



*Creating a Future -  
Owning the Past and the  
Present*

*Strengths and Needs Analysis  
Toowoomba's Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Community*

*March 2007*



**Social Justice Commission**  
Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba

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***March 2007***



***Cover Artwork – Abundance in Balance by Donna Moodie***

## **Executive Summary**

The city of Toowoomba has a human history dating back tens of thousands of years. The size of the Indigenous population has changed dramatically over time. Introduced diseases, frontier conflict and forced removals brought about great loss of life and dispossession. By the early 1900s only a handful of Aboriginal people remained living in Toowoomba. An Indigenous population of 231 in 1971 has grown to at least 3500 in 2007.

### **Strengths:**

A number of strengths emerged from this study. There is a growing number of articulate young Indigenous professionals employed in the government and non government sector. Many of these individuals have shown a willingness to make a positive contribution to the community. A number of elders within the community give generously of their time on almost a weekly basis. There is a strong commitment to making things better for youth.

Carbal Medical Centre and the Community Justice Group (including 'Whaddup' Programme) are two services which were recognised as strengths by respondents to a survey conducted as part of this study. In terms of material assets the local Aboriginal Housing Company holds housing stock of 52 houses and land and buildings on the outskirts of the city. The *Gummingurru* stone arrangement and ceremonial ground is another cultural and material asset.

### **Challenges:**

A number of challenges were identified and prioritised for action in this study. These challenges are: unity within the community, lack of local run services, education, housing, racism and employment. In terms of available data the two areas which cause greatest concern are literacy and numeracy and relative crime rates. More than a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Toowoomba leave Year 7 without meeting the national benchmarks for literacy and numeracy. While the overall number of criminal offences within the wider Toowoomba community has decreased, the rate of crime committed by people identifying as Indigenous has significantly increased. More than half of the juvenile justice orders in Toowoomba city are Indigenous youth.

Whilst the challenges are enormous, it is important to stress that in the area of education and juvenile justice there are a number of programmes in place. One of the major recommendations of this report is that the challenges be met in a co-ordinated way, with greater resources given to breaking the cycle of illiteracy and poor numeracy amongst the younger members of the population.

## **1. Background to Study**

This research has been commissioned by Toowoomba City Council. In 2005 some members of Toowoomba's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community had a series of meetings with staff from the Indigenous Co-ordinating Centre (I.C.C.) Roma Office. Community members identified the need for a strengths and needs analysis of Toowoomba's Indigenous population. The I.C.C. provided Toowoomba City Council with the funds to commission this research. Some resources will also be made available to implement the recommendations of this final report.

## **2. Acknowledgements**

This research would not have been possible without the support of a number of people. The Diocese of Toowoomba has provided administrative assistance throughout the research and write-up phase of the project. Ms Rosie Horn assisted with transcription of interviews. Ms Celia Warr acted as Executive Officer for the Social Justice Commission enabling the principal author, Dr Mark Copland the capacity to conduct the research. I would like to thank a number of people for assisting with data collection. These people include: Malcolm Lewis, Brett Rangiira, Judith Standen, Phillip Dreise, Carolyn Weldon, Stacey McCarthy, Jodie Luck, Jason Hopgood and Kristian Rose.

Members of a steering committee were invaluable in guiding the research and providing advice and support. Members of this group generously gave of their time and were constant in their encouragement and inspiration. Members of this group included:

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Darryl Bates  
Dick Rose  
Edwina Yasso  
Janet Suey  
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### 3. History of Toowoomba Area

#### Pre Contact

Some of the oldest evidence of human activity on the Darling Downs comes from a place near Warwick named Talgai. Until the late 1960s the “Talgai Skull” was believed to be a major piece of evidence proving human activity on the Downs for 12000 – 15000 years. Carbon dating of charcoal remains, including some from King’s Creek, Clifton on the Downs now indicates Aboriginal life as early as 40,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup>

The process of scientifically establishing the length of time that Aboriginal people have been in Australia is still being developed. This period of time is now believed to be at least 40,000 years. Some experts claim that this period of time could be up to 120,000 years.<sup>2</sup> In recent years the Jarowair/Giabal people have come to be accepted as the Traditional Owners of the Toowoomba district. The restored ceremonial site at *Gummingurru* is a community asset. This venue is used by Uncle Brian Tobaine and traditional owner groups to conduct cultural awareness sessions with a number of groups including Queensland Police and School groups.

#### Post Contact

Cunningham's favourable account of the pastures of the Darling Downs was widely circulated in the late 1820s, but it was not until June 1840 that Scotsman Patrick Leslie formed a station at Canning Downs (present day Warwick District), and claimed hundreds of thousands of acres – from Toolburra to the head of the Condamine. Before long he was joined by other squatters looking to establish themselves on the Downs.<sup>3</sup>

It appears that the Leslie brothers set a pattern of violence on the Darling Downs frontier. Writing to his family in 1841 George Leslie said: ‘We never allow them to come about the stations or hold any communication with them except it be with a gun or sword. Two blacks were shot the other day by a new arrival on the Downs for attempting to spear some sheep he had lost in the bush’.<sup>4</sup> The Leslie letters reflected a willingness to employ any measures deemed necessary to protect white servants and property. The killing of cattle and sheep by local Aborigines often met with swift revenge.

Early in 1844 George Leslie wrote to his elder brother William, saying:

*The Blacks have been annoying us greatly within the last 10 months. We have lost through them 100 head of cattle and they attacked us again the day before yesterday. Walter being down country I can't leave home, but Dalrymple and a party are out hunting the niggers. They have killed a*

<sup>1</sup> French, Maurice: *Conflict on the Condamine*, USQ Press, Toowoomba, pp.5-6

<sup>2</sup> Broome, Richard: *Aboriginal Australians*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p.174

<sup>3</sup> Maurice French (1996), *Conflict on the Condamine*, pp.60-64.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of the Leslie Brothers in Australia 1834-1860*, John Oxley Library, OM71-43, letter 195, 24 June 1841.

*great many white men in this part of the country and not many days pass without our hearing of some man killed.*<sup>5</sup>

Leslie's reference to a party "out hunting the niggers" is worth noting: Ernest Dalrymple was related to the Leslie family (as was Darling Downs Crown Lands Commissioner Christopher Rolleston). Ernest's brother George Dalrymple was an important figure in European expansion into North Queensland and also believed that settlers must "make the Blacks fear them".

Between January 1842 and October 1844 there were thirteen white men reported killed by Aborigines within the Darling Downs Pastoral District.<sup>6</sup> Rolleston at first could find no provocation for these attacks and believed it to be a part of their 'hostile and aggressive habits'.<sup>7</sup> A year later he acknowledged that provocation was the reason for attacks on white lives and property:

*That this disposition is inherent in the tribes frequenting this part of the country I should be very loath to believe, and would rather account for such an anomaly by the interference of the shepherds and stockmen with the Gins, in consequence of which quarrels are likely to have ensued and where the death of the offenders could not safely be accomplished the stock of the masters has been attacked by way of revenge.*<sup>8</sup>

While news of white deaths resulting from frontier violence was recorded and made public, the same could not be said for black lives lost at the hands of white squatters and their servants. Archibald Meston later commented, 'Very singular is the silence of those old pioneers – Leslie, Arthur Hodgson and Stuart Russell – with regard to the blacks. It looked suspiciously like a conspiracy of silence'.<sup>9</sup> These silences were sometimes broken. Charles Pemberton Hodgson (Arthur Hodgson's younger brother) 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'.<sup>10</sup>

Only a small number of inquests were conducted into the deaths of Aborigines on the Darling Downs frontier. A white man killed one Aboriginal man 'in self defence', and another two were reported as 'accidentally shot'.<sup>11</sup> In October 1848 Rolleston held an inquest into the deaths of an 'unknown number of Aborigines' murdered by 'unknown whites'. The only known records of these inquests are entries in a New South Wales register.<sup>12</sup> Many of the inquests were conducted by Arthur Hodgson, who was one of

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, letter 208, 1 January 1844.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Rolleston to John Wickham, 28 October 1844, John Oxley Library, A2.14, frame 619, letter number 44/8352.

<sup>7</sup> Annual report on the Aborigines for 1843 from Christopher Rolleston to Colonial Secretary, 5 January 1844. John Oxley Library, A2.14, frames 400-402, letter number 44/507.

<sup>8</sup> Annual report on the Aborigines for 1844 from Christopher Rolleston to Colonial Secretary, 1 January 1845, John Oxley Library, A2.15, frames 76-79, letter number 45/324. The word 'Gin' is a racist term for Aboriginal females of all ages.

<sup>9</sup> Archibald Meston, 'The Genesis Of Queensland, Part 2', *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 9 April 1920.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Pemberton Hodgson (1846), *Reminiscences of Australia*, p233.

<sup>11</sup> Archives Authority of New South Wales, Attorney General and Justice, Registers of Coroner's Inquests, 1834-1859, reel number 2921, also held by the Toowoomba Family History Society.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*.

the Darling Downs squatters accused by Meston of maintaining a ‘conspiracy of silence’.

The use of state-sanctioned violence against Aborigines in Queensland began on the Darling Downs and in the Moreton Bay area. In 1843 Crown Lands Commissioners Rolleston and Simpson joined with a vigilante group of settlers, Lieutenant Johnstone and ten soldiers from the 99th Regiment to chase a group of Aborigines into the Rosewood Scrub in the Lockyer Valley following the ‘Battle of One Tree Hill’.<sup>13</sup>

In his 1888 book *Genesis of Queensland*, squatter Henry Stuart Russell described the shooting of an Aboriginal man in a battle near Toowoomba on the main range. ‘The blacks were dancing and bellowing their war-song at the time, and this big blackfellow was more prominent than the rest. ‘Cocky’ took true aim at his head with his rifle, and struck the black somewhere in the body, which made him rebound six feet high, and all the tribe then commenced to roll the stones of the hill down the incline fancying they could kill all the whites on the flat’.<sup>14</sup>

An accurate number of Aborigines who were murdered on the Darling Downs frontier would be impossible to calculate. But there is evidence to suggest that 1840 to 1843 was a particularly violent period. Letters from Crown Lands Commissioner Rolleston constantly reported attacks upon white lives and property. Rolleston often joined with white squatters and their servants in seeking retribution for these acts of resistance. In August of 1843 he reported chasing a group of Aborigines suspected of driving away 484 sheep from Sibley and King's station.<sup>15</sup> The driving away of such a large number of sheep represented more than a crime brought about through hunger. Rolleston appears to have been incapable of comprehending that these acts of aggression were motivated by settlers trespassing on Aboriginal land.

Rolleston reported, ‘Game and fish abound throughout the district and the ‘Bunya Bunya’ fruit during three or four months of the year affords an ample feast for the tribes within a circuit of a hundred miles, so that their acts of aggression cannot be attributed to a want of sustenance’.<sup>16</sup> He described one encounter with local Aboriginal people:

*On the third morning we came suddenly on a large tribe of them down upon the top of a steep bank backed by a thick scrub to oppose our progress. We rode steadily towards them and shouted to them to lay down their spears which was addressed only by a yell of defiance and a volley of spears, one entering the shoulder of a horse ridden by one of our party – killed him on the spot – several shots was then fired but none proved fatal. The blacks retreated into the scrubs immediately which from their denseness defied our attempts to follow them on horseback’.<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 October 1843, p.3.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Stuart Russell (1888) *Genesis of Queensland*, pp.327-328.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Rolleston to Colonial Secretary, 15 August 1843, John Oxley Library, A2.13, frames 178-180, letter number 43/6628.

<sup>16</sup> Annual report on the Aborigines for 1848 from Christopher Rolleston to Colonial Secretary, 12 January 1849, John Oxley Library, A2.18, frames 383-387.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Rolleston to Colonial Secretary, 15 August 1843, John Oxley Library, A2.13, frames 178-180, letter number 43/6628.

A hint at the probable number of Aboriginal deaths on the Darling Downs can be gleaned from the reminiscences of William Stamer who visited during the late 1850s:

*It was enough to make ones blood run cold to listen to the stories that were told of the diabolical manner in which whole tribes had been 'rubbed out' by unscrupulous squatters. No device by which the race could be exterminated had been left untried. They had been hunted and shot down like wild beasts – treacherously murdered whilst sleeping within the paddock rails, and poisoned wholesale by having arsenic or some other substance mixed with the flour given to them for food. One 'lady' on the Upper Condamine had particularly distinguished herself in the poisoning line, having, if report spoke the truth, disposed of more natives than any squatter by means of arsenic alone...<sup>18</sup>*

With the intensive settlement of the Darling Downs, the Aboriginal population in a number of towns had decreased rapidly by the turn of the century. While an Aboriginal presence remained in the Dalby district by 1900, Meston stated 'There are no blacks either in or around Stanthorpe. The old Toowoomba aboriginals are now represented by ten or a dozen men and women'.<sup>19</sup>

Official reports and correspondence traced the decline in numbers on the Darling Downs. In 1861 the Police Office at Drayton reported that 150 Aboriginal people were living in the local area.<sup>20</sup> By 1900, just four blankets were distributed to Aborigines in the same area.

In 1904 a survey of the 'half-caste' population was conducted in the Toowoomba Police District, which included the towns of Crows Nest, Dalby, Goondiwindi, Highfields, Inglewood, Killarney, Southwood, Stanthorpe, Texas, Toowoomba and Warwick. The Chief Protector of Aborigines, Walter Roth, approved the actions of police in remanding half-caste children until a removal order could be obtained, saying 'I can assure you, and any of your officers, that I will at all times render every help in my power to rid the district of incorrigible and undesirable blacks'.<sup>21</sup> In 1904 the following return for the Aboriginal population of the Darling Downs District was made.

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<sup>18</sup> William Stamer (1866), *Recollections of a Life of Adventure*, vol. 2, p.98.

<sup>19</sup> QSA, COL/140, 97/147.

<sup>20</sup> QSA, A/13704, Drayton Police Office Letterbook.

<sup>21</sup> QSA, A/58749.

## Aboriginal Population of Darling Downs 1904

Petty Session Districts	Total Aboriginal Population
Crows Nest	9
Dalby	49
Goondiwindi	62
Highfields	1
Inglewood	3
Killarney	1
Southwood	2
Stanthorpe	1
Texas	1
Toowoomba	7
Warwick	2

22

Despite the forced removals and the decline in population, connection with country was still important. In 1904 one old couple lived near Jondaryan on the Darling Downs. Following the death of the man, his widow fell sick and was pressured into moving to a settlement. Local residents observed her ties to the area:

*We tried to persuade her to go to the home for Blacks but she would not hear of it, said she would stay at any price, near by and be buried with her blackfellow. She is a rather intelligent gin and seems to have very strong sentimental home ties'.<sup>23</sup>*

### 4. Size and make up of population

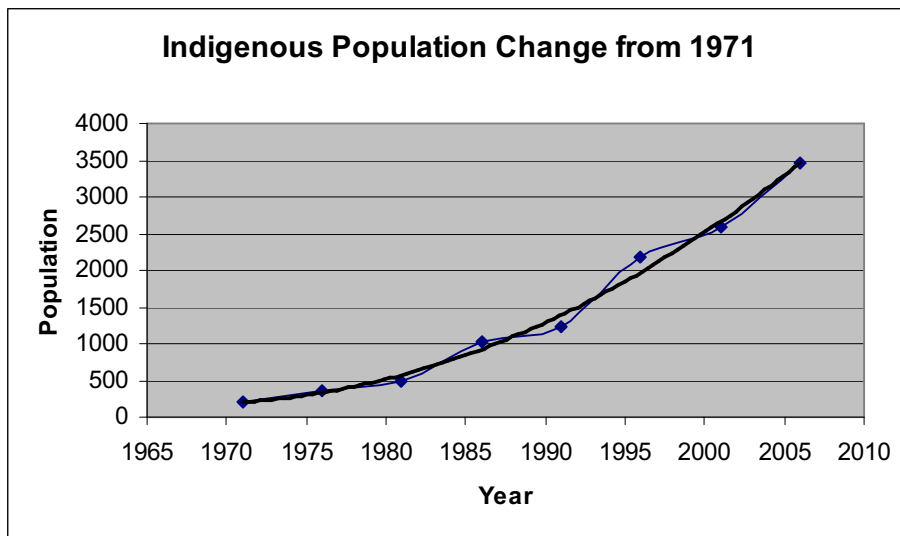
Between the early 1900s and 1970s a small number of Aboriginal people called Toowoomba home. In 1967 91% of the Toowoomba population voted YES for the Federal government to take responsibility for Indigenous Affairs. The local Indigenous population has grown from 213 in 1971 to an estimated 3500 in 2007.<sup>24</sup> The graph below shows a projected population based on previous Census data.

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> QSA, A/58750.

<sup>24</sup> Toowoomba Chronicle May 29 1967. Census data supplied by Australian Bureau of Statistics.



## 5. Methodology (Strengths / Needs)

Data for this research project was collected from three main sources. The first was a literature survey and service provider data. Information was gleaned from previous research reports along with relevant government departments and service providers. As the last Census occurred five years ago this data was not relied upon as much as would normally be the case.

A survey of the Indigenous community was also conducted. All major community interaction points (eg. Schools, Community Justice Group, Community Development Employment Programme, Neighbourhood Centres, Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Sporting Groups, Aboriginal Health and Dental Service) along with various government departments were utilized.

The third source of data was focus groups and qualitative interviews with a number of stake-holders and key community members.

The approach taken was based on the framework proposed by Kretzman (Assets based Community Development) and Minkler (Community Based Action Research)<sup>25</sup>. This method involved community members in the framing of 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

<sup>25</sup> 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.

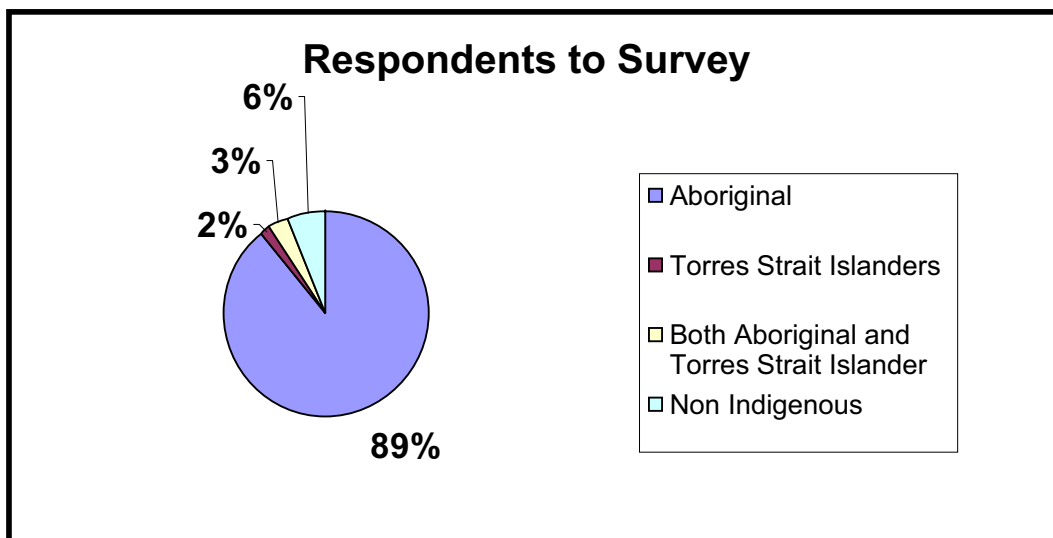
Toowoomba?” – The first question was “What are community strengths?” – “What is working well?” In essence this approach looked for strengths and was based on identifying assets as well as prioritising ways of addressing disadvantage.

Most studies such as this rely upon Census data. Considering that the only available data comes from the Census for 2001. For this reason this data has not been relied upon. Once the Census 2006 data is released in 2007 it should supplement the information presented in this report.

## The Survey

The questions were devised with the Steering Group and a gift voucher was provided to add as an incentive for people to return survey forms.

There were 156 respondents to the survey. This is a larger number of respondents in Toowoomba compared with similar projects. The Working Together for Indigenous Youth Toowoomba Survey had 60 Indigenous respondents.<sup>26</sup> There were 126 Indigenous respondents to the Indigenous Mental Health Needs Analysis Project<sup>27</sup> and there were 43 respondents to the Community Needs Analysis for the Carbal Medical Service.<sup>28</sup> Although the number of respondents was lower than hoped for, the background of respondents can be seen to be broadly representative of the local Indigenous community.

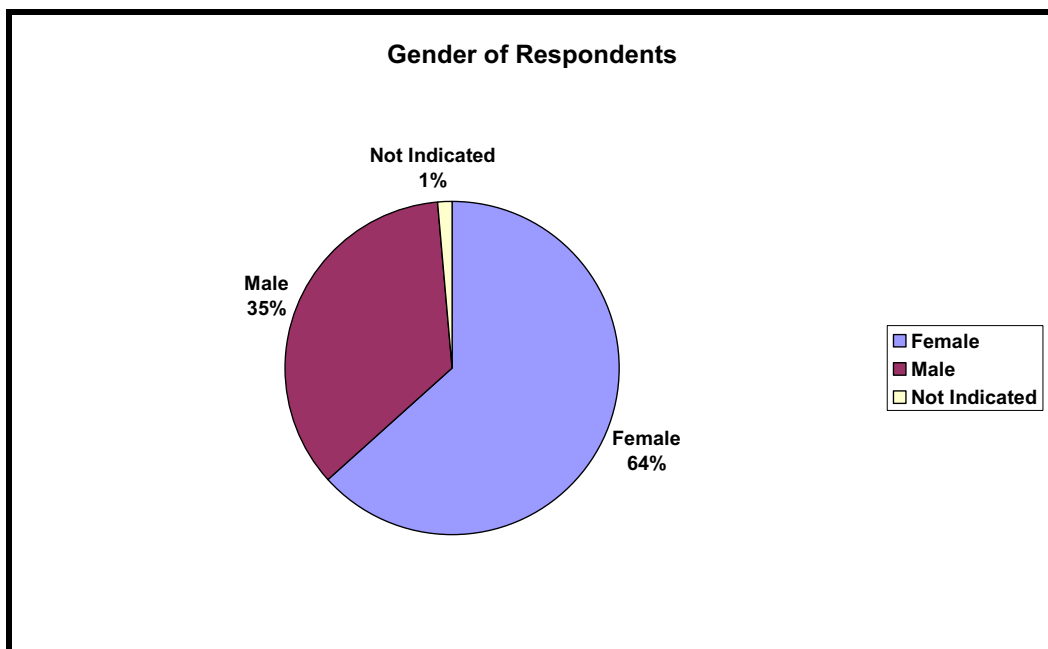
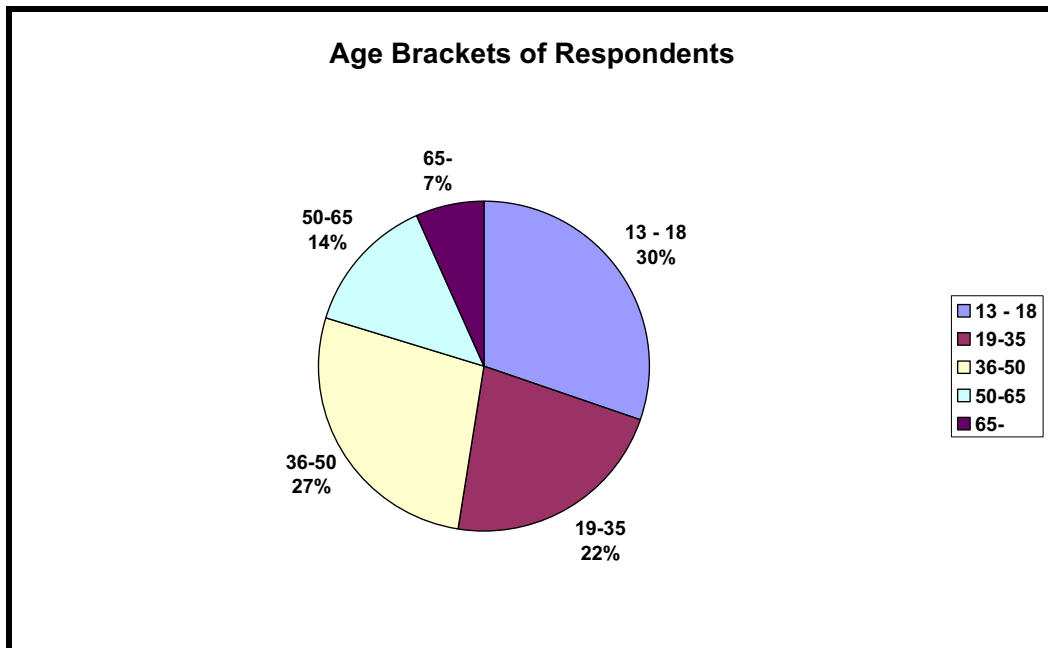


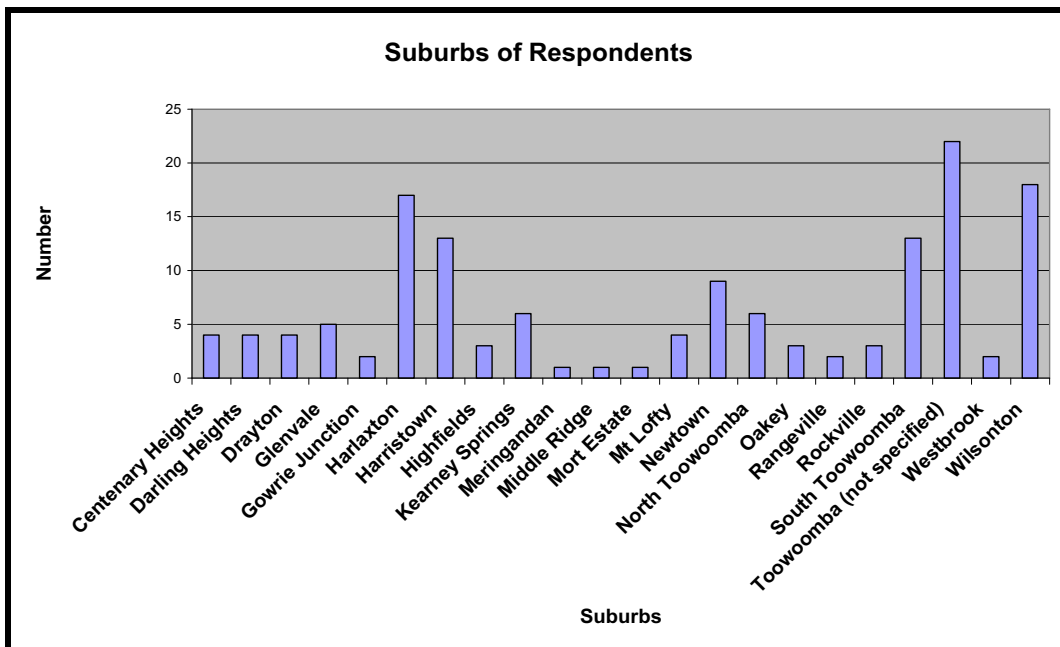
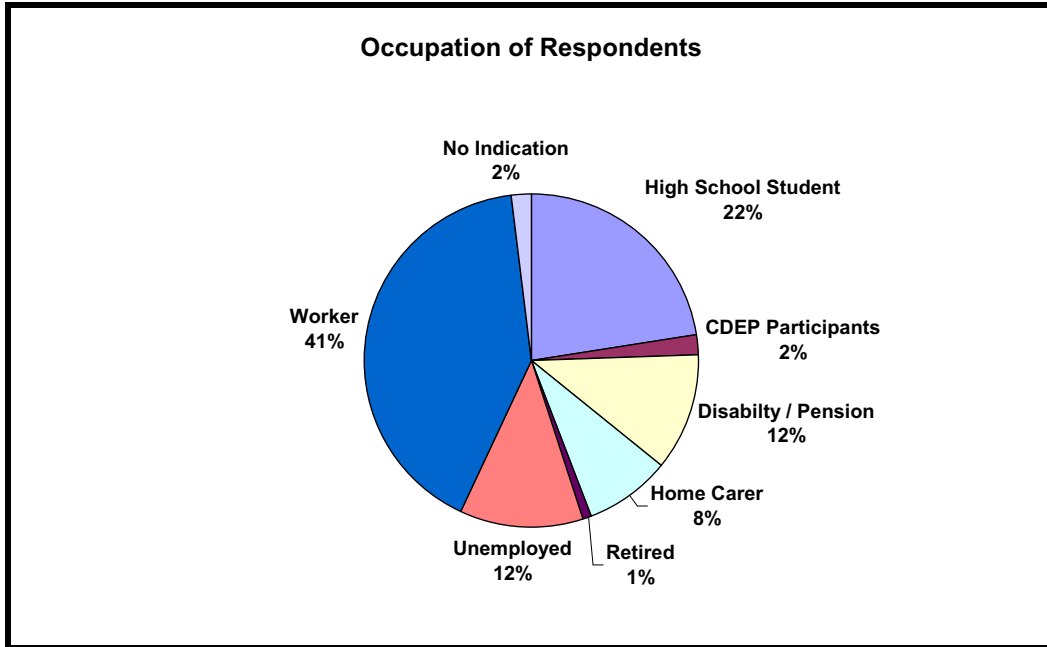
<sup>26</sup> Stephen Hughes, Working Together for Indigenous Youth Toowoomba – An initial exploration of the Toowoomba context and perceptions of potential barriers to Indigenous young people participating in post-compulsory education and training options. Prepared for the WTIIY Steering Committee, Toowoomba. April 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Indigenous Mental Health Needs Analysis Project – Toowoomba District Mental Health Service, December 2003

<sup>28</sup> Community Needs Analysis for the Carbal medical Service – Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health, September 2006

The information given by non-Indigenous respondents was used especially in the qualitative interviews which were conducted, but the results of the survey shown on this report are from only Indigenous respondents. As the accompanying graphs demonstrate the survey respondents were spread across age groups, employment and education status and geographical locations in the city of Toowoomba.

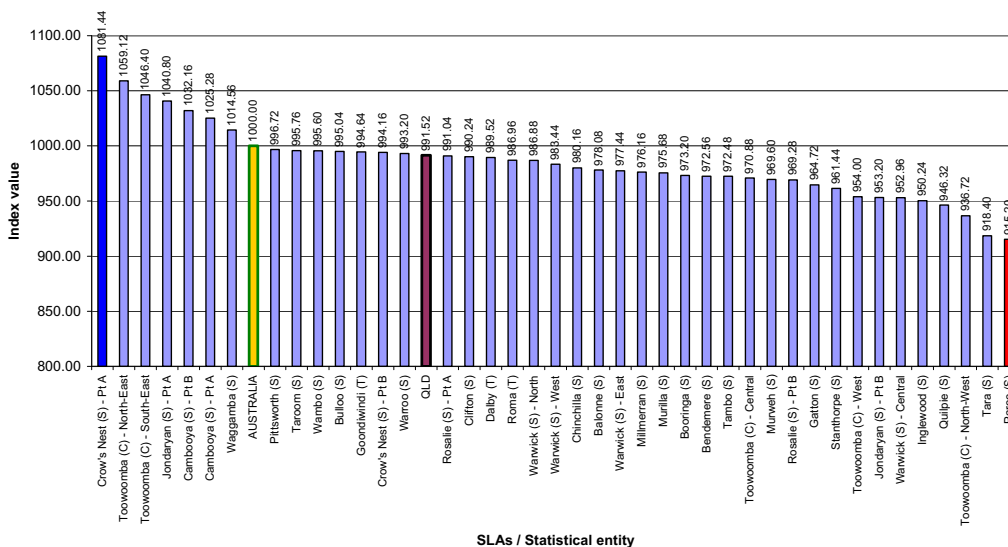




Anecdotal evidence and available Census data indicates that the geographical location of respondents to the survey corresponds to overall location of the Indigenous population in Toowoomba. The 2001 Census shows that the statistical local areas of Central, North West and West Toowoomba contain a higher proportion of Indigenous

residents then the rest of Toowoomba City. The highest number living in the North West Statistical area.

Figure 1.1(B) - T'mba & South West SLAs: SEIFA Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage Index Values



This area ranks as the second lowest on the SEIFA Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage Index for Toowoomba and the South Western region.<sup>29</sup> This index shows great disparity between North East and South East Toowoomba and North West Toowoomba. It is interesting to note that North West Toowoomba is one of the lowest on the Socio Economic Disadvantage Index for the region. At the same time North East and South East Toowoomba is one of the highest on the same index. In terms of poverty it would seem that there are two Toowoombas.

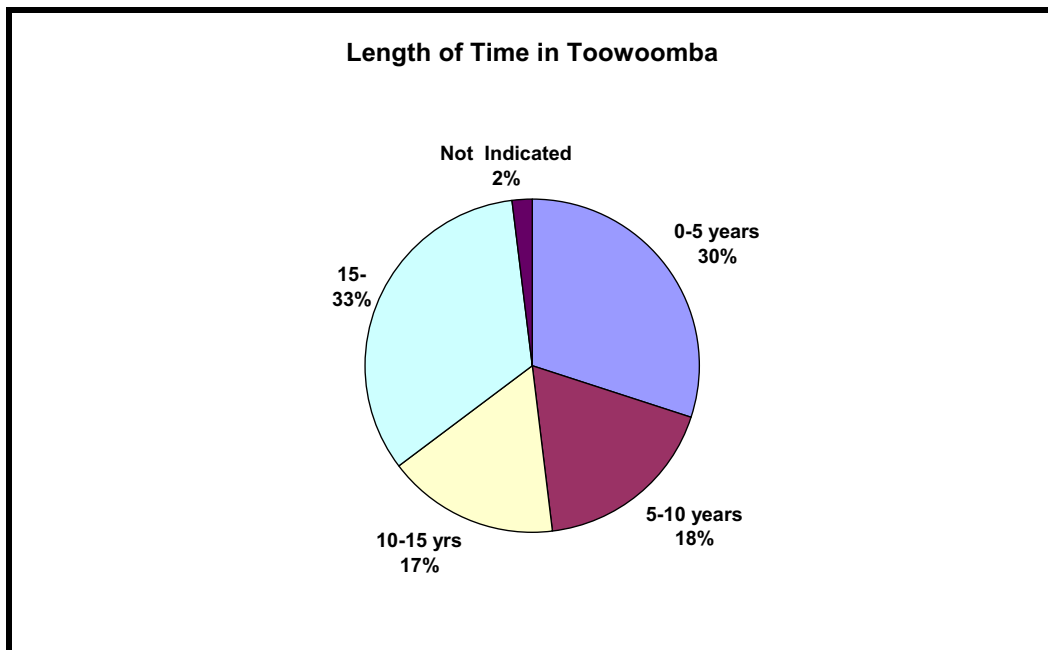
In the 2001 Census Toowoomba was found to be in the top 17 centres with the highest Indigenous counts of population.<sup>30</sup> At that time Toowoomba was found to have 3% of the total population identifying as Indigenous. In terms of social justice in the region priority should be given to Paroo Shire, Tara and Toowoomba North West. In 2001 Toowoomba city had 24.12 percent of the Indigenous people in the region. The second closest to this was Cherbourg with 10.08 percent of the region's Indigenous population.<sup>31</sup> Considering the relative size of the Indigenous population in

<sup>29</sup> The result was 936.72 for Toowoomba North West. Paroo Shire with an Index of 915.20 is the lowest.

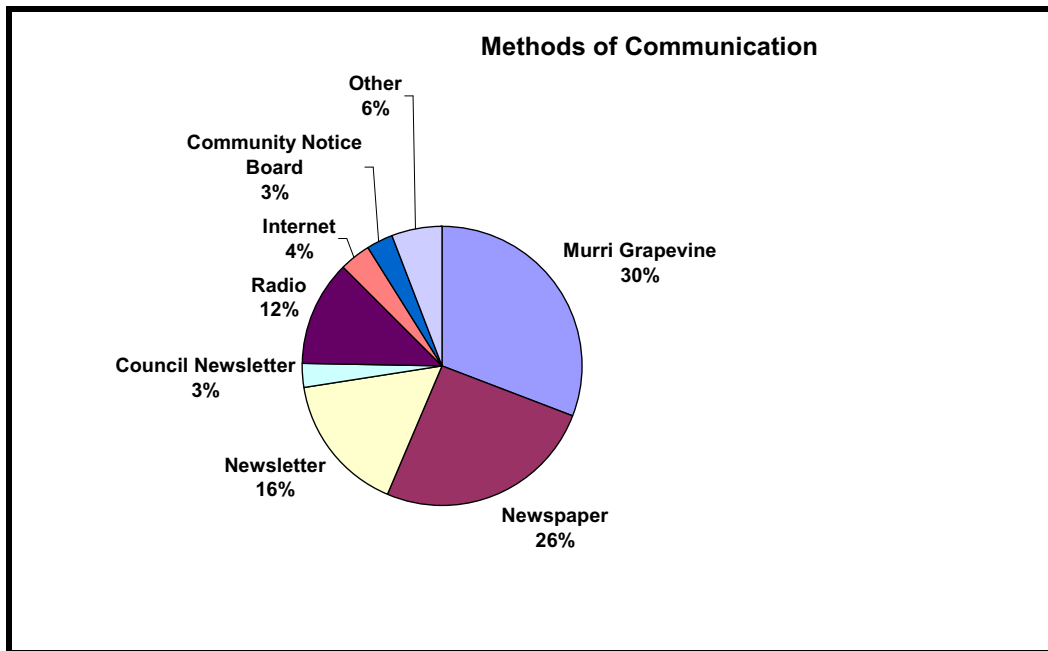
<sup>30</sup> Population Distribution, Indigenous Australians, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001

<sup>31</sup> ATSI Regional Plan 2004 – 2007 Goolburri Regional Council, Roma, 2004, p.48 (Based on 2001 Census data)

Toowoomba a significant amount of resources from the region should be allocated to addressing disadvantage within the Toowoomba Indigenous community.

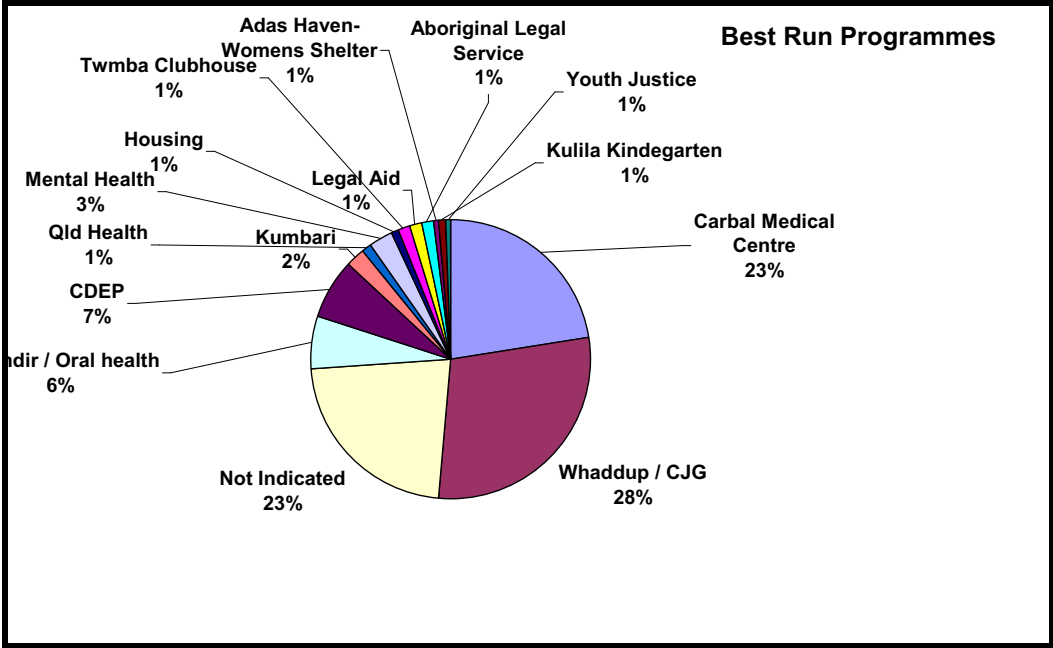
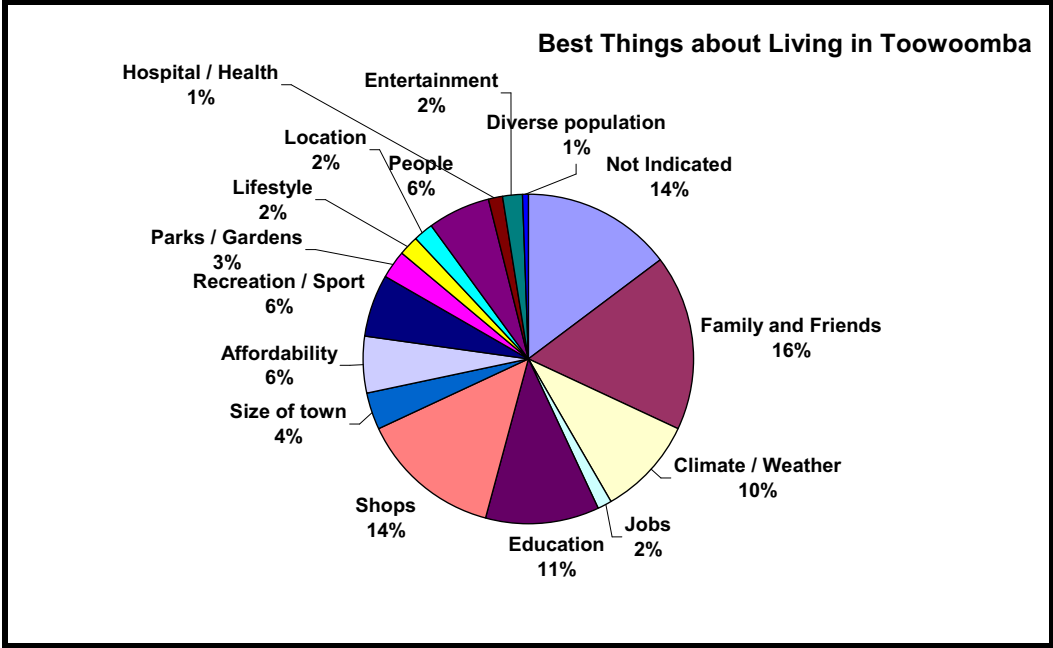


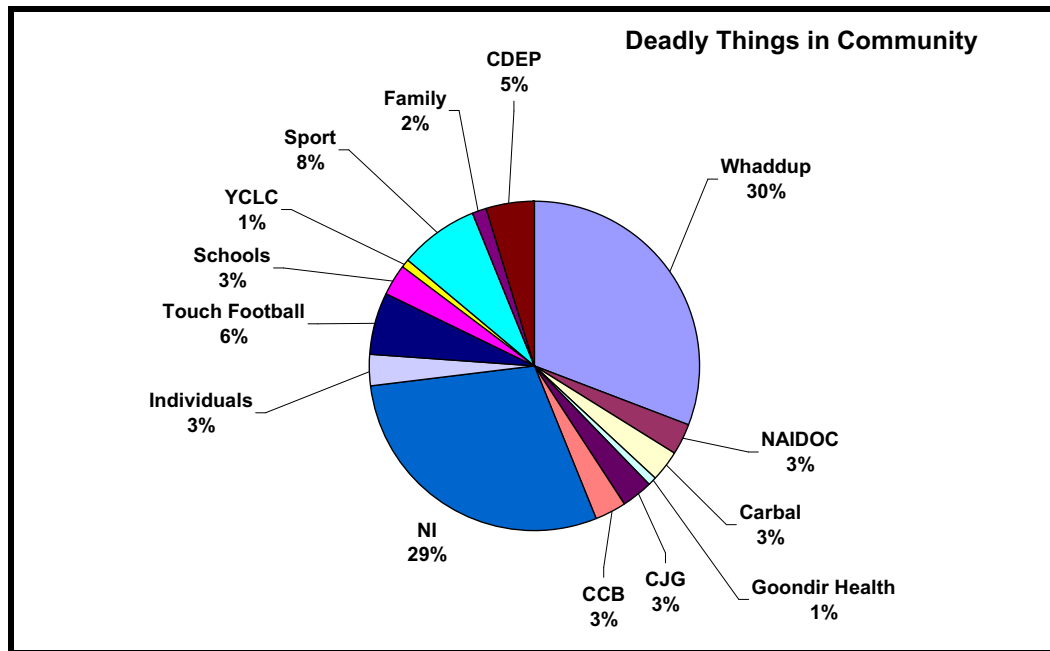
There is a common perception that the Indigenous population in Toowoomba is quite transient. Fifty percent of respondents to this survey have lived in the city for more than ten years.



The results to this question clearly indicate a need for improvement in the way that information is conveyed and received by members of the Indigenous community. Obviously word of mouth – (the Murri Grapevine) is the main way that information is conveyed but there are problems with this. A number of individuals may not be “on the grapevine” and service providers will find it difficult to tap into this informal method of communication. The local community radio station 4MBS has an Indigenous programme each Friday night. This could be better promoted and supported.

**Recommendation 1:** That an Indigenous Community newsletter be produced and distributed through schools and community organisations / government departments.





### Community Justice Group

The Community Justice Group (CJG) works with key stakeholders in the community to reduce the number of Indigenous youth coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The group has been functioning effectively over a number of years and is presently a part of Centacare Toowoomba. The group has a number of working parties – youth engagement, sentencing group and youth leadership. The youth engagement group organises diversionary activities such as the Whaddup Youth Programme. Whaddup occurs every Friday night during school term and has between 60 and 70 Indigenous youth attend a range of activities at St Joseph’s College. Another activity run by the CJG is supporting group of performers at attend Croc Fest at Moree. This activity promotes self esteem, leadership and culture for young people. The Sentencing group works with Toowoomba Magistrates linking young offenders with local Indigenous elders. Elders spend time with the youth involved and offer advice, guidance and support. The youth leadership group runs a number of activities such as leadership camps annually. Again young people have contact with positive Indigenous role models and community members and are challenged to achieve various personal goals.

Although the CJG is funded by Queensland Department of Attorney General the key to its success is a number of active volunteers and stake holders who have shown tremendous and consistent support for four years. The majority of these volunteers are members of the local Indigenous community. The CJG has also been able to provide community support for groups such as the Community Capacity Building Group and activities such as NAIDOC week.

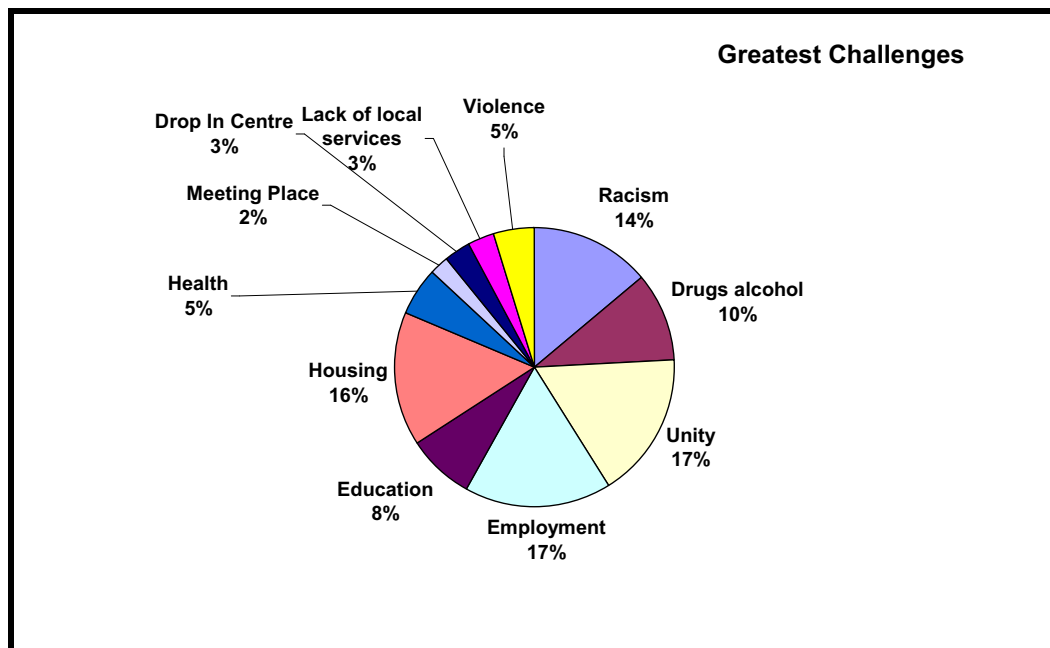
### Carbal Medical Centre

Carbal Medical centre is a community controlled medical centre. It is managed by Darling Downs Shared Care Incorporated. Its main objective is to provide primary health care to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of Toowoomba and surrounding area.

All board members have been trained in the area of governance and this has provided support in the area of risk management. Carbal Medical Centre is part federally funded. This organisation has a commitment to working with the community and have shown this through a range of innovative programmes. Examples of this include the Healthy Me programme and the Asthma Music Project. The Asthma Music project is a partnership with USQ. Carbal has also formed partnerships with GP connections and a number of other organisations within the Toowoomba community.

The centre is also exploring implementing the Let's Read project with the Smith Family. A Mum's and Bubs playgroup is also being run through Carbal medical centre. This is a programme responding to the needs of young Indigenous women and children. Some other clinics run by Carbal include a Diabetics Clinic in Eye Clinic and Women's Business Clinics. Carbal is also looking at ways of starting a Men's Business Clinic and Hearing Health Clinic. The Hearing Health Clinic will target children of five years and above.

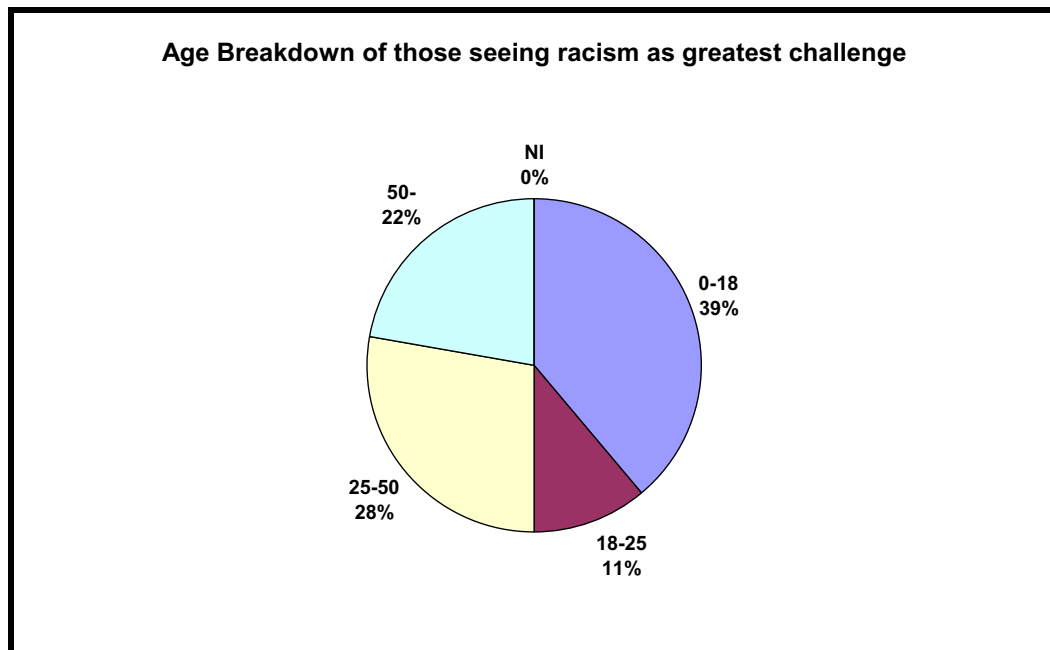
Carbal has a commitment to ongoing training and professional development of staff.



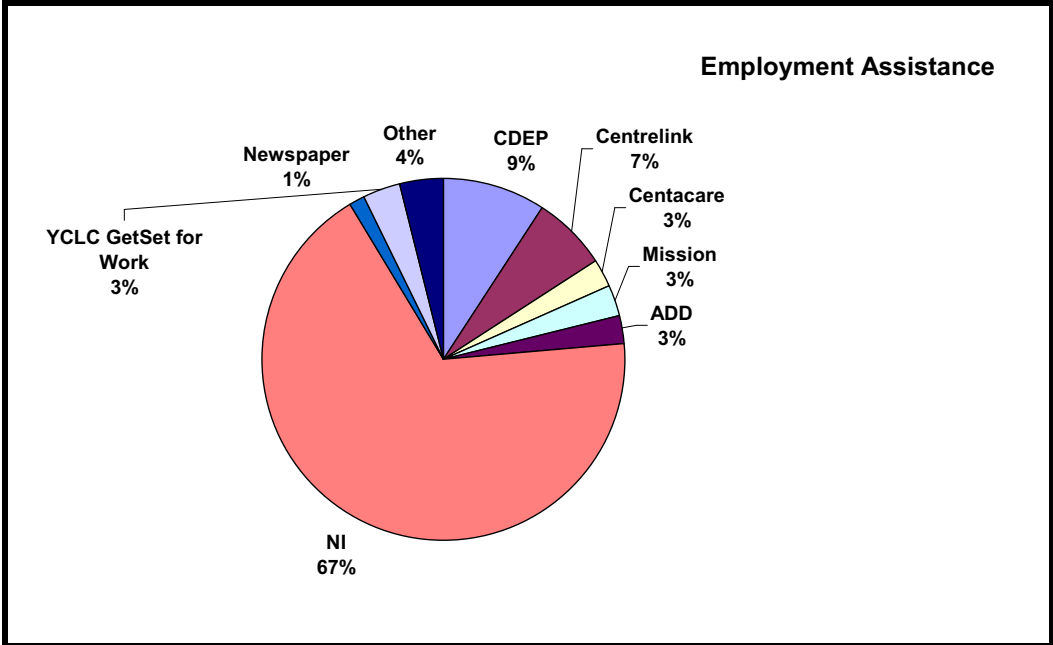
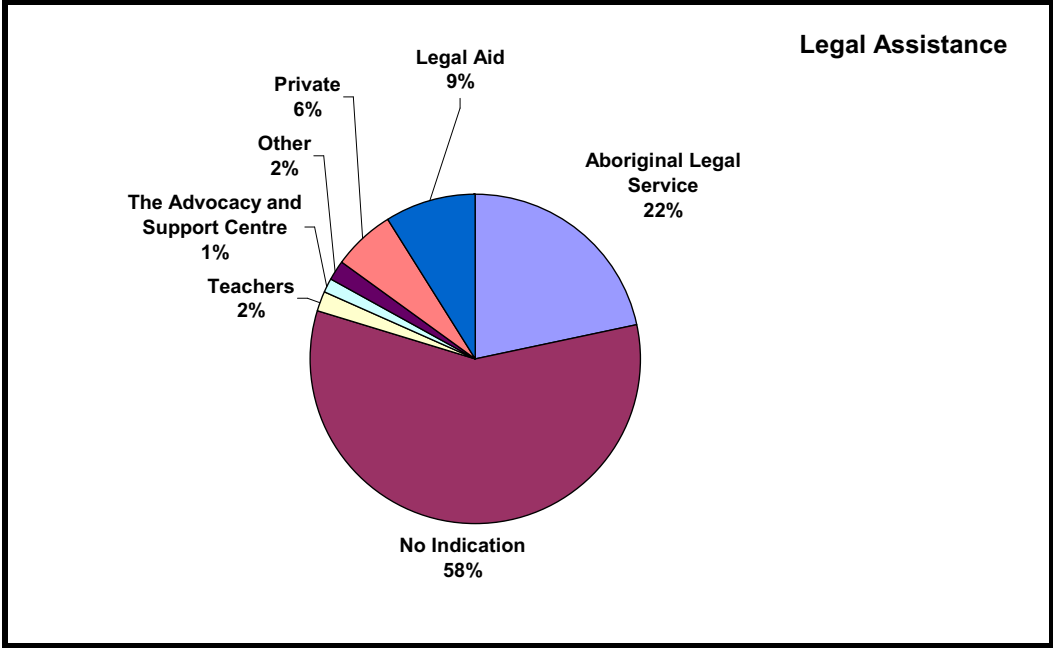
Unity, Employment, Housing and Racism were cited as the greatest challenges facing the Indigenous population of Toowoomba. The difficulty in finding a house was a constant response from people surveyed and interview for this project. The

difficulty of obtaining a house with the Aboriginal Housing Company was also often described. There were also reports of racism involved when making application to obtain a house in the private rental market.

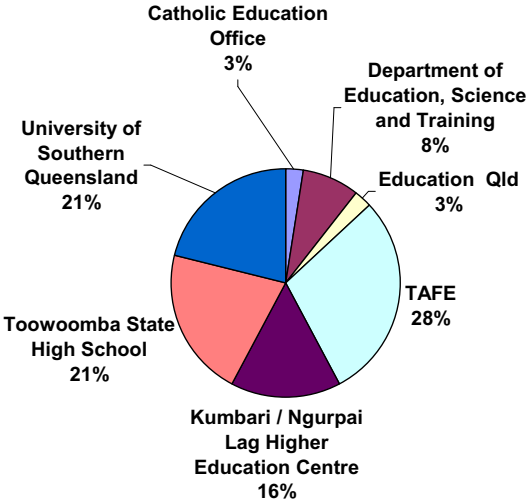
A number of incidents where people felt discriminated against because of their heritage were described. These took place in public spaces such as the swimming pool, shopping centre and at various schools. The graph below demonstrates that racism was experienced across all age groups in the community. Community discussions involving employment highlighted the lack of basic skills required to achieve sustainable employment. The inability to achieve employment in a range of skilled areas was also emphasised by a number of respondents. Unemployment rates are approximately 9.54 % for the Indigenous population in Toowoomba and around 4.5% for the entire population.<sup>32</sup>



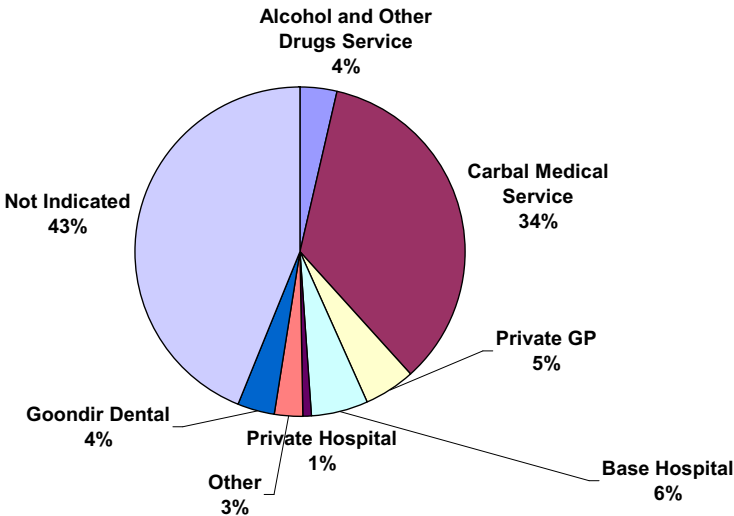
<sup>32</sup> See Available Data section of this report for further explanation of these figures. June 2006 – Unemployment Figures.

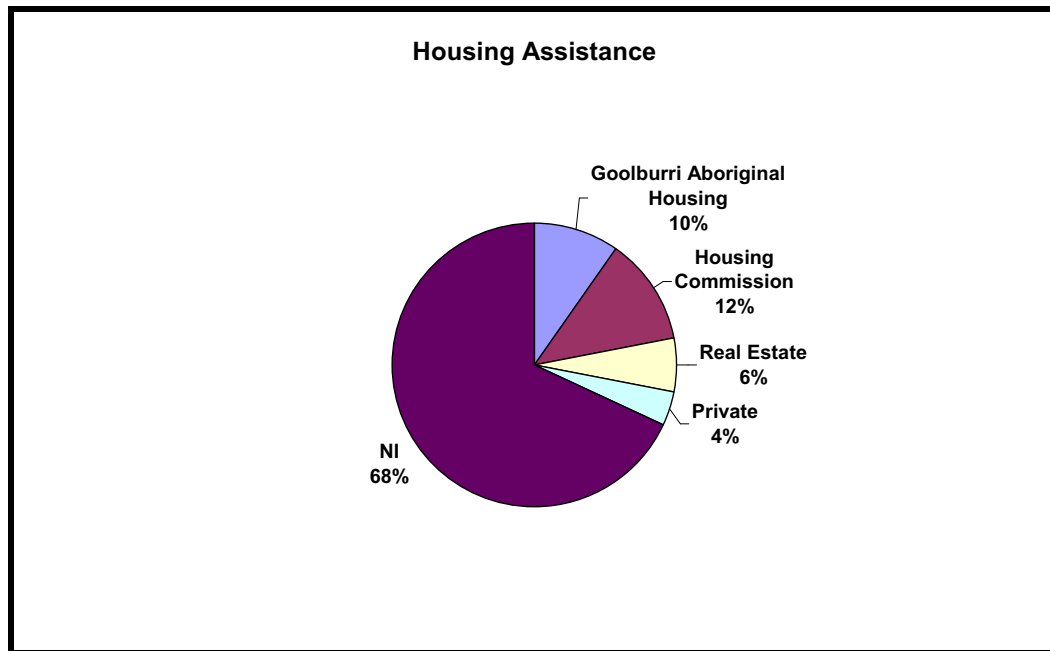


**Education Assistance**



**Health Assistance**





**Prioritising Disadvantage (Results from Survey)**

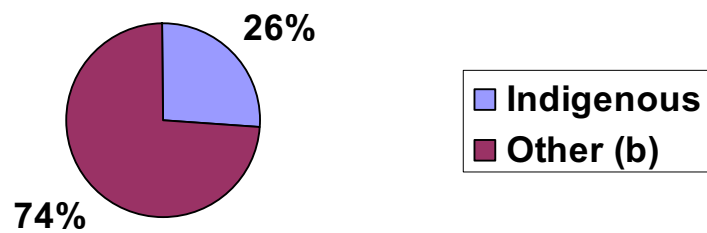
- *Life expectancy at birth*
- *Victim rates for crime*
- *Deaths from homicide and hospitalizations for assaults*
- *Suicide and self-harm*
- *Rates of Disability / Participation*
- *Household and individual income*
- *Home ownership*
- *Substantiated child protection notifications*
- *Young people getting into university and succeeding*
- *Imprisonment and juvenile detention rates*
- *Labour force participation and unemployment*
- *Young people staying in school Yr 10-12*

The above social indicators are taken from the key indicators for Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (Productivity Commission, 2005). The results of the prioritising of these indicators showed that there was a feeling that the most immediate issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Toowoomba is basic safety and health.

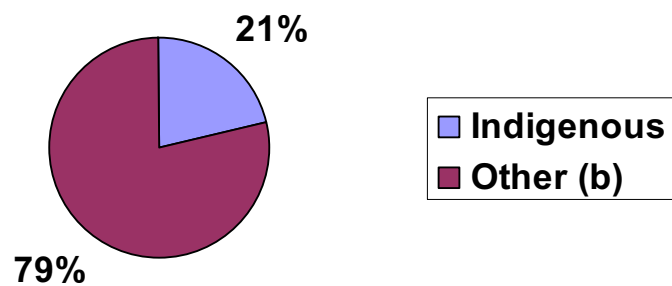
## Available Data<sup>33</sup>

### Child Safety Statistics

#### Queensland - Children Admitted to Protective Orders

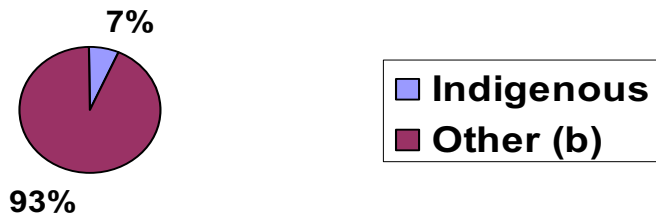


#### Toowoomba - Children Admitted to Protective Orders

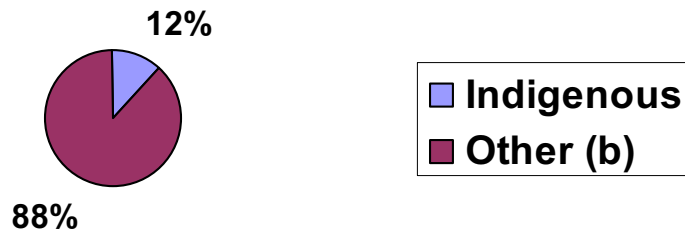


<sup>33</sup> Much of the data presented in this report has been provided on the understanding that it is to be used as a way of “benchmarking” social indicators within the Indigenous population of Toowoomba.

### Toowoomba Children subject to a substantiated risk notification

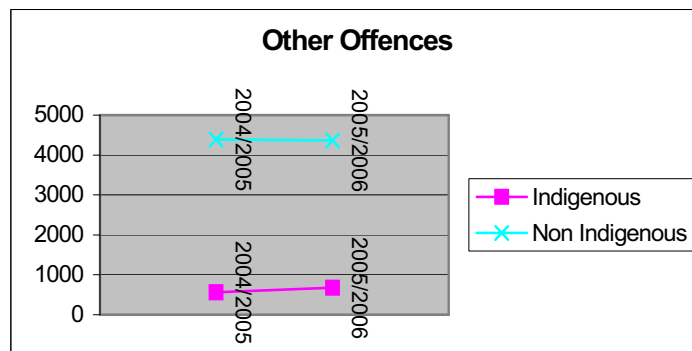
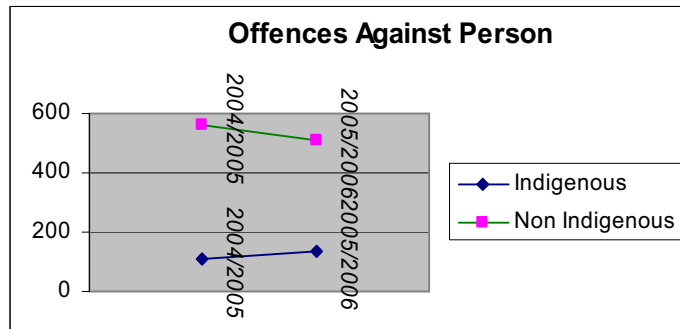


### Queensland - Children subject to a substantiated risk notification



Whilst these figures are similar to state figures they are still starkly demonstrate the over-representation of Indigenous children at risk of admitted to protective order.

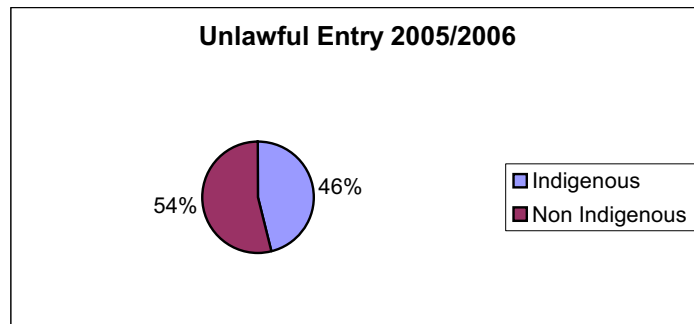
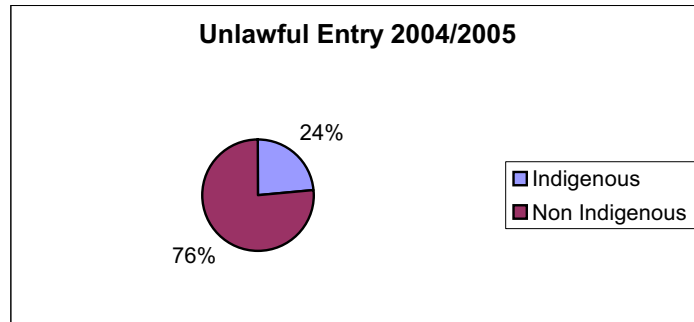
## Crime Statistics



Statistics supplied by the Queensland Police Service demonstrate that while the overall rate of crime is decreasing in Toowoomba the rate of crime involving Indigenous offenders is increasing. The Indigenous population is 2.9 percent of the Toowoomba population and yet they make up 18.48 percent of offences recorded in the Toowoomba police district for 2005/ 2006.<sup>34</sup> In discussing this data it is important to recognise that this is recording the number of offences and not offenders – so there is always a possibility that multiple offences are being recorded.

One of the most startling parts of the most recent crime statistics is the rise in number of unlawful entries between 2004/2005 and 2005/2006.

<sup>34</sup> Figures based on data supplied by Queensland Police Service. This data is not official Service data as it is outside the bounds of what is published in official Service documents.



The Youth Justice Service Centre (Qld Department of Communities) reports that in November of 2006, 56.25% of Youth Justice Orders in Toowoomba City are Indigenous Males and 6.25% are Indigenous females. The local office reports that the figure for Indigenous males have hovered around the 50 – 60% mark for some time. A recommendation is that these statistics be collected annually to measure the impact of various programmes and design initiatives to reverse this trend.

## Health Statistics

### Age of Mothers (usual residence) Toowoomba with Qld and National Comparisons

<i>Age of Mothers</i>	<i>2001-2005 Indigenous *</i>	<i>2001-2005 Not Indigenous *</i>	<i>2001-02005 All* mothers</i>	<i>All Mothers</i>	<i>All Mothers</i>
	<i>Toowoomba</i>	<i>Toowoomba</i>	<i>Toowoomba</i>	<i>QLD 2003</i>	<i>National 2003</i>
<b>Less than 20</b>	19.5%	7.2%	7.9%	6.2%	4.6%
<b>Mother 20-24</b>	35.4%	20.8%	21.7%	17.7%	14.9%
<b>Mother 25-29</b>	24.5%	31.0%	30.7%	28.4%	27.8%
<b>Mother 30-34</b>	14.3%	27.9%	27.1%	31.4%	33.9%
<b>Mother 35-39</b>	5.5%	10.9%	10.6%	13.6%	15.6%
<b>Mother over 40</b>	0.8%	2.1%	2.0%	2.8%	3.2%

\* To dampen the effects of random movements in a smaller population a range of years has been used. Source: Queensland Health Prenatal Data Collection customised data. Year 2005 data of provisional status. National Data from Laws PJ & Sullivan EA 2005. Australia's mothers and babies 2003. AIHW Cat. No. PER 29. Sydney: AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit (Perinatal Statistics Series No. 16).

**Percentage low birth Weight Babies Mothers (usual residence) Toowoomba  
with Qld and National Comparisons**

<u>Population group</u>	<u>Toowoomba 2001-2005*</u>	<u>Qld 2003</u>	<u>Australia 2003</u>
<u>Indigenous low birth rate less than 2500 grams</u>	<u>8.4%</u>	<u>12.2%</u>	<u>12.9%</u>
<u>Non-Indigenous low birth rate less than 2500 grams</u>	<u>6.1%</u>	<u>6.5%</u>	<u>6.3%</u>
<u>Difference Indigenous to Non Indigenous</u>	<u>138%</u>	<u>186%</u>	<u>205%</u>

## **Carbal Medical Centre**

### **Population Analysis 15/12/2005 – 20/11/2006**<sup>35</sup>

- ✓ Current Clients – 3176<sup>36</sup>
- ✓ Past Clients – 646
- ✓ Transient Clients – 95
  
- ✓ 81.14% - Aboriginal
- ✓ 0.94% - Torres Strait Islander
- ✓ 2.11% - Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
- ✓ 12.76% - Non- Indigenous
- ✓ 2.82% - Not Stated
- ✓ 0.23% - Not Applicable
  
- ✓ Patients under 1 – 47
- ✓ 1-4 years..... 351
- ✓ 5-12 years..... 820
- ✓ 13-17 years ..... 517
- ✓ 18-24 years .....454
- ✓ 25-44 years ..... 1116
- ✓ 45-64 years..... 476
- ✓ 65-74 years ..... 63
- ✓ 75+ years ..... 33
  
- ✓ Male Clients ..... 1738
- ✓ Female Clients ..... 2140
  
- ✓ New Patients 15/12/2005 – 20/11/2006..... 876
- ✓ New Patients 01/01/2005 – 14/12/2005 ..... 487

#### Five most common conditions treated 15/12/2005 – 20/11/2006

- ✓ Asthma / Respiratory Tract Infections
- ✓ Skin Infections
- ✓ Diabetes
- ✓ Coronary Heart Disease including Hypertension and Hyperlipidaemia
- ✓ Depression / Anxiety

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<sup>35</sup> Data supplied by Carbal Medical Centre

<sup>36</sup> Of this figure 473 clients are Non-Aboriginal

Deceased Patients 15/12/2005 – 20/11/2006

- ✓ Number of Deaths – 6
- ✓ Average Age 49.12 years
- ✓ Contributing Factors:
  - Diabetes x 2
  - Heart Disease x 1
  - Alcohol x 1
  - Unknown x 2

## **Employment Statistics**

Approximately 9.54% of registered job seekers in the city area are Indigenous.<sup>37</sup> The June March 2006 quarter showed that the overall unemployment rate for Toowoomba was 4.5 percent.<sup>38</sup> The unemployment rate for Indigenous persons in 2005 in year average terms in Queensland was 14.6%, down 0.1% point since 2004 and down 5.9% points since 2002. The overall rate in Queensland, calculated in comparative terms was 4.8% in 2005, down 0.8% points since 2004 and down 2.7% points since 2002. In 2001 the Indigenous unemployment rate for Toowoomba city was 28.2%<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that the 9.54% is not an official figure and 2006 Census data will give a better indication of changes in the unemployment rate for the Indigenous population. It can nevertheless be shown that there has been a significant decrease in the official unemployment rate in the last five years. While there has been an improvement the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous unemployment still remains. An Indigenous person in Toowoomba is still two to three times more likely to be unemployed.

The national Indigenous unemployment rate in 2005 was considerable higher than the Queensland rate at 16.5% down 0.3% points from 2004. The latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics provides evidence that while in 2005 unemployment fell overall in Australia and in Queensland, the number of unemployed Indigenous persons increased.<sup>40</sup>

## **Post Year Twelve (Darling Downs and South West)**

Indigenous Year 12 completers were less likely than their non-Indigenous peers to enrol at university (9.5 per cent compared to 29.8 percent). Indigenous students were more likely to be an apprentice or trainee (23.8 per cent compared to 18.9 per cent).

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<sup>37</sup> This percentage is based on unofficial figures supplied by Department of Workplace and Employment Relations. It has been cross-checked with estimates from Job Network providers and the proportion of Indigenous to non-Indigenous job seekers indicates a fair degree of accuracy.

<sup>38</sup> Unemployment Rate June 2006, Figure supplied by Department of Employment and Training

<sup>39</sup> ATSIC Regional Plan 2004-2007, Goolburri Regional Council, Roma, 2004, p. 66 (Based on 2001 Census Data)

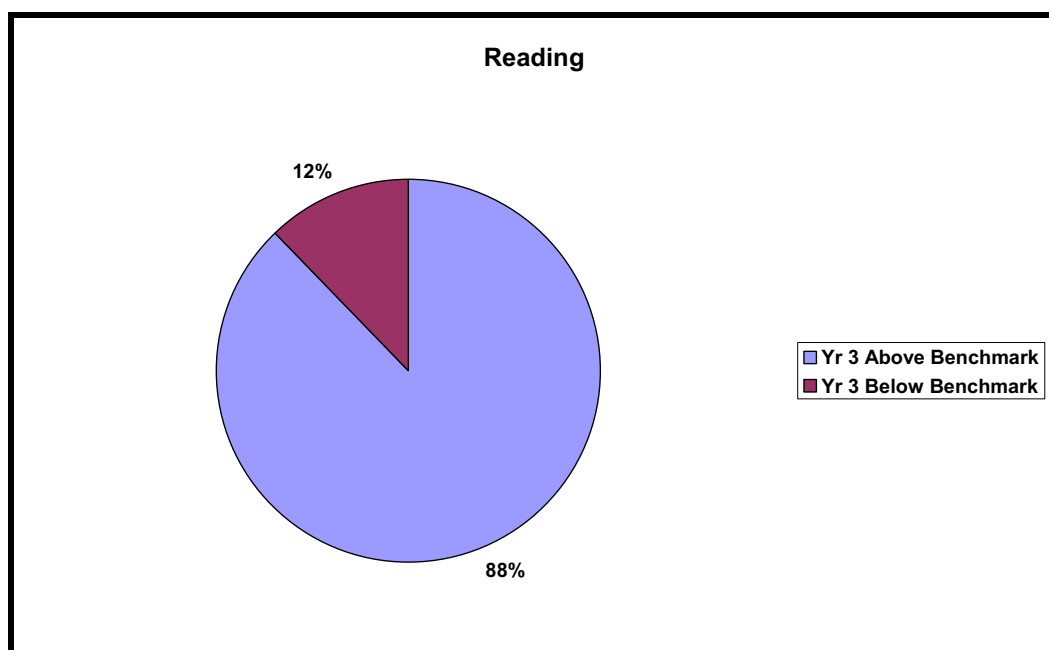
<sup>40</sup> Data provided by Queensland Department of Employment and Industrial Relations

Indigenous Year 12 completers were more likely to be seeking work than their non-Indigenous peers (12.7 per cent compared to 4.2 per cent).<sup>41</sup>

## Education Statistics

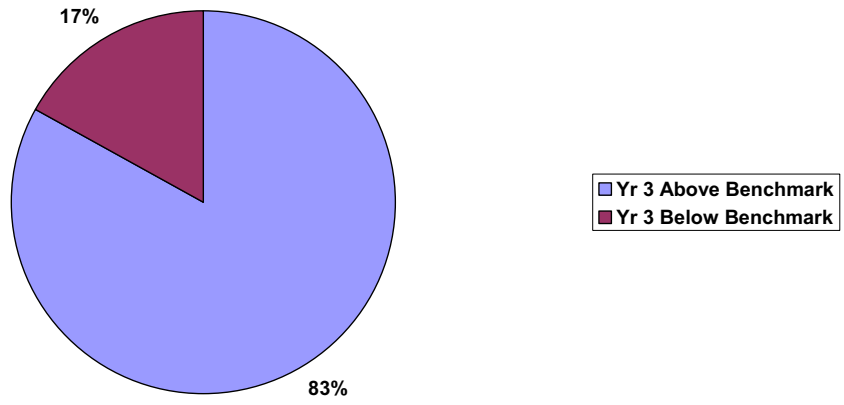
The data below was supplied by Education Queensland (EQ). EQ combined their figures with available data from the Toowoomba catholic Education Office. The results for Indigenous students for 3 / 5 / 7 literacy and numeracy tests show great areas of need. One of the most important recommendations made is that the whole of community take responsibility for these results, and that efforts be made to reverse them. By Year 7, 39% of Indigenous students are not reaching the national benchmark for Reading, 11% are failing in Writing and 48% are not reaching the benchmarks in Numeracy.

These students then enter secondary school with very little hope of achieving an outcome which will make employment possible. The complexities of home life for students not reaching benchmarks are well documented, but these disastrous results must be addressed. A change in this set of statistics will also bring about change in crime and employment statistics.

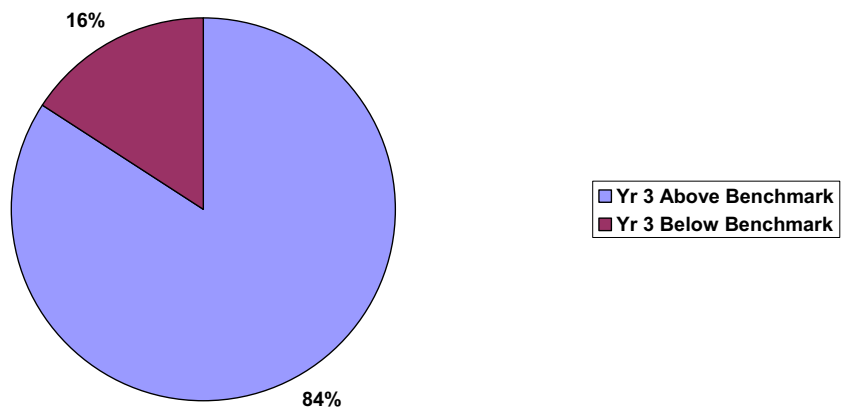


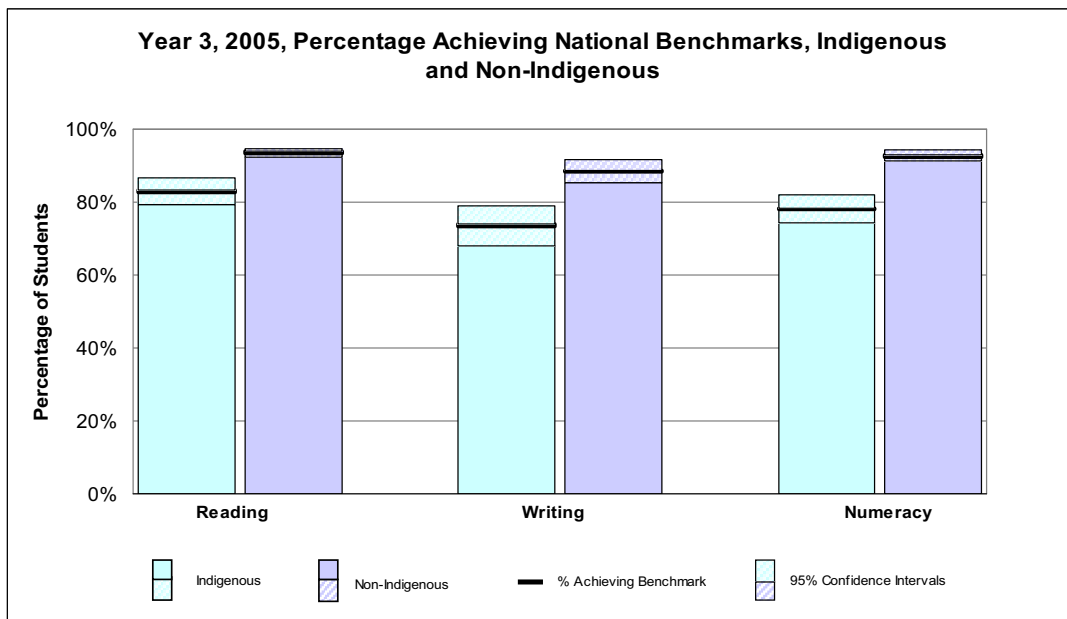
<sup>41</sup> Next Step Report 2006 on the destinations of Year 12 completers in the region of Darling Downs / South West. Conducted by the Centre for post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne for the Queensland Government Department of Education and the Arts.

### Writing



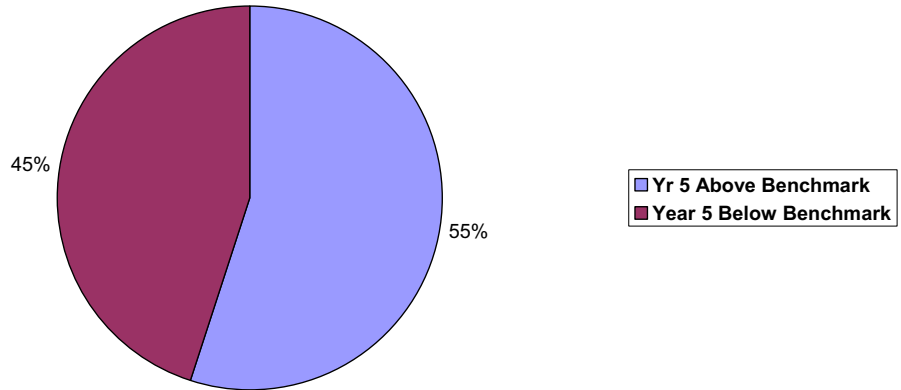
### Number



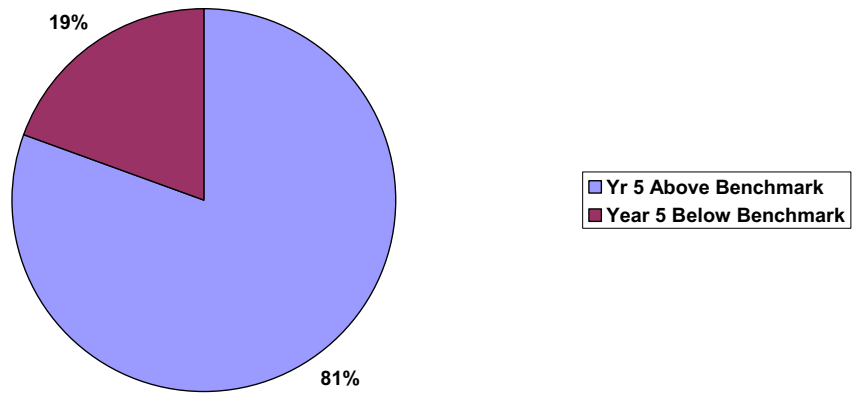


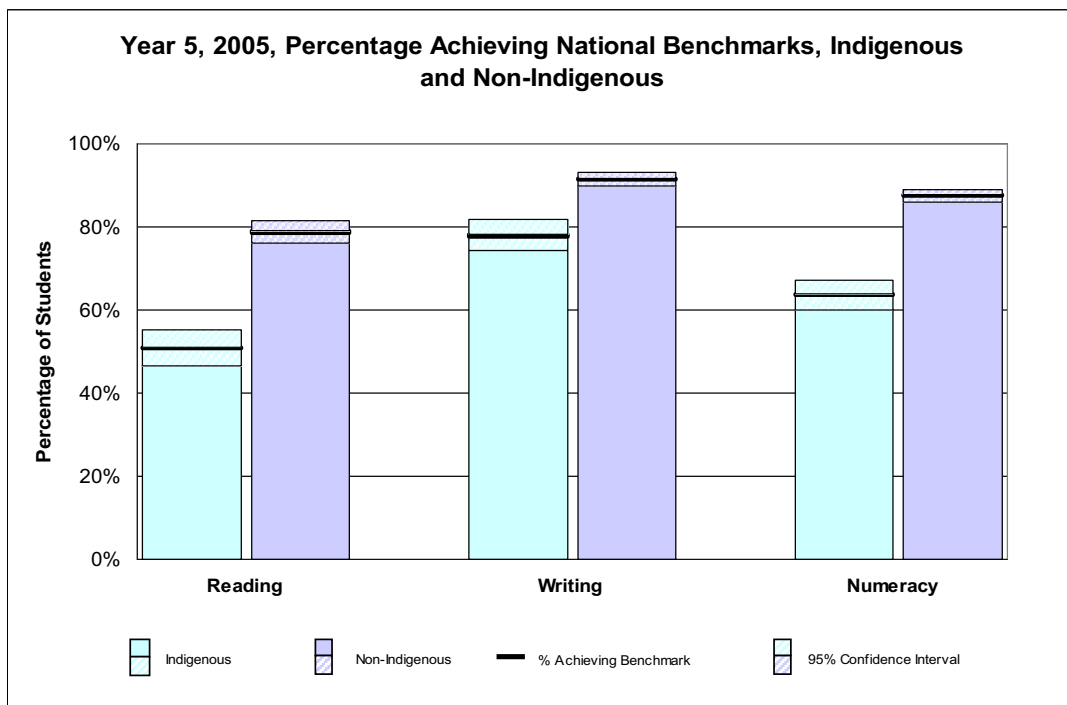
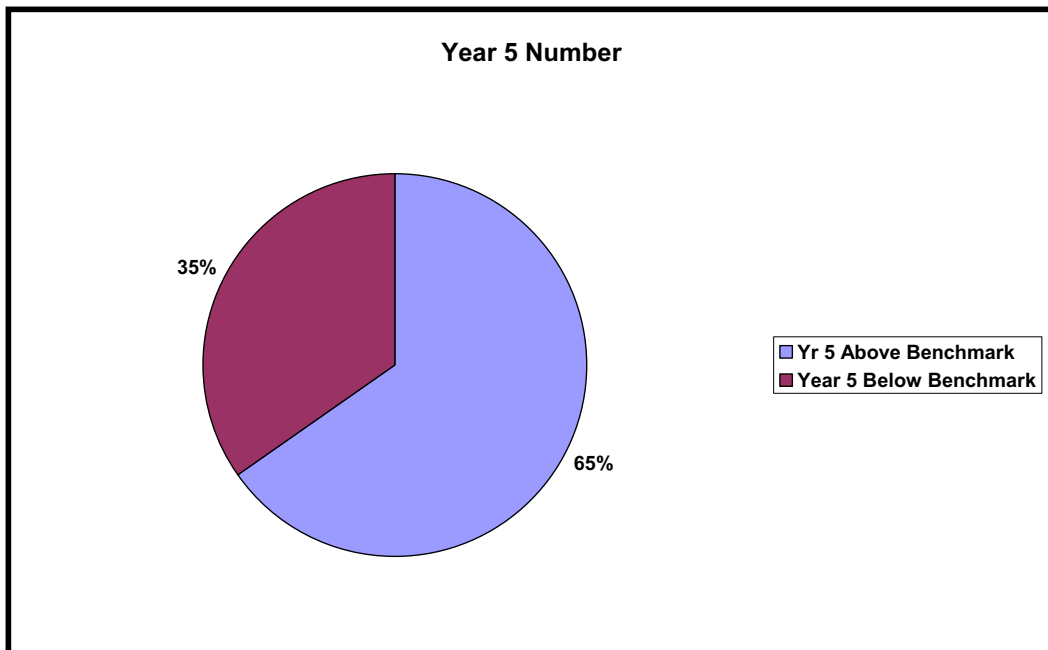
(Queensland Results – From Education Queensland, Office of Strategy and Performance, Indigenous Education, 2005)

### Reading Year 5



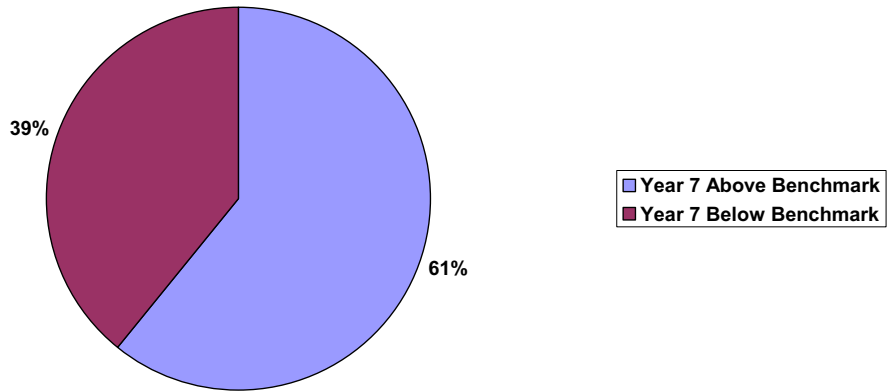
### Year 5 Writing



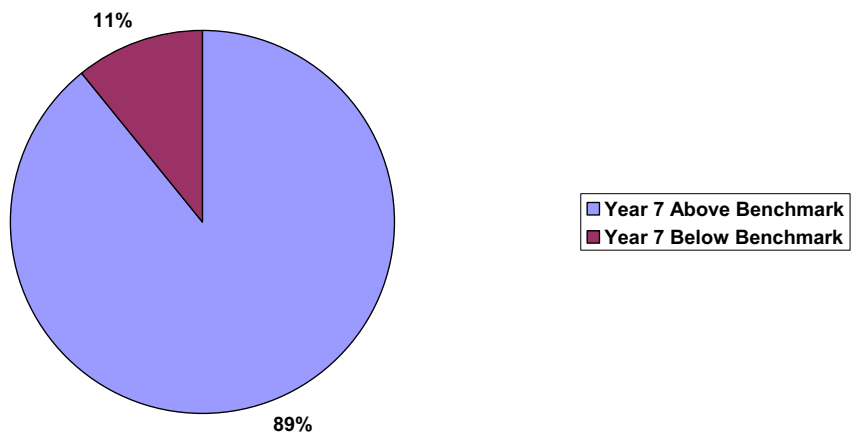


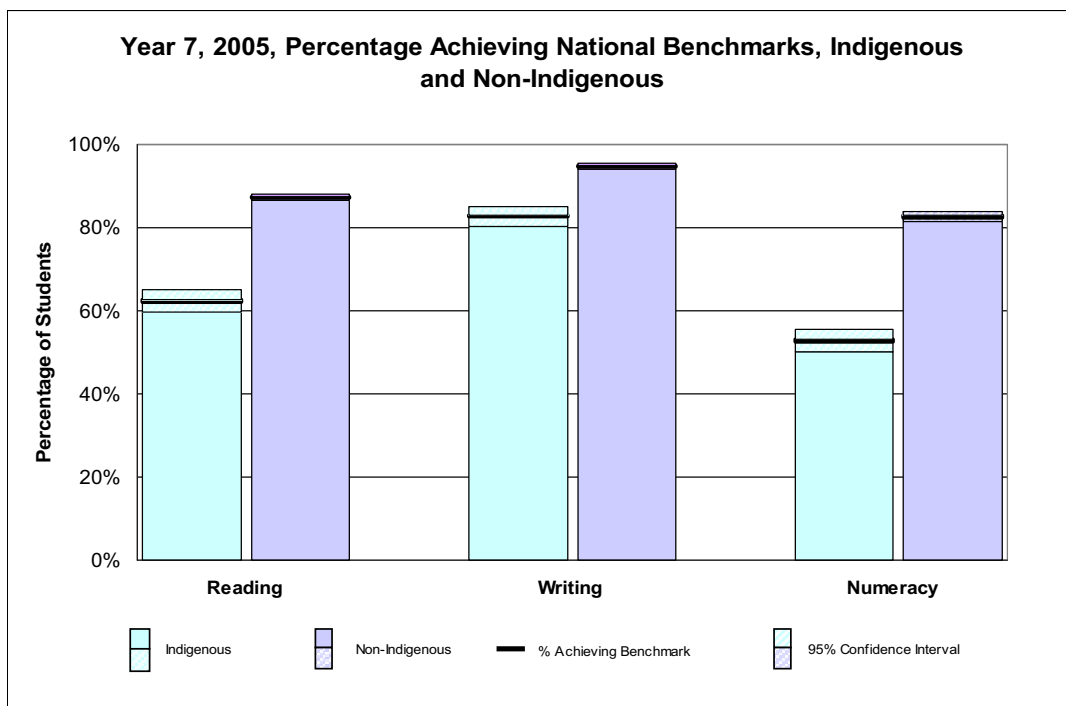
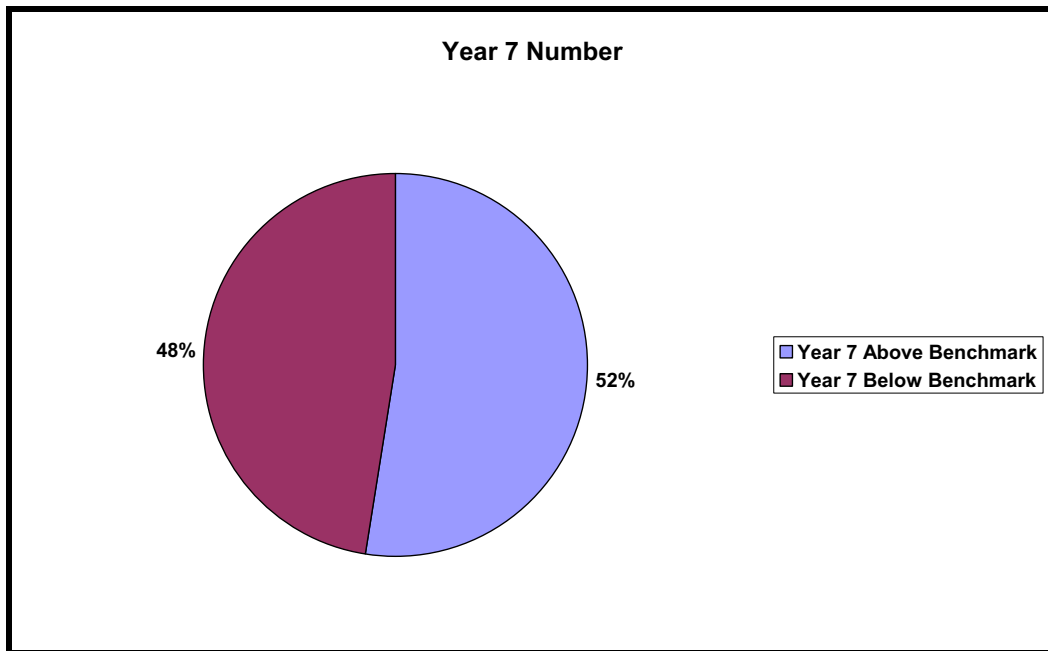
(Queensland Results – From Education Queensland, Office of Strategy and Performance, Indigenous Education, 2005)

### Year 7 Reading



### Year 7 Writing

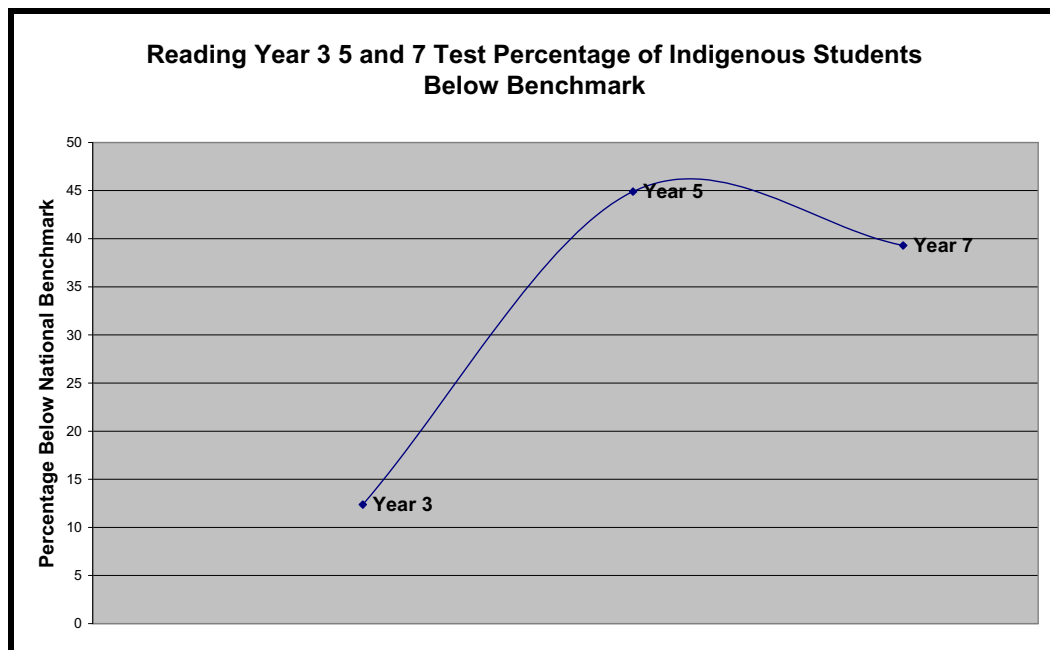




(Queensland Results – From Education Queensland, Office of Strategy and Performance, Indigenous Education, 2005)

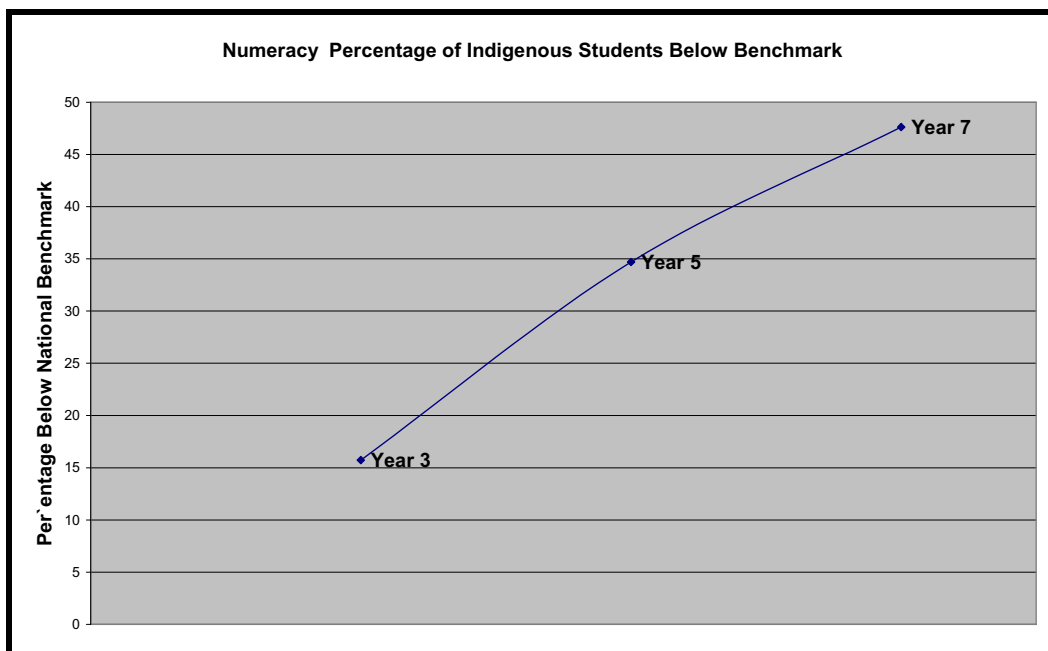
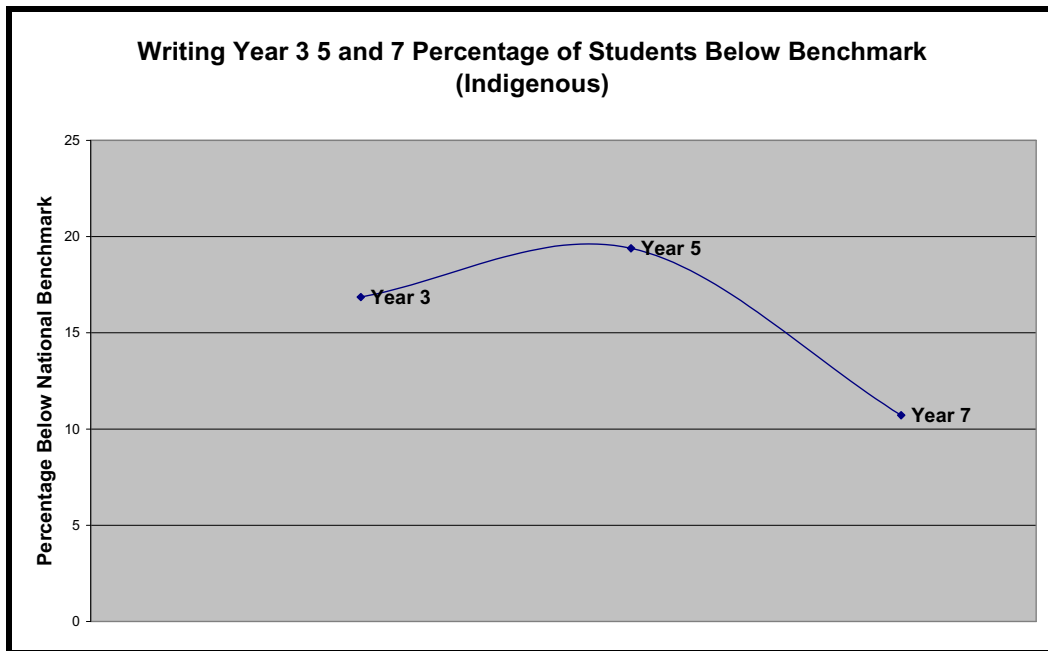
**Toowoomba Indigenous Students (State and Catholic Schools) - National Benchmarks - 2005**

		Yr 3 Below Benchmark	Year 3 (% below)	Yr 5 Above Benchmark	Yr 5 Below Benchmark	Year 5 (% below)	Yr 7 Above Benchmark	Yr 7 Below Benchmark	Year 7 (% below)
<b>Reading</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12.35955</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>44.89796</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39.28571</b>
<b>Writing</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16.85393</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19.38776</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10.71429</b>
<b>Number</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15.73034</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34.69388</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47.61905</b>



**Recommendation 2:** That data such as that presented in this report be collected at regular intervals so that key social indicators can be measured at a local level.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Toowoomba Indigenous Steering Committee make a priority in reversing the percentage of Indigenous students not reaching national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.



It is important to stress that the above graphs are a “snapshot” and do not show the same group of students over time. If data collection such as conducted in this project continues – then it would be possible to track changes in results for Indigenous students over time.

## Interview and Focus Group Results

The following people and organisations agreed to be a part of the focus group / qualitative data collection phase of this project.

Alec Wightman (sport and rec)	Michael Veasey
Alfred Orcher	Phillip Dreise
Jim McCarthy	Rex McGrady
Randall Taylor	Sharon Gray
Andrew Darbyshire	Traven Hooper
Carol Vale	Veronica Pegler
Lizzie Adams / Goondir Dental	Walter McCarthy
Carolyn Weldon	Zona Martin
Cheryl Moggs	Keith Hunter
Edwina Yasso	Community Justice Group
Jim Hagan	Kumbari
Judith Standen	Dick Rose
Carbal Medical Centre	Veronica Pegler
Kathy Donovan	Youth and Community Learning Centre
Kev Saide	Jason Hopgood
Kristian Rose	Cheryl Moggs
Kulila Kindegarten	Jean Suey
Mercy Family Services / Janet	Grace Weatherall
Lingwoodock	Malcolm Lewis
Indigenous Health Team	Michael McCarthy
Stacey McCarthy	James Boney
Harlaxton Neighbourhood Centre	

A number of themes emerged through the process of interviews and focus groups. These were:

### **UNITY**

Diversity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community was cited by a number of respondents as a strength. At the same time there was almost universal feeling among all respondents that lack of unity within the community was a major issue in terms of community development and addressing disadvantage. One respondent stated,

*“We have generation gaps and intellectual gaps and identity gaps... and the cultural diversity between each of these groups is just enormous.....”*

The “Tall Poppy” syndrome was mentioned by a number of respondents. There was also a feeling that some sections of the community had access to support and services while other parts felt isolated. Within the schools, isolated examples of divisions

amongst Indigenous students based on skin colour were cited as evidence of disunity within the wider Indigenous population. Perceptions of divisions along the lines of educational background were also mentioned by respondents to this project.

Aligned with the issue of unity is the broader issue of representation. The phrase, “We don’t have a voice”, was raised a number of times by respondents. The way in which government departments and non government organisations resorted to dealing with one or two individuals within the Indigenous community was also observed. The problems with this are two fold. The first is that an assumption can be made that the individual chosen speaks for the Indigenous population. The second difficulty is that there is no mechanism whereby the individual selected is accountable to the community.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Community Capacity Building Group be better supported and used as a vehicle for non government organisations and government departments to deal with issues effecting the Indigenous population. This group would not claim to be representative of the community but could claim a mandate to be a group established to promote community unity, communication and address wider issues of disadvantage.

## **LOCAL SERVICES**

The majority of respondents highlighted the need for services to be run by local Indigenous people. At the time of collecting data services which were not administered in Toowoomba included: Community Development Employment Programme (CDEP), Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Housing. It is important to note that the two services which were singled out for commendation amongst respondees were locally run services.

**Recommendation 5:** That service providers (government and non government) ensure that there is a mechanism whereby community members are able to be fully informed of the particular service offered.

## **A BASE / SHOPFRONT**

A common issue raised by respondents to this project was the lack of an identifiable base for the Indigenous population. With a population possibly in excess of 5000 there is no real indication that Toowoomba has an Indigenous presence, history and culture. Previously there has been an identifiable community space which often has been controlled and run by an Indigenous organisation. A number of barriers to this currently exist. These are:

- The lack of an Indigenous organisation which can claim to be broadly representative of the whole population.
- Funding to purchase / lease property and then ongoing funding to maintain property and run programmes.

**Recommendation 6:** If the proposed Community Capacity Building Group achieves broad support from community that they explore the possibility of a permanent basin the Toowoomba CBD. That the Aboriginal Housing Company along with other sources of funding be approached with this proposal.

## **YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**

Many of the respondents described a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in a variety of government departments. These individuals are articulate, community minded and wanting to implement strategies that are accountable to government and the Indigenous community.

### **Challenges**

These young leaders sometimes feel isolated and unsupported within the wider community. A number of women are involved but the question was posed, “Where are the men?”

**Recommendation 7:** That opportunities for leadership training and support be made available for emerging leaders within the community. Some of these are already provided by the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-Ordination and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. That the possibility of these opportunities being made available locally be explored.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Strengths**

A number of strengths emerged in the education sector. Education Queensland and the Catholic Education Office have employed competent Indigenous people to co-ordinate service delivery. During the research phase of this project an Indigenous Sports day was hosted by the Catholic Education Office. This day involved a cross section of the wider community and was a great example of promotion of Indigenous culture. For a number of years an Indigenous dance group has been organised through Harlaxton State Primary School.

Education Queensland has been exploring establishing playgroups for Indigenous parents – especially in schools with relatively high numbers of Indigenous students (eg. Harristown Primary School). Parent education sessions have also been co-ordinated by the Indigenous Education Unit of Education Queensland. A number of State High Schools were involved in leadership training for senior Indigenous students in 2006. This training involved the students budgeting for, planning and implementing some NAIDOC week events.

Education Queensland regional office has also set concrete targets in terms of national literacy and numeracy benchmarks and has a strategic plan in place to meet these goals.

## Challenges

Despite the efforts outlined above a number of respondents felt that there needed to be greater cultural education for all students. The greatest need which emerged was students failing to meet national literacy and numeracy benchmarks and disengaging with the formal education system.

One respondent stated,

*“You’ve just got to go and spend a day with the Get Set for Work kids to know that those kids disengaged from school a long long time ago – those kids are probably sitting there doodling in their books and they’re not getting picked up. Education is probably one of the biggest challenges.”*

Other respondents described the difficulty faced by at risk youth. One young person had been forced to live in a bus shelter and his only access to a shower and food was at an educational institution. Another situation was described in which a young person had to sleep in a telephone booth. This homelessness was attributed to substance abuse, domestic violence and dysfunctional households.

**Recommendation 8:** That the possibility of a short term safe house for youth be explored. This would be a place where young people would be able to continue attending school. That the Aboriginal Housing Company and other sources of funding be approached with this proposal.

**Recommendation 9:** That the Community Capacity Building Group make its first priority a decrease in the percentage of students not reaching national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. An education working group be formed with its primary focus identifying and implementing programmes. One example of a programme which might be adapted would be MULTILIT – a programme run by Macquarie University. MULTILIT has shown great results in supporting children in making up for lost time in literacy. The methodology is evidence based and pilot projects in New South Wales and Queensland have already shown great results for children involved. Service clubs, church groups, non government organisations and government organisations be invited and encouraged to support concrete steps in increasing literacy and numeracy standards for Indigenous Primary school students.

**Recommendation 10:** That the possibility of adapting and implementing the Reading for Life programme (Smith Family). During the research phase of this project Carbal Medical Centre, Kumbari / Ngurpai Lag Higher Education Centre and the Wilsonton Community House (Crime Prevention Partnerships) all showed interest in implementing the Reading for Life programme. This programme is designed to increase the level of literacy in children prior to school age. It is specifically designed to involve parents in reading to children.

## **ELDERS**

### **Strengths**

A number of elders have volunteered countless hours for the good of the community. They generously give of their time often without pay and recognition. An example of this is the elders group who the local magistrate refers Indigenous youth offenders to. Over a number of years a number of elders have played a prominent role in establishing and maintaining a number of services for the Indigenous community. The Community Justice Group is a great example of an organization working respectfully and utilizing the wisdom and experience of local elders.

### **Challenges**

One of the major challenges is a lack of unity. There are two recognised groups of elders with both claiming to be the most representative of the wider community. There is “historical baggage” with some individuals involved in Indigenous organizations which were de-funded or closed down due to poor governance and accountability.

Respondents again voiced the need for a designated base for elders. This base needs to be close to the CBD so that other services and transport make it accessible. The lack of a respite centre – a place where elders are able to connect with the wider community and engage in recreation was also identified as a need.

**Recommendation 11:** That the possibility of a respite centre / community space for elders be considered. That the Aboriginal Housing Company along with other funding sources be approached with this proposal.

## **HOUSING**

### **Strengths**

The local Aboriginal Housing Company owns 52 houses. These houses have provided a number of Indigenous families with affordable housing for a number of years. Another community asset is the Jack Martin Centre – a relatively large piece of land with some buildings located on the road to Westbrook.

### **Challenges**

Until recently this housing company was in receivership and maintenance, rent, administration was conducted through Murrumba Aboriginal Corporation based in Dalby. There has been no local members of the Toowoomba Aboriginal Housing company able to be represented through Murrumba. A number of respondents complained about a poor standard of maintenance on houses.

A number of respondents complained about the difficulty of finding accommodation in Toowoomba. Instances of people having to live in Warwick or Gatton because they could not get housing were described. Children have at times been at risk of being removed from families due to the lack of adequate housing. Racism was often experienced by people trying to access the private rental market. One respondent stated,

*“One lady has applied for 45 houses and been rejected. Salvation army came to the rescue.”*

### **Recommendation 12:**

That a housing working group be established. Some of the goals of this group would be to establish positive relationships with private real estate agents and to explore the possibility of the Aboriginal Housing Company expanding its number of housing stock. That Queensland Department of Sport and Recreation work with Toowoomba City Council and the Jack Martin Centre Trust to restore and upgrade the main oval so that it can be utilized for youth activities.

## **RACISM**

### **Strengths**

There is a greater awareness of racism in the wider community. Within the community a number of individuals are aware of the impact of racism upon the local community. The Mayor has shown herself to be approachable on matters of individual racism and the Council has also made efforts to recognise important cultural events such as NAIDOC week.

### **Challenges**

Many of the challenges of racism have already been outlined in this report. These occur in the areas of housing, education and employment. The symbolism of maintaining the “Nigger Brown” sign on the Athletic Oval grandstand was raised by a small number of respondents. Instances of racism were also described as occurring in a number of public spaces within Toowoomba city.

A more subtle or structural form of racism was also raised by a small number of respondents. One of these stated,

*“A government response is, ‘It’s too hard to deal with Toowoomba Aboriginal people because of your factionalism’”*

There were also complaints that with regards to government and non-government organisations there seemed to be a constant temptation to lump Sudanese people together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Recommendation 13:**

That the efforts of bodies such as Toowoomba City Council in recognising and promoting Indigenous culture and heritage be built upon. That greater understanding of the dangers of racial profiling in shopping centres, swimming pools etc/ be promoted amongst security and general staff.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **Strengths**

As highlighted in this report the number of Indigenous employees in the government sector has greatly increased over the past twenty years. There is also great evidence of a willingness to increase Indigenous employment within the Department of State Development and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. School based apprenticeships were cited as one area of positive achievement in the field of employment.

### **Challenges**

The great disparity between overall unemployment rates and Indigenous unemployment rates has already been highlighted. The impact of the closing of CDEP means that there needs to be extra resources put into basic training for a number of community members. Some resentment was expressed about a perception that newly arrived refugees seemed to be able to gain employment more readily than Indigenous youth.

### **Recommendation 14:**

- That any Indigenous organization emerging from CDEP be greatly supported in the wider community.
- As a long term strategy literacy, numeracy and school retention rates be addressed.

### **Recommendation 15:**

That an employment working party identify specific opportunities and barriers for employment in the Toowoomba area. Research would be commissioned that should highlight the needs/opportunities for a number of groups such as school leavers, long term unemployed, disabled, under-employed, CDEP participants etc. (This research would also identify problems for individuals that are trying to break into the labour market such as literacy/numeracy).

# COMMUNITY SPIRIT

## Strengths

A number of individuals care deeply about the Toowoomba Indigenous community. They regularly give time and energy to ensuring that the future is a better place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth. These individuals work to create communication networks across the community. They organise events such as NAIDOC week. They give time to support youth who are in trouble with the law. They negotiate with stakeholder trying to establish employment pathways for community members. They give time to mentor and train young people.

## Challenges

The individuals outlined above are small in number and can tend to “burn out”. A great deal of energy is spent trying to manoeuvre positive strategies to ensure that they are supported by the whole community.

### **Recommendation 16:**

That a small amount of money be made available to co-ordinate events such as NAIDOC week and regular newsletters.

### **Recommendation 17:**

- That a group such as the Community Capacity Building Group be broadened and build its profile within the local Indigenous population.
- That this group take ownership of the recommendations of this report and establish a series of working groups to address the various issues raised.
- Eg. Education / Housing / Racism / Unity etc.
- That statistics such as the Year 3 / 5 / 7 literacy and numeracy tests be regularly collected so that progress can be mapped.
- Partnerships with key stakeholders be built with each working group and other community organizations. (eg. Service groups, Non Government Organisations, Church groups etc.)
- That this group initially be auspiced by a “neutral body” such as Centacare / Lifeline / Toowoomba City Council with a view to eventually becoming independent
- That a Co-ordinator be appointed to ensure that working groups and the Community Capacity Building Group is running effectively
- That the Community Capacity Building Group investigate possibilities for making the Co-ordinator’s role full time and permanent with support possibly through the Indigenous Co-ordinating Centre or Queensland Department of Communities
- That Toowoomba City Council establishes an Indigenous Portfolio which would work closely with the Community Capacity Group.

## **Conclusions**

There has never been a greater capacity for positive change within the Indigenous community in Toowoomba. A number of individuals have the skills, experience and willingness to bring about this change.

While there is a basis for hope the level of despair within sections of the community cannot be underestimated.

The history of the city of Toowoomba and its Indigenous population possibly means that the ideal of a unified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and a single representative organization may never be realised.

At the same time there is extraordinary energy within sections of the community to address areas of disadvantage. This report proposes that this energy be harnessed in a partnership with the wider community.

It is important to stress that this project was a “snapshot” of the community and cannot be seen as comprehensive. Areas such as domestic violence and the situation of young women were raised by respondents. The structure which is established following this report should allow other areas of focus within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community to be focused on.

Forty years ago this year over 90% of Toowoomba residents voted in a referendum to state that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people should be included as full members of our community. The reality is that many barriers to this still exist today.

The situation faced is complex and requires long term solutions. At the same time the wider Toowoomba community needs to own the possibilities of a better future for Indigenous generations to come. The low levels of literacy and numeracy in primary school need to be one of the key areas of shared action if positive change is to be made.

The recommendations outlined in this report are a starting point for a steering group to begin action on. They will require much more than a six month process.

Toowoomba is known as a centre for education. It has a number of schools and tertiary institutions which have a great reputation. It would be an achievement for the city of Toowoomba to ensure that Indigenous students can enter secondary school with the same competencies as any other student. This can only be achieved by transparent accountable actions owned by partnerships between the Indigenous population and the whole city of Toowoomba.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** That an Indigenous Community newsletter be produced and distributed through schools and community organizations / government departments. This would be a way of connecting all parts of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Toowoomba.

**Recommendation 2:** That data such as that presented in this report be collected at regular intervals so that key social indicators can be measured at a local level.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Toowoomba Indigenous Steering Committee make a priority in reversing the percentage of Indigenous students not reaching national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Community Capacity Building Group be better supported and used as a vehicle for non government organisations and government departments to deal with issues effecting the Indigenous population. This group would not claim to be representative of the community but could claim a mandate to be a group established to promote community unity, communication and address wider issues of disadvantage.

**Recommendation 5:** That service providers (government and non government) ensure that there is a mechanism whereby community members are able to be fully informed of the particular service offered.

**Recommendation 6:** If the proposed Community Capacity Building Group achieves broad support from community that they explore the possibility of a permanent base in the Toowoomba CBD. That the Aboriginal Housing Company be approached with this proposal.

**Recommendation 7:** That opportunities for leadership training and support be made available for emerging leaders within the community. Some of these are already provided by the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-Ordination and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. That the possibility of these opportunities being made available locally be explored.

**Recommendation 8:** That the possibility of a short term safe house for youth be explored. This would be a place where young people would be able to continue attending school. That the Aboriginal Housing Company be approached with this proposal.

**Recommendation 9:** That the Community Capacity Building Group make its first priority a decrease in the percentage of students not reaching national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. An education working group be formed with its primary focus identifying and implementing programmes. One example of a programme

which might be adapted would be MULTILIT – a programme run by Macquarie University for the Cape York Institute in Coen. Service clubs, church groups, non government organisations and government organisations be invited and encouraged to support concrete steps in increasing literacy and numeracy standards for Indigenous Primary school students.

**Recommendation 10:** That the possibility of adapting and implementing the Reading for Life programme (Smith Family). During the research phase of this project Carbal Medical Centre, Kumbari / Ngurpai Lag Higher Education Centre and the Wilsonton Community House (Crime Prevention Partnerships) all showed interest in implementing the Reading for Life programme. This programme is designed to increase the level of literacy in children prior to school age. It is specifically designed to involve parents in reading to children.

**Recommendation 11:** That the possibility of a respite centre / community space for elders be considered. That the Aboriginal Housing Company be approached with this proposal.

**Recommendation 12:**

That a housing working group be established. Some of the goals of this group would be to establish positive relationships with private real estate agents and to explore the possibility of the Aboriginal Housing Company expanding its number of housing stock. That Queensland Department of Sport and Recreation work with Toowoomba City Council and the Jack Martin Centre Trust to restore and upgrade the main oval so that it can be utilized for youth activities.

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- That Toowoomba City Council establishes an Indigenous Portfolio which would work closely with the Community Capacity Group.



## Social Justice Commission Catholic Diocese of Toowoomb

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(Appendix 1)

### Consent Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information sheet on the Toowoomba Assets / 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 Assets / 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: \_\_\_\_\_

(Appendix 2)

### **Background to Toowoomba Indigenous Community Assets / Needs Analysis Project**

Toowoomba City 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 City 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 Toowoomba City Council and the Social Justice Commission. In partnership with local Indigenous community members Toowoomba City Council will then work towards implementing recommendations flowing from this research.

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) 46392611  
[mark@twb.catholic.org.au](mailto:mark@twb.catholic.org.au)

**(Appendix 3)**

Form Number .....<sup>42</sup>

Age: .....

Gender: Male  Female

Occupation: Work (please specify):.....

- Caring for Family
- Unemployed
- Student – Primary  
High  
TAFE  
University

How long have you lived in Toowoomba?.....

How do you find out what is happening in the community? (please circle)

Newspaper      Council Newsletter      Television      Internet      Radio

Word of Mouth      Community Notice Boards      Other

What are the three best things about living in Toowoomba?

.....

The level of government which offers the greatest assistance to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is:

- a) Local (Toowoomba City Council)
- b) State Government
- c) Federal Government
- d) None of the above

Name or describe the best government or community run programme delivering service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Toowoomba city?

.....

---

<sup>42</sup> The identity of the person filling out the form is not necessary – but the number of the form / and entry into the prize is a way of preventing repeats of data collection.

Name or list some of the things being achieved by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members:

.....

What is the greatest challenge facing Toowoomba's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

.....

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

.....

Where do you go to for help in the following areas?

Legal: ..... Employment:.....  
Health:..... Housing:.....  
Counselling:..... Other help:.....

Which of the following areas of life most require attention for Toowoomba's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents? (Select just one)

Child Health  Education  Employment Rate of Indigenous People in Prisons Youth Activities Housing  Domestic Violence  Child Safety  
Support for Elderly  General Health

What is the best way that Toowoomba City Council could provide support for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

.....

I can influence decisions that affect my life (please circle)

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree Disagree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community can influence decisions that affect Toowoomba City.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree Disagree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly

Do you have any other comments about the strengths and needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Toowoomba?

.....

.....

**(Appendix 4)**  
**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 Toowoomba?
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 Toowoomba?
9. Did you have anything else to add?