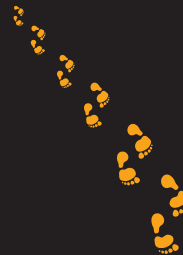
- Parent involvement in home, school and community-based activities
- Prevalence of asthma among Indigenous children and factors that may affect the incidence of asthma
- Factors that lead to positive education, social, emotional and physical wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth
- Factors leading to good English language skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- How stability and change in parental and family circumstances influence children's social and emotional wellbeing
- The extent to which Indigenous languages are spoken by Indigenous children
- What drives parenting efficacy among parents of Indigenous children
- Causes of Indigenous inequality
- Experiences of racism for children and their families
- The effects of maternal employment on childhood obesity.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to *Footprints in Time* families for their continued dedication to the success of the study. We hope that you will continue your support of this important and valuable study in the years ahead.

## Next steps

By the time you receive this booklet we've probably seen you recently for your seventh interview, so we will not see you again until 2015. As the children are getting older, we are hoping to ask them more questions about their life, like who they look up to, about family and friends, and about the use of technology. We also hope to continue gathering data from teachers to gain a greater understanding of the role schools and teachers play in children's lives.

We will continue to report our findings to communities and study families about the things we are learning from the study. Each year, we are hoping to continue to produce these booklets and our feedback sheets to keep our participants up to date on the findings from *Footprints in Time*. If you have ideas of what you would like to see included in this booklet please contact us and let us know. You can tell your interviewer at your next interview or send us an email at **[LSIC@dss.gov.au](mailto:LSIC@dss.gov.au)**. We hope that you will continue to be involved with this worthwhile study.



## Want to know more about *Footprints in Time*?

Go to Department of Social Services (DSS)  
**[www.dss.gov.au/lxic](http://www.dss.gov.au/lxic)**

### Study participants

If you are a study participant, we need to keep in touch with you. If you have moved or are going to move, please remember to contact us on the free-call number **1800 106 235** or contact your local interviewer.

To receive more copies of this booklet, please contact us on the free-call number **1800 106 235** from any landline in Australia, however, you may be charged for the call if you call from a mobile phone.

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### To access the *Footprints in Time* data

*Footprints in Time* data is made available to researchers approved by DSS. There are strict security and confidentiality protocols surrounding the use of the data.

Queries about the study or data should be forwarded to **[LSICdata@dss.gov.au](mailto:LSICdata@dss.gov.au)** and queries about applying for the data or licensing arrangements should be sent to **[longitudinalsurveys@dss.gov.au](mailto:longitudinalsurveys@dss.gov.au)**

