

A Sense of Hope and A Sense of Belonging



A Strengths and Needs Analysis of the Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community

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Social Justice Commission

Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba

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Background

In 2008 Toowoomba Regional Council along with Oakey State School and Oakey State High School hosted 'The Oakey Jigsaw'. 'The Oakey Jigsaw' was a way of gathering community members and service providers together. One of the main outcomes of the Jigsaw project was a Community Inter Agency planning day. Over 130 agencies and individuals were invited to the forum and 86 individuals attended the day. The final report of 'The Oakey Jigsaw' includes a social snapshot of Oakey with a list of strategies to be employed in addressing a number of challenges. The prominence of the local Aboriginal community emerged through the 'Oakey Jigsaw' process. One of the strategies listed in the final report was to conduct a Strengths and Needs analysis with the local Aboriginal community.

In early 2009 a small group of Aboriginal community members contacted the Social Justice Commission to discuss the possibility of conducting a Strengths and Needs analysis in the Oakey community. It was decided to embark on this journey in February of 2009. The research process for the Strengths and Needs analysis was to be collaborative – not relying on an outside expert. It was also to be positive – identifying strengths in the community as well as prioritising challenges.

Acknowledgements

A steering committee was formed and from this the Oakey Reconciliation Group was born. During 2009 members of this group have played a significant role in promoting respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture and strengthening relationships in the Oakey community. A number of people have contributed to this strengths and needs analysis but it would not have been possible without Jodie Collins, Saskia Smith, David Totenhoffer, Jennifer Wharton and Dawn Woodbridge. It is also important to acknowledge the work of Tamica Hilder (Oakey Service Centre, Toowoomba Regional Council), Shupikai Kanemanyanga (volunteer with the Social Justice Commission), Nicole Booth, Malcolm Lewis and Brett Rangiira who have assisted with data collection, analysis and feedback on the approach to this project. I would also like to thank David Bosworth, Chris Golightly and Chris McNally for their assistance.

It has been a true privilege to be involved in this project. The members of the Oakey Reconciliation group have constantly inspired me. They are passionate, articulate and committed to the common good. They have a love for their local community and refuse to be seen as victims. I am still learning about the Assets Based Community Development approach to research. The Oakey community has taught me much about how the theory can become a reality. They have embodied the words of a friend and mentor to me, Murrie Elder Aunty Lilla Watson.

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time; but if you are here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Thank you for allowing me to share this time with you.

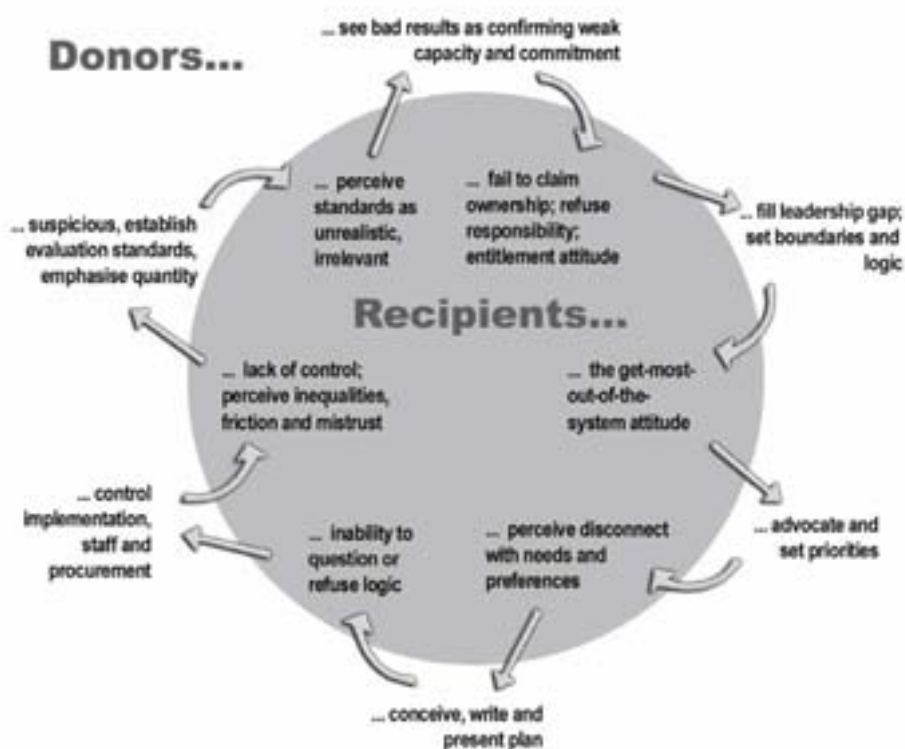
Mark Copland 13th February 2010

Methodology

The approach taken was based on the framework designed by Kretzman (Assets Based Community Development) and Minkler (Community Based Action Research)¹. This method involves community members in constructing research questions and ways of implementing the project. The approach was to begin with strengths in the local Indigenous population. Rather than begin with the question as to “What is wrong in Oakey?” – the first question was “What are community strengths?” – “What is working well?” This approach looked for strengths and was based on identifying assets as well as prioritising ways of meeting the challenges faced.

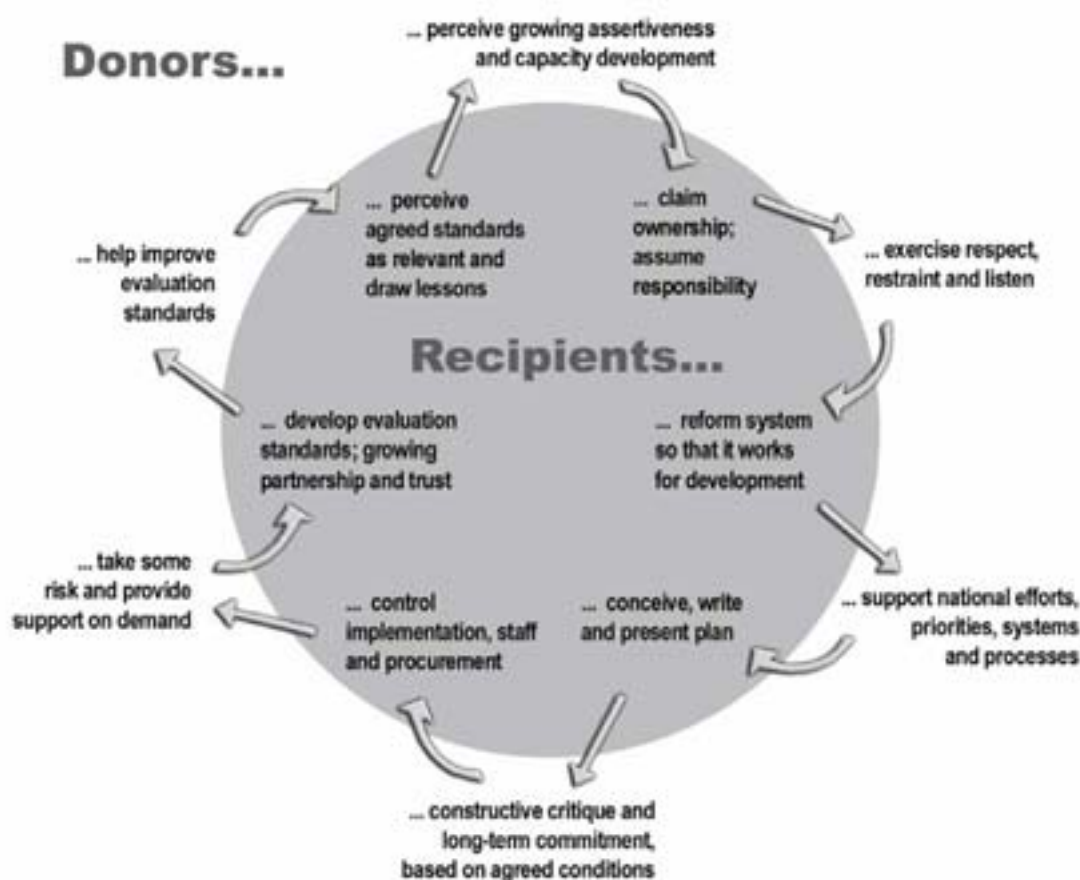
In a paper prepared for the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research Janet Hunt looked at international capacity development and analysed implications for Indigenous Australia. Hunt depicted two models of working in the community – one of disempowerment and one of empowerment.

The vicious cycle of disempowerment (Lopes and Theisohn (2003))



¹ Seminar held by the New South Wales Department of Community Services led by Jody Kretzman, 10 August 2004; Meredith Minkler, “Putting Communities First – The Power of Community Based Action Research for Health and Well Being”, Speech delivered to Communities in Control conference convened by Our Community & Centacare Catholic Family Services, 2006.

The Virtuous Cycle of Empowerment (Lopes and Theisohn (2003))



Anybody involved in policy, service delivery or advocacy in Australia will see some familiar patterns described in the vicious cycle of disempowerment. Indigenous communities throughout this region have countless stories of projects that have emerged from an external government policy and been implemented in a way that has taken power away from the local population. Wherever possible this project has tried to work within a framework of empowerment. One of the key requirements for true capacity development is what is termed an ‘enabling environment’.

There is evidence of this in Oakey. The work of the Oakey Reconciliation Group demonstrates clearly the importance of strong partnerships and respectful relationships. On the handing down of the second ‘Closing the Gap’ report card Professor Mick Dodson stated, *“Much of the evidence presented in the report card shows that progress comes from the ground up, rather than top-down and that the roles of governments and others is in supporting and working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities to address their issues.”*

The research process was progressed with the direction of the Oakey Reconciliation Group. The list of stakeholders to be interviewed was drawn up by the Oakey Reconciliation Group. This group also helped to frame and refine the questions used in the interviews with the stakeholders and also the questionnaire. It is important to

note that there was no external funding source for this research. The Oakey State School provided a meeting space and Toowoomba Regional Council provided assistance in the research phase of the project

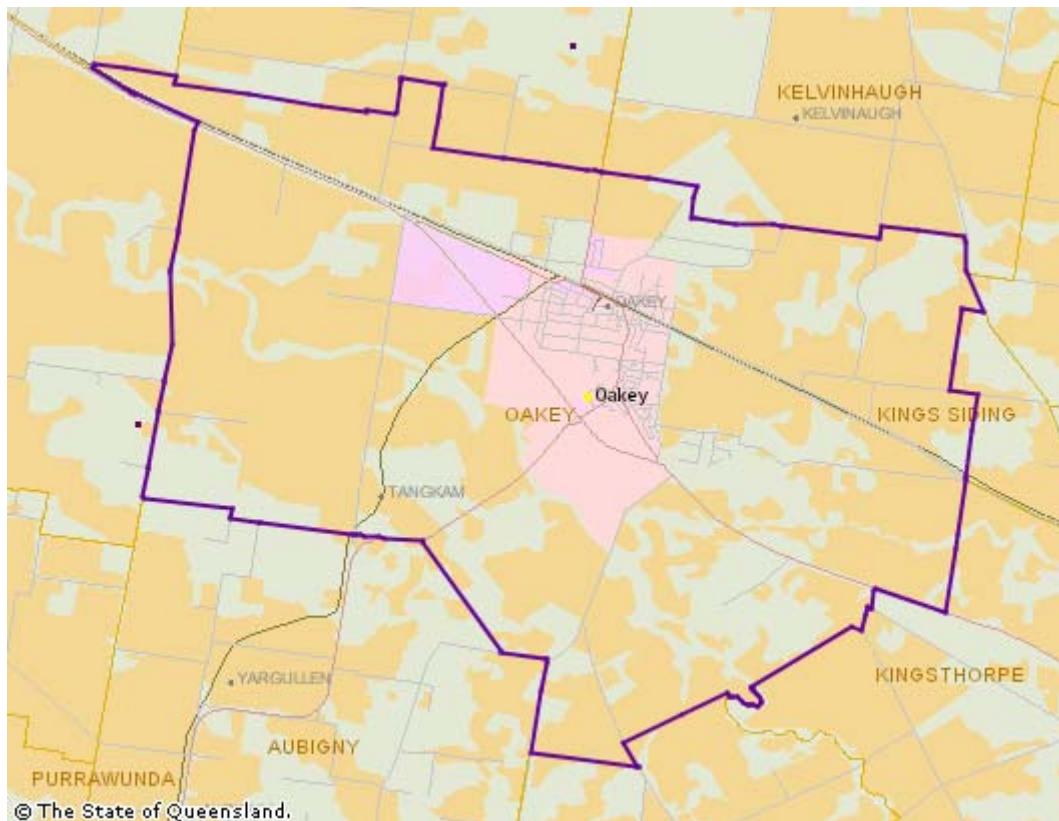
The lack of funding had a positive and negative effect on the research process. On the positive side there was no unstated motivation. The research was not initiated by a government policy and was not a response to any sectional interest. Those motivated to be involved did not have ulterior motives or a desire to impose their will on a group of passive recipients. The desire was to strengthen community relationships and to increase the social capital of the Oakey community.

The negative side of the lack of funding meant that the whole process has taken longer than was the case in a previous project.² On the whole, however the lack of funding has not hampered this strengths and needs analysis.

There were three main sources of information. The first was ‘desk top’ – that is previous reports, research and data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Whilst this is the ‘official’ record – in one sense it is the least reliable. The under-reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the national census has been previously documented. It was not always possible to be precise with this material in terms of location. Some data collection did not focus on the Oakey township itself. When this was the case it was decided to use the Postcode 4401 as a geographical focus area. This data is much more accurate than the local government area which at the 2006 Census was Jondaryan. Data from local education providers was also collected as a way of creating a snapshot of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

At the outset it is important to acknowledge a preference in using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as a term. On most occasions this has been done but where it has been unavoidable – or other data sources have used Indigenous the term Indigenous has also been used.

² Creating a Future – Owning the Past and the Present Strengths and Needs Analysis Toowoomba’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community, Toowoomba City Council, March 2007



The second source of information was a community survey. This was distributed throughout Oakey during 2009. The questions were designed by the steering committee. The survey form was initially found to be over complicated and was simplified during the survey period. About 20% of the 2006 Census population completed survey forms. When the households represented is taken into account it could be safely said that the views of more than two thirds of the local community can be found in the surveys results. (The total household members from completed survey forms was 446 – the total population from the 206 Census was 331)



The third source of information was stakeholder interviews. These interviews were conducted by Mark Copland and Jennifer Wharton during 2009. Whilst not exhaustive they canvassed the views of a number of key service providers and stakeholders in the local community.

Section 1 – History and Background to the Community

It is well accepted that there has been an Aboriginal presence in the Oakey area for over 40000 years. At the time of initial contact with Europeans there would have been at least forty traditional owner groups within the region.³ Reliable estimates suggest that as many as 20,000 Aboriginal people lived on the Darling Downs and in South Western Qld immediately prior to 1788.⁴

There is much credible archival evidence for large-scale conflict occurring between white settlers, the state and Aboriginal people on the Darling Downs and in South Western Qld during the mid 19th century. Charles Pemberton Hodgson reflected on his experiences as a Darling Downs pioneer, remarking, ‘The earliest inroads of the settlers were marked with blood, the forests were ruthlessly seized, and the native tenants hunted down like their native dogs’.⁵

Following the frontier period of history the colony of Queensland enacted “Protective” legislation. This system of laws and policies controlled almost every facet of Aboriginal lives through to the 1970s. A number of people were removed to church run missions or government reserves. Those left behind were attached to white employers with an employment agreement system or applied for an “exemption from the act”.

The Protection period was followed by a policy of assimilation. In this period of time very little recognition was given to Aboriginal culture or knowledge. It was largely viewed as an obstacle in the way of the process of ‘civilisation’. Following the assimilation period a policy acknowledging Aboriginal people’s rights as citizens took place. This moved into a policy advocating “self-determination” in the 1980s. In the mid to late 1990s the federal government dismantled much of the machinery of self-determination and implemented a policy which advocated “mainstreaming”. From 2007 the mainstreaming initiative has been revamped with another direction. At this time in history the phrase that would best describe the current approach by all levels of government would be “closing the gap” between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian population.

There is no space to analyse the failures or otherwise of each approach but as is reflected in the next part of this report on most social indicators a gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider community is very evident. During periods of our shared history there has at times been a very deliberate intention to take Aboriginal lives, break apart families and suppress or eradicate Aboriginal knowledge and culture. Despite this in the year 2010 there is much evidence that Aboriginal people have survived and

³ Based on Norman Tindale (1974), *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*. Tindale’s work needs to be used with caution, but this figure nevertheless gives an indication of the numbers in the region.

⁴ Based on figure of Smith and Tindale.

⁵ Charles Pemberton Hodgson (1846), *Reminiscences of Australia*, p233.

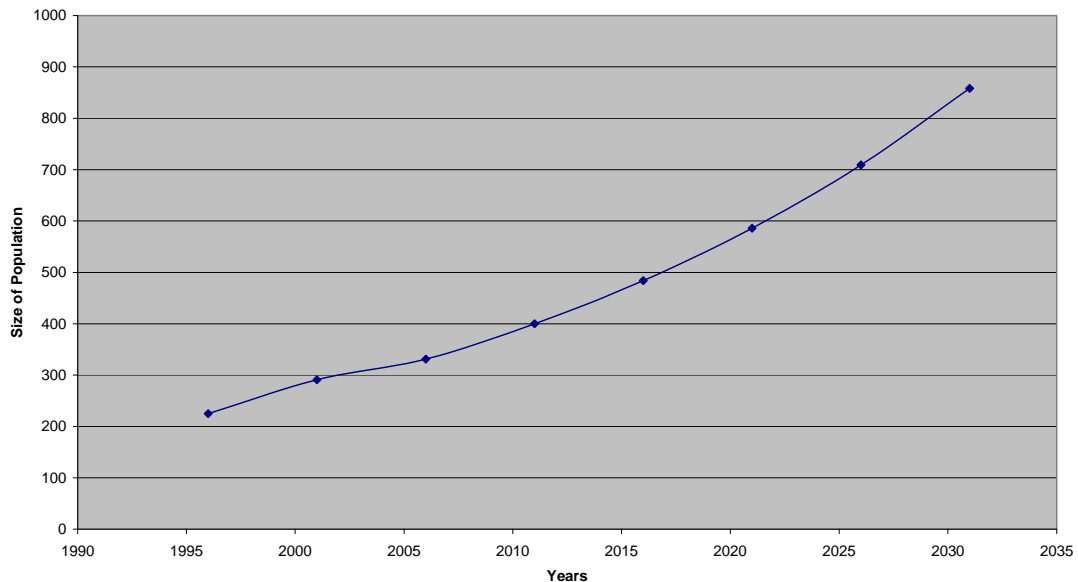
community members living in Oakey continue to practise a connection to kin and country that has existed for tens of thousands of years.

The local community acknowledges the Jarowair Giabal people as the traditional owners of the area and Uncle Brian Tobain as a key elder for the district. Uncle Brian is the caretaker of Gummingurru, a local ancient stone arrangement which has generations of connection with the traditional owners and people journeying to the Bunya Mountains. Using Census data the Aboriginal population has grown by 47% between 1996 and 2006. By 2016 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population will be in excess of 500. According to the 2006 Census data the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is recorded as over 9 percent of the total population.

Recorded and Projected Population (Based on current growth patterns)

1996	225
2001	291
2006	331
2011	400
2016	484
2021	586
2026	709
2031	858

Projection of Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population (Based on ABS Census Data)



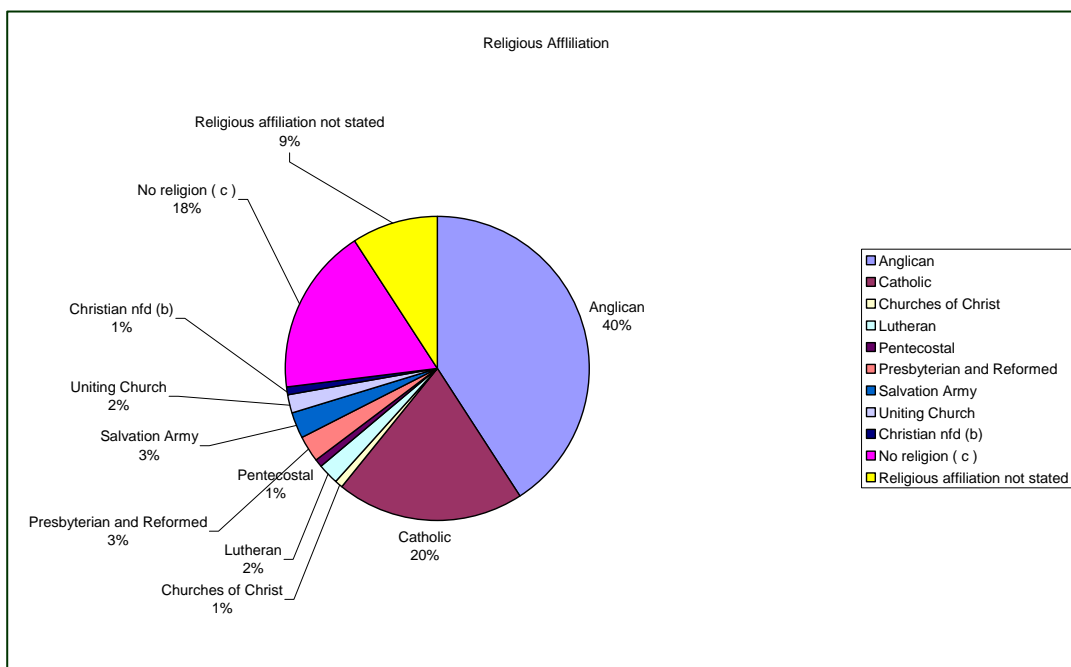
Section 2 – Available Data

Part of the experience of the array of policies effecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives has been an enormous amount of research. Almost every time Aboriginal people go to the hospital, enrol their students in a school, try out for a sporting team or apply for a job somebody somewhere is recording data. This data is rarely returned to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in an accessible form.

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide a snapshot of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander population at this point in time. It is hoped that this might be revisited in years to come.

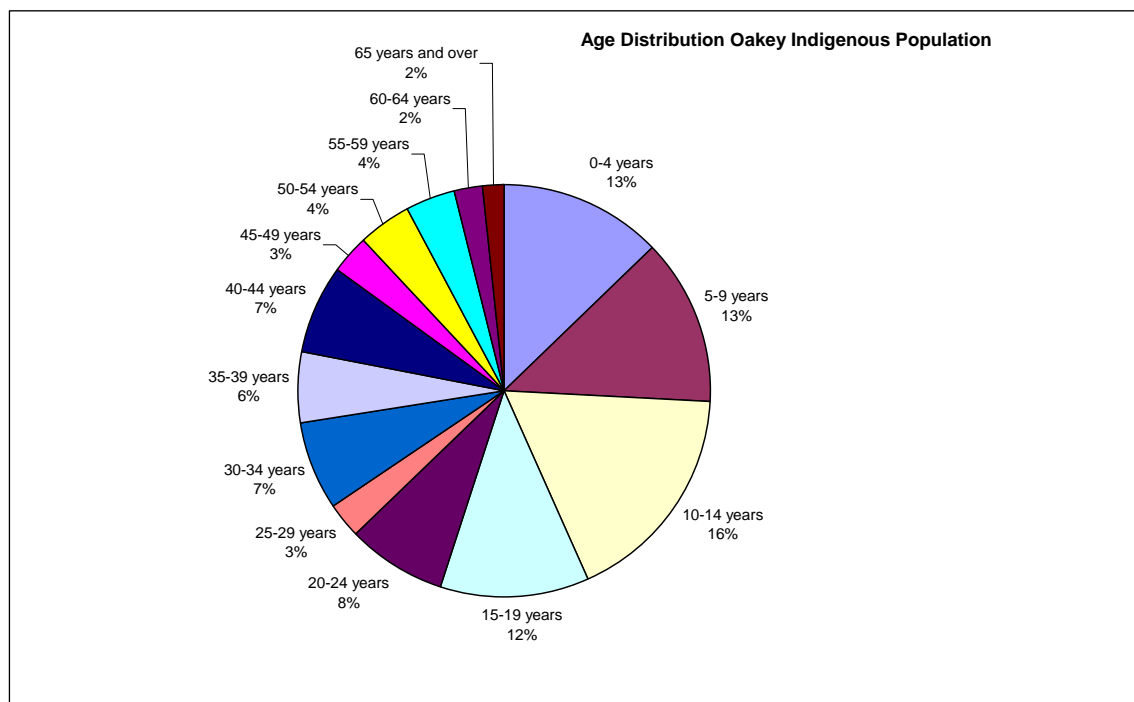
Religious Affiliation

One of the strengths observed during the research phase of this project has been a willingness on the part of local Churches to support the work of the Oakey Reconciliation Group. The group itself has a number of members who are active in their own faith communities. The primary researchers in this project were invited to meet with the members of the local ministers fraternal. During NAIDOC 2009 a number of local denominations decided to attend the flag raising ceremony and march as a part of their regular Sunday worship. This was a very powerful symbol of the commitment present in a number of Oakey churches. Below is the religious affiliation of Oakey's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.



Age Distribution

The Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is a very young one with 54 percent under the age of 18 while the wider community has 27.4 percent under the age of 18. This has a number of implications for local services. The importance of youth is found in the stake holder interviews and survey results.



Number of Children Born

24 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women aged between 15 and 24 have had more than one child. This compares with 17 percent of non Indigenous women. 85 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women between the age of 25 and 34 have had more than one child. This compares with 75 percent for non Indigenous women. This statistic supports the efforts being made in supporting young mothers and children and highlights the ongoing need.

Highest Year of School Completed

15 percent of the Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have achieved a year 12 level of schooling or equivalent. This compares with 26 percent of the non Indigenous population.

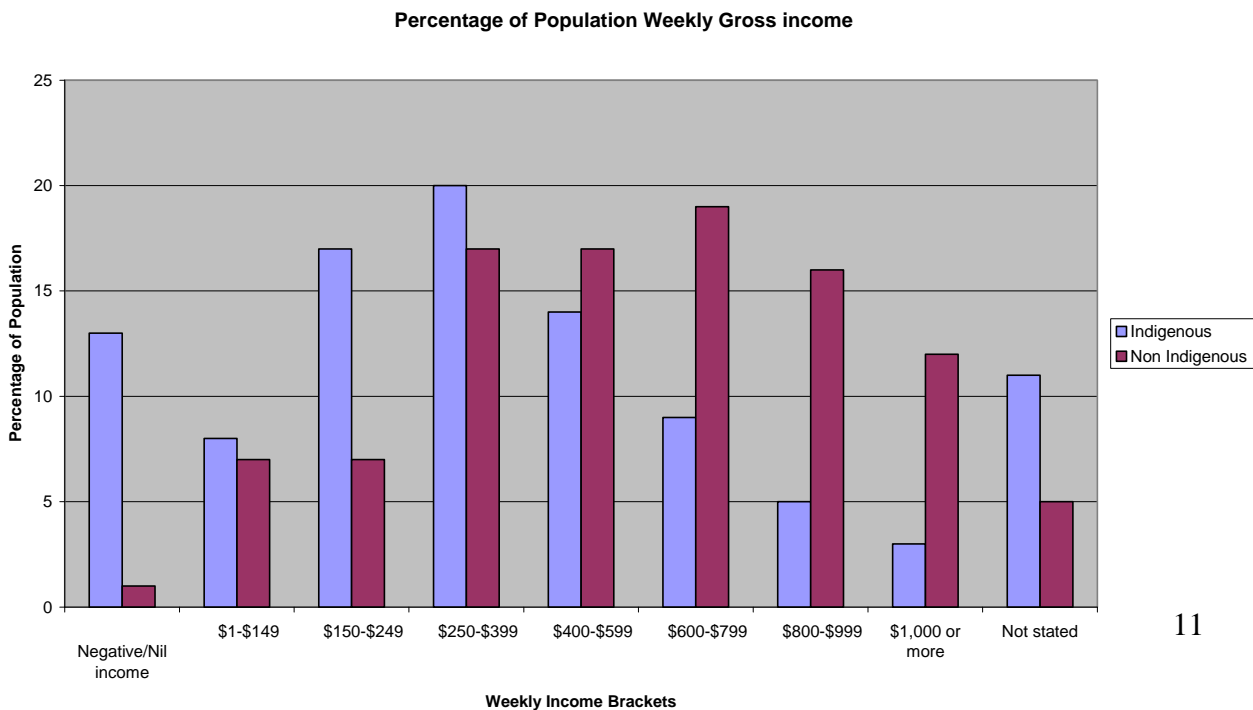
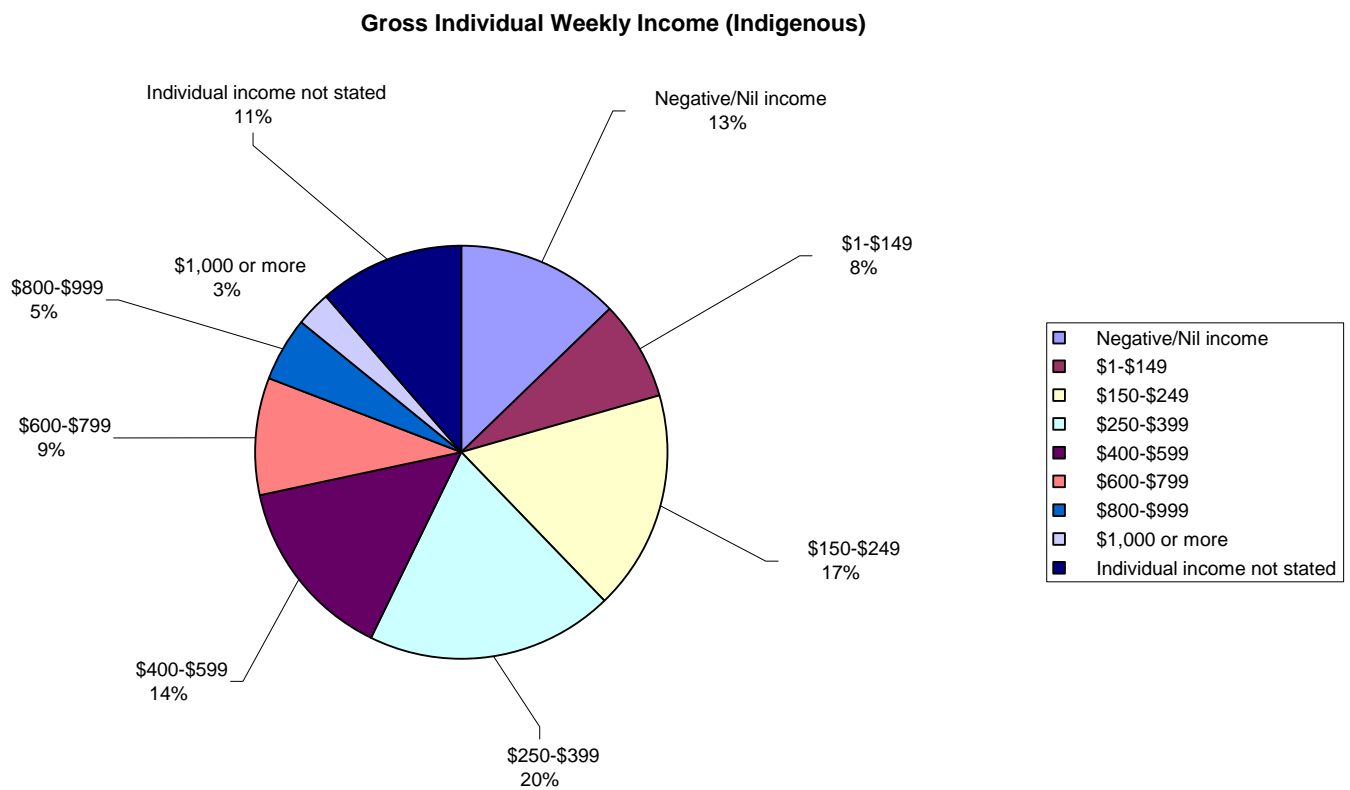
Household Tenure Type

31 percent of households with Indigenous residents are purchasing or fully own their home. This compares with 70 percent for the wider community. 33 percent of the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are in the private rental market. This compares with 11 percent for the wider community.

Individual Income

A common misconception is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are receiving a relatively large income. The following statistic shows that 58 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Oakey receive less than \$400 gross per week.



It is also clear that a greater proportion of non Indigenous residents receive more than \$400 gross income per week.

In the 4401 Postal Area, the median weekly individual income for persons aged 15 years and over who were usual residents was \$421, compared with \$466 in Australia. The median weekly household income was \$905, compared with \$1,027 in Australia. The median weekly family income was \$1,043, compared with \$1,171 in Australia. In Oakey the median weekly individual income for Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over is \$276.

Employment

The Oakey unemployment rate in 2006 was 18.8% for Aboriginal people and 4.4% for the rest of the population. The March quarter for 2009 has Jondaryan B (Oakey area) at 1.6 % unemployment - but the Indigenous figures are not recorded for this period.

Percentage of Oakey Population engaged in various industries.

Industry of Employment	Indigenous	Non Indigenous
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	7	14
Mining		0.6
Manufacturing	32	25
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services		0.5
Construction	9	4
Wholesale Trade		5
Retail Trade	6	10
Accommodation and Food Services		3
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	12	5
Information Media and Telecommunications		0.4
Financial and Insurance Services		1
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services		1
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services		2
Administrative and Support Services		1.5
Public Administration and Safety	4	9
Education and Training	10	5
Health Care and Social Assistance	14	7
Arts and Recreation Services		1
Other Services		3
Inadequately described/Not stated	6	2

It is interesting to note that a greater proportion of Indigenous population is employed in the Health and Education sectors compared to the non Indigenous population in Oakey.

The Australian Early Development Index

“A society that is good to children is one with the smallest possible inequalities for children, with the vast majority of them having the same opportunities from birth for health, education, inclusion and participation.”

Stanley, Richardson & Prior, 2005

In 2009 the Australian government established the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). The AEDI is a population measure of children’s development as they enter school. The AEDI is based on the scores from a teacher-completed checklist consisting of over 100 questions in the 5 developmental domains of physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge. These domains are closely linked to predictors of good adult health, education and social outcomes.

Early childhood development results across Australia








- The majority of children are doing well on each of the five AEDI developmental domains.
- Overall in Australia, 23.4 per cent of children are *developmentally vulnerable* on one or more domain/s.
- Overall in Australia, 11.8 per cent of children are *developmentally vulnerable* on two or more domains.
- There are higher proportions of children living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities and in very remote areas of Australia who are *developmentally vulnerable* on each of the AEDI domains.
- The majority of Australian Indigenous children are developmentally *on track* on the AEDI domains, with the exception of the language and cognitive skills domain.
- Children who are proficient in English and speak another language at home are less likely to be *developmentally vulnerable* on most of the AEDI domains compared to all other children.
- There are children in Australia who only speak English, but are reported as not proficient in English. These children are more likely to be *developmentally vulnerable* on all the AEDI domains.

(http://video.wch.org.au/aedi/AEDI_Snapshot-2009.pdf)

The AEDI results for the Jondaryan area and Oakey in particular emphasise a need to focus on support in the early childhood area. In Oakey 39.4 percent of children surveyed were vulnerable on two or more AEDI domains. This was the highest

proportion of children in the Darling Downs and compares to 11.8 percent for children across Australia.

Summary of AEDI Results for Jondaryan Community

	Percentage of children on track 	Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable 
 Physical health and wellbeing	68.0%	16.7%
 Social competence	63.7%	16.3%
 Emotional maturity	68.3%	14.4%
 Language and cognitive skills (school-based)	56.7%	18.69%
 Communication skills and general knowledge	67.9%	14.8%



Overall there are 34.0 per cent of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDI  and 23.2 per cent are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains .

Table of Children Developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDI Domains for the Darling Downs Region

Town	Result (%)	No. Vulnerable	Total tested
Allora	28.0	7	25
Cambooya	29.2	7	24
Chinchilla	25.4	15	59
Crows Nest	5.3	1	19
Dalby	12.9	19	147
Glenvale	16.3	7	43
Goondiwindi	11.5	13	113
Gowrie Junction	29.7	11	37
Highfields	10	13	113
Jandowae	14.3	3	21
Kingsthorpe	27.3	9	33
Meringandan	35.6	16	45
Millmerran	6.3	1	16
Oakey	39.4	26	66
Pittsworth	11.4	8	70
Stanthorpe	16.0	12	75
Tara	20.0	4	20
Warwick	19.6	37	189
Westbrook	10.3	6	58
Wyreema	21.1	4	19

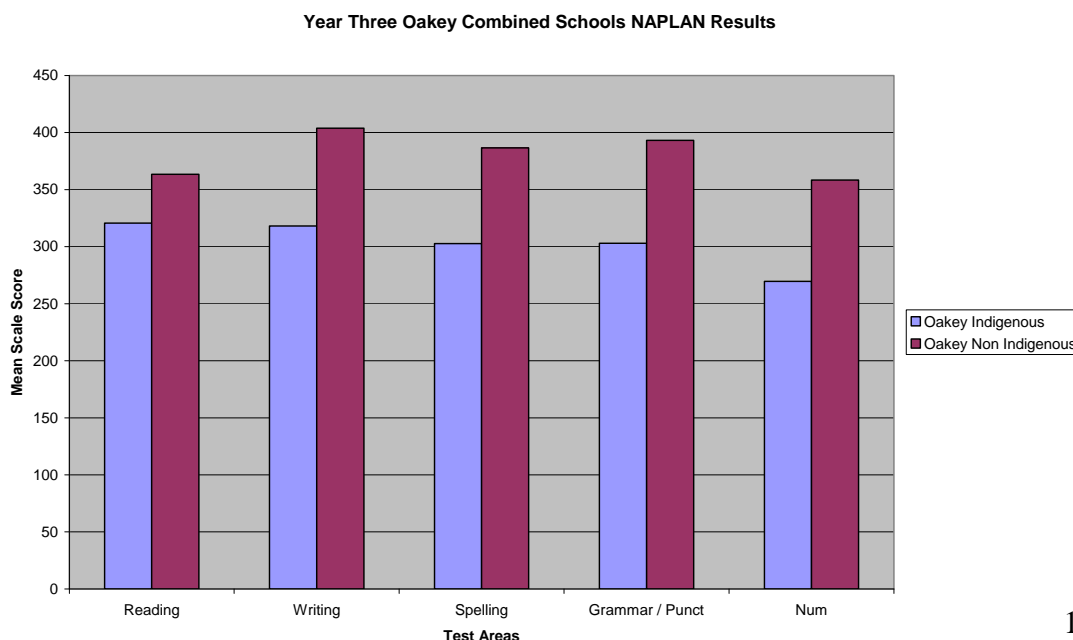
Education

One of the greatest areas of opportunity and strength is to be found in Oakey schools. With such a young population this is crucial. Around 26 percent of the local state school students are of Aboriginal descent. All education workers were identified as a source of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Schools have made concrete physical changes to ensure that they provide a space that is welcoming and affirming of Aboriginal history and culture. The leadership model and support from the High School is another great strength.

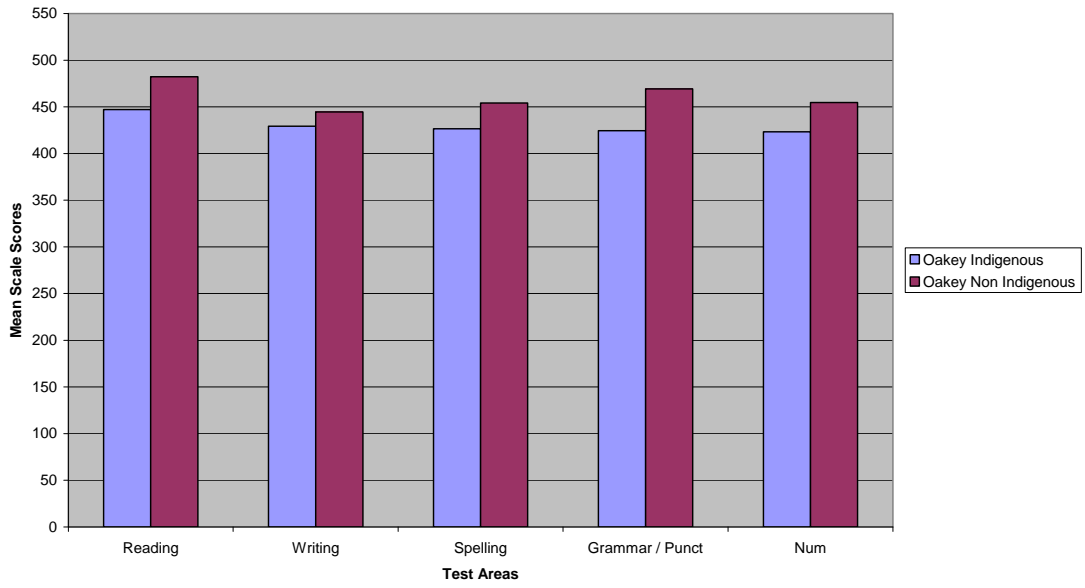
During the time of research both the primary and state high school had Aboriginal students in leadership roles. St Monica's primary school has worked hard to promote Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum. The school also has committed teacher aide resources to Aboriginal students enrolled at the school. Some of the programmes in place and strengths of the schools will be elaborated upon in the next section of this report.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was first introduced across Australia in 2008. Students are annually tested in years 3, 5 and 7 in every Australian school. Results are given to parents of students, individual schools and school systems. The data from the NAPLAN test results gives schools and systems the ability to compare their students' achievements against national standards and with student achievement in other states and territories. It also allows the monitoring of progress over time. For more background on NAPLAN go to www.naplan.edu.au

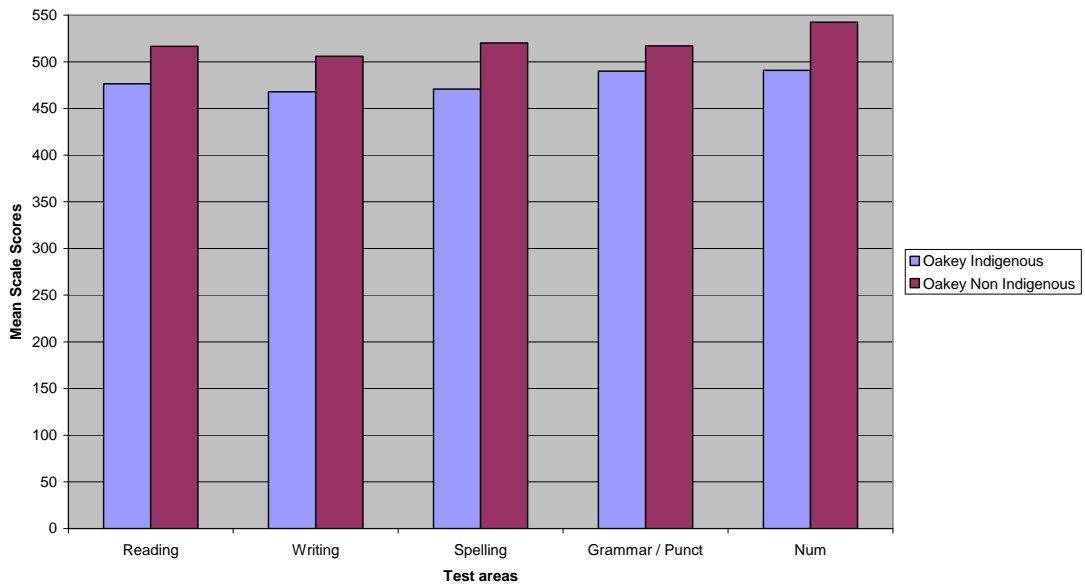
Whilst it does have some limitations it is one important measure of the educational progress of students in Australia. The purpose of this study was not to compare school or education sectors and so data from the local State Primary School and Catholic School was combined to compare results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the wider student body. In the five testing areas, (Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation and Numeracy) the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous students is quite apparent.



Year 5 Oakey Combined Schools NAPLAN Results

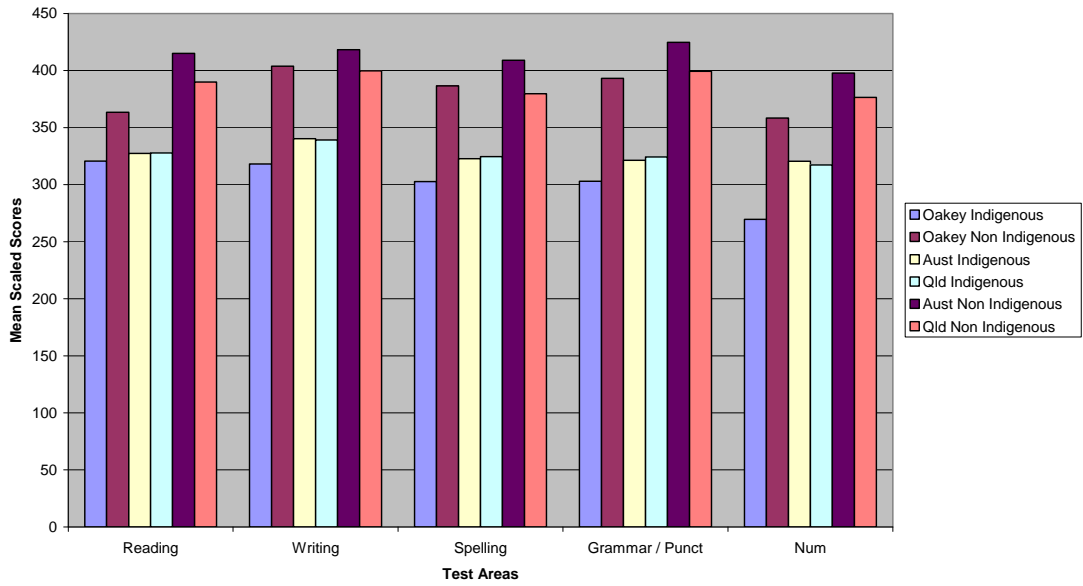


Year 7 Oakey Combined Schools NAPLAN Results

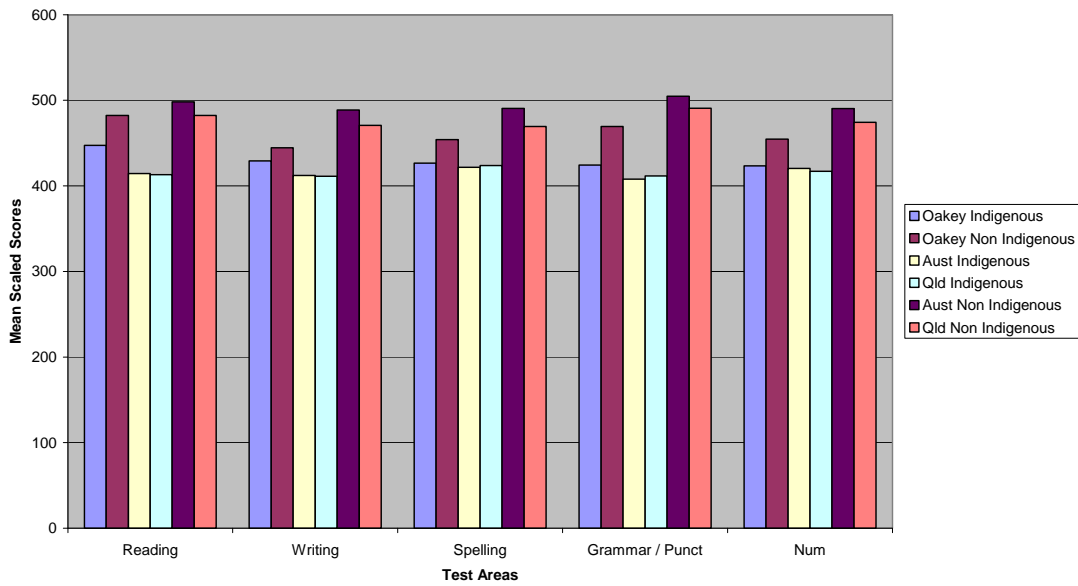


In most areas the Oakey Indigenous results were close to and sometimes ahead of the mean scores for Australian and Queensland Indigenous students.

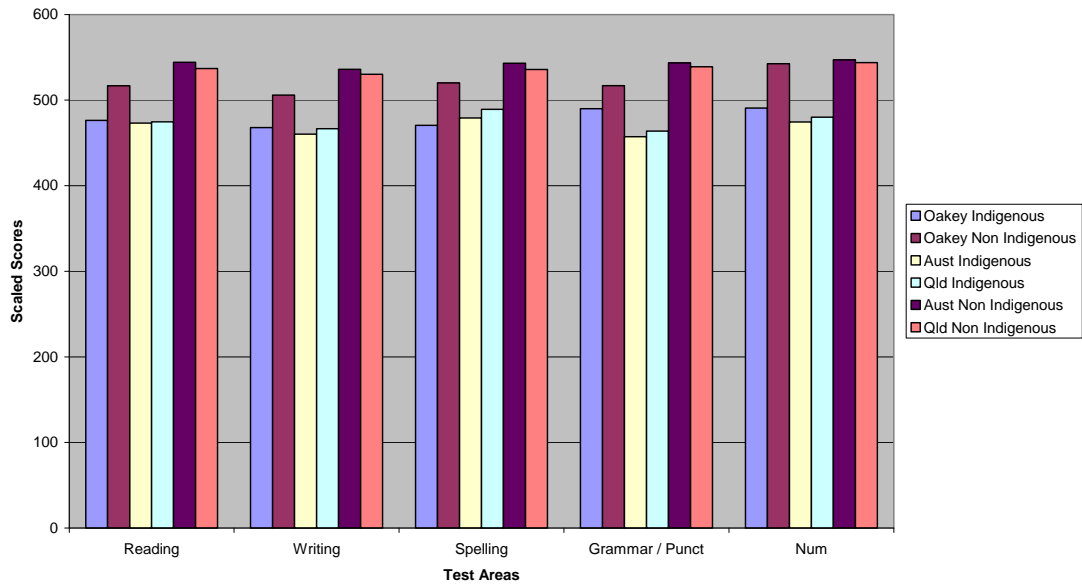
Year 3 NAPLAN Results compared to Australia and Queensland Mean Scaled Scores



Year 5 Oakey NAPLAN Scores compared to Australia and Queensland

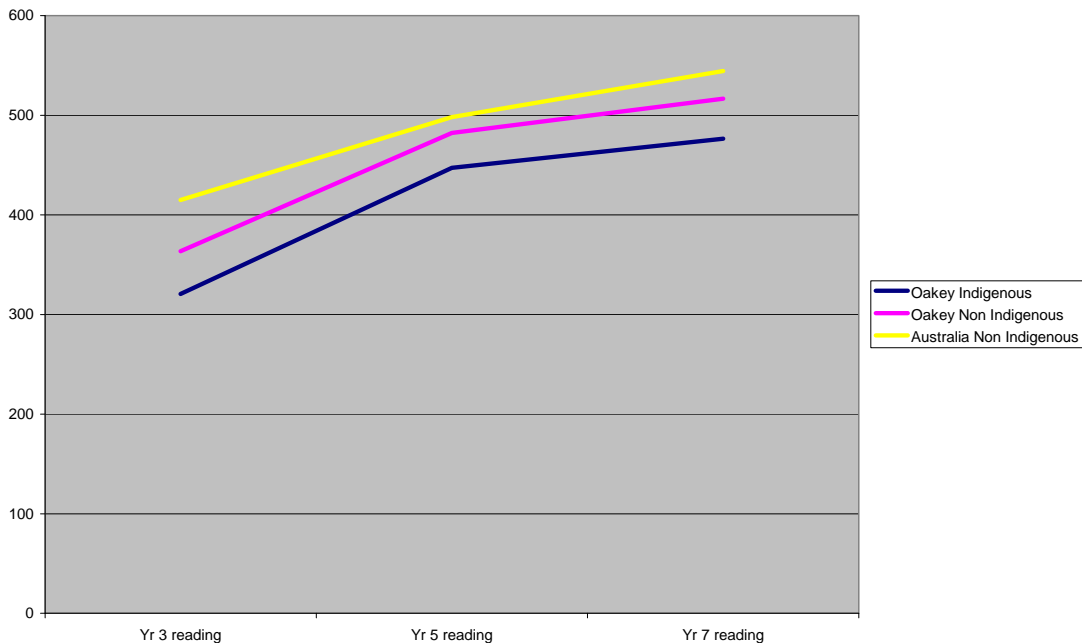


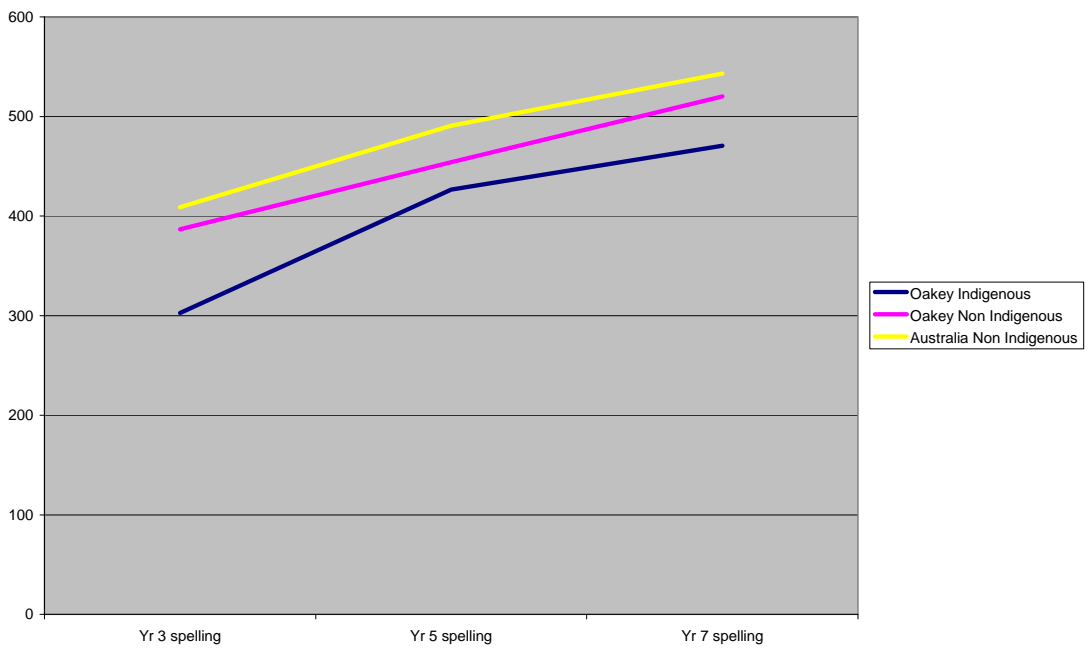
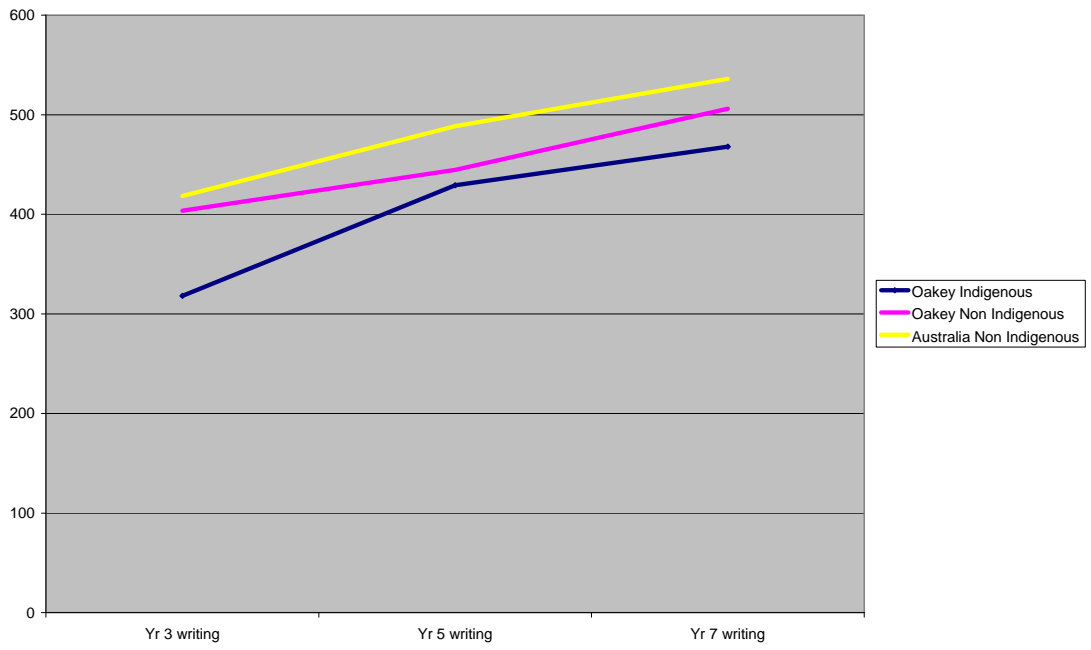
Year 7 Oakey Combined Schools NAPLAN Results compared to Australia and Queensland

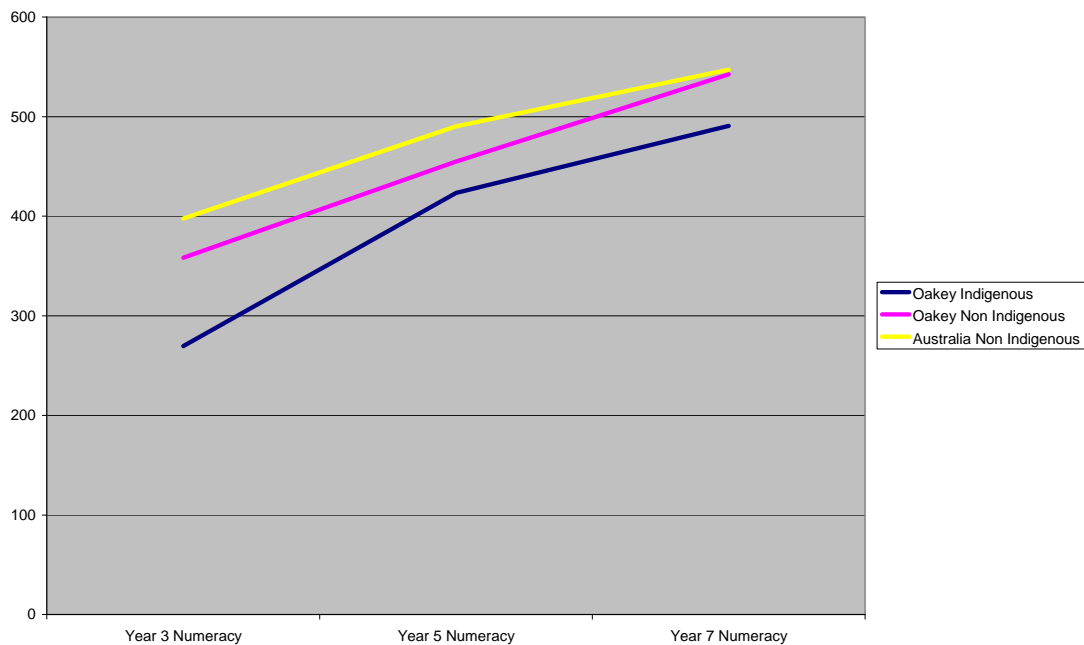
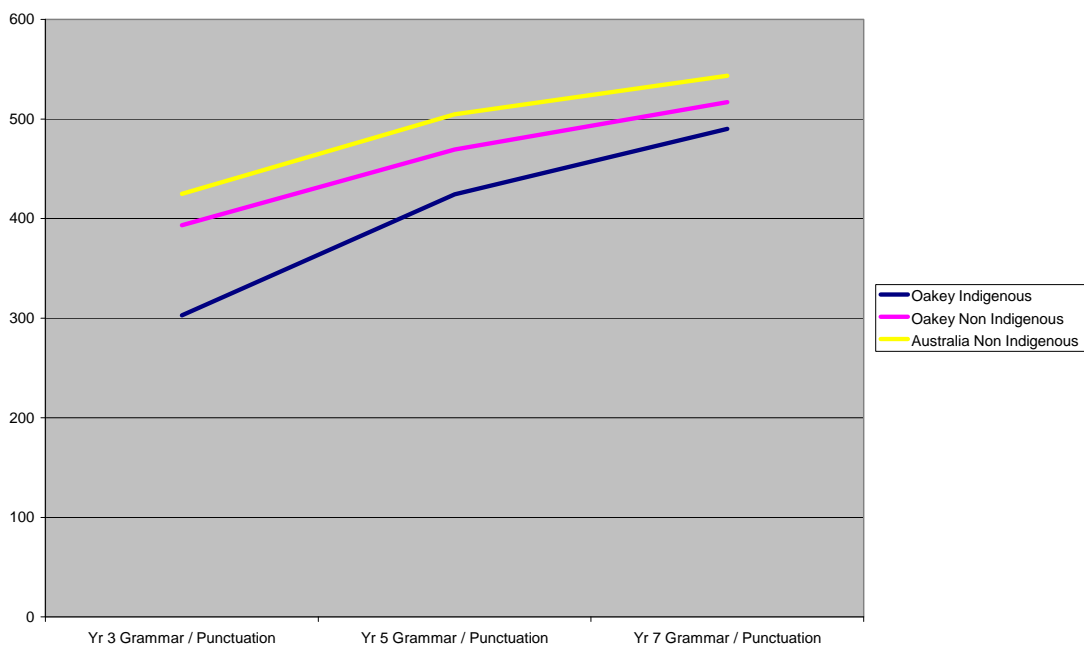


The following graphs demonstrate the gap between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal students in Oakey and where the results sit in comparison to the mean results for Australian students. It is important to stress that this is only one measure of educational achievement and must be examined in the context of the challenges faced by students when they begin school as revealed in the Australian Early Development Index. A further local examination of the limitations of NAPLAN and the caution required when analysing results can be found in the Finding the Gaps: Navigating Sustainable Learning Futures for Indigenous Students report.

<http://www.tsjc.org/finding-the-gaps/>





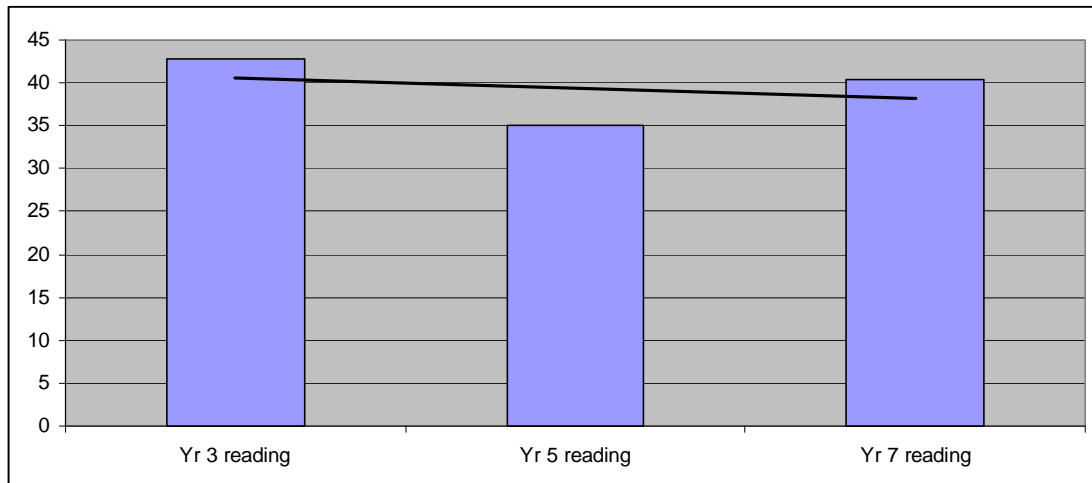


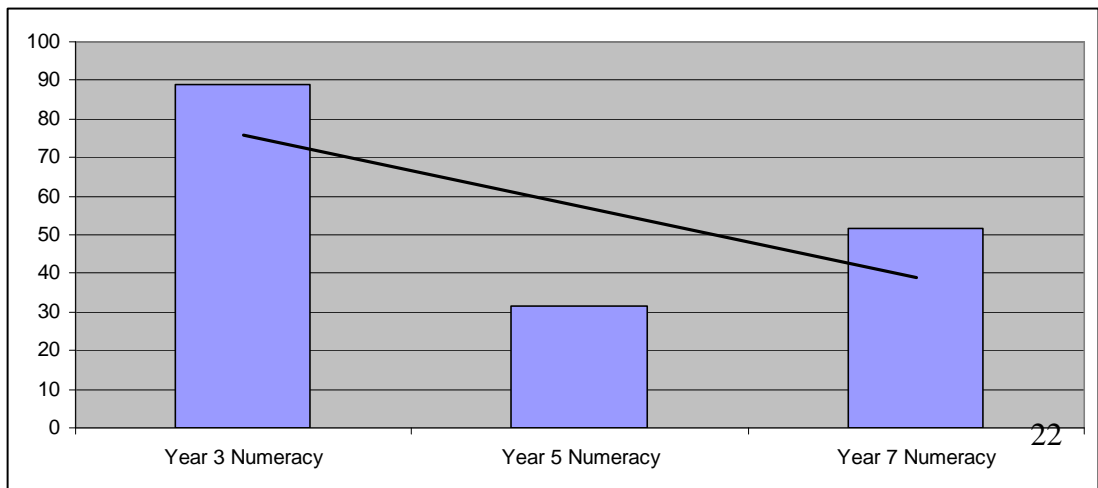
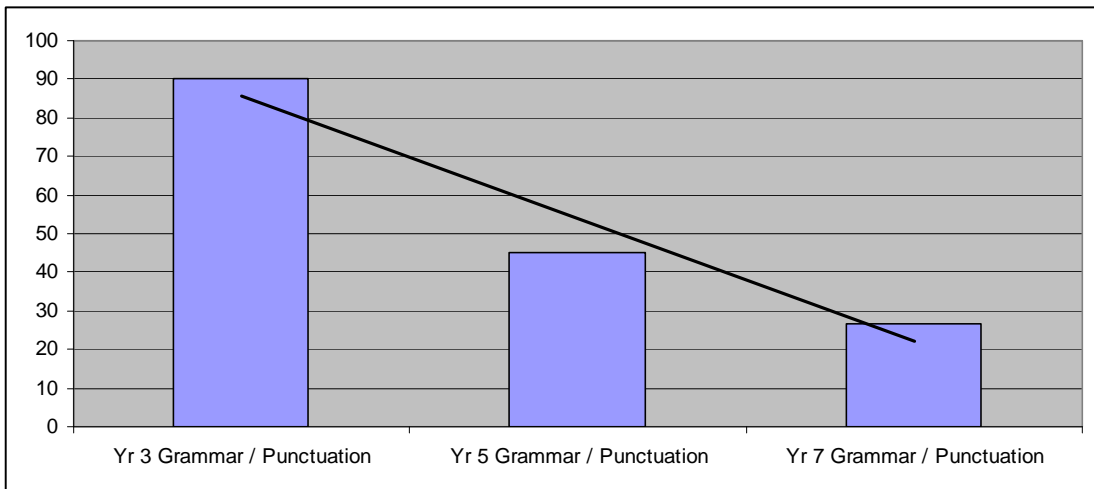
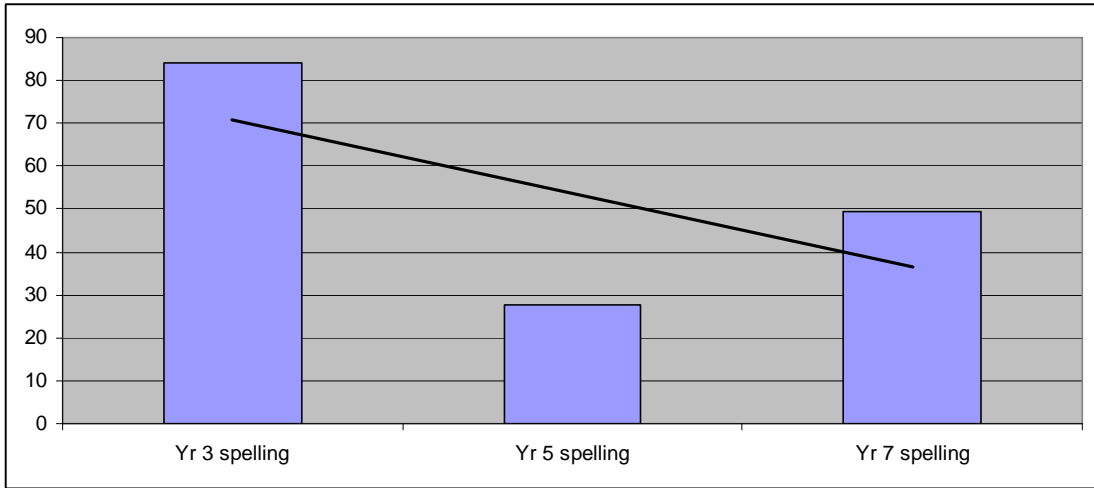
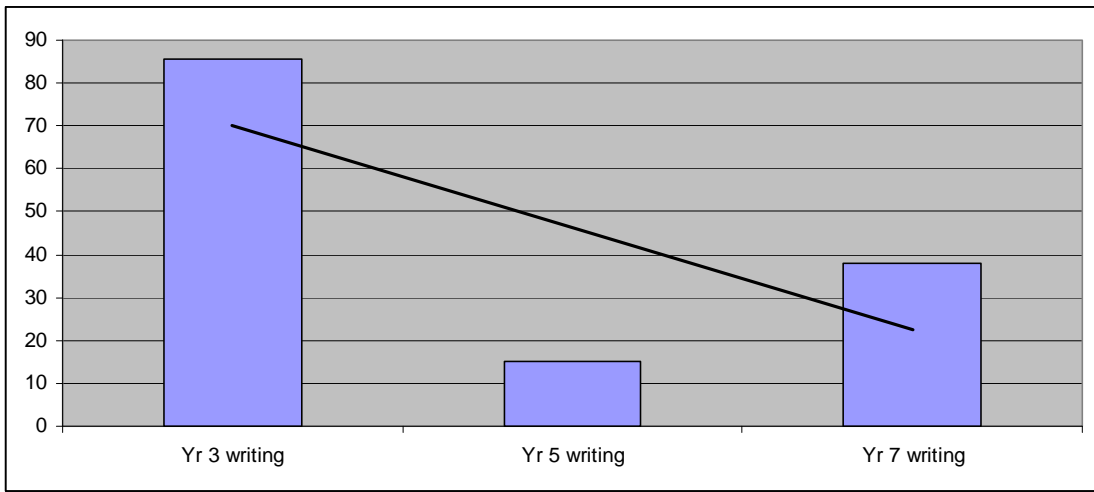
The above graphs demonstrate that the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous students is narrower in Year 7 than it is in Year 3 across all areas. (See table below) This is some evidence of progress. The Australian mean results also show that there is still a long way to go in overall closing this gap. It is important to note that this is not a longitudinal study – i.e. at the moment it is not possible to identify progress in individual students across the school years. In future years this will be one valuable way of measuring success.

The Gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous students (combined schools) in Oakey

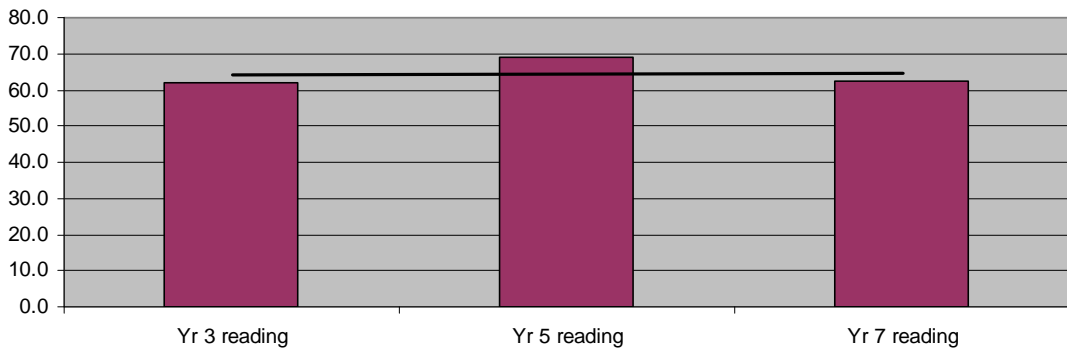
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 3 reading	42.8
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 5 reading	35
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 7 reading	40.3
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 3 writing	85.6
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 5 writing	15.3
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 7 writing	38.1
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 3 spelling	84
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 5 spelling	27.5
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 7 spelling	49.4
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 3 punctuation and grammar	90.3
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 5 punctuation and grammar	44.9
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 7 punctuation and grammar	26.8
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 3 numeracy	88.8
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 5 numeracy	31.4
Difference between non Indigenous and Indigenous mean score for year 7 numeracy	51.8

The Gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous students (combined schools) in Oakey with trend-line for each testing area

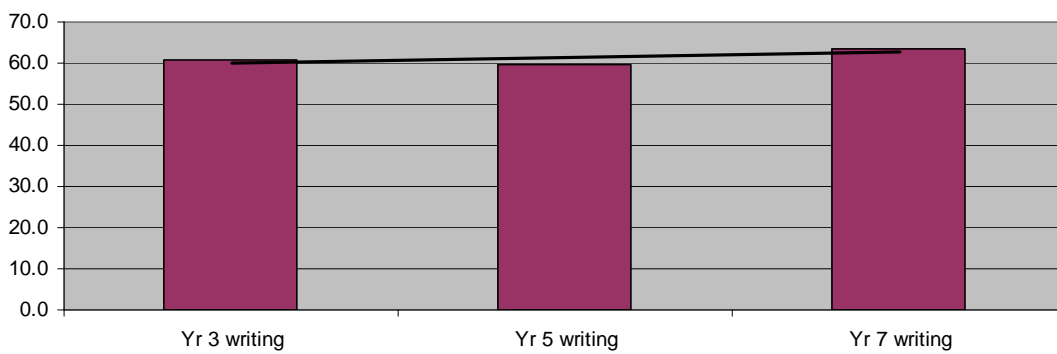




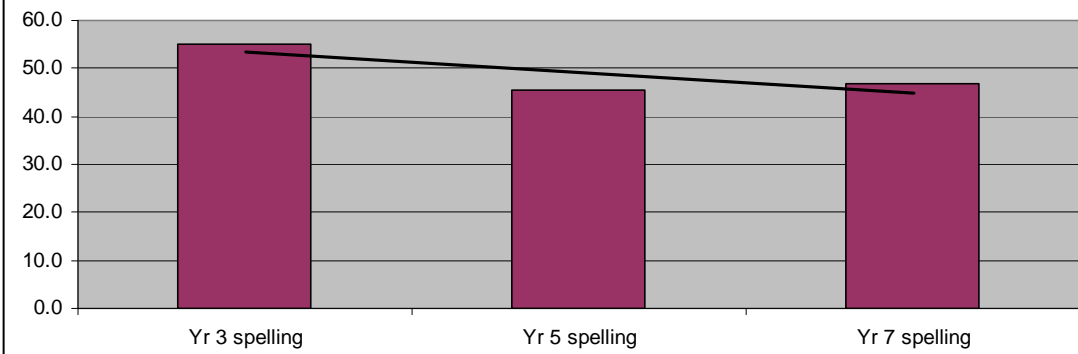
The Gap between Queensland Indigenous and non Indigenous NAPLAN results 2009 with trend-line



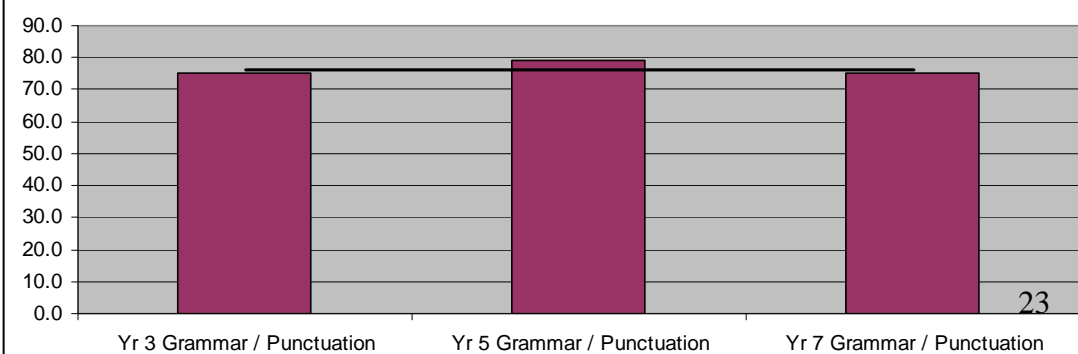
The Gap between Queensland Indigenous and non Indigenous student NAPLAN results 2009 with trend-line

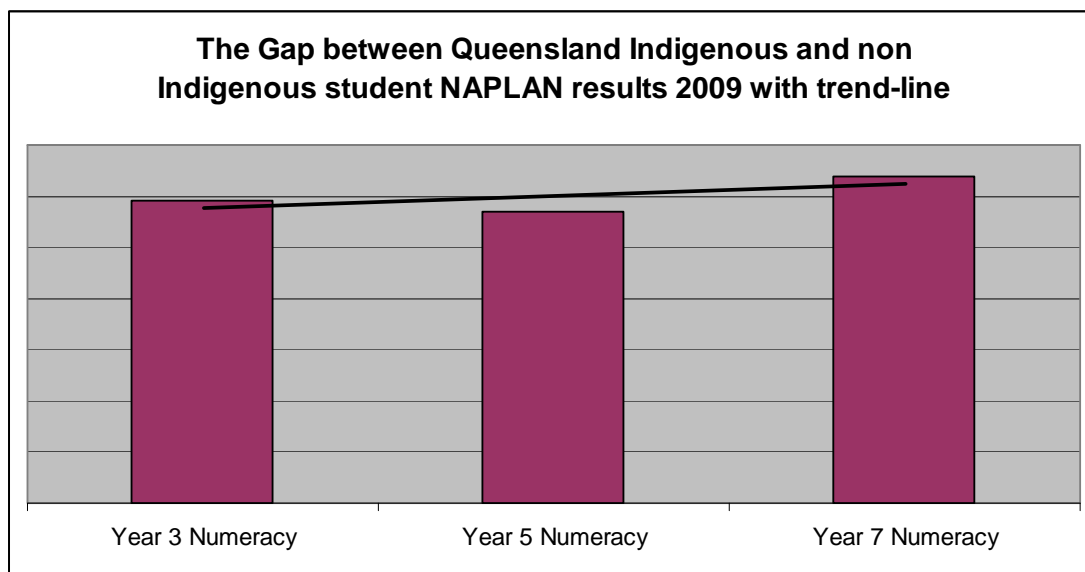


The Gap between Queensland Indigenous and non Indigenous student NAPLAN results 2009 with trend-line



The Gap between Queensland Indigenous and non Indigenous student NAPLAN results 2009 with trend-line





The above series of graph demonstrate that Oakey is moving in the right direction in the area of education. While it can not yet be demonstrated that the gap is closing for the same group of students what can be said with confidence is that the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous students is significantly smaller in year 7 compared to the gap in year 3. This is a positive trend. In 2010 it will be possible to track students from Year 3 to Year 5 and Year 5 to Year 7. To gain a better insight into this area it will also be important to take into account the rate of stability amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander student population. If there is a high level of movement in and out of Oakey schools by Indigenous students then the task of comparing results and progress will be made more difficult. There are nevertheless great signs of hope in the Oakey schools.

Families on the Fringe

In 2009 Mission Australia released *Families on the Fringe – Promoting the social inclusion of young families moving to non Metropolitan areas*. This study by Karen Healy analysed the movement of young families to four non metropolitan areas of New South Wales and Queensland. Families on the Fringe found that between 2001 and 2006 58.7 percent of all population growth in Queensland occurred in non metropolitan city areas. The purpose of the study was to discover what factors drove the move to certain locations and how social inclusion could be promoted amongst young families resettling in non metropolitan areas. Oakey was one of the areas of focus for this study.

The study found that Oakey had limited overall population growth between 2001 and 2006 and was one of the most disadvantaged areas in this region. The Census data reveals that between 2001 and 2006 the non Indigenous population grew by 5 percent while the Indigenous population grew by 13 percent. Between 1996 and 2006 the non Indigenous population grew by 15 percent while the non Indigenous population grew by 47 percent.

Families on the Fringe found that there were three main factors attracting young families to non metropolitan areas. These were: affordable housing, employment opportunities and lifestyle and safety. Some comparisons of key statistics across the four communities studied can be seen in the table below. The higher than national rate of people renting is worth noting.

COMPARISON OF KEY STATISTICS

Table 1: Comparison across areas of key demographic features

Demographic features	Wyong	Camden	Oakey	Gladstone	Australia
Percentage of population <14yrs %	20.4	25.5	24.2	24.4	19.8
Proportion of households with one parent and children %	18.6	14.0	19.9	13.5	15.8
Median income (families)	\$1,061	\$1,465	\$995	\$1,437	\$1,171
Unemployment %	7.1	3.9	6.6	5.0	5.2
Percentage of population who is Indigenous %	2.2	1.3	9.1	3.3	2.3
Percentage of population renting %	25.7	18.9	36.2	29.1	27.2

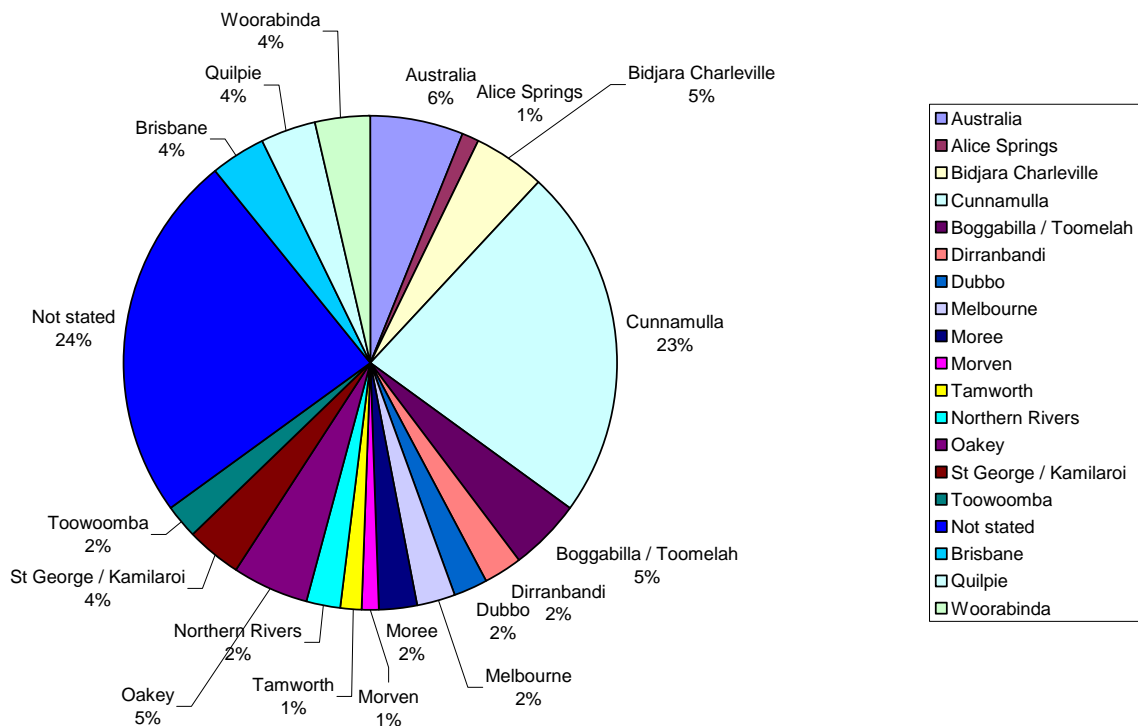
(adapted from ABS data cited above)

(Families on the Fringe, 2009, p.16)

Healy et al. identified a number of factors which contributed to social exclusion in the four study areas. The six identified themes were: dislocation from informal networks, lack of local transport services, commuting for work, insularity, mobility of the community and inadequate service systems. In Oakey commuting to work and mobility were the two factors most contributing to a lack of a sense of belonging. (Families on the Fringe, 2009, p.33)

As part of the survey phase of this research Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents were asked to identify locations which they viewed as having traditional links or ties with. The fact that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people moving to Oakey from other locations have family members or kinship ties with people already living in the town has contributed to a sense of belonging in Oakey. The issue of commuting and transport will be discussed further in the survey section of this report.

Links with Traditional Country



The graph, “Links with Traditional Country” was compiled from results from the community survey. It gives an indication of the diverse background of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. From this survey 51 percent of respondents came from the Darling Downs and South Western Queensland.

Conclusions to available data / literature review

While the information presented so far in this report represents a valuable snapshot in time the most useful part of the process will be to revisit the same measures over a regular period of time. Some of the service providers consulted as part of this research have welcomed such an approach. This would make the action / research more of an ongoing process rather than a ‘one off’ exercise. While the gap remains large there is much to suggest that resources are being targeted in the most important areas. These strategies will be discussed in the next section.

Section 3 – Stakeholder Interviews – Health and Education

As a way of analysing identifying strengths and needs in the Oakey Aboriginal population the steering committee identified key stakeholders to be interviewed. The list of questions was devised and refined by the group. Interviews were conducted by the principal researcher and co-chair of the Oakey Reconciliation Group (Jennifer Wharton). The list of people interviewed was not exhaustive. Two areas of the community which were not formally interviewed were the local police force and sporting clubs. A number of interviews were also conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is suggested that the Oakey Reconciliation Group invite key people from each of these groups to address the questions informally during meetings in 2010. This will help to ensure that the action research process remains dynamic. The list of questions appears at the end of this report.

The interviews were conducted with the following people:

David Bosworth (Principal Oakey State School)
Chris Golightly (Principal St Monica's Primary School)
Ann Klibbe Community Health Nurse, Oakey Health Services
Alice Collins (Indigenous Education Worker, Oakey State High School)
Dawn Woodbridge (Indigenous Education Worker, Oakey Primary and High Schools)
Chris McNally (Principal, Oakey State High School)
Maree Toombs (Indigenous Higher Education Pathways)
Sharon Brown and Kim Neilan (Cuddly Bears Child Care Centre)

Identified Strengths

Family connections and a sense of community amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents were identified by the interviewees. A sense of belonging was mentioned in a number of interviews. The connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents meant that communication and networking was quite strong. One interviewee described the population as, "one big family". In the health area there was great acknowledgement of the immunisation programme and how the state primary school had worked closely with the Aboriginal health worker in delivering a range of programmes. Local efforts to engage youth through the Toowoomba Regional Council Service Centre were also recognised. Involvement of Aboriginal residents in local sporting clubs was viewed as a positive sign of belonging. A number of strengths and positive initiatives were identified in the local childcare centre and schools.

Cuddly Bears Child Care Centre

Much evidence in the last ten years has identified the early years as crucial in terms of good adult health outcomes in adulthood. At a local level this has also been recognised. The Cuddly Bears childcare centre has made great efforts to welcome and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the local area. More than 10 percent of the children attending are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. At the time of interview there were 5 Aboriginal Childcare workers at the centre. A great relationship with Queensland Health was observed. The cultural background of children was affirmed and a number of appropriate resources had been developed and used. Efforts have been made in terms of cultural awareness of all staff and indeed this childcare centre was a great lighthouse sharing its knowledge and best practise with childcare centres in other locations in Southern Queensland. Considering the results of the Australian Early Development Index discussed in the previous section of this report the work of Cuddly Bears is a crucial part of 'closing the gap'. The work of this centre should be affirmed and supported at every opportunity.

Local Schools

The three schools have made great efforts to acknowledge and affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and to improve the educational outcomes for their students. The state primary school always flies the Aboriginal flag. Close to a quarter of the students are Indigenous. The school has a mural depicting a local creation story and recognition of the diverse ties to country that the local students have. The school

runs a Steps into Prep programme three times a week. This assists in getting students ready for school and also provides a support service for parents. It is an avenue for early diagnosis of special needs and a way of strengthening relationships with parents.

The challenges facing the local community have been recognised by the Federal government and the primary school is part of a National Partnerships scheme. A number of initiatives have been resourced through this partnership including literacy training for teacher aides and better classroom support. The school conducts regular internal testing of students and is constantly looking to refine its practise based on evidence collected. The old pre-school has been provided as a community meeting space and is called 'the yumba'. The yumba symbolises a concrete commitment to view the school as a hub for service providers and a place where all people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage are welcome. The word 'yumba' is well known throughout South Western Queensland and is used to describe a camp or fringe settlement. The yumba is part of the history of Aboriginal people from locations such as Charleville, Cunnamulla and Mitchell.⁶

There is a similar spirit of positive engagement evident in the Catholic and High School. The High School has introduced a system of Indigenous leaders and during the research phase of these project great efforts at supporting and affirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students was observed. Students are supported to express and develop their cultural skills in the areas of art and music. Efforts are also being made in creating pathways to employment and further education at the high school. The leadership in the high school had shown great support for the Indigenous Higher Education Pathway Project. During 2009 this project had increased from 17 students to 70 students, 11 of which came from the local high school. The programme focussed on developing confidence in students and assisting them in achieving post school education.

Community Health

The community health service has strong links with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. For a long period of time this service has supported and partnered an Oakey based Aboriginal health worker. The service has worked pro-actively in the community advocating on behalf of clients and working with a range of service providers. The Oakey Community Care Committee is well supported by the local community health service. The work of the community health nurse is both pro-active and holistic in her approach to improving health for the whole Oakey community. Three successful projects identified were immunisations, the school health project and the work of the Aboriginal health worker.

During the period that this research has taken place there has been a great change in the delivery of health. A specified Aboriginal health worker is no longer based in Oakey. There were many positive reports of how this position had worked over the years. While this is major challenge – there is an opportunity for positive change in the future. In September of 2009 three health providers met in Oakey to discuss a

⁶ To read more about yumbas see Hazel Mackellar, Matya Mundu, Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association, Cunnamulla, 1984; Nalingu, - Memories of the Mitchell Yumba, Mitchell, 1985 or Herb Wharton, Yumba Days, University of Qld Press, St Lucia, 1999

way of improving access and provision of health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community members.

Identified Needs

Transport was identified as a challenge by the interviewees. In the health area examples of elderly people attending medical appointments was cited as an existing challenge. In general being unable to access services located only in Toowoomba due to a lack of transport was discussed a number of times. A need for adult education and suitable qualifications for employment was another challenge facing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The lack of employment was a need linked with the lack of suitable qualifications.

The lack of an identifiable Indigenous voice was raised by a number of interviewees. This was a challenge for service providers wishing to engage with the Indigenous community and also made it difficult for local Aboriginal people to access sources of funding for community projects. It also meant that Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had to leave Oakey to have their heritage formally recognised. A 'shop-front' or identifiable community centre was suggested in a range of forums during this project.

A lack of adequate housing was also raised as a need by a number of interviewees. Stability within a number of families was identified as a challenge in Oakey. Substance abuse and poor self esteem and cultural identity were also raised in a number of interviews.

It is an irony that during the research phase of this project a locally based Aboriginal health worker moved from strength to an identified need. In the context of a significant section of the community the impact of an effective 'champion' and 'advocate' cannot be underestimated. This area of need has already been discussed and is highlighted in the recommendations section of the report.

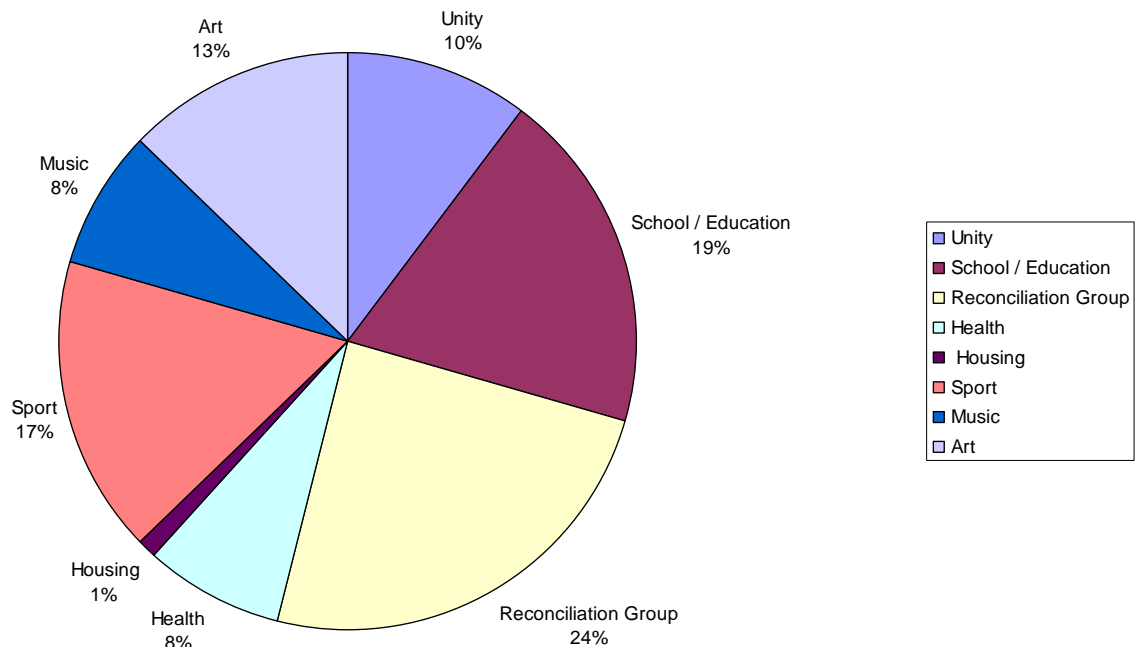
Conclusion

The previous two sections of the report have clearly identified a number of challenges facing the Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. A strong message that was heard in compiling this report was, "We are not victims!" It is important to note that a number of strengths are very evident in Oakey. Community Capacity does not need to be built in Oakey – it already exists. It needs to be further developed and in a small and close knit community the possibilities for change are great. External bodies and funding sources need to take time to listen to the views of the local population and provide support where it is requested. The solutions to the challenges raised lie within the Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

Section 4 – The views of the community

As mentioned in the method section of this report more than one in five of the recorded Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander population returned a completed survey form. This represents household members exceeding the total population recorded in the 2006 Census. The survey questions were adapted over the life of the project. The key questions remained but it was felt that the original form was complex and difficult to complete.

Strengths of Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community



The Reconciliation Group – Unity and the Arts

In terms of research rigour it is important to acknowledge that there is a measure of self reporting in the number of people recognising the strength of the reconciliation group. As the group driving this project and distributing the survey form it is not surprising that it has been recognised as one of Oakey's strengths.



At the same time the achievements of this small group have been incredible. In its first twelve months it has co-ordinated and facilitated a NAIDOC week celebration which was the first for over thirty years. The week celebrated literature, story telling, cooking, music, art and dance. It promoted a great sense of pride and was well supported by local government. The theme, "It's OK to be Aboriginal in Oakey" was well received. Perhaps the best measure of the success of the week comes from the mouth of a young non Aboriginal girl. After taking part in a dance workshop she went home and told her parents, "When I grow up – I want to be Aboriginal so I can dance like that!"

Reports from the local library also stated that the week had improved the self esteem and confidence of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. A full programme was held during the week with great community support. The Toowoomba Regional Council Community Development unit along with local business and industries provided sponsorship and assisted with ticket sales. The Toowoomba Regional Council Regional Arts Development Fund also made the literature and dance workshops possible.

The wonderful music of local musical artists Robert Wharton and William Haupt along with Toowoomba city's Josh Arnold provided Oakey with a sound track of hope for 2009. They have modelled how as a wider community we can all work together and learn from each other. The Reconciliation Group was also successful in bringing employment providers and health providers to the table to focus on the

best outcomes for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. I would urge all levels of government and all sections of the local community to get behind the Oakey Reconciliation Group. The work they do benefits the whole of Oakey and they are at the forefront of reconciliation for the whole of this region.

Other Observations / Local Champions

Art

There are a number of talented Aboriginal artists in the Oakey area. In early 2009 there was a great event held in the cultural centre. The Queensland Arts Council affiliate group (Oakey and District Arts Council) hosted and organised the event. Local artwork was added to a travelling exhibition. This art exhibition was well attended by local community members and demonstrated a great willingness to partner Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the future.

Media

The Oakey Champion Newspaper has provided extraordinary coverage and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues during 2009. It has celebrated local talent and been a very effective advocate in areas where services are lacking (eg. Health care). The Champion is a great example of how local media can promote unity within a community and promote a fair go for all.

Local Government

The Toowoomba Regional Council Oakey District Community and Economic Development Office has been a strong partner in recent times. The Oakey Service centre of Toowoomba Regional Council has shown great support for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community. In many ways it could be said that Oakey is leading the way in the Toowoomba region. David Totenhoffer and the staff at the Council are a great source of strength for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The local service centre has been a part of building and developing capacity within the local community. It is significant that the greatest things are being achieved in the Toowoomba region in the location with the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander residents.

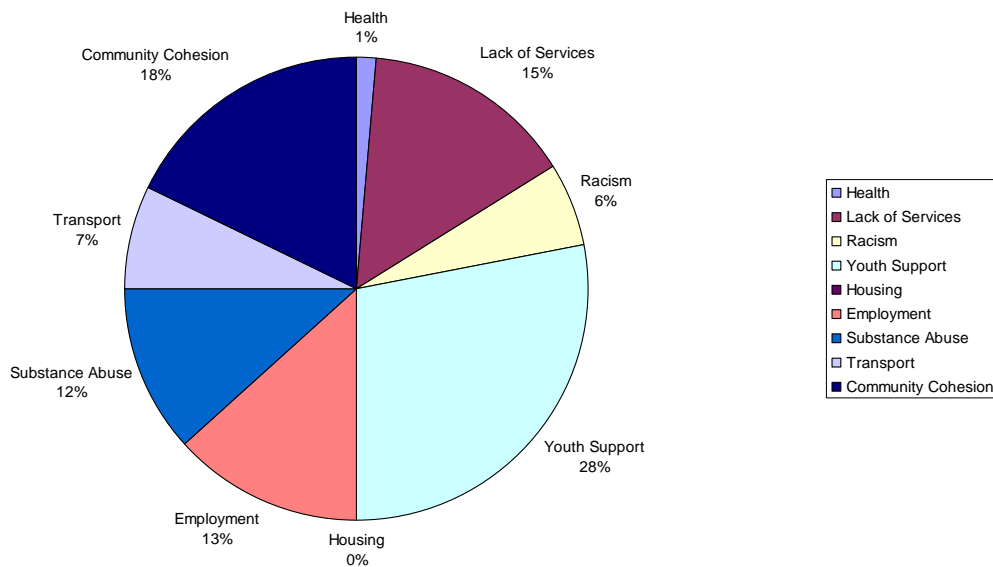
Needs of Local Community

Three questions from the survey were used to identify needs in the Oakey district. Each of these questions required the person responding to prioritize needs in the local community. Two areas which were prominent in the answers provided were community unity / pride and support for youth. In conversations around the community housing was constantly raised as an issue. The condition of houses provided through the local Aboriginal housing company and the barriers to accessing private rental and home ownership markets are examples of the challenges faced in Oakey. Transport was another area of need raised by respondents to the survey and community members attending various functions during 2009. The Oakey Jigsaw found that 7 percent of homes in Oakey had no vehicle. Oakey also has poor public

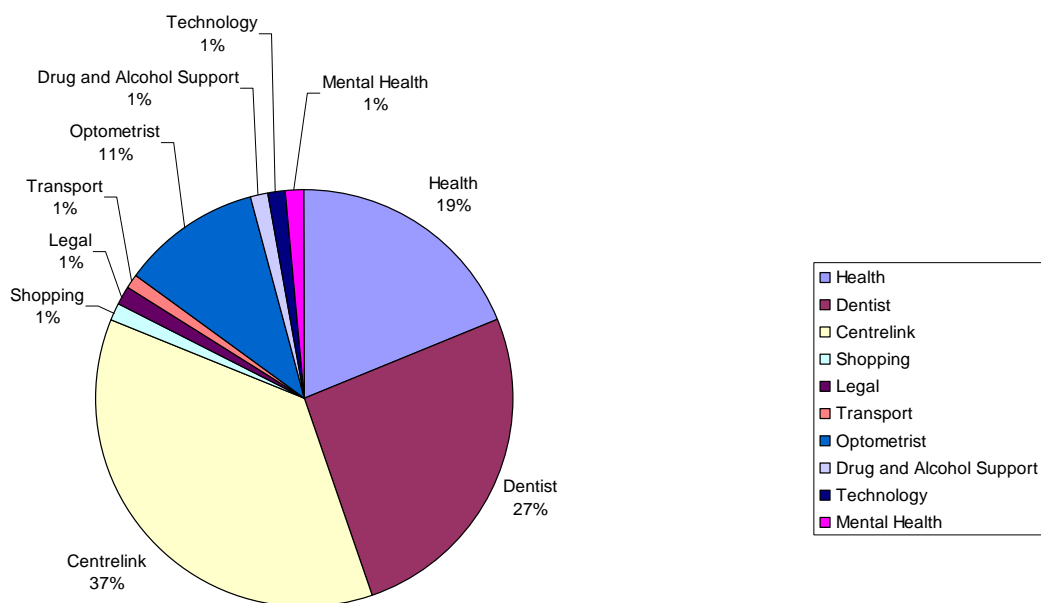
transport options linking the township with Toowoomba city. Education, Employment and Health were also areas of need identified through the survey.

The recommendations have been drawn up by the steering committee for this study. They are based on the areas of need identified in the survey and stake-holder interviews. Many of these needs are common to the whole Oakey community.

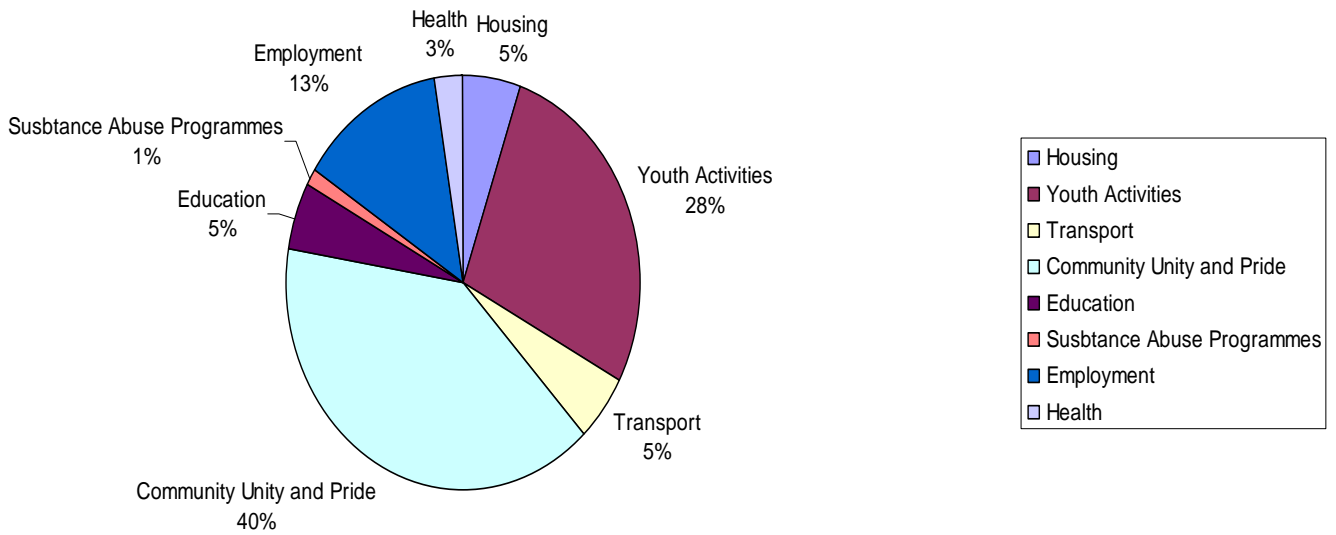
Needs / Challenges for Oakey Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community



Difficulty Accessing Services



If you could change one thing in Oakey What would it be?



	Requiring Most Attention
1	Youth Activities
2	Housing
3	Child Health
4	Transport
5	Child Safety
6	Support for Elderly
7	Employment
8	General Health
9	Domestic Violence
10	Rate of Aboriginal People in Prison

Conclusions

The challenges and needs facing Oakey's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have been detailed in the previous sections of this report. It is important that service providers with responsibilities in these areas acknowledge the gaps that have been identified. It is also important to stress that many of the same challenges and issues that face Oakey's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population also face sections within the wider Oakey population (eg. transport, youth activities, access to services.) In other words change in these areas will benefit the whole community.

The areas of need identified in the community survey have been organised into seven major areas for recommendations. These are: Youth, Housing, Employment / Education, Access to Services, Health, Transport and Community Unity and Pride. Two of the most difficult questions which must be faced when making recommendations in any report to a community are:

Who will own them? and Who has the power to implement them?

It is hoped that the Oakey Reconciliation Group can take responsibility for these recommendations. They will only succeed if the group is well supported and maintains a level of focus and sustainability. I would humbly urge all concerned – especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents to get involved. Government and non government organisations must be willing to enter the process and share their power and resources to bring about a better future for all of Oakey.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. (Margaret Mead, 1901 – 1978)

Recommendations:

YOUTH

- Explore and implement opportunities for youth to learn and perform traditional dance and music
- Support the Oakey Youth Drop-in centre
- Introduce School Holiday youth activities
- Organise an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rugby Knockout competition with Oakey Rugby League clubs

HOUSING

- Work with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing company to repair and maintain the houses they manage
- encourage home ownership

EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATION

- Facilitate local delivery of RATEP (community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Education Program) in Oakey
- Explore and implement Adult Education Classes in Oakey
- Partner with local business and industry to develop employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and unemployed adults

ACCESS – (Centrelink / Dentist / Health)

- Negotiate for a venue or venues for the delivery of visiting health and social services

HEALTH

- Pursue the provision of Aboriginal Medical Services in Oakey as a partnership between existing service providers and the local Medical Centre, and Community Health Service
- Pursue the employment of an Aboriginal Health Worker in Oakey to connect community members with health services
- Pursue the provision of Dental services in Oakey
- Pursue the provision of Mental health services in Oakey

TRANSPORT

- Pursue the provision of regular public transport between Oakey and Toowoomba
- Strengthen the partnership with the Oakey HACC Transport service for transport of eligible clients to services in Toowoomba

COMMUNITY UNITY / PRIDE

- Organise Oakey Community NAIDOC celebrations for July 2010, in partnership with local Schools and Council
- Pursue incorporation of the Oakey Reconciliation Group
- Establish Oakey Reconciliation Group as the representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in the Oakey district
- Continue to meet regularly
- Pursue Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and individual involvement in local and regional events and opportunities
- Nurture and encourage individual talent, skill and achievement in sports, the arts, culture, education, employment and community involvement.

APPENDICES

If you could change one thing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Oakey what would that thing be?

Rank the following areas of life which most require attention for Oakey's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents? (Rank 1 – 3 with 1 being the most important, 2 the next and 3 the next important)

Child Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	General	
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Youth Activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transport	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic Violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Child Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rate of	
Indigenous					
Support for Elderly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	People in	
Prisons	<input type="checkbox"/>				

How many people live in your household?

Age and Gender (Fill in number and gender in the table below. Do not include yourself.)

	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number
Male	0-4		5-14		15-24		25-54		55-64		65+	
Female	0-4		5-14		15-24		25-54		55-64		65+	



Background to Oakey Reconciliation Group Strengths / Needs Analysis Project

The Oakey Reconciliation Group and Toowoomba Regional Council has commissioned the Social Justice Commission to conduct research to identify strengths and needs of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The Social Justice Commission is a part of the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba and is a not for profit organisation. Two of the key roles of the Commission are Research and Advocacy. Over the past four years the Commission has been involved in promoting justice for Indigenous Australians.

The purpose of the project is to create a “snap-shot” of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community. It is to identify things that are going well as well as assets which are in the community. The other purpose is to gather feedback from community members in order to prioritise areas which require urgent attention. It is hoped that this information will enable local Indigenous residents in partnership with Toowoomba Regional Council and other levels of government to advance the well being of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

The results of the research will be presented to an open public meeting of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The final report will be available from Oakey Reconciliation Group, Toowoomba Regional Council and the Social Justice Commission.

One of the major sources of information for this project will be interviews conducted with Indigenous community members and other individuals working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These interviews will be approximately thirty minutes in length. Interviewees will have an opportunity to ask questions of the interviewer. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and an interviewee can refuse to participate at any stage. The relationship with the primary researcher (Dr Mark Copland) will in no way be affected should a person decide not to participate in an interview.

Any information collected from interviews will be securely stored and destroyed once the project is concluded. The identity of interview participants will be protected unless the interviewee specifically wishes to be identified. An interviewee can at any stage request that information from their interview not be used as part of the project.

For further information contact:

Mark Copland
(07) 46130895
mark@twb.catholic.org.au

Social Justice Commission
Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba

Consent Form

Name: _____

Address:

Contact Phone Number: _____

I _____ have read the information sheet on the Oakey Strengths / Needs Analysis Research project. I have had the study explained to me and had an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. I know that I am not obligated to be involved in this project and can withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the Social Justice Commission. I understand that the information can only be used as part of the Strengths / Needs Analysis project and that my identity will not be revealed.

I AM / AM NOT (circle one) happy for my name to be placed on a list of people interviewed for this project.

Signed: _____

Date:

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. What do you see as the strengths of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?
2. What are some examples of projects / initiatives / things that are working well?
3. How can these programmes be better supported and expanded?
4. If you have a serious problem in the local community who do you go to for help?
5. Which member or members of the local Indigenous community would call a meeting to address things if a crisis emerged?
6. In your opinion what are the top three challenges facing Indigenous people living in Oakey?
7. Do you have any examples / stories of the difficulty faced by people in this situation?
8. Do you have any suggestions as to how life can be improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Oakey?
9. Did you have anything else to add?

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