no. 31 The Problem of Aboriginal Marginalisation: Education, Labour Markets and Social and Emotional Well-Being

Perri Campbell, Peter Kelly and Lyn Harrison
no. 31 The Problem of Aboriginal Marginalisation: Education, Labour Markets and Social and Emotional Well-Being

Perri Campbell, Peter Kelly and Lyn Harrison
The Alfred Deakin Research Institute Working Papers

SERIES TWO

The Alfred Deakin Research Institute (ADRI) is a specialised research unit that was established at Deakin University in 2009. From its foundation in the humanities and social sciences, the Alfred Deakin Research Institute promotes research that integrates knowledge generated from a broad range of disciplines in ways that address problems of local, national and international importance.

This series of working papers is designed to bring the research of the Institute to as wide an audience as possible and to promote discussion among researchers, academics and practitioners both nationally and internationally on issues of importance.

The working papers are selected with the following criteria in mind: To share knowledge, experience and preliminary findings from research projects; To provide an outlet for research and discussion papers (some of which have a policy focus); To give ready access to previews of papers destined for publication in academic journals, edited collections, or research monographs, and: To present this work in a form that is scholarly, well written and which has a clear sense of particular purpose and context.

Series Editor
Peter Kelly

Series Editorial Team
Santosh Jatrana
Tanya King
Samuel Koehne
David Lowe
Mark McGillivray
Gillian Tan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>The Coloombo Plan and 'soft' regionalism in the Asia-Pacific: Australian and New Zealand cultural diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s.</td>
<td>Lowe, D.</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Policing ethnic minority groups with procedural justice: An empirical study.</td>
<td>Murphy, K. and Cherney, A.</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>'We need one district government to be set up to replace other district governments': The beginnings of provincial government in Papua New Guinea.</td>
<td>Ritchie, J.</td>
<td>April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>'The Australian Tax Survey of Tax Scheme Investors': Survey methodology and preliminary findings for the second stage follow-up survey.</td>
<td>Murphy, B. and Murphy, K.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Policing Youth: Can procedural justice nurture youth cooperation with police?</td>
<td>Murphy, K. and Gaylor, A.</td>
<td>July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>The Anglican Church and the Vanuatu Independence Movement: Solidarity and Ambiguity.</td>
<td>Brown, T.M.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Decolonising the Solomon Islands: British Theory and Melanesian Practice.</td>
<td>Moore, C.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Re-framing Polynesian Journalism: From Tusitala to Liquid Modernity.</td>
<td>Hayes, M.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Taking over, of what and from whom?: Women and Independence, the PNG experience.</td>
<td>Dickson-Waiko, A.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Risky business: Why the Commonwealth needs to take over gambling regulation.</td>
<td>Hancock, L. and O'Neill, M.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Fijian Qoliqoli and Urban Squatting in Fiji: Righting an Historical Wrong?</td>
<td>Bryant-Tokalau, J.</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Australian Tax Survey of Tax Scheme Investors: Methodology and Preliminary Findings for the Third Follow-up Survey.</td>
<td>Murphy, B., Murphy, K. and Mearns, M.</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>How ‘responsible’ is Crown Casino?: What Crown employees say.</td>
<td>Hancock, L.</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Understanding minority group willingness to cooperate with police: Taking another look at legitimacy research.</td>
<td>Murphy, K. and Cherney, A.</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The 2007 public safety and security in Australia survey: survey methodology and preliminary findings.</td>
<td>Murphy, K., Murphy, B., and Mearns, M.</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>'The 2009 Crime, Safety and Policing in Australia Survey': Survey Methodology and Preliminary Findings.</td>
<td>Murphy, K., Murphy, B. and Mearns, M.</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>'A Social Science of Risk: The Trap of Empiricism, the Problem of Ambivalence'</td>
<td>Kelly, P.</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>'Social Enterprise: Challenges and Opportunities'</td>
<td>Campbell, P., Kelly, P. and Harrison, L.</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>'Old Wine, New Bloggers: Public Diplomacy, India and Australia'</td>
<td>Lowe, D.</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>'Composite Indices: Rank Robustness, Statistical Association and Redundancy'</td>
<td>Foster, J. E., McGillivray, M. and Seth, S.</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>'Historians as Expert Witnesses: How do Holocaust Perpetrator Trials Shape Historiography?'</td>
<td>Turner, M.</td>
<td>November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Transitional Labour Market Programs: Challenges and Opportunities</td>
<td>Campbell, P., Kelly, P. and Harrison, L.</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>'American liberalism and capitalism from William Jennings Bryan to Barack Obama'</td>
<td>Robinson, G.</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>&quot;Peaceful and Secure&quot;: Reading Nazi Germany through Reason and Emotion</td>
<td>Koehne, S.</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SERIES 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Procedural Justice as a component of the Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) syndrome: Understanding opposition to the building of a desalination plant in Victoria, Australia</td>
<td>King, T. J. &amp; Murphy, K.</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Birthing Kits, NGOs and reducing maternal and neonatal mortality in Ethiopia</td>
<td>Jackson, R.</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Problem of Aboriginal Marginalisation: Education, Labour Markets and Social and Emotional Well-Being

ABSTRACT

This working paper emerges at the beginning of a three (3) year Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme project. The project is a partnership/collaboration between researchers at Deakin University and Mission Australia. In July 2009 Mission Australia, a national community service organisation, opened the high end restaurant Charcoal Lane in Gertrude St, Fitzroy (Melbourne), as a social enterprise based Transitional Labour Market Program (TLMP) for marginalised, unemployed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people. This social enterprise aims to celebrate Aboriginal food and culture, provide training for unemployed young people, and be sustained as a profitable social enterprise.

In this paper we identify and discuss the characteristics and consequences of marginalisation among Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. Forms of marginalisation experienced by many Aboriginal people are shaped by complex, and often ambiguous relationships between age, social class, gender and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. The characteristics and consequences of these challenges, of marginalisation, are diverse and have been understood in a variety of ways by social researchers, and in public and policy debates. In this paper we list the extent or scale of the challenges Aboriginal people face in the context of education, employment and social and emotional well-being. We then provide some commentary around these issues and discuss some of the debates that we have encountered in academic, policy and media discourses. It is important to acknowledge from the outset that these fields are linked by various shared experiences within Aboriginal communities, including the many consequences of the Stolen Generations.
In particular, social, emotional and well-being concerns arising from the experiences of the Stolen Generations profoundly shape educational and employment challenges.

Perri Campbell  
Alfred Deakin Research Institute

Peter Kelly  
Alfred Deakin Research Institute

Lyn Harrison  
School of Education, Deakin University
The Problem of Aboriginal Marginalisation: Education, Labour Markets and Social and Emotional Well-Being

The ‘Problem’ of Aboriginal Marginalisation

Noel Pearson is a prominent and controversial Aboriginal leader and participant in ongoing debates about the character and consequences of continuing Aboriginal marginalisation in Australia at the start of the 21st century. In late December 2011 Pearson (2011:20) wrote a substantial article in The Weekend Australian in which he set out his claim that in order to understand, acknowledge and address the marginalisation of Aboriginal Australians, and the education, employment and physical and mental health and well-being consequences of this marginalisation, then ‘constitutional reform which properly defines the place of indigenous Australians in the nation is a matter of first importance’. Pearson acknowledges the controversial nature of this proposition and situates his claim in the ongoing, often polarised, community, policy and political debates about the character of continuing Aboriginal marginalisation, its consequences, and what to do about this. We outline the ways in which Pearson characterises this debate below. But first it is worthwhile presenting the reasoning behind Pearson’s position. He claims to have ‘come to think of national constitutions as the ultimate framework within which the wellbeing – or un-wellbeing – of a nation’s citizens is provided for’. In this sense a nation’s constitution:

‘...defines how a society is to be governed and the place of the citizen and his or her relationship with other citizens and the country’s institutions. The values and expectations, rights and responsibilities of citizens and the institutions by which they are governed are ultimately provided for, or not provided for, in the national constitution. National constitutions also provide important symbols for the nation with more or less, high or low, poetry’.

Understood in this way Pearson suggests that Australia’s constitution can, in many respects, be ‘considered one of the great constitutions in world history’ because ‘the level of wellbeing of the overwhelming majority of the nation is among the highest in the world’. By the same reasoning, suggests Pearson, there must be something in Australia’s constitution, or, indeed, something missing from Australia’s constitution that can provide an answer to the question: ‘why are the levels of wellbeing of indigenous Australians so far below the rest of the nation?’

As Pearson indicates, and as we will discuss in later sections of this paper, differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, in terms of educational attainment, workforce participation, and a range of physical and mental health and well-being indicators, are:

‘...not just a matter of marginal difference: the gaps are gaping wide. It is as if there is a Third World country in the middle of the First, one showing few signs of development.

What is it about our status as citizens of this privileged and opportunity-brimming country that explains the yawning gap? Why does the Constitution not operate to secure indigenous wellbeing as well as it does for the rest of the nation?’

In posing these questions Pearson provides a number of possible responses that seek to make an explicit connection between various aspects of Aboriginal marginalisation and constitutional reform. In the first instance Pearson suggests that:

1 Pearson is the Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. In this section all subsequent references to Pearson’s argument relate to Pearson, N. (2011) Constitutional reform crucial to indigenous wellbeing’, The Weekend Australian, December 24-25, p.20
‘...there is an existential angst about our indigenous culture and identity and what place, if any, it has in the Australian nation. This is a longstanding and fundamental anxiety, one paralleled by distinct peoples the world over’.

For Pearson, the anxieties, dilemmas and ambivalences that attach to what it means to be Aboriginal in Australia - both historically and in contemporary contexts - continue to create challenges for understanding the character and importance of Aboriginal culture at the start of the 21st century, and the impacts of these challenges on Aboriginal marginalisation: ‘Only with confidence can people find the common grounds of assimilation and integration with others while maintaining and celebrating diversity.’

The second point that Pearson makes is about the vexed question of race, and the roles that contested ideas of race have played in the framing of Australia’s constitution, and in attempts at reforming the constitution to include/acknowledge Aboriginal people. Pearson claims that:

‘...indigenous peoples are treated as members of a race, and indeed a particularly mendicant one. This is directly mandated by the Constitution, which until 1967 specifically excluded Aboriginal people from the operation of the race power (section 51(26)) and since 1967 has been the basis of indigenous inclusion in the Constitution.’

This identification of Aboriginality on the basis of race, and the constitutional framing of ideas about citizenship, government, rights and responsibilities on the basis of race, is particularly problematic for Pearson:

‘Today we understand something not understood in 1967. The act of inclusion was correct, but the basis of that inclusion - race - was most unfortunate.

I share the view of conservatives such as commentator Andrew Bolt that we must move beyond race. Australia must remove race as a concept from our national Constitution. I am convinced that the constitutional characterisation and treatment of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as members of a race is why the national Constitution does not work as a framework for wellbeing for the country’s native peoples.’

Pearson’s point is that contested, problematic, ideas about race - what it is, what it means, how it can be used to explain something - are an inappropriate, even damaging, basis on which to develop educational, work and health and well-being policies which aim to address the problem of Aboriginal marginalisation:

‘Whether adverse or benign, treating people as members of a race should never be the basis for law or policy. In the past the race power was used as the means for adverse discrimination and exclusion. Since 1967 it has been primarily used as a means for positive discrimination and responding to mendicancy.’

As Pearson acknowledges, there are many in the wider Australian community (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), many commentators, politicians, policy advisors and academics, who will not agree with his proposition, and will have other explanations for continuing Aboriginal marginalisation:

‘It is possible to argue that indigenous un-wellbeing is unrelated to the nation’s constitutional framework: that it is to be completely explained by the collapse of indigenous responsibility and by the innate features of indigenous peoples and their cultures, or whatever.’

It can also be argued that this debate will be a defining characteristic of the ways in which the Australian nation develops in the 21st century. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia’s House of Representatives on Wednesday, 13 February 2008 gives some indication of the weight that large numbers of Australians attach to these concerns:
‘...The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry...’

However, the apology, the histories it emerged from and the issues it sought to highlight and focus attention on, continue to provoke intense, often divisive, debates. Pearson’s discussion of the imperatives for constitutional reform is positioned, in this article, in relation to these historical and contemporary debates about what it means to be Australian, and the places available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in these national stories. Pearson sketches two poles of this debate as it has unfolded in/between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the last ten years:

‘The first camp, largely comprising people of progressive, left-liberal disposition, believes it is the failure of indigenous people to enjoy their human rights that explains the parlous status of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. This camp predominantly champions what came to be called “the rights agenda”.

Larissa Behrendt and my colleague on the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians and co-chairman of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, Les Malezer, are well-known representatives of this camp.’

The second camp, claims Pearson, consists, largely of those people:

‘...of liberal and conservative disposition...[who believe]...it is the inability of indigenous people to exercise personal and social responsibility that is the more salient explanation. This camp predominantly champions what has come to be called “the responsibilities agenda”.

Former ALP national president Warren Mundine and Northern Territory leader Bess Price are well-known representatives of this camp.’

Pearson acknowledges that during the last decade – in his participation in policy discussions, community development work, and media commentary (most particularly in the Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland) – he has become identified as an advocate of the responsibilities agenda. However, he also seeks to claim that this work has not meant a complete distancing from a rights agenda: ‘I have also been involved in advocating the rights agenda, and have not stopped. Indeed I have always sought to argue that the right to take responsibility is our most fundamental right.’ He also suggests that by framing the debate in these terms he is involved in a possibly crude caricature of a shifting and complex landscape.

Regardless of these qualifications, and reservations about simplifying the positions available/adopted in these debates, Pearson takes the opportunity to make some forceful observations about what he sees as the limits and shortcomings of the ‘rights agenda’ and those who take these positions:

‘But it is a matter of emphasis and weight, whether one falls on one side of the argument or the other. And emphasis and weight matter in public discourse.

When policy discourse becomes policy practice, then emphasis and weight have real consequences. Those championing the rights agenda can end up ignoring, or indeed outrightly resisting and thwarting, practical responses to the corrosion of personal and social responsibility in indigenous communities. Witness the strange obsessions of the anti-intervention Left.’
It is here that Pearson most explicitly identifies his political position in relation to the positions he claims are articulated from both ‘camps’:

‘It is this thoughtless willingness to abandon people who are suffering real crises of hunger, violence and social breakdown, to millennial hopes for a New Jerusalem of social justice for the indigenes, that I side with leaders such as Price against the bourgeois resistance, black and white. It is why I believe this newspaper has been on the right side of the argument for a decade now.

I have always believed that indigenous rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. They must both be in place.’

Our reason for beginning this paper with a somewhat detailed account of Pearson’s public statements on continuing Aboriginal marginalisation, its consequences, and his (and others) push for constitutional reform and recognition of Aboriginal people as a means to address this marginalisation, is not to support and/or argue with these statements. We have some sense of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal politics, debates and confrontations Pearson refers to, and, indeed, has provoked as a consequence of the positions he has taken in recent decades – especially during the period (1996-2007) of the conservative Liberal/National Party coalition government lead by John Howard.

However, given our purposes here, this account provides a contemporary reference point for the complexity and ambiguity that characterises the question of Aboriginal marginalisation and what should be done – by governments, by Third Sector Organisations (TSOs), by private and social enterprises, by communities, by individuals – in order to address diverse aspects of this marginalisation. This complexity and ambiguity, and our efforts to work with this, will give shape to the discussion that follows.

Charcoal Lane: A Social Enterprise Transitional Labour Market Program for Marginalised Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Young People

This working paper emerges at the beginning of a three (3) year Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme project. The project is a partnership/collaboration between researchers at Deakin University and Mission Australia. In July 2009 Mission Australia (MA), a national community service organisation, opened the high end restaurant Charcoal Lane in Gertrude St, Fitzroy (Melbourne), as a social enterprise based Transitional Labour Market Program (TLMP) for marginalised, unemployed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people. This social enterprise, established in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Heath Service (VAHS), aims to celebrate Aboriginal food and culture, provide training for unemployed young people, and be sustained as a profitable social enterprise (see http://www.charcoallane.com.au/).

Charcoal Lane has characteristics that set it apart as a social enterprise, including: its focus as a high-end restaurant with complex staffing dealing with the demands of the hospitality industry; its potential for full sustainability as a high-end restaurant; the tensions between the restaurant as a business enterprise, a community service organisation as owner and the Aboriginal community as partner.

The project that has two distinct, but intimately related parts: (Part A) an action research project; and (Part B) a longitudinal, qualitative project. These two parts will explore the following key research questions/objectives:

Part A
1. What are the important organisational processes and practices in determining the possibilities for sustainable social enterprise based TLMPs?
2. What processes, relations and practices facilitate (or hinder) knowledge transfers about social enterprise and TLMPs within the organisation and between other policy, commercial, training and third sector organisations?
Part B

3 What factors influence marginalised young people’s experiences and outcomes (successful or otherwise) in this social enterprise TLMP?

4 What effect does completion of the training demands of this TLMP have on the transitions of marginalised young people into full time employment?

The difficulty many young people encounter entering, and maintaining a place in, labour markets, has resulted in Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) taking increasingly significant roles in providing entry points or Transitional Labour Market Programs (TLMPs) for young people (see Campbell et al 2011 a&b). The role these programs can play and their relevance to young Aboriginal people’s lives is significantly affected by the many challenges these young people face.

In this paper we identify and discuss the characteristics and consequences of marginalisation among Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. Forms of marginalisation experienced by many Aboriginal people are shaped by complex, and often ambiguous relationships between age, social class, gender and ethnic/cultural backgrounds. The characteristics and consequences of these challenges, of marginalisation, are diverse and have been understood in a variety of ways by social researchers, and in public and policy debates. In order to engage with complex issues without simplifying diverse experiences of marginalisation we draw on a particular theoretical approach outlined by Annemarie Mol and John Law. Mol and Law (2002: 1) work with complexity and ambiguity to open and provoke ongoing debate about meanings and measurements, responsibilities and rights. They suggest that complexity is present when ‘things relate but don’t add up, if events occur but not within the processes of linear time, and if phenomena share a space but cannot be mapped in terms of a single set of three-dimensional co-ordinates’ (Mol and Law, 2002: 1).

Mol and Law (2002: 1) suggest that tools such as lists provide a means of working with complexity. In what follows, we list the extent or scale of the challenges Aboriginal people face in the context of education, employment and social and emotional well-being. We then provide some commentary around these issues and discuss some of the debates that we have encountered in academic, policy and media discourses. It is important to acknowledge from the outset that these fields are linked by various shared experiences within Aboriginal communities, including the many consequences of the Stolen Generations. In particular social, emotional and well-being concerns arising from the experiences of the Stolen Generation profoundly shape educational and employment challenges.

The Character and Consequences of Young Aboriginal People’s Marginalisation: Education, Employment and Social and Emotional Well-Being

Education: The Scale of the Problem

Aboriginal educational marginalisation is viewed differently by different sources. For some it is a significant problem, while others including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) emphasise the considerable educational achievements of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal educational attainments should not be played down. However for Malin and Maidment (2003: 90) the question of educational attainment for young Aboriginal people is problematic because many are reaching the age of 15 ‘without being sufficiently literate or numerate to gain quality employment’.

2 ‘The stigma associated with the term ‘mental health’ has also been noted among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and it has been suggested that the term ‘social and emotional wellbeing’ is preferred because it offers a less ‘loaded’ term to describe ‘mental health’ (Henderson et al. 2007:137). However, rather than being just a euphemism to subvert the stigma associated with mental illnesses, the term social and emotional wellbeing should be seen as an Indigenous concept that differs in important ways to non-Indigenous concepts of “mental health” (Kelly et al, 2009: 6).
Aboriginal enrolment in education over the last three decades has increased dramatically. Table 1 shows Aboriginal education participation estimates for 1966-1967 as compared with 2001 (1967 figures may exclude Torres Strait Islanders. Figures are originally from the Department of Science, Education and Training.) (Malin and Maidment, 2003: 89). Table 2 shows increases in secondary level educational attainment and non-school qualifications between 2002 and 2008 (ABS, 2008).

Table 1: Aboriginal education participation estimates for 1966-1967 compared with 2001 (* = % of population).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1967</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td>130,130</td>
<td>410,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preschool (%)</strong></td>
<td>2,164 (2%)</td>
<td>10,404 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary (%)</strong></td>
<td>19,306 (14%)</td>
<td>78,943 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary (%)</strong></td>
<td>2,596 (2%)</td>
<td>36,522 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University (%)</strong></td>
<td>9 (.007%)</td>
<td>6,414 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TAFE (%)</strong></td>
<td>111 (.09%)</td>
<td>58,046 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Schools</strong></td>
<td>119</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Highest Year of School Completed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over–2002 and 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002 (%)</th>
<th>2008 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 12 or equivalent</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10 or 11</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 or below</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a non-school qualification</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, many acknowledge that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school retention and attainment remain ‘unsatisfactorily high’ (Malin and Maidment 2003: 89). The ABS (2011) argues that there is a significant gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes: 71% of Indigenous adults are likely to have attained Year 10/11 or basic qualifications, compared to 92% of non-Indigenous adults. Also, rates of attainment differ according to geographical location. The following table shows comparative levels of educational attainment for Indigenous people aged 18 years and over in 2008:
The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) (Zubrick et al 2006: 35) suggests that engagement in schooling is affected by the capacity and desire of families to get their children to school and issues such as: ‘trouble accessing schools (particularly in remote areas), inability to afford education, and other community pressures and expectations’. Zubrick et al (2006: 35) suggest additional factors:

> ‘Among the most pronounced disadvantages affecting the education of Aboriginal people are: the geographical dispersion of the population; minimal use or knowledge of Standard Australian English (which accounts for significant proportions of Aboriginal children who begin school in remote parts of Western Australia); and a high degree of chronic health conditions. These factors have existed for many decades and have had a cumulative impact on the educational outcomes of successive generations’ (Zubrick et al, 2006: 38).

Currently, the Victorian State Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD, 2011a) offer ‘Aboriginal Strategies’ for educating ‘children and their families’ such as: Dardee Boorai and the Victorian Aboriginal Children’s Plan; Balert Boorrorn: The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020); Wannik – Education Strategy for Koorie students; Aboriginal Early Years Support, along with other Government Directions. For instance, the Wannik Strategy for the Education of Koorie students proposes collaboration with other Victorian schools through ‘a culture of strong leadership, high expectations and individualised learning’. This involves ‘placing Koorie students at the centre of the Government’s school reform program’ (DEECD, 2011a).

These educational strategies are framed by the Closing the Gap initiative. The Closing the Gap initiative is an acknowledgement of the challenges Aboriginal communities face particularly in regards to education, employment and social and emotional well-being. It was developed in response to the Social Justice Report 2005\(^3\). The strategy was agreed to through the Council of Australian Government (COAG), which is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia (Australian Government, 2011).

---

Education: The Debate

‘Colonialism set in motion a process of invasion, settlement and nation-building which fundamentally altered the lives of those people living in Australia who became known as Aborigines. These processes disrupted existing economies, political and religious institutions and cultures, and disrupted the modes of governance through which the Indigenous peoples of Australia lived…This colonial framework has profound implications for understanding both who Indigenous peoples are and their relationship with the Australian nation-state today’ (Cunneen, 2001: 7).

Many commentators describe the challenges Aboriginal people face today as emerging from a history of colonial intervention and abuse (Fredericks and Legge, 2011: 10). While this history has had a profoundly negative effect on many different facets of Aboriginal people’s lives, in this section we focus on its effects on education, teaching practices and education policies.

Zubrick et al (2006: 38) – authors of The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey – suggest that having a ‘close relative who has been directly affected by forced separation has a negative impact on a child’s educational outcomes’:

‘While some children overcome this type of adversity, for others it can take many generations of continuous access to education for a family to be able to overcome disadvantage and function effectively. This point is reinforced by anecdotal evidence from schools, which suggests that the involvement of Aboriginal parents in their child’s education is shaped by their own experience, i.e. parents who have had poor educational experiences are generally less likely to get involved in their children’s schooling. In many cases, this is because they do not have the skills to assist their children with school work’.

Parents play a significant role modelling behaviour. Young people can adopt an attitude based on their parents attitudes that doing well at school is ‘of little value; something to be ashamed of; or simply unattainable’. These relationships and experiences can play a role in intergenerational cycles of ‘educational disadvantage’ (Zubrick et al, 2006: 38).

Past educational policies have also had a significant impact on the educational attainment and experiences of Aboriginal people. Zubrick et al (2005: 38) argue that the outcome of education policies has been overwhelmingly negative, producing ‘intergenerational educational (as well as broader social) disadvantage’ (see also Lichtenberg and Smith, 2009). In particular, Aboriginal people have been affected by educational policies ‘excluding Aboriginal people from contact with non-Aboriginal people and…excluding Aboriginal children from government-run schools which persisted into the 1950s’ (Zubrick et al, 2005: 38).

Today, culturally unsafe school environments and lower standards of teaching remain one of the greatest challenges. Malin and Maidment (2003: 89-91) list a number of issues raised by Aboriginal respondents, families and students they interviewed from a diverse range of communities in the Northern Territory:

- The low school retention rates and relatively high rates of suspension, expulsion and dropout are an area of widespread concern;
- The poor communications between non-Aboriginal teachers and parents also warranted attention. Many were concerned that primary school children were not being taught in their mother tongue and that bilingual education had disappeared;
- Many parents expressed dismay at what appeared to be high levels of teasing and fighting between the different language/dialect groups in schools;
- Students themselves said that they found learning in school hard because the teachers spoke too fast, used unfamiliar words, and did not explain concepts and tasks with sufficient clarity.
Aboriginal parents discussed their aspirations for their children. One particular aspiration was that their children would be able to ‘walk tall’ in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social environments, ‘while retaining and consolidating their Aboriginal identity and culture as their first priority’ (Malin and Maidment, 2003: 90). Malin and Maidment (2003: 85) suggest that these aspirations are not being met in schools and that there is a lack of cultural awareness and support in educational environments for young Aboriginal people. This marginalisation is amplified in situations where young people displaying problematic behaviours are discouraged from attending school, or in schools where literacy standards and cultural awareness are low (Malin and Maidment, 2003: 92).

Cultural sensitivity, cultural orientation and cultural difference are significant issues in schools. Malin and Maidment (2003: 87) argue that many teachers struggle with culturally appropriate modes of teaching. Without sensitivity to difference, to culture and Aboriginal student’s needs, these students ‘are at educational risk…learning can be restricted by a lack of understanding on behalf of teachers and other students’ (Zubrick et al 2006: 39). A lack of cultural sensitivity is described by one student who participated in the ‘Voices Telling It Like It Is: Indigenous Young People on Education’ report:

‘The negative thing is being able to communicate with my teachers and… and them not having the cultural thing about, like, how I work or, not just me, but… other Indigenous persons in this school... like if there’s funerals in the family and they sort of just don’t understand... I’ve had two funerals, two weeks following and... the days I missed at school… they just thought I was lying about the funerals and, like, I had to explain and had to ring my parents – and why would I lie about that sort of stuff’ (VIYAC, 2011: 24).

The ways in which educational issues are addressed is of primary importance for Beresford and Gray (2006: 265) who raise concerns about ‘current approaches to the delivery of education’. They argue that there is a lack of understanding of appropriate education approaches. For instance, a ‘social justice’ approach acknowledges educational disparity and structural disadvantage as producing barriers to the progression of students at school, however, there is a lack of supportive frameworks to articulate:

‘(a) the complex causes of Aboriginal socioeconomic disadvantage, (b) its links to Aboriginal youth alienation, (c) the range of school-based programs needed to alleviate its impacts on Aboriginal young people, or (d) the links between school-based and wider community programs’ (Beresford and Gray, 2006: 266-268).

Also, Zubrick et al (2006: 38) argue that problematic elements of earlier policies are still retained in present-day policies and practice. For instance, programs for Aboriginal education often had two unintended side effects:

‘…first, they marginalise the target group and the personnel who implement the programmes, and second, they become the focus of perceptions about unfair access to additional resources’ (MCEETYA, 2000: 43).

Many argue that programs or models of education need to be integrated and systematically adopted in policy development and review processes, in ways that do not further alienate or marginalise the students and educators involved (Beresford and Gray, 2006: 278)

Employment: The Scale of the Problem

It is widely acknowledged that Aboriginal people face significant disadvantage in the labour market (Hunter 2000: 1; see also Zubrick, 2005: 38). ‘Not only are they [Aboriginal people]
much more likely to be unemployed than other Australian citizens, but they are less likely to participate in the labour market’ (Hunter, 2000: 1). Towards the end of the 20th century Aboriginal unemployment rates were between two-and-a half and five times the national average. ABS statistics also indicate that in 2002 63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 15-64) were in the labour force, compared with 79% of non-Aboriginal people. The unemployment rate in 2002 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the same age bracket was 23% - 4 times the rate of unemployment for non-Indigenous Australians (ABS, 2010d). Six years later Indigenous adults still experience an unemployment rate (15.1%) four times as high as non-Indigenous adults (3.8%). Hunter et al (2003) argue that there have been ‘no improvements in the overall position of Indigenous people in the labour market since 1996’, and that unemployment rates among Aboriginal people would increase between 2003 and 2010 due to a growing Indigenous working-age population. Between 2007 and 2010 the number of Indigenous Australians estimated as unemployed increased from 25,700 to 36,600 (Altman 2011).

Young Aboriginal people in particular face complex challenges in transitioning from school or further education institutions into labour markets that are increasingly competitive, uncertain, unpredictable and shaped by part-time and casual employment. A significant number of Aboriginal school leavers do not enter the workforce after leaving school. In fact, ‘Aboriginal school leavers are four times more likely to be unemployed (19.1 per cent compared to 5.1 per cent of non-Aboriginal school leavers)’ than non-Aboriginal school leavers (VICYAC, 2011: 14).

Employment: The Debate

The ways in which Aboriginal marginalisation is experienced and/or conceptualised is, as we have indicated, a matter of continued debate. In a discussion paper published by The Australian National University’s (ANU) Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Hunter (2000, v) suggests that exclusion from mainstream society or one’s own group as a result of unemployment is a major cause for community and policy concern5. However, at the same time he questions predominantly negative understandings of marginalisation and social exclusion. He suggests that social exclusion – in the form of unemployment – can result in time made available for other equally valuable activities. Somewhat controversially, he argues that ‘social exclusion’ from mainstream (or in this case non-Aboriginal communities) need not necessarily lead to a decline in forms of social capital, such as ‘reciprocal relationships, shared values and trust, which help to keep societies together and enable collective action’ (Hunter, 2000: v). In this sense, social capital or worth is not inherently tied to employment in non-Aboriginal communities. For Hunter (2000: v) low employment rates amongst Aboriginal people may enable:

> ‘many traditional Indigenous peoples to hunt, fish, paint, and live on the country. Indeed, the extra hours of “spare” time may facilitate more extensive participation in ceremonial activities, thus increasing what may be defined in the Indigenous context as “social capital”’.

Hunter also argues that unemployment does not necessarily mean that individuals lack social networks, particularly in their own communities:

> ‘Exclusion may reinforce a sense of personal value within encapsulated cultures. This issue may be particularly pronounced within Indigenous culture which is, in some ways, constructed according to its difference from the mainstream colonising culture’ (Hunter, 2000: 4).

Hunter (2000: 4) acknowledges that his argument is provocative and somewhat controversial. He suggests that one ‘problem with the existing discussion of social exclusion

---

5 The WAACHS identify social exclusion as ‘one of the four main constraints in the social and emotional well-being of children and young people’ (Silburn, 2006: xv). ‘Social exclusion can be overt, such as outright abuse and bullying, or less transparent, such as non-recognition or inappropriate disapproval’ (Silburn et al, 2006: xv).
is the failure to identify the extent to which exclusion from mainstream society may be an assertion of positive value of particular (encapsulated) cultures’. Hunter’s (2000) discussion of social exclusion is also a discussion of social inclusion, and how inclusion and belonging is negotiated by those engaging in/between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spaces.

Employment within the mainstream culture is not necessarily an unproblematic path for Aboriginal people who are in many respects constructing an identity and negotiating sometimes conflicting demands in/between complex cultures. Fredericks and Legge (2011: 23) identify a lack of pathways or opportunities for young people that assist in negotiating in/between spaces and boundaries between cultures. Such pathways are for Fredericks and Legge (2011: 23) linked to identity and wellbeing, participation and inclusion, exclusion and racism:

‘there are too few pathways through which our young people can find roles and subjectivities in mainstream institutions that do not conflict with their pride in being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. We are suggesting that some young people are forced to suppress their sense of being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as a condition for participation and others are locked out of wider participation because of the pain and discomfort of racist environments’.

The ways in which young people can imagine themselves, their relations to others and their inclusion/exclusion is a process that determines future pathways. For many young people growing up in/between cultures there are limited pathways which offer ‘unconflicted multiple identity’. Aboriginality is increasingly difficult to maintain ‘in the face of racism and exclusion and weakening community discipline, and pathways to alternative ways of seeing oneself are blocked by poverty, lack of education and institutional racism’ (Fredericks and Legge, 2011: 35).

Even in employment pathways created with Aboriginal employees in mind, discrimination and exclusion is still a concern. In 2003 a program for Facilitating Indigenous Staff Employment and Retention (FISER) was developed by The Cairns Region Department of Families (now the Department of Child Safety and the Department of Communities – DCSDC). After completing the training in a Wellbeing Empowerment (FWB) program (part of FISER), and having work placement, participants commented that they still faced barriers within the very organisation that trained them. One participant said:

‘That’s what I’ve noticed with a lot of the trainings they get you to do with the Department. They’re all happy for you to do the training, but then when you come back to start using the knowledge that you have gained they sort of close doors off to you because you are not getting the regular things or even simple things like access to a vehicle to pick kids up on a regular basis to run the activities or programmes. It’s pretty annoying’ (Whiteside et al, 2006: 431).

Physical and Mental Health and Well-being: The Scale of the Problem

Aboriginal people face a variety of social and emotional well-being challenges that are not as prevalent among non-Aboriginal communities. For instance, survey results released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that: ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely than the total population to die from external causes such as accidents, poisonings and violence. External causes also include deaths from transport accidents, falls and intentional self-harm or suicide’ (ABS, 2002). The ABS (2010b) suggests that for the period 2005 to 2007:

---

6 In attaining this information the ABS used a ‘direct demographic method, which derives life tables for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population by adjusting death registrations data by identification rates obtained from the Census Data Enhancement (CDE) Indigenous Mortality Quality Study’ (ABS, 2010b).
Life expectancy at birth for Indigenous males is estimated to be 67.2 years, 11.5 years less than life expectancy at birth for non-Indigenous males (78.7 years).

Life expectancy at birth for Indigenous females is estimated to be 72.9 years, 9.7 years less than life expectancy at birth for non-Indigenous females (82.6 years) (ABS, 2010a).

A larger proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths occur at younger ages than non-Indigenous deaths. For example, 6% of deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males were in the 15–24 age group, compared to 1% of deaths of non-Indigenous males (ABS, 2010b; see also ABS 2010a).

Physical and mental health are intimately connected. The ABS (2010c) also claim that in ‘2008, nearly one-third (32%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years and over had experienced high/very high levels of psychological distress, which was more than twice the rate for non-Indigenous people’. One quarter of people surveyed by the ABS reported that poor physical health contributed to feelings of psychological distress. Psychological distress was also considered to affect an individual’s ability to work or carry out normal life duties.

Drawing on ABS data (2010b) Figure Two shows levels of high psychological distress reported by Aboriginal men and women.

**Figure 2: Percentage (by age group) of Aboriginal males and females who report high/very high levels of psychological stress**

Stress is a significant contributor to poor health among Aboriginal communities. Stress ‘which progresses to serious psychological distress may be an independent predictor and contributor to reduced life expectancy and premature mortality’ (Kelly et al, 2009: 3).

Aboriginal people have also identified unresolved grief and loss, and substance misuse as significantly impacting upon their well-being (Kelly et al, 2009: 11). Experiences of loss and grief were identified as ‘the largest single risk factor to impact on the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Each year, Indigenous people grieved for twice as many deaths per head of population as other Australians’. Particularly high levels of trauma resulted from the many deaths which were preventable and which involved ‘infants, children, young adults, and men and women in their prime’ (Kelly et al, 2009: 11).

Alcohol abuse, disadvantage and poverty are frequently discussed as impacting upon the Social and Emotional Well-Being (SEWB) of Aboriginal people (Stanely et al, 2002: 20). Dingwall et al (2011: 50) argue that ‘Significant morbidity and mortality are associated with
excessive alcohol use, which, for Aboriginal Australians, generally occurs within a context of disadvantage’. Willis (2009: 10) argues that Aboriginal individuals:

- ‘are almost three times as likely to smoke [than non-Aboriginal people], although they consume less;
- are less likely to report having consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months but, when they do, are more likely to have consumed alcohol at risky or highly risky levels;
- are almost twice as likely to report recent illicit drug use, with those who do use illicit substances being more likely to do so at a younger age’.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience disadvantage across a broad range of health and socio-economic indicators (Thomson, 2010: 4). They have experienced few of the improvements in health, education, or wellbeing non-Aboriginal children have enjoyed in Australia. Williamson et al (2010) argue that young Aboriginal people are:

‘disproportionately exposed to risk factors for poor mental health, including the ongoing grief and loss caused by colonisation, socioeconomic disadvantage and discrimination. Indeed, research indicates that Aboriginal young people are significantly more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to meet criteria for emotional or behavioural problems and to commit suicide, but less likely to access mental health services’.

LeBon and Boddy (2010: 56) argue that young Aboriginal people have less access to health and medical services and are more likely to suffer from preventable illnesses. Also:

‘They are more likely to live in sole parent families, or with extended family, and in households in which the adults are unemployed than those living in non-Indigenous households (Daly & Smith, 2005). They are significantly over-represented in the child welfare system being seven times more likely to enter the child protection system than other Australian children’.

The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey suggests that the disparity in income and opportunities for wealth between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians as one of the key impediments to the development of children and young people’ (Silburn, 2006: xvii).

**Physical and Mental Health and Well-being: The Debate**

‘It is now accepted that physical and ‘mental health’ are interdependent, such that the contribution of physical health to mental well-being and the effect of mental health on physical health must be considered when looking at the overall health of population groups’ (Kelly et al, 2009: 9).

Historical, social and economic conditions contextualise Aboriginal SEWB problems. In particular, the forced removal of individuals from their families has resulted in ‘a group of profoundly hurt people living with multiple layers of traumatic distress, chronic anxiety, physical ill-health, mental distress, fears, depressions, substance abuse, and high imprisonment rates’ (Atkinson 2002: 70). One Aboriginal person contributing to the ‘Bringing them Home’ report explains:

‘We may go home, but we cannot relive our childhoods. We may reunite with our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, communities, but we cannot relive the 20, 30, 40 years that we spent without their love and care, and they cannot undo the grief and mourning they felt when we were separated from them’ (Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission, ‘Bringing them Home’, 1997).

For Watson (2009: 1) ‘the colonial project continues…and remains largely immune from a critical gaze at its underlying impulses’. The Howard Government’s intervention into the Northern Territory was a ‘National Emergency’ response to the report ‘Little Children are Sacred’. The report argued that domestic violence and sexual abuse of minors in isolated
Aboriginal communities was rife7. It was also a response to a ‘number of tragedies and public complaints about the inadequate responses of child protection services’ (Silburn et al, 2006: 268). Other related investigations such as the Western Australian report called ‘Putting the Picture Together’ (commonly known as the ‘Gordon Inquiry’, after its author) were instigated by the Western Australian Government after the death of a young Aboriginal girl (see Gordon, 2002):

‘This inquiry highlighted that child abuse was endemic in Aboriginal communities around the State and, along with other documented evidence, supports the notion that family functioning and parenting quality are associated with issues of child protection and safety’ (Silburn et al, 2006: 268).

The report found that child abuse and child sexual abuse were under-reported: ‘The reported statistics on Aboriginal children indicate that they are much more likely to suffer abuse than non-Aboriginal children...The rates of abuse of Aboriginal children must be viewed with alarm’ (Gordon, 2002: 46).

‘Indigenous people experience violence (as offenders and victims) at rates that are typically two to five times those experienced by non-Indigenous people and this can be much higher in some remote communities...Indigenous women in particular are far more likely to experience violent victimisation, and suffer more serious violence, than non-Indigenous women (Wills, 2011: 1).

The controversial intervention highlighted a number of concerns about young Aboriginal people. However, in the wake of the report issues such as violence and family functioning have not been listed as the key health challenges that young Aboriginal people face. Zubrick (2004) argues that there are four main constraints acting on SEWB and these are: ‘stress that accumulates and overwhelms, chaos, social exclusion (including racism), and social inequality’.

Wills (2011: 7) suggests that the role of law enforcement and legal proceedings that reinforce particular negative behaviours within communities should also be considered. For instance:

‘Indigenous women have reported hearing influential people, such as judges and barristers, say that violence is accepted as commonplace in Indigenous communities and therefore not treated seriously (Queensland DPP cited in Robertson 2000). When there is a high prevalence of unlawful sexual activity in a community, young girls may feel they have no choice but to accept being sexually abused and that resistance is at best futile’.

Young Aboriginal people's engagement with the justice system in other contexts has also been shaped by marginalisation. Many young Aboriginal men experience marginalisation in ways that are profoundly shaped by criminalisation, high rates of arrests and police harassment. ‘Almost one-half of Indigenous male youths have been arrested before they even enter the labour force’ (Hunter 2000: vi; see also Cunneen, 2001). Cunneen (2001: 230) argues that the criminalisation of Aboriginal peoples is associated with over-policing and surveillance of Aboriginal communities.

‘In June, 2005, Indigenous people represented 22% of those in prison in Australia. As at December 2005 the highest age standardised ratio of imprisonment for Indigenous persons was recorded in Western Australia and South Australia with Indigenous people being 19 and 13 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be in prison’ (Vinson, 2009: 5).

For Barney and MacKinlay (2010: 2) these high rates of imprisonment are tied to the colonial practice of forcibly removing children from their families. Forced removal continues today through juvenile detention as ‘Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed for child welfare reasons and 21 times more likely to be removed for juvenile detention reasons

---

7 The physical intervention was called Operation Outreach and involved a force of 600 soldiers and detachments from the Australian Defence Force on the 21st of October 2008.
than non-Indigenous children” (Barney and MacKinlay 2010: 2) (see also Northern Territory Government, n.d. 2007 and 2010).

**Some Concluding Remarks**

Many of the issues we have considered throughout this paper are connected in multiple ways, adding to the complexity that we have encountered in our attempts to map key challenges Aboriginal people face. For instance, SEWB shapes Aboriginal engagement with education, while education can lead to positive outcomes and consequences in SEWB and employment. High employment rates are associated with well-being, and the rate of full employment more than triples for Indigenous adults with a Bachelor degree (63% in full time employment) compared with those who have Year 10 attainment (18% in full time employment).

Despite these connections many of the papers we reviewed suggested a focus on one particular field, as the key to improving the living standards and experiences of Aboriginal people. For those involved in the field of education, education was the key. The ABS and Australian Government policy also identify education as a primary concern. However, as a whole the literature suggests that the challenges Aboriginal people face – young and old – are far more complex and far reaching. Many challenges such as good health, employment opportunities and access to education are shaped by social experiences of discrimination, injustice, ineffective responses from the legal system, and polarised responses to the history of abuse Aboriginal people have faced. In this sense, the challenges that Aboriginal people face should be understood in the context of broader social problems that involve both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The challenges young Aboriginal people face reflects these broader social problems. Aboriginal parents want their children to be able to ‘walk tall’ in both environments; however this involves negotiating the requirements of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal spaces. This is not an easy task given the lack of pathways available to young Aboriginal people and the complex social and emotional well-being challenges they face.

The series of documentaries *Shifting Shelter* (1, 2, 3 and 4) captures some of the challenges young Aboriginal people face, and which we have documented in this paper. Acclaimed Aboriginal filmmaker Ivan Sen follows the lives of Willy, Danielle, Cindy and Ben through a series of visits that start when these young people are aged 15 years old and growing up in rural New South Wales. Following a format similar to the acclaimed *7 Up* series Sen tracks these young people’s lives through their teens, 20s and into their 30s. In *Shifting Shelter* 2 Danielle is a young woman in her late teens or early 20s. In the extract below she retells an encounter with police, and the ways in which this encounter, and its consequences, are linked to her family background, her educational and work histories, and her sense of physical and mental health and wellbeing - now and in terms of her aspirations for a future which has some sense of purpose:

Danielle: ‘They put a gun to me head. And I said, “Juvenile”, and I just kept running. And, they got me boyfriend, and they locked him up and...but they didn’t get me. I just ran away. Ran home. Stayed home. And that was it, I didn’t see him after that or anything. I’ve just stayed home since. I don’t go out much. I don’t really talk to me Dad much any more, but...er, because of his girlfriend. She’s a bit jealous. She doesn’t like us associating with him. So, yeah. Me mum, she’s in Queensland. I went and seen her a couple of months ago. And, she’s alright. I’ve just been living here with me Nan. Staying here. I don’t know...what I’m gonna do. I might get locked up and I mightn’t. But...I’d say that I’ll probably get Community Service or something like that. I want to get a job. I want to do something with me life...instead of just sitting around every day’

(Shifting Shelter, Episode 2).
Reference List


Shifting Shelter 2, Broadcast in Australia on Channel ABC, 17/02/2006.


