

Brighter Futures Evaluation Summary Research Design



JUNE 2009

Aboriginal Families Study

Background and Rationale for the study

The Brighter Futures Aboriginal Families Study aims to provide evidence of the benefits of participating in the Brighter Futures early intervention program for Aboriginal families. It aims to determine the most effective ways to deliver the program, help Aboriginal families to engage in it and achieve intended program results.

Feedback from program and community stakeholders has informed the research design and implementation approach.

See (www.community.nsw.gov.au/earlyintervention) for a full list of research objectives and questions.

Indigenous Prevention and Early Intervention Research Base

Internationally, prevention and early intervention research has had a very limited focus on Indigenous people or programs and none have explored participation or outcomes for Indigenous families. A number of Australian early intervention initiatives target Indigenous people, but until recently, very little research has been undertaken in relation to the outcomes from these programs.

The *Brighter Futures* Aboriginal Families Study provides an opportunity to inform improvements to program design and delivery for Aboriginal families. It will build on a number of themes that have emerged from research in this area that has been undertaken to date including:

Program effectiveness

What program approaches/interventions/services work for a particular group and under what circumstances?

Engagement

It is important to work actively with people in a community to secure their participation and ensure work is relevant to them. Activities such as barbecues and excursions both in the lead up and during program implementation can support interest and attendance rates.

Approaches to service delivery

The most effective approaches to delivering programs involve flexibility to deliver programs in ways that meet client needs and align with existing supports within each community.

Access is another key to effective service delivery – transport issues for people living in rural and remote areas may need to be factored into delivery approaches.

Cultural competence of staff

Cultural competency can impact outcomes for clients – how can staff work with Aboriginal clients in a way that respects their world view and acknowledges their strengths and capacities?

Overview of Brighter Futures

Brighter Futures aims to reduce the likelihood of family problems escalating into crises within the child protection system and improve the capacity of parents to build positive relationships and raise stronger, healthier children. Further details about the program can be accessed at http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/about_us/our_services.html.

The program is delivered by DoCS and fourteen non-government lead agencies. From July 2007 to the end of June 2008, 24 per cent of families in the program (671 families) identified as Aboriginal. The distribution of Aboriginal families and children in the program by DoCS region is in Table 1.



NSW Department of
Community Services

brighter futures

Table 1
Number of Aboriginal families and children in Brighter Futures at 30 September 2008

REGION	NUMBER FAMILIES	NUMBER CHILDREN
Metro Central	26	63
Metro South West	37	88
Metro West	53	152
Hunter/Central Coast	54	152
Southern	77	206
Western	125	348
Northern	144	408
Totals	516	1417

Source: Corporate Information Warehouse, extracted 11/11/2008

Aboriginal Family Study Design

The Aboriginal Family Study is linked to the evaluation of Brighter Futures being undertaken by an academic consortium led by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Interim findings from this evaluation reflect many of the themes identified in previous studies, which will be explored in detail in the Aboriginal Family Study.

Methodology

The study will involve both qualitative and quantitative data, providing an opportunity for families to 'tell their story', as well as evidence of program outcomes.

Quantitative data collection

Aboriginal families will complete a survey about their experience and participation in the program. They will complete it when they start the program and again between six to twelve months afterwards.

As far as possible, measures used in the study overlap with other relevant data collections, in particular, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, titled *Footprints in Time*.

Sample frame

The study aims to include 100 Aboriginal families from metropolitan, rural and remote locations with high representation of Aboriginal families in the program. The research will include families at the study sites who exit the program with goals met, or exit without goals met.

The study will focus on families in:

- ▲ Lismore
- ▲ Tamworth
- ▲ Armidale
- ▲ Coffs Harbour
- ▲ Taree
- ▲ Dubbo

- ▲ Nowra
- ▲ Corrimal
- ▲ Hunter and Central Coast
- ▲ Western Sydney.

Recruitment of families

Caseworkers at each location will be briefed about the study, and asked to help recruit families to participate. Caseworkers will provide printed materials to families that explain the purpose of the study and how they could be involved. A \$50 voucher will be provided per family interview to thank them for their participation. If families agree to participate, their caseworker will ask them to give verbal consent for their contact details to be given to the researchers to arrange interviews.

Research ethics

In recognising the importance of conducting research with, for and about Indigenous people, the study will be done within the ethical frameworks and guides developed for implementing research with Indigenous people including the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, National Health and Medical Research Council, and DoCS guidelines.