

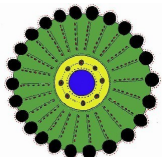
Back on TRAAC: Community-led Social Change in the Thamarrurr Region



August
2013

Final Report

A REPORT TO THE BOARD OF THE THAMARRURR
REGIONAL AUTHORITY ABORIGINAL CORPORATION BY
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Community-led Social Change Initiatives in the Thamarrurr Region

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	5
Background	6
Methodology	14
KEY FINDINGS	16
Government initiatives	16
Governance and leadership	18
Social norms.....	19
Economic Development.....	20
Evaluation	21
AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE THAMARRURR REGION	23
Population	23
Social structure – languages, clans, families and leadership.....	25
Leadership.....	27
Social norms.....	28
Schooling	30
Housing	35
Employment and training.....	37
Criminal justice	41
Change and emerging issues.....	44
ABORIGINAL VIEWS IN THE REGION ON RESPONSIBILITIES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.....	46
What is a “family”?.....	46
Responsibility for who?.....	48
ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMPARED TO MAINSTREAM PERSPECTIVES	51
The Vision that Aboriginal People hold for the Future for their Children and Families.....	58
THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT AND NGO INITIATIVES: WHAT IS WORKING, WHAT IS NOT, AND HOW IT CAN BE IMPROVED?.....	61
Schooling	64
The new model of SEAM as part of Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (2013–2022)	68
School Attendance Team	70

Families as First Teachers	73
Da Ngimalmin FRC.....	73
Wadeye Children’s & Family Centre	78
Sport.....	79
Economic development	81
KEY BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES AND HOW BETTER LINKAGES AND OUTCOMES CAN BE ACHIEVED	83
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE DA NGIMALMIN FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY CENTRE.....	85
BROADER SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE THAMARRURR REGION.....	89
Rural living.....	90
RECOMMENDATIONS	92
Aboriginal Governance, Leadership, and Decision-making	92
Further Development of the Da Ngimalmin Family Responsibility Centre.....	92
Coordination, Linkages and Alliances.....	93
Community Direction and Endorsement of Service Providers	93
Development of Life Plans.....	93
TRAAC Data and Information Unit.....	94
Thamarrurr Business Precinct and Centre.....	94
Economic Development.....	95
Support for successful initiatives	95
Evaluation	95
REFERENCES	96

FOREWORD

This report is part of a wider process of engagement that aims to inform Wadeye people and the government about some of the possible opportunities and threats that face this community now and in the future. It is integral to a process that is bringing people together including community members, leaders, agencies and governments to think about and inform where effort and programs should go in the future and how the way forward is to be articulated and activated. As a process it will continue through discussions, workshops and actions until the latter part of 2013.

It will provide a footprint for governments to follow in implementing positive social change in the next few years.

While the report has been commissioned by the Federal Government, it is a report that “belongs” to everyone with an interest and stake in the region.

There has been a substantial interest in the report and its process and it should be considered to be a serious attempt to facilitate societal change.

The consequences of not taking action may be dire in terms of community decision-making; further it may have serious consequences in terms of community dysfunction and opportunity lost.

We, the Directors of the Thamarrurr Regional Aboriginal Authority Corporation (TRAAC) commend this report.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a scoping study designed to assess the need for and likely efficacy of community-led social change initiatives in the Thamarrurr region centred on the town of Wadeye. This region has a population moving toward 3,000 people. For various reasons, a substantial proportion of this population has not received the opportunity of proper education or training and is having significant difficulty in contributing to the workforce and the development efforts of the wider community. Many of these people are now parents. Such dislocation results consistently in social issues that negatively impact on families and upcoming generations.

These issues were brought to public attention and discussion by members of the Thamarrurr community via their 2008 complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) alleging breaches of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* by the Northern Territory Government and the Commonwealth of Australia in relation to arrangements for education funding. Partly in response to this, and subsequent to a Heads of Agreement signed by the Commonwealth and Mr Tobias Nganbe on behalf of the Wadeye community on 7 June 2012, the Thamarrurr Regional Authority Aboriginal Corporation (TRAAC) was funded by the Commonwealth Government (FaHCSIA) to implement the *Wadeye Community-Led Social Change Initiative*. This Initiative intends to build on current progress with school-aged children, parents and the community whilst also examining the development of appropriate pathways for the above-mentioned “disconnected” section of the population so that they have more fulfilling lives. It is anticipated that their improved well-being will impact on positive social outcomes for the entire community. In order to examine the issues involved in successfully implementing this initiative, TRAAC engaged Dr Bill Ivory and Professor John Taylor as consultants to undertake the following tasks:

- Consider and explore how enhanced community leadership of positive social change can be embedded in community governance and structure in the Thamarrurr region, noting the current operations of the Thamarrurr group through TRAAC and TDC Ltd. This will involve consultations with community members and other stakeholders, research and analysis and policy design;
- Explore and develop community-based approaches and strategies, that are complementary to existing Government policy and legislative frameworks and

that aim to enhance the outcomes of existing programs and initiatives operating in Wadeye and the Thamarrurr region. Consideration should also be given to how Government policy or legislation can be improved based on the experience and circumstances of the Wadeye community;

- Produce a scoping document that will provide recommendations and advice on how the Da Ngimalmin Family Responsibility Centre (FRC) currently operating within the school can continue to influence and strengthen school attendance and engagement and develop a broader purpose and role across the community in relation to the positive development of the community.

As essential context for pursuing these tasks, the consultants were asked to structure their report according to the following headings:

- The current social environment in the Thamarrurr region;
- Aboriginal views in the region on responsibilities to children and families and how these differ from mainstream views;
- The vision that Aboriginal people hold for the future for their children and families;
- The impact of Government initiatives: what is working, what is not, and how they can be improved?
- Key behavioural issues and how better linkages and outcomes can be achieved;
- Recommendations for the further development of the Da Ngimalmin Family Responsibility Centre;
- Options for the broader social development of the Thamarrurr region.

Before embarking on these tasks some essential background is necessary.

Background

In the late 1990s, the people of Wadeye and its surrounds began to develop an approach to regional governance that they envisaged would enable them to move forward after years of “top-down” administrative arrangements and problematic decision-

making structures that tended to favour certain groups over others. The new approach, referred to as “Thamarrurr” was founded on traditional principles of engagement, resolution, reconciliation, and cooperation. It previously enabled clan groups to live together and interact on country and achieve outcomes that were of benefit to the wider society. Senior men and women in a participatory action mode worked for several years on revitalisation of the concept until it was formalised into a contemporary council arrangement (Desmarchelier 2000; Ivory 2009).

The concept is sustained in modernised form and is manifest in incorporated bodies such as the Thamarrurr Development Corporation (TDC), which is focused on achieving economic development outcomes, and the Thamarrurr Regional Authority Aboriginal Corporation (TRAAC), which is the platform for social advancement and enhancement. The latter was incorporated under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 in 2011 and is a public benevolent institution endorsed to access income tax exemption, GST concession and FBT exemption. Significantly, in terms of its operational possibilities, it is also endorsed as a deductible gift recipient. Through these bodies, the Thamarrurr approach enables 22 clan groups embedded within a tripartite ceremonial arrangement to reach decisions for the good of the general community.

The community sees the Thamarrurr way as being the key underlying principle for its role in local governance and it is fundamental to the *Community-Led Social Change* Project. It is about engagement across the board, respect for the views of others, and collaboration on how to move forward. Hence the strategies and activities associated with this initiative are to be agreed upon within the TRAAC decision-making framework and will involve a wide range of community members. It will also be about seeking the input of service providers and community participants who may have guidance and positive advice to offer.

Many leaders within the community indicate that they are keen to strengthen what they see as positive social norms, such as parental responsibility, intolerance of violence, abuse of others and harmful behaviour, respect for all members of the community and a commitment to bettering the lives of all members of the community. With time, it is possible that this community-based approach might lead to the development of new strategies for dealing with offenders who do not comply with recognised and responsible standards of behaviour. For the present, however, the aim of local leadership is to re-

establish a strong and recognised local governance role for adding its voice and backing to existing government partnership initiatives aimed at ensuring that children attend school every day, have better access to life's essentials, and are raised in safe communities.

Given that the catalyst for the present exercise was the issue of persistent low levels of participation in schooling at Wadeye (extending now into a new school-age cohort), and given that this outcome is symptomatic of underlying norms and behaviours, it is appropriate to reflect on what education might be considered to be by Wadeye residents and to establish upfront a clear statement of its purpose. Why, in the minds of government, community leaders, parents and children at Wadeye is education necessary? What is its purpose? What does it/should it lead to? Who should be responsible for ensuring that it occurs? What role should schooling play in contemporary Aboriginal society and how should it operate in the 21st century in a town like Wadeye? In relation to all this, how effective are government programs and how can the community itself contribute to the achievement of desired outcomes whatever they may be?

From the state's perspective, the answer regarding the purpose of education is unequivocal. It is seen as a means to providing citizens with foundational skills necessary to function in society, part of which (but not all) involves a pathway into employment. To paraphrase the COAG Productivity Working Group, it provides the means to acquisition of knowledge and skills to enable effective participation of individuals in society and employment in a globalised economy. Beyond schooling, the aim is to provide all working-aged Australians with the opportunity to develop skills and qualifications needed to enable them to be effective participants in, and contributors to, the modern labour market. To achieve this, individuals are to be assisted to overcome barriers in education, training and employment and to be motivated to acquire and utilise new skills. In support of these state-sponsored aims the various Education Acts of States and Territories have long legally required parents to enrol their children of compulsory school age and to ensure their regular attendance at school throughout each school term.

From the perspective of parents and their children in the Thamarrurr region, it would seem that the question has never been systematically addressed in any comprehensive

way until the present exercise. However, to the extent that recognised Thamarrurr leaders have represented such views in the past (we shall present these views later), it would appear that their ambitions and the aims of education as articulated by government are not incompatible.

While there would therefore seem to be common purpose and aspiration in regard to educational outcomes at Wadeye, even a cursory examination of school participation and performance data reveals that these remain far from being achieved even though some progress has been made in recent years. Foremost in this regard is the large number (and proportion) of compulsory school-age children who continue to attend school only sporadically, if at all. To begin to understand why this is the case and how it may reflect other, broader, issues of community functioning and expectations, it is necessary to understand the local institutional and social context within which community aspirations are being sought. We argue on the back of evidence and opinion from local people and their leaders that effecting social change for the better is as much about institutional reform around community governance as it is to do with the nuts and bolts of program delivery or program design. As Noel Pearson has recently argued (*The Australian* June 15, 2013) “[n]o amount of services to Indigenous people will change things without leadership... [and] this leadership must come from the people whose lives and futures are at stake”. Echoing his earlier case for a “right to take responsibility” (Pearson 2000), he pleads for responsibility to be restored to Indigenous people and their organisations and raises the valid counterfactual of where things might have been if the vast resources of the intervention had been available to local governing bodies (a point that is pertinent to the recent history of Wadeye and that is raised by local leaders as we shall see).

In the not too distant past, the argument at Wadeye has been that a lack of infrastructure and program provision had led to a general deterioration in community well-being as indicated by measures such as severe overcrowding in housing and a substantive disengagement from schooling of an entire generation. Government responses to this, via the Northern Territory Emergency Response and subsequent measures as well as through the conciliation efforts of the Australia Human Rights Commission, have now largely made redress and the focus has shifted away from ensuring that facilities and programs are in place towards ensuring that community members make maximum use of them. While this inevitably turns the focus onto changes required in social practice it

also raises the issue that Pearson highlights above about the appropriateness of institutional frameworks to bring about such change. To understand more about this and its significance for the current scoping exercise it is necessary to revisit key aspects of the institutional history of the region.

The deeper background

Contemporary institutional and social history of the Thamarrurr region commenced in 1935 with the arrival of missionaries at the Murrinhpatha estate of Werntek Nganaiyi (or “Old Mission”). The unfolding of significant events since that time has been well documented by Nganbe and McCormack (2009) in a paper that provides essential background to the present exercise (see Attachment A). In effect, the past 70 plus years have seen the bringing together, both socially and economically, of several language groups and numerous patrilineal clan groups with connection to distinct estates across a region that is now referred to as Thamarrurr (Figure 1). While the mission site of Port Keats became the residential focus for this polyglot population, interconnections were established through a tripartite ceremonial structure comprised of Tharnpa/Wulthirri/Malkarrin, Wangka, and Lirrga ceremonial groups (Nganbe and McCormack 2009). This structure remains foundational in determining the social relationships and interactions that occur across the region that is now connected to the town of Wadeye (Ivory 2009).

According to the anthropologist Stanner, who accompanied the original missionary party, the area between the Daly and Fitzmaurice Rivers was one of the least known parts of the continent up to the time of their arrival. In 1939, in order to secure a reliable water supply, the mission site was relocated 16 kilometres inland to Wadeye Creek on Yek Diminin country and what then became known as Port Keats. For the next 30 years, the residents of Port Keats and those from surrounding country who came under the influence of the Mission were effectively wards of the state under the supervision of respective Mission superintendents. They were effectively subject to their theology and policy.

Under this arrangement formal education commenced with the arrival of three Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in 1941 who taught basic literacy and numeracy to girls who had assumed residence at the convent. While the war years were disruptive, in 1947 school dormitories were constructed from war-surplus materials to separately

accommodate boys and girls with 65 students aged 5–17 attending school. This number is significant given that the mission population of the day was barely 300. In this way, schooling was wholesale and children were separated from their families to ensure a focus on western learning and a deliberate devaluing of traditional culture. This dormitory system of education persisted through to the late 1960s until a new open school was established at the current site.

In effect, the generation alive today that was born before the 1960s, and that now forms the middle and senior leadership groups in Thamarrurr, was educated in a closed environment often away from family and under the watchful supervision of mission staff. This inevitably instilled a particular set of world-views and educational outcomes that remain apparent today, certainly when compared with those of subsequent, and especially most recent, generations.

The contemporary school commenced at a time when Catholic influence in the community reached its zenith, ironically at a time when mission control over people's lives was about to be relinquished in line with a policy shift away from assimilation towards self-determination. As if to symbolise this transfer, the school acquired its first lay principal in 1975 and the proportion of religious-to-lay staff fell from 50 per cent in 1972 to just 13 per cent by 1980.

By now the Port Keats settlement was expanding rapidly with the return of families from life on cattle stations south of the Fitzmaurice River following the award wages decision, and by natural increase. Anticipating this, Stanner (1969: 58) observed in his 1968 Boyer lecture that, “the composition of their population is....undergoing a startling change: it is now, in at least some groups, very much more youthful, and growing in size at a very much faster rate, than ours. It follows that their conditions will have to improve faster than ours if they are to stay even at their present relative disadvantage”. This observation proved to be remarkably prescient.

Significant developments in this new self-determination era came quickly. Alongside increasing reliance on cash from work came social security payments and the prospect of access to cash without work. This significant change in material circumstances occurred against a background of limited economic opportunity to absorb growing numbers including those excluded from pastoral work following the award wage decision. In this environment, mission control of the growing settlement was relinquished

to the hastily-constituted Kardu Numida Council at the same time as which the Northern Territory acquired self-governing status in 1978. In terms of schooling, the significant fact about this latter development was the signing of the Mission Schools Agreement (MSA) between the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments in 1979. Under this agreement, the Commonwealth agreed to hand over responsibility for support of the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) School to the Northern Territory government on the proviso that, “the Commonwealth would expect this to be at no less a level than that previously provided by the Commonwealth which has been on the same basis as for government schools”. In other words, control of the school was being handed over to the Territory on the condition that it continue the Commonwealth practice of providing funding at the same level as all other government schools.

From 1992 to 2000, Kardu Numida Council entered a phase of administrative and financial restructuring in order to manage and resolve a combination of inappropriate governance arrangements and financial inadequacy against a background of a rapidly growing population (Desmarchelier 2001: 41). According to the former CEO of Kardu Numida (and TRC), Terry Bullemor (pers. comm. 30 May 2013), this “also provided the starting point from which to develop an information and education process that would provide community leaders with the time, information, knowledge and confidence to establish and manage a contemporary structure of governance which they had planned, developed and constructed”. Determined to re-establish control, clan leaders sought to create a new governance structure that could provide for legal representation of government functions as required by the contemporary world, while reasserting and enabling customary residential rights and responsibilities throughout the region. As we have seen, this was found in a pre-existing culturally-based model for resolution and power balance in the region referred to in Murrinhpatha as ‘Thamarrurr’ (Desmarchelier 2000). The first Thamarrurr entity to be formed was Thamarrurr Association Incorporated registered in 2000 under the NT Associations Act (Bullemor pers. comm. 30 May 2013). Later, in 2003, this body became the basis for the creation of the Thamarrurr Regional Council as a fully-elected representative body under the Northern Territory Local Government Act. While this arrangement was to last for only five years until June 2008, its legacy is seen today in the TDC and TRAAC both of which retain a clan-based governance structure. The TDC is concerned with business development in the region while TRAAC represents and pursues the social ambitions of local leadership.

A further legacy of the TRC was the change in status of the school, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) from that of a 'Mission School' within the Northern Territory Education system to that of a 'Catholic Systemic School' as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School (OLSHTCS) in 2007. In effect, this process commenced in April 2005 when the then Prime Minister and the Northern Territory Chief Minister agreed to revisit the 1979 MSA and, as an interim measure from 1 January 2006, treated OLSHTCS as a government school for the purpose of allocating mainstream Australian Government funding programs. As a consequence, it became entitled to, and swiftly received, substantially higher funding than it did when it was resourced pursuant to the MSA. Significantly, in November of 2007, the new secondary campus was officially opened and the overall increase in capital investment and recurrent funding for the school has been substantial.

As this recent institutional history shows, the present review of social circumstances at Wadeye and consideration of the role and aspirations of local people in determining their current and future lives is occurring at a time of considerable policy flux. This has seen a rapid move away from whole-of-government responses that were fully accepting of local governance structures to a situation where local leaders are effectively passive recipients of government and NGO largesse with little if any input into policy development or program design and delivery and only a limited formal consultative or representative role via the procedures for endorsing the intergovernmental Local Implementation Plan (LIP). In effect, the local leadership feels substantively disenfranchised and largely divorced from the formal running of their own community (pers. comm. Tobias Nganbe and Leon Melpi April, 2013).

For those in the community who in recent years have held statutory positions of authority and responsibility, this sense of disempowerment has become acute in the face of interventionist activity around the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), the restructuring of local government involving dismantling of the TRC and the creation of Victoria-Daly "Super-Shire", and the introduction of various COAG and Northern Territory reform processes aimed at closing the gaps in education and related socioeconomic indicators. These developments have had significant fiscal and program implications for the Thamarrurr regional population including the designation of Wadeye as a growth town under the COAG National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery (RSD) strategy, but all of this has occurred at a time when the formal representation of local people has

been absent. A key message to arise from our discussions with clan leaders and the Thamarrurr polity at large is that the reinstatement and formal recognition of local governance arrangements is a pre-requisite for the success of social policy. They argue that if only the TRC had available to it the level of investment that now exists, then outcomes to date would have been far more favourable because one of the difficulties that the TRC faced as an organisation was an inability to follow through on expectations that were raised for want of adequate resources. While this counterfactual is difficult to prove *ex post facto*, our basic thrust is to support this contention.

Methodology

Work on the project commenced late in 2012. An initial step was the development of an Activity Work Plan in conjunction with FaHCSIA officials and the TRAAC Board. This set out the fundamental approach to the design of the project including engagement activities, key milestones, available resources and risks. It was endorsed by FaHCSIA in March 2013.

Information gathering was conducted on a variety of fronts and in a variety of ways. First of all, effort was expended to update (as far as possible given resource and data constraints) the TRAAC regional population database that had been maintained since it was first developed by the TRC in 2003. This was done with the assistance of local senior women who had previously been involved in such an exercise. This activity partly involved house-to-house interviewing but it was largely conducted as a desk-top exercise in demographic accounting. Inputs to the database were sought from key agencies in Wadeye including the school, the Shire, TDC and the clinic.

As for community input on issues related to the project, this involved the collection of qualitative information from as wide a cross-section of the adult population and Thamarrurr leadership as was feasible in the time available using a mix of standard and targeted questions as appropriate. These consultations commenced in late February 2013 and were ongoing through to July. Some of the engagements were informal with individuals, parents or with whole family groups; others were more formal gatherings of up to 50 people as with the school leadership group. Due to the hectic environment of the town, it was difficult at times to plan long term with confidence and much information gathering was opportunistic. In some instances, snowball referral techniques were used, particularly when working with clan groups, with individuals or families referring on to

others. In some cases information was gathered by participant observation, an example of this being the observance of interaction that occurs on school Culture Days.

A total of 312 adult Aboriginal residents of the Thamarrurr region were approached in these various ways and contributed to the findings of this report by providing information, insights and views. This comprised almost 20 per cent of the population aged 15–64. In terms of a representative sample, there is some bias towards older age groups with 69 per cent of those engaged aged between 25 and 64 (compared to their share of the adult population at 63 per cent) while the gender mix was slightly in favour of females. It was anticipated that single youth and young parents (especially males in each case) would be the most difficult group to engage and under the circumstances the resulting sample was highly successful. Furthermore, all 22 clan groups of the region were represented in discussions at various stages, although some more so than others depending on availability and interest.

Twelve meetings were held with recognised community leaders. Three of these meetings involved representation from the leadership base as a whole and the remaining nine involved meetings with groups of leaders and the three ceremony groups (Tharnpa/Wulthirri/Malkarrin, Wangka and Lirrga). Local people were used as interpreters in all encounters as appropriate depending on the issues and concepts being discussed and the comprehension of those involved.

Local community organisations approached for discussions and data (as appropriate) included TDC, Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel, OLSHTCS, Palngun Wurnangat Association, Thamarrurr Rangers, TDC Job Futures, Murin Association, The Makura Wunthay Association/Catholic Care group and the Murinbata Tribal Development Association (Murrinhpatha Nimmipa Store). The more mainstream service providers approached included Save the Children, NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service, NT Department of Children and Family Services, Centrelink, Catholic Church (Wadeye Parish), NT Department of Local Government, NT Department of Housing, NT Department of Justice, NT Police, NT Catholic Education Office, Victoria Daly Shire, Wadeye Clinic and Family Centre, and the Wadeye Children's and Family Centre.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the scoping study are listed under a number of headings that assume a logical flow from those findings that relate to what government initiatives are working or not, to issues regarding governance arrangements and leadership, through to social norms, then economic development and finally to considerations in relation to the evaluation of outcomes.

Government initiatives

There is little hard evidence readily available to indicate conclusively what works and what doesn't in respect of existing government programs in the Thamarrurr region. This is not necessarily because impacts do not exist, rather it is more an observation about the lack of proper evaluation mechanisms built into program design and delivery. To the best of our knowledge, programs at Wadeye that are designed to support families, children and social change are very much focused on ensuring that inputs are delivered with little attention paid to the overall measurement and evaluation of the impact that programs are having in terms of stated objectives at the individual or community level, at least not in any way that lends itself to public scrutiny. This is not so much a criticism as it is a statement of fact or reality in the face of the more pressing requirements to address substantial immediate needs. It also reflects the fact that many programs are relatively new with little time elapsed to consider possible impacts. Having said that, some long-term changes in social and economic outcomes are observable and, in some instances, it is possible to attribute these directly to government programs.

Most notable in this latter regard is the impact of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) which has resulted in a reduction in housing occupancy rates from around 17 per dwelling ten years ago to around nine per dwelling today. This also involved capacity building for the TDC in delivering a substantial component of the new housing construction. As for schooling, we find that many of the program obstacles to school attendance that were highlighted by inquiries several years ago have now either been eradicated or are diminished. The school has undergone enormous improvement in infrastructure and staffing and there are now substantial and sustained initiatives aimed at encouraging daily attendance. We note, but have no basis upon which to establish a causal relationship, that school enrolments have also effectively increased and that attendance rates are effectively higher than in the recent past.

Despite this, a key finding is that chronic absence from school remains prevalent among at least half of the school-age population with regular attendees (more than 80 per cent of the time) accounting for less than one-third. Overall, attendance is highly episodic and to some extent seasonal (higher at the beginning of year/term); we also find some social patterning involved, in so far as certain clan groups and families are more prone to absence than others.

The Commonwealth's School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) and the Northern Territory Government's Every Child Every Day (ECED) initiative are both aimed at enhancing enrolment and attendance. The SEAM was trialled at Wadeye from 2009 to 2012 and evidence made available from this trial indicates a high degree of parental compliance to the enrolment data matching process and in relation to consultation processes on receipt of enrolment notices. While there were some income support payment suspensions, there were no income support cancellations during the trial. As at 29 June 2012, 155 parents in relation to 260 children in Wadeye had received attendance notices with 76 parents receiving income support suspensions and less than 20 parents having their income support payments cancelled. At one level, in terms of the hoped for outcomes of the trial, this can be viewed as a positive outcome as it demonstrates that with social worker support and other assistance parents in the trial were able to respond appropriately within the 13 week compliance period before there was a need for the cancellation of income support payments.

As for overall impact on school attendance, however, this is less apparent since attendance remains consistently below optimal levels. A revised SEAM with more streamlined processes for payment cancellation is now being fully implemented and continued non-compliance may result in prosecution and maximum fines that are now significantly higher (up to \$2,115 for a first offence and \$2,820 for a second). Application of this revised SEAM is too recent to determine any meaningful assessment of impact. The same applies to the parallel ECED initiative.

The Families as First Teachers (FaFT) Program that aims to build family knowledge of early learning through active engagement in early childhood education programs is very active and well received by parents and carers at Wadeye but the main shortcoming remains low participation relative to need. Presently, a total of 38 children are involved in FaFT with a variable group of around 30 parents/carers.

All agency and program deliverables are outlined in the Wadeye Local Implementation Plan (LIP) originally signed off by the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government, the Victoria-Daly Shire and representatives of a Thamarrurr Local Reference Group in 2010 (Commonwealth of Australia 2010). The first update of this LIP has recently been endorsed by the TRAAC Board. One issue that arises in this process is a need for agency information on program outcomes as opposed to inputs to be more closely detailed for TRAAC and for TRAAC to be provided with the means to digest this information in a way that enables an informed understanding of program effectiveness. This is because TRAAC has a role in endorsing the LIP but it has limited capacity to assess the nature of progress to date and whether proposed future actions might be adequate and relevant to their needs. This goes to the issue of informed consent in decision-making and whether this is adequately provided for under current governance arrangements.

Governance and leadership

A search for appropriate governance arrangements for the people of the Thamarrurr region has exercised much thought and effort over the past two decades. Ten years ago, it was considered by most in the region that the establishment of the TRC under the NT Local Government Act in 2003 had finally resolved long-standing issues of appropriate local governance only for this achievement to be dashed in 2008 by the formation of the much larger Victoria Daly Shire. While there appears to have been some focus in recent time on the Da Ngimalmin FRC as the main vehicle for affecting social change, a key finding from discussions with the local leadership (including of Da Ngimalmin) is that this role is properly vested in TRAAC. The vision of TRAAC is “to facilitate communication between the clans of the Thamarrurr Region, the government and service providers to deliver positive outcomes for our people and our country” (KPMG 2011). This describes an umbrella role that incorporates bodies such as Da Ngimalmin. In recognition of this umbrella role of TRAAC, local TRAAC board members have indicated that Da Ngimalmin would be more appropriately situated to fulfil its role if all of its administrative and finance functions were transferred to TRAAC. This would also involve a physical relocation to the cultural/museum precinct.

What we find, however, is that TRAAC has struggled to fulfil its vision since the demise of the TRC due to a lack of core resourcing and the absence of a formally recognised

day-to-day role in the running of Wadeye. Organisational issues have also arisen out of shared administrative arrangements with TDC. As a consequence, it is not uncommon for agencies, including NGOs, to operate within the region without any structural link to, acknowledgement of, or even knowledge of (in some cases) the key organisation that was established by local people and their leaders to represent their interests and all that they stand for. Although reliance on sporadic and unpredictable external funding has constrained TRAAC's activities, it is worth recalling that its public benevolent status and endorsement as a deductible gift recipient provides a significant opportunity for TRAAC to enhance its external funding and make this more secure. An important task for the future is to identify available opportunities. It should be noted that recent additional resources provided for restructuring and governance support from FaHCSIA are providing for renewed recognition of TRAAC as a legitimate local governance organisation. The primary purpose here is to bolster administrative back-up for the Board's activities.

Social norms

Leaders within the community are keen to strengthen what they see as positive social norms, such as parental responsibility, intolerance of violence, abuse of others and harmful behaviour, respect for all members of the community and a commitment to bettering the lives of all members of the community. In particular, as highlighted in the TRAAC Strategic Plan, they see a need to change people's attitudes towards education to facilitate higher student attendance rates and encourage participation in adult education. It is argued by local leaders that their efforts to champion such aspirations need to be strongly backed up by government action if they are to be taken seriously by the community.

Since the demise of the TRC with its local government role in clan-based decision-making and a legislative basis for attempting to influence individual and group behaviour, many of the communal notions of responsibility and control that were previously articulated through these formal channels have substantially dissipated. This has resulted in disjointed and often unsuccessful attempts by clan leaders to influence family and community social norms with parental control over the behaviour of children being particularly fragile. Now, if individuals breach expected norms the view is that due western process should be applied and that appropriate government authorities should

intervene. The perception is that all too often government agencies abdicate this responsibility by threatening, for example, to impose financial penalties on parents who do not send their children to school and then failing to follow through. At times, community leaders have felt exposed and diminished by this lack of follow-through when they themselves are advocating for such. This has enhanced their feeling of disempowerment and emphasised their continuing lack of a formal role in local governance. The message is, if any progress is to be made at all in shifting behavioural norms, then a pre-requisite is that government agencies and the Thamarrurr leadership should be seen to be on the same page and governance arrangements should be re-organised in such a way as to make this clear.

Economic Development

The TDC has been successful in stimulating economic activity in recent years and the increased program funding that has been directed at Wadeye as a Northern Territory growth town has also contributed to jobs growth as has the renewed investment in the school. Most notable in terms of the scale of economic activity here has been the involvement of TDC in the substantial housing construction and maintenance program that has developed at Wadeye as well as in the associated development and maintenance of internal roads. Aside from contracts under the SIHIP program, TDC has commenced development of a serviced land leasehold housing development at Wadeye South adjacent to the airport. Further opportunities in construction and maintenance will be presented by the ongoing upgrade of the main Wadeye to Daly River road and any improvement to feeder roads to the many rural settlements in the region that might also emerge. An important recent development is the appointment of TDC as the provider for the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP). With coverage including the Thamarrurr region as well as Palumpa and Peppimenarti, this has potential to provide significant income to TDC as well as enable it to mobilise local labour supply in line with and in support of its own emerging economic opportunities. This contract coincides with funding for TRAAC to develop adult education programs and pathways into work for the many adults in the region who have poor literacy and numeracy skills and limited, if any, formal work experience.

Evaluation

One element of TRAAC's umbrella role pertains to the whole process of information gathering, analysis and estimation of population needs as a tool for community planning. It was clear from discussions with various service delivery agencies that no common measure of population needs is currently available. Worse still, variable, even competing, metrics often exist between agencies. Simple matters such as the size of the population are contested, while other vital information such as the number of births each year are known (by some) but not shared. Further data on who is incarcerated, attending school, seeking work, in need of a house etc. are accessible but not consolidated. More poignant questions such as the true extent of child neglect or substance abuse are hinted at but probably not known. There is a pressing need for a collaborative effort to consolidate the many sources of population data that exist in Wadeye and then to reconcile these with the TRAAC population database that was originally created under the auspices of the COAG Trial in 2003 and that has subsequently been maintained by TRAAC through community involvement. As to who might then manage such a resource is an open question but TRAAC should certainly have a key role in this given its local demographic knowledge.

Such a role was planned for by the TRC but this was never enacted due to a lack of resources at the time and then, of course, the demise of the organisation. The idea was to develop a Thamarrurr Region Information and Education Office that would serve as a data repository and information clearinghouse to enhance communication between the people of the region and those servicing and interacting with them. Whether such a plan could be resurrected is for consideration by the TRAAC Board but TRAAC does have a sophisticated privacy policy in place to facilitate such a role. Such a database could be deployed to establish what TRAAC is envisaging as life plans for each individual so that all members of the community are visible to service providers at appropriate stages in the life cycle and their needs are addressed as appropriate. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that as of April 2013 TRAAC estimated that some 80 plus young Thamarrurr adults aged 18–24 were absent from the service delivery net, including that of Centrelink.

An information clearing house role would be consistent with a number of the objectives of TRAAC as stated in its Constitution: to be responsible for the on-going spiritual, cultural, social and political development of the Aboriginal People in the Thamarrurr

Region (clause 3.2); to protect the human rights of the Aboriginal People in the Thamarrurr Region (clause 3.3); for the relief of poverty, misfortune, destitution, disadvantage, distress, dispossession, helplessness and suffering amongst the Aboriginal People in the Thamarrurr Region (clause 3.4); to teach, enhance and ensure the continuity of Aboriginal Law and the cultural and environmental heritage of the Aboriginal People of the Thamarrurr Region, particularly the Thamarrurr Clan Groups, including management, maintenance and public education (clause 3.17); to conduct public programs including education programs, social and community programs and research programs (clause 3.19); to disseminate information relating to education and community programs and to produce, edit, publish, issue, sell, circulate and preserve such papers, periodicals, books, circulars and other literary matters as are conducive to these objects (3.20); and, establish and maintain relationships and close communications with corporations, entities, associations, foundations, institutions, organisations and groups including Federal, State and Local Government instrumentalities, authorities and professionals that may have related interests to the Corporation and utilise their resources and facilities to provide and achieve the objects of the Corporation (clause 3.21).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE THAMARRURR REGION

Population

The Aboriginal population of the Thamarrurr region has been enumerated by a comprehensive house-to-house survey conducted by local people under the auspices of the TRC twice in the last decade (in 2003 and 2005). The latter enumeration has subsequently been updated twice (in 2008 and 2013) using a combination of local knowledge on deaths, births and migration in combination with local administrative data where available (for example from school enrolments, baptisms and employment registers). The initial enumeration in 2003 recorded a usual resident population of 2,034. Based on demographic trends at the time, this was projected to increase in compound fashion to reach 3,833 by 2023. Presently, we are half way along this timeline and the latest assessment of resident numbers (between 2,700 and 2,800) suggests that this projection is more or less on track. It is difficult to be more precise at this stage since, as we have seen, the resources that TRAAC would need for a thorough and rigorous enumeration are not currently available, nor have they been in recent years.

It might be said that this deficiency is overcome by access to five-yearly census data, the most recent being from 2011. However, the accuracy of previous census counts at Wadeye has been drawn into question and even official post-census adjustments to the count are questionable (Taylor 2004, 2007, 2008). In any case, there is a substantial time gap between the actual census and release of any post-census estimates of population (2011-based estimates will not be available until 2014) and even then numbers by five-year age group that are critical for community planning are only made available for large regions and not at the scale of the Thamarrurr region. Other vital ABS data are also not available at this scale, most notably data on births by age of mother that are necessary for calculating age-specific fertility so vital in preparing projections of the population.

Presently, then, the precise size and age composition of the regional population is unknown but it is likely to be in the region of 2,700 persons with just over half of this number less than 18 years of age with a more or less even balance between males and females. Combined with a high degree of regional residential concentration at Wadeye, this profile presents a very different demographic size, structure and distribution to that

prevailing when today's oldest Thamarrurr residents were growing up. It raises significant questions regarding new social formations that are manifest in a degree of anomie among younger cohorts and a blurring of customary lines of authority and leadership (Nganbe and McCormack 2009; Ivory 2009). As it has built up, this profile has overwhelmed community institutions at times and one indicator of this has been the downturn, historically, in school attendance and an expanding cohort of unemployed adults.

In terms of considering the implications of this demographic structure for families and children several features stand out. First, is the continuation of high natural increase that continues to provide a steady flow of population into early childhood and school-age. As noted, precise determination of this rate of increase is hampered by lack of access to data on recent births. Second, there are going to be more family units in the future and as a consequence there will be continued pressure for additional housing to allow for family formation despite recent reductions in residential crowding. Third, there are likely to be more families and households in income stress unless growth in available jobs and work-readiness can keep pace with a projected expansion in working-age adults. Finally, there will be an increase in numbers of aged people leading to a likely increase in the number of carers in families and a growing demand for aged care services.

For the present exercise, the importance of ensuring up-to-date accurate population data is best revealed by considering the best estimates of current population available from the TRAAC Population Database for age ranges that typically form the focus of policy interest. For reasons already mentioned, there is imprecision here but the figures shown in Table 1 are likely to be close to the mark. Thus, there are around 300 infants and this may or may not be an expanding number. From the perspective of educational goals, the focus on securing universal preschool access and the extension of compulsory schooling through to age 17 under "learn or earn" programs, suggests a number of relevant groups, but whichever way this is interpreted there are around 150 pre-schoolers and 800 of compulsory school age (a number of whom will be in work experience on Youth Allowance). The various adult groups of interest in working ages are roughly equal at around 480 and the aged group now numbers around 150.

From TRAAC's point of view, the importance of these figures, approximate as they are at this stage, is that they provide a starting point with agencies for a discussion about the

adequacy of program responses to various needs. They become the essential denominator in benchmarking the extent of population inclusion. However, for that to properly occur there needs to be a formal concordance between the various databases that exist around Wadeye so that there is a common agreement around population size and composition for social planning.

Table 1. Likely size of policy-relevant age-groups: Thamarrurr Region, 2013

Infant (0–3)	312 ^a
Preschool (4–5)	147 ^b
Compulsory school age (6–17)	802
Broad school age (4–17)	890 ^c
Young adult (18–24)	471
Young adult (25–34)	481
Middle adult (35–54)	489
Old adult (>55)	152

a: Figure not known in 2013. The figure shown here is from Taylor and Dermody 2009

b: Figure not known in 2013. The figure shown here is from Taylor and Dermody 2009

c: Figure not known in 2013. The figure shown here is from Taylor and Dermody 2009

Source: TRAAC

Social structure – languages, clans, families and leadership

There are ten languages and dialects associated with land areas contained within the Thamarrurr region (Dixon 2002: xli). The predominant language spoken is Murrinhpatha due to the fact that the town of Wadeye as the predominant residential site is on the land of Murrinhpatha speakers. Within each language group there are several clans with associated estates and delineated boundaries. Local people identify around 25 of these clans each of which is associated with a ceremony group, a language group, family group and totemic system as indicated in Figure 1 which is a remarkable visual representation of these linkages compiled by the combined research over many years of the Wadeye Aboriginal Languages Centre and the OLSH Thamarrurr Catholic School with assistance in graphic presentation from Batchelor College. Clans are therefore the

key structural unit in the region and their senior members provide the basis for collective decision-making and discussion on matters affecting the broader polity within the Thamarrurr structure (Ivory 2009: 78). As in the past, ceremonial activities continue revolve around a tripartite coalition of three groupings (Tharnpa/Wulthirri/Malkarrin, Wangka and Lirrga) and their song genres with each of the individual clans of the region linked to one of them (Ivory 2009: 98). It has been suggested that the evolution of this tripartite reciprocal exchange arrangement may have occurred as a response to a need to accommodate “new Indigenous social subjects” into the environment of the mission (Furlan: 2005: 9).

Fig. 1. Cermonial Groups, Language Groups, Clan Groups and Clan Totems of the Thamarrurr Region



Source: Wadeye Aboriginal Languages Centre, OLSHTCS, Batchelor Institute

Leadership

Ivory (2009: 134) has described how, at an appropriate time, individuals develop and then begin to assume leadership responsibilities to their extended family and the clan. Such acquisition is contingent on several factors including age, demeanour and knowledge. The responsibilities acquired relate in the first instance to people in the clan and relevant estate but over time they may extend as well to people and structures beyond these constructs (such as ceremonial responsibilities to other clans or groups). These responsibilities relate to care for one's family and to land in the early stages of adulthood and they extend to the wider clan, intra-clan relationships and politics at older stages. This traditional system of leadership continues to operate today, although as previously mentioned it is under significant challenge from younger cohorts. It was clearly manifest in the social structure of the TRC which identified a group of middle-aged men and women (Kardu Keke) to work with more senior men (Kardu Pulen Pulen) and women (Kardu Muthingka) in making decisions on behalf of the community and managing relationships with the outside world.

While the leadership structure was formally recognised by government in 2003, the enthusiasm that it instilled in local leaders was seriously challenged and diminished by the 2007 Northern Territory Intervention process that came in over the top of the TRC, an outcome that was exacerbated by the mandatory amalgamated local government structure established by the Northern Territory Government in 2008 that led finally to the elimination of the TRC. Current clan leaders argue that their position and role was not recognised in this new governance model and that this resulted in a lack of morale and an inclination on the part of many of the leaders to "walk away from the table" (interviews with Tobias Nganbe and Leon Melpi 2013). The impact on morale of these changes to local governance is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that only a few years earlier the then Northern Territory Minister for Local Government, John Ah Kit, had addressed a crowded meeting outside the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum in Wadeye to proclaim the TRC in session as a third-tier and equal partner in government. For as long as this arrangement lasted, it provided meaning and substance to the contemporary role of local leadership in their engagements with government and in the processes involved in managing the community. With the loss of this substantive authoritative role, clan leaders have struggled even further to cope with an emerging large cohort of young

people many of whom now have their own agenda and their own inclination to challenge the existing order.

Despite this recent history, the collective desire of the current leadership remains to secure a better future for the people of the region and this is manifest in their continued involvement in community development, albeit with no recurrent budget and no statutory governance role. As we have seen, in anticipation of the demise of TRC, the Thamarrurr clans incorporated as the TDC in order to pursue economic development and then as TRAAC to further their social aims. Establishment of the Da Ngimalmin FRC is an integral expression of this intent and it is significant that one of the key initiatives of Da Ngimalmin has been the weekly Culture Day at the school as this is highly symbolic of the continuing presence of local lines of authority and representation.

Social norms

Leaders within the community are keen to strengthen what they see as positive social norms, such as parental responsibility, intolerance of violence, abuse of others and harmful behaviour, respect for all members of the community and a commitment to bettering the lives of all members of the community. In particular, as highlighted in the TRAAC Strategic Plan, is a need to change people's attitudes towards education to facilitate higher student attendance rates and encourage participation in adult education. It is argued by local leaders that their efforts to champion such aspirations need to be strongly backed up by government action if they are to be taken seriously by the community.

Since the demise of the TRC with its local government role in clan-based decision-making and a legislative basis for attempting to influence individual and group behaviour, many of the communal notions of responsibility and control that were previously articulated through these formal channels have substantially dissipated. This has resulted in disjointed and often unsuccessful attempts by clan leaders to influence family and community social norms with parental control over the behaviour of children being particularly fragile. In fact, a common observation of parents is that children, in many instances, are now in control of them! Viewed historically, contemporary social mores and behaviours appear to have reversed "traditional" lines of authority amidst an ever-encroaching change in the social environment influenced by new age technology, rights, ready access to cash and a breakdown of traditional life as it was. This change, and an

apparent exasperation about what to do about it, is probably the most significant challenge to the people of the Thamarrurr region today.

Although there is widespread recognition and acknowledgement that biological parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children, including in ensuring that they attend school, are well fed and cared for and are free from misdemeanour, this tends to be practiced free of any sanction or ultimate authority. Often, intervention to achieve desired outcomes or caring falls to grandparents or older siblings as parents themselves can be reluctant to restrict a child's freedom. In a traditional setting of highly-regulated clan-based settlement this was no doubt an effective way of fostering young people's self-reliance, but in what is increasingly a polyglot urban setting and an environment of rapid social change it is a method of socialisation that invariably undermines the development of social norms (such as regular school attendance) that form the basis for participation in the wider economy and society.

While family leaders have a clear sense of their position and authority in the Aboriginal world (expressed as Da Ngimalmin), this does not necessarily extend to matters that are seen as lying beyond this world, for example in regards to school attendance, employment participation, or care for property. If individuals breach expected norms here, as in failing to send their children to school, by non-compliance with Centrelink requirements, or by some criminal act, then the view is that due western process should be applied and that appropriate government authorities should intervene. The perception is that all too often government agencies abdicate this responsibility by threatening, for example, to impose financial penalties on parents who do not send their children to school and then failing to follow through. At times, community leaders have felt exposed and diminished by this lack of follow-through when they themselves are advocating for such. This has enhanced their feeling of disempowerment and emphasized their continuing lack of a formal role in local governance. The message is, if any progress is to be made at all in shifting behavioural norms, then a pre-requisite is that government agencies and the Thamarrurr leadership should be seen to be on the same page and governance arrangements should be re-organised in such a way as to make this clear.

Schooling

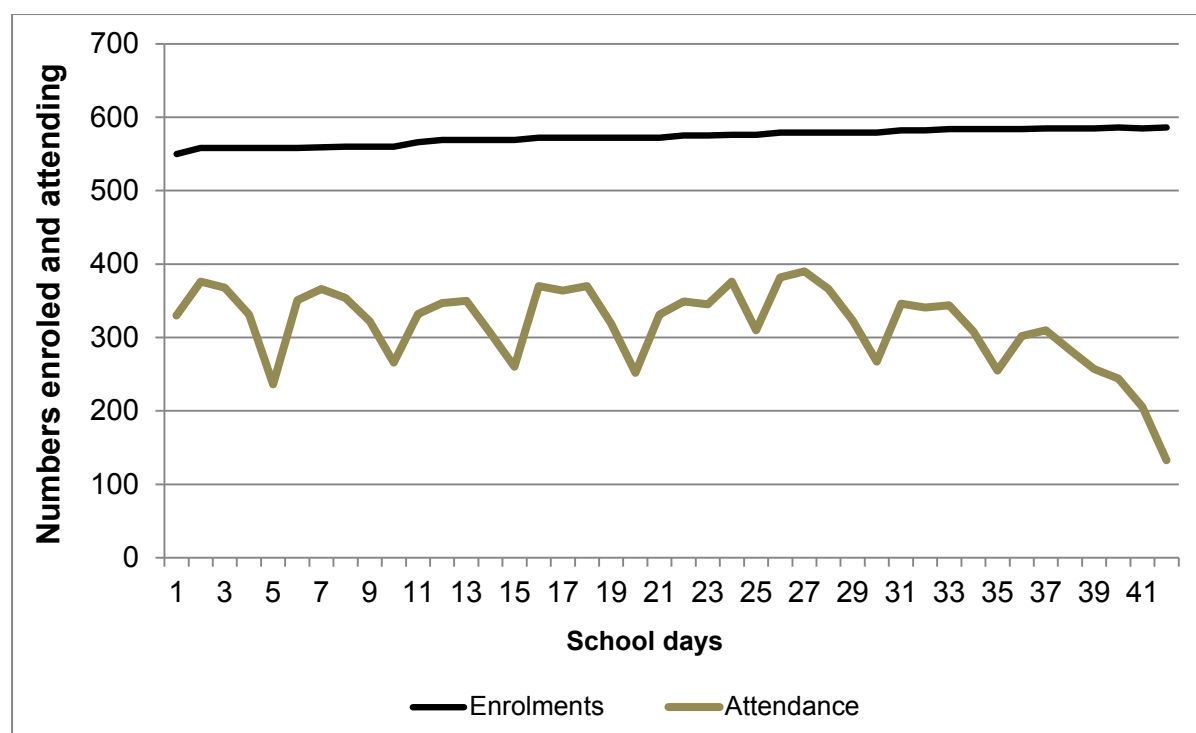
School enrolments at OLSHTCS have increased markedly over the past ten years. In 2003, enrolments averaged just over 400 during the first term of the school year; by 2013 this figure had risen to 572. Even allowing for population growth, this represents a real rise in school engagement. At the same time, the TRAAC database of resident population suggests that there could still be as many as 350 resident children and youth of compulsory school age who are currently not on the school roll. The note of hesitancy here reflects an urgent need to establish formal process for the reconciliation of the different data sets that exist between agencies in regard to the resident population so that more certainty can be provided around those who may be slipping through the education net. This is a priority issue that is developed later as a recommendation.

Whatever the numbers on the school roll, this simply reflects the extent to which students formally pass through the school gates. From an educational outcomes perspective, of greater interest is the extent to which students turn up each day and remain in attendance, leaving aside issues to do with the quality of teaching that they are exposed to if they do attend. This basic connection between attendance and performance has long been recognised. For example, the 1999 Review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory determined that, as a first requirement, children must attend school consistently in order to progress. It found that poor attendance was without doubt the primary cause of poor educational outcomes (Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDET) 1999: 141). “Consistent” here was taken to mean a minimum of 80 per cent of available days (NTDET 1999: 142). Given the fundamental importance of class attendance in the achievement of educational outcomes, it is important that an accurate measure of this is established for each student.

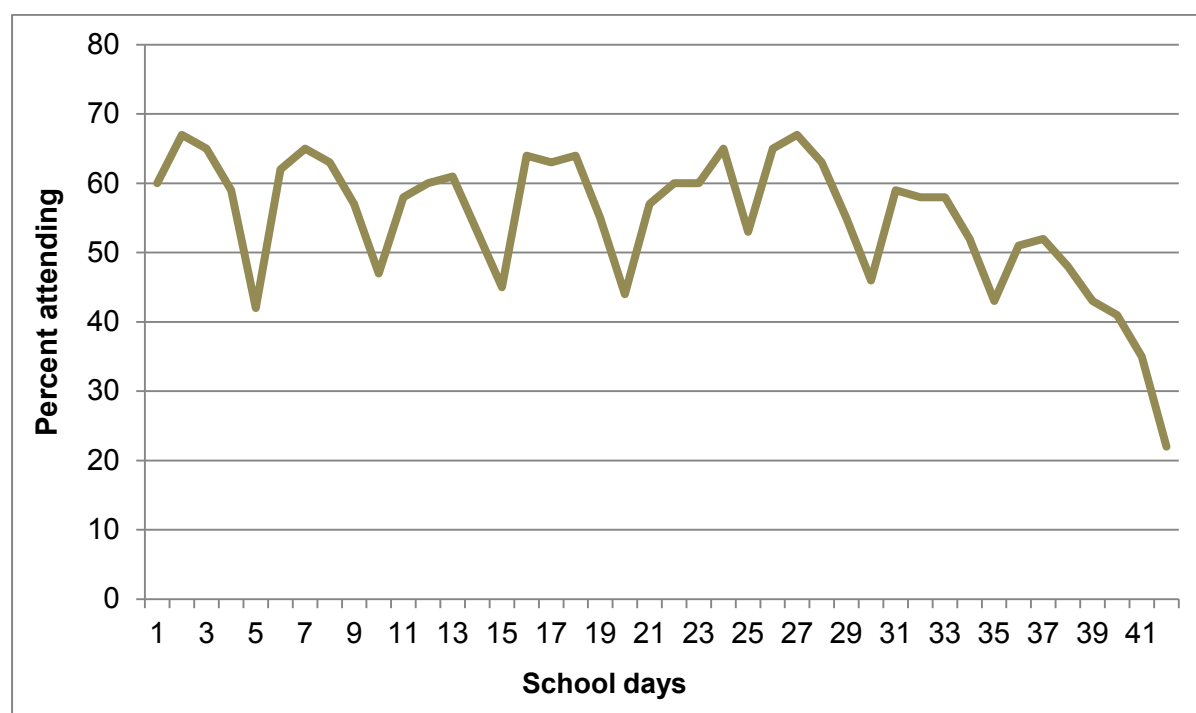
The most relevant and important measure here is the number of days throughout the school year that each individual child on the school roll actually attends class. This is a unit-record, longitudinal, rather than an average, cross-sectional, approach and it reveals far more about the true level of exposure to education. On a further point, it is conventional in education statistics to use the term “attendance”, and this is understandable because for the most part that is what school registers are measuring. However, at Wadeye, it might be more meaningful to talk about rates of “absenteeism”, or, in terms of the Northern Territory Education Act, rates of “truancy” (see Gray and Partington 2003), although we maintain use of the conventional term.

Figure 2 shows the trend in daily enrolment and attendance at OLSHTCS over the 42 school days of Term 1 in 2013. Enrolment commenced at 550 and rose slightly but steadily over the period to reach 586. Over the same period, the number of attendees each day has been a mere subset of those enrolled and a clear pattern of variation in the level of attendance is apparent each week with numbers peaking mid-week and falling before and after weekends. Over the term as a whole, there is also a tailing off in attendance in the final week. Actual rates of attendance represented by these numbers are shown in Figure 3. This indicates that attendance rates rise and fall each week from a low of around 40–50 per cent to a high of between 60–70 per cent. By the end of the term, however, attendance was down to just 20 per cent.

Fig. 2. Daily enrolment and attendance: OLSHTCS Term 1, 2013



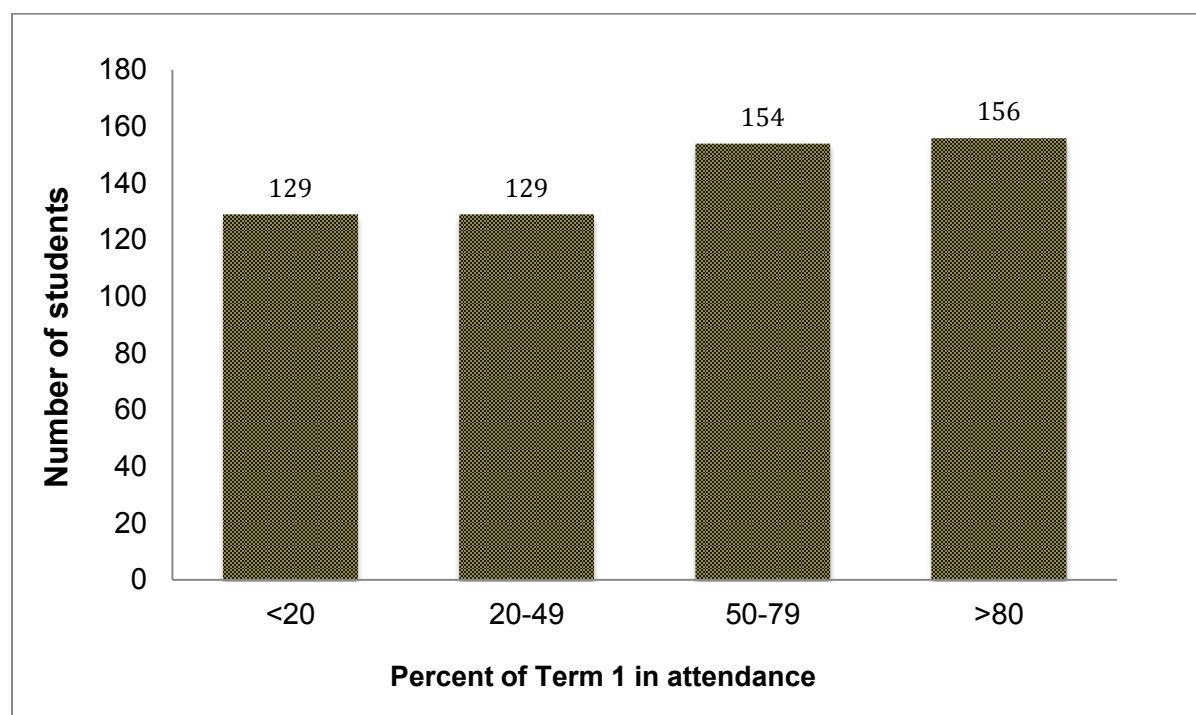
Source OLSHTCS

Fig. 3. Daily attendance rate: OLSHTCS Term 1, 2013

Source: OLSHTCS

A more longitudinal approach to examining individual student attendance was applied in the report to the Australian Human Rights OLSHTCS Working Group in 2009 (Taylor and Dermody 2009). This showed that out of 566 students who were consistently recorded on the OLSHTCS roll for each week of the 2008 school year, only 122 (22 per cent) attended for more than 80 per cent of the time. This cut-off of 80 per cent was based on the opinion of an experienced Northern Territory school principal as reported to the Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory in 1999: “Five days a week is the optimum with the amount of information the kids absorb these days, four days out of five on average is the minimum, three borderline, and anything less than that is childminding, not teaching” (NTDET1999: 142). Similar longitudinal data for the first term of 2013 shows that the number of regular attendees was higher at 156 and, because consistent enrolments were slightly lower at 522, this meant that regular attendees accounted for 30 per cent of enrolment. Of course, this means that those at school for less than the minimum ideal time are still the largest group at around 70 per cent. In fact, if we group students on the roll into categories of attendance we can identify four main groupings as shown in Figure. 4.

Fig. 4. Number of students in attendance for varying proportions of time, OLSHTCS Term 1, 2013.



Note: Term 1 comprised 42 school days

Source: NTCEO, Darwin

This shows that the previously mentioned group of 156 regular attendees is the largest single grouping but behind them is an equally large group of students who are almost regular attendees with average attendance of between two and four days per week. Further disaggregation of this group reveals that just over one quarter of them (44) are close to regular attendance (between 70–80 per cent) and the remainder are in danger of slipping into less than half-time attendance. At a stretch, then, it could be claimed that around 200 students are within scope to receive an adequate education. Those who are not are mostly in categories of less than half-time attendance and here we also identify two major groups of equal size including those with minimal attendance of between one and two days per week and those with virtually no attendance at all averaging less than one day per week.

This variation in degrees of attendance points to a need for different strategies for the different groups to substantially raise the level of engagement of “hard core” and “partial” absentees, to lift near-regular attendees into more sustained attendance and to ensure that the core group of regular attendees remains in place and achieves maximum benefit from their optimal situation. Though still relatively small, some encouragement should be

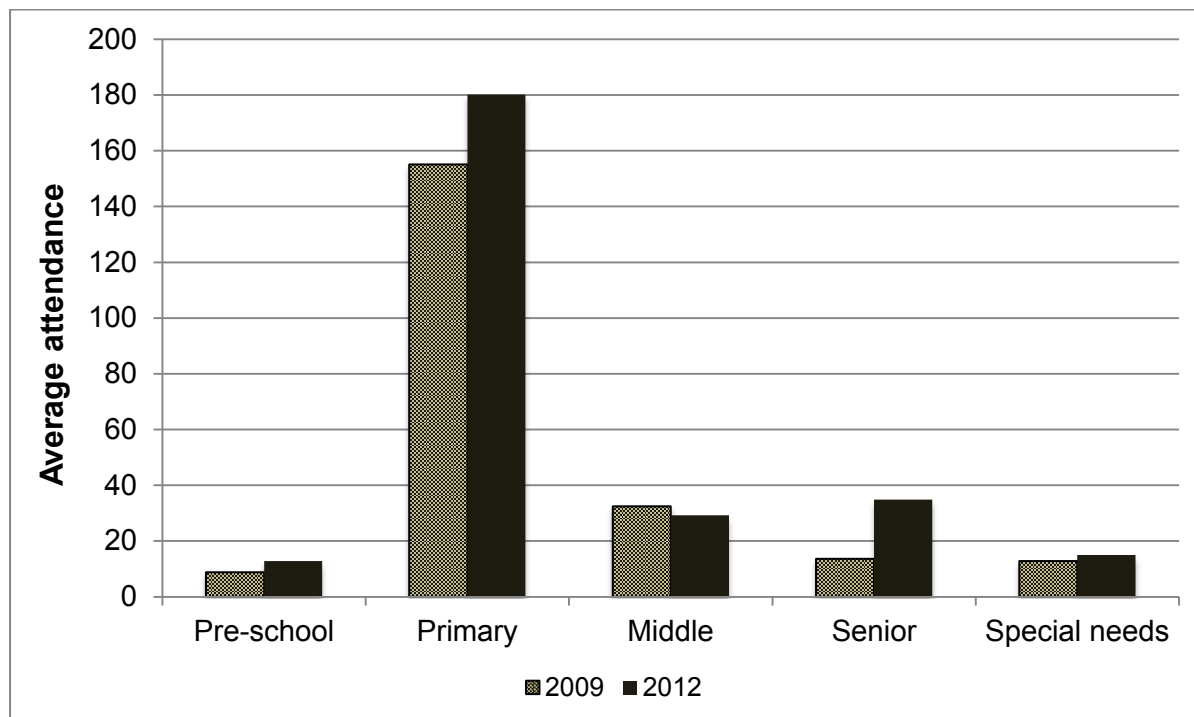
taken from the fact that this latter group of regular attendees appears to have steadily grown in size over the past ten years. Over the school year of 2002, this group numbered as few as 57 (Taylor 2004: 63); by 2008 it had risen to 122 (Taylor 2010: 29) and, as we have seen above, it now stands at 156 with potential to rise closer to 200 if near-regular attendees are further encouraged. As for developing such plans, it is well within scope of the school's student data management system working in tandem with TRAAC and Da Ngimalmin to identify the family circumstances of individuals within these different categories and this should be a first step in the further development of targeted responses such as the verandah education initiative for non-attendees and the reading recovery program for regular attendees. It also flags a useful application of the TRAAC population database, an issue returned to later in the report.

While much thought is given to raising school attendance, a question that is less considered is whether the school is adequately equipped and prepared to deal with full attendance if this were to be achieved. Presently, the school is resourced to deal with an enrolment of 520. If the estimated existing cohort of some 800 children were to turn up to school every day then substantial additional resources would be required (indeed in the school's view, for some items, this is already the case). Thus, there would be a need for around eight extra teachers, for better recreational facilities such as a sports oval irrigated for all year usage and a gymnasium, for teaching specialists and rooms for art and music, also for a food technology teacher and a purpose built early education centre, there is already a need for more ablution blocks as there is for a psychologist and a counsellor. With current cash reserves, there is a need to prioritise internal and external painting of primary school classrooms and provide new furniture and advanced training options for local staff need to be considered even if this involves selected release from teaching for pre-university studies.

In order to get a sense of how school attendance levels have changed in recent years, Figure 5 shows the average numbers attending school across the eight school census periods in 2009 and 2012. The overall annual average attendance was 22 per cent higher in 2012 compared to 2009 (272 versus 223) and this increase in numbers was most evident in the primary and senior sections of the school. Average numbers attending in the senior school more than doubled, albeit from a low base. Of course, these average figures are much smaller than the number of individual students that occupy classrooms throughout each year. One measure of this is provided by the

average annual school enrolment and this also shows an increase of 17 per cent from 485 in 2009 to 569 in 2012.

Fig. 5. Average annual attendance numbers by school level, OLSHTCS 2009 and 2012



Source: NTCEO, Darwin

Housing

One of the more tangible policy impacts at Wadeye, in terms of a stated objective to reduce residential overcrowding, has been the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP). Overcrowding in housing has long been identified by community members and the Indigenous Leadership Group at OLSHTCS as a key factor contributing to low school attendance and to poor outcomes for those who do attend. Overcrowding in housing increases the propensity for poor health, family tensions, noise and interrupted sleep all of which impact on student attendance and performance.

In 2003, the Thamarrurr Regional Housing Authority managed a total of 217 dwellings across the region, the majority of which were at Wadeye. However, a number of these were improvised dwellings and others required major repair or demolishing. This left only 148 habitable homes. Using this number of habitable dwellings an average occupancy

rate of 17 persons per dwelling was calculated, although in some dwellings occupancy levels were much higher (Taylor 2004: 70–71).

Since that time, there has been substantial investment in housing development both in terms of new housing construction and upgrades to existing stock. In April 2013 the total number of habitable dwellings available across the region was 314, an increase in the dwelling stock of 112 per cent. This included 255 dwellings at Wadeye (incorporating the sub-divisions of Nilinh and Manthathpe) and 59 in rural areas, including 6 at Namarluk, 7 at Merrepen, 6 at Nadirri, 5 at Perreder, 3 at Kuy, 16 at Wudapuli, 13 at Nama, 2 at Old Mission and 1 at Fossil Head. It should be noted that some of these dwellings (both in town and in rural locations) are unoccupied from time to time for a variety of reasons, and that this can reduce the actual available stock at any one time. Nonetheless, the effective figure for calculating occupancy rates remains 314. With an overall population in 2013 of around 2,700 this produced an average occupancy of nine persons per dwelling, almost half the rate observed ten years earlier. In order to match the accepted government standard of seven persons per dwelling an additional 82 dwellings would immediately be required.

However, many of the new houses constructed in recent years at Wadeye have been two-bedroom duplexes and so a more accurate indication of change in housing adequacy is provided by a comparison of persons per bedroom. In 2003, total available bedrooms amounted to 484. By 2013, this had increased by 89 per cent to reach 917. On this basis, the crude occupancy rate per bedroom reduced from 4.7 persons in 2003 to 3.0 persons in 2013, a less dramatic reduction in crowding than that based on dwelling numbers but nonetheless a substantial improvement. Of course, this remains higher than accepted standards and overcrowding remains a key concern for TRAAC. One complaint from community leaders is that they explicitly rejected the option of duplex housing during the SIHIP planning phase and yet these are now increasingly common in new developments around town. This is just one of the more visible manifestations and daily reminders of a gap that often exists between processes of consultation and subsequent outcomes on the ground.

Employment and training

The distribution of the adult Indigenous population (those aged over 15 years) in 2013 according to labour force status categories was established by a survey of employers at Wadeye combined with the acquisition of data from Centrelink and Thamarrurr Job Futures and Job Find. Determination of standard labour force categories is made problematic by the blurring of administrative arrangements between welfare and work. For example, an individual may be registered for Newstart on one administrative system at the same time as holding a part-time position with a local employer. In this instance we count them as employed as opposed to unemployed with the caveat that our labour force status figures are estimates only.

In August 2003, out of an Aboriginal adult population of 1,104, a total of 178 individuals were employed (133 of these, or 75 per cent, were in CDEP and just 45 were in “mainstream” jobs), an estimated 449 were unemployed and 477 were not in the labour force. Almost ten years later, in April 2013, out of an Aboriginal adult population of around 1,700, a total of 210 individuals were employed with all of these in mainstream jobs and none in CDEP. In effect, the number in mainstream jobs had increased almost five-fold. There is no doubt that some of this growth reflects the reclassification of people in former CDEP jobs into mainstream positions, but there is also no doubt that new mainstream jobs have been created and that local people have occupied them. This has occurred most notably at the school, the Shire and the TDC. The stand-out example here is the school. In 2003 it employed 38 local Aboriginal staff with 11 of these on CDEP; in 2013 a total of 69 local Aboriginal staff were employed with none on CDEP. On the downside, in some employment sites, such as the Wadeye Health and Family Centre, local employment has actually fallen from 11 local staff in 2003 (including four on CDEP) to just one individual in April 2013, although opportunities for increasing local employment were under review at that time.

Estimating change in the status of those not in work is more difficult because this is subject over time to changes in administrative arrangements and definitions. However it is still the case that the vast majority of Aboriginal adult residents of the Thamarrurr region remain dependent on income support payments from Centrelink either in the form of Newstart or Youth Allowance for those actively seeking work, or as a variety of family, disability and aged pensions for those who are not.

Table 2 shows the number of discrete payments made to Aboriginal customers at Wadeye at the end of March in 2013. It should be recalled that these data refer to payments and not actual individuals and may involve some double counting as an individual can have more than one payment. Leaving this aside it reveals a number of interesting points. First, it confirms the clear focus on mothers as the recipients of family payments which is significant in terms family and household budgeting and the social dynamics that develop around family finances particularly in regard to income management as women we spoke to (and often men) overwhelmingly preferred the greater control over family finances that is provided for by the Basics Card. Second, it shows that disability payments are a substantial component of welfare spending; what is not known is the composition of disability. However, this does raise questions about the possible scale and nature of future disability services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The third observation concerns the size of the unemployed group which, at 430, is very similar to the level estimated ten years ago suggesting that while the unemployment rate is likely to have fallen slightly (due to growth in the working-age base) it remains very high.

Table 2. Number of discrete Centrelink payments for Aboriginal female and male customers: Wadeye Office 2013^a.

Payment	15-34	35+	Total
FEMALE			
Abstudy	<20	<20	<20
Age Pension	<20	28	28
Baby Bonus	<20	<20	<20
Carer Payment	<20	<20	<20
Disability Support Pension	32	69	101
Family Tax Benefit (Part A)	250	139	389
Family Tax Benefit (Part B)	245	123	368
Newstart Allowance	66	58	124
Parenting Payment Partner	120	26	146

Parenting Payment Single	62	<20	73
Youth Allowance (Jobseeker)	49	<20	49
MALES			
Abstudy	<20	<20	<20
Age Pension	<20	<20	<20
Carer Payment	<20	<20	<20
Disability Support Pension	48	63	111
Family Tax Benefit (Part A)	<20	<20	<20
Family Tax Benefit (Part B)	<20	<20	<20
Newstart Allowance	129	86	215
Youth Allowance (Jobseeker)	42	<20	42

a: As at March 29th, 2013

Source: Department of Human Services, Canberra

Training

A major concern and impetus for the Human Rights action mounted by the Thamarrurr community was a realisation that an entire generation of individuals now aged between 20 and 39 years had passed through their years of compulsory schooling with inadequate attention paid by the State to their educational attainment and, therefore, subsequent life chances especially in terms of their capacity for citizen participation and employment. Thus, a key element of the agreement struck between the community and the Commonwealth via DEEWR, was to establish the means for remedial training of this group and the establishment of pathways into work. TRAAC is now in the process of developing these pathways focussed on young adults aged between 18 and 34.

Agreements have been signed with Batchelor Institute, Charles Darwin University and the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office for training provision. Batchelor Institute will be providing a lecturer in Building and Construction to deliver units in Certificate II in Building and Construction. There is also an application to the RJCP Community Development Fund for associated materials and an agreement in place with TDC

Housing and Construction unit about meeting their training needs. At the school, VET courses in automotive trades, building and construction and community services have now commenced at the newly-opened Trade Training Centre located in the school grounds. As for other accredited courses, a Certificate III in music is about to be launched with about 30 participants, a Certificate II in retail is arranged via the Women's Centre for around 20 participants, a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is expected to attract 14 participants, there are three clusters of some 30 community services workers who meet fortnightly from the following workplaces: the Shire, OLSH, Save the Children, Youth in Communities and the Child Care Centre, a Certificate I and II in Indigenous Languages and Knowledge is also ready to go. What remains unclear at this stage is how exactly the TRAAC training programs will articulate with the new RJCP administered by TDC.

An immediate task is to establish an assessment system for the targeted cohort covering:

- individual learning profiles including previous educational background;
- level of English language, literacy, numeracy and learning (employability skills) using the Australian Core Skills Framework;
- personal, family or systemic barriers to engagement for training and for future workplace placement and employment.

TRAAC has commenced further development of the TRAAC population database to incorporate these variables and to establish a system for tracking and monitoring of participation and outcomes. It is also intended to use the database to determine the specific education and training needs of clan groups.

The overall aim of the TRAAC workforce development plan is to design a program of education activities ranging from community development-type activities for reluctant learners to informal learning programs and accredited training activities that meet the needs of personal, clan and business stakeholders. The program is being designed in line with the National Foundation Skills Strategy. The suite of programs includes, but is not restricted to the following:

- A set of community development (Tier 1) activities aimed at introducing young adults to the concepts and opportunities of adult or second chance education

and to formal learning situations. This includes collaboration with Da Ngimalmin in delivering the verandah education project funded via PACE as well as with the Families as First Teachers program operated out of the school;

- Short courses to respond to immediate needs with the outcomes aligned to qualifications and units of competency from the Foundational Skills Training Package and other vocational training where relevant pathways can be identified;
- Accredited training through RTOs including upskilling of existing staff, traineeships and apprenticeships with the NT Department of Business, and additional tutorial and mentor support for workplace-based learning and foundation skills.

Criminal justice

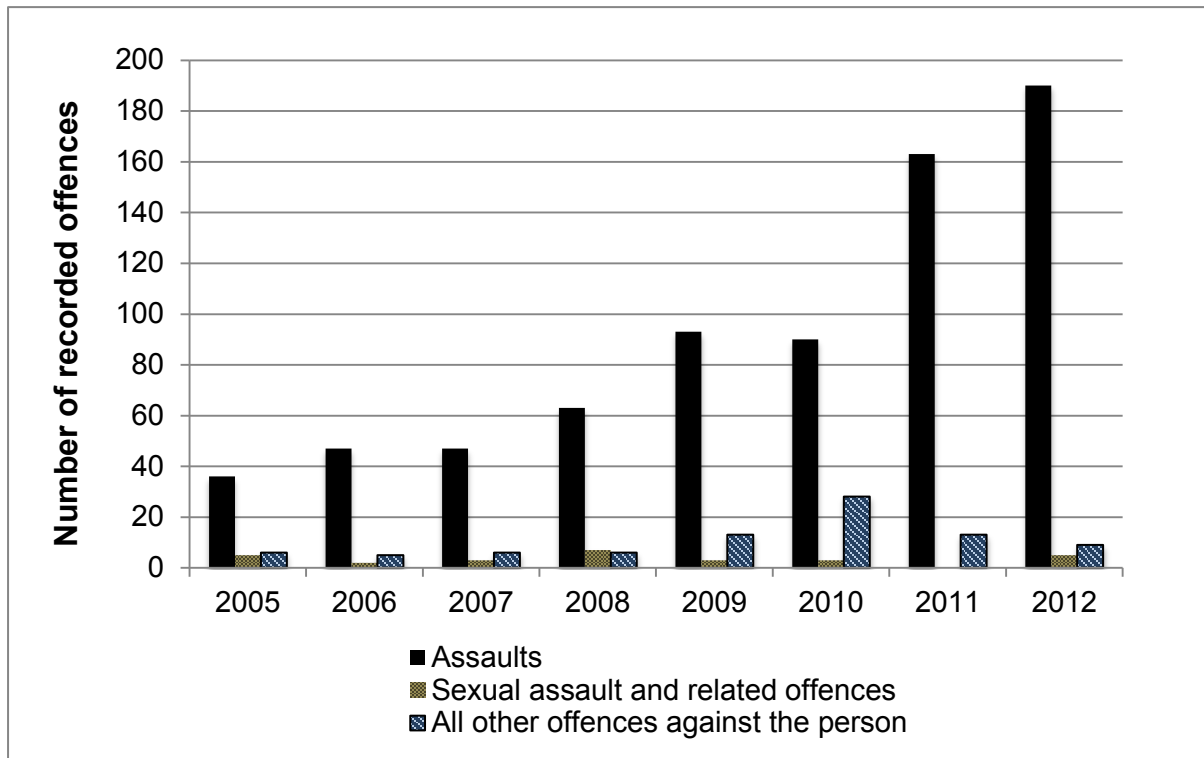
Interaction with police, and subsequently with the courts and various custodial institutions, has become a pervasive element of social and economic life in the Thamarrurr region with major consequences for successful and prolonged social and economic participation. In 2003, Wadeye had the highest per capita juvenile offending rate in the Northern Territory (Taylor 2004). While recidivism in the region is frequently portrayed as a measure of social dysfunction, precisely how dysfunction might be defined and explained in this particular cultural setting is only just beginning to be understood, although it is clear that the issues are more complex and culturally-bound than a simple model of low socioeconomic status leading to social dysfunction would suggest (Ivory 2003, 2008). One line of argument suggests that by deliberately seeking incarceration via their actions, Aboriginal youth are engaging in an alternative rite of passage to manhood (Biles 1983), although Ogilvie and Van Zyl (2001) view detention not as a rite of passage but rather as simply another venue for the construction of identity among marginalised and bored adolescents who are desperate for change to their routine.

Whatever the underlying causes, the fact is that individuals in the region transgress the criminal code all too frequently and this affects their chances of participating successfully in the regional society and economy (to say nothing about disruptions to others who feel

the effect of these transgressions). Figures 6, 7 and 8 present a picture of trends in recorded offences in the region over the period of 2005 to 2012. This is an interesting period because it straddles the change over from the days of the TRC and into the present post-intervention/Stronger Futures period. What we see across virtually all types of recorded offence is a sharp increase in recording after 2007 and especially for certain types of offence. This is a significant break in the time series because it coincides with the increase in policing resources and more rigorous application of the law that was introduced with the NTER legislation in that year. Thus, for offences against the person there has been a marked increase in those recorded for assault (Figure 6). For property offences, there has been an almost five times increase in the recording of property damage offences (Figure 7) and among other offences traffic and public order offences have also substantially increased (Figure 8).

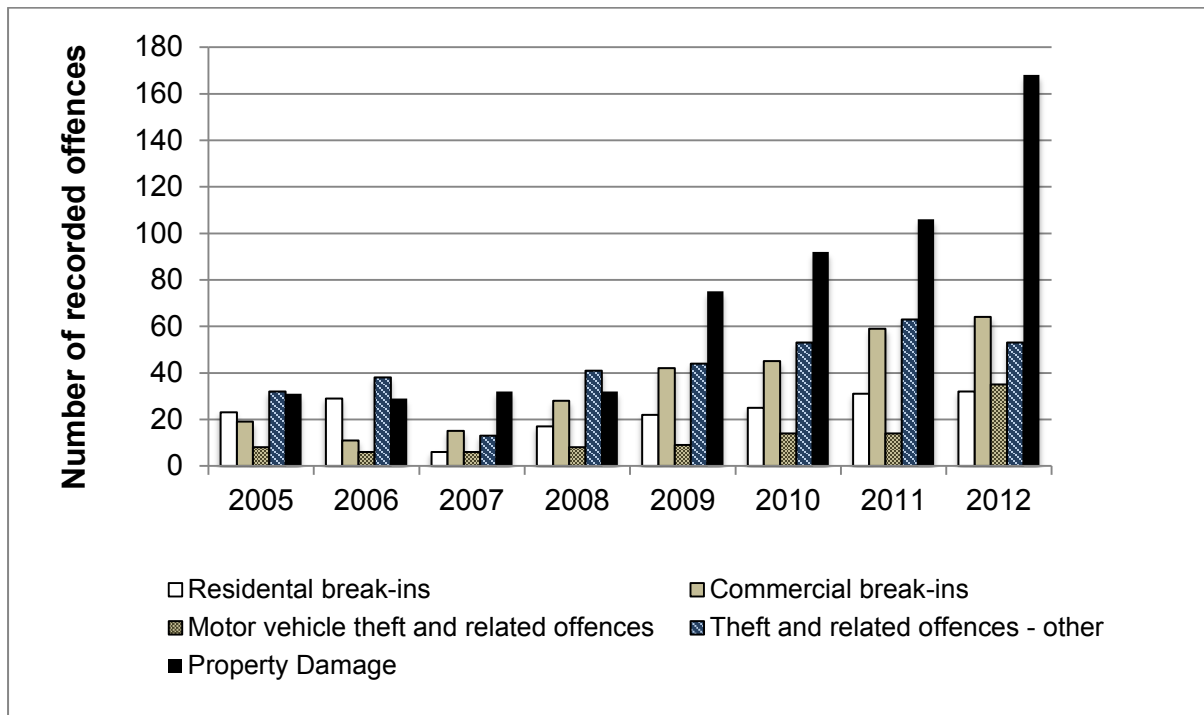
The burning question here is whether these increases represent a real rise in levels of criminal activity or whether they simply reflect the administrative changes mentioned above. Certainly, as offences have to be reported to the police in order for them to be recorded in this way, it does suggest a rise in the confidence and/or ability of members of the public to do this. But whatever the underlying reason, either crime levels have increased, which is a worrying trend given the resources that have been directed towards achieving the opposite outcome, or, the current reporting regime reflects a level of offending that has always been there but hasn't previously been recorded, at least not statistically. What is not known, because data are currently not made available at the Thamarrurr Region level, is how many individual offenders are responsible for these offences and what their characteristics are by age and sex.

Fig. 6. Number of recorded offences against the person: Thamarrurr Region 2005-2012.

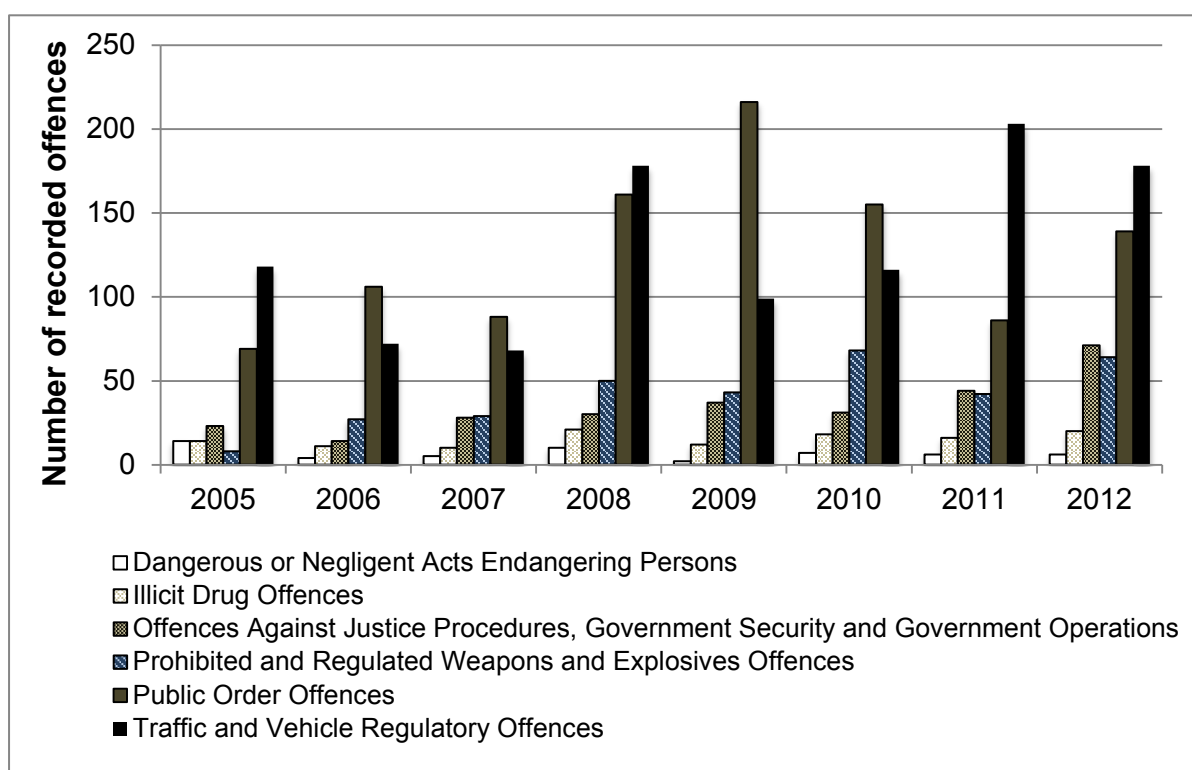


Source: NT Department of Justice

Fig. 7. Number of recorded offences against property: Thamarrurr Region 2005-2012



Source: NT Department of Justice

Fig. 8. Number of recorded other offences: Thamarrurr Region 2005-2012

Note: Based on ANZSOC group description

Source: NT Department of Justice

A further question is the extent to which these offences lead on to conviction and subsequent sentencing. In 2011–12, a total of 102 episodes of custodial detention were recorded by the NT Department of Justice in relation to Aboriginal residents of Wadeye, although this was in respect of 73 distinct persons, all but one of whom were male. This is around twice as many as reported over the period 2002–2007 (Taylor and Dermody 2009) and probably reflects higher levels of apprehension and sentencing associated with the post-intervention policing and judicial changes mentioned above. As at May 2013, NT Correctional Services in Wadeye had 11 adults and 4 youth (under 18) on good behaviour bonds tied to offences usually related to alcohol and other drugs. All of these offenders receive weekly counselling and some are on community work projects.

Change and emerging issues

As indicated by the discussion on levels of crime, measuring social and economic change in the Thamarrurr Region is not always straightforward. Outwardly, there are many signs of apparent positive change at Wadeye, mostly reflected in new

infrastructure although away from the town little has changed in this regard. There is clearly more and better housing, expanded and improved infrastructure at the school, more people are in jobs that pay higher wages, the main Wadeye oval is now grassed and used regularly by sporting teams, there is a new, much larger clinic, more street lighting, an extended sealed road network and a private residential complex owned by the TDC.

At the same time, many aspects of life appear unaltered—as we have seen criminal activity is still prevalent, school attendance remains intermittent for most, overcrowding is still a reality for many households, there is insufficient employment and an (as yet) unmet demand for basic adult remedial education and training, consumer choice remains limited, road access in and out of town and throughout the region to outstations is still sub-standard, living costs are extreme compared to the nearest city (Darwin), and child neglect is evident but whether better or worse is not known. Against all this, a key change that is also observable relates to governance and representation. Many of the former leaders (*Kardu Pulen Pulen* and *Kardu Muthingka*) who modernised the ethos of Thamarrurr and forged a new way of working with government have now passed away. In turn, the cohort of middle managers (*Kardu Keke*) who were recruited to this process are themselves now ageing, some are deceased, whilst some are disillusioned and have disengaged (or as they often say “retired”). While most remain engaged as part of the Board of TRAAC and/or TDC, there is an urgent need to nurture and train the next generation of *Kardu Keke* for a role in community leadership. This process needs to be handled discreetly and at a pace suited to a gradual transition of power.

ABORIGINAL VIEWS IN THE REGION ON RESPONSIBILITIES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

What is a “family”?

In discussions with individuals and focus groups the concept of “family” was explored and guidance was sought on what this means in terms of family composition—who belongs to each family? How many families are there? How do they function economically? Most importantly, who within them has responsibility for children?

Invariably, in providing a simple definition of family, people referred to a nuclear arrangement of a spouse (including de facto) and children. However, this was typically and quickly followed by a depiction of wider and quite extensive family structures and relationships involving layers of responsibility and reciprocity that incorporated ego’s clan and that of a spouse. A typical statement would be, “Rak Kirnmu is my clan (about 65 persons) and my wife’s clan of Yek Diminin (about 300 persons) are my family as well”.

In order to establish an archetypal family arrangement in terms of functional units that have daily responsibility for, and receive support for, the raising of children this question of family composition was examined by way of household interview for one clan alone (Kardu Kura Thipman) whose members are spread across 13 dwellings in Wadeye and one house at Fossil Head that is intermittently occupied. A total of 129 individuals were counted in this clan group with numbers in these dwellings ranging from 3 to 14 at the time of interviewing but subject to variation over time. According to their own classification these 129 individuals were organised socially into 38 “families” typically grouped in separate dwellings as a grandparent(s) unit and a son/daughter-in-law plus grandchildren and/or a daughter/son-in-law plus grandchildren unit (or both or more of such units). Various additional “family” units such as a sister and children or single adult male(s) may also be included.

Two messages were conveyed. First, that child rearing is very much a communal/whole of family activity. Parents, siblings, grandparents and relatives interact and move around the community throughout each day as close-knit units with the youngest children never far from sight. It is striking to the observer from mainstream Australia just how openly affectionate family members are to each other and how, in this setting, the very notion of child neglect seems an aberration from social norms. While young children are afforded

considerable freedom and are frequently indulged, this is very much under the watchful eye of adults (of both sexes) and older siblings. While primary responsibility for children rests with biological parents whether married or (as is often the case) in a de facto relationship, if application of this responsibility breaks down for whatever reason (parental absence, incapacity, disinterest etc.), other household members (notably maternal grandparents) will step in though with less authority/control. Second, that these individual families operate as separate budget units (not least because that is how Centrelink payments are derived and disbursed) but a good deal of cross-subsidisation goes on in relation to the acquisition and use of household resources such as food, power and vehicles and this can often blur the boundaries between who is responsible for what.

To obtain some sense of the picture overall in the Thamarrurr region in terms of who cares for children, information was obtained from Centrelink on the number of primary carers in the community according to the number of dependents as at April 2013. Unfortunately, due to data suppression, it was not possible to obtain full details of this distribution although it appears that the majority of primary carers had three or less dependents with an average of two. It is also estimated that there were a total of 425 primary carers responsible for 912 dependent children mostly infants and school age as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Number, age and sex of children dependent on primary carers: Thamarrurr Region, April 2013

Age group	Female	Male	Total
0-4	158	162	320
5-9	140	162	302
10-14	117	123	240
15-19	24	26	50
Total	439	473	912

Source: Centrelink, Canberra

It is interesting to benchmark these data against numbers in the TRAAC Population Database. As noted, TRAAC no longer has resources to conduct an enumeration but the last time it did so (in 2005) a total of 378 infants aged 0–4 years were counted which is notably higher than the 320 recorded in current Centrelink records. Likewise, in the 5–9 and 10–14 age group, TRAAC identifies 349 and 353 respectively—considerably more than Centrelink, especially in the teenage group. Not surprisingly, beyond age 15, respective numbers really do diverge as individuals begin to move away from parental dependency into work or Youth Allowance or some other benefit. While these data sets are not strictly comparable and exact concordance is not expected, there seems to be sufficient difference to raise questions about Centrelink coverage, or at least to consider reasons as to why such discrepancies might occur in case they are revealing.

One aspect of the scope of responsibility for children that these data do not represent concerns those situations where child neglect is apparent. Indications of such situations are determined by a process of confidential data-sharing between agencies such as the clinic, the school, the Northern Territory Office of Children and Families and relevant NGOs (currently Save the Children). While precise data were difficult to obtain in this area, one measure of the extent of need is indicated by the fact that Intensive family Support services following statutory investigation were provided to 12 families involving 32 children by the Save the Children Fund as at April 2013. Cases of substantiated neglect established by the Northern Territory Office of Children and Families arise from the mandatory reporting processes of the clinic using failure to thrive indicators and any other clinical signs, the police, school and social workers.

Responsibility for who?

In the social system at Wadeye, it is parents who bear primary responsibility for children. Up to about age 11, this includes ensuring that children attend school. Given that many children of primary age do not attend school on a regular basis we conducted a focus group session with the school Indigenous Leadership Group in order to tease out whether this meant that traditional expectations of responsibility were changing. This group of around 40 staff was established at the school as a consultative and support group for senior management in recognition of the large number of Aboriginal staff and their growing importance in the life of the school. It is mostly comprised of women of all ages many of whom have been dealing with the issue of non-school attendance and its

underlying causes for many years. Aside from contingent disruptions to home life due to domestic violence, late night discos, card games, and crowding, the issues that people were most keen to convey were that of a tussle between children and parents for ascendancy, in which the former are increasingly dominant, as well as an emerging tendency for grandparents (especially grandmothers) to assume the role of “looking after” grandchildren in cases where (mostly) young parents shrug responsibility out of physical incapacity because of a dependence on illicit substances or participation in gang activities. An interesting observation in regard to this was that despite their preparedness to forgo responsibilities, these parents inevitably insist on retaining their parenting allowances. In such circumstances, it was felt that by the local leadership that Centrelink should do more to monitor and ensure the responsible use of parenting payments although, to be fair, it should be indicated that this situation with younger parents was considered the exception rather than the rule.

In addition to parental responsibility, there is also a view of more community-wide responsibilities that are highly structured within the social system. This finds expression in the TRAAC Mission Statement as follows:

Thamarrurr is responsible for the way of life of our people. We hold the spirit of our people and express our way of life. The spirit is expressed through family life and through our country. Family life is our relationship to kin and country. Responsibility for good family life has always belonged with the Clan Leaders. Thamarrurr, through *Kardu-Pulen Pulen* (older men) and *Kardu Muthingka* (older women), provides direction and make decisions for this way of life. The decisions are made by the *Kardu Pulen Pulen* and *Kardu Muthingka* with the support and help of the *Kardu Keke* (the middle-aged men and women) for the benefit of our people. This is our way of doing business. It is not a new way of doing business. The people of the Thamarrurr Region have been doing business this way for thousands of years (KPMG, 2011).

Interviews with community members and clan leaders supported this idea of layers of responsibility linked to social and political life-stage categories. These produce what might be described as “higher” and “lower” levels of adult responsibility. For example, up to their recognition as *Kardu Keke*, males are principally responsible for their own

immediate family. Beyond this stage, as *Kardu Pule* and beyond, they become much more responsible for additional matters including clan obligations and political affairs such as the organisation and running of ceremonies and decision-making in broader community-wide arenas and the resolution of major disputes.

Thus, while in mainstream society, use of chronological age provides us with life-stage categories such as infants, school-age, school-to-work transition age, prime working age, and old or retirement age as the basis for much social and economic policy, these stages in Wadeye can be viewed quite differently. As pointed out, age is just as likely to be a social category constructed around age grades, age sets and generation sets whose cultural meaning reflects social status and responsibilities and indicates whether a person is married or unmarried, initiated or uninitiated, or has a particular degree of prestige and so on. In such a schema, purely social, ritualised factors are prominent in determining relationships between individuals as well as roles and expectations.

As it turns out, a lot of the work on Aboriginal categories of social age in Australia has been conducted with the people of the Thamarrurr region, first by Stanner (1936) and Falkenberg (1962) and most recently by Ivory (2009). While systems reported in the past have clearly changed, the broad age category progression and its underlying social significance have remained. Thus, in the age range 11–18 in which Western education expects attendance at school and then training to progress from primary through secondary education and on to work is also the one in which boys progress in stages to manhood with potentially quite different priorities and expectations. Similarly, many young women will already have assumed motherhood and possibly marriage. Precisely how this age grade system currently operates to impact on social outcomes has been difficult to fully establish in the time available. However it would be a mistake to assume that chronological age alone provides a sufficient framework for an understanding of social roles and expectations.

ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMPARED TO MAINSTREAM PERSPECTIVES

There is inevitable imprecision in any attempt to compare Aboriginal perspectives on children and families with so-called “mainstream” perspectives given the richly-textured intercultural world in which contemporary Aboriginal families and children exist (Merlan 1998) to say nothing about the diversity that exists in the rest of society as well. It is also the case that Aboriginal childhoods have received little attention in cross-cultural studies of child development and so, according to the most recent attempt to consider this issue, there is astonishingly little research on how contemporary Indigenous children and adolescents experience life and shape their social world (Eickelkamp 2011: 1–2). As a general observation this is true, although some attempt has been made to understand this at Wadeye (Ivory 2009: 289–327).

That there are distinct Aboriginal practices of child socialisation and that Aboriginal youth, in particular, increasingly seek to make decisions for themselves free of the strictures imposed by elders, is readily observable and there is renewed interest in characterising and theorising these developments (Sutton 2001; Nganbe and McCormack 2009; Robinson 2008; Eickelkamp 2011). One question to arise is whether increased exposure to the outside world and the contemporary thrust of policy towards more individualism has led to change in what young people regard as their important social contexts and whether this impacts on intergenerational relations. As Eickelkamp (2011: 3) points out, dominant topics in the older ethnographic literature relating to young Aboriginal people have tended to focus on initiation and family and life cycle events (Hamilton 1981) while more recently the interest has been on broad social pathologies (Brady 1992; Sutton 2001; Robinson 2008). In all of this there has been little child-centred study, rather the tendency has been to determine the views and behaviours of adults vis-à-vis children and youth (Eickelkamp 2011: 3).

This last point is also largely true of Wadeye although Ivory’s (2009) work on young male leadership and the evolution of youth groups at Wadeye provides more insight than for most places, as does McCormack (2006) and Nganbe and McCormack’s (2009) work on changing gender roles and intergenerational relations. What these show, and what is being reported from elsewhere in remote Australia (Brooks 2011; Tonkinson 2011), is that children and youth at Wadeye remain embedded in a high degree of social organisation that originates from within the local society but increasingly operates across

the generations rather than between them as was more the practice when many of the now older generation were themselves growing up (McCormack 2006). Under the mission regime, a more hierarchical structure of parental authority and clan authority over children was underwritten by the powers of the Mission Superintendent in a situation where the ratio of children to adults was relatively low. Today, this demographic pattern is reversed in a situation where expectations of conformity are imposed by an increasing array of western institutions and yet parents indicate that they have little or no residual influence over their children's decisions and activities.

Clearly, judging by continuing problems of school attendance, formal education has become a low priority in the minds of children and is clearly not enforced by many parents. Whether this is a conscious choice over preferred use of time or whether schooling simply no longer registers for many children (and increasingly for many parents) as a necessary part of socialisation (as it does in the mainstream) is a moot point. To the extent that formal education has been allowed over time to become a trade-off with other forms of social interaction and socialisation, then part of the problem here is likely to be an example of Noel Pearson's use of the term, the "soft bigotry of low expectations" on the part of both parents and the state. It is this low expectation that Da Ngimalmin is aiming to overcome by its persistent message to clan leaders and families about the importance of schooling and the need to build individual confidence in engaging with the wider world. The funding that Da Ngimalmin currently receives from DEEWR is for the continuation of its present activities. In terms of raising expectations around schooling these are focussed mainly on the school Culture Day which has been successful in attracting parents onto the school campus and, more recently, the co-delivery with TRAAC of the verandah education model. Da Ngimalmin, in conjunction with TRAAC and Batchelor College, also recently organised a graduation ceremony for adult education participants. Another role is in maintaining contact and support for Wadeye students (and their parents) who are studying elsewhere such as in Daly River, Darwin and Victoria. Da Ngimalmin also hopes to work more closely with the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum in showcasing Wadeye culture and engendering a wider sense of cultural pride as the basis for parental engagement.

Key points of difference observed between local Aboriginal perspectives at Wadeye on children and families and those pertaining in the wider Australian society relate to the practice and purpose of child socialisation and the manner and degree of

intergenerational transfer of social norms and expectations. While the daily interaction and ritual recognition of family and clan remains of paramount interest to both old and young generations, substantial gaps in social expectation have emerged in recent years that are of vital interest to the present exercise concerning school attendance since it places a focus on the required role of parents, families and local officials if ambitions for schooling are to be realised. Peter Sutton (2001: 141) has summarised this issue well:

It is not rational for people to support traditional child-rearing practices, and thus their emphasis on the autonomy of the young child, while both officials and community members turn a blind eye to what are sometimes massive school absenteeism rates, and [then] continue with rhetoric about the important role of education in the liberation of Indigenous communities from dependency. This is placing impossible and unfair burdens on a child's capacity for biculturalism...and is setting children up for failure.

What Sutton is highlighting here is a tension, indeed contradiction, between the high degree of autonomy for decision-making and behaviour that is available to children at Wadeye from an early age and the demands from schooling and much else in the workings of mainstream institutions for conformity, orderliness, and predictability in daily life. Recognising this, there have been major attempts in recent years by the older leadership in the region to stimulate and guide discussion in regard to parental responsibility and educational futures for children and the whole means to locally-meaningful livelihoods under the notion of "Thamarrurr". As Nganbe and McCormack (2009) outline, this is not about cultural revivalism, it has a hard practical edge and is as much about cultural survival—in their words, it is a case of "those who are the mostly bi-cultural, who have acquired a work ethic and who understand the value of education, that is now the generation charged with resurrecting from the mire the generations that are the least bi-cultural and for whom training and work are unknown forces and who have no concept of education, in some cases from both an Aboriginal and Western-culture perspective" (Nganbe and McCormack 2009).

While parents and their children are the foundational social units of Thamarrurr society, unlike the situation more generally across Australia they are also enmeshed in an extended family/clan structure. This structure is bound together by common allegiances (through the male partner) to a specific area of land or "country" and sacred sites. There

is a particular language, cluster of songs, ceremonial ritual and dance that is “held” by the group and this provides definition to themselves and to others about who they are and how they live their lives. Within this arrangement reciprocity is expected behaviour—if a family is hungry or needs cash or physical support, they can automatically turn to other individuals or families within the clan and vice versa. While this operates as a long-standing social and economic support system, in the context of contemporary social relations in the region that are founded on widespread scarcity in a cash economy it can place considerable stress and be a source of ongoing tension both within and between families.

Wadeye society also differs from the mainstream in terms of who “grows up” a child. As we have seen, while parents are responsible for this up to about the age of eleven, often grandmothers are inevitably involved and uncles, especially with boys, also play a role. It should also be noted that older siblings, both male and female, are often also heavily involved in caring for younger siblings (indeed, this burden of sibling responsibility is offered as one reason why some children fail to attend school). From this point a child, male or female, usually begins a process of initiation and indoctrination into more religious and moralistic aspects of the society. Uncles, aunts and grandparents are increasingly involved and responsible for this process the purpose of which is to teach young people how to conform and act within Wadeye’s societal constraints. Increasingly however, many of these methods are under challenge as young people make their own lifestyle decisions often influenced by outside sources. Some young people have turned away from the ceremonial and procedural system and created their own forms of life progression and support through gang affiliation (Ivory 2009).

Despite the differences in upbringing styles between Wadeye and the mainstream, informants also highlighted commonalities. Wadeye people overwhelmingly want their children and families to be safe. They want their children to go to school (although many were unable to articulate precisely why and in practice do not follow through on such a philosophy). The main reasons offered were for young people to progress through life and have opportunities and, importantly, a job. They want them to “see the world” and interact and learn about other societies. However a regular occurrence among youth who have been sent away for schooling is for them to grow disillusioned with the process and then to be fully supported by their parents in leaving the school and returning to a life of no schooling at all at Wadeye. On the safety issue, the following comment from

one senior woman was commonplace, “I want my kids to grow up in a safe place where there is no fighting. I want them to be able to go to school and not have to worry about them being harmed”. This concern for safety overrides any desire for schooling and if there is any notion of insecurity at school then the child will be kept at home. This insecurity can emanate anywhere on a range from what is commonly referred to as bullying to the communal violence that erupts from time to time associated with feuding gangs. Accordingly, the school has implemented policies and practices aimed at discouraging bullying.

In order to provide some coordinates around these general observations regarding children and families and links to education, the 300 plus individuals who were questioned in various ways were responding to a common set of questions as listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of responses to questions on children and families

QUESTIONS	Main responses	Secondary responses	Not sure/don't know
Who is responsible for making decisions in your house?	72% said father and mother	18% said Aunts/ Uncles/ Grandparents/ or others (such as foster parents)	10%
What sort of things do they have to be responsible for?	75% said children	10% said “looking after house”, “cleaning yard” and other.	15%
Is school important?	85% said Yes	9% said No	6%
What sort of things should parents do to help with their children's education?	75% said “getting them to school”, “getting them breakfast”	10% of responses were “helping them to understand”, homework, or similar	15%
What sort of things might be made better to encourage kids to attend school?	52% of responses were similar to “providing breakfast”, uniforms	41% said that bullying, teasing, and physical threats had to be curtailed	7%
Should families be made to send kids to school?	75% said Yes	12% said No	13%

Why do you think some kids don't go to school?	71% said parents don't care; "kids do what they want"; "parents have no control"	25% said bullying, teasing, and physical and verbal threats made some children and parents are afraid of repercussion	4%
Do you think the verandah education idea is a good one or not?	22% thought it is a good idea	61% had never heard of it	17%
Do you think culture is important?	93% said Yes	7% were not sure	0%
Who is responsible for teaching culture?	85% said "Family"	13% said "Elders" or "Family and elders"	2%
Can culture and school work together?	89% said Yes		11%
Do you think the Thursday Culture Day at the School is good or no good?	62% said Yes	36% were not sure what it is.	2%
Do you talk to the teachers about your child?	82% said No	15% said Yes	3%
Do you know what Da Ngimalmin Family Responsibility Centre is?	77% were not sure	23% of people said Yes	0%
If yes, is it important?	71% said that it helps them with school problems; issues with children	21% said because they organise Culture Day	8%

Source: Community consultations

Fairly clear messages emerge from these responses. First of all, is the idea that it is parents who are responsible for decision-making in the household and that their primary responsibility is for their children. Also, they overwhelmingly view school attendance as important and consider that parents should be made to send their kids to school. Against this, however, is the equally large response that many parents do not fulfil these

obligations and, in any case, they have no control over the decisions of their children. The fact that a majority of respondents were not familiar with the Da Ngimalmin FRC is not surprising. A clue here is that most did know about the school Culture Day which is a key initiative of Da Ngimalmin. If the question had been about the activities of the FRC rather than its name it is likely that a more positive response would have been forthcoming. The fact is, to most people, Da Ngimalmin is a concept rather than an institution, especially when it is labelled, "FRC". Having said that, a reasonably large share of respondents were not even aware of the Culture Day and a majority were unaware as well of Da Ngimalmin's other main program, verandah education which is less surprising given its highly concentrated focus in just one neighbourhood at the time of asking. Interestingly, on the one hand most respondents felt that Da Ngimalmin helped them with school problems and issues relating to their children; on the other hand, very few parents spoke to teachers about their children. In response to this, during the course of this project, Da Ngimalmin in conjunction with the school commenced a parent-teacher interview program and while attendance was limited it is too early to gauge the success or otherwise of this initiative.

One aspect of family/household decision-making that has been changing over time and that has been given impetus by income management is a shift away from men towards women as the primary focus of economic management within the group (McCormack 2006). Respondents reported that the Basics Card has provided mothers with much more ability than in the past to control expenditure and to ensure that it is used for household items such as food and clothing. As a consequence, there was a sense that less household income is now spent on alcohol and illicit substances because of income management although we have no data to back up this claim. While people also reported that they now shop more frequently at the store, once again we have no data to indicate whether purchasing patterns and volumes have altered.

While more household control now exists over family payments, the Thamarrurr leadership was keen to point out that substantial cash still flows through the community but in ways that are far from equitable or beneficial. Particular mention was made of the proliferation of card games involving winnings and a *Tong* (levy) that can amount to thousands of dollars. Likewise, gunja dealers can accumulate similar amounts within a matter of hours and baby bonus monies have contributed to conspicuous expenditures notably on saloon cars purchased in Darwin.

The Vision that Aboriginal People hold for the Future for their Children and Families

Aboriginal people of the Thamarrurr region have been publicly expressing a vision of the future for their children for some time now. For example, a key objective of the Thamarrurr COAG trial between 2003 and 2007 as articulated by the elected members of the TRC, was captured by the slogan, “Give Every Kid a Chance”. One understanding of this phrase, that was manifest in the establishment of the COAG trial working groups on Education, Youth and Families, was the stated aspiration of local leadership that Wadeye kids should have as good an access to education as any other kids in Australia and that this would be essential preparation for their eventual transition into paid employment and the achievement of control over their own destiny. It was a means to enabling the children of Wadeye to confidently engage with and understand the wider world from a position of cultural strength and continuity. A clear sense of this aspiration is evident from statements made by the now head of the Da Ngimalmin FRC at the opening of the OLSHTCS secondary complex in 2007:

We seek to provide our young people with the best western education in this day and age.....to have the services provided for education that our people deserve...to develop personality, talents and abilities to the fullest possible extent. [To] improve employment prospects and prospects for advancement in Australian society. This includes the needs of disabled children. Education is the key that opens the doors of opportunity.... [our] vision is to produce strongly educated young men and women to become leaders in their community...to look people straight in the eye and say what clan they are from, to make the right decisions as leaders of their own people. To understand and appreciate how the wider community operates and how to live in this great land called Australia. I want to see them after they have worked hard and saved their money....a time to say these youth can and must learn, a time where they must be pushed forward to their full potential, a time where our community must come together and take full responsibility and control of our children's education. Give our youth the opportunity to see the world beyond what they live in today. Through this education we want to open their minds and give them the knowledge to explore life outside Wadeye and the Thamarrurr region (Nganbe 2007).

This vision of engagement with the wider world from a position of cultural strength is embedded in the concept of *Da Ngimalmin*, a Murrinhpatha word for “roots of a tree” that is understood by the various clans of the Thamarrurr region to convey their belief that collective good arises from individual family integrity—literally a bottom-up view of well-being. This term was passed to current generations by Theodora Narndu, a senior woman of the Kardu Yek Diminin and is now adopted by the Da Ngimalmin FRC.

This mix of a desire to retain culture while engaging with a wider world and economy was common in discussions with individuals who were often quite explicit about their aspirations for the future. For example, an aspirant clan leader said his hope was “to take my people (clan) back to our country at Nama. We have houses there and a school but no transport. I want them to learn skills like I learnt as a plumber—go away to other places, meet white people, make new friends”. And this from a young teenage male back at home on a school break, “I go to school down south and I’ve learnt about whitefella ways. I learn at my job and I have a chance to play in a good football competition”. From an elderly clan leader, “I want these young people to learn both ways—black and white. How to hunt and how to fix motor car. But what’s going to happen to some of these young mob—they know nothing!”

It is also true, however, that when many parents were asked what they wanted their children to be when they grew up and what future they wanted for them, they had difficulty even comprehending the question let alone providing a coherent answer. The issues of interest to them were much more focussed on the minutiae of the present. While this was a common response among many of the younger parents whose children tended to be chronic absentees from school, it was surprising to find that others not in this category who were asked the same questions in parent-teacher interviews at the school organised by Da Ngimalmin responded in similar fashion. Where potential future occupations were flagged for children these tended to be restricted to opportunities within Wadeye itself such as driving the Shire garbage truck, working in the mechanical workshop or with Thamarrurr Rangers. No respondents envisaged a life beyond the region.

Table 5. Distribution of responses on questions about the future

QUESTIONS	Main responses	Secondary responses	Not sure/don't know
What things are important in life to you?	86% said Family and/or children	10% said having a job; having money	4%
What do you want to achieve yourself?	72% were not sure	15% said having a job; playing football	13% did not respond
What do you want for your family?	76% said that they wanted to have a good life; be safe; have money	13% said that they would like to have their family together; live on their "country"	11%
Can government or NGO's help? If so how?	73% said that governments "should help people"; make kids go to school; provide better housing	14 % said that Aboriginal people have to be stronger; work with government	13%

Source: Community consultations

The distribution of responses to questions about the future are shown in Table 5. Of note is the fact that jobs and money fall way behind concerns around family and children as the most important individual aspirations for the future. This is reflected in the fact that the vast majority of respondents had no sense of what they wanted to achieve for themselves with only 15 per cent indicating a job, although most saw money for families as important. It is interesting that living "on country" and "having family together" raised a mention as one of the priorities for the TRAAC Board is to ensure that real options exist for rural living on country as we shall see later. As for whether government's can help, the notion that we have already tabled that government should ensure that kids attend school is raised again and relatively few people placed the onus for the future on themselves.

THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT AND NGO INITIATIVES: WHAT IS WORKING, WHAT IS NOT, AND HOW IT CAN BE IMPROVED?

The range of government activities and commitments that are focused on social and economic development in the Thamarrurr Region are outlined in summary format in the Wadeye Local Implementation Plan (LIP) signed off by the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government, the Victoria Daly Shire and Thamarrurr Local Reference Group representatives in 2010. In this section we consider relevant programs and activities that were also identified in the Thamarrurr LIP and provide some assessment of progress where possible. Particular attention is afforded those parts of the LIP that have a direct bearing on families and children.

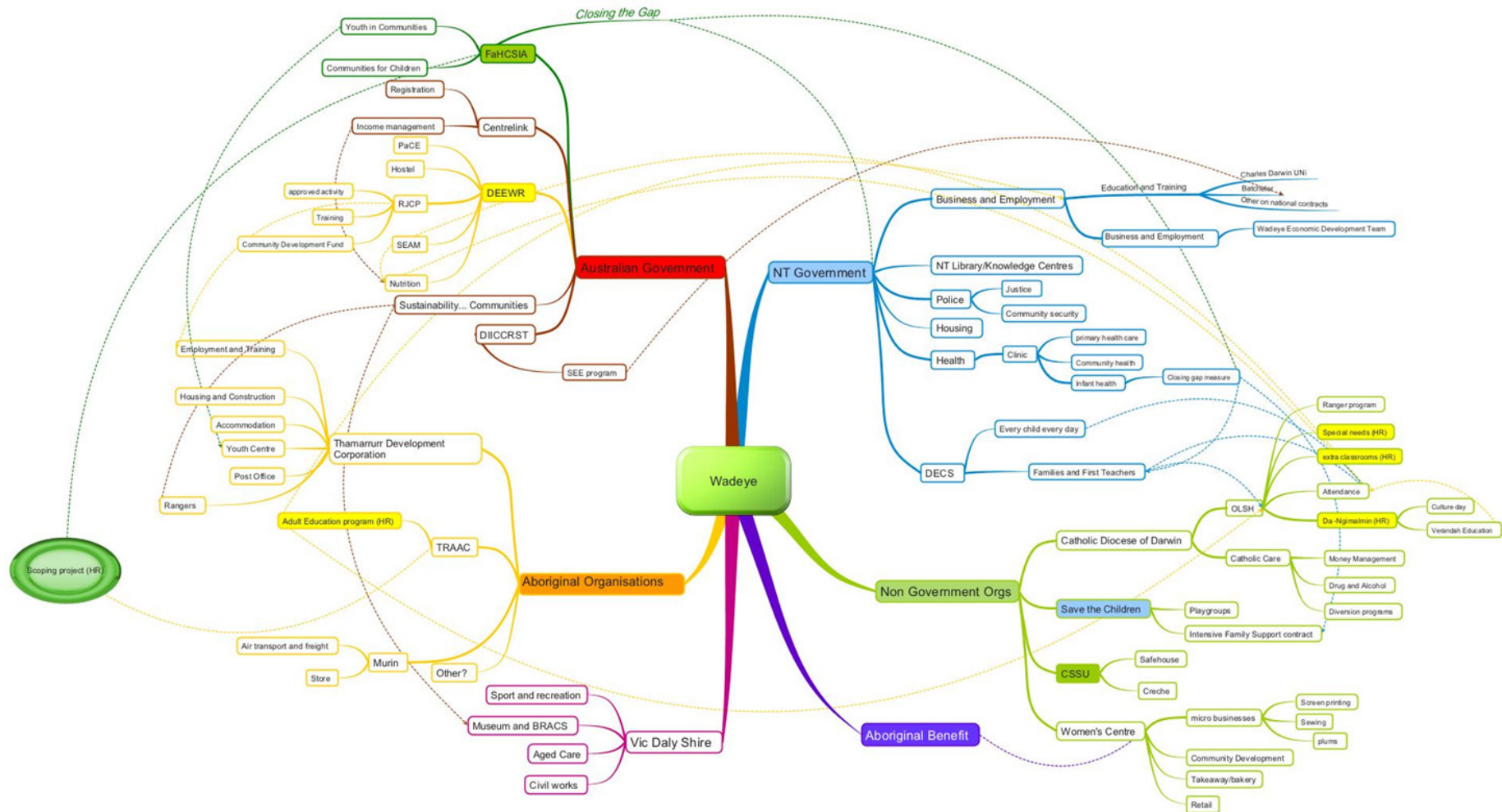
Before examining these, it is worthwhile considering the complexity and fragmented nature of current service delivery arrangements at Wadeye. One of the aims of the Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilot (ICCP) project at Wadeye (the so-called COAG Trial that commenced in 2002) was, as the term suggests, to bring about better coordination through an effective whole-of-government and community cooperative approach to the delivery of services that were spread across many departments, agencies, and programs. There was recognition by government that significant change would not be achieved by continuing to address the problems in “silo” approaches and without the active engagement of Indigenous communities (Morgan Disney Associates 2006: 12). The trials were therefore established so that communities and governments could work in partnership and share responsibility for achieving improved life outcomes in a way that raised the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs. Accordingly, the trials were referred to as “Shared Responsibility Trials”.

Without revisiting the reasons why this arrangement broke down at Wadeye (Gray 2006), it is fair to say that the situation now resembles the period before the COAG Trial began and it replicates the circumstances in which the Trial had its genesis in that there are myriad (arguably now less siloed) government and NGO social services and programs being delivered by numerous agencies with no connection to, or shared responsibility with, a recognised representative local community governance entity. While TRAAC would nominally be this agency, it has remained effectively impotent “in the achievement of improved life outcomes” for want of an operational budget to provide secretariat services and the means to an effective voice and seat at the table. In terms of shared responsibility and the building of local governance capacity, ten years on

Thamarrurr is effectively back to its pre-TRC days. However as previously noted, the funding by FaHCSIA is now enabling TRAAC to begin to move forward.

Because, in the meantime, there has been substantial government activity and investment at Wadeye commencing with the NT intervention and culminating in the Stronger Futures initiatives, the variety and density of government servicing is more complex now than it has ever been. This makes mapping the content, connections, overlaps, gaps and effectiveness of programs all the more challenging, if not impossible, for local leaders especially in the absence of any formal or statutory means to do so. Some idea of this complexity is illustrated by Figure 9 that shows the institutional and servicing nodes at Wadeye with a notional indication of functional connections between them.

Fig. 9. Service delivery nodes and programs at Wadeye, 2013



Source: Rosa McKenna, TRAAC, Wadeye

As a general statement, it is fair to say that very little hard evidence is readily available to indicate conclusively what works and what doesn't in respect of government programs in Wadeye. Even the federal government's Clearinghouse on Closing the Gap struggles to find adequate and irrefutable evidence of comprehensive and positive program impacts in areas such as school attendance and many other aspects of Indigenous social policy (AIHW 2012). As at Wadeye, this is not necessarily because such impacts do not exist, rather it is more an observation about the lack of proper evaluation mechanisms built into program design and delivery.

To the best of our knowledge, programs at Wadeye that are designed to support families and children are very much focused on ensuring that inputs are delivered with little attention paid to the overall measurement of impact. Again, this is not so much a criticism as it is a statement of fact or reality in the face of substantial immediate needs. Thus, much of what we do know by way of impacts is available only by comparing observed current conditions with those that prevailed ten years ago as determined by the COAG Trial and reported in Taylor (2004). This reveals that some aspects of social and economic life are likely to have improved as a consequence of government action whereas others are likely to have not. So what can we ultimately say?

Schooling

Attempts by the community and the school to promote and encourage children to attend school on a regular basis as outlined in the LIP have been formalized for some time. In 2004–05, as part of its commitment to the COAG Trial, the TRC working with the school made a concerted effort to address the issue of chronic low attendance. An education program was conducted across the community regarding the school attendance provisions of the Northern Territory *Education Act* and the responsibilities of parents and police officials in this regard (Sections 21, 22 & 31). Many families visited by the school attendance team at the time indicated that they wanted their kids to go to school but that kids wouldn't listen to them—often people would ask the coordinator to get a policeman to make the kids go to school (TRC 2005: 7).

It would appear from the data already presented on school attendance that these efforts had only limited success but they did lay the groundwork for what has now become a substantial effort between the school attendance team and the Da Ngimalmin FRC to raise enrolment and attendance. To assess progress in this area it is worth reflecting on

previous observations reported by the TRC on the obstacles to sustaining school attendance (TRC 2005):

- First time students: many students had never been to school before and had no idea how to behave in a classroom environment. With most of the community's children at school this inevitably brought rival "gang" members together with negative consequences.
- First time teachers: Many teachers were new to teaching and their lack of experience and inability to cope was exacerbated by a shortage of Indigenous teacher assistants.
- Lack of school discipline policy: With the relatively low school attendance that the school was used to dealing with there had not been a need for a structured discipline policy and the principal tended to handle most matters directly. However, with the rise in numbers it was clear that improved procedures and support systems were necessary, sometimes involving the police.
- Lack of transitional programs: The first few weeks of school are crucial in securing student adaptation to the school environment and sustaining student interest, but the system was overwhelmed by the need to manage behavioural issues.
- Lack of law enforcement: The proposition that parents would be fined if children did not attend school was demonstrably not the case and this undermined the credibility of any threat of sanction.

From discussions in 2013 with Da Ngimalmin, the school principal and the school's Indigenous Leadership Group, it is fair to say that most of these constraints have now been overcome certainly in terms of the team that is now at the school and its preparedness to deal with new and existing student intake. In addition, the Da Ngimalmin Culture Day has begun to attract many families onto the school premises for the first time while their verandah schooling trial demonstrated a capacity and method for achieving similar first-time engagement off-campus.

School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM)

One form of official sanction that has been trialled to assess its impact on school attendance is the SEAM. The trial of SEAM was announced in the 2008–09 Budget and formed part of the National Welfare Payment Reform Agenda. It was extended in the 2011–12 Budget for another 12 months as part of the Building Australia's Future Workforce Package. The trial of SEAM finished on 30 June 2012. Wadeye was one of six sites in the Northern Territory to participate in the trial. The aim was to determine the success or otherwise of instituting a system whereby select income support payments could be suspended for parents whose children did not enrol or attend school in a reasonable time after an issue of compliance notices.

Overall in the Northern Territory, the internal departmental evaluation of SEAM (DEEWR 2012) concluded that it had a positive effect on enrolment. As many as 82 per cent of parents provided enrolment details following issuance of an enrolment notice. Those who did not also complied following suspension of income support payments. As a consequence no parents had income support payments cancelled as part of the enrolment component of the trial. While strong compliance to attendance notices was also observed, these were mostly short-term responses and the evaluation concluded that in order to sustain improvements in school attendance, SEAM must be combined with other measures that engage children in learning.

A final evaluation of the SEAM trial will be completed in late 2013. Interim DHS monitoring data in relation to Wadeye as at 29 June 2012 are shown in Table 6. This indicates that 321 parents in relation to 656 children had been in scope for the enrolment component of SEAM in Wadeye, and 299 parents in relation to 568 school age children had been in scope for the attendance component. For enrolment, 59 parents in relation to 92 children had been subject to an income support payment suspension and none were cancelled. For attendance, 76 parents in relation to 108 children had been subject to an income support suspension and less than 20 were subject to a cancellation.

Aside from the fact that the scope of this measure appears to have captured most (but not all) of the school age cohort, the interesting observation is the relatively low numbers of suspensions and cancellations. In the trial, this was due generally to the effectiveness of enrolment and attendance notices and social worker support. These factors were instrumental in motivating the parent to get their child to enrol and attend school without

the need of income support suspensions. While SEAM has demonstrated its effectiveness in engaging parents and returning children to school initially, it must be acknowledged that ensuring sustained attendance improvements requires a multifaceted approach. Once children return to school, a range of other measures are required to ensure they are fully engaged in education and subsequently motivated to attend on an ongoing basis.

As noted, school attendance still averages around half of the enrolment level and much of this involves quite chronic absenteeism. While the exact rules surrounding decisions about suspension and cancellation of income support payments are not known, nor are the particular circumstances surrounding each individual assessment, perception is everything with a measure such as this and the general feeling among community members and teachers when questioned about SEAM is that it was never seriously enforced. To that extent, community members interviewed were somewhat sceptical of the efficacy of such approaches whilst (interestingly) being mostly supportive of the idea that sanctions for non-attendance should be applied.

Table 6. Monitoring data for the Wadeye SEAM Trial (as at 29 June 2012)

ENROLMENT DATA (Since SEAM began)	
Children ever “in-scope” for SEAM enrolment component	656
Parents ever “in-scope” for SEAM enrolment component	321
Children whose parents have been issued an enrolment notice	407
Enrolment Income Support Payment Suspensions	59 parents in relation to 92 children
Enrolment Income Support Payment Cancellations	0

Table 6. Monitoring data for the Wadeye SEAM Trial (continuing)

ATTENDANCE DATA (Since SEAM began)	
Children ever “in-scope” for SEAM attendance component	568
Parents ever “in-scope” for SEAM attendance component	299
Children referred to DHS for poor attendance	260
Children whose parents have been issued an attendance notice	260
Total Attendance Income Support Suspensions	76 parents in relation to 108 children
Total Attendance Support Payment cancellations	Less than 20

Source: Department of Human Services, Canberra

The new model of SEAM as part of Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (2013–2022)

Commencing from Term one 2013, a new model of SEAM was introduced at Wadeye. It is part of a roll out to 52 schools in 23 locations across the Territory in four phases over the next two years and will operate until June 2022. It will align with and complement the existing Northern Territory Government’s Every Child Every Day (ECED) attendance strategy to ensure that there is a clear and consistent set of processes and support for parents whose children do not attend school regularly.

Under the new model of SEAM, if children are not regularly in attendance at school their parents may be required to attend a conference. At this conference, officers from the Northern Territory Department of Education and Children Services and social workers from the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) develop an attendance plan with parents aimed at assisting their child(ren) to return to school. Failure to enter into a plan, or to follow this plan, may lead to the issuance of a compliance notice and failure to comply with this may lead to a suspension of income support payments. With new SEAM, every attempt will be made to assist and support parents to get their child to

school. Suspension of income support payments is only as a last resort if parents do not comply with their requirements and no special circumstances apply.

EVERY CHILD EVERY DAY (ECED)

The Every Child Every Day strategy that is administered by the Northern Territory Department of Education and Children's Services and, as with SEAM, it has as its basis a process for administering financial penalties for parents who fail to comply with legal obligations. Before examining this process, it is worth pointing out that in the past the TRC had on a number of occasions made representation to the Northern Territory Government to seek clarification on the interpretation of truancy provisions in the Northern Territory *Education Act* and whether these are adequately applied at Wadeye. This question was again asked in 2009 as part of the Human Rights exercise with a view to extracting any data on specific activities that might occur under the Act. No such data were forthcoming and NTDET advised at the time that uniformed officers are authorised of their own volition under Section 31 of the Act to take action in regard to school non-attendees. While individual officers may make notes in regard to any such action that they might take, these notes are not routinely available to NTDET.

In any event, the idea of taking formal action against parents under the various State and Territory statutes is a contentious issue nationally and one in regard to which there is a variety of conflicting opinion. The tendency to date in addressing school non-attendance has been to work with parents and students to resolve issues in a collaborative fashion and the SEAM and now the ECED are examples of this approach. The bottom line is, any coercive or punitive action contemplated would require Ministerial consent in writing (S. 74) and in the case of Wadeye this would require the NT Catholic Education Office to seek the approval of the Minister to commence proceedings. To date, there is no indication that any such permission has ever been sought. However, it should be noted that the *Education Act* does allow the NTDET Chief Executive to appoint one or more authorised persons to assist with the management of truancy in Wadeye. This would allow the school community to identify a traditional owner(s) or other senior community member(s) to undertake this role in support of increasing enrolment and attendance. A seemingly obvious candidate here would be Da Ngimalmin but their view is that the truancy provisions are government law with processes for

prosecution now in place under SEAM and ECED and so the government should simply go about doing its business.

To administer ECED, Northern Territory government Truancy Officers work closely with the school and Centrelink to develop school attendance plans that target students who are disengaged or at risk of disengagement. The school can utilise Officers' expertise to develop these plans and establish an individualized case referral process. As noted, Truancy Officers work with parents and students to develop personal Attendance/Participation Plans that identify and work to overcome barriers to participation. Amendments to Part 4 of the Northern Territory *Education Act*, which came into effect in June 2011, gave greater powers to authorised officers to achieve such re-engagement. Senior Attendance and Truancy Officers can issue:

- Directions to Enrol – to direct a parent/child to enrol in school;
- Compliance Notices – to inform and direct parents to meet their legal obligations under the Act;
- Compulsory Conference Directions – to compel parents and/or children to attend a meeting with the Officer to agree to an individual Attendance Plan;
- Infringement Notices – issued when parents/children fail to comply with an Officer's notices/directions (including the Attendance Plan) without reasonable excuse. Parents and guardians can be given a fine of \$282 and children over 14 years of age living independently can be fined \$28.

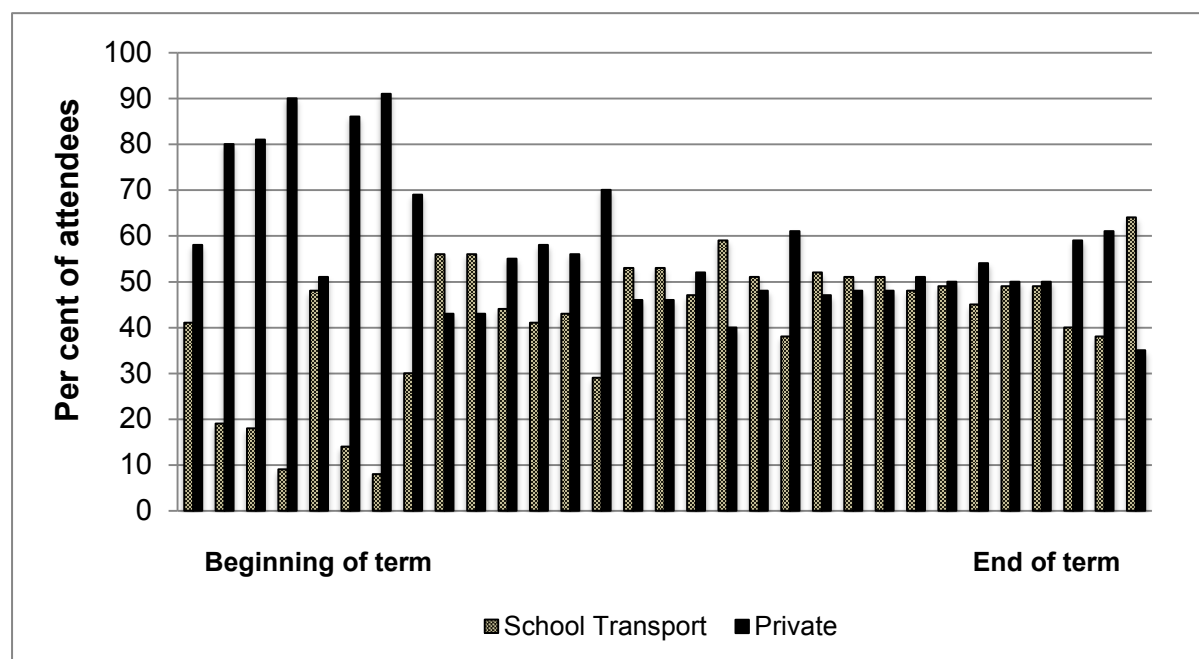
Continued non-compliance, without a reasonable excuse, may result in prosecution where maximum fines for parents/guardians are now significantly higher than in the past (up to \$2,115 for a first offence and \$2,820 for a second).

School Attendance Team

After a number of years in operation, the OLSHTCS school attendance team has an increasingly streamlined system in place for monitoring daily class attendance and a strategy for allocating school vehicles along with drivers familiar with particular neighbourhoods to pick-up and drop-off students in the morning and afternoon across what is an increasingly dispersed residential space. A teacher is allocated to this task full-time with assistance from local people with connections to different parts of the town

operating to round up children. At this stage, it is difficult to discern any relationship between the availability of school transport and the level of attendance. At the beginning of Term 1 in 2013, there were few vehicles available for the school run, but by week 5 as many as seven vehicles were deployed at times and this certainly shows up in the proportion of attendees using school transport throughout the term as shown in Figure 10. On some days, more than half of those attending were being picked up by school transport with the average seeming to settle in at between 40 and 50 per cent. This raises an interesting counter-factual as to whether attendance would be substantially impacted if no transport was available. Given the fairly regular level of attendance at between 300–400 each week during Term 1, the answer, on the face of it, would seem to be no.

Fig. 10. Percent of OLSHTCS school attendees travelling by school transport and other means: consecutive days during Term 1, 2013



Source: OLSHTCS

As for the monitoring of daily class attendance, this provides a real time indication of absenteeism and enables the school attendance team to work either by themselves or in conjunction with Da Ngimalmin to follow up. A clear indication from this process is that particular families in particular neighbourhoods tend to be chronically absent from school. While there are likely to be a complex of reasons for this, some to do with clan rivalry, this revelation prompted Da Ngimalmin to trial what it calls “verandah schooling”

in an area of town with low average attendance at school. It is the view of the school, as well, that it would be worth developing a number of small two-room classrooms around the town including at outlying neighbourhoods such as Manthathpe. A further idea advanced by the school to address behaviour issues is the development a separate girls' secondary school. There also needs to be much greater effort and participation in early childhood education. While programs exist to enable this, such as the creche and the Families as First Teachers program, participation in these is very low relative to the size of target cohorts.

The same goes for the Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel. In April 2009, a consultant report canvassed demand among Thamarrurr residents for a boarding hostel at Wadeye and the idea of such a facility met with widespread support. Four years on the facility is now open on a secure site adjacent to the secondary campus. The hostel is managed and operated by Aboriginal Hostels Inc. and includes accommodation and facilities for up to 40 students at Year 7 or above. However, as at April 2013 only 15 students were in residence, mostly from Wadeye itself, and this number varied substantially with high turnover. Part of the reason for this is the very location of the Hostel within town plus the fact that residence is voluntary. The Hostel employs several youth workers who supervise the students in residence and organise their day around meals, cleaning, attending school and follow-up activities such as homework, IT, sport and bush activities. Residence at the Hostel is free but entry is limited to students who are already regular school attendees. Parents of those in the Hostel report that they want to ensure that their children reach the next level in their school performance. Whilst it is early days, an indication that this does occur is provided by feedback from school teachers who report that Hostel residents rarely fall asleep in class, have good hygiene and nutrition, are more disciplined and are showing improvement against metrics of performance.

Despite these outcomes, there is a feeling at the school that the Hostel would benefit from greater school involvement, if not management. The current arrangement under Aboriginal Hostels leads to somewhat distant management and it is felt that the Indigenous Leadership Group in the school, which is growing in confidence and ability, could provide more local input into decision-making and after hours supervision of students. The school could also share staff, costs and resources with Aboriginal Hostels, including vehicles.

Families as First Teachers

The Families as First Teachers (FaFT) Program works to strengthen positive relationships in families, promote positive behaviour in children and build confidence in parenting. This is done through demonstrating behaviour management at early learning sessions held at the school and by encouraging families in their interactions with children through group discussions, parenting workshops, home visiting and individual consultations. The program takes a strength-based approach to parenting working from the belief that all families want the best start in life for their children. A number of community members interviewed (mostly mothers) felt that the FaFT program was very helpful in assisting them to achieve this.

Presently, a total of 38 children are involved in FaFT at Wadeye along with a variable group of around 30 parents/carers. In 2013, nine of these parents/carers responded to a survey of FaFT conducted by the school for onward reporting to NT DETCS. All respondents reported that they were happy with the program, that they knew more about how to help their children's development due to their involvement in the program. As a consequence, they now had more information about other child support services that are available. Among the positives listed, parents found it useful to have help when they had trouble with their children, to have access to a variety of games and to share their experiences with other parents and FaFT team members. Use of a dedicated (air conditioned) space was also noted. In terms of how the program might be expanded, interestingly parents were looking for opportunities for their own development including cooking classes, computer lessons, swimming lessons and horticulture. As the program therefore elicits a positive response, the main issue to be addressed would seem to be the low level of participation.

Da Ngimalmin FRC

Discussions held in 2009 among local staff at the school and to some degree with community groups representing various clans from the Thamarrurr region identified a need and a vision for a cultural centre within the school. In further workshopping this idea in 2010, Tobias Nganbe had the following to say:

Our aim is for our students to receive high quality education to give them the opportunity in life in the future. Kardu leaders to be in the front line working

and participating in the learning that is implemented at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School and in the community, these leaders to know and to understand what is happening in education so that they can make the right decisions. Kardu leaders will take control and have real authority as soon as they understand the values what education brings into people's lives. We want our leaders receiving first hand information on where the school is going. OLSHTCS School Leadership and those of us that have worked for many years in education and understand the importance of giving each child a chance to learn at school and anywhere else will play a big part in helping our clan leaders to have full knowledge of education and what it stands for—how the system works etc.

Learning needs to be recognized as coming from the child's home first and then into school that is the missing links that needs a strong foundation. The governments need to recognize they have to trust us in trying to help ourselves the best way possible... they must be alongside us supporting every possible way that will determine a better life for our people. Our Kardu children coming to school for the first time brings with them what they learn at home... language, family structure, relationship and importantly the way they think as a Kardu child. At home and in our homeland we teach our children about the importance of who we are through showing and talking about our cultural identity.

When our children come to school they have all this information in their head and understand it. Our people, the clan leaders, uncles, aunts and other members in the family must be seen teaching culture in the school level. Two-way educations system walking hand in hand is the answer to many of our children having problem whether it is attendance, behaviour management, learning difficulties and the school culture... children will see their family involved in the teaching of culture that will be integrated with the normal school program. The children will realise and understand the meaning of what education is all about.

- Da Ngimalmin Culture Centre
- Thathatngathay Foundation

- Thamarrurr Inc. (TRAAC)
- School Board
- School Indigenous Leaders

These areas mentioned above are where the Thamarrurr people feel strong and will be involved towards the education of our children and the people of this region. This is where the control and authority made by the Kardu leaders of the Thamarrurr region will be most reflected upon. It is where our real story of success or failure can be praised or criticised by other people.

Out of this workshop, the Da Ngimalmin Culture Centre became re-badged as the Da Ngimalmin FRC. The aim was to celebrate and strengthen traditional cultural heritage and identity and encourage stronger community involvement in the life of the school and a more robust commitment to its aspirations. The expectation was that this would contribute to enhanced school attendance and educational outcomes. Traditional values and learning structures would be integrated by an intergenerational transfer of knowledge and customs and community and school groups would participate in cultural activities and in caring for traditional lands under the guidance of local elders and knowledge holders.

As part of the federal government response to the Human Rights complaint, a total of \$1.7 million was allocated by DEEWR in 2012 to continue the Da Ngimalmin Project as it had demonstrated a capacity to engage elders and senior community leaders in the activities of the school. Under the program, elders and school students join in weekly activities, including culturally focused excursions to significant sites, fishing and hunting trips, bush tucker trips, arts and craft activities and interaction with conservation projects.

The vision of the Da Ngimalmin FRC is to increase rates of school attendance, broaden students' experiences and improve educational outcomes. Its specific objectives as agreed with DEEWR are as follows:

1. Increase rates of school attendance, broaden students' educational experiences and improve educational outcomes for students at the School;
2. Through the engagement of elders and senior community leaders increase the School's capacity to strengthen relationships between the community and the School;

3. Provide a range of cultural activities that are integrated into the school timetable;
4. Link school activities with wider community based activities;
5. Create a website and a monthly newsletter that is accessible to community members and the wider population;
6. Regular meetings with elders and the Principal on project progress;
7. Participation in school leadership activities and working with teachers in cultural awareness; and
8. Link the school and develop relationships with other stakeholders and interest groups.

These objectives are derived from the idea promulgated by the FRC that “you have to know where you come from in order to know where you want to go”. Accordingly, the project aims to provide cultural experiences in a school setting to broaden and improve student’s educational outcomes. It aims to provide students with a sense of belonging and ownership in the school and in the wider community environment. It is intended to build relationships with other key organisations at Wadeye, notably TRAAC and the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum, so that this sense of ownership extends throughout the community. Da Ngimalmin also works with other projects operating in the school such as the Indigenous Ranger Cadet program.

A particularly successful initiative of Da Ngimalmin has been the Culture Day which is held each Thursday during term time in the school grounds unless there are extenuating circumstances such as a death. There are currently 138 “cultural advisers” that assist with the proceedings. These include parents, relatives, elders, and cultural experts. Certain people depending on their involvement are reimbursed for their time. The event commences after morning classes with parents painting groups of primary-age boys and girls in the open courtyard area in their appropriate ceremonial attire (Tharnpa/Wulthirri/Malkarrin, Wangka and Lirrga). Proceedings usually last for two hours and parents, family members, teachers, the Principal, and senior clan leaders all attend. One senior *Kardu Pule* leader who was interviewed referred to the event as “a way that we can respect the young people”. This respect is signified by the high degree of participation by *Kardu Pule*, *Kardu Muthingka* and *Kardu Keke* who perform with the

children and guide them through their dances. In this way, a significant achievement of Culture Day is the opening up of the school campus to some families who have rarely, if at all, ventured there before. It has also provided for the first time a visible role for many men and fathers in the life of the school and the cover photograph to this report is intended to convey some sense of the importance of this.

Da Ngimalmin has also conducted a trial in providing so-called “verandah education” as a means of building a transition into more formal schooling for those children (and their parents) who have become chronically disengaged. Given the large number of children and families in this situation a priority for Da Ngimalmin has been to break down the barriers to education and training by taking services off-campus and directly into family homes (specifically verandahs) as a way of building bridges between the home and cultural life of families and the school. The idea is to deliver off-campus learning activities in a way that responds to immediate needs before transitioning to more formal on-campus schooling. The trial involved a number of sessions at houses in the Creek Camp area of Wadeye with groups of between 8 and 12 children together with their parents/carers. These sessions involved the use of books, iPads, and artistic materials and lasted for some three hours including a meal break. They proved to be very popular with both children and parents. In total, some 50 families participated.

Further funding from the Parental and Community Engagement (PACE) Program has now been secured and the aim is extend to the program to other areas of the town where disengaged families are prominent. In July 2013 the new round of funding commenced with a full-time teacher, a program coordinator and an Aboriginal assistant teacher. The TRAAC Adult Education Project is also assisting with staff time. Attendances are ranging from 14–30 children at the present time and from all reports it is proving very popular with children often continuing on with activities into the afternoon after the formal sessions have ended. Aside from the number of children and parents attending, a key performance indicator is going to be the number of transitional workshops and sessions conducted with parents and children to increase engagement with the school of at least 80 per cent of participants.

Wadeye Children's & Family Centre

The Wadeye Children's and Family centre is operated by Children's Services Support Unit (CSSU) Inc. that was established in 1973 as a not-for-profit organisation focused on providing childcare services. CSSU has a head office in Perth, but many of their services are based in rural and remote communities. The Wadeye Centre provides a safe, supportive and welcoming long day care service for families living in Wadeye. Mothers are encouraged to stay and support their children in learning and social interaction with their peers. The Centre caters for children aged six months through to five years providing exposure to early learning experiences. In April 2013, there were 69 children enrolled, although on average only 20–25 children attend each day. In both cases, this is substantially less than the target cohort. The service is free and breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea are provided for the children and all meals are prepared in line with nutritional advice from the local nutritionist with the aim of exposing children to a variety of foods.

The Centre provides children with an array of learning opportunities through play and interaction with their peers. Language and culture is a significant aspect of this learning and this is supported by the employment of four local Aboriginal staff. Kindergarten children are given the opportunity to transition into preschool by a transition program that operates in the second half of the year in conjunction with OLSHTCS. This program helps support the children and their families to transition into school life with the support of both entities.

In order to promote positive relationships between children and their parents and to help support families in maintaining this inside and outside of the home, monthly community events now form part of the Centre's schedule. The Centre is also used for the delivery of other child support activities. For example, the Strong Women, Strong Families, Strong Futures program uses the Women's Room to deliver programs to promote healthy lifestyles and support young mothers in caring for newborns. This service also educates mothers in a variety of health issues and child rearing practices. The Child Health Nurse from the Wadeye Clinic and Families Centre also uses the Health room two to three times per week to conduct health checks on children generally from the community as well as those at the creche. This service ensures vaccination coverage and general health check-ups and provides developmental information to parents and other service providers.

Sport

There is no doubt that a key element of life at Wadeye is sport and, in particular, Australian Rules football. There is a re-vitalised local competition with six teams drawn from combinations of clans and families. Reflecting this, the teams have symbols that are usually a symbolic of an association to particular country. For example the crow is a key symbol for the Wadeye Crows. This team also has the colours of the AFL club the Adelaide Crows so there is also cross-affiliation. During the season, which runs from February to July games are played on both Saturdays and Sundays with considerable participation by many of the youth in the community. Indeed, with 25 players in each team squad and the majority of these drawn from the 15–34 age group, it is fair to say that something in the region of 200 individuals of the group targeted by TRAAC for remedial adult education is involved in this highly structured and well organised activity.

The competition has local Aboriginal coaches, water boys, umpires, time keepers and so on. It is well organised and many families attend to support their teams as a form of clan solidarity. Competition is keen and occasionally there are disputes, however it provides a welcome distraction for many families who do not have transport for other diversions such as hunting or visits to the beach some kilometres away. An elite team from the community, Wadeye Magic, has been competing for a few seasons in the local Darwin competition with considerable success. They may play again during the 2013–14 season on a fly-in fly-out basis. This notion of elite sports is long-established and forms part of the opportunity that exists to build on the football/school nexus.

One such initiative that has successfully emerged in recent years is the Thathangathay Leadership Program run by the Thathangathay Foundation. This is a not for profit organisation that is committed to improving the lives of Aboriginal people of the Thamarrurr Region through education, improved health and leadership. It is run by a locally-based advisory committee comprised of representation from each of the three ceremony groups in the region.

Participants in the Thathangathay Leadership Program spend seven months of each year of the program based in the town of Bright, in Victoria's North East. While in Bright, participants play football for the local Bright football club and engage in a range of education, health, employment and cultural learning initiatives. In particular, they receive assistance in completing their education. For this they undertake daily accelerated

literacy support, complete first aid training and receive assistance in obtaining work related qualifications such as TAFE courses and industry specific competencies. They follow a health and fitness program free of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, undertake cooking lessons, learn about eating well and the damaging impact of substance abuse as well as train and play football with the local Bright Football Club. They also work part time with local employers learning valuable skills for future employment.

Participants share their culture with schools in the region thereby strengthening their own cultural identity as well as gaining valuable cross cultural learning experience through their engagement with the local community. They also participate in mentoring and leadership programs with the Essendon Football Club and Red Dust Role Models. To support all of this, Thathangathay has a deductible gift recipient status with the Australian Tax Office and receives donations to operate the Kardu Kigay Sponsorship program to assist with participant costs associated with training and education, cultural development activities and experiences, travel (four return flights per year), insurance and protective clothing etc. In terms of evaluating the success of this program it is interesting to note that 38 per cent out of 21 of participants to date are currently employed compared to just 5 per cent of Wadeye residents in the 18–24 age range generally. To be fair, the program is selective of regular school attendees. Once again, therefore, while this program appears largely successful in terms of meeting its stated objective, the main drawback remains low participant numbers.

In the past, local female teams have participated in competitions in Darwin, especially in softball, but compared to the current situation for males the opportunities for organised sport for females are relatively few. These are limited to those organised for school attendees and residents of the boarding hostel while the TDC Youth in Communities program and the Vic-Daly Shire sport and recreation officer provide some out of school activities

Economic development

Aside from the activities of service delivery agencies, both government and NGO, the main driver of economic development in the Thamarrurr Region is the TDC. In the past few years the TDC has been involved in planning and delivering major infrastructure projects many of which have created ongoing employment for local workers. These include the construction of 70 new houses using materials from the local tilt slab factory, a bitumen road between Wadeye and Manthathpe, a new Ranger's complex, a new gymnasium and youth drop in Centre, a timber processing yard, an all-access road to Old Mission and an all-weather road from Wadeye to Manthathpe, a new football oval and change rooms, a new service station and a range of other community facilities such as a barge landing shed, road upgrades and landscaping projects. At present TDC is part-way through developing a 36 block fully-serviced housing sub-division at Wadeye South. It is also about to commence work on a new airport terminal.

TRAAC is tied to these TDC developments by way of substantial cross-Board membership as well as, until recently, joint financial management. In this way, and through connections with other local businesses such as the Murrinhpatha Nimmipa store and the various operations at the Wadeye Palngun Wurnangat Association (Women's Centre), TRAAC enables its directors and members to be aware of initiatives and opportunities, although some improvements to governance practice are required to optimize the value and performance of this arrangement. As the governance capacity of both the TDC and TRAAC boards improves this should also provide a basis for increased involvement by local people in economic development ventures. In particular, TRAAC can serve as a conduit for ideas about possible economic activity on the various clan estates with ideas such as pastoralism, eco-tourism, road maintenance and mineral extraction mooted.

An important development role that TRAAC has recently been assigned is to provide opportunity and training for the estimated 800 or so individuals who passed through their school years in recent decades without adequate education. The TRAAC Adult Education program will be aligned to ventures and businesses by feeding trainees into appropriate courses. The opportunity is also now developing for economic development, jobs, training, and school to be better aligned and coordinated via the Trade Training Centre located at the school and operated by TRAAC. This Trade Training Centre was officially opened on 2 August 2013.

Importantly, commencing in July 2013, TDC will be running the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) for the Thamarrurr region (including Palumpa and Peppimenarti). This should generate substantial funding streams and enable both TDC and TRAAC to align their activities in job creation and labour supply with a degree of flexibility that provides pathways into work for the many adults in the region who have limited skills and work experience.

KEY BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES AND HOW BETTER LINKAGES AND OUTCOMES CAN BE ACHIEVED

Key behavioural issues that occupy the minds of local people at Wadeye are generally those that arise from shifts that have occurred in the locus of authority away from structures that have evolved within the Aboriginal world (in which senior men and women hold sway), towards more introduced structures such as in the justice system, school, workplaces and in the provision of services generally, where other rules, players and expectations apply. If we add to this the rapid shift in demography that has seen an historic proliferation of young people over old and a commensurate shift in socialisation across the generations rather than between them, then a substantial social transformation is seen to have occurred in which lines and powers of authority are increasingly diffuse and opaque. Where transgressions now occur and where social norms are violated, as in damage to property, communal violence or school attendance for example, local leaders feel relatively powerless and the State is increasingly viewed as the appropriate body to intervene partly because these are seen as transgressions of State rules and partly because any formal local authority in such matters was effectively stripped away by the dismantling of the TRC. Because of this, in the search for better social outcomes, the powers of the State to intervene need to be more closely aligned with, and seen to be aligned with, local representative leadership.

While the LIP is presently the main vehicle for such an alliance with TRAAC identified as the main community consultative body, the role of TRAAC in this process is more about signing off on government and NGO programs than it is about strategic and collaborative planning, although the refreshed LIP does expect that Thamarrurr leaders will develop a long term plan for the community beyond the life of the present schedule. To that extent, any linkages as already exist between agencies and TRAAC are reasonably well articulated in this document. What is less clear is the extent to which TRAAC is engaged by agencies and the quality and effectiveness of such engagement. While the manager of TRAAC attends regular inter-agency meetings at Wadeye, there is less reporting of agencies the other way around—directly to the TRAAC Board. Likewise, while information on program activities and progress feeds through the LIP process, this is more about inputs than outcomes and TRAAC struggles at times to obtain even basic data on matters of interest such as growth in the population, reductions in overcrowding, improvements in literacy, child notifications or spending on homelands. One aspect of

linkage that could therefore be improved is increased dialogue with TRAAC involving greater data sharing. This issue is developed further in a summary recommendation regarding the TRAAC population database.

As for seeking to achieve better outcomes, a particular point made by TRAAC is a need to improve access to and use of the various rural settlements that exist on clan country in order that families can spend more time away from the confines of Wadeye. Spending on rural roads and infrastructure (or relative lack thereof) has been a contentious issue for some time and it is felt that better options for rural living would help to ease tensions at Wadeye and provide clan leaders with greater opportunity to manage behavioural issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE DA NGIMALMIN FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY CENTRE

The leadership of Da Ngimalmin FRC have a vision for how the Centre can develop and how it can play a central role in fundamental societal change. It must be said that their thoughts are not particularly “hard line” or statutory based—in fact they are concerned that if they were to be associated with an approach based on “criminal” type sanctions then this may further complicate the situation causing confusion and even a further retreat from the mainstream by the parents and children involved. They are advocating a model founded on the words “Da Ngimalmin” —foundational roots of family strength, sustainability and responsibility—as explained in by Tobias Nganbe:

Leadership is something that we have to grasp. We are obliged to take control of our own people. We have to take charge by knowing and understanding what this means. We have to find out what the issues are and we need to take risks. If we do not take the risks then our future is very bleak. We have to have a way of engaging with both cultures. The model that we have in mind is one where Da Ngimalmin is the umbrella body that links all education and training policy development in Wadeye and the region. DN’s role will be to provide the vision in close engagement with our people (Tobias Nganbe, interview, April 2013).

The following is a list of identified activities and ambitions:

- Develop outreach educational services (within the Wadeye community and on homelands);
- Develop the data, information and knowledge that informs us about the children that need to be educated;
- Provide the guidance for adult education and interact and advice with agencies such as Charles Darwin University and Batchelor College;
- Provide the link between culture and education;
- Be the facilitator of engagement with families, clans and ceremony groups;
- Oversight parent/teacher relationships and give guidance;

- Engage with other regions and schools about education and learn from their successes and failures;
- Foster and build relationships with other schools;
- Enhance the linkages with other schools particularly the ones where our kids are attending such as Darwin, Melbourne and Bright;
- Assist our kids to reach their full potential by driving alternatives and making opportunities obvious to the kids;
- Being the body that keeps the focus on the Da Ngimalmin vision (the Roots);
- Being a direction-provider for youth activities in close consultation with programs such as Youth in Communities, Sport and Recreation, Police Blue Light and so on;
- Work on a viable Education Board model that is effective and reflective of the Wadeye community.

In the immediate context Da Ngimalmin is keen to build on its trial of verandah education by further developing the educational model and extending its delivery to neighbourhoods of Wadeye that have families who are chronically disengaged from formal schooling. The vision is for verandah education to break down the barriers to education and training by taking services to families and build bridges between the home and cultural life of the people of Wadeye through education activities responding to their immediate needs. The shared experience of community learning is expected to change the practices of formal education providers in Wadeye.

Teaching on verandahs is a community education concept in which Da Ngimalmin, OLSHTCS and the Thamarrurr Adult Education Project can work on together to achieve better school attendance and outcomes for students and reengage adults in second chance education. Verandah education takes a team of educators with expertise in child development and adult learning along with teacher assistants to the verandahs of people's houses or shared spaces with activities for families to gain basic life skills, awareness of further education opportunities for themselves and their children in a secure environment and prepare them for participation in formal education.

Simultaneously, the experience of working in the community will inform practices in schools and VET to better adapt to the needs of Indigenous learners.

The objectives, then, of verandah education are to:

- Provide education for children who are not attending or whose attendance level is at a very low rate;
- Provide a responsive holistic approach including basic education, health, hygiene, parenting and nutrition, etc.;
- Target intervention with the whole family;
- Strengthen children's learning capacity through building self-confidence, resilience and cognition;
- Provide a second chance education for adults to know about and access basic and vocational education;
- Build cooperation between the school and adult education providers through joint delivery of education services to families.

The project is developing in two Wadeye locations/districts with training planned for new teams to be formed to service other areas as resources become available. Currently, families in Yelmugam (Creek Camp) and Nguminhik areas are targeted and two sessions a day are provided to two houses (morning and afternoon). The program will focus on the same families for a term ten weeks) with sessions catering for a minimum of ten children and two adults although experience to date indicates that these numbers may well be exceeded and the actual individuals participating is also likely to vary. By the end of the year, the program is estimated to reach 80–100 children and 30 adults and a school roll will be maintained for the children participating and supplied daily to the school attendance officer. A record of participation by adult participants will also be maintained. Interestingly, the program is showing early signs of success in encouraging adult education as much as it is among children with many of the parents involved keen to utilise the facilities at the new Trade Training Centre.

The program is designed to be transitional. It provides informal education to ensure some access to basic education as an interim measure until individuals and families are

ready to enrol and participate in formal education and training. There are four stages of transition to formal participation in the school program:

- Verandah activities;
- Visits to school and age level class with a senior family/clan members as appropriate and adult from the verandah session;
- Joining a school based group with support of a Traditional Owner in a dedicated room with a teacher provided by OLSHTCS;
- Moving to mainstream class but attendance and engagement monitored by the team.

It also involves parental support and engagement. Parents from verandah education families will be provided with a space and a TA for organised activities while their children are in transition class. This will include familiarising them with the school, doing activities to support education, e.g., how to read with their child, playing games, etc., techniques for behaviour management, talking with teachers and attending school Culture Days and other events. A referral process to adult education services will be also provided.

While there has been a focus in Da Ngimalmin on education and training reflecting its genesis out of the school Culture program, the view of the TRAAC Board is more of Da Ngimalmin as a “Well-being” Centre rather than as an FRC with its influence everywhere within the community and not just at the school. To this extent, they are in favour of a proposal to relocate Da Ngimalmin both structurally and physically away from the school and under the umbrella of TRAAC with new premises at the Wadeye cultural precinct alongside the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum.

BROADER SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE THAMARRURR REGION

The consultation paper of the Northern Territory Regional Governance Working Group (which Wadeye is represented on) distributed in March 2013 outlines two models of local government reform one of which offers the prospect of a governance arrangement that is not far removed from the old TRC model that was established in 2003 with much enthusiasm by the 22 clans of the Thamarrurr region after much discussion and consultation. This is the Regional Authority model with each community or area that is serviced by the Regional Authority having its own Local Authority including a local representative group decided by consensus or a process endorsed by the community. This idea of regionally-defined local government is starting to take shape around a combination of Nauiyu and the communities of the Daly River/Port Keats Aboriginal Land Trust Area. Within such an arrangement TRAAC could naturally perform the role of a Local Authority.

Aside from providing advice and contributing to Local Government planning for the Regional Authority, the precise functions of TRAAC rejuvenated in this way would need to be determined but, once again, these may not substantially differ from those that were emerging under the TRC net of any service delivery functions that are properly the responsibility of government and other agencies. Thus, an emerging plan under the TRC was for individual councillors to hold responsibility for liaising between the community and various service providers in areas such as health, housing and education. They were to be assisted in this task by a secretariat that was to include a population information gathering, processing and dissemination function that consolidated and kept up-to-date a basic data set on community members and their significant characteristics such as their housing situation, school attendance, adult education needs and employment status.

Of course, events have moved on since the TRC days and not least in the formation of the TDC and TRAAC. In tandem with its business development activities, the TDC will soon commence as the sole training provider in the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) at Wadeye. Alongside this is the establishment by TRAAC of the Adult Education Centre and the Da Ngimalmin FRC each of which are assuming specific roles in education and training. There are the beginnings here of a structure forming under the auspices of TRAAC that is not dissimilar in composition to the Cape York model of

joined up services from cradle to grave that are locally-run and not government-run. Ideally, those services that remain government-run would also operate under the umbrella of TRAAC as the Local Authority at least in terms of linking with TRAAC to ensure that services are joined up and working in step with local aspirations. One aspect of this would be a facility for authorised information sharing to assist in building a life plan around child development, schooling, adult education and work for each individual and family in the region. This idea, which is supported by TRAAC, will require further consideration including discussions with other agencies regarding data-sharing. However, the proposition is that TRAAC would manage and maintain the outcome.

Presently, there is no single /simple cross-agency answer to fundamental planning questions like: what is the population of the Thamarrurr Region? How many people are employed, who are they and what are they doing? What is the housing occupancy rate and which families need new housing? How many kids are attending school regularly/irregularly and which families do they come from? Who are the new children born each year? What children and families suffer from neglect and/or have special needs? How is all this distributed by clan group?

Since 2003, TRAAC has developed and maintained a unit-record database of the Aboriginal resident population of the Thamarrurr Region to assist in fulfilling its vision of facilitating communication between the clans of the Thamarrurr Region, the government and service providers to deliver positive outcomes for its people and their country (KPMG 2011). Its use of data for this purpose is bound by the National Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* as provided for in the TRAAC Privacy Policy developed pro bono by the public interest law section of Arnold Bloch Leibler. Over the years, this has enabled TRAAC Board members to keep abreast of some of the questions above and to use that insight in making authoritative representation to government and others in pursuit of their social and economic goals.

Rural living

An issue frequently raised by the Thamarrurr leadership, and by many families as well, is the need to maintain an option for rural leaving away from the polyglot town of Wadeye which is situated on the country of Kardu Thithay Diminin. This is for reasons closely tied to the concept of Da Ngimalmin given that well-being arises from ongoing links to country. It also has a more practical edge in terms of attempting to manage the many

social problems that arise from living in close proximity to others in the relatively crowded environment of Wadeye. Clan leaders are adamant that one solution to unruly behaviour among children and youth is to remove them to the more manageable surrounds of clan country where opportunities for misdemeanour are reduced and traditional lines of authority are more enforceable (see also Socom and DodsonLane 2009). It is also felt that school attendance would be enhanced if education facilities were available in rural localities with the experience of attendance at Kuy school often cited—presently two teachers from OLSHTCS go out to Kuy three days a week, 12 students regularly attend and the kids are better behaved and more engaged than at school in town. In addition to Kuy, it should be noted that there is a Northern Territory Government preschool at Nama which is serviced out of Nganmarriyanga (Palumpa) school (although no-one lives at Nama presently), and that preschools have previously existed at Namarluk, Merrepen and Perrederr.

While by far the majority of people in the Thamarrurr region live for most of the time in Wadeye, there are some 20 other localities where families reside either permanently or occasionally on their own traditional lands and as a consequence live for long periods at some distance away from town. In discussions with TRAAC, the Board members were keen to promote the notion that the residence of people in these localities on clan country should be seen not as an “outstation movement” but simply as a desire to occupy rural sub-divisions away from the main service hub in much the same way as has occurred across a much wider area surrounding Darwin/Palmerston and other Northern Territory towns that are fully serviced by bitumen roads and other infrastructure (this includes the sub-divisions of Nilinh and Manthathpe next to Wadeye). This idea of Wadeye (Port Keats) as a service hub to support people on their country is a long-standing perception and understanding of clan groups that dates from the early days of the mission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aboriginal Governance, Leadership, and Decision-making

That the Thamarrurr Regional Authority Aboriginal Corporation (TRAAC) representing Aboriginal interests be recognised by government as a legitimate decision-making organisation in the region. The TRAAC Board of Directors should be supported by a Secretariat to provide management, finance, social engagement, liaison and research capacity to ensure that agreed deliverables and targets are achieved. That funding is considered to support the ongoing operation of this body including for the provision of two staff houses. Pro bono and other support for building governance capacity will continue to be provided by the public interest law section of Arnold Bloch Leibler Lawyers and Advisors. FaHCSIA should meet formally with TRAAC as a matter of urgency to discuss the aspirations and proper role of TRAAC.

Costing (\$1 million per year for the next three years for secretariat; \$1.4m in 2013-14 for staff housing)

Further Development of the Da Ngimalmin Family Responsibility Centre

An important requirement for the further development of the Da Ngimalmin FRC is its structural relocation under the auspices of TRAAC. This would include transfer of its administrative and finance arrangements away from OLSH to TRAAC. At the same time, Da Ngimalmin would remain located at the school albeit in separate dedicated accommodation away from the school administrative block.

In terms of its functions, Da Ngimalmin would open regular discussion of these via the TRAAC Board. First to be considered is a wider expansion of the verandah education program to incorporate children and families from neighbourhoods that are currently mostly absent from school. Also for consideration would be a close alliance with the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum in order to facilitate Da Ngimalmin's role as an educator and reinforcer of cultural roots.

Coordination, Linkages and Alliances

That an overarching Coordination Plan be developed by TRAAC that links the activities of agencies including governments, NGO's, and others. This plan will detail the connections in the provision of services "on the ground", outline desired outcomes, set timeframes, and provide evaluation mechanisms. It will also link programs such as Communities for Children, Youth in Communities, Families as First Teachers and other key initiatives. The Plan will be cognisant of the Wadeye LIP (and other regional plans) but will be broader in scope, more detailed, and include an outline of processes and linkages. We note that many services at Wadeye are substantially undersubscribed based on a ratio of participants to target group populations—the classic example being the school with only around 50 per cent attendance. A key element of a Coordination Plan should therefore be an assessment of whether existing resources are sufficient to meet maximum needs.

Costing (\$200,000 for initial establishment and \$50,000 for annual review))

Community Direction and Endorsement of Service Providers

Building on this Coordination Plan, local people will have the opportunity to examine and assess the credentials and effectiveness of service providers and NGOs. A system will be developed that enables assessment and interviewing of providers to occur. One outcome should be a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines community, government, and service provider expectations and deliverables and is more binding than undertakings outlined in the LIP. Such an MOU will be signed by clan leaders and government Ministers.

Costing (\$120,000 per year)

Development of Life Plans

That a program be developed and funded to provide Life Plans for individuals as they progress from early childhood to adulthood. Such plans will be developed in conjunction with parents, families and local leadership and will support the positive development of people founded on local educational and career achievement aspirations and mainstream social norms as appropriate. Such plans will reward progress and attainment with opportunities but also provide support, alternatives, and possible

sanctions for individuals who may be negatively challenged, incarcerated, or whose behaviour is considered unacceptable. It will also provide “red light” beacons for people, particularly the young, who may be in distress or neglected and who require some form of assistance or intervention. Consideration should be given to the possible introduction of related programs that have proved effective in other regions (such as the Clontarf Program). Part of the establishment phase would involve discussion and agreement about coordination and management of the plans and agency roles and responsibilities.

Costing (\$300,000 for establishment and \$100,000 per year for maintenance and update)

TRAAC Data and Information Unit

That TRAAC be resourced to consolidate and build on its already established Thamarrurr Population Data Base as a one-stop shop for data and information. This database assists TRAAC to represent the interests of its constituents and it helps the community and agencies in general to better understand and plan for economic development, services and social programs. There is a pressing need for a collaborative cross-agency effort to consolidate the many sources of population data that exist in Wadeye and then to reconcile these with the TRAAC population database. While the question of who might manage such a resource remains to be determined, TRAAC should certainly have a key role in this given its local demographic knowledge. TRAAC should consider and endorse its draft privacy policy to facilitate such a role.

Costing (\$200,000 for establishment and \$100,000 per year for maintenance and update)

Thamarrurr Business Precinct and Centre

That a business precinct be planned, funded and developed to enable a more efficient and effective form of service provision to the people with TRAAC offices prominently sited. This centre will include a central meeting area and offices for the use of all community-based agencies and visiting providers. It should be noted that a “business centre” is on the drawing board and this proposal will further broaden the concept.

Costing (\$5 million).

Economic Development

That economic development continues to be an important link in the region building on the substantial achievement of the Thamarrurr Development Corporation that currently provides business and infrastructure outcomes and most importantly jobs for local people.

Support for successful initiatives

That seemingly successful initiatives (such as the Boarding Hostel) be the focus of on-going monitoring and if positive outcomes are observed on the basis of robust evidence, then further support be forthcoming. Likewise, projects that are demonstrated in the same way to have little impact should be shelved.

Evaluation

That progress in pursuing these recommendations be subjected to annual evaluation.

Costing (\$150,000 per year).

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