



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Following the Footprints

Findings from Wave 7 of *Footprints in Time*

The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children



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

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Findings from Wave 7 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.



Acknowledgments

We acknowledge Traditional Owners for their support in allowing *Footprints in Time* staff access to communities within our study areas. We appreciate their continuing support and the local knowledge they provide which greatly benefits our staff working with families in the study.

We also thank the children, parents, families and teachers in the *Footprints in Time* study. Allowing us to ask you about your life means we can learn about what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up strong.

Special thanks go to the *Footprints in Time* Steering Committee. Many of the members give their time outside of scheduled meetings to support the Department of Social Services research and fieldwork team.

We also acknowledge and thank the interviewers, many of whom travel long distances to visit *Footprints in Time* participants in their homes and communities.

Ethics approval for this study is obtained through the Department of Health's Ethics Committee.

Permission has been granted for the reproduction of all photographs and quotes included in this booklet.

Foreword by the Chair, Professor Mick Dodson

As always, I want to begin with a big ‘thank you’ to all the children and their families for opening up their homes to take part in *Footprints in Time*.

By being part of this study you provide the evidence that shows what we need to do to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities strong.

This evidence shows which government policies work, which ones don’t, and where there are gaps with nothing being done. The detailed information you give us shows why some government policies work and why some don’t.

The questions you and your family answer also show what makes our children successful, why some fall through the cracks, and what we can do about it.

This information means that governments don’t have an excuse to ignore problems or ignore what strong Indigenous communities need. It supports the development of well thought out, long-term policies that will keep our communities moving forward.



What is *Footprints in Time*?

Footprints in Time is a study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children born in 2003–2005 and 2006–2008. It is the first large-scale Australian study that interviews Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families every year. Nearly 1,700 families started in the study in 2008.

Footprints in Time families live all around Australia. In this booklet we sometimes compare the outcomes of children in cities and towns with those living in country areas. Depending on where they live, families may have different services available to them, or face different circumstances which may be important for development of good programs and policies.

Table 1 shows which *Footprints in Time* locations fall into city and country groups.

Wave 7 of *Footprints in Time*

This booklet uses data from Wave 7 of the study, collected in 2014.

At the time, the younger children were about 7 years old and the older group were about 10 years old.

For Wave 7, we spoke with more than 1,200 families. Nearly 750 families have taken part in all seven waves of the study.

Table 1: Cities and country places in *Footprints in Time*

Country	Cities and towns
Northern Peninsula Area and the Torres Strait	Darwin
Central and Western Queensland: Mt Isa, Mornington Island, Normanton and Doomadgee	Perth
Alice Springs and Ntaria	Cairns
Katherine, Hodgson Downs/Minyerri and Galiwin'ku	Townsville
Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Ardyaloon	Bundaberg
	Brisbane
	Gold Coast
	NSW Coast
	Canberra
	Adelaide and Port Augusta
	Shepparton and regional Victoria
	Dubbo and regional NSW
	Sydney and surrounding areas

Many *Footprints in Time* families have moved since the study began in 2008.

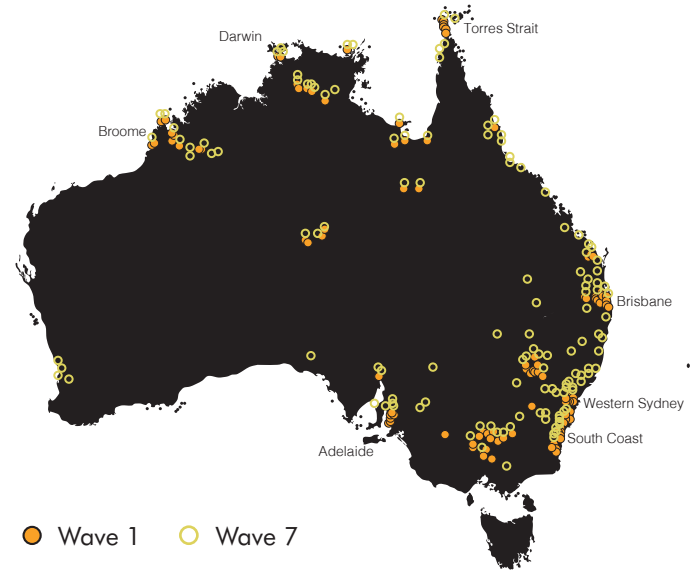
Six out of ten families have moved at least once. About one in ten have moved three or more times.

When families move to a different community we try to follow and interview them at their new address. Map 1 shows how the locations of the *Footprints in Time* interviews have spread between Waves 1 and 7.

I've been everywhere

In one month, a *Footprints in Time* interviewer (RAO) can drive up to 3,000km to visit all the families they interview – this is like driving from Darwin to Adelaide.

Map 1: Where *Footprints in Time* families lived in Waves 1 and 7





School

By 2014 all *Footprints in Time* children had started school. The younger children were mostly in Years 1 and 2 and almost all the older children were in Year 4 or Year 5. Most children went to a government school (86%) but nearly one in ten (8%) went to a Catholic school and one in twenty (5%) went to an independent or (non-Catholic) private school.

Plans for high school

We asked parents of the older children if they had decided where their child would be going to high school:

Local government high school was the most popular choice, for about half the families (47%)

About two out of ten parents (17%) named **non-government high school**

One in ten parents (11%) chose **boarding school**

A quarter of parents (25%) had not yet decided

Which high school?

We asked parents why they had chosen that type of high school. Here are the most common things they said.

Why a local government high school?

- no other choice available
- closest and most convenient
- friends or family go there
- good school

Why a non-government high school?

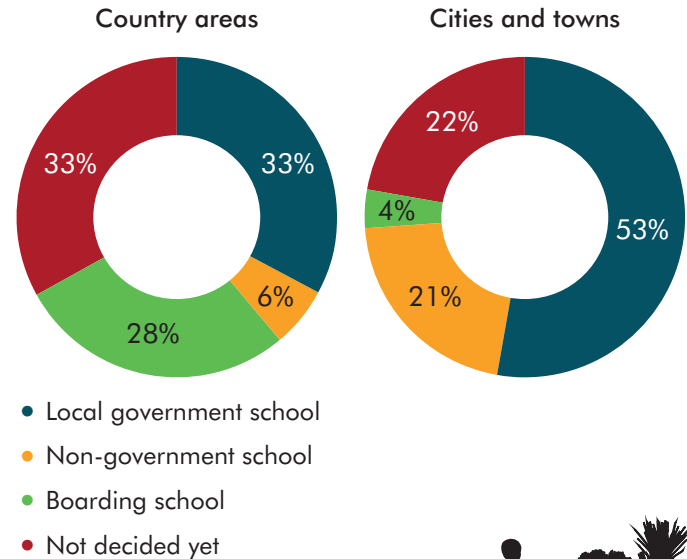
- the school has a good reputation or provides better education opportunities
- because of the school's discipline and behaviour policy
- the child had friends or relatives there
- because there is no need to change schools for high school

Why boarding school for high school?

- better education than the local school
- other family members go to this boarding school
- to give their child a fresh start

Parents in country communities made different choices for their child's high school education than parents in towns and cities (Figure 1). Very few children from cities will go to boarding school, but in the country boarding school was the second most popular choice. Only a few children in the country will go to local private schools.

Figure 1: Where children will go to high school





School attendance

Going to school every day is a very important part of a child's education. Children learn new things each day, and missing school can put them behind their peers. Students don't just learn facts at school. They also develop social skills and good habits that help them succeed after school, at work or in further study or training. Missing school can affect their test results and their relationships with other students.

Why do *Footprints in Time* children miss school?

Sickness was the main reason both parents and teachers gave for children missing school. In Wave 7, nearly half of parents (44%) said that their child was sick when they did not go to school.

Family events was another important reason. One in four parents (24%) said that they kept their child home from school for things like family events, or sorry business.

Like many children, *Footprints in Time* children said they sometimes wished they didn't have to go to school. However, more than half the children (67% of the older group and 59% of the younger group) said they felt happy about going to school always or most of the time.

More girls than boys said they were happy to go to school, and children from country areas were happier about going to school than children living in cities and towns.

Language and culture in school

Many study children are learning a language other than English at school. Two out of ten children (20%) are learning an Indigenous language and more than one in ten (15%) are learning a foreign language. Children from country areas are more likely to be learning an Indigenous language, while most of the children learning a foreign language live in cities and towns.

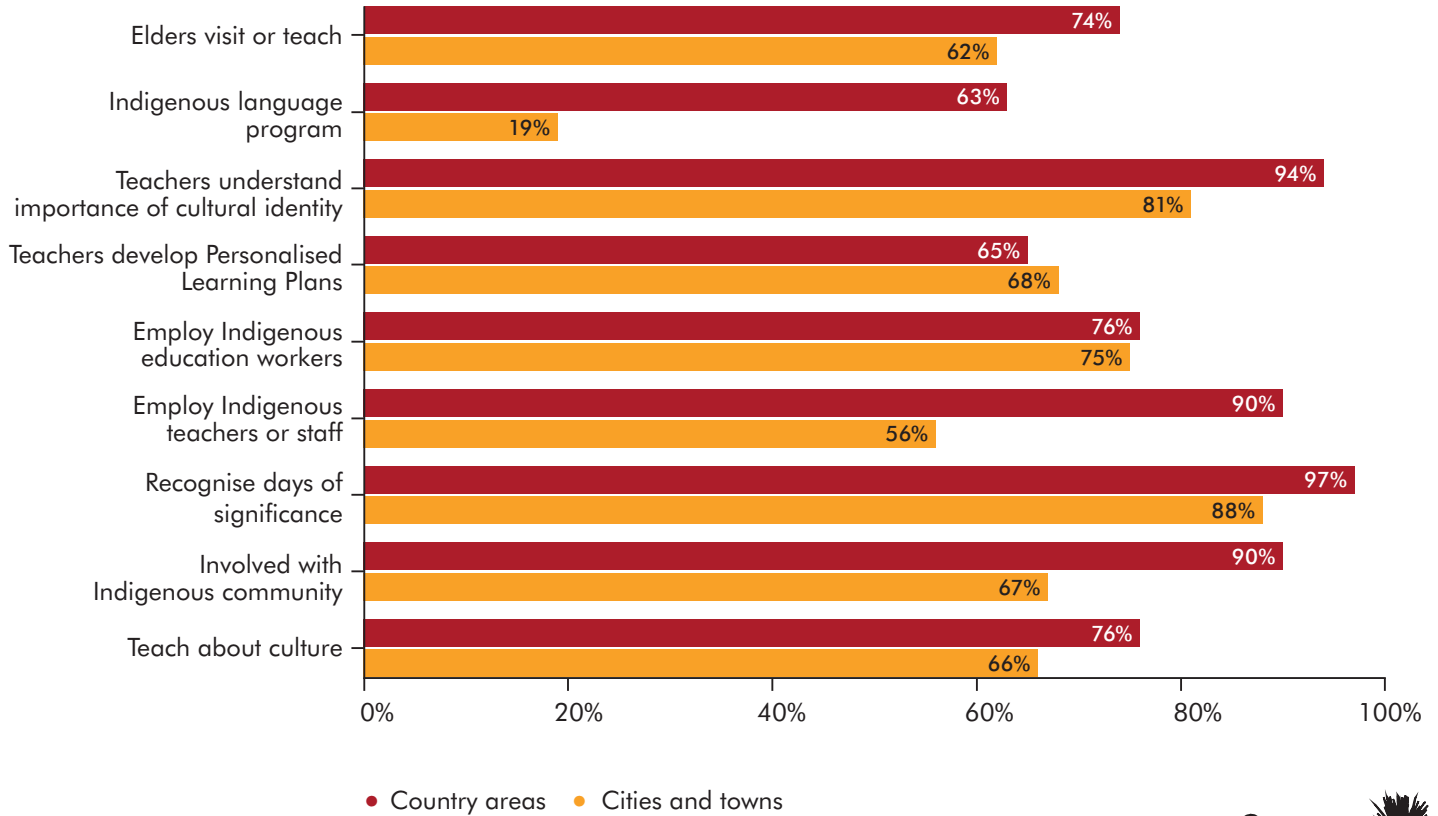
A small number of children from country areas are learning English as a second language. These children speak an Indigenous language at home and at school.

We asked parents if their child's school did things to raise Indigenous cultural awareness, such as Elders visiting or teaching at the school. Most schools did quite well providing these activities (Figure 2), although many parents in city areas said that an Indigenous language program was lacking. Overall, schools in country areas did more than city schools to increase cultural awareness.

In Wave 7 we collected data from 449 teachers:

- 4% of teachers said they were Indigenous
- 9% of teachers said they could speak or knew a few words in an Indigenous language
- 33% of teachers said they would like to learn an Indigenous language
- 57% of teachers said they would like to learn more about local Indigenous cultures

Figure 2: What schools do to increase cultural awareness



We asked parents if they were happy with how their child's school taught Indigenous culture. Many parents said they were happy but some thought their school could do better. Here are some of the things parents said:

They had done Aboriginal Week well.

No, the school could do better and get more Elders involved.

[The school needs to] be more aware of the Aboriginal children at the school and teach Aboriginal culture to the non-Indigenous children at the school. I would like the children to learn more about Aboriginal culture.

I don't think it's the school's responsibility to teach my child about her culture.

The school embraces parts of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and are embedding some of this into the school community. An Elder [is employed] to teach the boys dance.

I would like them to implement an Aboriginal curriculum.

[The school] needs an Aboriginal liaison worker to support the children through school years [and] work with the school to promote Aboriginal culture. They need a homework centre.

The students built an Indigenous garden and painted a mural. Elders come from the community to teach the students weaving and dot painting and they also have fortnightly activities teaching about culture.

Maths and reading

We asked the older *Footprints in Time* children about school lessons, such as reading and maths. Around 75% of the children said that they liked reading and thought they were good at it. Girls rated their reading ability higher than boys. Children in country areas were more likely to say they feel good about their reading ability than city children.

Children were more positive about reading than about maths. Just under seven out of ten children (66%) said they were good at maths, and those in country areas were more likely to feel good about maths than those in cities. Girls and boys felt the same about their maths ability.

Parents play an important role in children's education

Children's maths and reading scores were higher where teachers reported that parents were involved in their child's learning.

Younger children's reading scores were also higher if parents checked or helped with their child's homework.





Dads

In Wave 7 we collected information from 222 fathers or father figures of the study children in a Dads survey. Most dads (86%) were the biological father of the study child but some were step-fathers, adoptive fathers and granddads. We would love to have more information from dads because they play an important role in children's lives.

Most dads (91%) interviewed in Wave 7 lived in the same house as the study child. They were on average 39 years old, but ages ranged from 22 to 71 years.

Four in ten dads interviewed in Wave 7 had completed Certificate III or Certificate IV qualifications. Almost two in ten (17%) had Diploma or above qualifications, such as a university degree. About 15% of dads were doing further studies at the time of Wave 7 interview, most of them part-time.

Most dads were very involved with their child's education. About nine out of ten dads (89%) took their child to school at least some days and more than eight out of ten (81%) checked or helped with homework at least once a week. Dads said they also did other things to support their child's school learning:

I'll do reading in his class with him when I can. I'll challenge him to read out or pronounce things I point out, other times I'll ask him to spell out loud a word.

Make sure she does her homework.

Attend parent-teacher interviews and attend events that she is in.

I take him with me on cultural tours.

Encourage her to do her best.

Bring home books from the library to read and teach her maths and drawing at home, also reading.

I answer his questions when he is curious about something. We talk about news events.

Encouraging him that education is the most important thing in our lives.



Most important thing I do as study child's dad

When asked what was the most important thing they did as a dad, most said it was loving their child. Others said the most important thing was 'to be there', to show the child what was right, to teach, support, protect and provide. Very few said the most important thing was to discipline.

Other things dads said included:

Support him, be there for him, show him what it's like being an Indigenous man and guide him with good values.

Give her love and support and encourage her to do her best in life.

Just trying to make him understand what is right and wrong and to not undersell himself, how to treat other people.

Listen to her, to be there for her when she needs me. Protect and cherish her. Let her know she is special and there is no-one like her.

Provide someone to go to and talk about men's things; teach respect and how to do things, to be a man.

Provide her with a good home, toys and healthy lifestyle and to let her do what she puts her mind to. Also showing her discipline as well, like helping around the house with chores.

Be there for them, listen to them and show respect, in turn they'll listen and respect you back.





Family and friends

The older *Footprints in Time* children were asked who they would go to if they or a friend were bullied, when they were sad, who they tell when something good has happened and who teaches them about being Indigenous. Most children said their mother was this person, but some also went to their father, grandmothers, teachers and Elders to learn about being Indigenous.

About three in ten of the older children (31%) said most or all their friends were also family members but more than half (56%) said none or very few of their friends were also family members.

Good friends

More than seven out of ten of the older children in our study said they get along with other children and make friends easily. Many also said that other children liked them and wanted to be their friend





Other important things in children's lives

We asked parents to tell us about other important things in their child's life. Here are some examples of what they said:

[She] won an art competition where her painting went to the children's hospital.

[She] received a silver award for karate.

[My son] joined the school string orchestra.

[My daughter] received a netball medal and a citizenship award.

He gets complimented on how well-mannered he is.

She is a volunteer in church.

[My child] received Merit Award for active learning, and danced in the festival.

[She is a] Student Representative Council member at school this year.

[My son won an] award for finishing reading recovery, an attendance award, and best and fairest player for football.



Where to from here?

We hope that you continue to enjoy being part of this important study and will share your stories with us again next year. Researchers tell us that it is a wonderful resource and more and more people are asking to use the data.

Footprints in Time is being used to build understanding of the lives of Indigenous children and their families so that good policies and practices can help create strong and healthy futures for all Indigenous children.

Nearly 300 researchers are using or have used *Footprints in Time* data for interesting and important projects like:

- Does engaging in music activities from an early age affect Indigenous and English vocabulary and language competency?
- How the experiences of bullying and discrimination affect health and wellbeing, education and social outcomes, and protective effects of individual, family and community identity.
- Sleep and its effects on child development and school performance, and social, physical, emotional and psychological health.
- How do Indigenous children grow up strong in education?

Next steps

By the time you receive this booklet we have probably seen you recently for your ninth interview. We look forward to seeing you again in 2017. We'd like to ask all parents and children about how close they feel to different people in their lives, and about experiences of children who live away from home for school. We'd also like to ask the older study children about racism, risky behaviours, social skills, the justice system and who they turn to for help. There will be questions for the younger children about school, what they do after school, what they're good at, and about their friends. We also hope to continue collecting data from teachers to get a greater understanding of the role schools and teachers play in children's lives.

Next year marks an important milestone for our study – it will be Wave 10 of *Footprints in Time*, the 10th time we will be visiting the study children and their families.

We will continue to report our findings to communities and study families about the things we are learning from the study. We are also planning to continue the Community Booklets and Site Feedback Sheets to keep you up to date on the findings from *Footprints in Time*. If there is something you would like to see included in this booklet please contact us and let us know. You can tell your RAO at your next interview or send us an email to 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 *Footprints in Time* website www.dss.gov.au/lxic

The web-site contains links to this booklet, as well as to the study's Summary Reports and other publications.

In the Study?

You are part of something unique in the world and we cannot replace you. Thank you for being part of this study through the good and the bad times. *Footprints in Time* is valuable to researchers and policy makers as long as enough people stay in the study. What you tell us can make programs and policies better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and parents across Australia. Thank 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 or other publications, 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.

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 and queries about applying for the data or licensing arrangements should be sent to longitudinalsurveys@dss.gov.au

