
NON-AGENDA

With the view of causing an increase to take place in the mass of national wealth, or with a view to increase of the means either of subsistence or enjoyment, without some special reason, the general rule is, that nothing ought to be done or attempted by government. The motto, or watchword of government, on these occasions, ought to be — Be quiet...Whatever measures, therefore, cannot be justified as exceptions to that rule, may be considered as *non-agenda* on the part of government.

—*Jeremy Bentham* (c.1801)

Indigenous Welfare Policy: Lessons from a Community Survey

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Although Indigenous Australians only represent two per cent of the Australian population, they have a high profile in the community as the original inhabitants of the continent and because of the problems associated with their poverty, dispossession and welfare dependence. In this article we present a summary of research findings from a three-year study conducted among Indigenous people living in and around the town of Kuranda in Northern Queensland — about half an hour's drive inland from Cairns. According to the 1996 Census there were 203 Indigenous and 420 non-Indigenous people living in the Kuranda postcode area. (The term 'Indigenous Australians' is used to describe people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. In the context of this study, the people interviewed were Aboriginal.) The aim was to document the role of the welfare system in the Indigenous domestic economy and to consider options for improving the delivery of welfare payments and services.

The research arose from a recognition that family welfare payments were not necessarily reaching their targets of children and those most in need of support. In the context of Indigenous families, the care of children within an extended family network appeared to be a crucial factor. It was argued that a better understanding of sources of income, household structure and the mobility patterns of members, and child care arrangements would help develop more culturally appropriate welfare policy and services for Indigenous families. The study's use of informal

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focus groups, and a structured questionnaire to the same people over a three-year period, provided a unique opportunity to detail the relationship of these people with the welfare system. The results confirm the picture from ethnographic and aggregate data about the importance of government transfers in the Indigenous domestic economy (see, for example, Finlayson, 1991; Daly, 1999). While too much reliance should not be placed on one case study, the results highlight some important issues for policy development in an era of welfare reform.

Methodology

The mixed methodology was designed to explore the domestic economy and childcare arrangements of Indigenous people with the aim of developing culturally-informed and workable welfare policy and service delivery. A loosely structured questionnaire was administered to one key reference person (any adult) per household in the sample. The questionnaire covered household membership, shared childcare arrangements, income sources, adult and child mobility, and employment status. Project researchers were assisted by local Indigenous facilitators who relocated respondents from the original set, introduced the interviewers to potential new respondents, helped explain the nature of the research, and acted as translators during each interview.¹ At each successive survey, respondents were very keen to discuss the research outcomes. A detailed discussion of the methodology employed and the results of the first year of the study are available in Smith (2000). More detailed results from subsequent waves of the study are presented in Henry and Daly (2001) and Henry and Smith (2002).

A longitudinal survey of a highly mobile population such as the Indigenous population at Kuranda has many problems. It is difficult to ensure that respondents are representative of the underlying population and that they can be subsequently relocated. It was not feasible, in the light of the high rates of mobility of some individuals, to track all the original set of household members. To include them, and their new households, would have expanded the pool of respondents to unmanageable proportions. The project focus was therefore on tracking the original sample of key reference persons and eliciting information on changes to their respective households at each subsequent survey.

The employment of local Indigenous facilitators played an extremely important role in relocating respondents from previous years, and making contact with possible new respondents. New key reference people were not randomly selected, but were chosen by the Indigenous facilitators and researchers, so as to specifically add more households with welfare recipients (primarily female) who cared for children and young adults to the sample. Despite best efforts, this 'familiarity effect' probably skewed the sample towards particular members of the community and the final sample in each year was not statistically random. However, a comparison with data from the 1996 Population Census and

¹ Julie Finlayson, Anne Daly and Diane Smith conducted the interviews in 1999, Anne Daly and Rosita Henry in 2000, and Rosita Henry and Diane Smith in 2001.

administrative data from Centrelink suggests that the sample was representative of the Indigenous population living in Kuranda (Daly and Smith, 2000).

Table 1 summarises the number of households and individuals covered by the survey. New individuals and therefore households were added to maintain the sample size over the course of the study. Using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition, households were defined to be a group of two or more related or unrelated people who usually reside in the same dwelling, who regard themselves as a household, and who make common provision for food and other essentials for living (Daly and Smith, 2000:13). As the great majority of household members were close kin, all people living in the household at the time of the interview were included as household members rather than trying to make arbitrary decisions about who were 'usual residents' and who were 'visitors'. These ABS categories make little sense in this context of a highly mobile population.

Table 1: Size of the Survey Sample 1999-2001.

	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
Key reference people (no.)	28	28	29
Attrition from preceding year (no.)		6	3
New key reference people (no.)		6	1
Key reference people from 1999 absent in 2000 but returning in 2001 (no.)			3
People in households (no.)	182 (106 adults, 76 children)	179 (105 adults, 74 children)	202 (117 adults, 85 children)
People from 1999 survey still in sample (no.)		108	136

Source: Henry and Smith (2002).

Key results

The research found many characteristics of these Indigenous households that have been identified in other studies. The households were typically large and multi-generational. The average household in the sample had about 6.5 members, compared with the Australian average from the 1996 Census of 2.7 persons (Daly and Auld, 2000). About half of all households in each of the Kuranda sample waves contained three or more generations of related kin and households approximating a nuclear family were rare (for example, only three of the 28 households in the 1999 sample contained just a couple and their biological offspring). The large size of these households was not just a reflection of

preferences for living in an extended family network but also can be attributed to the shortage of affordable housing in the Kuranda area.

The longitudinal nature of the study enabled a detailed documentation of the high levels of mobility among this group of Indigenous Australians. Localised networks of movement characterised by a high incidence of mainly circular or short-distance mobility were identified. For example, few people moved outside the Kuranda area (Kuranda and the outlying settlements at Mantaka, Kowrowa, Mona Mona, and Koah). Of those who did, most moved to neighbouring urban centres (Cairns and Mareeba). Between 1999 and 2000, only five people moved further afield (two to Perth and three to Armidale). Three of these had returned by the time of the 2001 survey. Between 2000 and 2001, five others moved (a family of three to Brisbane, and a single man each to the Gold Coast and to Nambour).

In 2001, 24 (13 per cent) of the 179 survey participants from the previous survey year were no longer in the sample. Of the remaining 155, 107 people (60 per cent) were still living in the same house, while 48 individuals (27 per cent), had moved from one place of residence to another by the time of the 2001 survey. Some of these had moved to households within the survey and others to households outside our survey sample. In addition, 59 new people (34 adults and 25 children) who had not been part of the 2000 survey, had moved into the ongoing sample of households by the time those were re-surveyed in 2001.

Table 2: Movement in and out of the Sampled Households Between the 2000 and 2001 Kuranda Surveys

Adults (26 years and over)	47
Youth (17–25 years)	15
Children (16 years and under) ^a	45
Total movers	107

Note: For the purposes of the three surveys, the definition of ‘child’ was taken to be a person aged 16 years and under, in accord with standard criteria used by the social security system to determine eligibility for a range of welfare payments.

Source: Henry and Smith (2002).

As Table 2 indicates, of all the people surveyed in 2000 and 2001 (222 persons), a total of 107 (62 adults and 45 children) had moved (either into houses outside the survey, between houses in the survey, or from houses outside the survey). In other words, one out of every two persons had moved. Nevertheless, in the midst of this substantial degree of mobility, there exists a critical core of stability for many families. Our data indicated that some families had remained in the same house for extended periods prior to the first survey.

Children and young adults were significant contributors to this high degree of mobility (see Table 2). A comparative analysis of data over three surveys enables some conclusions to be made regarding the relationship between child-care

arrangements and mobility in the Kuranda area. Child-care is an extended family-centred rather than a household-centred activity, and the mobility of children and youth is an expression of extended family networks. Of the 20 children in the 2000 sample who moved out of houses between 2000 and 2001, eight moved to other houses in our survey. Twenty-five children from houses outside the survey had moved into survey houses at the 2001 survey. Almost half of these moved with their primary carer or carers. Thirteen children moved alone, including one from Brisbane and three from Armidale. In all these cases the children moved to households within their kinship network.

These results relate to mobility over a year but our discussions with key reference people highlighted the importance of short-term movements as well. Children were cared for by an extended family network and moved freely between households, sometimes staying for a few nights and at other times for much longer periods. The primary caregiver was not necessarily a biological parent. For example, in ten of the households surveyed in 2001 there were children under the age of 16 years without a biological parent present (Henry and Daly, 2001). In 2000, approximately 75 per cent of surveyed households had children other than their own biological children in residence and being cared for by people other than their biological parents (Finlayson, Daly and Smith, 2000:35). In these cases usually the grandparents, particularly grandmothers, were the primary caregivers and received family payments on behalf of the children.

In addition to collecting basic information on household composition, the questionnaire included detailed questions on sources of income for each of the household members. We did not attempt to collect information on the amount of income received from each source because of the biases expected in reporting on the income of other people. The results on the number of sources of income show the high level of dependence on government transfers among these households as to receive these transfer payments, individuals must pass income and asset tests indicating that they do not have substantial income from non-welfare sources (see Table 3). Data from Centrelink for 1999 show that Indigenous welfare recipients in Kuranda were less likely to have additional sources of income than were their non-Indigenous counterparts. On average, those that did, reported smaller amounts of additional income (Daly and Auld, 2000). The important role of welfare income was pervasive; there were no households identified in the survey without at least one adult receiving income support.

The major employer of Indigenous people in Kuranda was the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme. Under this scheme, Indigenous communities receive funding based on their welfare entitlements with an additional payment toward capital costs in order to undertake community-based employment projects. Participants are expected to work part-time for their welfare entitlements.² Income from CDEP participation is in large part, funded by the government so approximately 85 per cent of the total surveyed adult household

² For a fuller discussion of the CDEP scheme see Morphy and Sanders (2001).

members in 2001 could be classed as being dependent on some form of government transfer payment as their main source of income.

Table 3: Share of Total Number of Sources of Income for Indigenous Adults, Kuranda, 1999, 2000 and 2001

<i>Income source</i>	<i>Share of total sources (%)</i>		
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
CDEP	34	36	31
Parenting Payment	13	11	14
Family Tax Benefit	23	19	22
Newstart	6	6	6
Disability Pension	6	7	3
Age Pension	7	4	3
Carers Pension	2	4	2
Youth Allowance	1	1	1
Wage	4	6	12
Abstudy	3	6	6
Total (%)	100	100	100
No. of sources	129	132	147
No. of households	28	28	29
No. of adults	103	105	111

Note: Some people have more than one source of income, so the number of income sources exceeds the number of individuals. Some adults had no independent source of income.

Source: Henry and Smith (2002).

It is possible for participants in the CDEP scheme to supplement their basic welfare entitlements with additional income generated through activity on the scheme, for example sale of arts and crafts. Altman, Gray and Sanders (2000) show that Indigenous people working on the CDEP scheme in 1994 had 55 per cent higher incomes than the Indigenous unemployed and 64 per cent higher than those not in the labour market.

Wage earners were a small minority in the sample, although they had increased in number in 2001. The great majority of all employed adults worked part-time; only two were in full-time employment. Adults were in a range of jobs including cleaning, art and craft work, working with the railways, national parks, or the shire council, working as health and teaching assistants, or as Tjapukai

dancers. (The Tjapukai Cultural Park in Cairns, formerly the Tjapukai Dance Theatre in Kuranda, is a major cultural tourism attraction where a small number of Indigenous residents of Kuranda work as dance performers and artists. The Cultural Park also purchases arts and crafts from Kuranda CDEP participants.)

An important source of income for households was Abstudy — the income support payment, subject to the usual income and asset tests, given to Indigenous Australians studying at high school or a tertiary institution. In addition to Abstudy income received by adults (presented in Table 3), a larger component of Abstudy income accrued to children under 16 years. In 2001, for example, there were 20 children aged 16 years and under in receipt of such income, compared to the seven adults. If these sources of income were included in Table 3, then Abstudy would proportionally increase from 6 to 16 per cent of all sources of income from the surveyed households in 2001. The two earlier survey waves revealed that similarly high levels of Abstudy income accrued to children in 1999 and 2000.

While Abstudy payments for persons over 16 years are paid directly to the individual concerned, for children under 16 years it is paid to their responsible parent. Over three-quarters of respondents reported that persons receiving Abstudy within their households made a regular contribution from their payment to help with such things as clothing and food, in addition to their school needs. Thus Abstudy is a source of income which makes an important contribution to Kuranda domestic economies through demand sharing mechanisms. Schwab (1995:13), included the following among the core principles of demand sharing:

Aboriginal people are, in general, protected by and benefit greatly from the generosity of members of broad-ranging kinship systems. Individuals involved with and supported by such systems consider them normal and sensible, and expectations related to the sharing of shelter, food, cash and other resources appear entirely reasonable to the participants in such kinship networks. Sharing among Aboriginal people is propelled by demand but constrained by a delicate balance between what is considered appropriate to demand and appropriate to refuse.

The survey highlighted the problems facing youth in the transition from school to work, albeit based on a small sample. For the 32 individuals aged 17–25 years who were present over two, or all three, survey waves, only four were observed moving into waged employment. Ten young adults on CDEP stayed on the program over the three surveys; and seven on Abstudy stayed on that form of income assistance. For the remainder (11 persons) who transferred from one source of income to another, the major exits were from Abstudy to welfare or CDEP payments; from the CDEP to Abstudy or back to welfare payments; or from welfare to the CDEP scheme. In other words, these young people were already recycling through various forms of government transfer payments.

The data reinforce comments, repeatedly made by respondents, that the main transition for young school leavers in the community is into either the CDEP

scheme or the welfare system. Of those respondents who indicated they were CDEP participants, 36 per cent were aged 25 years and under, and a number of those were recent school leavers. For young Indigenous school leavers in Kuranda, the local CDEP scheme seems to be the first point of entry into any work environment. A number of respondents express concern about young adults taking the CDEP pathway, suggesting it could become a dead-end street for them. Parents were keen to see their children leave high school and enter into the local labour market where they might develop employment skills in local businesses, establish a career path, and gain a higher income.

Policy Implications

The results of this three-year survey have some important implications for welfare and employment policy development. The first result we would like to highlight is the implication of the lack of paid employment and the reliance on transfer payments for the incomes of these households. Evidence from the wider community shows a close correlation between a lack of paid employment and low family incomes (Harding and Richardson, 1999; Harding, Lloyd and Greenwell, 2002). Data from the 1996 Census show that the median household income per household member in Indigenous households in Kuranda was 57 per cent of that of other Australians living in Kuranda (Daly and Auld, 2000). If household incomes are to be raised among the Indigenous community in Kuranda, it is important that people move into paid employment.

Labour market opportunities are limited in Kuranda. Daly and Auld (2000) note that according to the 1996 Census, the unemployment rate in the Kuranda postcode was above the Australian average for non-Indigenous people (11 per cent compared with 9 per cent) but below the Australian average for Indigenous people (15 per cent compared with 23 per cent). The relatively good result for Indigenous people in Kuranda is probably attributable to the high proportion who considered themselves to be outside the labour force and the successful CDEP scheme whose participants were counted as 'employed' in the Census. While the local Indigenous population is highly mobile within the Kuranda area, there is a general reluctance, given cultural preferences and ties to the land, to move outside the area. Even if they were willing to move to a more active labour market, their low level of labour market skills, might limit their economic prospects at least in the short term. These restrictions imply that if growth in household incomes is to be achieved then locally available paid employment needs to be accessible.

The reliance of these households on income transfers from government appears to be a long-term issue. It continued at least over the three years of the survey. Clearly developments in welfare reform have important implications for the Indigenous population of Kuranda. A major development of welfare reform over the 1990s and increasingly emphasised by the Coalition government in its most recent policy statement *Australians Working Together* is the idea of a mutual obligation between the state and welfare recipients. The McClure (2000:34) report which is the basis for the most recent reforms of the welfare system argued:

Within the social support system social obligations are defined as mutual obligations, whereby the whole of the society has an obligation to provide assistance to those most in need. Similarly, those who receive assistance and opportunities through the social support system have a responsibility to themselves and the rest of society to seek to take advantage of such opportunities.

Under this policy, recipients are expected to undertake 'reasonable requirements' such as work experience, training or community work to prepare them for paid employment in return for their income support (Department of Family and Community Services, 2001a). Financial penalties can be applied for non-compliance. In this context, the list of activities that are considered to satisfy these requirements will be critical for Indigenous people in Kuranda. Our survey showed a high level of community participation among local organisations and family support activities such as informal childcare. As well as CDEP work, recognised activities need to be broadly defined to include some of these activities such as the care and education of children, voluntary activities undertaken for Indigenous and community organisations, and cultural activities such as teaching Aboriginal dance and language.

As part of *Australians Working Together*, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is responsible for the development of Community Participation Agreements between remote Indigenous communities and government agencies. This program is focused on remote communities where there are few opportunities 'for people on income support to meet activity test requirements' (Department of Family and Community Services, 2001b). Under these agreements a set of activities are recognised by the community and ATSIC as appropriate justification for income support. For example, in the case of the Mutitjulu community in Central Australia a proposed agreement included education and training activities such as adult literacy and numeracy, mechanical training and health training; employment activities such as landscaping, rubbish and firewood collection and craft production; and community development activities such as community governance, aged care, housing maintenance and sports coaching (Smith, 2001). Our study of the Indigenous community in Kuranda suggests that Indigenous people living in areas where there is an active labour market may also face some of the difficulties of those in remote areas in accessing opportunities. The recognition of a wider range of activities for the purposes of satisfying mutual obligation tests — such as those acceptable under Community Participation Agreements — is necessary for those Indigenous people in less remote locations who are excluded from wage employment for whatever reasons. Without these options many may find it difficult to satisfy the mutual obligation conditions. Recent discussions (August 2002) with Centrelink in Cairns suggest that they are adopting a fairly wide definition of mutual obligation activities in dealing with the Indigenous population in Kuranda.

The survey results emphasise the importance of the CDEP scheme in providing work opportunities for members of the community. It is important to note that the wage for this employment is notionally linked to welfare entitlements and therefore intended to support a minimal standard of living, although there are opportunities to supplement the basic CDEP income (see above). Under *Australians Working Together* the Coalition government is promoting the idea of CDEP employment as a temporary step on the way into standard employment (Department of Family and Community Services, 2001c).³ The introduction of Indigenous Employment Centres (IEC) in urban CDEP schemes is intended to increase the placement of participants in mainstream full-time employment. Under the IEC program, CDEP organisations will be funded to identify local employment opportunities, to provide selected participants with relevant skills and training, and to case-manage their transition into full employment.

The evidence of our survey in Kuranda suggests that at least so far, CDEP employment has not proved to be a stepping stone into standard employment in this labour market. It is important, therefore, to consider the incentives both financial and otherwise for leaving CDEP and to identify any barriers that are preventing Indigenous people from gaining standard employment before the CDEP scheme can be expected to act as a conduit to standard employment in a small urban centre such as Kuranda. Some of the barriers mentioned by respondents to the survey included transport, childcare, a general lack of employment opportunities in Kuranda and a perception that the wider community was not keen to employ Indigenous people.

A particular focus of our survey was childcare arrangements and the implications of these arrangements for the delivery of income support and services to children. The high level of mobility among the householders including children has important implications for this. Many welfare payments such as Parenting Payment and Family Tax Benefit are designed to provide income support for children but where children are highly mobile, the money does not necessarily go to the person currently responsible for the child. Over the course of the project a number of options have been considered and discussed with respondents. It was generally agreed that an important element for the success of any proposal is the recognition of the extended nature of childcare in Indigenous families. However, the majority of respondents in Kuranda preferred to make their own agreements regarding the financial implications of shared child-care. Initiatives to improve welfare delivery need to respect individual autonomy and be careful to avoid imposing unwanted restrictions on families and individuals.

A Statement of Care, agreed on a voluntary basis between carers for a child, is one possibility. It provides a means of facilitating an agreement among the various carers of a child on how Family Tax Benefit and related payments will be shared between them. However, as the Kuranda case study has revealed, among the carers of a child might also be people who look after the child regularly on a

³ See Champion (2002) for a discussion of the CDEP scheme and the related Indigenous Employment Centre in Redfern in inner Sydney.

day-care or after-school basis, and who are often placed under financial strain as a result. How might this situation be addressed? These carers might be given financial assistance via adjustments to the Child Care Benefits scheme. They might also be included as participants in a Statement of Care where such an agreement is made.

A Statement of Care approach to paying Family Tax Benefit and other payments for Indigenous families has been tested by DFACS in a number of pilot sites, with early results indicating that the supportive case-management approach provides positive outcomes for some Indigenous families. These pilots were evaluated positively and are currently being considered for wider application (DFACS, personal communication). One of the respondents in the Kuranda survey, who was a grandmother experiencing difficulty supporting her two grandchildren on an Aged Pension, with no financial assistance from the mother of the children, herself suggested that such an approach might help alleviate her situation. However, it was suggested that supportive case management would only be required in particular situations, where families seek help in conflict resolution. It is important to recognise that there are some aspects of family life to which policy and service delivery cannot hope to respond fully.

One final set of our results with implications for policy development relates to young Indigenous people in Kuranda. Many respondents expressed deep concern for the futures of young people in Kuranda. The reasons they cited were lack of work and activities for youth, overcrowding in houses, and rising alcohol and drug abuse among the young.

The youthful Indigenous demographic profile and related rapid formation of young families in Kuranda suggests a growing future demand on services and a potentially expanding rate of welfare dependence amongst young unemployed parents and school leavers. This adds weight to the arguments in favour of immediate targeted support for this group, before they enter the welfare system.

The problem of how to effect the transition from welfare to employment and, in particular, from school into employment is a matter of mainstream policy concern. A number of new mainstream programs have been initiated to facilitate such transitions for welfare recipients. These include the Training and Literacy Supplement, Training Credits for the long-term unemployed and Job Search Training (Department of Family and Community Services, 2001a). However, there is little information available on such transitions among young Indigenous adults (for some relevant studies based in the Torres Strait see Arthur and David-Petero, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c).

Our results show the importance of the CDEP scheme as an employer of young Indigenous people in Kuranda, but they also show that a typical young person is not moving off the CDEP scheme into standard employment. If young adults are not to become permanent participants in either the CDEP scheme or the welfare system, then they must be targeted with policy and service support immediately upon leaving school — and preferably while still at school. The CDEP scheme could be used to provide training, mentoring and work experience for youth with the aim of facilitating entry into the local labour market. In

addition the position of young mothers who may wish to enter the labour market at some future date cannot be ignored.

Conclusions

In this paper we have summarised the results of a three-year case study of the Indigenous community in Kuranda in northern Queensland. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between Indigenous people and welfare service delivery. Data were collected from key reference people on household composition, employment, sources of income and patterns of childcare over a three year period. The results show large multi-generation households organised around a core of individuals with a highly mobile group of temporary residents. Most of the households were dependent on welfare income for their survival and this was true in each of the three years of the study. The study raises some important issues for policy makers.

The lack of standard employment and the reliance on government transfers implies low incomes for these households. In order to raise these incomes it is important to promote employment of Indigenous people in the local labour market. Our survey shows that progress on this front has been slow and it seems to be important to understand why before the problem can be adequately addressed. For example, further training will not get Indigenous people into jobs if there are no jobs available in the local labour market, or if there is resistance to employing Aboriginal people amongst local businesses. If, as seems likely, many of these people remain on income support, it is important that a broad range of activities is included in the list of those that satisfy mutual obligation for recipients of welfare support. This is already the case for CDEP participants. While it has been recognised that those living in remote communities will have difficulties meeting stricter activity tests under *Australians Working Together*, Indigenous people living in small rural communities such as Kuranda may also face significant barriers to entry to the local labour market. Our survey shows that, at least so far, the CDEP scheme in Kuranda has not acted as a stepping-stone into the local labour market. How best to promote employment opportunities for Indigenous people remains a critical question for future research and policy consideration.

Our survey also considered the delivery of income support and services to children and young adults in the community. The advantage of a three year survey was that it enabled us to document the movement of children between carers over time. The results reported here show substantial movement of children between household but they only tell part of the story as in addition to these annual 'snapshots' of mobility, there was considerable movement reported by our key reference people between surveys. Children were cared for in an extended kin network that meant they might move between relatives for short or long periods. Our results highlight the importance of recognising a wider family responsibility for childcare in welfare payment systems. An example of one such approach is the Statement of Care which has been trialed by the Department of Family and

Community Services and enables welfare money associated with an individual child to be shared between a group of carers according to some voluntarily agreed formula.

The third wave of the survey has identified an important characteristic of young adults: the apparent absence of any transition from school into mainstream local employment. The main transition is, in fact, into early dependence on welfare or CDEP payments. If inter-generational welfare dependence is to be short-circuited, there needs to be immediate targeted policy and program support for this age group, preferably before they enter the welfare system.

The use of a longitudinal case study has enabled a more detailed investigation of some aspects of the domestic economy of Indigenous families that have been highlighted in earlier ethnographic studies (see, for example, Finlayson, 1991) and in aggregate data. It has proved to be a useful research tool for greater understanding of the complexities of these domestic economies. While the results we have presented relate to a small community in northern Queensland, the similarities between our results and other studies suggests that the conclusions have wider application although the small sample size suggests a need for caution in basing any policy changes solely on our findings.

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We thank CAEPR and DFACS for funding this study. Our particular thanks go to the Kuranda community, the Aboriginal facilitators and respondents and their families, the local organisations, officers from Centrelink regional and national offices and DFACS and its Indigenous Policy Unit for their contributions to the project. We also thank staff at CAEPR, particularly Jon Altman and all contributors to the project over the 3 years, for their comments and assistance on this and earlier papers based on this research. We are grateful to two anonymous referees for their comments.