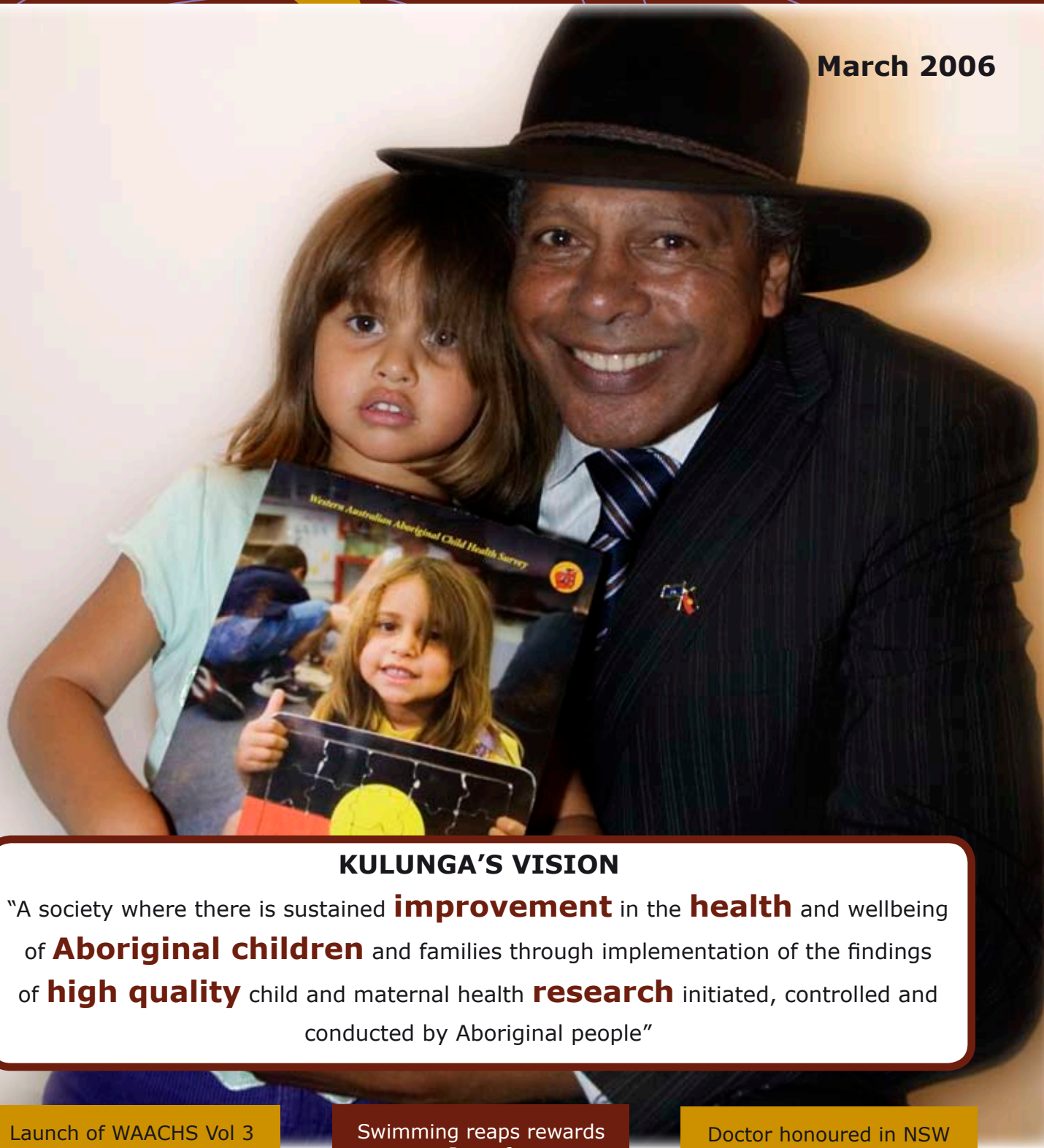


March 2006



KULUNGA'S VISION

"A society where there is sustained **improvement** in the **health** and wellbeing of **Aboriginal children** and families through implementation of the findings of **high quality** child and maternal health **research** initiated, controlled and conducted by Aboriginal people"

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About Kulunga

The Kulunga Research Network is the Institute's Indigenous research arm.

It was established in 1999 as a joint initiative between the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the WA Aboriginal community (through WA Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, now known as the Aboriginal Health Council of WA).

The aim of Kulunga is to build capacity in Aboriginal research. A team of Aboriginal researchers and staff oversee the Aboriginal child and maternal health research programs of the Institute.

Kulunga aspires to a model of research and practice that is of the highest value in bringing the ideas and experiences of Aboriginal communities and the research expertise of Aboriginal people together in a world class, multi-disciplinary research setting. Our firm belief is that improvements to the lives of Aboriginal children through sustainable, community owned research effort will have far-reaching impacts on the lives of our families and future generations.

Kulunga Logo

Kulunga is a Nyoongar word for "children's".

'The design represents a joyful child, nurtured by the land and the family. The heart shape represents the love surrounding the child and the nurturing, the child emerging as if a beautiful flower. The wavy line could be thought of as the life course of the child, as she/he moves to adulthood, the open petals symbolising the flexibility of the young child's personality.'

Design is by artist Peter Cameron.

Kulunga Patron

The Kulunga Research Network Patron is Troy Cook from the Fremantle Football Club.

FRONT COVER

Photo taken at WAACHS Volume 3 Launch

Left to right: Matilda Ogilvie and Ernie Dingo

Story on page 3



Newsletter produced by the
Kulunga Research Network of the
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

Farewell Shardé

It is with sadness that we farewell one of our colleagues, Shardé Lee.

Shardé has been on staff at the Institute for 12 months as the Administrative and Research Assistant.

Shardé leaves us to pursue opportunities with her family business.

We'd like to thank Shardé for her contribution to the Institute and Kulunga and wish her all the best in her future endeavours.



Improving Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People

On Friday 24 March 2006, the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) launched its third volume of findings - *Improving Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*.

Ernie Dingo was the Master of Ceremonies for the event and guests were treated to performances by students from Montrose Primary School.

The WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey is the largest and most comprehensive study of Aboriginal child health and well being in Australia.

The Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, with the support and advice of the WA Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (WAACCHO), the WA Council of ATSIC Commissioners, and the WA Council of Elders, has completed this state-wide survey of Aboriginal children and families.

This survey assists in gaining an understanding of what children and young people need to develop in healthy ways.

Data has been collected through a household and school survey primarily, with young people between the ages of 12-17 also completing an individual survey.

Key findings from this third volume include:

- Three main factors contributing to poor academic performance among Aboriginal students are:

1. The lower levels of academic achievement of carers of Aboriginal student

2. The higher rates of absence from school; and

3. The higher proportion of Aboriginal students at moderate to high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioral difficulties.

- Educational disparities in school performance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children are larger than the disparities in physical and mental health.

- Educational disparity is evident from the earliest years of schooling and the longer Aboriginal students are at school, the wider the education disparity grows.

As part of the Communication and Dissemination Strategy for the WAACHS, a specific Communication and Dissemination Plan for Volume 3 has been developed and the team are preparing for the regional visits and dissemination

Copies of the WAACHS Volumes can be purchased from the Institute or downloaded from the website at www.ichr.uwa.edu.au/waachs.

Photos of the event can be viewed on the website.

Manager recipient of Premier's Ambassador Award

On Tuesday 21st March 2006, at the Vice-Chancellor's Oration at the University of Notre Dam, Kulunga Manager, Associate Professor Colleen Hayward, was awarded the prestigious Premier's Multicultural Ambassador Award, which recognises an outstanding Western Australian who has demonstrated excellence and innovation in providing leadership in promoting multiculturalism and advancing human rights and anti-racism in our community.

The award read:

Ms Colleen Hayward has demonstrated a long term commitment to human rights, anti-racism and advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples as well as Indigenous Reconciliation in WA. For more than 20 years, Colleen has provided significant input to policies

and programs on a wide range of issues, reflecting the needs of minority groups at State Government, national and community levels.

Ms Hayward is a well respected and strong advocate for the rights of indigenous people and is an inspiring and well sought after speaker with an inherent ability to communicate across cultural and other boundaries. She has built lasting partnerships and initiatives between indigenous and non-indigenous Western Australians.

Congratulations Colleen.



Above: Kulunga Manager, Colleen Hayward and her award

Kulunga undertakes consultancy on proposed State Aboriginal Mental Health Support Service

The Kulunga Research Network was contracted by the North Metropolitan Health Service to undertake a state wide consultancy on a proposed State Aboriginal Mental Health Support Service.

The service model was designed by the Project Planning Group and features several elements that seek to increase the WA State Health Department's capacity to work and respond to the needs of Aboriginal people with diagnosed mental health illnesses.

A central focus of this service is to increase the capacity of the Health Department's mental health services at the local level, by working in partnership with other key stakeholders in each region.

It is proposed to achieve this through the provision of leadership in areas such as staff recruitment, professional development and support, establishment of standards of care based on the Department's cultural security policy framework and the development of a Aboriginal centred model of mental health.

The Kulunga consultancy, managed by Mr Glenn Pearson and Ms Sharon Bedford, involved interviewing stakeholders through regional consultation throughout the Kimberley, Pilbara, Murchison, South-West and Great Southern, as well as Perth Metropolitan areas.

Representatives were also interviewed from Kalgoorlie, the Western Desert and Wheatbelt.

A comprehensive email out of the survey questionnaire was also sent to stakeholders across the State and included major government agencies, Aboriginal community groups and service providers and, the non government service providers.

A total of 70 completed questionnaires were received

A total of 42 group or face to face interviews were held and involved over 110 people representing 40 services or groups across the State.

The Report identified a number of issues that were common to all stakeholders and included:

- Emergency after hours;
- Lack of culturally appropriate models of practice;
- Crisis driven practice;
- Carer support and respite;
- Looking after clients who were transferred to Perth and when they return home.

The final report and presentation was made by Kulunga to the Project Planning Group in January and was fully supported and endorsed by the group for tabling at the Project Control Group later in February.

Upon endorsement from the this group, it is expected that the report and its recommendations will be presented to the Implementation Committee for their deliberations.

The report was approved by the project funder, the North Metropolitan Area Health Service in late March 2006.

A copy of this report will be available on the Kulunga website shortly.



Above: Glenn Pearson

Indigenous Capacity Building Grant workshop a success

On the 6th to 8th February 2006, some 30 members of the Indigenous Capacity Building Grant (ICBG) assembled at the Yalgorup Eco Park in Yalgorup, near Mandurah in WA, to look back, reflect and acknowledge the first year's many achievements.

The workshop also provided an opportunity for ICBG Team Investigators to meet with their supervisors and mentors face to face to discuss their progress to date and to set the direction for the year ahead.

Overall, the entire workshop was a huge success for all those who attended. Participants left full of enthusiasm and already talking of the next one, planned for later in the year.

New project to address the use of alcohol during pregnancy

Alcohol and pregnancy is the focus of a new project recently launched at the Institute.

The Alcohol and Pregnancy Project will build on previous research conducted by the Institute which identified that health professionals want more information about the diagnosis of the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and on advising women about alcohol consumption in pregnancy.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) describes a range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy.

The effects may include physical, mental, behavioural, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong effects. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) represents the severe end of the range of abnormalities resulting from use in pregnancy.

Western Australian data show that Aboriginal children are over 100 times more likely to be diagnosed with FAS. Alcohol use in pregnancy and its effects, and FAS in particular, have received limited attention in Australia.

Our earlier research found that most health professionals do not enquire about or provide women with information on the consequences of alcohol use during pregnancy, and most reported their need for resources such as written material for themselves and for distribution to clients.

In this project, researchers will consult with health professionals and community groups to develop best practice health promotion material for health professionals to use when advising women on alcohol consumption and its effects during pregnancy.

Chief Investigator Carol Bower said the Project will provide useful materials for use by health professionals when consulting with women who are pregnant.

"We aim to increase the number of health professionals in WA who routinely ask women about alcohol during pregnancy," Professor Bower said.

"For this to be successful, it is important to support health professionals with material that can be given out to women to supplement advice on alcohol use in pregnancy.

"An effective way to do this is to work with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members and health professionals directly to develop materials that they will feel comfortable with using," she said.

The Alcohol and Pregnancy Project has been made possible by funding from Healthway and is a collaboration between researchers at the Institute, Edith Cowan University, Curtin University of Technology, University of Sydney and the WA Department of Health.

National Symposium to focus on healthy pregnancy

START OUT STRONG: A healthy beginning in life is the theme for the national two day symposium being hosted by the Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership on the 9th- 10th May 2006 in Perth, Western Australia.

The symposium will showcase success stories in Indigenous early years and provide opportunities for networking and sharing learnings with health professionals, community leaders, researchers and policy developers and have an emphasis promoting healthy pregnancy, in particular programs that are achieving results in the areas of:

- reducing substance use during pregnancy
- improved nutrition (including breastfeeding)
- the first years of life.

The symposium will also explore the sub-themes of workforce issues, community engagement, capacity building, and enhancing opportunities for collaboration across jurisdictions.

Registration forms and program information will be available early in April 2006. Keep checking the Kulunga website for this information at www.ichr.uwa.edu.au/kulunga.

Swimming reaps enormous rewards



Jigalong is located around 170 kilometres east of Newman in the hot, desert Pilbara region of Western Australia.

The community is accessible only via an unsealed road or airplane, yet has its own 25 metre swimming pool, an "oasis" in the middle of this harsh red land.

The pool was installed by the State Government in 2000 and since then, our researchers have been following the children of Jigalong to see how the pool has impacted on their health.

The results have been simply stunning!

Between 2001 and 2005 at Jigalong clinic there have been reductions of:

- 41% in antibiotic prescriptions
- 44% in ear disease
- 51% in skin disease
- 63% in respiratory disease

when compared with the pre-pool rates.

Institute Director Professor Fiona Stanley said she was thrilled with the results, that showed a big drop in ear and skin disease when children are swimming for sustained periods of time.

"We know that extremely high rates of ear disease have caused many children to suffer significant hearing loss which disrupts their education and increases the level of disadvantage that these children face," she said.

"These pools appear to be an effective option that has real long term benefits for the children and the community as a whole.

"For these results to be sustained it is important that the pools remain open for as long as possible each year."

Study paediatrician Dr Desiree Silva said the reduction in skin sores was important.

"Skin sores are associated with rheumatic heart disease and glomerulonephritis or kidney disease – the effects of which can be very debilitating or fatal," Dr Silva said.

"If we can stop young children getting skin sores, we may reduce the risk of kidney and heart disease later."

Like Jigalong, the children of two other Pilbara communities, Burringurrah and Mugarinya, have also been reaping the benefits that have flowed from regular swimming.

The children of these communities have also recorded improvements in their skin and ears and they too are enjoying the positive social benefits that stem from using the pool.

Professor Stanley said the positive results of this research provide real evidence to support the importance of providing infrastructure in remote communities.

At a special swimming carnival in Jigalong on February 23, Professor Stanley and the research team thanked the community for their participation in the study over the past six years.

Olympic Gold medallist Shane Gould helped to organise the carnival, leading the children in a range of fun activities as well as developing their swimming skills

The pools are operated by the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA). Qualified RLSSA instructors are teaching the children to swim using the "Swim and Survive" program.

The project has been made possible by the joint efforts of the communities with the Department of Housing and Works, The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.

Plan to tackle STI's among WA Aboriginal people

By Michael Wright

The launch of the WA Aboriginal Sexual Health Strategy 2005-2008 document in December 2005 was in part recognition of the many years of hard work by so many dedicated people and organisations, which included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health professionals, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and members from Aboriginal communities across the state.

In 2003, the WA Department of Health in partnership with others developed the WA Aboriginal Sexual Health Strategy 2005 to 2008.

The main impetus for the Strategy came from the high rates and health impacts of STIs in WA for Aboriginal people.

A significant reason for the high rates of STIs among Aboriginal people is poor access to good sexual health services.

The traditional mainstream health approach has been mainly to treat the disease rather than looking at causal pathways and other underlying issues.

It was therefore felt that in the Strategy it was also very important to focus on all the elements that contribute to poor sexual health, which include social, economic, historical and structural elements.

For example, STIs are usually higher in communities where there is ongoing social disadvantage, including unemployment and poverty.

The guiding principles underpinning the Strategy are about collaboration and partnerships. WA surveillance data shows that young people, aged 16 to 25 are most at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI), with approximately between 50-60% of all STI notifications in WA occurring in this age group.

It was therefore very important to the overall sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young adults that interventions that are meaningful to them are implemented.

Apart from the holistic health services delivered by Aboriginal Medical Services, there are still few models of service delivery, particularly sexual health programs, which moves beyond a 'disease focus', and as a consequence mainstream health services are struggling to respond to the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people.

Therefore it is very important to establish partnerships with agencies and sectors that have a good understanding and relationships with young people.

The aims of the Strategy are about encouraging cross agency partnerships, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health services and with those services that have focus on youth.

NOTE: At time of publication, Michael no longer works at the Department of Health. He is now a PhD student at Curtin University and is a Team Investigator with the Indigenous Capacity Building Grant at the Institute.



Above: Michael Wright, Senior Policy and Planning Officer, Communicable Disease Control Directorate, at the launch with Parliamentary Secretary for Health Sue Ellery.

Photograph reproduced courtesy of WA Department of Health

Manager opens Well Women's Centre

On Thursday 9th March 2006, Kulunga Manager Colleen Hayward, opened the new premises of the Hedland Well Women's Centre as part of International Women's Day celebrations in Port Hedland.

The Centre is the only one of its kind in the North West of WA, as it provides a specialist female service that crosses barriers of age, race, culture, religion and socio economic divisions.



Above: Director Janet Brown and Kulunga Manager Colleen Hayward

Aboriginal doctor honoured for medical research

By Anne Davies & Ben Cubby

One of Australia's foremost indigenous medical researchers, Sandra Eades, has been named the 2006 NSW Woman of the Year, in recognition of her work in identifying links between social factors such as housing and infant health.



Above: NSW Woman of the Year 2006, Professor Sandra Eades

Professor Eades, the first Aboriginal medical doctor to be awarded a PhD, was named as the winner of the award by the Premier, Morris Iemma, at a function to celebrate International Women's Day on 8th March 2006.

"Tonight we recognise and celebrate the outstanding contribution Sandra Eades has made to Aboriginal health research. In particular, I acknowledge her role in improving the health of Aboriginal women and children pediatric and perinatal epidermiology." Mr Iemma said.

Professor Eades is a senior research fellow in Aboriginal Health at the Sax Institute, Sydney and conjoint professor in the faculty of public health at the University of Newcastle.

Nominations for the NSW Woman of the year are sought from all NSW MP's and ministers. Professor Eades was nominated by the Minister for Science and Medical Research, Frank Sartor.

"Professor Eades was the first to show a strong link between infant health and social factors such as education and access to housing," Mr Sartor said.

"Her current research involves culturally specific smoking intervention for pregnant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and the establishment of a major study among NSW Aboriginal children and families attending urban Aboriginal medical services," he said.

Article reproduced courtesy of The Sydney Morning Herald.

NOTE: Sandra Eades assisted in the establishment the Kulunga Research Network and was it's inaugural Manager.

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