

**‘They Think They Know Us Better’:  
Aboriginal Experiences of Education, Health and  
Employment in Contemporary South Australia**

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## Abstract

The annual reports released by the Australian Government over the past ten years indicate that little progress has been made to address the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. It is in this context that this research adopts an ethnographical approach, and echoes the post-colonial turn in anthropology by placing the primary importance on the views of the Aboriginal Australians themselves and thus, allowing thick descriptions to be developed. This research places the voices of Aboriginal Australians at the centre of it, to understand their lived experiences within education, health and employment, which in turn identifies factors that impact the efforts of closing the gap in equality. Members of two Aboriginal communities in South Australia provided their in-depth perspectives, opinions and experiences about education, health and employment, while grounded theory helped to identify key factors impacting on these, namely the inclusion or exclusion of Aboriginal Australians in contemporary society and politics, the fragmentation of trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and the importance of Aboriginal culture. The lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians provide examples and important explanations of how services and initiatives within education, health and employment are received, and highlight how they are interconnected in their everyday lives. The findings show that although current social services and initiatives are not necessarily failing to address the issues they target, the lived experiences of some Aboriginal Australians reflect that it is the fractious relationships between Aboriginal Australians, the Australian Government and wider Australian society that have a direct impact on their success. The research reveals that Aboriginal Australians' reluctance to accept and access some health, education and employment services is a key problem, which results in the ineffectiveness of these services. This thesis illustrates why some services and initiatives available to the communities are not as effective as others, and suggests that Aboriginal culture is a significant underpinning factor present in successful services and initiatives, but less evident in those considered ineffective. The inclusion of the actual voices of members of two Aboriginal communities in South Australia helps to highlight key attributes of effective services and initiatives, which have enabled possible suggestions for improving the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians, which in turn support the efforts in closing the gap in equality.

# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Abstract</b> .....   | i  |
| Table of Contents .....   | ii |
| List of Figures .....   | v  |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b> .....   | vi |
| <b>Chapter I</b> .....  | 1  |
| <b>Introduction</b> .....   | 1  |
| <b>Research Design and Findings</b> .....   | 3  |
| <b>The Structure of the Thesis</b> .....  | 6  |
| <b>Chapter II</b> .....   | 10 |
| <b>Contextualisation: Setting the Scene</b> .....   | 10 |
| <b>Historical Context: Australia’s Past</b> .....   | 10 |
| <b>Social Policy Reform: The Shift in Focus</b> .....                                     | 15 |
| <b>Understanding Concepts: The Impact of Value Differences</b> .....                      | 19 |
| <b>Closing the Gap Reports: The Australian Government’s Approach</b> .....                | 25 |
| <b>Education and Aboriginal Australians</b> .....   | 29 |
| <b>Employment and Aboriginal Australians</b> .....  | 34 |
| <b>Health and Aboriginal Australians</b> .....  | 39 |
| <b>Education, Employment and Health: The Nature of Policies’ Interconnectedness</b> ..... | 45 |
| <b>Building a Contextual Framework: Ngarrindjeri and Kurna Literature</b> .....           | 48 |
| <b>Acknowledging the Gap in Current Literature</b> .....                                  | 52 |
| <b>Concluding Comments</b> .....  | 53 |
| <b>Chapter III</b> .....  | 54 |
| <b>Methodology</b> .....  | 54 |
| <b>The Ngarrindjeri and Kurna People: Introducing the Aboriginal Communities</b> .....    | 54 |
| <b>Ethnographic Research: Characteristics and Application to this Research</b> .....      | 55 |
| <b>Ethical Considerations</b> .....   | 57 |
| <b>In the Field: Organising the Research</b> .....  | 60 |
| <b>Building Relationships in the Field: Addressing Power Relations</b> .....              | 64 |
| <b>Grounded Theory: Analysing the Research Findings</b> .....                             | 68 |
| <b>The Use of Photographic Evidence</b> .....   | 75 |
| <b>Concluding Comments</b> .....  | 76 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Chapter IV</b> .....  | 77  |
| <b>The Unheard Voice: Silencing Aboriginal Australians</b> .....   | 77  |
| <b>A Case Study of Silencing: The Coorong Drought</b> .....  | 78  |
| <i>The Dreamtime and Dreaming Narratives: Aboriginal Connections with the Land</i> .....                               | 99  |
| <i>The Australian Government's Response to the Drought</i> .....   | 102 |
| <b>Re-Silenced: The Australian Government's Rejection of the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's Report</b> ..... | 107 |
| <i>A First Nations Voice in the Constitution</i> .....   | 108 |
| <i>Declaration of Recognition outside of the Constitution</i> .....  | 110 |
| <i>Makarrata Commission</i> .....  | 111 |
| <b>Officialising the Aboriginal Voice: Response from the Australian Prime Minister</b> .....                           | 114 |
| <b>Loss of Hope: The Impact of Re-Silencing Aboriginal Australians</b> .....   | 118 |
| <b>Silenced Today: Being Spoken on Behalf of</b> .....   | 126 |
| <i>Speaking Out on Silencing: Shareena Clanton's Speech</i> .....  | 135 |
| <b>Concluding Comments</b> .....   | 142 |
| <b>Chapter V</b> .....   | 144 |
| <b>Absence of Trust: The Impact of Distrust on Aboriginal Australians</b> .....  | 144 |
| <b>Perceptions of Aboriginal Australians: The Realities of a Racially Fragmented Society</b> .....                     | 145 |
| <i>Witnessing Racial Behaviour: Aboriginal Segregation on Public Transport</i> .....                                   | 147 |
| <i>Realistic Perceptions of Aboriginal Australians: Positive Versus Negative Attitudes</i> .....                       | 153 |
| <b>Historical Past: The Stolen Generations</b> .....   | 164 |
| <i>One Family's Experience of the Stolen Generations: Pain Overrides the Ability to Trust</i> .....                    | 165 |
| <i>Justice through Financial Compensation: Can Trust be Bought?</i> .....  | 170 |
| <i>The Impact of History on Present Day Lives: Perspectives of Aboriginal Australians</i> .....                        | 172 |
| <b>The Impact of Distrust on Medical Care and Health Policy</b> .....  | 177 |
| <i>Medical Misdiagnoses of Aboriginal Australians: Fuelling Distrust Further</i> .....                                 | 187 |
| <i>A Case Study in Community Engagement: Moorundi Health</i> .....   | 192 |
| <b>The Implications of Closing a Successful Employment Scheme: CDEP Versus CDP</b> .....                               | 197 |
| <i>CDEP and CDP: Understanding Government Initiatives</i> .....  | 198 |
| <i>The Reception of CDEP: Closing a Trusted Initiative Instils Distrust</i> .....                                      | 200 |
| <b>Concluding Comments</b> .....   | 203 |
| <b>Chapter VI</b> .....  | 206 |
| <b>Aboriginal Culture: The Impact on Everyday Life</b> .....   | 206 |
| <b>Culture as an Identity: Its Importance to Aboriginal Australians</b> .....  | 207 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Knowledge and Understanding: Interactions with Culture</b> .....   | 213 |
| <i>Racism and Acceptance: The Role of Aboriginal Culture in Reconciliation</i> .....                          | 224 |
| <i>A Case Study of Cultural Understanding: The Power of Cultural Recognition in a Health Service</i><br>..... | 228 |
| <b>Preserving Aboriginal Culture: Honouring Differences</b> .....   | 233 |
| <i>Cultural Preservation in Adelaide: The Kurna Perspectives</i> .....  | 246 |
| <b>Concluding Comments</b> .....  | 250 |
| <b>Chapter VII</b> .....  | 253 |
| <b>Conclusions</b> .....  | 253 |
| <i>Silenced: The Unheard Aboriginal Voice</i> .....   | 254 |
| <i>Distrust: The Impact of Fractured Relationships</i> .....  | 256 |
| <i>Culture: The Value of Aboriginal Cultural Traditions</i> .....   | 260 |
| <b>Reflection on the Research</b> .....   | 264 |
| <b>Bibliography</b> .....   | 267 |
| <b>Appendices</b> .....   | 289 |
| <b>Appendix A: Participant Descriptors</b> .....  | 289 |
| <b>Appendix B: Artefacts Log</b> .....  | 295 |
| <b>Appendix C: Analysis Coding Example</b> .....  | 306 |
| <i>Example 1:</i> .....   | 306 |
| <i>Example 2:</i> .....   | 309 |
| <b>Appendix D: Interview Transcript Example</b> .....   | 314 |
| <i>Transcript 1:</i> .....  | 314 |
| <i>Transcript 2:</i> .....  | 320 |

## List of Figures

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Figure IV. 1: The Coorong National Park</i> .....  | 79  |
| <i>Figure IV. 2: Dead Crabs near the Coorong</i> .....  | 83  |
| <i>Figure IV. 3: View across the Ngarrindjeri Land</i> .....  | 85  |
| <i>Figure IV. 4 &amp; 5: The Water Conditions of the Coorong</i> .....                                    | 87  |
| <i>Figure IV. 6, 7 &amp; 8: Ngarrindjeri Weaving</i> .....  | 91  |
| <i>Figure IV. 9: Lake Alexandrina, South Australia</i> .....  | 99  |
| <i>Figure IV. 10: Personal belongings in Whitmore Square in Adelaide</i> .....                            | 124 |
| <i>Figure IV. 11: The community youth centre in Meningie, South Australia</i> .....                       | 134 |
| <i>Figure V.1: Aboriginal bus passenger from the Northern Territory</i> .....                             | 151 |
| <i>Figure V. 2: Homelessness in Adelaide city centre</i> .....  | 156 |
| <i>Figure V. 3: An Aboriginal man and woman in Adelaide</i> .....   | 158 |
| <i>Figure V. 4: An Aboriginal couple near Whitmore Square in Adelaide</i> .....                           | 160 |
| <i>Figure V. 5, 6 &amp; 7: The Moorundi Health Service centre in Raukkan</i> .....                        | 182 |
| <i>Figure VI. 1, 2 &amp; 3: The Yellaka group performing at Adelaide Fringe Festival 2018</i> .....       | 215 |
| <i>Figure VI. 4, 5 &amp; 6: The 2018 Adelaide Fringe Festival light illuminations</i> .....               | 220 |
| <i>Figure VI. 7, 8, 9 &amp; 10: The Ngarrindjeri community museum in the Coorong Region</i> .....         | 238 |
| <i>Figure VI. 11, 12 &amp; 13: The Pelican Path cultural walk in Meningie, South Australia</i> .....      | 241 |
| <i>Figure VI. 14 &amp; 15: Dual language signs in Adelaide using the Kurna and English language</i> ..... | 247 |

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# Chapter I

## Introduction

Aboriginal Studies has been a topical research area, often focusing on the disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal Australians, although rarely is their voice at the heart of it. More often, research has concentrated on analysis of statistics and other sources rather than the people themselves. A key aim of my research is to provide a platform for the Aboriginal voice, and put an emphasis on the unique evidence of Aboriginal Australians' actual experiences, feelings and perceptions. The gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is significant, particularly in the context of social policy around education, health and employment, which is not only acknowledged in non-governmental literature, but has also been recognised by the Australian Government for many years. The level of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal Australians has also been acknowledged at an international level, with former Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan stating, 'In the heart of this first world I found scenes more reminiscent of the third world' when reflecting on her visit to Australia (Amnesty International, 2009). Over the last ten years, the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians has remained a central topic of discussion at national and international levels.

2008 was an important year for Aboriginal Australians, when the Australian Government formally apologised for its assimilation policy, which resulted in the forced removal of Aboriginal children, known as the Stolen Generations. The apology was not only significant because the Australian Government accepted its wrongdoing and the trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal Australians, but also because it recognised the severe gap in equality. To address this, the Australian Government subsequently focused on the annual Closing the Gap Report, which introduced targets relating to education, health and employment in order to build up the living prospects and wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians. Although this initiative aims to improve the lives of Aboriginal Australians, the progress made towards meeting the targets, which is published each year, highlights not only the gravity of the gap in equality but also the lack of progress made. Whilst the education, health and employment of Aboriginal Australians has always been a focus of research, as is indicated in a range of publications (Baxter and

Meyers, 2016, 2019; Biddle et al, 2004; Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Parkes et al, 2014; Jordan and Altman, 2016; Hughes and Hughes, 2010; Fisher et al, 2010; Banham et al, 2017; Gould et al 2015), the Closing the Gap Report has highlighted the necessity for further research into the key problems surrounding the disadvantages faced by many Aboriginal Australians. For example, the extent of disadvantage for Aboriginal children and youths in education falls specifically within areas of educational attainment and attendance. In health, there is a significant discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians regarding life expectancy and infant and child mortality rates. In employment, the rate of unemployment for Aboriginal Australians is significantly higher than for non-Aboriginal Australians.

Literature that focuses on the gap in equality in education, health and employment, tends to consider each area separately which has led to some understanding of the extent of issues faced by Aboriginal Australians, and while emphasising problematic areas reflective of the Closing the Gap Reports, offers some explanations about these problems. Alongside the contribution of knowledge provided by this body of literature, it also highlights the fact that the three social policy areas are deeply interconnected, necessitating research to be conducted into Aboriginal education, health and employment that considers these social policy areas as one. In the light of literature and reports since the release of the first Closing the Gap Report, and the most recent Closing the Gap Report indicating that most targets have seen little progress and disadvantage is still problematic, new research needs to be undertaken that focuses on education, health and employment in an interconnected way. Moreover, while the use of statistics in literature and reports helps to outline the severity of disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal Australians, the statistical evidence has in fact overpowered the Aboriginal voice, with the result that their experiences and perceptions are less visible in publications (Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Biddle et al, 2004; Hunter, 2009; Sanders, 2016; Banham et al, 2016; Sjöholm et al, 2018). Indeed, the Aboriginal voice is an important means to help address the gap in equality, yet it is still rarely listened to in research and included in the literature. More significantly, the Aboriginal voice has not featured in research that analyses the three social policy areas in an interconnected way. Thus, the Aboriginal voice and an understanding of the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians within education, health and employment represents a critical gap in existing literature, which this research seeks to address while identifying factors that contribute to positive experiences,

and subsequently could influence the effectiveness of social policies and address the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

### **Research Design and Findings**

Through an ethnographic approach, two Aboriginal communities in South Australia are at the forefront of this research: the Kurna People and Ngarrindjeri People. An important aspect of the research was to place the Aboriginal voice at its centre, in order to collect unique evidence which enables greater depth and detail in the findings. This ethnographic approach aligns with the turn in post-colonial anthropology through empowering Aboriginal Australians and their voice. This is particularly significant as historical research relating to them has taken more of an armchair approach, that being arm's length academic theorising, (Van Maanen, 1988: 15), which arguably contributes to the silencing of Aboriginal Australians as their voices have rarely been included in previous research. Anonymity has been applied throughout my thesis which is reflective of the requests from many participants who did not wish to be identifiable; many participants, especially those who identify as Aboriginal, stated that they felt reassured to have conversations and share personal experiences with me, knowing that they would be kept anonymous (see Appendix A for participant descriptors). Listening to Aboriginal Australians helped me to identify influential factors impacting on their experiences of education, health and employment, and to understand how and why some experiences are more positive than others. The ethnographic approach helped to build rapport with members of both communities. During the early stages of fieldwork, it was important to gain the trust of the Aboriginal Australians through participating in cultural practices and having informal conversations about Aboriginal culture and their traditional ancestral land. This stage was crucial, as the mutual sense of trust formed the basis for successful fieldwork and the quality of data collected, including personal testimonies and experiences portraying the realities of Aboriginal everyday lives. The emotions, facial expressions and body language of Aboriginal Australians were hugely beneficial and added to the depth of the findings and my understandings. While the Aboriginal voice is at the centre of the research findings, the application of grounded theory helped to analyse the experiences of Aboriginal Australians and identify factors that influence how feeling silenced, the issue of distrust and the

importance of Aboriginal culture influence their education, health and employment experiences and prospects.

Distrust, feeling silenced and culture are not being considered as major anthropological or sociological concepts in this thesis, but instead are significant issues raised by the Aboriginal Australians themselves when discussing their experiences regarding health, education and employment in South Australia. If similar research was undertaken in other sociocultural contexts, the findings may resonate with those of this research, but would still be subject to the particular historical experiences of each different cultural group. Due to the historical context of colonialism in Australia, a hierarchy has developed within Australian society in which Aboriginal Australians are perceived to be the bottom tier and it could be argued that the continued subjugation of Aboriginal Australians since the white settlers first arrived, has also provided the legacy of institutionalised racism against them. This has influenced Aboriginal Australians' perceptions, with them feeling distrust towards authorities, silenced and concerned that their culture is undervalued, due to their subjugation. These perceptions have been passed down through generations of Aboriginal Australians and have been perpetuated by more recent events, such as the assimilation policy resulting in the Stolen Generations; these continue to shape their views.

The Aboriginal voice, mutual trust and traditional culture are all key factors that influence Aboriginal Australians' experiences of education, health and employment. The Aboriginal voice is a form of empowerment that influences knowledge on matters concerning Aboriginal health, employment and education, specific to the needs of Aboriginal communities. The inclusion of the Aboriginal voice in the provision of Aboriginal services and initiatives instils confidence in Aboriginal Australians to access them, which in turn can positively influence their education, employment and health prospects. Community engagement provides a platform for Aboriginal Australians to be involved in matters directly impacting them and allows their voices to be heard. Moreover, the role played by mutual trust is significant, highlighting the importance of positive rapport built on trust between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians. Although distrust exists beyond the Australian Government's institutional boundaries, the research found that distrust felt by Aboriginal Australians towards the Australian Government was paramount in how they accessed and

received education, employment and health services and initiatives. For real progress to occur, trust needs to be based on more visible and evidence-based change, and not just verbal promises, given the lasting impact and disappointment of past government initiatives and events involving Aboriginal Australians. A third factor highlighted by the research relates to culture and the important role it plays in shaping people's perceptions, which in turn influence Aboriginal Australians' decisions, and thus, their experiences of education, health and employment policies and services.

The value of the Aboriginal voice is self-evident in ethnographic research and is at the forefront of the findings, presented via numerous personal accounts about the factors that influence education, health and employment prospects of Aboriginal Australians. Through the ethnographic approach, I was able to gain more in-depth knowledge about their experiences, and to identify and understand, often on a more personal level, factors that influence how different education, health and employment services and initiatives are viewed by Aboriginal Australians, which in turn impact their overall effectiveness. The descriptive and analytical nature of this thesis, with contextualisation of the findings through referencing selected literature, ensures the prominence of the Aboriginal voice. The originality of this research thereby lies within the emphasis on the unique evidence provided by the combined analysis of lived experiences of education, health and employment, and the centrality of Aboriginal voices in the research and written thesis. The key questions asked in this research are:

1. What are the reasons behind statistical evidence about continuing social inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, despite the launch of the Closing the Gap Report initiative ten years ago?
2. Is the relationship and trust, or lack thereof, between Government and Aboriginal Australians significant for the success of education, employment and health initiatives and services, and how can this be improved?
3. What are the key factors that support positive experiences which could improve the success of initiatives targeted to close the gap in education, employment and health equality for Aboriginal Australians?

The central aim of this research is to analyse the factors that impact on the overall effectiveness of education, employment and health initiatives and services in Aboriginal

communities in South Australia, through the study of their lived experiences and told by the actual voices of Aboriginal Australians, which are often absent in literature and reports.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

The structure of this thesis is influenced by the ethnographic approach to research, which also determined the writing style and use of phrases and terminology. The focus is on understanding the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians and, as Van Maanen (1988) suggests, the focus on participants and their experiences allows the events of their everyday life and personal viewpoints to be presented, alongside the analysis of the researcher (1988: 52). As a non-Aboriginal Australian conducting research into the experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal Australians, and wishing to highlight the importance and value of Aboriginal voices, it did not seem appropriate to omit words from direct quotes. Unedited quoting throughout the thesis thus enables Aboriginal voices to be truly heard and understood. I also discussed their representation with my Aboriginal Australian participants in the two communities I visited, who preferred the use of 'Aboriginal Australian' as the term when referring to them.

In terms of thesis structure, Chapter II entitled 'Contextualisation: Setting the Scene' begins by explaining the importance of the Closing the Gap Reports, published annually by the Australian Government and highlighting the extent of the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The chapter reviews existing literature about the disadvantages endured by Aboriginal Australians in regards to education, employment and health before indicating the interconnectedness between the three social policy areas. Cross-referencing literature with a focus on either education, health or employment, and highlighting the references to the influence of the other two areas, emphasises the gap in existing literature and the resultant research questions and aims. The chapter is then followed by Chapter III, 'Methodology', which introduces the two Aboriginal communities I visited during the fieldwork, the Kurna People and the Ngarrindjeri People, and offers an insight into their community life and structures, and their rich traditional culture. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology for the research. As mentioned previously, the research on which this thesis is based is ethnographically-informed, and this section provides a solid

justification and the key characteristics of ethnographic research to justify the chosen methodological approach, including the data collection methods and how these were advantageous during my fieldwork. This chapter also explains the application of grounded theory, including its characteristics and the analytical stages taken to derive the explanations. The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the subsequent findings chapters IV (The Unheard Voice), V (Absence of Trust), and VI (Aboriginal Culture).

Chapter IV entitled 'The Unheard Voice: Silencing Aboriginal Australians' focuses on the unheard voices of Aboriginal Australians. It begins with a comprehensive case study about the drought in South Australia and its impact, then and now, on the Ngarrindjeri community. The purpose of the case study is to illustrate the significance of not listening to Aboriginal Australians, and the implications this has had on the community, in particular cultural impacts, daily impacts, and the responses by the Australian Government and authorities. The chapter then explains the verdict on the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report, which was a significant opportunity for Aboriginal Australians' voices to be included via constitutional recognition, and its impact on Aboriginal Australians' emotions and sentiments, which is depicted here in quotations by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Aboriginal Australians are often not only ignored, but others also speak on behalf of them, which is the focus of the following section. Detailed accounts from my fieldwork present the perceptions and concerns of Aboriginal Australians, which highlight their negative emotions about not being heard and how these can have an impact on the effectiveness of education, health and employment initiatives and services. Finally, in the chapter an incident is discussed that came to light following a television appearance by an Aboriginal Australian actress. Being spoken on behalf of and feeling silenced, a sad reality for Aboriginal Australians, was further evident during my fieldwork when the actress appeared on a current affairs panel show, the significance of which resulted in this incident being raised in personal conversations and interviews with my participants.

The issue of distrust is the central focus of Chapter V, 'Absence of Trust: The Impact of Distrust on Aboriginal Australians', which opens by addressing the current experiences and perceptions regarding distrust felt by Aboriginal Australians in contemporary South Australia. The section specifically focuses on the attitudes displayed towards Aboriginal Australians and

the impact this has on them. An example of discriminatory behaviour which I observed during fieldwork is presented here to illustrate the magnitude of the situation in Australia, and how it reinforces the distrust that Aboriginal Australians experience towards non-Aboriginal Australians, and vice versa. The chapter moves on to outline the impact of historical events on Aboriginal Australians, and how these influence their perceptions about education, health and employment services and professionals. The events of the Stolen Generations are explained, with its lasting trauma and emotions that are still felt amongst Aboriginal communities, which participants described in personal conversations and testimonies. The chapter specifically highlights the link between such historical events and the resulting lack of trust that Aboriginal Australians feel towards the Australian Government, and explains its influence on those Aboriginal Australians who access education, health and employment services. A case study gives further insight into issues relating to medical care for Aboriginal Australians, who often conveyed their bad experiences and negative attitudes towards medical services due to their distrust of governmental services and initiatives. A contrasting example then illustrates a successful medical service, the Aboriginal community-controlled Moorundi Health service, where trust and community engagement are key factors of its effectiveness. This chapter finishes by explaining issues of distrust in relation to employment. The Community Development and Employment Programme was a successful government initiative, yet was closed, the implications of which are revealed in the emotions expressed by Aboriginal Australians, such as disappointment and frustration that strengthened their feelings of distrust towards the Australian Government. The chapter then describes a newly implemented government programme and its reception in the Aboriginal Australian communities I studied.

Chapter VI, 'Aboriginal Culture: The Impact on Everyday Life', begins by outlining the strong link between Aboriginal culture and the identity of Aboriginal Australians. The chapter revisits the Stolen Generations event through personal experiences to demonstrate the significance of culture and the huge impact that being denied their own culture has had on the Stolen Generations. The chapter then discusses the significance of cultural recognition, notably the importance of cultural knowledge and understanding, which is connected to Aboriginal Australians' perceptions of trustworthiness of services and initiatives which demonstrate cultural recognition and knowledge. The last section of the chapter addresses the importance

of cultural preservation for Aboriginal communities in forming trust in and rapport with the Australian Government and its authorities. An example of the barriers to cultural preservation is illustrated through the method of teaching the Ngarrindjeri language in a local primary school. The discussions then move to Adelaide to explain how people in the capital city work with the Kurna community to support cultural preservation of Aboriginal arts, demonstrating the different approaches in the preservation of Ngarrindjeri and Kurna culture through the voices of Aboriginal Australians. The chapter shows the way that cultural preservation and support for it directly impacts on the trust, understanding and perceptions of Aboriginal Australians whom I studied during this research.

The Conclusions Chapter VII is the final chapter of the thesis, which opens with the three factors which impact education, health and employment experiences of many Aboriginal Australians that were derived from the raw data via the application of grounded theory. The chapter re-emphasises the significance of the Aboriginal voice in this research, and its impact on education, health and employment services and initiatives in South Australia. This is followed with discussions that highlight the critical issue of trust and the importance of trustworthy relationships between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians, and the necessity for trust to enable positive experiences within education, health and employment. Culture is the final theme emerging from this research's analysis, and its influence on the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians regarding education, health and employment by boosting confidence, changing perceptions and assisting in the establishment of trust. These key findings will be summed up in the light of the initial research questions and aims of this research.

## Chapter II

### Contextualisation: Setting the Scene

Aboriginal Studies is a broad subject of academic and other interest, with an array of research conducted by both the Australian Government and academic researchers (Baxter and Meyers, 2016, 2019; Fogarty et al, 2017; Gould et al, 2013; Jordan and Altman, 2016; Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Sanders, 2016). The topics of research span from niche areas related to health and wellbeing, through to colonialism and historical events. Adopting different methodological approaches, academic Aboriginal Studies research often aims to highlight the different aspects of Aboriginal Australians' lives in addition to the gap in equality. The contribution of this literature is valuable in understanding the significance of inequality in education, health and employment. Given the severity of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal Australians, the Australian Government made its commitment in 2008 to publish annual reports focused on closing the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Clearly, both governmental and academic research highlights the severity of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal Australians, in addition to how policy agendas have evolved, and this will be the focus of this chapter to examine the extent of disadvantage and the lack of achievement in closing the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians since the Australian Government introduced the Closing the Gap Reports.

#### **Historical Context: Australia's Past**

This thesis is focused on the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians in contemporary society, however due to the significance of the colonisation of Australia, and the lasting impact it has had on society, it is paramount that historical context be provided.

Captain Cook's arrival during his first voyage in 1770 marked the beginning of the forced changes to the lives of the First People of Australia, and following subsequent voyages,

colonisation of Australia began in early 1788. South-eastern Australia was the focus of the initial settlement, so it was not until 1836 when South Australia was impacted by British settlers' subjugation of the Aboriginal Australians and their declaration of power and control over the Aboriginal Australians' land (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988). There was no communication with Aboriginal Australians because the settlers could not understand or speak the local language, and they had no intention of doing so, as they considered themselves the superior race. Nevertheless, the lack of communication did not hinder the British settlers selling Aboriginal land for their own benefit, nor did it prevent the British Parliament passing an Act to adopt South Australia as a colony in 1834, describing the area as 'waste and unoccupied' and most significantly, insisting that Aboriginal Australians became British subjects (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988: 3). There was a total lack of regard towards the Aboriginal Australians who inhabited South Australia, including their culture and way of life which were ignored and disrespected, and the settlers' presumed superiority prevailing. From the moment South Australia became a British colony and Aboriginal Australians became British subjects, the brutality of the British settlers' assumed superiority increased. The way of life that the Aboriginal Australians had known, their languages, religion, spirituality and laws were all gone, and instead, those of the settlers were imposed; all aspects of their life were changed because of colonisation, from food to clothing to health and wellbeing.

It was inevitable that culture clashes would occur when the settlers arrived, mainly over clothing, food and land. Where clashes occurred, these were resolved by Aboriginal Australians being forced to conform to the settlers' ways of living; for example, following complaints from settlers of 'indecent exposure', Aboriginal Australians were told to dress in western attire (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988). Food was another area of conflict; prior to the colonisation, Aboriginal Australians lived by hunting and gathering off their land which provided all the resources they needed. However, the settlers used the land for agricultural purposes, thus preventing Aboriginal Australians from hunting and gathering for food, and instead, the settlers provided a solution to this through the introduction of food rationing for Aboriginal Australians (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988). The rationing itself was another form of oppression that the settlers enforced on Aboriginal Australians, with it also being used to reward Aboriginal Australians who conformed to British culture. However, the settlers not only determined quantities of food but also what food could be consumed which

consequently led to the diet of Aboriginal Australians changing drastically, from a traditional diet of game, fish and plants to flour, sugar and tea, as well as alcohol and tobacco being introduced, all of which subsequently led to poor health (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988). The health of Aboriginal Australians was impacted not only because of the change in diet through the introduction of rationing and new items, but also as they became exposed to the diseases that the British settlers brought with them, which were new to Aboriginal Australians who did not understand how to treat them (Sutton, 2011). Before colonisation, Aboriginal Australians understood welfare and healthcare through knowledge which was passed down through generations; as it was the knowledge of ancestors, the methods and medicines taught were proven to work and therefore the understanding, alongside their traditional diet, enabled Aboriginal Australians to live healthy lives. Land was another aspect of life where there were clashes between Aboriginal Australians and British settlers. Aboriginal Australians lost all their rights to land during the colonisation, and the settlers focused their use of the land on agricultural farming (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988). What Aboriginal Australians once knew as a sparse area of open land, was turned into fenced fields with cattle and sheep and the native wildlife and plants which they lived off gradually declined as the settlers' agricultural farming evolved.

It was not only the Aboriginal Australians' health that was impacted by the colonisation of their country but also their education and employment. Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal children were educated but very differently compared to postcolonial times; for example, children would be with the adults all the time and therefore, education was a continuous process, with children being taught how to talk, walk, how to care for and live off the land and how to behave. However, education was a means for the settlers to instil British values and customs in Aboriginal children, and therefore, they imposed rules for children to attend schools and used bribes, including food rations and blankets to encourage unwilling parents to conform (Mattingley & Hampton, 1988). Similarly to education, employment of Aboriginal Australians benefitted the settlers; for example, Aboriginal Australians were employed in undesirable occupations, such as working in the fields, being housemaids, making fences and breaking stones for roads. Employment was a further means of oppression and exploitation of Aboriginal Australians; although their work was benefitting the settlers, their wages in

return were rarely monetary and instead were rationed items, for example flour and tea (Neill, 2002).

The colonisation of Australia is without question a clear form of racism and oppression, with the British settlers' attitudes and language used towards Aboriginal Australians driving racism into Australian society, which arguably is the root of contemporary racism in Australian society today. The development and understanding of the hierarchy within society, whereby Europeans were considered superior to Aboriginal Australians, evolved because of colonisation; evidence of how people lived was used to divide people into races, with notions of 'civilised' and 'barbaric' influencing the categorisations (Behrendt et al, 2009; Carlson, 2016). Based on evidence of how Aboriginal Australians were treated by the British settlers, it is unsurprising that they were frequently referred to as being uncivilised and barbaric, and thus placed at the bottom of the hierarchy with Europeans, including the British settlers, being superior to them (Behrendt et al, 2009; Carlson, 2016). Through the settlers assuming the upmost superiority over Aboriginal Australians, it enabled all aspects of Aboriginal culture and ways of life to be easily discarded by the settlers and replaced by British values and customs. The mistreatment and lasting impact of colonisation has been provided as an explanation for the causes of disadvantages and discrimination which Aboriginal Australians experience in contemporary society, both through direct and indirect racism (Sutton, 2011). An example of this is the use of the term 'Aborigines', which is still widely used in contemporary society when referring to Aboriginal Australians. The word was originally decided by Europeans and not Aboriginal Australians themselves; historically, the term was associated with Aboriginal Australians being inferior to Europeans (Carlson, 2016). Non-Aboriginal Australians are not necessarily aware that they are being racist, but using terminology and behaviours which exist because of colonisation is still a form of racism due to the mistreatment of Aboriginal Australians and the original meanings associated with terminology.

The lasting impact of colonialism has resulted in a number of significant moments in history which have directly impacted Aboriginal Australians. Land Rights has been an ongoing issue within Australia since colonisation when Aboriginal Australians were dispossessed of their land, and it has been important to them to reclaim their lands, not for economic reasons but instead for cultural ones. A historical event which invoked hope in many Aboriginal Australians

was the *Mabo* legal case in 1992 in Queensland. The outcome overturned the assumption made during colonisation that land belonged to no one and gave recognition to Aboriginal Land Rights through native title, defined by Aboriginal customs and laws, and essentially was a token of redress for the injustices (Behrendt et al, 2009; Carlson, 2016; Povinelli, 2002). Following this case, the *Native Title Act 1993* was passed to support recognition of native title in Australia through legislation. However, this legislation has been criticised as the power that Aboriginal Australians had in the *Mabo* case to define native title was changed, and under the new legislation the definition has been restricted and gives judges the greatest power in making decisions regarding native title, including recognising the existence of it (Behrendt et al, 2009). Criticism has also referred to the legislation being put in place due to an expectation of increased numbers of native title claims being raised in light of the *Mabo* case, and therefore is arguably not a political recognition of Aboriginal land rights but instead, is a form of 'administrative structure' to cope with an increased number of native title claims (Behrendt et al, 2009: 186). Further criticism has also argued that the Western legal definition of authenticity needed for native title has 'trapped' Aboriginal Australians, as they are required to demonstrate their continuity of rights and interests to traditional lands through their connection with lands and waters since colonisation (Altman, 2010: 265). Since the 1993 legislation, further legislative amendments have been made under different governments, the first of which was made in 1998 and the most recent in 2015, with a total of six legislative amendments being passed. However, despite the amendments being made, there is yet to be significant positive acknowledgement of them. Nevertheless, an important moment in history for Aboriginal Australians and prominent among land rights debates, is the return of Uluru to its original owners in the Northern Territory, the Anangu community, in 1985. The transfer, which is known as 'handback', was a particularly symbolic highpoint in the land rights debates, as it recognised the Anangu community as the customary owners of the land, something which the community had been campaigning for since the late 1970s (Hueneke and Baker, 2009). With Uluru being such an iconic landmark in Australia, the campaign attracted unprecedented attention in national debates on Aboriginal land rights, with the Anangu community's claims being widely contested and opposed, including by the Northern Territory government (Hueneke and Baker, 2009). Although a positive outcome for Aboriginal Australians, the return of Uluru caused a backlash, with concerns raised over access for tourists, and the economic implications of this, in addition to comments about the return of Uluru symbolising a loss for

the settler nation (James, 2007). For the Anangu community, Uluru and its surrounding land holds great cultural significance to them and that was why it was paramount for them to be recognised as the traditional owners of it. Although there was a significant amount of negativity surrounding the campaign and outcome, there has also been support for the return of Uluru to Aboriginal Australians and it has been recognised as being symbolic in the reconciliation process in Australia (Hueneke and Baker, 2009).

Another historical event, and arguably the most significant event in Australia, is the 1967 Constitutional Referendum which saw more than 90 per cent of Australians vote 'yes' to the reforms; it was a momentous occasion for Aboriginal Australians as it was the first time in 200 years of white settlement that they were recognised as full citizens of Australia (Neill, 2002). The referendum consisted of two constitutional reforms; one reform saw Aboriginal Australians counted in the Australian census and recognised them as Australian citizens, which in turn gave them the right to vote, and the second reform gave the Commonwealth legislative powers to make laws that were 'in the best interest' of Aboriginal Australians (Beckett, 2010; Neill, 2002). In response to this reform, an advisory body, the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs were created to implement policy and legislation concerning Aboriginal Australians, which enabled the government to have a greater involvement in Aboriginal matters. Furthermore, this reform was also important as it removed discriminatory references to Aboriginal Australians within the Australian Constitution and was the catalyst for a formal policy transition for Aboriginal affairs, which included a transition of policies of assimilation to those of self-determination (Carlson, 2016).

### **Social Policy Reform: The Shift in Focus**

Prior to the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal Australians were denied any welfare support, so it is significant that due to policy reforms and shifts in agendas since then, Aboriginal Australians now have full access to such support. Rather than Aboriginal Australians being forcibly excluded from social welfare, since the referendum their inclusion in such support has progressively improved, the present welfare support consisting of monetary allowances, including unemployment welfare entitlements and pensions (Altman and Sanders, 1995; Smith, 2004). This shift in policy meant that the welfare payments enabled members of

Aboriginal communities to purchase items from shops to augment their lifestyles of living off the land, thus facilitating the communities' connectedness to their land (Altman, 2019).

In the early 1970s a policy shift occurred, with policy focus changing from imposed assimilation to self-determination (Altman, 2019; Carlson, 2016; Sanders, 2018). This change was viewed as a form of empowerment for Aboriginal Australians, and further optimism was fuelled with the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), which was considered a significant representative body for Aboriginal Australians (Altman, 2019). Essentially, ATSIC's structure, spanning from permanent public servants through to elected national commissioners, facilitated its aim of giving Aboriginal Australians a form of representation within political institutions, whilst also trying to engage with Aboriginal Australians at a local level (Sanders, 2018). A significant aspect of ATSIC that has been argued as being an important attribute of the policy shift, was the support and encouragement that Aboriginal community-based organisations received, both through programmes and financial support (Sanders, 2018; Rowse, 2004). As Aboriginal Australians gained access to welfare support, ATSIC became aware of the need to assist the development of self-management and self-sufficiency among Aboriginal Australians. However, in 2004, when ATSIC was abolished, the approach to Aboriginal policies changed again, with a 'mainstreaming' approach being adopted. This mainstreaming approach to Aboriginal policy has been criticised: Sanders (2018) explains how Aboriginal-specific programmes, that had been introduced by ATSIC, became broader and more generic. Sanders (2018) also points out that the overall interests of Aboriginal Australians, including funding for Aboriginal services, were adversely affected when the majority of Aboriginal-specific programmes were centralised into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. As a result of this reform, Aboriginal services now face greater competition when trying to access government funding to support disadvantaged Aboriginal Australians; due to the mainstreaming approach, Aboriginal organisations have to compete in the mainstream social service market. The shift in approach has been described as going from a 'peoples approach' to a 'populations approach' (Sanders, 2018; Rowse, 2012). This has led to more generic welfare support, rather than focusing on the specific needs of Aboriginal Australians and other general Aboriginal matters (Howard-Wagner et al, 2018). Although the mainstreaming agenda may have helped to minimise segregation through standardising social policy, rather than Aboriginal Australian policy being considered separately in its own

designated department, it is evident from literature that the impact of the mainstreaming approach on social welfare has left Aboriginal Australians more isolated.

The introduction of the principle of mutual obligation in reference to social welfare support was another shift in social policy focus. The policy ensured that those who receive welfare support should be required to 'give something back', and it has since been endorsed by major political parties (Saunders, 2004; Rowse, 2004). However, it has also been met with criticism because of its consequences on the rights of citizens to receive welfare support. Saunders (2004) explains that the policy shift causes conflict between what is expected through the mutual obligation principal and how the rights of citizens are articulated in social security legislation. It has further been considered as problematic because mutual obligation would require individuals to change their approach to social welfare support, from being 'passive' welfare dependents to 'active', whereby they would be expected to engage in the economy through employment (Altman, 2018). Referring back to the shift in policy to focus on assisting Aboriginal Australians to be self-sufficient, it has been suggested that the introduction of mutual obligation can encourage greater participation in government programmes as well as supporting the transition of individuals from being reliant on income support to becoming more self-sufficient (Smith, 2004). It is likely that this reform stems from the understanding that recipients of welfare support become increasingly dependent on the payments and therefore it is seen as a method of transition towards self-sufficiency (Smith, 2004). Smith (2004) also suggests that a policy framework which supports personal and cultural autonomy for Aboriginal Australians, including social and cultural responsibilities, is critical in helping the social security system address welfare dependency, as a mainstream policy will fail to recognise diversity amongst Aboriginal communities.

Looking at the policy reforms and shifts more broadly, it is evident that there is an influence of neoliberal ideologies, specifically the link between social policy and the economy with the social welfare reform now focused on the free market opportunity. Sanders (2018) explains that where self-determination was once an agenda focus for social policies, it has since been overrun with market liberalism, which is a characteristic of neoliberalism. A clear indication of this is the policy shift within social welfare where there is now a focus on developing policies that emphasise economic independence, rather than just supporting individuals (Howard-

Wagner et al, 2018). The shift to neoliberal thinking within policy-reform processes has been criticised as a 'second wave of colonisation' because policy shifts and reforms are focused on westernised forms of education and employment, and therefore it has been recognised as a product of neoliberal assimilation through the enforcement of these reformed policies onto Aboriginal Australians (Altman, 2019). The neoliberal shift became evident through the mainstreaming policy-reform in 2004, when ATSIC was abolished, and has been criticised for eliminating the right for people to be different, and instead trying to get everyone to conform to the neoliberal ideologies, including the economic focus (Altman, 2019). Altman's work discusses how the neoliberal policy shift has impacted welfare reform through redefining citizenship; it defines citizenship through the understanding that individuals have the responsibility to use welfare to enhance their engagement with mainstream education and the labour market (Altman, 2019). However, the idea that individuals must engage in mainstream education and employment relies on Aboriginal Australians having the opportunities to do so. Arguably, the policy reform may be more suited to non-Aboriginal Australians who have greater opportunities for the engagement, as Altman explains that one standardised format does not fit all, particularly the more remote Aboriginal communities (Altman, 2019). For example, Altman (2019) explains how it is unjust to expose the Kununjkun people to welfare reform that is focused on the free market opportunity, as those opportunities do not exist in remote Arnhem Land. Moreover, it is suggested that the marginalisation that many Aboriginal Australians experience is no longer understood through factors such as discrimination and racism, and instead neoliberal ideology has influenced a shift in welfare policy to understand marginalisation as a result of individual failing (Altman, 2019). The impact of the neoliberalism influence on the policy shift, and the effect this has on Aboriginal Australians, is that conflicting ideologies and state intervention are 'morally restructuring' Aboriginal Australians (Altman, 2019: 181). The neoliberal influence on policy shifts and reforms, and the mainstreaming of Aboriginal specific social policies, has been criticised as the 'one size fits all' approach is not suitable, or realistic, for Aboriginal Australians, especially those who are more remote.

It is evident that social policy concerning Aboriginal Australians has gone through various reforms and shifts, with the approaches of the Australian Government displaying changing characteristics in the reforms. However, the neoliberal ideologies that are present in the most

recent reforms are identifying social justice issues for Aboriginal Australians, because the economic and the free labour market focus in policy agendas are not taking into account the unequal opportunities experienced by Aboriginal Australians and the conflicts the neoliberal ideologies have with their own principles.

### **Understanding Concepts: The Impact of Value Differences**

The differences in meanings of concepts to some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have been discussed in literature as 'value differences', as well as their impact when considering the conceptual gap between policies and practice. To illustrate this, the question of what constitutes the 'good life' for Aboriginal Australians has been asked, with the responses demonstrating the complexities of value differences, in particular making reference to socioeconomic struggles that Aboriginal communities face. The link to traditional country and the presence of culture are two key areas that influence how Aboriginal Australians interpret what constitutes a 'good life' and how economic value, and the overall economy, within Aboriginal communities is understood. Many Aboriginal Australians want to be on country and maintain connection to their land, including being able to hunt, fish and gather food on it, participate in rituals and engage in activities which provide a sense of connectedness with land and family (Altman, 2019; Magowan, 2019). This understanding of what constitutes a good life focuses on moral commitments which are meaningful tasks that support family and the wider community, such as gathering food, whilst also addressing emotional, practical and cultural dimensions of life which are fulfilled through living off the land and having a strong sense of interconnectedness within the community (Magowan, 2019). Altman describes the good life as a form of domestic moral economy, which is self-sufficient, sustainable and driven by moral imperative (Altman, 2019). However, this interpretation differs from that of wider Australian society, which arguably aligns more closely to the more economically driven neoliberal understandings (Altman, 2019; Magowan, 2019). The economically focused interpretation of the 'good life' presents challenges because there are different economic frameworks; for example, there is a clash between the neoliberal framework which focuses more on commodities and materialistic value, compared to that of Aboriginal Australians where a relational focus on family and kinship are considered most valuable (Austin-Broos, 2003; Peterson, 2005). However, to add to the competing ideologies

of economic value, it has been recognised by Austin-Broom that contemporary conflicts occur within Aboriginal communities, with the value of commodities and cash becoming more present within kinship relations, overpowering some, but by no means all, of the knowledge of kin relations being established through connections to place (Austin-Broos, 2003). This is further explained through the acknowledgement that 'Things make places interesting, and therefore an interest in place, or country, is mediated by the things that bosses can bring to that place.' (Austin-Broos, 2003: 119); in other words, objectification is becoming more prominent within kin relations and Aboriginal life, demonstrating how some aspects of the neoliberal understanding of economic value has merged with the values of traditional country, kinship and culture which are important for Aboriginal Australians.

Discussing poverty in relation to Aboriginal Australians can also be challenging as land ownership is often viewed as a form of wealth, and as a result Aboriginal Australians can be understood to be 'land rich but cash poor' (Altman, 2007: 2). In addition to this, cultural practices, such as a hunting and gathering lifestyle, and the importance of being on country are dominant aspects of Aboriginal life, and these can greatly impact the levels of poverty through the different interpretations of economic value. Altman highlights this in his reference to a 'hybrid economy', which focuses on the understanding that Aboriginal Australians are not reliant on just one sector of the economy (Altman, 2007, 2009). His coined term is significant in the discussion on economic value and poverty as it places an emphasis on the priorities of Aboriginal Australians to stay connected with their land, their involvement in social and ceremonial activities and their interconnectedness as a community, which all influence their way of life, in addition to how they make a living, and subsequently the levels of poverty they experience (Altman, 2009). It is referred to as 'hybrid' because it is an economy that consists of three sectors: public, which is support from the state, the non-market, which refers to the customary sector, and private (Altman, 2005, 2009). This model is further explained through specific examples: the customary sector is the most dominant of the three and refers to the hunting, fishing and gathering lifestyle, welfare support is the role of the state and art sales is considered as the private sector (Altman, 2005). The importance of Altman's model is his emphasis on how economic value differentiates for Aboriginal Australians, and this therefore impacts the level of poverty Aboriginal Australians experience, particularly because of the reliance on and importance of the customary sector. Aboriginal Australians who are more

remote find it harder to live off the land, as access to necessary vehicles and equipment, and services which support the hunting and gathering lifestyle, are essential in supporting this way of life and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, location can have an impact on limiting opportunities for those who are living in more remote locations, including those for selling art which provides income to help subsidise the hunting and gathering diet of Aboriginal communities with store-bought food. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to resolve location issues to improve levels of poverty, as connection to land can mean that Aboriginal Australians do not want to leave their traditional country, even if doing so would increase opportunities and improve living conditions. For many Aboriginal Australians, the value of caring for country and extended kin is significantly higher than the value of financial and materialistic gain. This is illustrated through Magowan's work when she had a conversation with a widow about the option of moving from her old house, which had poor soil, sloped grounds and little privacy, to a new house in a different area (Magowan 2019: 159). Relational issues and obligations of caring for family, specifically the grave of the widow's husband, alongside spiritual, emotional and practical challenges in the new area, resulted in the woman feeling obliged to stay in her home (Magowan, 2019: 156). This example shows how dominating interconnectedness is for Aboriginal Australians, how necessary it is to maintain it through being on country as well as the complexity of understanding poverty and the means to improve it.

Moreover, the differing interpretations of what constitutes a good life and the alternative understanding of economic value and economy within Aboriginal communities further highlights the complexities of different interpretations of what is economically valuable within everyday life, compared to that of neoliberal ideology, which explains why the concept of 'poverty' is not viewed in the same way within Australian society. For Aboriginal Australians, poverty extends further than not being able to afford store-bought food; it has broader implications concerning cultural ties, with some causing financial burdens, including the interconnectedness of place and cultural customs. An example of this is 'demand sharing', which can be understood as gift exchanges between extended kinship; forms of exchange are significant for Aboriginal Australians within their kinship system because they originate from the social obligation of reciprocity (Austin-Broos, 2003; Peterson, 1993). Demand sharing is relatively complex, as it is not solely based on one's needs; different social contexts can produce alternative reasons for demand sharing, such as testing behaviour where social

actions are a key aspect of maintaining and establishing relationships (Peterson, 1993). As mentioned, reciprocity is a key ethos for Aboriginal Australians and, therefore, families give to kin in response to their demands, but if however, the demands are refused then individuals can be perceived as being 'a bad relative' (Austin-Broos, 2003: 121). Whilst non-Aboriginal Australians sometimes find it challenging to understand demand sharing positively, because of differing interpretations of what generosity means, for Aboriginal Australians the moral obligation and commitment that they must meet the demands of family has resulted in demand sharing being understood as a positive form of generosity within extended kinship (Peterson, 1993). Demand sharing relates to poverty in two ways, firstly in terms of what people are able to share through gifting, but also by sharing being a mechanism that supports individuals through impoverished times, with their demands reflecting their needs. Peterson argues that poverty directly impacts the pattern of demand sharing, with it causing an increased intensity of sharing amongst kin, whereas affluence can reduce the frequency of it as the need for demands is less (Peterson, 1993; 2005). Furthermore, with the recognition of the link between demands and relatedness, demand sharing has been associated with social struggles, notions of shame and identity as it is embedded within the ideologies of what it means to be Aboriginal, and therefore, there is pressure within the extended kinship as a whole to maintain a level of sharing which in turn demonstrates the kinship's ethos of egalitarianism (Peterson, 2005). Poverty has implications because it increases pressure on families to maintain and fulfil demand sharing within their kinship, with those who are more affluent needing to compensate for other members of their kinship who are unable to meet the demands, in addition to demand sharing being a mechanism to support family members who are experiencing more impoverished lifestyles. Overall, the reference to discussions on the good life, the hybrid economy model and the example of demand sharing, not only demonstrates how concepts are interpreted differently, but also illustrates how the conversation of poverty in relation to Aboriginal Australians is complex because there are wider implications for Aboriginal Australians than may be initially understood. Poverty does not simply mean a lack of money or food for Aboriginal Australians, it spans more widely and has implications for extended kinship and cultural customs, which for non-Aboriginal Australians do not exist.

Similarly to the concept of poverty, the term 'culture' can be used differently when being discussed in relation to Aboriginal culture; specifically, the different uses illustrate the different interpretations people have of Aboriginal culture. When discussed, the term is not only used differently but also positioned differently, and literature has illustrated that this not only differentiates between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians, but also between Aboriginal communities. For many non-Aboriginal people, they use the term 'culture' in the form of a noun, whereby it is applied more as a categorisation of the acts which take place as part of Aboriginal life, for example song, dance and language, and is also often referred to during policy discussions. For example, when a policy discussion about language in schools takes place, the term may be used as a noun when referring to language being a part of Aboriginal culture because it is understood as something which Aboriginal Australians partake in, rather than the deeper meaning of the Aboriginal languages which are spoken. Contrastingly, Aboriginal Australians use the term 'culture' in the form of an adjective because they have a broader outlook of what their culture entails, including the cultural processes and discourses which are present in everyday life. They interpret culture as being part of them and their identity, and therefore their interpretation of the term focuses on the connotations of their cultural practices and beliefs, rather than just seeing it as something that they participate in. The work of anthropologists has enabled a greater understanding of the different uses of the term, in addition to highlighting the complexities and conflicts which stem from the different interpretations. The works of Magowan (2000) and Povinelli (1993) provide clear examples of how these different interpretations of 'culture' play out in society, specifically highlighting how the westernised interpretation of non-Aboriginal Australians tends to maintain a surface-level level of interpretation, rather than any deeper meanings. Magowan's work focuses on the importance and meanings of Aboriginal dance, and the significance of it to Aboriginal identities (Magowan, 2000). An example discussed, is a performance of an Aboriginal woman dancing on the streets outside the High Court of Australia following the Wik decision, which concerned native title rights; the dance is explained as being an illustration of a cross-cultural encounter through the dancing changing the space from a public legal building 'into a living, moving, ancestral arena' (Magowan, 2000: 308). The differing meanings of the dance for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians demonstrates the contrasting interpretations and use of the term 'culture'. For the woman who was dancing, and other Aboriginal Australians, it was not about performing for others, it was a way for her to identify

with spiritual connections and express herself and her emotions in response to the political outcome; it was not meant as a spectacle and instead has been described as performative politics (Magowan, 2000). However, for non-Aboriginal onlookers who witnessed the dance, they may have understood it as a spectacle and an expression of culture, understanding it to be a cultural performance, without conceptualising a deeper meaning as to why the Aboriginal woman danced.

A further example of different uses of the term 'culture' is provided by Povinelli (1993), who discusses the influence of westernised concepts and understandings on the interpretation of Aboriginal culture. It is explained that perceptions of Aboriginal Australians and their lives have been established outside of Aboriginal culture because of the influence of Western understanding, coined as the Western Gaze, and thus has an impact on how the term 'culture' is used and applied in society (Povinelli, 1993). For example, Uluru is understood as being an example of culture and is used to attract tourists to Australia and encourage them to see Aboriginal culture; however, this is in conflict with the cultural perspective and interpretation which local Aboriginal communities have of Uluru, who instead value the rich spiritual connections associated with it (Povinelli, 1993). Additionally, Aboriginal culture is discussed alongside economy, specifically highlighting the issue of the westernised economic framework not valuing the importance of cultural identity and not understanding that cultural processes can be considered as economically valuable; for example, many jobs which hold cultural importance for Aboriginal Australians are not held in high esteem by non-Aboriginal Australians (Povinelli, 1993). It is emphasised that it is more important to understand how cultural practices are linked to Aboriginal identity, and the richer meanings behind them, rather than what they are; however, this is overpowered by the influence of western ideology which in turn affects how the term 'culture' is interpreted and used (Povinelli, 1993). Moreover, it is not only Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians who interpret culture differently, but it can also differ between Aboriginal communities (Bagshaw, 2014; Povinelli, 1993). It is suggested that only those in the community have the fullest understanding of the cultural knowledge associated with the environment around them, and this is demonstrated through the work of Bagshaw (2014) who discusses the ownership of saltwater among the Burarra and Yan-nhangu people. The literature emphasises how only those who are part of the Burarra and Yan-nhangu people fully understand the cultural knowledge of the land,

whereby the saltwater is two separate entities which they identify and have affiliations to different types of water (Bagshaw, 2014). However, it is suggested that other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians would not have the same cultural affiliations or ownership over the saltwater and therefore their interpretation of culture would be slightly different.

The use of the term 'culture' and the differing interpretations associated with it illustrate the complexity of discussing Aboriginal culture. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight the conflicts and complexities associated with concepts, and the challenges these may cause, as it can greatly impact how culture is being conveyed and the impact it has on the value and understanding of Aboriginal culture, specifically the different cultural discourses and processes of Aboriginal communities. This in turn can impact how culture is understood when included in social policies, and the value differences could influence the overall effectiveness of the initiatives because the policies may not align with what is needed on the ground.

### **Closing the Gap Reports: The Australian Government's Approach**

In 2019, the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade announced that Australia was ranked as one of the top 20 countries based on a variety of indexes, including health and education, with the education system ranked 6<sup>th</sup> best in the world, and Australia ranked 13<sup>th</sup> for the highest life expectancy (Australian Government, 2019). However, there is a significant gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, specifically in the extreme levels of poverty and disadvantage that some Aboriginal Australians endure. In addition to the enormity of the situation being captured by former Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan (Amnesty International, 2009), a report was provided to the Human Rights Council in 2017, following a visit by a Special Rapporteur to examine the rights of Indigenous peoples in Australia, including Aboriginal Australians. This report highlighted that the conditions for Aboriginal Australians had deteriorated since her predecessor's report in 2009 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2017: 4). More specifically, it emphasised the inability of the Australian Government to improve the inequalities faced by Aboriginal Australians, stating, 'Despite having enjoyed over two decades of economic growth, Australia has not been able to improve the social disadvantage of its indigenous population' (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2017: 9). In response, the Australian Government introduced the Closing the Gap

Report in an attempt to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal Australians through an approach which monitors the impact of six targets (see below), all of which relate to the education, health and employment of Aboriginal Australians. The 2009 Closing the Gap Report was the first report published and used by the Government to announce these targets in addition to outlining the measures to be put in place to support the meeting of these targets. The Closing the Gap targets are as follows (Australian Government, 2009: 5):

1. Close the life expectancy gap within a generation.
2. Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade.
3. Ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities within five years.
4. Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade.
5. Halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.
6. Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The targets were the result of acknowledging the failures of successive Australian Governments' actions to improve the disadvantages faced by Aboriginal Australians. All the annual reports since 2009 indicate that the Australian Government understands that the main areas of disadvantage are life expectancy, infant and child mortality, early childhood education, literacy and numeracy skills, school completion and employment outcomes (Australian Government, 2009: 10). In addition, the 2009 report highlighted further areas for development in order to improve the overall quality of life for Aboriginal Australians. In addressing the fragmented relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal communities, the reports considered the delivery of services to Aboriginal communities, the responsibility of Australian citizens to support and actively assist the Government in responding to Aboriginal disadvantage, and the accountability of the Australian Government (Australian Government, 2009: 5-6). The Australian Government vowed to be more accountable for improving the outcomes for Aboriginal Australians, and committed to publish and present to Parliament an annual Closing the Gap Report.

Every year, the Closing the Gap Reports acknowledged the challenges in meeting the targets within the allocated timespans, with some being extended and others remaining unmet. The first report to indicate that progress had been made towards meeting targets was in 2010, when it identified that some improvements were visible in each of the target areas. However, it acknowledged that there were mixed results where improvements and eleven elements of deterioration were noticed in regards to the reading, writing and numeracy target (Australian Government, 2010: 23), as well as noting that the rate of improvement for the employment target needed to drastically increase, if the target was to be met within the allotted timescale (Australian Government, 2010: 30). The Closing the Gap Report 2013 was the first year when there were updates on substantial progression towards meeting the targets, when it outlined that the target for infant mortality rates was on track, the Year 12 attainment target progress was ahead of schedule and there had been improvements in employment rates (Australian Government, 2013: 14). However, both the reading, writing and numeracy target and the life expectancy target were off track to being met (Australian Government, 2013: 14). Additionally, the report confirmed the early childhood education access target was on track to be met during 2013 (Australian Government, 2013: 14), but despite this certainty, the 2015 report revealed that this target had not been met, and furthermore, the progress failed to meet the target benchmark by 10% (Australian Government, 2015: 10). The 2015 report is significant as it introduced a new target aimed at closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school attendance within five years (Australian Government 2015: 11-13), and also raised concerns about the lack of progression towards the other targets. The report indicated that only two targets were on track to be met, one target had not been achieved within its timescale and the other three were not on track (Australian Government, 2015: 5). The fact that over half of the targets set in 2009 were unlikely to be achieved, emphasised concerns over the success of the Closing the Gap initiative. Since then, the initiative's rate of progress has remained unchanged, with the most recent 2019 Closing the Gap Report stating that only two of the seven targets are on track to be met (Australian Government, 2019: 10). 2019 marks the tenth year since the Closing the Gap initiative was implemented, however the limited success of meeting the targets suggests that the Australian Government has been largely ineffective in tackling the issues relating to education, health and employment.

In 2017, for the first time that the report included chapters dedicated to Aboriginal culture and its importance. In its culture chapter the report emphasised various cultural aspects which are significant to Aboriginal Australians, including the preservation and celebration of the culture, the ability of art and language to share Aboriginal culture and stories and the importance of the environment to Aboriginal communities (Australian Government, 2017: 15-18). The report also outlined broader topics related more closely to encompassing Aboriginal culture within Australian society. Specifically, there was a focus on the importance of cultural knowledge by integrating Aboriginal culture in the public sector through various employee training programmes (Australian Government 2017: 18). The culture chapter finished by focusing on reconciliation and righting the wrongdoings of the past. It referred to the recognition of Aboriginal Australians in the Australian Constitution, reconciliation within Australia and the support given to individuals of the Stolen Generations (Australian Government, 2017: 18-19). Over the last two years the reports have continued to highlight aspects of Aboriginal culture, and have additionally included case studies of successful initiatives and achievements. For example, in the 2018 report, case studies focused on successful conservation initiatives in the Northern Territory and Western Australia; these highlighted the cultural importance of land, in addition to forms of reconciliation, employment prospects and Government funding (Australian Government, 2018: 33-35). Although the most recent Closing the Gap Report in 2019 includes fewer case studies, it instead looks at the respect and appreciation of Aboriginal culture at local, regional and national levels to emphasise the work of the Australian Government in supporting the culture through actioning policies and initiatives, such as the support for Aboriginal artists through professional opportunities (Australian Government, 2019: 17-27).

The inclusion of these chapters concentrating on Aboriginal culture in the Closing the Gap Reports over the last couple of years is significant for two reasons: firstly, it reflects an important message stated during the National Apology for the Stolen Generations and secondly, it identifies a link between culture and the disadvantages faced by Aboriginal Australians. The Closing the Gap initiative was implemented in response to the National Apology for the Stolen Generations, whereby the Prime Minister apologised for the Government's actions which inflicted suffering and grief when Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and communities. The National Apology by Prime

Minister Kevin Rudd mentioned Aboriginal culture twice, firstly by stating at the beginning of the speech, 'That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history', and then, 'And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry' (Parliament of Australia, 2008). This, therefore, suggests that the Australian Government would acknowledge and respect Aboriginal Australians' culture in order to right the past, when their culture was ignored. The Closing the Gap Reports prior to 2017 mentioned Aboriginal culture briefly, and only in subsequent years has its importance to Aboriginal Australians been acknowledged more via an increased focus. Through this greater inclusion, a clear emphasis is placed on the link between Aboriginal culture and disadvantages facing Aboriginal Australians. The reports' chapters on Aboriginal culture not only indicate a link between the culture and the disadvantages, but also signifies the relevance of it in working to improve the inequalities, as the case studies and informative actions outlined by the Australian Government indicate in the 2017, 2018 and 2019 reports.

### **Education and Aboriginal Australians**

A broad collection of statistical data outlines the undeniable level of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal Australians compared to non-Aboriginal Australians within education. These issues relate to attainment and attendance levels throughout the different stages of education, from pre-school through to high school. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority monitor and assess aspects of Australian education and achievement rates and release their figures annually. The figures provide statistical evidence for the Australian education system as a whole, and also provide break-downs of the data for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The most recent figures that have been published highlight the differences in attendance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. There is a gap of more than 10% between attendance rates of students, with 82.3% of Aboriginal children attending school between Year 1 and Year 10, compared to 92.55% of non-Aboriginal children (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2018). The causes for poor attendance of Aboriginal children have been a key focus for researchers, both in Australia and internationally, because of these differences in attendance rates. Research focusing on the lack of attendance has been both specific to Aboriginal children and more generalised.

The findings of research on the causes of children not attending school appear to be similar for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. For example, although Reid (2008) researched the issue of non-attendance in the United Kingdom, his findings are applicable to Aboriginal Australians, as indicated by Biddle et al (2004), Purdie and Buckley (2010) and Baxter and Meyers (2016, 2019). However, it should be noted that although the factors can be applicable for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, research has indicated that causes of non-attendance were less significant for non-Aboriginal Australians (Baxter and Meyers, 2019: 35). Reid includes parents and carers, society, schools, the government, pupils, local authorities, the local economy and cultural diversity as factors that are considered influential to students' attendance (2008: 351). These factors are broad and each one includes a comprehensive spectrum of issues; for example, under the category of 'pupil' Reid has referenced the influence of bullying and the lack of career aspirations, and under 'society' he refers to the value of education and welfare safeguarding (2008: 351).

The factors highlighted by Reid contribute to the low attendance of Aboriginal Australians, but recognition of culture and heritage and causes relating to the students' home environment appear to be the most influential (Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Baxter and Meyers, 2016, 2019). In a case study, Baxter and Meyers (2019) analysed the causes of Aboriginal students' non-attendance in an urban primary school over a period of ten years and found that the cultural ties of being Aboriginal and the home environment influenced attendance, but these influences were unpredictable and attendance rates fluctuated over the years, a point that has also been emphasised in other research (Reid, 2008: 355; Ladwig and Luke, 2013: 176). Initially, Baxter and Meyers found that a lack of family affluence and integration, linked to Aboriginal status, were the leading causes of non-attendance (2019: 30). Their research also showed that other major reasons for non-attendance were the need for extra learning support and that Aboriginal children were more likely to start school at an older age than non-Aboriginal children (Baxter and Meyers, 2019: 30). As the case study progressed over the years, the research indicated a shift of influence whereby socio-economic circumstances, specifically poverty, and family structure and guidance became the most prominent causes of non-attendance, instead of those related to Aboriginal status. Within Aboriginal families, it is a norm that extended family members, specifically grandparents, contribute to the care of children, and in some circumstances, are sole carers because the children's parents are

absent; this was highlighted as a key factor that influences Aboriginal children's non-attendance (Baxter and Meyers, 2019: 34-38). The instability that some Aboriginal children and their families endure as a result of life experiences linked to poverty and inter-generational trauma, including the Stolen Generations, were explained as contributing factors to lower attendance rates of Aboriginal children (Baxter and Meyers, 2019: 34-38). Interlinked with the suggestions that socio-economic circumstances and society influence non-attendance, geographic location has also been highlighted as a possible factor (Biddle et al, 2004; Fogarty et al, 2017: 190). The distance an Aboriginal child needs to travel to school often varies between primary and secondary institutions, with a primary school being more conveniently located than secondary schools, even in the most remote regions of Australia (Biddle et al, 2004: 6). Thus, attendance in the late stages of primary school can decline when students realise they will need to travel further to attend secondary school (Biddle et al, 2004: 6). In the same research by Biddle et al, the role of online learning is discussed in relation to the vast number of educational resources available and the difficulty for some Aboriginal households to access the internet and computers. It is argued that this contributes to the low attendance of some Aboriginal students as they are hindered by their inability to access electronic syllabus materials put online and referred to by schools (Biddle et al, 2004: 23). This specific influence on Aboriginal attendance levels links back to the factor of socio-economic circumstances and poverty, which is regularly highlighted by researchers (Baxter and Meyer, 2016, 2019; Fogarty et al, 2017; Purdie and Buckley, 2010; Reid 2004).

The consequences of low attendance rates have been linked to attainment levels, which for Aboriginal Australians are lower than non-Aboriginal Australians. When looking at the most recent figures for reading, writing and numeracy, for children in Year 3, which is approximately halfway through primary education, Aboriginal Australians are falling behind non-Aboriginal students. For reading, the percentage of Aboriginal children reaching the national minimum standard was 82%, compared to 96.2% of non-Aboriginal children, in writing 78.4% Aboriginal children were meeting the minimum writing standards compared to 95.5% of non-Aboriginal children and for numeracy, 83.1% of Aboriginal children were meeting the national minimum standard compared to 96.7% of non-Aboriginal children (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy, 2018). The non-attendance for Aboriginal children is a major contributing factor to educational attainment, with one third of the gap in attainment levels

being the result of poor school attendance (Fogarty, 2017: 189). Furthermore, the importance of the connection between school attendance and levels of attainment has been emphasised in research which states that when attendance falls below 90%, which is the equivalent of frequent absence from school for more than half a day, then a student's education is deemed to be at risk (Fogarty et al, 2017: 189; Purdie and Buckley, 2010: 3). Because of these findings, it is no surprise that the improvement of attendance levels has been advised as the main gateway to improving educational attainment for Aboriginal children (Fogarty et al, 2017: 189; Griffiths, 2011: 76). With attendance being considered as such a fundamental aspect of educational attainment, it is argued that by getting Aboriginal children to attend school, progress is already being made to improve educational attainment (Fogarty et al, 2017: 189). With the link to attainment, improved attendance is the first step that must be taken to improve the overall educational outcomes for Aboriginal Australians (Griffiths, 2011: 76). There is little dispute over the influence of the level of attendance on educational attainment, nonetheless there is some disagreement that there is a significant link between the two. Ladwig and Luke (2013) argue that the link between attendance and educational attainment is not as substantial as other researchers claim. Their research indicates that there is little correlation between increased attendance and increased attainment, and therefore, do not agree that there is a relationship between the two (Ladwig and Luke, 2013: 187). However, it could be said that their argument is slightly ambiguous, as they do acknowledge that their research highlights a link between improved attendance levels and increased attainment levels in reading (Ladwig and Luke, 2013: 188). They state that the connection between the attendance level and educational attainment is not viable as an overall argument for Aboriginal educational outcomes; nevertheless, they argue that both should be assessed at an individual level as they understand that for some students, attendance is a positive factor for increased attainment (Ladwig and Luke, 2013: 173).

Furthermore, literature has also highlighted additional factors that can affect attainment levels. It has been suggested that attendance is just one of many factors which impact the levels, alongside multiple factors of social disadvantage, with an emphasis on poverty as a compounding factor to educational attainment (Fogarty et al, 2017: 190). Fogarty et al recognises how poverty can impact access to a sufficient standard of healthcare and housing, as well as causing accumulative exposure to high levels of violence, alcohol and drug

dependency and high incarceration levels; they also understand that these are factors which influence the disparities in educational outcomes for Aboriginal Australians (2017: 190). Culture is another influence on attainment, through its inclusion within the school curriculum and also in its role in contributing to an Aboriginal child's self-esteem. The inclusion of cultural awareness within school ethos is considered beneficial to student attainment levels as it leads to teachers' better understanding of the specific needs that Aboriginal children may have, which differ from those of non-Aboriginal children. All students have different needs and Nakata (2011) argues that through educational staff having the knowledge to understand Aboriginal children's needs, they are better equipped to support Aboriginal students and subsequently influence their educational outcomes. It is suggested that a cultural interface is needed in education, whereby the curriculum regularly includes Aboriginal culture so that all students engage in enriched learning opportunities and gain a better understanding of the world they live in (Nakata, 2011: 2-3). Recognition of this can be illustrated by the introduction of Aboriginal history as a mandatory subject for Year 10 students in 2010, although deeper subject knowledge of the Stolen Generations has only been included since 2012 (Magowan, 2014: 217). Furthermore, the acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture is understood to be a supporting mechanism in the improvement of attainment levels as it can boost Aboriginal students' self-esteem and instil more positive attitudes within school (Griffiths, 2011: 72). A case study by Munns et al (2013: 8) noted the importance of cultural recognition in creating mutual respect between Aboriginal communities and local schools, which in turn positively contributes to attendance and attainment levels. Moreover, it has been suggested that Aboriginal culture can be influential to student engagement, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and therefore, by including the culture in schools, it can positively improve academic engagement and attainment, especially for Aboriginal students (Mooney et al, 2016: 20). A final aspect linked to culture and its influence on attainment levels is the importance of Aboriginal staff and community engagement. It has been argued that Aboriginal staff within the school environment can contribute to the participation of Aboriginal children in school because the children feel more settled and have a greater sense of belonging (Dockett et al, 2006: 142). This was a concept that was highlighted during the discussion of the increased risk of Aboriginal children needing to retake school years because of poor attainment (Anderson, 2013: 204). Additionally, Anderson noted that it is not only independent researchers who have recognised the importance of Aboriginal culture and staff contributing to school attendance

rates and educational outcome, but also the Australian Government in reference to State Schools in Queensland (Anderson, 2013: 204).

Levels of school attendance and educational attainment appear to dominate the literature on the topic of Aboriginal Australians' education; however, this focus could be explained through the Australian Government's approach to Aboriginal Australians' educational outcomes. Not only did they highlight attendance and attainment through the targets they set in the initial Closing the Gap Report, but they have remained focused on these each year, publishing the figures and reports against their targets.

### **Employment and Aboriginal Australians**

Research relating to the employment of Aboriginal Australians appears to be less prominent compared to the literature on Aboriginal Australians and education. Nevertheless, this does not reflect the necessity for research as the unemployment rate for Aboriginal Australians is significantly higher than non-Aboriginal Australians, and this is consistent across all ages, although there are some fluctuations which are dependent on age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). For example, the most significant difference relates to those aged between 15-24, where the rate of Aboriginal unemployment was recorded as 27% compared to 14% for non-Aboriginal Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

A topic that has been researched in reference to employment struggles for Aboriginal Australians relates to aspirations and kinship. Aboriginal Australian family formations could be considered different to the nuclear family pattern because of the Aboriginal kinship structures (Parkes et al, 2014; McRae-Williams and Gerritsen, 2010). Large extended families are considered to be a more common family structure within Aboriginal communities, and the family formation of some Aboriginal Australians can be seen as a barrier that can prevent individuals participating in employment (Parkes et al, 2014: 764). The significant value that Aboriginal Australians place on relatedness and the cultural importance of kinship and family can make it challenging for Aboriginal Australians to sustain employment (McRae-Williams and Gerritsen, 2010: 10). Furthermore, this challenge has been linked to more senior employment positions, whereby it may be difficult for some Aboriginal Australians in

managerial positions to conform to mainstream work practices if other kinship members are employed in the same company. An example that McRae-Williams and Gerritsen explained was of an Aboriginal supervisor who faced pressure to conform to mainstream work practices, whilst additionally feeling obliged to show compassion to employees who were family (2010: 11). It is argued that this example illustrates the absence of boundaries between work and life outside the work environment, which would challenge non-Aboriginal attitudes and behaviours in the workplace (McRae-Williams and Gerritsen, 2010: 11-12). The commitment Aboriginal Australians have to their kinship system is so crucial to their lives that it will override the importance of paid employment (Peterson, 2010: 255). The view of valuing kinship over employment to some non-Aboriginal Australians can be interpreted as Aboriginal Australians being lazy because of their lack of commitment to employment (Peterson, 2010: 255-256). However, this viewpoint also means that the aspirations of Aboriginal Australians can differ to those of non-Aboriginal Australians, specifically in reference to employment. The findings of Parkes et al (2014) concluded that many Aboriginal Australians' aspirations for employment were influenced by the strong desire to connect and engage with family, whilst not always comprehending the value that non-Aboriginal Australians put on the transition from education to employment (2014: 770). Therefore, with aspirations for employment being less important, or non-existent, for some Aboriginal Australians, it would impact their determination to secure employment and subsequently be reflected in the unemployment rate for Aboriginal Australians.

It is only recently that literature has included the cultural implications on employment; however, other factors have remained vague. Some of the less recent literature highlights characteristics which decrease the chance and opportunity of employment for Aboriginal Australians. Education, language, age, family, criminal record and health were a number of determinants that were proposed as being significant to Aboriginal Australians' employment (Hunter, 1996: 3). Firstly, it is suggested that education is the most influential determinant for Aboriginal employment, with school completion and post-school qualifications being outlined as contributing factors which can impact employment opportunities (Hunter, 1996: 3-5). Although age is mentioned, it is not considered as influential as other factors; however, if Aboriginal Australians have children and are located in rural locations then their chances of employment decline (Hunter, 1996: 5-6). An individual's criminal record and overall health are

the last two determinants that Hunter acknowledges in his research; being arrested or having a long-term health condition both have negative influences on employment outcomes for Aboriginal Australians (Hunter, 1996: 6-7). Although Hunter's research is not recent, it is still significant, as some of the determinants he stated as being influential on employment have since been identified as factors that impact educational outcomes, and therefore, are likely to still be relevant to the employment outcomes of Aboriginal Australians.

The issue of Aboriginal Australians' unemployment was included in the initial targets set out by the Australian Government in the Closing the Gap Report in 2009, in response to the 2006 census indicating a gap of 24% between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment (Australian Government, 2009: 17). Social determinants that impact employment were highlighted at the time of the target being published, which although they do not reflect the cultural influences on employment, they do reflect Hunter's (1996) research, specifically the large influence of education. The Australian Government has recognised in their most recent report that the overall employment figures for Aboriginal Australians has fallen over a ten year period, from 2006 to 2016, in contrast to non-Aboriginal employment rates which remain stable and therefore, this explains why the employment target is not on track to be met (Australian Government, 2019: 97). A criticism that relates to the employment opportunities of Aboriginal Australians is the closure of the Community Development and Employment Programme (CDEP) which is a programme that has been widely commented on in literature when discussing employment. Although CDEP is not the only programme or initiative implemented to support unemployment, it is arguably the most prominent in literature. CDEP is considered as one of the most influential Australian Government programmes which had a substantial impact on Aboriginal Australians and their employment prospects (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 2). The programme initially started out in remote areas of Australia to target the unemployment rates in remote Aboriginal communities; it was focused on Aboriginal Australians who were on social security unemployment payments, with the aim of the programme to remove them from benefit payments to being employed part-time (Sanders, 2016: 44). However, following its success it was expanded into more urban and metropolitan areas of Australia which meant that more Aboriginal communities were eligible for the programme, and this was seen as the first major wave of policies to reduce the Aboriginal Australian unemployment level (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 2). The Aboriginal Australians who

engaged with CDEP could acquire skills suitable for a variety of employment, such as building and construction, environmental resource management, mechanics and health services (Magowan, 2007: 460). Essentially, the Australian Government provided funding through CDEP as grants to enable Aboriginal organisations to employ individuals who would otherwise qualify for unemployment benefit entitlements (Hunter, 2009: 43). One of the focuses of CDEP was to encourage individuals to take up paid employment opportunities, rather than relying on benefit entitlements. It could be argued that people who took up these opportunities did so for their own reasons, because by 2006 the amount paid was roughly in-line with welfare benefit payments (Magowan, 2007: 460-461). As the title of the programme states, it not only focused on employment prospects but also community development. However, although CDEP did facilitate some community development, it was a programme that was difficult to define as it was essentially attempting to fulfil community development, employment and welfare needs (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 4). Nevertheless, during the early years of CDEP the Australian Government viewed it more as an employment programme than a community development or welfare programme (Hunter, 2009: 43).

Up until the closure of CDEP in 2013, which meant that participants in the programme eventually lost their CDEP status in 2015, the programme went through many reforms with the different Australian Governments contributing to the changing framework and approaches. It is argued that these reforms caused the demise of the programme (Sanders, 2016: 44). When the programme was reformed, it resulted in CDEP becoming more aligned with the social security framework, rather than being focused on part-time employment, as it had been previously (Sanders, 2016: 41). After the reforms, CDEP began to be criticised more broadly within literature, as questions were raised about the work participants in the programme undertook in order to receive their payments (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 6-7; Hughes and Hughes, 2010; Sanders, 2016: 41). An example of some of the jobs that those enrolled in CDEP were required to undertake included home duties and attendance at funerals (Hughes and Hughes, 2010: 3). This aspect of the programme was criticised as the requirement to work these 'pretend jobs' was detrimental to Aboriginal Australians when attempting to secure employment outside of CDEP, including lowering self-esteem (Hughes and Hughes, 2010: 17-18). Despite the criticism of CDEP, it was still a programme that was considered effective to a certain extent because of the support it gave to Aboriginal culture and lifestyle

through enabling participants on the programme to stay living near or on their traditional country (Hunter, 2016: 67). There is no doubt that the closure of CDEP had a substantial impact on Aboriginal communities, both economic and social, due to how dependent Aboriginal Australians were on the programme (Hunter, 2016: 67).

Since the closure of CDEP, the Australian Government has introduced a new programme to fulfil the same requirements of supporting employment prospects. The Community Development Programme (CDP) was introduced in 2015 and is defined as being a programme that focuses on increasing employment and breaking the welfare dependency cycle (Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 2019). A recent reform to the programme in early 2019 has focused on ensuring there is assistance to help jobseekers make the successful transition from welfare payments into 'real jobs' (Australian Government 2019: 104). Despite the reform including improvements to the role communities have in delivering CDP in their area and the emphasis the programme has on community engagement (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2019), the Australian Government stated in the Closing the Gap Report 2019 that CDP has aspects that can be further developed. It was suggested that CDP could be more effective if it was tailored to the needs of remote communities and jobseekers (Australian Government, 2019: 106), which is interesting considering that the Australian Government had previously stated that the role of CDP is a 'remote employment and community development service' (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2019). Therefore, it could be assumed that tailoring the programme to the needs of individuals in remote areas was a priority during its development and implementation stages. Because CDP is a programme aimed at remote communities, it is inevitable that Aboriginal Australians will form a significant proportion of participants, although it is not specifically for them. An evaluation of the programme, two years after it was implemented, confirms high enrolment of Aboriginal Australians in CDP with 80% of the 35,000 people participating in it being Aboriginal, as of January 2016 (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

Despite CDEP proving to be a popular topic covered in research, little has been mentioned about CDP. However, the Australian Government's own evaluation of CDP has highlighted areas of criticism of the programme, with communities raising concerns about the running of CDP, and as a result, only 21% of remote communities believing that they were better off since

its introduction (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). The penalties imposed on participants if they do not attend CDP appointments or activities was an aspect of the programme that was criticised; the latest figures collected in 2016 state that one in ten of the penalised participants lost 20% or more of their quarterly payments (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). These figures are significant because the purpose of the programme is to support individuals with employment, whilst breaking the welfare dependency cycle. The issues surrounding Aboriginal Australians and employment are evident, both in literature and governmental reports. With the most recent information on employment indicating little improvement for Aboriginal Australians, it would suggest that programmes to support employment are not being wholly effective.

### **Health and Aboriginal Australians**

Due to how the Australian Government is structured, the responsibilities of healthcare in Australia is split between the Australian Commonwealth Government and the eight regional governments in Australia. Although health is not the only area of social policies where this split applies, it is normally more evident as blame for any ineffectiveness of healthcare delivery is usually transferred between the different levels of government (Fisher et al, 2016: 548). Whilst the Australian Commonwealth Government holds more power than the State and Territory Governments, it could be argued that the role of the State and Territory Governments is more significant for the health of Australian citizens. The State and Territory Governments and the Australian Commonwealth Government jointly fund and run public hospitals. However, State and Territory Governments are solely responsible for funding Medicare healthcare services within their region. Medicare is a national public healthcare system that is strongly supported in Australia (Fisher et al, 2016: 559); through Medicare, people can access free and low-cost health services, although not all health services are included (Department for Health, 2019). It is increasingly common in Australia to have some form of private health insurance to subsidise the health services not covered by Medicare.

The health of Aboriginal Australians is frequently researched, with literature covering a broad spectrum of health topics, ranging from cultural respect in primary healthcare (Freeman et al, 2014) to the application of a network approach to policy framing health legislation (Browne

et al, 2017); however, the most common approaches to researching Aboriginal health have usually focused on specific medical needs or lifestyle choices. The topic of cancer in relation to the health of Aboriginal Australians has been widely researched, which is arguably explained through cancer being ranked amongst the top three causes of fatality for Aboriginal Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015: ix). The increased fatality rates of Aboriginal Australians diagnosed with cancer correlate to the significantly later diagnoses of cancer that they are likely to receive (Banham et al, 2017). Literature that has also compared the outcome of cancer diagnoses between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians has identified that comorbidity, the presence of simultaneous chronic diseases, is more problematic for Aboriginal Australians, impacting their outcome (Pule et al, 2018). Moreover, the prospects for improving the outcomes of cancer have been assessed, with cancer patients' care being identified as an important contributing factor for the outcome for a patient (Green et al, 2016). In addition to cancer being identified as a topical avenue of research due to its contribution to Aboriginal mortality rates, cardiovascular disease has been highlighted as another health concern, as it has been ranked as the most significant disease when considering the mortality of Aboriginal Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015: ix). Some literature assesses determinants that impact cardiovascular issues amongst Aboriginal Australians and identifies high blood pressure, smoking and poor diet as major factors (Sjöholm et al, 2018: 308). There have also been studies of the support of healthcare in managing cardiovascular disease for Aboriginal Australians which have indicated the importance of Indigenous Health Liaison Officers (Grant and Draper, 2018). A commonality within the literature concentrating on Aboriginal Australians and cancer and that focusing on Aboriginal Australians and cardiovascular disease is a split emphasis on researching the cause and significance of the disease and the role of care in managing it.

Although cancer and cardiovascular disease have been outlined as two significant contributing factors for Aboriginal Australian mortality rates, the range of literature is broader than just these two areas: smoking is also a dominant lifestyle choice that has been found to be a determinant of Aboriginal health. A significant amount of literature has been written about Aboriginal Australians and smoking but Gould et al (2015) offer an alternative viewpoint of why smoking continues to be problematic. They highlight that many national anti-smoking campaigns are not working effectively because there is a lack of culturally targeted approaches

that are framed more positively, despite them being necessary to run in conjunction with the fear campaigns (Gould et al, 2015: 7). The research concludes by identifying the need for local anti-smoking campaigns because they could be tailored to fit the specific needs of the local audience being targeted, as well as highlighting the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and between Aboriginal communities (Gould et al, 2015: 8). The spectrum of Aboriginal health in literature is broad and is a response to the situation in Australia, where Aboriginal Australians are disadvantaged when compared to non-Aboriginal Australians. In relation to the overall mortality rate of Aboriginal Australians and life expectancy, smoking has been identified as a preventable risk to health among Aboriginal Australians. Despite there being a decline in the number of Aboriginal Australians smoking, it is still perceived as a substantial contributor to life expectancy and mortality rates in addition to alcohol, poor nutrition and exercise (Australian Government, 2019: 134).

The Australian Government highlighted the extent of disadvantage concerning Aboriginal health when they set two targets as part of the Closing the Gap initiative, one focused on life expectancy of Aboriginal Australians and the other on child and infant mortality rates (Australian Government, 2009: 10-12). The infant and child mortality rates target was set to be met by 2018, but, as the latest report indicates, this is not on track (Australian Government, 2019: 10), despite previous reports stating that it was (Australian Government, 2018: 8). There has been a decline in the rates of Aboriginal Australian child and infant mortality, with the rates declining by 35%; however, as there has also been a decline in non-Aboriginal child and infant mortality rates, the overall gap between the two has not lessened (Australian Government, 2019: 34). The child and infant mortality rates of South Australia appear in the middle of the table showing comparative mortality rates in states and territories, with the Northern Territory indicating the highest mortality rates and New South Wales with the lowest (Australian Government, 2019: 36). Despite the rates not showing significant improvements, it should be noted that the statistics on mortality include both medical and other causes. For example, the causes of childhood deaths between 2013-2017 saw over half being connected to non-medical circumstances, such as drownings and transport accidents (Australian Government, 2019: 37). However, for all infant mortality and child deaths, perinatal medical conditions have been highlighted as a main cause for nearly half of the deaths (Australian Government, 2019: 37). The statistics provided by the Australian Government indicate that

Aboriginal Australians are at a greater disadvantage compared to non-Aboriginal Australians where health is concerned. Smoking was outlined as a contributor to the mortality rates by the Australian Government and it has been highlighted that Aboriginal Australians have a proportionately higher rate of smoking during pregnancy (Australian Government, 2019: 37-40). Reflecting this, there is a substantive amount of published literature which addresses the link between pregnancy and smoking, with specific focuses on knowledge and understanding of the smoking risks (Gould et al, 2013; Passey et al, 2012). In addition to smoking, accessing healthcare is shown to be another contributing factor, with the number of Aboriginal Australians accessing antenatal care falling behind that of non-Aboriginal Australians, although a slight improvement was recorded in 2016 (Australian Government, 2019: 39).

Furthermore, medical anthropology literature has offered insight into the gap between policy and practice in regards to Aboriginal healthcare, and the overall impact it has on health outcomes. Anthropologists have highlighted that although there are healthcare policies, they are not effective because of how they are put into practice and because they are not accurately addressing the 'real' situation on the ground (Amery, 2017; Dembinsky, 2017; Trudgen, 2000). The attitudes shown towards Aboriginal Australians when recognising poor health conditions contribute to the ineffective delivery of policies, and through Trudgen's work with the Yolngu community, he explains that 'blaming', 'naming' and 'lecturing' are three main approaches which are used by health professionals, and those developing the policies (Trudgen, 2000: 61-65). It is revealed that when professionals look for answers to poor health they name the Aboriginal community or their lifestyle in a derogatory way, they blame Aboriginal Australians or their culture for having genetic or degenerative defects, and then they lecture Aboriginal Australians informing them on how to change in order to resolve the health issues (Trudgen, 2000). In other words, Aboriginal Australians are blamed for their poor health, either because of their culture, how they live their lives or for just being who they are. Trudgen's research and discussion evidences how there is a gap between policy and practice; policies developed using the unrealistic knowledge and derogatory approaches to the causes of poor health are ineffective because they are not being developed using accurate knowledge of the situation on the ground. An additional factor which contributes to the gap between policy and practice focuses on how medical information is distributed amongst Aboriginal communities. Three main forms of communication used to help implement health policy

strategies are spoken, written and different media formats, such as adverts or video materials to be used within communities. However, the work of Dembinsky (2017) illustrates how a specific form of spoken communication is the most effective way of distributing health information, although health professionals do not always have this understanding. The term 'being-in-relationship' refers to a complex social network that Aboriginal Australians are part of and is explained as being a key tool in distributing health information within, and between, Aboriginal communities. Grounded on what is considered valid and reliable, information which is passed on through spoken communication is more likely to be accepted and trusted, particularly if the information is originally distributed by a person of high status and then transferred through the web of social relations (Dembinsky, 2017). Trustworthiness is established through being-in-relationship, and therefore, this form of spoken communication allows those receiving the information to determine the validity of it based on the route it has taken. This approach enables Aboriginal Australians to take ownership of health information by choosing what to reproduce and circulate, and therefore directly, and indirectly, influence how and what health information gets distributed (Dembinsky, 2017). It is not all spoken communication which is effective in delivering health policy strategies; the information distributed verbally through health professionals who are not from the community is often not considered trustworthy and lacks validity. The lack of understanding and familiarity that health professionals have of the living conditions and the way of life in Aboriginal communities, paired with the short visits and the style used to tell Aboriginal Australians what they need to do, creates a feeling of discontent amongst the community, and therefore, Aboriginal Australians do not trust the health professionals or their information as readily (Dembinsky, 2017). The trust and validity of information received through spoken communication is founded on the experiences, reputation and kinship ties of those who it passes through, all of which are difficult to decipher through written communication, such as health leaflets, where the 'speaker' is absent (Dembinsky, 2017).

Through her research on women's cancer and the distribution of knowledge relating to it, Dembinsky has highlighted the additional challenges which arise because direct translations into Aboriginal languages of certain health conditions do not exist; for example, there is no direct translation for the word 'cancer' (Dembinsky, 2017). This can be detrimental to Aboriginal Australians' health as the full extent of the seriousness of a health condition, or the

knowledge that medical advice needs to be sought based on certain symptoms may not be understood. Building on this, it is not only language and direct translation which can be problematic, but also differing cultural and world views. Because of these differences, specialised medical terminology, and also common terminology, can be misunderstood during conversations with health professionals (Amery, 2017). An example Amery provides to evidence this is when he explained to some Aboriginal Australians that 'someone chucked his guts up', which was met with confusion as it was understood that the individual literally threw their intestines in the air (Amery, 2017: 14). This illustrates the literal thinking and translations that can occur because of the differing world views, which are a result of misinterpretations from the interface of communication and culture. It also further adds to the gap in policy and practice, as professionals do not always understand that there are misunderstandings with Aboriginal patients (Amery, 2017). Moreover, communication with patients when discussing health problems and potential treatment has been highlighted as a challenging situation due to the lack of acknowledgement and understanding when an Aboriginal patient misunderstands the conversation, even after a consultation when a patient appears to be satisfied, but actually may have misunderstood (Amery, 2017; Trudgen, 2000). Often percentages are used by health professionals when explaining the severity of a medical condition or when trying to encourage participation in treatment. However, some Aboriginal Australians do not understand the concept of percentages and are therefore none the wiser of their condition when percentages are used during medical consultations; instead, diagrams can effectively be used to explain the same knowledge (Amery, 2017; Trudgen, 2000). If medical professionals are aware of when Aboriginal Australians misunderstand, they can then find alternative means of communicating vital information. This is not only relevant when discussing diagnoses, but also when there is resistance towards treatment; showing patients how something works, rather than just verbally explaining it, may lead to a better understanding and greater participation (Amery, 2017). Nevertheless, despite the necessity for health professionals to alter how they communicate with Aboriginal patients, it is argued that 'effective communication is grossly underutilised' and the patients' misunderstanding is frequently missed, which contributes to the gap in policy and practice, as this issue is not taken into account in health policies, as well as contributing to poor medical outcomes (Amery, 2017).

### **Education, Employment and Health: The Nature of Policies' Interconnectedness**

Literature covering education, health and employment clearly reveals their interconnectedness. For instance, when literature, whether governmental or independent, has outlined limitations of a programme or offered reasons for the gaps in equality in education, health and employment, it is common to make reference to one or both of the other two areas of social policy. Whilst these are not the sole explanations offered, there is often a considerable amount of weighting placed on them. Indeed, there is an understanding that living a healthy life means that children can achieve better attainment levels at school, and adults are more able to secure long-term employment. In addition, better educational attainment usually expands the employment opportunities for Aboriginal Australians. A recent report released by the Australian Government called *My Life My Lead* (Department of Health, 2017) highlighted the interconnectedness of education, health and employment in addition to the existence of cultural determinants that also need to be considered for a fuller understanding. Education is a determinant for employment and health because high levels of attainment increase the opportunities for employment, and a better education provides the skills and opportunities needed for improved health (Department of Health, 2017: 26). The specific link between education and health is focused on self-management, and individuals with higher educational attainment usually have a better understanding of health-related issues and how to live a healthier life compared to those with lower educational attainment. Moreover, the report highlights the extent to which education is a determinant for employment through the suggestion that education is key in significantly reducing the gap in employment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, given that high attainment can virtually close the gap in employment (Department of Health, 2017: 28). While education can enhance health and employment prospects, employment or unemployment can impact on Aboriginal Australians' health, albeit in different ways. Being employed increases opportunities for better physical health, in addition to being a positive influence on mental health. In contrast, unemployment has been closely associated with poor health and wellbeing (Department of Health, 2017: 11). However, the connection between health and employment could be perceived as a vicious cycle, especially in reference to unemployment. Being unemployed contributes to poor health, yet poor health has been an indicator of preventing Aboriginal Australians from securing employment. It is stated that over 42% of unemployment

for Aboriginal Australian men is due to poor health, and for Aboriginal women, although significantly lower, nearly 14% of unemployment is due to health reasons (Department of Health, 2017: 11).

The Australian Government has regularly linked employment and health, particularly when assessing Aboriginal unemployment. In the Community Development Programme (CDP), evaluation findings criticised the programme for contributing to mental health issues, specifically stress and anxiety, due to penalties for those unable to participate (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). However, health was also highlighted as a determinant for why Aboriginal Australians may not be able to participate in the programme and are therefore, subjected to penalties (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019). These findings clearly indicate the difficulties Aboriginal Australians face when they are either employed, unemployed or enrolled onto a government support programme because health can be a barrier to employment progression. The difficulties associated with employment can also exacerbate poor health and wellbeing which, in turn can contribute to unemployment. Furthermore, the influences between education and health are just as entwined as employment and health. In order for Aboriginal children to be able to attend school, with attendance leading to improved attainment, they need to be in good health. In literature, poor health has been identified as a barrier to Aboriginal education, leading to poor attendance and attainment amongst Aboriginal children (Baxter and Meyers, 2019: 23; Fogarty et al, 2017: 190). Specific examples of long-term health conditions are hearing and vision impairments, which impact educational ability, self-esteem and attendance (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016: 117). The interconnectedness between health and education can be seen in the ways that each of them impacts the other. Health influences social disadvantages that impact Aboriginal children's education, whilst in turn, education impacts the health of Aboriginal children, both positively and negatively. Just as employment can have a negative impact on health, so can education, if the poor health of Aboriginal Australians is exacerbated through the stress and anxiety experienced in the school environment. However, literature has highlighted that success in education has a positive impact on the overall health of Aboriginal Australians, and also equips them with the values and knowledge needed to live healthy lives (Mooney et al, 2016: 12; Munns et al, 2013: 5). It is understood that education influences long-term successes for Aboriginal Australians within employment, as good

educational attainment is associated with stable employment and income, which, in turn, positively impacts their health through being able to provide for their families and to be in better circumstances to cope with ill health (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016: 131). As well as the education that Aboriginal Australians receive, the social and environmental influences within the school environment can have a positive impact on health, especially through early childhood education (Department of Health, 2017: 16). Although education can have a positive influence on employment prospects, employment can have a different impact on educational outcomes of Aboriginal Australians. The interconnectedness of employment and education is evident in literature that highlights that unemployment within Aboriginal children's families can be detrimental to their educational outcomes, as well as the employment pathways Aboriginal students deem to be available to them (Baxter and Meyers, 2019: 23; Fogarty, 2017: 190; Griffiths, 2011: 70; Mooney et al, 2016: 12). For instance, if Aboriginal students perceive a lack of employment opportunities for them upon completion of their education, they may not feel motivated to attend school, and thus fail to reach higher attainment levels. However, Aboriginal children are more likely to see the benefits of education, if their parents are in better employment due to their educational outcomes.

Despite the interconnectedness between health, employment and education of Aboriginal Australians being highlighted across this literature, research usually focuses in depth on one policy area and only acknowledges the other areas briefly or not at all. Little explanation on how these policy areas are interconnected is given, and this is usually because the research focuses on a specific aspect of the social policy area, rather than seeking a broader understanding. The clearest research indicating the interconnectedness of these social policy areas is published by the Australian Government, however, the lack of action in response to their findings counteracts the positive aspects of this work. An example of this is the *My Life My Lead* report, which is not only focused on highlighting the social policy determinants, but also offers explanations and statistics to support their claims. Because of this, it provides a clear indication of how the three social policy areas are interlinked, but other than publishing the report it appears that no actions on the findings have been undertaken. This is shown in the Australian Government's Closing the Gap Report 2019, which states that actioning and transforming the report's findings is an area for development in relation to Aboriginal health,

specifically life expectancy (Australian Government, 2019: 140). Therefore, although the interconnectedness of education, health and employment is evident across literature that acknowledges the determining factors across the policy areas, there is a critical lack of literature, independent of the Australian Government, which focuses on all the policy areas evenly. Although education, employment and health may seem to be vast policy areas in their own rights, the value of acknowledging and understanding their interconnectedness makes it a necessary area of research. Where one area of social policy fails, individuals will consequently suffer in another policy area due to their interconnectedness, as each one is a determinant of the other policy areas. This research will therefore address the three policy areas as one which reflects trends in the field of international public policy, where multi-dimensional approaches have been used to understand health inequalities. In the UK, public health agendas have focused on the social determinants of health and wellbeing, specifically education and employment, as their interconnectedness is recognised, and this is particularly evident in The Marmot Review (2010). While The Marmot Review refers to the UK, its findings demonstrate why my research needs to consider the three areas of education, health and employment simultaneously and to illustrate how each determinant impacts on the others in Aboriginal Australians' experiences of the inequalities they face in Australia.

### **Building a Contextual Framework: Ngarrindjeri and Kurna Literature**

My research is focused on two Aboriginal communities in South Australia: the Ngarrindjeri community and the Kurna community. Publications focusing on community life and published personal testimonies help to build a contextual framework of Aboriginal Australians' lives, their experiences and life journeys including issues that which have caused pain and hardship for Aboriginal Australians, both in the past and in contemporary society. Some publications offer a comprehensive understanding of key concerns relating to the Aboriginal communities in my research, some providing detailed accounts of historical events and their lasting impact, others focusing on reconciliation in contemporary society and the foresight of what is needed to progress the lives of Aboriginal Australians in future years (Davenport et al, 2005; Trevorrow et al, 2007; Trudgen, 2000). This contextual knowledge offers a valuable contribution to the field as it provides an understanding of why some Aboriginal Australians have certain perceptions and opinions of wider Australian society.

Autobiographical and biographical books have been published by Aboriginal Australians and anthropologists who have previously worked alongside the communities to capture testimonies of life within Aboriginal communities. These publications are driven by the emotions of the individuals whose stories are being told and enable personal perspectives and outlooks on Aboriginal community life to be depicted and understood in great detail. *And the Clock Struck Thirteen* (Gale, 2007) and *Too Afraid to Cry* (Eckermann, 2012) are two notable examples of memoirs of individuals who have connections to the Kurna community in Adelaide; although both books focus on the difficulties of Aboriginal identity, they depict the different hardships the individuals experienced relating to identity, and thus illustrate the complexity of issues related to Aboriginal identity. In one memoir, a woman who was part of the Stolen Generations (Eckermann, 2012), explains her challenges of trying to reconnect with her family and understand her own identity, whilst the other (Gale, 2007) presents the life of a man who had white heritage which led to personal challenges of him feeling that he did not fully belong in his Aboriginal community because his appearance was more similar to that of a non-Aboriginal person. Members of the Ngarrindjeri community have also offered enriched knowledge of their way of life and the personal struggles they have lived through, from childhood through to adulthood (Gale, 2002; Kartinyeri and Anderson, 2008). The insights of Veronica Brodie (Gale, 2002) and Doreen Kartinyeri (Kartinyeri and Anderson, 2008) leave no topic unspoken; it is not only their own personal lives that are written about, the traumas experienced growing up, as well as the more positive memories of family holidays, but also stories of the community as a whole, including the importance of the Ngarrindjeri culture and the more challenging times of when they have had to fight to protect their community and culture, including the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission in 1995.

The 1995 Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission, which is also referred to as the Hindmarsh Island Bridge controversy (Rigney and Hemming, 2014) was very significant for the Ngarrindjeri community, and has notably been researched and referred to by anthropologists. This case was a lengthy process and was seen as a political and legal issue because the proposal to build a bridge to Hindmarsh Island was opposed by the Ngarrindjeri community on the grounds of the island's cultural importance and the repercussions of the construction on their sacred land and traditions (Rigney and Hemming, 2014). However, even greater

controversy arose when court cases and the Royal Commission focused on the credibility of the Ngarrindjeri community's cultural claims. Diane Bell, an Australian anthropologist who has worked closely with the Ngarrindjeri community, focuses on the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission in her book *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrun: a world that is, was and will be* (1998). She gives an extensive timeline of how the Royal Commission case developed and explains how the site of the proposed bridge is sacred because of its spiritual connection to a Ngarrindjeri Dreaming story called the Seven Sisters. Because the Ngarrindjeri community pass on much of their cultural knowledge, including stories such as this specific Dreaming story, ceremonies, rituals, songs and dances down through generations orally, the Royal Commission found no trace of the spiritual and cultural significance of the land, and hence decided the evidence given to oppose the proposal was not sufficient and instead stated that the Ngarrindjeri women who provided the Seven Sisters as evidence were accused of fabrication (Bell, 1998). It is clear that the Ngarrindjeri opposed the proposal because the land that would be impacted by the bridge held great significance to Ngarrindjeri women's traditions; however, the traditions were devalued when they were compared to "radical' feminist interests' (Hemming and Rigney, 2008: 762) and were said by the Royal Commission to be fabricated (Rigney and Hemming, 2014, 2008). However, when the Royal Commission stated that the Seven Sisters story was never part of the Ngarrindjeri Dreaming, Bell worked with other anthropologists to highlight evidence of when the Seven Sisters Dreaming story, and other Ngarrindjeri cultural beliefs, had been referenced for many years prior to this case, and how they linked to the site of the bridge proposal (Bell, 1998: 1-39). Despite the insensitive approach to the case and the disregard for Ngarrindjeri culture and traditions, the community continued to voice their concerns and in 2001 the Federal Court overturned the Royal Commission's findings and deemed the Ngarrindjeri women's cultural traditions as credible, as there was supportive evidence from anthropological and historical records (Rigney and Hemming, 2014: 540). The value of the Ngarrindjeri cultural traditions, land and laws that are associated with Hindmarsh Island were eventually shown respect in 2009 when the South Australian government registered the traditions under the State heritage legislation (Rigney and Hemming, 2014: 540). Despite this ruling offering some relief for the community, it came too late as the bridge had already been built, the Ngarrindjeri beliefs desecrated and their traditional lands destroyed, which alongside the ongoing legal battle, have all had a devastating emotional and cultural toll on community members (Ngarrindjeri Tendi et al,

2006). This case is important for numerous reasons, firstly because it illustrates the value of lived experiences and cultural traditions which are captured through anthropological research, but also because it highlights an issue with how Aboriginal culture is valued. A key point that Bell highlights is that there is a lack of knowledge of Ngarrindjeri culture, and a lack of opportunity for Ngarrindjeri voices to be heard, although she also outlines the link between the two and argues that their voices explaining their stories are needed to keep the Ngarrindjeri Dreaming stories and culture alive (Bell, 1998). Additionally, the work of Rigney and Hemming (2014) has seen a link between the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission and the Closing the Gap initiative. They highlight the risk of Ngarrindjeri interests, including well-being, protection of lands and cultural heritage, being silenced by emphasis being placed on quantitative measures overriding, and arguably denying, recognition of the wider Australian context (Rigney and Hemming, 2014; 2008). The connection between Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (land) and well-being is clearly explained, through the necessity for the community to have healthy lands and waters, and aspects associated with them such as sustainable regional economy, in order to achieve good-wellbeing within the community (Rigney and Hemming, 2014).

As highlighted above, Bell has focused her work on the importance of the Ngarrindjeri voice, specifically addressing the relationship between yarning (story-telling) and weaving within the Ngarrindjeri community. She has spent a considerable amount of time working with the community and conducting ethnographic research, and her passion to share the stories of the Ngarrindjeri community is evident in her work (Bell, 2008). The stories told in Bell's work indicate the value of story-telling, family, weaving, painting, culture, history, law and government to the Ngarrindjeri community, whilst also emphasising how they believe all things are connected: the land, the water and the people (Bell, 2008). The work of Bell explains how weaving is central to the Ngarrindjeri culture as it is symbolic of how every aspect of life is woven together and connected, including past, present and future (Bell, 2008). Being connected is a key foundation of the Ngarrindjeri community: connected to each other, connected between generations, connected to ancestors and connected to country and their waters, which are all represented in the Ngarrindjeri weaving pattern (Trevorrow et al, 2007). The complexity of the connectedness is symbolised through the art of Ngarrindjeri weaving and by community members sharing stories of the Ngarrindjeri; Bell captures this complexity

and explains the value of yarning in teaching community members about these complexities, and how they are important to the Ngarrindjeri culture (Bell, 2008). One example in Bell's work which further accentuates the connectedness and importance of yarning and weaving is when an Elder's story explains that whilst weaving, community members tell 'survival teaching stories', which are stories of the land, water and the surrounding habitat of the Ngarrindjeri (Bell, 2008: 11). An element of Bell's work that is particularly commendable is her ability to maintain the focus of yarning and weaving, and more generally her passion for telling the stories of the Ngarrindjeri community, whilst clearly drawing attention to significant topics, such as well-being and education (Bell, 1998; 2008).

### **Acknowledging the Gap in Current Literature**

The literature on education, health and employment of Aboriginal Australians tends to be generalised for all Aboriginal Australians, or focused on states and territories, with the exception of South Australia which is a state where research is rarely conducted focusing on education, health and employment experiences simultaneously. However, the latest Closing the Gap Report indicates that research in South Australia should be just as important, as the progress made in meeting the targets in South Australia reflects the progress made in the other states and territories of Australia (Australian Government, 2019: 11). Moreover, a further gap in research is the emphasis on the Aboriginal voice, which is arguably a key component to understanding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the policies for Aboriginal Australians. Some literature acknowledges that there is a critical need to listen to Aboriginal voices, both in terms of research and more generally within Australia (Bell, 2008; Vass, 2013). Therefore, the recognition of Aboriginal Australians' lived experiences can be valuable in furthering the understanding of the disadvantages they face in education, health and employment. However, it appears to be a rarity to find literature or reports which are heavily influenced by the voices or lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians. Another critical gap in existing literature is the approach taken to address education, health and employment as one. As previously explained, this research adopted an approach to identify factors which are influential to education, health and employment, and to understand the interconnectedness of the three social policy areas. By addressing education, health and employment

simultaneously, it will enable factors that are present in the everyday lives of Aboriginal Australians to be identified and understood through the broad scope of the research area.

### **Concluding Comments**

As the literature has emphasised, the current predicament that Australia finds itself in regarding equality in health, education and employment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is significant. There has been minimal improvement as evidenced in the statistics and quantity of literature focusing on these areas. A lack of progress in addressing the targets set by the Australian Government also suggests that there are underlying factors which are influential in closing the gap. Despite the acknowledgment that the Aboriginal voice is an important element that needs to be included when considering the disadvantages, the approaches to research still indicate a lack of relevant inclusion when outlining the circumstances relating to the disadvantages faced by many Aboriginal Australians in education, health and employment. Therefore, this research places a substantial focus on the Aboriginal voice and lived experiences when, not only acknowledging, but also understanding factors which are influential to the gap in equality in regards to the three social policy areas. This approach, combined with research focusing on education, health and employment simultaneously, enables me to outline factors which are present in the everyday lives of the Aboriginal communities and which influence all three social policy areas.

## Chapter III

# Methodology

With the Aboriginal voice being crucial to this research, it was essential that the methodological approach enabled the flexibility for participants to voice their thoughts and feelings of their lived experiences, thus guiding the research. An epistemological stance was therefore applied to this research project, with an interpretive theoretical approach being used. Ethnographic research is the most suitable methodology for gathering data as it illustrates the complexities and perspectives of a social group in their natural setting, and is the reason why this research is ethnographically informed.

### **The Ngarrindjeri and Kurna People: Introducing the Aboriginal Communities**

I focused my research on the two Aboriginal communities in South Australia: the Kurna community in Adelaide and the Ngarrindjeri community in the Coorong region. My decision was influenced by the urban and rural locations being an important aspect to understand if location affects factors that influence their education, health and employment prospects.

The traditional country of the Kurna community, made up of large open grass plains, trees, shrubland and rivers, changed after colonisation. When the term 'Country' is used in reference to Aboriginal location, it refers to the cluster of traditional land and waters that belongs to the Aboriginal community. The Kurna community's country is situated in Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains, which is now considered a versatile area with the metropolitan city, agricultural land and rivers. However, the Kurna community call Adelaide and its parkland *Tarntanya*, which means Red Kangaroo Place, in recognition to how their Country used to be. An important area in Kurna Country is the *Karrawirra Pari*, the Kurna name for the River Torrens, which is culturally significant to the Kurna community because it was a favoured camping location for their ancestors. This was due to the enriched sources of food, water and materials which could be gathered from around the river. Within their culture, the Kurna community recognised the connectedness of their people, land and the stars, and they believe

that spiritual ancestors are living on through their land. The Ngarrindjeri community are a neighbouring Aboriginal Nation and are situated in the Coorong region, where the Lakes, Coorong, Great Southern Ocean and river systems form their traditional Country. In recognition of the vast amount of water around the Ngarrindjeri community, they are also known as the 'Water People'. Although the Ngarrindjeri are one community, there are eighteen clans who live in different areas around the Coorong region; however, they are all connected through their *Ruwe*, which means Country in Ngarrindjeri language, kinship lines, Aboriginal laws and Ngarrindjeri culture. The Ngarrindjeri community have a strong connection to their land and water; it is not only of cultural significance to them, but also a means of living. Their culture is underpinned by their spiritual ancestor, Ngurunderi, who they believe taught them how to live off the land in a sustainable and respectful way, and therefore, they have relied on the fresh produce, medicine and materials that are found in the water and bushland on their Country. Both the Kurna community and the Ngarrindjeri community recognise the important connection that they have to their Country, and this is emphasised through their belief that their people, their land, their water and all other living things on their Country are connected as one. Although Aboriginal people are separated by clan, nations and land, there is a sense of connectedness between them, particularly through ceremonial exchanges. For example, the Kurna and Ngarrindjeri communities are linked through the river system in South Australia and traditionally tools, weapons and materials were exchanged between the two Nations.

### **Ethnographic Research: Characteristics and Application to this Research**

Ethnographic research is significant because it can reveal the complexities of daily life; researchers are committed to conduct ethnographies as they value the opportunity of reviewing and making sense of moral experiences, no matter how fragmented they may be, because it offers them a method of entering into the social surroundings of the participants (Parker, 2007: 2250). They believe that researching people in 'action' is the only way to capture social and cultural phenomena, as laboratory environments with strict controls of variables diminish the complexities of the social world and social interactions (Murchison, 2010: 4). Therefore, the focus of ethnographic research studying life outside a controlled

environment is derived from the aim of preserving the complexity of human lives and their interactions, and is essentially a written representation of culture (Van Maanen, 1988). The central aim of ethnographic research is to collect rich data which is holistic to the lives and experiences of the people being studied, whereby insights into people's views and their surroundings in which they live can be acknowledged and understood (Reeves et al, 2008: 512). Ethnographic researchers are able to gain an understanding of the daily lives of people or communities and can obtain knowledge of important cultural aspects, which are essential to their participants' lives, and this trait makes ethnographic research unique. Arguably, the participation of researchers in ethnography is valuable because being in the field and talking to participants surrounded by their natural environment enables findings to be more reflective of social reality, than those gathered through other methodologies (Hammersley, 2002: 66).

The collection of first-hand data by ethnographic researchers not only offers the opportunity for emotion to be understood, but the relationship between the participants and researcher allows richer data to be collected through the establishment of trust gained in the field. There is a variety of data collection techniques encompassed within ethnographic research; however, participant observation and various forms of interviews and oral data collection are considered the most prominent. Through applying these approaches simultaneously, research can be enhanced, as the findings gathered from each form of data collection can complement and 'illuminate' the other (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 102). For example, what a researcher learns in interviews could offer an alternative outlook during observations, and vice versa (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 103). The style of interviewing that is adopted in ethnographic research is argued to be reflexive (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 117). Ethnographic researchers rarely go into interviews with a completely blank agenda; they will usually have a theme or topic that they want to discuss in the interview. However, the overall interview is flexible and the researcher will ensure that the interview flows naturally through the flexibility of how they structure their questions and what questions they choose to ask, usually taking guidance from the participants' answers, persona and emotions. The participation is valuable in establishing data which enables behaviours, beliefs and participants' ways of life to be understood, which in turn contributes to the notion of ethnographic fieldwork producing accounts that are reflective of reality (Hammersley, 2002:

66). Through ethnographic researchers immersing themselves in the environment and daily lives of participants, and actively participating in activities, a relationship can be established with participants and trust can be gained. Therefore, the rapport between the researcher and participants is usually established early on in the fieldwork and this assists in the availability of rich and holistic data being gathered during interviews.

The lived experiences shared by Aboriginal Australians are central to this research and the flexibility of ethnographic research ensured that the voices and accounts of participants could direct the fieldwork and data collection. Because Aboriginal Australians have such a strong sense of culture, both individually and as a community, the ethnographic approach ensured that the complexities of Aboriginal life and their culture were acknowledged and included in conversations, which added depth to the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

With the complexity of my research, it was important that the correct ethical considerations were made. Alongside gaining ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores University, I had conversations with those who have valuable experience in research ethics to gain further understanding of how best to ensure research ethics were maintained throughout my research, including at times when fieldwork can be unpredictable. I also sought clarity on the use of verbal consent, with the understanding that written consent was not going to be appropriate for this research because of the complexities of forms and the struggles some Aboriginal participants may have concerning literacy ability and understanding the nature of the research.

After ethical approval was gained, I contacted an Elder in the Ngarrindjeri community to discuss my research and ask if it would be possible to visit their community as part of my research, and I also contacted an academic in Adelaide who passed on contacts for Kurna Elders who I arranged to meet during my fieldwork. Although the Ngarrindjeri and Kurna Elders gave me approval, I was aware that there was still a need for me to gain participants' consent when in the field, especially as many participants were introduced to me by other

participants. Therefore, I had conversations with the Ngarrindjeri Elder and Adelaide academic to check that my approach to gaining consent verbally would be the most appropriate, both in terms of ability and trust. An added benefit of using verbal consent in my research, was that it gave greater opportunity for potential participants to ask questions about my research before consenting. I wanted to ensure that individuals fully understood what my research entailed, including the different forms of gathering data and use of photography, and I was aware that one approach to describing this may not be suitable for all participants. Using verbal consent gave me the flexibility to explain my research and what consent meant in different ways so that individuals had a clear understanding. For example, some people indicated that they understood and consented with minimal confusion or questions, whilst others required more questions to be answered and the purpose of my research to be explained in alternative ways. Also, I felt that verbal consent would not be as intimidating as using written consent because I could explain the need for it in a conversational format.

Moreover, when planning for my fieldwork I wanted to be realistic about gaining consent and understood that sometimes it is not possible to gain consent in advance. Because I was going to use different data collection techniques in the field, I knew that verbal consent would suit the unpredictability of some data collection methods, such as generalised conversations and weaving sessions when people join part way through. Cultural activities can be a large affair for Aboriginal communities, with wider kin attending and some people turning up late. Therefore, as I planned to engage in these activities, as well as having informal and unplanned conversations with individuals who I had not met before, I was aware that it could be difficult to ensure that consent was obtained in advance. In these circumstances, with my cultural understanding, I knew it was not appropriate to gain consent during some cultural activities, and instead a conversation was necessary afterwards to explain my research and to gain participant consent. I was fortunate that at some of the activities which I engaged in, the Elder who was running the session explained to everyone who I was and why I was visiting the community, and then gave me the opportunity to talk to everyone and ask for consent prior to the activity commencing. Nevertheless, this was not always the case and therefore I had to ensure that ethical consideration was given to circumstances, applying my cultural understanding of the most appropriate means to do so. For example, there were occurrences

whilst I was having a more generalised conversation with individuals in Adelaide, such as in art galleries or coffee shops, when the conversations turned to a topic which related to my research, during which valuable data was disclosed. In these circumstances, I therefore had to obtain consent after the conversations, as it was not possible to get it in advance. Additionally, it was vital that throughout my fieldwork participants remembered that I was in the field conducting research, which occasionally individuals forgot when sitting and yarning because they felt comfortable and were engaged in conversations. Although there was never a time when a participant discussed something that they later regretted, I wanted to ensure that I maintained ethical consideration and consent by continually reminding individuals of why I was there and asking for verbal consent. This further indicates how one form of written consent would not have been appropriate, as there was the need for reminding and reobtaining consent, whilst also maintaining the flow of a situation so that disruption did not interfere with data collection or the participants' activities, including cultural occasions.

When gaining consent, I was conscious of the impact that trust, or lack of it, may have on the willingness for participants to consent. However, the use of verbal consent made it easier for conversations to take place about my research and thus helped to establish a form of trust which led to individuals feeling confident to consent and participate. A further aspect of research ethics which supported individuals' confidence in participation was the use of anonymity. In early conversations with Elders prior to my research, it was suggested that some Aboriginal Australians would only feel comfortable to participate if they were kept anonymous because it would be reassuring for them if they could speak to me openly and not worry that their voices would be identifiable, especially if a significant proportion of voices were interwoven in my research. Although this notion was originally raised by the Elders in advance of my fieldwork commencing, it was apparent in the field, particularly through questions when gaining consent, that the majority of participants were eager to be anonymous because they were concerned about their voices being identifiable in the research. Therefore I decided that participant descriptors, such as gender, age, status and job, would be used to provide an essence of the individual speaking, whilst maintaining anonymity (see Appendix A for participant descriptors). To ensure anonymity was maintained throughout the research, initials of participants were used in fieldnotes and transcripts during data collection, so that

no names of individuals were used anywhere within the research, thus respecting the wishes of participants to be kept anonymous.

### **In the Field: Organising the Research**

My fieldwork focused on two locations, Adelaide, the State capital of South Australia and the Coorong, a rural coastal region. My approach to my fieldwork was different in each location due to the size and environments of the locations. In Adelaide, there were fewer opportunities for me to participate in activities, so I spent more time having conversations with participants and making observations around the city.

During my fieldwork, I used mainly participant observation, unstructured interviews and informal conversations and testimonies to collect data, along with gathering documents and artefacts. The centrality of the Aboriginal voice in my research was paramount, and therefore I had to ensure that in order to collect rich data, I needed to take my participants' views into account throughout the data collection. In conversations with an Elder, it was revealed that there were some suspicions around the use of technology to capture conversations within the community. Potential participants were concerned that there was a lack of transparency and that they would not be able to retract something that they had said as well as feeling uncomfortable and having to constantly think about what they were saying. Although I did explain that with the use of a recorder their comments could be deleted or retracted at any time, participants wanted to be able to see when I wrote something down during a conversation, so they would know their comments were noteworthy. Therefore, as I wanted to ensure that the views of my participants were respected, I needed to use an alternative data collection method during interviews and conversations, whilst still providing myself with the best opportunity to collect a vast quantity of rich data. I decided that pen and paper would be the best option to allay the participants' concerns and provide transparency for them when I was writing throughout the fieldwork. The Elder appreciated the change of approach, and was reassured that it resolved the community's concerns affiliated with the use of technology. Going into my fieldwork, I was aware of the challenges associated with the absence of a recorder and collecting data manually, however I put several strategies in place so that my

research was not limited in any way. Firstly, I ensured that the data I collected was typed up and securely backed up every day, to prevent any loss of data. During interviews and conversations, I also used a technique to ensure that I did not miss any data collection; I asked participants questions which would either encourage them to elaborate on the point they had just shared, or to clarify the point they had made to check I had heard them correctly. This was not only beneficial for the depth of the data I was collecting, but it also provided me with adequate time and opportunities to check the data I was collecting at that moment. Finally, I was aware of the importance and value of emotion in this research, and as part of my data collection it was vital that I made notes referring to my participants' apparent emotions, including facial expressions and tone of voice, throughout conversations. Whilst I was unable to use technology to capture data, the use of pen and paper did not hinder my research, it actually gave some participants confidence to open up because they felt comfortable in the setting.

Although it wasn't possible to use technology to record data collection during interviews or conversations, I still used it at times to capture observational data; for example, when I was in a large city setting. In order to capture my observations in the rawest details, I recorded myself explaining what I had observed, including settings, emotions and other key details. If I was not able to make a recording during a certain observation, for instance when I was around participants, I would then make one as soon as possible afterwards so that I could still verbally capture my observations, viewpoints and details. Doing this enabled me to capture all of the details at the earliest opportunity, and this form of data collection was then used alongside my other data collection processes of notetaking and photographs, to help support the collection of rich data presented in this research.

Ahead of arriving in Adelaide, I had been in contact with a few participants; however, during my fieldwork I was introduced to other people by participants who were already involved in my research. This proved to be very valuable in collecting broad and detailed data, which included participants telling me about personal experiences of how they are currently feeling isolated and alienated whilst living in the city, and the influence that historic events have on education, health and employment initiatives. I established connections with new participants

through informal conversations and whilst I was making observations around Adelaide; for example, an Aboriginal man on a public bus in Adelaide agreed to participate in the research after we had a conversation about why I was visiting the city. I found out which areas of Adelaide are popular meeting places for Aboriginal Australians and I regularly walked around these, such as Whitmore Square, observing daily life. Whitmore Square has become a central meeting point for some Aboriginal Australians and because of this, several homelessness and drug and alcohol addiction charities have set up centres around the square. I decided to visit the same cafés frequently so that I became a regular customer, and it was in one of these that I met several charity workers who, in turn, introduced me to some of their clients. Whilst in Adelaide, I visited the South Australian Museum and the Migration Museum several times as part of my fieldwork to find out how Aboriginal culture is portrayed, and also visited Tandanya Aboriginal art gallery on the recommendations of some participants. In contrast, my data collection in the Coorong region was more equally divided between participant observation, unstructured interviews and informal conversations. Before visiting the Coorong region, I was in contact with an Elder from the Ngarrindjeri community who helped me to organise my visit. She was essentially my gatekeeper for the community, who introduced me to members of it and invited me to participate in cultural activities during my stay.

In order for me to include the Aboriginal voice at the centre of my research, I needed to establish rapport and trust with the community members. I was aware that I was going into the field as an outsider, not only non-Aboriginal, but also British, and therefore was mindful of the challenges I could face with participants not being comfortable to talk with me. However, my contact with Elders prior to commencing my fieldwork was beneficial in this trust building process. An Elder who I was in contact with prior to arriving in Australia holds a particularly high status and is held in high esteem within the Ngarrindjeri community, in addition to being known to some Kurna people. Therefore, it was particularly advantageous that she welcomed and introduced me herself to others when I arrived and that she reassured other community members about my research. The rapport I had already built up with the Elder was symbolic to other Ngarrindjeri members, showing them that I could be trusted and that I had their best interests at heart. Nevertheless, despite this being an advantageous step in helping me gain the trust of Aboriginal Australians, and potential participants, it did not

mean that trust was never an issue; instead, it was a constant process that I had to evaluate and build on throughout my fieldwork to ensure that the people held a positive view of me and considered me trustworthy. As part of this process, it was vital that community members understood that I valued their voices, their way of life and their culture, and small actions, such as not using a recorder, provided them with the knowledge that I was listening to them and respecting their views.

Engagement with community members was a key element in the process of establishing and maintaining trust. I was eager to participate in activities throughout my fieldwork because of the value it added to my research in capturing daily life. However, it was also important for community members to see me engaging in their cultural activities, such as yarning gatherings, weaving sessions and going for walks on the land, as it illustrated to them that I was keen to learn and develop an understanding of their culture and its importance. This also enabled me to demonstrate respect towards their culture, and them as individuals and a community, and it was important that if I did not understand something, I asked them to explain it, as I learnt early on in my fieldwork that they have a passion to educate people about their culture and way of life, and this was a further opportunity for me to demonstrate my enthusiasm to learn more about them. Yarning sessions were one of the most valuable aspects of establishing and maintaining trust because I did not just listen to what was being spoken, but also engaged in conversations which developed a mutual understanding and respect for each other. In these sessions, opportunities arose for conversations with the Ngarrindjeri weavers about trust which allowed me to show my understanding of why it can be a challenge for community members to trust non-Aboriginal people. This in turn helped me build trust with individuals during my fieldwork. I found that staying in the area and participating in cultural activities, including bushwalks and weaving groups, created opportunities for me to have informal conversations with participants, which subsequently led to longer unstructured interviews and more community members wanting to talk to me. I learnt how they have been affected by the Stolen Generations and what ramifications this has on daily life, and also how integral Aboriginal culture is in Aboriginal identity. Not all the participants in my research identified as being Aboriginal, but the non-Aboriginal participants all had some kind of connection to Aboriginal Australians. The connections included being an academic in the field

of Australian and Aboriginal studies, working for a charity supporting Aboriginal Australians and, the loosest connection that a participant had to Aboriginal Australians, was a woman whose daughter works in the welfare services handling Aboriginal cases.

In addition to carrying out participant observation, unstructured interviews and informal conversations, I collected a variety of documents throughout my fieldwork, both in Adelaide and the Coorong region (Appendix B). During my fieldwork, I regularly checked the daily newspapers for relevant news stories (Appendix B: 6, 7 & 8) and also watched television interviews to keep updated on current affairs, which contributed to my understanding of Aboriginal Australian perspectives more generally in Australia. Other documents, such as leaflets and brochures, were given to me by participants during conversations and were associated to certain services or events (Appendix B: 1, 5 & 9). Overall, my ethnographically informed research appeared successful in gathering rich data about the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians and how these can be informative to the education, health and employment of Aboriginal Australians. The fact that I am non-Aboriginal, which could have exacerbated distrust, did not appear to be impact my fieldwork as I established a rapport with participants to ensure that trust was gained.

### **Building Relationships in the Field: Addressing Power Relations**

Although I was fortunate because my connection with the highly respected Elder supported the establishment of trust in the field, I did still encounter challenges with a few individuals who were wary of my presence. However, it was important that I responded to this reaction with patience, rather than being frustrated or disappointed, and instead showed compassion and expressed that I understood why there was an element of distrust. Through showing this understanding and having patience, I was able to build a rapport with community members who were unsure of me when I arrived, and they became happy to participate in the research and have conversations with me. It was paramount that I gained rich and insightful data in order for the voices to be prominent throughout my research, and I was very fortunate that the bond I built and the trust gained with the Aboriginal Australians enabled me to do this, including learning of personal and emotional testimonies which required significant trust. The

key lessons I learnt throughout my fieldwork in regards to trust, which I continuously used to strengthen my rapport with the communities, was to be transparent with them, understand that trust takes time to build up, and never be hesitant to ask them questions about their culture or way of life.

Also, I was aware of the complex power relations which can exist, specifically those between the researcher and participants when a trustworthy relationship needs to be established. The roles that researchers and participants are assigned in research projects, specifically data collection, can cause power imbalances to occur; these therefore need to be addressed, or at least acknowledged, in order to redistribute and rebalance the power in the researcher's and participants' relationships (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009; O'Connor and O'Neill, 2004). Therefore, with this knowledge, alongside my understanding of how being non-Aboriginal could impact the status I was perceived to hold, I was conscious of needing to have processes in place to ensure that the potential impact my status may cause on my research was minimised. This was of particular importance as the relationship between myself and Aboriginal participants was reflective of those which they disclosed to me when they discussed their lived experiences of issues relating to racism, distrust and assumed superiority within Australia.

Firstly, I ensured that there was never the assumption amongst participants that once something had been said in my presence, then it could never be retracted or stopped from being used in my research. Throughout the course of my research, both before, during and after my time in the field, I explained to participants that if there was anything they shared with me that they did not wish to be included in my research, then they had the right to ask me to withdraw that information from my data. By being this transparent, it enabled them to maintain authority over the data they shared with me, deciding for themselves what they were happy for me to include. At times during the data collection process there were instances when participants shared particularly personal and emotive experiences that they had lived through, such as the impact of the Stolen Generations and also drug and alcohol misuse experiences. During these conversations, I emphasised that I was collecting data for research and clarified how it would be used and presented, as well as confirming that they consented to the information they were disclosing to be used. Due to the longstanding issues of trust

between Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal people, it was necessary for this research that there was a strong rapport and sense of trust between me and participants. Therefore, I wanted to ensure that the trust I had established with participants did not overshadow the realisation that I was conducting research or how the information they were sharing would be used, particularly when it was details of personal and emotive experiences. Additionally, it was important that I was engaging, rather than just observing, in cultural activities during the fieldwork, as this assisted me in minimising the impact that my status of being non-Aboriginal may have on my understanding of situations I came across in the field. The participation provided me with a greater understanding of the perspectives of my participants, as I was able to have a similar vantage point of certain cultural activities and aspects of their daily life, although I recognised that it was not exactly the same outlook as that of the community members. Throughout my research I endeavoured to make sure that my data collection did not interfere with the individuals' daily lives, particularly aspects which are reflective of their culture. Although I drew upon my own knowledge of Aboriginal culture to fulfil this, I also had ongoing conversations with Elders to ensure that community members were still happy with me visiting and conducting my fieldwork. In these conversations, I also took the opportunity to discuss any upcoming cultural activities which I was invited to join, to ensure that I understood any specific sensitivities or protocols which I needed to be aware of or follow. This further enabled me to have in-depth conversations with Elders about what I had engaged in within the community and opened up the opportunity for them to talk in more depth about cultural connections. Through these conversations I tried to minimise the status associated with me being a non-Aboriginal researcher overpowering the role of the community members in my research, specifically by valuing the importance of their culture more highly than the ability for me to gather specific data. Whilst I obviously wanted to collect rich data for my research, I did not want to gather it at the expense of disrupting community life or cultural traditions.

Once my fieldwork was completed, I still wanted to ensure that processes were in place so that my status would continue to have minimal impact on my overall findings. Therefore, I maintained communication with gatekeepers and Elders from the Aboriginal communities after my fieldwork, so that I could share my findings with them and also check that my data

collection and interpretations from the field had not interfered with the accuracy of the data I had gathered, particularly as I am non-Aboriginal. Although it was not possible to continue communication with all participants after my fieldwork, I was aware of this during the data collection process and therefore attempted to have multiple meetings with the same participants, allowing the opportunity for data from one meeting to be checked in subsequent meetings, including my understanding and interpretation of what had been said. The early stages of analysis and writing up of research notes and transcripts throughout my fieldwork gave me the chance to have conversations with participants about themes or specific points that had been raised by other participants during the fieldwork. This added further depth to my understanding, as well as the richness of the data, as it enabled views of multiple Aboriginal Australians to be gathered in regards to one topic. Moreover, the inclusion of direct quotes from participants was significant in physically having the Aboriginal voice at the heart of this research; however, it also added additional benefits through minimising the risk of misinterpretation by a non-Aboriginal researcher. Using verbatim quotes enables others to read the exact words of participants, so that although reflections and interpretations of data are provided, the rawest data that was collected is still being presented and thus reducing the risk of meaning being altered.

A significant risk that arose from me being non-Aboriginal was the suspicions that Aboriginal community members had towards my research, and this stemmed from previous communication between the community and other non-Aboriginal Australians where they did not feel that their interests were taken seriously or respected. To alleviate the suspicions amongst the community, I maintained transparency about my research as a whole, including the purpose of it, how I was collecting data, how I would use that data after I finished my fieldwork and reiterated the centrality of their voices in the research. I ensured that this was a continuous process, and also kept an open dialogue about the data that I had already collected, whilst maintaining anonymity. For example, I would share findings that I had collected, explaining their value and interest to me, both as a researcher and personally, and then occasionally this would turn into a broader conversation where participants would elaborate on the point being discussed. This not only enabled transparency of the data I was collecting, but also gave my participants an opportunity to understand how I was interpreting

and learning about their culture, lived experiences and, more generally, their daily lives. Furthermore, I regularly explained the reason and my determination for why I was conducting my research, in addition to how my interest in Aboriginal studies was ignited, despite being non-Aboriginal and British. It was important to share this with the Aboriginal communities as it gave me the opportunity to illustrate why I was passionate about conducting this research, whilst also providing them with the knowledge that I had every intention to be respectful towards them as individuals, and their lifestyle, and to show that I did not have the same attitude as those other non-Aboriginal people who had not shown them respect previously. Finally, I also ensured that the communication I had with Elders throughout my fieldwork provided opportunities for any concerns that community members had regarding my fieldwork to be shared with me. This not only allowed me to be aware of suspicions or concerns, but also to have conversations about them, learning why they were arising and to clarify and alleviate some of them. Essentially, the key to maintaining a trustworthy and professional rapport between myself and participants, and to help minimise the impact of my status, was continuous communication throughout my research.

### **Grounded Theory: Analysing the Research Findings**

The presence of the Aboriginal voice is crucial in my fieldwork and therefore I have provided a detailed presentation of the findings, not only providing descriptions about the daily lives of my participants, but also their opinions, perspectives and emotions towards situations and experiences. The necessity for ethnographically informed research to include the voices of participants has been viewed as advantageous because of authenticity and the added value of explanation and reasoning which it offers (Geertz, 1974; Van Maanen, 1988). As highlighted through Geertz's (1973) thick description, writing descriptively enables a level of analysis that can be used to understand the significance of behaviours, feelings, events and actions of participants through an emphasis being placed on the detail and context of the findings. The emphasis placed on narratives is an important trait of thick description that complements the inclusion of direct quotes in this thesis; narratives voice the perceptions and stories of participants which is particularly important in order to understand their emotions and opinions and provides an insight into lived experiences (Dawson, 2010). Through this approach

I am providing a greater sense of raw knowledge of the lived experiences of my participants, which is extremely valuable in comprehending their experiences of education, health and employment. However, I have also applied grounded theory as a framework to analyse the data to offer a set of concise statements which outline how the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians can influence the effectiveness of education, health and employment services and initiatives for Aboriginal Australians in South Australia.

Grounded theory is an analytical approach which consists of the data being analysed multiple times using coding to identify themes within the research findings, which in turn informs an overall set of explanations of the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Charmaz, 2014; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). It should be noted that grounded theory is not clear-cut, but is complex because of how it has evolved since Glaser and Straus' foundational work in 1967. Although Glaser and Straus are considered the 'founders' of grounded theory, a number of different strands have emerged, and these include constructivist grounded theory, situational analysis and critical grounded theory. The strands all take slightly different approaches; constructivist grounded theory understands and focuses on data and theory being generated by the researcher, knowledge being constructed through participants, and research positioned in the realm of social circumstances which influence it, resulting in the researcher identifying the socially constructed reality of their data (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Clarke's situational analysis focuses on the value of context in regards to a situation, arguing that elements of a situation are just as vital as other aspects of data, and therefore also need to be included in the analysis process in order to better address the complexities of social life (Clarke, 2003, 2005, 2014). Lastly, critical grounded theory has been established through the alignment with critical realist perspectives, focusing on the human perspectives, alongside the processes, social realities and structures which impact the outcome of different scenarios (Oliver, 2012). Whilst there has been acknowledgement of these different strands and the tailored approaches they follow, it has been highlighted how they are all still connected through key principles of classical grounded theory which influence their work (Priya, 2016; Timonen et al, 2018). All strands have the same aim: to develop a theory through questioning processes, interactions and contexts, alongside the application of coding analysis (Priya, 2016; Timonen et al, 2018). A key aspect of grounded theory is how concepts are grounded in the data, and therefore, emerge

from the data through the analysis process, which is then followed by researchers establishing explanations for the concepts and patterns which they have identified in the data (Hood, 2007). The analysis and coding stage of grounded theory is particularly significant as it is the process which researchers go through in order to identify connections which are not always visible at face value, and instead require multiple rounds of data analysis which involve close reading and constant comparisons of data (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 2014). An important part of grounded theory analysis is the requirement of constant comparisons to be made between different aspects of data and between concepts and categories once they have been identified through coding, which then enables similarities and differences to emerge (Glaser and Strauss, 2008; Strauss and Corbin, 2008). In turn, the constant comparisons then provide researchers with explanations of consequences of situations, key events or patterns in the data, which advance the conceptualisation of categories or concepts (Timonen et al, 2018). Unsurprisingly, because of the different strands of grounded theory, different terminology is used when referring to the grounded theory analysis process; for example, classical grounded theory refers to substantive coding, selective coding and then theoretical coding (Holton and Walsh, 2016), whereas Charmaz (2014) describes the processes as initial coding, focused coding and then theoretical coding. Nevertheless, despite the terminology, the theorists all use similar approaches for the coding analysis process, and Timonen et al (2018) outline that the main difference between them is the willingness of researchers to foster connections within the data during the early stages of analysis, and they all result in categories and concepts being derived from the data which then determine the final theory or statement after further refinement.

I also followed certain principles with how my research was constructed, namely my literature review, my flexibility throughout my data collection, which ethnographically informed research lent itself to, and the establishment of my research aims. There is some debate between theorists as to whether a literature review should be written at the beginning of a research project because of the influence the knowledge of research may have on the subsequent data collection. Glaser and Strauss (2008) argue that researchers should go into the field with a completely 'open mind' in order for new theoretical concepts to be discovered, and therefore researchers should not conduct a literature review in advance because it

creates biasness. Nevertheless, Glaser and Strauss have since vocalised their different viewpoints on this matter, after they parted ways, with Glaser (1992) confirming that advance literature reviews on the research area are detrimental to data collection, whereas Strauss and Corbin (2008) recognise the value of a literature review in advance. To add further complexity to this debate, it has been suggested that whilst an extensive literature review should not be conducted prior to data collection, some basic knowledge of the subject and previous works conducted would be beneficial, and there is the recognition that with this knowledge researchers are still able to go into the field with an open mind (Charmaz, 2007; Dey, 1993). I decided to follow the latter argument, whereby I conducted a brief literature review before going into the field, but then revisited it and developed it further once data collection was completed. This decision was made so that I was best equipped to go into the field with some knowledge, but was still approaching my data collection without any predeterminations of what data should be gathered. Furthermore, the establishment of research questions is an ongoing process when grounded theory is applied to research. As I chose to conduct a basic literature review prior to my fieldwork, it enabled a generalised set of research questions to be established, although not used to form the basis of my data collection in the field. This did not predetermine or influence my data collection, as I understood that my data collection would define the final set of research questions. The approach taken in developing research questions has proved to be different within grounded theory, with some researchers deciding not to have any specific research questions before embarking on fieldwork (Corbin, 2009), whereas others change and tailor their questions after data collection, using written memos and analysis to further establish them (Timonen et al, 2018).

There are a number of views about the grounded theory process of analysis concerning when the analysis should begin. One view held is that data collection and analysis should be conducted simultaneously, as that enables researchers to influence further data collection using the concepts which have been identified through analysis whilst in the field (Timonen et al, 2018). However, the practicality of this has been questioned due to the impact time constraints have on this approach and also the importance of researchers needing to maintain flexibility during fieldwork, taking opportunities to gather data as they arise (Corbin and Holt,

2011). During my research, I had to ensure that I uploaded my data electronically whilst I was in the field, as I collected it with pen and paper out of respect for my participants' views regarding recording equipment. This therefore gave me an opportunity to conduct an initial analysis, although not rigorous, whilst in the field and allowed me to identify provisional categories which were of interest at an early stage, enabling me to explore them further during data collection processes. This initial stage of analysis included the identification of concepts, patterns and potential gaps within the data from comparisons being made between transcripts and observations in fieldwork notes and was recorded using memos, so that I could refer to them at a later stage of the research, when a more rigorous form of analysis was applied once fieldwork was completed. Although it was time consuming to conduct early stages of analysis during data collection, I ensured it did not interfere with data collection itself or the time I spent with participants, and instead only focused on analysis whilst I was writing up the data electronically.

Therefore, the process of coding led to my final research questions by understanding the pattern of concepts that were arising during my data collection, which were noted through written memos in the field and then further understood through extensive coding. The first research question, focusing on understanding why inequality persists despite government initiatives being introduced, was shaped through coding highlighting the lack of regard shown towards initiatives and services, alongside patterns within observations detailing the extent of inequality some Aboriginal Australians endure. The topic of trust, relating to my second research question, was determined by the issue of trust being a concept that was first documented through memos whilst conducting fieldwork, and which became more paramount as the analysis process evolved. It was one of the first concepts to be derived from the coding, with initial coding highlighting easily noticeable forms of distrust, which then became more detailed when coding progressed. Explanations for not interacting with services and participants' views of decisions made by different authoritative bodies emphasised the fragmentation of the relationship between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian government. My final research question asks about key factors which support positive experiences within social policies. The many rounds of coding amplified positive experiences of Aboriginal Australians, through highlighting self-determination and community or

Aboriginal-led initiatives which encouraged engagement, and this was supported with written memos of how those initiatives were advertised and viewed within society. Because my research was not confined to a pre-determined set of questions, I was able to approach the data collection with some knowledge of my research area and then establish the questions through using the data collected, as further levels of understanding and interpretation developed from the analysis process. Moreover, when I conducted fieldwork, it was vital that I was flexible in my approach in order to maximise the collection of data, rather than limit it through structure or determining topics through a rigid format of questioning. This approach meant that conversations could follow the flow of participants, even if topic changes were unexpected, which benefitted my research when it came to coding, as the quantity and richness of data allowed rigorous rounds of analysis to take place in order for explanations to be established. Themes were derived from the analysis and coding of the perspectives of my Aboriginal Australian participants and their lived experiences that they shared with me (see Appendix C for examples), leading to a theory of statements.

I conducted my analysis through three stages, each one consisting of numerous rounds of coding and analysis. The initial stage, which has been referred to as 'initial' coding by Charmaz (2014), was the first round of coding that I undertook and involved me going through all the data, including interview transcripts and fieldwork notes of observations. Arguably, fieldwork notes are just as important to include during the analysis stage of research as they illustrate how the researcher has come to know what they know, and the process and experiences they have gone through to behold that knowledge (Barz, 2008). I established what participants, and the data I collected, told me, and began to identify patterns which were emerging as a result of the coding. For example, a pattern within the data emerged regarding changing attitudes towards Aboriginal culture, and these were identified through the coding highlighting direct comments, actions and indirect comments which indicated worry about the continuation of Aboriginal culture. During this stage, I also applied concepts to my interpretations of the data, which I could then use during the second stage of analysis, explained as 'focused' coding (Charmaz, 2014); for example, I used 'cultural attitudes' as a concept for when participants spoke about younger generations not having an interest to learn about their culture. During the second stage of the analysis, using the concepts applied

during the first stage of coding, I analysed more closely, looking for specific aspects of my data where descriptors fit into the concepts. Through doing this the coding became more intensive as I was not only interpreting and identifying new parts of data that fit within the concepts, but I also began asking more questions as a result of the intensifying analysis process and the coding of the data. This in turn began to develop explanations for certain situations that my data captured, such as Elders' comments about the local school being an important factor in keeping their language alive. Asking questions during the analysis enabled me to understand that the school was keeping the language alive, not because it was the only teaching opportunity within the community, but due to the fact that it was mandatory for the children to learn the language at school. Through further analysis, patterns emerged linking the Ngarrindjeri language being learnt in school to the lack of cultural engagement due to children's attitudes towards the language changing once it was not being taught in school; the analysis identified that the children did not wish to learn their language when it was no longer mandatory. Further rounds of coding and analysis helped to establish explanations for data, with a generational gap in how culture is valued being unveiled. As the analysis process progressed, the meanings of the concepts become more detailed and evolved, and with further analysis this led to the theoretical statements of my research being derived. To exemplify the fluidity of the whole analysis process and how the coding can change a researcher's understanding as they read the data more closely, ask more questions and apply more rounds of analysis, my initial concept of 'cultural attitudes' developed so significantly that the final results of the analysis demonstrated how my research illustrated the importance of culture for Aboriginal Australians through its connection to the establishment of trust. This was included in the statements which formed the overall theory that was derived from the application of grounded theory during the analysis stage of my research.

The analysis highlighted the themes of Aboriginal Australians feeling silenced, the issue of distrust and the importance of Aboriginal culture, in relation to education, health and employment initiatives, to be identified as key reoccurring themes amongst participants in both communities. Despite my research being presented in a descriptive manner, grounded theory has enabled me to present a focused set of explanations which are relevant to the everyday realities and lived experiences of the Kurna people and Ngarrindjeri community.

The data I gathered during my fieldwork is rich and has depth because it encapsulates the events and experiences which took place, and it shows how the ethnographically informed research unfolded, giving details of both my own experiences as the researcher and the lived experiences of my participants. Themes emerge during analysis of this data, specifically the analysis of the different experiences of myself and my participants (Van Maanen, 1988). Consequently, this theoretical analysis is appropriate to my research as it addresses how lived experiences can be informative about the effectiveness of education, health and employment initiatives. This theoretical approach was chosen to ensure that I could offer a clear set of explanations to conclude my research which provides clarity on how the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians influence the effectiveness of education, health and employment initiatives and services, in addition to the detailed ethnographic findings being described.

### **The Use of Photographic Evidence**

Although the communities were very reluctant over the use of technology in the recording of verbal data, they were supportive of me using photographs in my research. Using photographs was important as it enabled me to visually capture my observational descriptions and illustrate conversation topics. Essentially, I have been able to provide visual records to accompany the text of my research. Moreover, the role of emotion in my research is vital because it adds perspective to the voices of participants; however, I also wanted to use photographs to help relay the emotions that I felt during my fieldwork. Although the work of Edwards (2005) addresses how photographs are relational objects because they enable history to be articulated through the images, it reflects my own reasons for wanting to use photographs. There is the acknowledgment that photographs can be entwined with oral stories and not only display emotion but can also instil it, with Edwards arguing that photographs can be 'evocative' and provide 'sensory knowledge' (Edwards, 2005: 27). The level of description I have used throughout the research has attempted to convey my own emotions during different scenarios, and therefore the power photographs have to evoke emotion is something I wanted to utilise when capturing moments in the field to offer further insight into my findings. However, my use of photographs was multi-faceted: not solely to evoke emotion in the reader or to portray my own emotions, but also to visually share some participants'

emotions and scenarios that they were living through at the time of the photograph being taken, emphasising the reality of this research. In my research there are specific photographs which portray the feeling of emptiness, loneliness and exhaustion of Aboriginal Australians (e.g. Figure IV.1; IV.2), and these powerful images take the written descriptions of a situation and place them in a more personal sphere, with the photographs capturing and visualising those feelings. For example, the photographs act like a freeze-frame, portraying aspects of a person which people rely on to understand each other's emotions, such as appearance, facial expressions, stance and general surroundings. The importance, and the power, of photographs in my research is in the way they illustrate what I am unable to provide through descriptions, and thus adds a new spectrum of knowledge.

### **Concluding Comments**

In the following chapters, detailed ethnographic findings are presented to enable the voices of the Aboriginal communities to explain their experiences, perceptions and emotions which all contribute to factors that influence education, health and employment outcomes. My use of photographs has allowed me to give those who were not in the field the opportunity to see some of what I observed at the time, and gain a better understanding of what is referred to in the research. Therefore, the use of photographs expands my research from being a written text, to being reality through the photographs capturing different social scenarios, illustrating aspects of cultural importance and evidencing my findings. The conclusions drawn from the application of grounded theory have influenced the structure of how the findings are organised, with the inclusion of Aboriginal voice, understanding the issue of trust, and the importance of Aboriginal culture shaping the chapters.

## Chapter IV

### The Unheard Voice: Silencing Aboriginal Australians

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*We aren't asking for a lot; we just want to be respected and for our voices to be valued. Life is tough for us blackfellas, and with the problems that we've got we could be asking for a lot more. But we're not. We just want to speak for ourselves and not have whitefellas speak for us. Why do we deserve to be ignored and silenced? What did we do? If they would listen to us they might understand our points of view and realise that we want the same as them. We want change. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong Region, 10/02/2018)*

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Across literature, the use of the Aboriginal voice is not a common approach, and my conversations with Aboriginal Australians confirmed that this is reflected in society by feeling silenced. During the early stages of fieldwork, I noticed the importance of the Aboriginal voice when many Aboriginal Australians expressed how grateful they were to have conversations with me, and I reassured them when they were concerned that they were talking too much. During my many unstructured interviews (see Appendix D for examples), the Aboriginal Australian participants realised that our conversations were not simply forms of gathering data, but instead they valued them as a source of knowledge and understanding about themselves and their community. Indeed, talking to them directly was the best way to fully understand their situation, including its causes, and explanations for it and possible methods of improvement in their daily lives. This focus on people formed the very foundation for this research project, and therefore explains why Aboriginal voices are so evident throughout this thesis. When I explained my research approach to my Aboriginal Australian participants, and that their words would be quoted throughout the thesis, it became clear to me through their words and facial expressions that they were genuinely surprised. They said this is because they are not often asked by researchers to speak about their issues, including their experiences of education, health and employment, mainly because assumptions are usually made on their behalf. My approach helped to gain their trust due to my enthusiasm to include their Aboriginal voices, particularly when telling their stories or recounting personal experiences.

The responses I received from my Aboriginal Australian participants in my research also indicated the extent to which most Aboriginal Australians are feeling silenced and unable to make themselves heard and valued. This chapter will focus on the unheard voices of Aboriginal Australians in contemporary South Australia, and their experiences of being silenced. A case study from my fieldwork of the Ngarrindjeri community's suffering during a severe drought will help to set the scene and provide the context for the chapter, as it will show the way that the community's warnings were ignored by the Government and policy makers, and their unheard voices and silencing exacerbated the negative impacts of the drought on this community within the context of education, health and employment policy. The case study thus highlights the downfalls of the Australian Government, the negative impact on the relationship between this Aboriginal community and the Government, and, arguably the most vital aspect, the lack of local community engagement in tackling this crisis and rendering policy legislation effective.

### **A Case Study of Silencing: The Coorong Drought**

In 2007, the Coorong region was in the middle of a severe drought, which began in 2001 and lasted until 2009. For the Ngarrindjeri community, known as the 'water people', this affected them greatly. It was not just the physical drought that impacted the community, but also the handling of the situation on the authorities' parts and the lack of communication. During the worst stages of the drought, no water flowed into the Coorong for three years, causing the wildlife in the area to decline. Whilst the situation has improved, more than ten years since the start of the drought, I noticed during my fieldwork visit that members of the Ngarrindjeri community still felt the knock-on effects quite heavily. During my general observations in the area, and even without expertise in water management, I could see that the conditions of the water and surrounding banks were poor, and that wildlife was suffering due to the poor water quality. Prior to this research, I was in the area in 2014 and again in 2016. During this current fieldwork visit, there were noticeable changes in the environment compared to 2014 and 2016, with the most noticeable difference being the conditions of the water and the large areas of exposed sand where the water was no longer coming as far inland (Figure IV.1.). The

photograph of the Coorong National Park captures how idyllic and beautiful the scenery is in the Coorong region, with the white sandy shorelines, blue water and impressive sand dunes. As I stood taking the photograph, the scenery and view were just as striking as they appear in the image. However, what the photograph does not indicate is what makes it more significant; whilst the beauty of the area is depicted, the emotional pain of the Ngarrindjeri community is masked, and the environmental damage of the drought is invisible to those without knowledge of the drought or of what the area looked like prior to it. Therefore, the image illustrates how valuable the community's knowledge of the land is, as it can offer an understanding of what others cannot see. This change is significant, because the Ngarrindjeri community hold the land and water system in very high regard, both from a cultural perspective and as important resources for the area, and so it was clear to me that there was a problem even before meeting with members of the community.



**Figure IV. 1: The Coorong National Park**

*The Coorong National Park holds great cultural significance to the Ngarrindjeri People. The large areas of exposed sand are illustrative of the lasting impact of the drought on the environment. During previous visits to the area, the water was significantly more inland. (Author's own image, Coorong Region, 09/02/2018).*

During my time in the Coorong, the topic of the drought came up in numerous informal conversations as well as during arranged meetings and it became clear to me that members of the Ngarrindjeri community are fully aware of how much has changed around them over the years since the drought first hit them, and so are very conscious of the current situation.

Whilst the cause of drought is often related to natural causes, specifically weather, I was quick to understand that there were also other complications surrounding the drought in the Coorong. An underlying problem which first came to light at the beginning of the drought, but has since developed further into a larger concern to the Ngarrindjeri, is the lack of communication between the Australian Government, authorities and the Ngarrindjeri community. I noted a great level of frustration and anger in relation to the drought, especially towards the handling of it and the circumstances leading up to it, amongst members of the community, particularly Elders. Initially, members of the community noticed signs that their water quality was deteriorating and that wildlife numbers were declining to below average, which was unusual for that area. I was eager to find out more about the environment prior to the drought developing, and so I arranged to meet with a male Ngarrindjeri Elder, who has extensive knowledge of their lands (Appendix A: 1). The Elder was keen to show me photographs of how the Ngarrindjeri's land looked prior to the drought, and he described how it had been to live in the area then, when the community could fish in the Coorong, regularly see pelicans on the water and flying overhead and how they could witness the seasonal changes of vegetation across their lands. During the emotive conversation, he became visibly upset when he explained the signs of deterioration in the environment that the community members noticed:

Fish were dying, plants were dying, and we were even losing our pelicans. The water was so low and far out, and it was saltier than normal. This was all before we knew it was actually a drought, well we knew but before it was declared by authorities. We were, and still are at times, watching a disaster happen right in front of us, but what could we do? The land, the water, the wildlife, we respect it all and it means so much to us. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

In the early stages of the drought, many community members became more vigilant of the conditions of the wildlife, plants and water. Several community Elders contacted authorities to inform them of these changes and to warn them of the continuing deterioration. However, their attempts to communicate, to be heard, had no impact, and they received no acknowledgement or replies from the authorities. The Elders felt ignored and frustrated by this lack of communication, and more importantly, their powerlessness in halting the growing

severity and lasting impact of the drought. I heard first-hand about this frustration in one of the early conversations I had during my fieldwork, when I met up with a female Ngarrindjeri Elder who has spent her whole life in the Coorong area, to discuss daily life (Appendix A: 3):

The first time we tried contacting them the phone didn't get answered, so we tried calling again later in the day. That time we decided to leave a message so that someone could get back to us, it was important and we could see the changes happening right in front of us and something needed doing. Weeks passed and nobody had called us back, it was frustrating. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

The Elder conveyed how sensitive the situation was, not just because of the repercussions of the drought on the land, but also due to the ramifications of the lack of an open dialogue between the community and authorities, particularly in their attempts to comprehend the drought and put preventative measures in place. Her feelings clearly resonated with other community members; for instance, the male Ngarrindjeri Elder who I quoted earlier (Appendix A: 1), also told me of the difficulty they faced when trying to inform authorities of their concerns:

We tried so many ways of getting in contact with them, but nothing. We even thought that there may be a problem with their phone, or ours even though we'd made other calls, so we sent emails. More than one because we weren't getting replies. There were about three of us Elders who were trying to not necessarily get an answer about the drought, but just have our concern acknowledged and listened to. It was painful knowing there was a problem out there but not having anyone listen to us to try and help out. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

Whilst the deterioration of the environment was clearly a concern to the Ngarrindjeri community, their concerns grew with the declining population of pelicans, which became a pivotal problem during the initial stages of the drought. Although many bird species hold cultural and spiritual significance to the Ngarrindjeri people, they consider pelicans to be the most symbolic and sacred bird to their community. Pelicans are a totem and hold spiritual significance because the Ngarrindjeri community believe that the birds deliver different

messages to individuals, depending on the time and place the pelican is seen. The decline in pelicans was emotional and disturbing for many Ngarrindjeri community members, as they discovered dead pelicans at the water's edge daily and were aware that the numbers were in rapid decline. Moreover, a variety of sea life also died as a result of the drought, including fish, cockles and crabs (*Figure IV. b.*), whose numbers remain low. The concerns for the water conditions and its consequences on the surrounding environment grew consistently. Even so, many in the community, specifically the Elders, felt they were ignored by the authorities about the decline in wildlife. Once again, they felt frustrated about their concerns for wildlife being ignored by the authorities in the early stages of the drought, which was reflected by the female Ngarrindjeri Elder who I quoted earlier (Appendix A: 3):

We were trying really hard to get a response from them, but it just kept falling on deaf ears. Time after time we tried to contact them, but nothing happened. We know that we aren't water experts, that's why we wanted their help. We know our land and our wildlife, and we know when there's a problem. And there was a problem. But they just weren't listening to us. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

A clear example of community members' frustration and helplessness in the situation, is visible in the physical impact of the drought and their deteriorating land; for instance, in the masses of dead crabs found lying amongst the rocks on the edge of the Coorong, the carcasses of the sacred pelican at the water shore and the many other visible signs of the drought.



**Figure IV. 2: Dead Crabs near the Coorong**

*The Ngarrindjeri Elders were keen to show me the effects that the drought was still having on their land and the wildlife. I was informed that the crabs had died as a result of poor water conditions and levels. (Author's own image, Coorong Region, 09/02/2018)*

### *Living off the Land*

To contextualise and put the significance and implications of the drought into perspective, I wanted to understand what my Aboriginal Australian participants referred to as 'living off the land', which has spiritual significance to them. The plants and wildlife that inhabit their land are important resources for the Ngarrindjeri community who have continued their ancestors' cultural traditions and they were keen to show how they do this. Some members of the community explained to me three main uses: herbal remedies, diet and cultural activities. Herbal remedies are a significant part of Aboriginal culture that have been, and will continue to be, passed down through generations, although they emphasised that these are used alongside modern medicines. Geographic location influences the herbal remedies used by

different Aboriginal communities, making the remedies specific to each community, as the native flora available on the land is relied upon to devise the remedies (Bell, 2003). A Ngarrindjeri Elder took me on a bushwalk to show me first-hand how vast their land is, and how resourceful it is for them, even though they are not able to rely so heavily on the land since the impact of the drought. He guided me to a viewing platform, which stands tall above the treetops, and explained that everything I could see was Ngarrindjeri land. The view was breath taking, even on a cloudy day; in the distance, I could see the Coorong and a vast area of scrubland. I was pleased to see signs of recovery from the drought in one area where there was lush green vegetation. (*Figure IV. 3*) As we continued our walk the Elder pointed out a *watji* bush and explained that the leaves are used to clean your mouth. When trying the remedy, I initially got an acidic flavour when I chewed on the leaf, but the acidity gradually disappeared and afterwards my mouth felt refreshed. The Ngarrindjeri Elder, who had visited the Coorong regularly with his parents when he was younger (Appendix A: 2), explained that there are other remedies in the bush that they still use:

As well as the plants, we also use the salt and mud from around here. The salt is used during burials, although we don't use it as much as our ancestors did. We also have blue mud down by the water and that's really useful to stop bleeding. You just put some mud on the cut and it helps to stop the cut bleeding. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 13/02/2018)



**Figure IV. 3: View across the Ngarrindjeri Land**

*The view from this platform stretched across the traditional land of the Ngarrindjeri. The Elder who was taking me on the walk through the bushland wanted to emphasise the vast amount of resources that the Ngarrindjeri have been able to live off for many generations. (Author's own image, Coorong Region; 13/02/2018)*

The vast water system that surrounds the Ngarrindjeri community influences their diet, with community members revealing to me that they eat a lot of fish on a regular basis, specifically Murray cod, barramundi, yabbies and cockles. Meat is also included in their diet, with emu and kangaroo traditionally hunted by the Ngarrindjeri; however, I was informed that this is more of a rarity and the seafood is preferred by the community. During an informal meeting with several members of the Ngarrindjeri community, I was told that due to the severity and duration of the drought, traditional Ngarrindjeri practices were at risk, and the wildlife and plants struggled to survive. Early in my fieldwork, I wanted to discuss daily life, so I met up with a female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3), who has a prominent position in the community, because she has spent her whole life in the Coorong area. She described the impact of the drought on the Ngarrindjeri's diet:

Fish is such a big part of our diet. Us Ngarrindjeri live off mainly fish, but the drought made the quality of the water so bad that we couldn't eat the fish from the Coorong

anymore. It wasn't just the poor quality of the fish, but it was also how many there were. So many fish were dying; there was barely anything for us to catch because the numbers were so low. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

A Ngarrindjeri man (Appendix A: 4) who was also in the room, but who had been sitting quietly throughout the conversation, spoke up and elaborated on how the impact of the drought on wildlife and plants was distressing, as well as limiting cultural practices:

During the worst parts of the drought, the bush had lots of plants dying which meant that we couldn't use them for remedies and the animals were struggling to stay alive. We would find kangaroos lying on the ground struggling because of the heat, not having shelter under trees and there not being a lot of water. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri man, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

The Ngarrindjeri community's reliance on the water and land around them became more evident as I talked to the Elder on the bushwalk and in other conversations I had. I became aware that they were conscious of the risk to the community's health due to the impact of the drought on their environment. Being unable to live off the land as much as they were prior to the drought, led to a series of consequences, one of which was the increase in costs of living. Community members had to spend more money on food to compensate for the lack of fresh food they were able to gather off their land, and this in turn meant that the quality and quantity of produce was sparse and impacted their diet choices, which the community realised could adversely affect their health. Although the drought is officially over, it is evident that there is a reluctance among the community to revert to their way of living prior to the drought, partly because of the limitations caused by the lasting impact of it on their environment. Before the drought the community could fully engage in traditional cultural practices associated with living off the land, but now they are unable to fully return to that way of life due to the poor quality of the water, vegetation and wildlife. The situation has improved marginally in the area over the past years, with the increased level of water being one example mentioned in conversations, but there are still vast improvements that need to be made, particularly in the water quality in the Coorong (*Figure IV. 4 & 5*). When I was by the water it was not just the colour of the water, but also the brown foam that lays along the water's edge

that were indicators of the poor water quality. When I raised this with community members, they explained that the cloudy water and the foam are consequences of the drought.



**Figure IV. 4 & 5: The Water Conditions of the Coorong**

*Prior to the drought, the water along the Coorong used to be clear blue; however, the current water quality is a constant concern for the Ngarrindjeri community as it has drastically deteriorated. The water not only looks murky and unclean, but it is causing a lot of issues for the native wildlife. Author's own image, Coorong Region, 09/02/2018)*

Whilst diet was compromised during the drought, other cultural practices were also detrimentally affected. I was first introduced to weaving when a Ngarrindjeri Elder showed me a couple of baskets that she had woven and gave me a book on the Ngarrindjeri way of weaving (Appendix B: 3). She explained that the art of weaving within Aboriginal culture is different for each Aboriginal community; the style, patterns and material are all individual to each Aboriginal community and their location. Similarly to the diet and herbal remedies, the resources that are available to the community on their land influence cultural practices. For the Ngarrindjeri community, they weave using rushes that are native to their area and grow along the Coorong. I was invited to join the weaving group on several occasions where I was taught how to weave a basket in the traditional Ngarrindjeri style (Appendix B: 4), whilst community members told me of the wider aspects that are related to the weaving practice. I

realised during conversations that they understand there to be a connection between mental wellbeing and weaving, specifically during the collection of the rushes. When the Elders collect the rushes with the younger members of the community they are outside and have the opportunity to talk together, both generally and about matters that concern the younger generation. Community members are aware of the increasing concern regarding mental health within Aboriginal communities and therefore value this specific time that the Elders and younger generation have together which supports the younger generation to maintain a positive mental health. This time is also understood to be valuable for teaching cultural skills, with the Elders and the younger community members collecting the rushes whilst the children are taught the cultural skills of weaving. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) who has a prominent position within the community is a skilled weaver and has exhibited her work in museums across Adelaide and she explained how important it is for the Ngarrindjeri Elders to use the time collecting the rushes as a teaching opportunity to secure their culture in future years:

We take the young ones to pick rushes. We want this tradition to live on for many generations, and the only way we can ensure that is by teaching them the skills. You have to pick the rushes in a certain way so that they grow back, and we've got to teach that to them. Whilst we're picking the rushes we tell them stories (The Dreaming) about the land, stories which have been told for many years by our ancestors. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 15/02/2018)

She explained that there is a specific way that the rushes need to be picked and prepared (*Figure IV. 6*), and it is essential that these skills are taught by the Elders to the younger generations in order to secure the art in the future and maintain the Ngarrindjeri style of weaving. The Elder went on to explain how the rushes are prepared, a complex process of soaking at different temperatures to make them more durable and storage to ensure that the rushes damp for longer. When I heard this explanation, I understood why it was so important for the Ngarrindjeri Elders to educate the younger generation on this as it is a very niche method, and therefore, information that the younger generation will only learn if they are taught by the Ngarrindjeri Elders. Conversations I had during these times with the Ngarrindjeri weavers made it apparent that weaving holds a significant place in their culture because it

acts as a channel for them to ensure the continuation of their culture. The importance of weaving was clarified when I discussed how the drought had impacted weaving with two female Ngarrindjeri Elders (Appendix A: 3 & 5), including the Elder who has a prominent position in the community who told me about picking the rushes:

Weaving is more than just making something, it's our culture. When we weave, we yarn. Depending on who we are weaving with, we yarn about different things. If it's the young ones then we yarn about the Dreaming and tell them stories. It's a good time to educate them. Most of our culture is passed down orally so we have to make time to talk about our culture with them and teach them things. It's our responsibility. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 15/02/2018)

The young ones nowadays spend so much time inside; getting them to help us pick the rushes makes them come outside and on the land. It's healthy for their minds to be on the land, talking and taking part in something which they need to learn to pass onto the generations after them. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 15/02/2018)

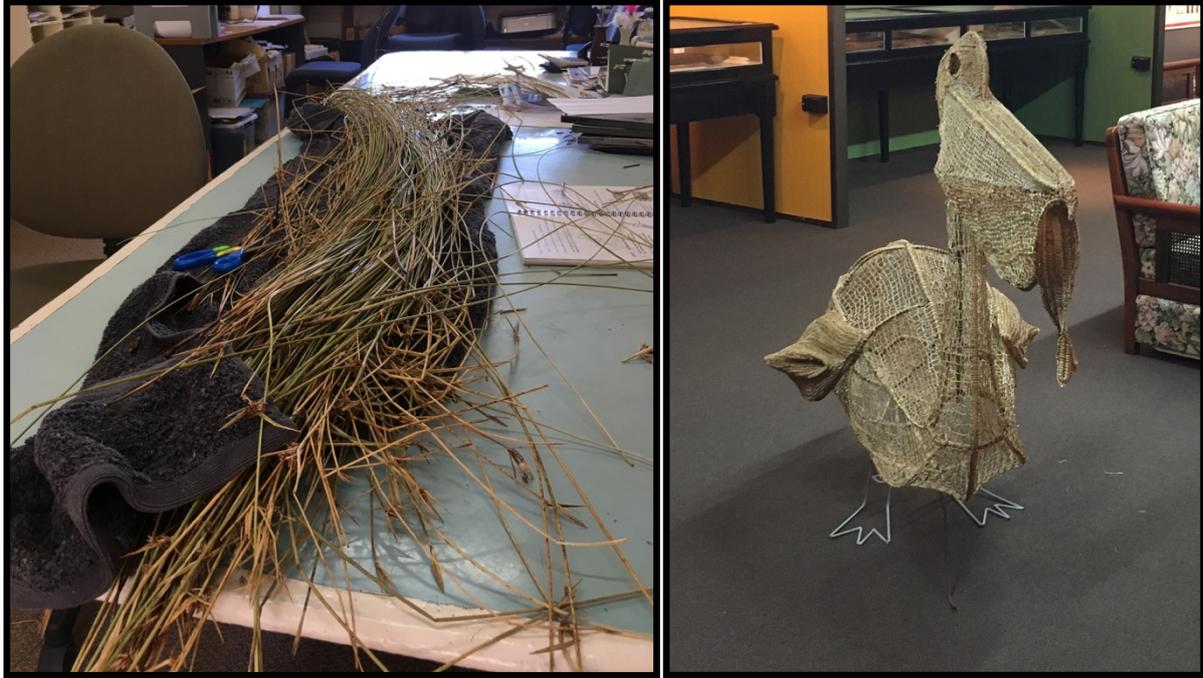
Consequently, the drought had an indirect impact on the Ngarrindjeri's weaving, due to the quality of water restricting the growth of the rushes. The rushes grew at a slower rate during the drought, and those that were growing were not of the same quality compared to the rushes the Ngarrindjeri community picked prior to the drought. This subsequently led to the Elders not taking the young community members to collect rushes as frequently, which the Elders expressed their concerns over as they understood the importance of this time with the younger community members. Additionally, the quality of the rushes meant people could not participate in weaving as regularly as they had been, which overall, was a disappointment for community members. However, despite this, the Elders were determined that they had to find an alternative solution to rectify the situation. It was clear in conversations that there was a sense of fear that they would have to stop weaving as a result of the drought, especially in the early stages when they were unsure of how long the drought would last or how much more severe the conditions may become. The Elders knew that they had to find a different way to continue their cultural traditions, with a focus on maintaining a healthy growth of rushes. They managed to find an alternative location to collect the rushes; it was a lake that

was further inland and had not been impacted by the drought to the same extent as the Coorong. However, the change of location subsequently meant that the routine of the Elders taking the younger community members to collect the rushes could not be such a significant occasion, compared to visits to their old location, but even so, despite the differences, the Elders seemed relieved that they could continue picking rushes and weaving together with the younger community members. Having seen the quality of the water for myself, I knew that although the Elders took action, the current situation must still be difficult for them. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3), who has a prominent position within the community and is a skilled weaver, gave one example of other measures they have taken to ensure that resources do not limit the continuation of weaving. She explained how she has started growing the rushes out the back of her house to ease the difficulties the community has faced since the drought:

Whilst we have it a lot better now, things aren't what they used to be. I've even got rushes growing out the back of my house so that I know there are rushes around, even if we can't go and pick them by the Coorong. But going and picking rushes from behind my house isn't the same for the young ones. As Elders, we're worried that the young ones don't seem as bothered with our culture and their responsibility of keeping it going, and that's why the collecting of the rushes is an important time. We can speak to them and show them the culture, so they know how special it is. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 15/02/2018)

During the weaving sessions, the determination amongst the Ngarrindjeri Elders was obvious; even when the drought caused hardships and challenges of locating resources, the dedication they gave towards educating the younger generation about their culture was barely compromised. The Elders understand the importance of cultural knowledge and education, which became evident almost immediately during my fieldwork; I was told that despite the challenges of the drought, cultural education was one area they could not afford to ignore. Weaving also provides a source of income for the community, albeit small, and is a tool of furthering knowledge about their culture outside of their community. Some woven items are sold in local shops, whilst others are exhibited in small independent and large State museums and galleries. For example, there is a woven pelican on display at a small community museum

in the Coorong region and a whale was in the process of being woven for a large museum in Adelaide (*Figure IV. 7 & 8*). Through exhibiting their work, they are ensuring that their cultural practices continue to be learnt by people outside of their community.



**Figure IV. 6, 7 & 8: Ngarrindjeri Weaving**

*The rushes get wrapped in a damp towel after they have been soaked to maintain the moisture, as I learnt that it is imperative that the rushes are damp when weaving. The woven pelican, which is their*

*totem animal, is on display at the local community museum, and during the fieldwork the Ngarrindjeri People were working on a large woven whale which is a commission for a large museum in Adelaide. (Author's own image, Coorong Region, 15/02/2018)*

The lasting impact of the drought is visible through observations of the area and conversations with members of the community. The damage the drought has caused has been impactful on two levels, one being the physical environment and the other being the community themselves. During my fieldwork, I could clearly see indicators of severe drought, with dry and cracked terrain and cloudy water. I learnt through conversations and photographs community members shared with me that less wildlife native to the area is seen, in comparison to the environment before the drought. However, the impact on the Ngarrindjeri community themselves is arguably more severe because of the personal implications, ranging from diet through to limiting activities which were beneficial for maintaining culture and individuals' wellbeing. Nevertheless, the most frustrating aspect of this situation, which was evident through peoples' tones and expressions during conversations with members of the community, is the belief that the drought did not have to occur, or could at the very least been minimised. There is the understanding throughout the community that authorities ignored the indications and signs that Elders had witnessed on their land and had thought were untoward, which they believe were early signs of the drought. As soon as the early indicators were noticed by Ngarrindjeri Elders, they informed authorities immediately but to no avail. The understanding that the drought could have been prevented had concerns been listened to and taken seriously at governmental level when Elders first contacted them, was a reoccurring viewpoint in conversations throughout my fieldwork. There is no dispute by the community that the primary cause of the drought was severe weather conditions, and therefore it would have been more difficult to prevent the situation altogether. However, it bothers the Ngarrindjeri community, and has done since the drought first began, that things could have played out very differently if they had not been silenced and instead their concerns had been heard, trusted and acted upon. The male Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 1) who spoke to me about the effects of the drought and showed me photographs is also a prominent political activist and spokesperson for the community. He spoke to ministers and authorities

on numerous occasions but his claims were not investigated, which he still feels very frustrated about:

We told them so many times that birds were dying and the water wasn't coming in as far as it used to. We were ignored, and now this is what we've been left with. Whether this would've been different if we weren't blackfellas, don't know. But I reckon we would've been heard when we first got in touch with them. It makes me angry because we're left to pick up pieces from the damage that was caused because they didn't want to listen to us. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

When I first arrived and had initial conversations about the drought and how the land has changed, I found that the community felt let down by authorities and the Australian Government, the people who are the experts in water management and environmental issues. The lasting damage of the drought on their land has hit the Ngarrindjeri community hard, especially because of its cultural importance to them. However, the feeling that their concerns were not valued, and they were silenced and ignored, despite their perseverance was evidently the one aspect of this whole situation that has been most hurtful and that community members are sensitive about. An initiative introduced by the Australian Government that targeted prospective parents during the drought exacerbated these feelings, especially as the Ngarrindjeri community saw it as putting an extra strain on their dwindling resources. The Maternity Payment initiative, known as Baby Bonus, was originally introduced by the John Howard Government in 2004 and was abolished in 2014 and replaced by an alternative initiative, Family Tax Benefit Part A (Klapdor, 2013). The initiative was introduced to encourage families to have children; however, concerns have been voiced that the payment was seen as a potential encouragement for teenage pregnancies or women from low income families to have children because of the monetary incentive, in addition to controversy around how the payments would be spent within families (Gans and Leigh, 2009; Risse, 2011; Garrett et al, 2017). All mothers in Australia received the payment of the Baby Bonus regardless of their financial means or the number of children they had; initially the payment was made as a lump sum to parents, but it was changed to be paid fortnightly in the latter years of the

initiative. The payment value was increased twice before it was abolished, once in 2006 and again in 2008, both times being increased by nearly \$1000 (Risse, 2011: 214-215), which arguably made it more of an incentive for some people who would benefit from the additional finance. It is important to note that in 2006 and 2008 the Ngarrindjeri community were still living in severe drought, and therefore they saw these policy amendments and increased payments as a painful realisation that they were continuously ignored and that their concerns were not being understood. The Ngarrindjeri Elders explained that this led to the impact of the drought increasing: families were encouraged to have more children, which put extra stress on the environment and resources. The Australian Government increased the payment again when the drought was at its peak and this caused problems for the community; there was a need for money by some families and so the incentive was high, but at the same time the living conditions for the community were at their worst. Ngarrindjeri Elders spoke of this example as being the most upsetting and frustrating moment during the drought as it increased the problems for the community, in terms of resources, and caused tensions between community members. It is not new knowledge that some of the people in Australia who would benefit the most from an initiative that provides additional finances are members of Aboriginal communities. This was echoed in the conversation with the female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 5) when she was venting her frustration about the community being silenced over the drought in parallel to the Australian Government causing more difficulties for them:

The baby bonus was the most frustrating time I think; it's one thing being ignored but then they go and up the amount that they're paying mothers. They were paying for mothers to have more children. It's a big incentive to people here, we don't have a lot of it. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

There was disappointment and concern amongst the Elders at the Australian Government's decision to increase this financial support, because of the heightened strain it caused on the community, both resources and personal well-being. The limited resources available for the community during the drought and the stress of the ongoing circumstances had an impact on the health of community members. For example, I was told that there was limited and poor quality fish available and the Coorong water was no longer safe to consume. After months of

trying to be heard the Ngarrindjeri Elders were proved right, which was a relief as they knew that they could eventually have help dealing with the drought. The dependency that the community has on the water resources has since been recognised by the Australian Government, in addition to it acknowledging that during the drought the Coorong was unable to meet the supply levels needed and a pipeline had to be built to get water to the Ngarrindjeri community (Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources, 2013: 9). This acknowledgment is bittersweet for the Ngarrindjeri community as it is a form of recognition that their community is no longer completely silenced, but the action should have been taken during the initial stages of the drought. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 5) who first mentioned the financial initiative for new mothers, expressed her disappointment in the Australian Government's decisions on where to focus their attention:

We were really tested during the drought. We had to change what we ate because we couldn't eat the fish anymore, and that (Coorong) water we used to drink. It was really testing on our health, we were pushed to our limits. But even so, the Government decided to up the baby bonus, which would persuade our people to have children because of the money. The Government was focused on building up the population in a crisis. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

A more sensitive consequence of the drought was the exposure of ancient burial grounds. Being aware of the cultural sensitivity around talking about the deceased, whereby some Aboriginal Australians choose not to speak the name or display photographs of the deceased, as they believe it could disturb the deceased's spirit, I did not speak frequently about this with community members. However, one Elder was happy to discuss how, because of low water levels and change in land conditions, the community noticed burial grounds of their ancestors becoming exposed across their land. The exposure of the remains left them vulnerable to damage, from both natural elements and wildlife. The Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 2), who grew up visiting the Coorong regularly with his parents, highlighted just how significant the exposure was, both on the remains and emotionally for the community:

From being protected for many years to then having them exposed and getting damaged was tough. We did all we could to carry on trying to protect them when we found them, but it was tough because so many were getting exposed. They're our people and it was hard to see. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 13/02/2018)

This Elder was comfortable to explain the process of Aboriginal burials to me, in addition to explaining more specifically why the drought was impacting burial sites. Aboriginal burials often take place around the coast and rivers because the land is favoured in these locations as it is usually better equipped to accommodate cultural aspects of the burial. Additionally, the Elder explained that in normal circumstances, this terrain is considered ideal for protecting the remains from environmental elements. Therefore, the Ngarrindjeri have burial sites around the Coorong which during the drought were impacted by the low water level. Due to the sensitivity and cultural importance and practices in relation to the deceased within Aboriginal culture, this consequence of the drought was highly significant to the Ngarrindjeri community and was understandably more upsetting, rather than frustrating. This was highlighted during a short conversation I had about the exposure of burial grounds with an Elder who became tearful. It was clear that the feeling of sadness was towards the guilt they felt for not being able to prevent the exposure of burial grounds, in addition to feeling upset that, at the time, there was no sense of remorse or urgency to help the community which led to the community feeling silenced and powerless.

The levels of stress and the sense of frustration that swept across the Ngarrindjeri community during the drought was expressed in conversations during my fieldwork. I was aware that members of the Ngarrindjeri community still have strong emotions in regards to how they were silenced and the lasting impact on their environment which they are now living with, even though the drought is officially over. One of the Elders (Appendix A: 1) who spends a lot of his time on the land making sure that everything is in a healthy condition, and who has deep knowledge of the wildlife and environment, explained the extent of the damage to me. He believes the damage has been caused as a consequence of the community being silenced and

ignored when they first raised their concerns and places his blame on poor water management by the Australian Government and authorities:

The Ngarrindjeri won't see water, fish or pelicans like they used to. It will never be the same. Time won't fix the damage that's been done, bad management by the Government contributed a lot to the extent of the drought and water conditions. They did this to us and to our land, it's an unfair world. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The Elder's disappointment and anger towards the Australian Government and authorities was made clear in how he expressed himself through frequent swearing and the tone of his voice. He was one of the first Elders to try to contact authorities to warn them of the developing drought and was therefore at the forefront of the rejection and felt he personally had no voice, in addition to the consensus feeling amongst the community that they were all being silenced. As he spends so much time on the land, he is constantly reminded of the hardships and damage his community have experienced and continue to experience today. When he was talking to me about the current feelings of anger and sadness felt towards the drought, he was keen to clarify that what he was saying is felt by many community members and not just himself. In their views, if their voices had been acknowledged and acted upon at the very beginning, they would not be in the situation that they currently find themselves.

Whilst I was with the community, I had the opportunity to look at some photographs of the Coorong before and during the drought, and the changes were evident. In addition to the clarity, colour and depth of the water from the shoreline, the photographs clearly depicted how the landscape has changed over the years. As I looked at the photographs, an Elder explained that the Coorong has been left with the worst quality water which is still killing the wildlife. Although I had seen some of the scenery of the Coorong and surrounding areas of the Ngarrindjeri community before visiting them, I decided to visit the land and water surrounding them again with the knowledge of the difficulties and changes the community had been through. I wanted to observe the area with the informed knowledge of traditions that they carried out before the drought and that they are no longer able to do. The Coorong is still a beautiful place, which when standing by the water had a sense of tranquillity and calmness. I

could understand why the Elders would pick the rushes and talk to the younger generation whilst by the water; it was a soothing environment which seemed perfect for sharing the Dreaming stories and talking to the younger generation about any concerns they may be experiencing. However, I know that it was easy for me to ignore the dirty water and the lack of pelicans on the Coorong because I had not grown up there, spending days by the water talking about the significance of the land and sharing cultural traditions with Elders. When I walked further along the water's edge, I stopped to watch two pelicans on the Coorong, and I realised how visible the consequences of the drought must be to the Ngarrindjeri community. Whereas the lack of fish would only be noticeable when fishing or looking into clear water, the presence of pelicans is easily recognised due to their stature, visible when driving along the road parallel to the Coorong or walking along the water's edge in a secluded, quiet area. Therefore, I understood that for the Ngarrindjeri community, especially their Elders, having lived a life seeing flocks of pelicans on the water or in flight but now being a rare sight, it must be an emotive vision, not least because the pelican is their totem animal. Although the Coorong is a picturesque landscape, there was evidence that the drought is still hard-hitting on the environment. The water conditions were poor so that nothing could be seen, there were indications on the banks and rocks of how far up the water would have come and there were dead shellfish, fish and pelicans near the water, all of which I had been informed about by community members. Unfortunately, it was not just the Coorong itself that had suffered the implications of the drought; the two lakes located nearby, Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina, also had poor water conditions. However, the lakes both appeared to be in better condition than the Coorong and appeared to attract more wildlife, including pelicans (*Figure IV. 9*).



**Figure IV. 9: Lake Alexandrina, South Australia**

*Lake Alexandrina in the Coorong Region has not been as harshly impacted by the drought, and as a result it was more common to see pelicans and wildlife on it. (Author's own image, Coorong Region, 09/02/2018)*

#### *The Dreamtime and Dreaming Narratives: Aboriginal Connections with the Land*

The relationship Aboriginal Australians have with their land is significant because of the cultural connections they share with it. The Dreamtime is considered a period of time that has never ended, and it is the foundation of religion and culture for Aboriginal Australians. Whilst there are variations of the Dreamtime and Dreaming narratives, different Aboriginal participants explained during conversations that Aboriginal Australians believe that the Dreamtime is the story of how the world evolved and how human beings were created, and this is learnt through the Dreaming. The Dreamtime refers to the very beginning of existence, and Aboriginal Australians believe that Aboriginal ancestors created the world during the Dreamtime. Aboriginal people, rocks, rivers, plants and animals were all part of the creation, in addition to other landforms. As a result of the Dreamtime, Aboriginal communities received their land, totems and their Dreaming narratives. Through the Dreaming, Aboriginal

communities learn of the sacred sites where they perform ritual ceremonies to keep the ancestral spirits alive. Each community has different Dreaming narratives, as they are unique to their land, however there are some Dreaming narratives that have the same base story with minor changes to make them relevant to location. During a weaving session, a Ngarrindjeri Elder explained that some of the Dreaming narratives of neighbouring Aboriginal communities are almost identical to those of the Ngarrindjeri and are told to teach the same lessons; however, there are minor differences between the narratives to make them specific to the communities themselves. For example, a large proportion of the Ngarrindjeri's Dreaming narratives are focused on the waters, sand dunes and bushland that surround them, which explains why the effects of the drought on these areas specifically caused a lot of upset and anger for the Ngarrindjeri community.

The cultural narratives, which are a part of the Dreaming, explain the existence of the land and the stages of the Dreamtime to Aboriginal Australians and are shared amongst all members of Aboriginal communities. However, Aboriginal participants were keen to emphasise the importance of the narratives being told to younger community members. Educating the younger community members on the Dreaming narratives ensures that the cultural tradition of orally passing the Dreaming down through generations continues, in addition to maintaining knowledge of the Dreamtime in the future. After Ngarrindjeri community members explained the role of the environment in the Dreaming narratives, it was evident why there is a strong sense of dedication towards maintaining and protecting the land and wildlife that surrounds them. The stories are focused on the land structure, native plants and animals, and when these narratives are told, Elders take the younger generation to culturally significant locations and narrate the Dreaming stories that relate to where they are, highlighting areas in the landscape that are referred to in the Dreaming that are of spiritual importance. However, as the impact of the drought increased, community members became concerned as some aspects of the Dreaming were not as visible as they had been. When I was weaving with some of the Ngarrindjeri Elders, they narrated *Ngurunderi*, which is one of the Dreaming stories that they consider to be of particular importance to their community, and elaborated how different parts of the narrative formed the landscape around their

community. The narrative is specific to the landscape along the Coorong, Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina and the surrounding waters.

In this Dreamtime, Ngurunderi was travelling down the River Murray in his canoe in search of his two wives and he was following a Murray Cod, the *Pondi*, which was widening the stream into a river; they explained that this part of the Dreaming describes the existence of the River Murray. The narrative continues with Ngurunderi attempting to spear the giant fish; he missed the first time, which is represented by Long Island near the Murray Bridge, his second spear then wounded the fish which escaped into Lake Alexandrina. Finally, Ngurunderi's brother speared the *Pondi* and cut it into pieces, throwing the pieces into the water and creating the land structure and wildlife. From the *Pondi*, Ngurunderi created the variety of fish in the waters for the Ngarrindjeri to live off. When looking for his wives, Ngurunderi stood on his huts to put his canoe in the sky before pursuing his wives; the huts are the hills at Mount Misery, and the canoe is the Milky Way. When fleeing Ngurunderi, the wives built a raft to cross Lake Albert, the grass-trees and reeds used for the raft are now the grass-trees and reeds by Lake Albert. During his pursuit, Ngurunderi fought Parampari, a great sorcerer, whose burnt body is the granite boulders located near Kingston. During Ngurunderi's journey pursuing his wives, he camped along the Coorong where he dug soakages and fished, before crossing the Murray Mouth and throwing a large tree into the sea which created the seaweed bed and fishing ground at Middleton. In a moment of anger after finding his wives, Ngurunderi threw spears into the sea near Victor Harbour, which are now visible as the off-shore islands. When his wives escaped to the land, which is now known as Kangaroo Island, he called for the water to rise to drown his wives; their bodies formed the rocky islands that are known as The Pages. The Dreamtime ends concluding that Ngurunderi is now a star in the Milky Way. The way that the Elders narrated the story was an experience in itself, as they told it with an abundance of emotion and charisma which brought it to life. Although I was only told this one Dreaming narrative, I could understand how the time spent sharing these narratives is valuable for community members.

This is just one of many narratives included in the Ngarrindjeri's Dreaming which emphasise the cultural significance of the land for the community; this specific narrative is considered important by the community because it provides explanations for the existence of a broad area of their landscape that surrounds them. It also provides an explanation for why there is a strong emotional attachment to the land and wildlife, and the passion which was projected by the Elders when narrating this story further illustrates this. The Elders pointed out that their attitude to their Dreaming is found in every Aboriginal community; each community has its own unique Dreaming are all unique to each community, but they all share the same emotional attachment to the landscape around them and use the narratives to highlight and appreciate sacred sights and areas of cultural importance.

#### *The Australian Government's Response to the Drought*

During a conversation with a Ngarrindjeri Elder who is a political activist, he mentioned that a report had been released about the response of the handling of the drought by the International Centre of Excellence in Water Resources Management and the South Australian Department for Water (2012). The report is based on a workshop, that consisted of community members, services and authorities, and was the first step in reviewing the process of handling the drought in South Australia. In the report, the drought was referred to as a 'catastrophe', however it also alluded that it was difficult to manage because it was a 'creeping natural disaster' as it was not known when it would reach its worst or when it would be over (ICE WaRM, 2012: i). The report is relevant to draw upon as it highlights steps that were taken by the Australian Government and authorities, procedures and approaches, which were successful and aspects that need to be improved for future legislations and strategies. Overall, the Australian Government states that they 'successfully achieved their goals' during the drought, which include water being available at all times for human need and water quality maintaining a suitable level for potable use (ICE WaRM, 2012: ii). When I mentioned this specific point to some of the Ngarrindjeri Elders during conversations, they gave a dismissive laugh and explained how it highlights the lack of understanding of the community's dependency on the land and water, as they could not continue using the Coorong water

themselves. One of the primary issues the Australian Government identified was community engagement, to inform the communities of the severity of the situation and to liaise decisions and progress with them (ICE WaRM, 2012: 12). Various strategies were put in place to support community engagement: community groups were set up, community liaison managers worked with community groups, the Minister attended public meetings to answer questions and there were regular meetings with communities and departmental staff (ICE WaRM, 2012: i). The topic of community engagement made interesting conversation with Ngarrindjeri community members because whilst they agree that community engagement is fundamental when handling any issues impacting Aboriginal communities, they found the examples of community engagement presented in the report confusing as they did not realise the strategies were put in place. The report reflects the community's viewpoint on community engagement as it clearly acknowledges the necessity of it, both throughout the drought and for future legislation, with conclusions stating that 'the importance of community engagement in informing policy was re-enforced' (ICE WaRM, 2012: 22). Engagement with the communities was considered a vital mechanism during the drought, although the report does acknowledge the reluctance of some departmental workers in contributing to the community engagement (ICE WaRM, 2012: 12), which could offer an explanation as to why Ngarrindjeri Elders do not think community engagement was actively being sought during the drought. On reflection, it is clear from the report that the authorities have the same viewpoint as the communities in that community engagement is valuable and necessary, whilst the report also recognises that community engagement is individual for each community. The fact that the Ngarrindjeri community feel that there was a lack of information about the authorities' response to the drought and any progress made, suggests that improvement to community engagement is needed for better understanding of a situation affecting communities. The Ngarrindjeri community members went through a very emotional and stressful period of time when the drought was impacting numerous aspects of their lives, however communication could have eased these emotional hardships. Dialogue with communities is pivotal, and this is supported by Durose et al (2013) when writing about the value of co-design and co-production of public services. They explain the importance of communication with communities, especially as it is essential in building 'trust, allay fears and generate understanding' (Durose et al, 2013: 330). In conversations with different community members, it was clear that they had little idea of

what actions authorities were taking during the drought, but if they had been informed of the additional work done by the public sector, the community might have been more reassured during that difficult time.

There are two points in the report that are significant in reflecting the concerns that community members told me. Firstly, the impact of the drought on the Ngarrindjeri community; it is acknowledged within the report that the drought had lasting effects on different communities, specifically their livelihoods and their levels of confidence (ICE WaRM, 2012: 23). Secondly, the report states that 'slow response of the Australian Government cost communities dearly' (ICE WaRM, 2012: 13), indicating that if the Government's response time had been quicker, the impact might have been minimised. These two points in the report are noteworthy because they support the concerns that Ngarrindjeri community members expressed to me. As already discussed, the community felt they were silenced and ignored when voicing their concerns about the drought and the extent of the environmental damage, which I witnessed first-hand, and their strongly held belief that it could have been significantly less if they had been heeded.

Whilst the community understands that the drought could never have been prevented completely, there is the firm belief that some of the implications of the drought could have been prevented or minimised if their warnings had been taken seriously. The attitude of the Australian Government and authorities, in this case, raises further questions. The approach to policy and procedures regarding the drought was overly pragmatic; this approach resulted in the Aboriginal culture being overlooked, which damaged the relationship between the community and authorities. The report by the water authorities and Australian Government highlights the necessity of community engagement and understanding how all Aboriginal communities are individual and therefore require different approaches to engagement, crediting community engagement as a 'positive mechanism' in dealing with the drought (ICE WaRM, 2012: 19). Whilst this is a positive acknowledgment by the Australian Government, namely that communities need to be included in discussions, Ngarrindjeri Elders contradicted

this acknowledgement by the Government, expressing that they felt ignored and not included in discussions. This contradiction indicates that community engagement was not effectively utilised during the drought. This therefore raises further questions regarding a difference of understanding between communities and authorities about what is considered as community engagement. The lack of recognition of the cultural significance of the environment that Aboriginal participants explained suggests that there was little respect shown towards the Ngarrindjeri community and their culture, which in turn raises the question of how the community is valued by the authorities. The community was very conscious of the little respect they were shown, as its members felt they were not valued, which consequently made it difficult for them to understand that their interests were at the forefront of the Australian Government and authorities when trying to rectify the drought crisis. Since the drought, the Australian Government has further announced that the management of the water was partly to blame for the severity of the drought; too much water had been taken from the Murray-Darling Basin, the source of the water that flows into the Coorong. Therefore, the cause of the drought was low rainfall in addition to the lowest inflow into the Coorong in history (Department for Environment and Water, 2017), but the low inflow into the Coorong was not a revelation to the Ngarrindjeri community as they had originally tried to inform authorities about these low water levels. The knowledge of the low inflows of water, a result of poor water management, further suggests how the severity and level of impact of the drought might have been minimised, if the community had been successful in communicating with authorities. A new strategy, the Basin Plan, has been implemented in an attempt to prevent the same severity of drought in the Coorong region again (Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources, 2013). Members of the Ngarrindjeri community, specifically an Elder who has extensive knowledge of the land and focuses his time on managing the environment, expressed their relief that some form of strategy had been put in place which will assist in protecting their land. However, it was also clear through the lack of positivity about the strategy that they want to let time pass before they can confidently say that the strategy has aided them.

The process used to tackle the drought was problematic on numerous levels and overly pragmatic; community engagement, or lack of it according to the community, resulted in the Australian Government and authorities being short-sighted and not recognising the cultural implications. Additionally, communication with the community was minimal and rather than the community approaching the authorities on numerous occasions trying to provide and receive information, the authorities should have been proactive in communicating, updating and listening to the concerns of the Ngarrindjeri community. When working with a marginalised group that holds strong cultural values, a different approach needs to be considered from what may have been successful when working with other groups. The Australian Government and authorities needed to be more considerate, taking into account the cultural implications and concerns of the community, providing reassurance and being in regular contact to create a strong rapport with the community where everyone is working together towards the same goal. Respect and understanding of cultural practices within a community is a significant step in achieving a positive working relationship with an Aboriginal community, something which I learnt and experienced when conducting my fieldwork. From conversations I had with community members and from reading official documents regarding the drought, there are disparities between how the community consider the situation to have been handled and how the Australian Government and authorities believe they dealt with the situation. Conversations I had, not only with the Ngarrindjeri Elders who tried to make contact with authorities about the drought, but also with other community members, accentuated their frustration and disappointment. They felt the authorities ignored them and believed that little consideration for their community and culture was given. However, arguably in a complete contradiction, the Australian Government and authorities prided themselves on their community engagement strategies and preventing the reliance on bottled water because of their response to the drought (ICE WaRM, 2012: i-19). Community engagement is an approach that both the community and the Australian Government agree is vital when implementing policies and strategies, in addition to designing new legislation. However, clarity on what is considered community engagement and the right approach to community engagement is where there is confusion, which led to the dissatisfaction of the community in regards to the handling of the drought and feeling voiceless and undervalued. It is apparent that there cannot be one framework for community engagement that is suitable for all

communities, but instead there needs to be a personalised approach that considers community culture, expectations and voices, developed alongside communities to ensure their needs and expectations are being fulfilled.

### **Re-Silenced: The Australian Government's Rejection of the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's Report**

During my fieldwork, it became clear to me that many Aboriginal Australians are determined to be heard, despite the challenges they face in achieving this. They are constantly trying to find a means for their voices to be heard, whether it be through lobbying outside Parliament, sending impassioned letters of concern to senior Members of Parliament and the Prime Minister or through talking to the media, and they are determined to succeed. Therefore, the aim of including the voice of Aboriginal Australians in the Constitution was welcomed by many Australians, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Hence, when the Uluru Statement was published, Aboriginal Australians were hopeful because they considered it a momentous opportunity for their voice to be enshrined within the constitution, and consequently, many see themselves being silenced through the rejection of it.

The Uluru Statement, formally known as 'The Uluru Statement from the Heart' (2017), was written by members of the Referendum Council, which is made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members. The Prime Minister at the time, Malcolm Turnbull, and the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, jointly developed the Referendum Council to deliver advice on ways to achieve a successful referendum that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution. As part of their role, the council held consultations with both Aboriginal Australians and the wider public to develop a report outlining the recommendations for a referendum that would recognise Aboriginal Australians in the constitution, as well as in the Uluru Statement. Throughout the process, Aboriginal Australians were included in discussions and provided with opportunities to give their feedback and opinions on proposals through regional events that the council organised. Overall, many Aboriginal Australians, including individuals from the two communities I visited, viewed this

approach favourably as they believed their viewpoints were valued and respected. Whilst in Adelaide and meeting members of the Kurna community, I informally interviewed a male Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 15), who had an interest in Aboriginal politics, and worked in an art gallery in the city. He explained that they thought this was their chance to be just as empowered as non-Aboriginal Australians, an opportunity that they rarely receive:

A voice is more than just recognition. We were allowed to be counted in 1967, that's when we were included in the census, and now we want to be heard. Rather than being powerless, we want to feel just as empowered as whitefellas do. This is, I suppose was, our chance at trying to achieve that or at least working towards achieving that. (Personal Communication: Male Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)

During my conversation with him, he gave me an Aboriginal newspaper which he had kept because of its coverage of the lead up to the Uluru Statement (Appendix B: 5). The concluding report, 'The Uluru Statement', published by the Referendum Council, clearly outlines an overarching aim of providing Aboriginal Australians with a voice within Australia through their recommendations. There are three recommendations presented in the report: A First Nations Voice in the Constitution, a Declaration of Recognition outside of the Constitution and the Makarrata Commission, which is unable to be classed as an official recommendation. All the recommendations align with the hopes of Aboriginal Australians that had been vocalised for years leading up to the report, and therefore, explains the positive reactions when the report and Uluru Statement were published.

#### *A First Nations Voice in the Constitution*

The first recommendation, which could be considered the most impactful, is the establishment of a consultation body that is written into the Constitution. To have the First Nations Voice written into the Australian Constitution would be a significant step forward in recognition, empowerment and respect. The proposal of the First Nations Voice is for a specific body to be established, consisting of appropriate representation, that provides advice, information and clarity on matters concerning Aboriginal Australians to Parliament. The body

would be a platform that would allow Aboriginal Australians to have a say on matters that directly impact their people, but it would not hold the same level of power as Parliament or act as an additional chamber. The role of this body would include an opportunity to voice advice and recommendations on laws and legislation which hold particular relevance and significance to Aboriginal Australians, although they would not have any powers to veto any legislation or law. The recommendation by the Council to have this First Nations Voice body written into the Australian Constitution is significant, as it would provide a safety-net to the preservation of the body in the future. There have been various representative bodies for Aboriginal Australians over the years, either in Parliament or who provide advice to Parliament. However, the effectiveness of these bodies to represent Aboriginal interests has been questioned and these bodies have frequently been disbanded through Parliamentary changes. Nevertheless, if the First Nations Voice is written into the Constitution, this could create the opportunity to develop a more effective and empowered Aboriginal voice within Parliament which could not be disbanded. Additionally, to have this recommendation included in the constitution would be a substantive form of recognition of Aboriginal Australians in the Constitution, something that Aboriginal Australians are keen to achieve. As an Aboriginal man (Appendix A: 24) in Adelaide explained to me when I was introduced to him at a charity coffee shop in the city, for advancement in recognition and equality to truly be achieved, recognition needs to be purposeful where their voices are heard and have an impact:

For something to actually happen and for us to actually be more equal, it has to be more than just words. There's no point just having the words written in the Constitution saying that we have a voice, we need something which actually gives us the chance to be listened to and allows us to use our voice. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 13/04/2018)

He was highlighting a significant detail relating to the Aboriginal voice; essentially, Aboriginal Australians are not after a platform where their voice is simply heard, which could be considered more of a gesture from the Australian Government, but instead a platform where their voice has a purpose and can contribute to meaningful change. This recommendation was designed with a heavy input from Aboriginal Australians during the consultation periods with the Referendum Council, and therefore is a significant step in proposing a change that has been long sought after by Aboriginal Australians, and many non-Aboriginal Australians,

enabling the Aboriginal voice to have an active purpose. In conversation with a politically active Ngarrindjeri woman (Appendix A: 6) who was excited at the prospect of the Uluru Statement recommendations, she explained how the changes would work towards fixing two problems: a fragmented relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal communities and being voiceless on issues directly impacting them:

For a long time now, we have had a broken relationship with the Government. Whenever there's a new Prime Minister the questions are asked about how Aboriginal problems will be dealt with, they all say they'll do lots for us, but that never happens. I think Kevin Rudd is the closest we've had to someone doing something right for us, because of the Apology for the Stolen Generations. But with the voice in Parliament, it could help to improve faith in the Government and the decisions they make, whilst knowing that our voices are being heard, and most importantly being listened to and valued. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

The power of having a First Nations Voice in Parliament for consultation purposes would be instrumental in bridging the gap that has formed between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians, where there is currently a lot of tension. Having their voices heard, Aboriginal communities would feel a sense of reassurance in the decisions being made by the Australian Government, in relation to legislation and matters directly impacting them. Moreover, the impact of achieving this reassurance on future social policy legislation would be positive, with Aboriginal communities having a greater understanding that their needs were the primary concern in legislation concerning them and could result in them being more open to change.

#### *Declaration of Recognition outside of the Constitution*

The second recommendation is a proposal for a Declaration of Recognition to be published that is external to the Australian Constitution. It is proposed that the declaration would be legally-binding and passed through Parliament, a motion that would further heighten the sense of acceptance and recognition within Australia. Unity is the main aim of this

recommendation by the Referendum Council, with the intention that the declaration will entail the recognition of Australia's history, not just Aboriginal Australians, but also the British and migrant heritage. Developing a declaration that illustrates mutual recognition of all Australians, rather than only Aboriginal Australians, would signify the effort of trying to rectify the inequality and racism in Australia; it would send a clear message that everyone is equal, and no group are worthier of recognition than another. This echoed the sentiments of an Aboriginal man (Appendix A: 8) whom I met when visiting an art gallery near Adelaide. He initiated a conversation, after learning I had been to the Coorong region:

It would seem more genuine because it doesn't seem like they're just trying to please us by saying that they recognise just us. We are a part of this country, so recognising everyone who is part of it, including us as the First Nations, it would seem like a fairer way to be recognised. And maybe it can lead by example for other Australians, that we are just as important as them in this country. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 05/04/2018)

Essentially, the Declaration of Recognition proposal progresses a mandate which works towards a reconciled country, which is still not close to being achieved. The declaration would act as a strong basis for future legislation, allowing Aboriginal Australians to understand that the aim of the Australian Government is to close the gap in inequality because it has the commitment to ensure everyone is equal. However, currently this is often a question that is asked by Aboriginal Australians because there is no official form of recognition and instead only have the Australian Government's word to go by. Unfortunately, as there have been many failed initiatives on social policies, including the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (2014) that was considered to be ineffectively implemented (Australian National Audit Office, 2017), the Aboriginal Australians who I spoke to feel they need something more substantive than words from the Australian Government about its intentions.

### *Makarrata Commission*

The Makarrata Commission is the third recommendation, although it cannot be classed as an official form of recommendation because it is a legislative one and therefore falls outside the

role of the Referendum Council. Nevertheless, the importance of this proposal, and what it could achieve, ensured that it was included in the final report. The word chosen for this Commission is very relevant and has obviously been chosen purposefully because of the meanings behind it. The word *makarrata* is an Aboriginal word that has two meanings: it refers to people living together in peace after coming together following a struggle or dispute (Northern Territory Government, 2017), and it also means treaty. This recommendation is focused on truth-telling and agreement-making, both of which are areas that Aboriginal Australians have struggled to achieve between themselves and the Australian Government. As a male Ngarrindjeri community member (Appendix A: 7), who had the responsibility for overseeing political and legal matters for the Ngarrindjeri, explained to me, the truth about historic events is a main focus, and necessity, in an attempt to progress towards a compatible relationship between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government:

So many things have happened to us blackfellas in the past. We need to be able to move forward, but that can only happen if the truth is told. We deserve to know the truth and we also deserve the truth to be told to everyone, not just us.

(Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri man, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

Similar to the First Nations Voice being written into the Australian Constitution, having the Makarrata Commission as a formal piece of legislation would add weight to the determination of the Australian Government's willingness to rectify the past and build a positive means of reconciliation. The purpose of the Makarrata Commission would be to provide a supervised agreement-making function that focuses on truth telling between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government, including regional Governments. It would also open up the possibility for more effective communication between the two sides, which arguably would assist in the Aboriginal voice being heard and achieving a more positive reception to future social policy initiatives, as well as enabling the historic past and more recent discrepancies between them to be addressed in a supervised and fair manner.

Essentially, the main objective of this recommendation is to put right the wrongdoings of the past, a topic on which some Aboriginal Australians feel that they have been silenced and violated. Enabling a policy where it forces the historical tensions to be addressed by all parties

involved through the truth telling and agreement-making process could be beneficial for both the Australian Government and the Aboriginal communities. The communities would get the opportunity in a mediated environment to get answers to questions that are still unanswered, whilst the Australian Government could benefit from having a stronger relationship with the communities to ensure a better line of communication. I heard first-hand about this from a Kurna woman (Appendix A: 9) from Adelaide, when I was visiting Tandanya, an Aboriginal art gallery. The woman was giving out leaflets and struck up a conversation with me about my visit to Australia, the Coorong and my research. She volunteered the fact that her family were negatively impacted by historical events and went on to explain how it is just as important to be able to have a conversation about the past as it is about current events affecting them:

We need to have conversations about the past, even if we've been given an apology or something. No matter how much work the Government does, we won't forget what has happened. But it can make a difference by talking truthfully about what happened, because I think people, like the Government, will then be less afraid to talk about the past because there's nothing left untold. And sometimes it's useful to talk about things which have happened because you learn from them, whether they're good or bad. (Personal Communication: Kurna Woman, Adelaide, 22/03/2018)

The conversation with the Kurna woman highlighted an important asset that the Makarrata Commission could provide. Through holding agreement-making processes and truthful conversations, its additional information and resources for legislation and strategies in the future could be activated by improving the relationship with Aboriginal communities. These conversations would improve the rapport between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians, which in turn could assist with the willingness for both to work together on issues targeting Aboriginal Australians. Moreover, if there were to be further circumstances which are detrimental to Aboriginal Australians caused through the work of the Australian Government, either directly or indirectly, this recommendation would enable meaningful conversations to be had at earlier stages, rather than a situation deteriorating or the effect lingering and having a greater impact, as is the current state regarding historical events.

### **Officialising the Aboriginal Voice: Response from the Australian Prime Minister**

Despite the promising findings in the Referendum Council's report and their recommendations outlined in the Uluru Statement, the Prime Minister at the time, Malcolm Turnbull, rejected it. The rejection was due to the one recommendation of the First Nations Voice, which would be enshrined in the Australian Constitution and would enable Aboriginal Australians to have a platform for their voices to be heard. Malcolm Turnbull stated:

The Government does not believe such an addition to our national representative institutions is either desirable or capable of winning acceptance in a referendum...It would inevitably become seen as a third chamber of Parliament. (Turnbull, 2017: n.p.)

Turnbull interpreted the recommendation as creating a third chamber in Parliament which would be solely for Aboriginal Australians and did not think it was a realistic principle to adopt. However, this argument causes some confusion as the Referendum Council clearly outlined that the recommendation of a body would enable a more substantive way for Aboriginal voices to be heard, but without interfering with the powers Parliament hold or the structure of Parliament:

The proposed Voice would not interfere with parliamentary supremacy, it would not be justiciable, and the details of its structure and functions would be established by Parliament through legislation that could be altered by Parliament. (Referendum Council, 2017: 38)

In addition to the council stating that the Voice would not restrict the powers of Parliament, they proposed that Parliament would outline the details regarding the structure and functions of the body itself through legislation, which in turn would provide Parliament with the security of knowledge that they would not design a body that would limit legislative powers or impact the effectiveness of Parliament. Instead, Parliament would have the reassurance that they could develop a First Nations Voice body that would be solely a source of consultation and advice, and they would be able to change the organisation of the body at any time due to the proposed legislation.

Moreover, the Prime Minister's response outlined that he did not think the public would support this recommendation in a referendum because it would be such a 'radical change'. However, the main change between this proposed body and past representations of Aboriginal Australians is the inclusion of it in the Australian Constitution. As the report clearly explains, having it enshrined in the constitution protects the representation of the Aboriginal voice in Parliament, ensuring that this representation will be maintained in the future:

One of the reasons for seeking a body enshrined in the constitution is so that it cannot be removed, as ATSIAC was, without being replaced by another body. (Referendum Council, 2017: 66)

Throughout the work of the Referendum Council on this report, it was highlighted that Aboriginal Australians wanted to feel empowered in a substantive manner, where their voices are heard, impactful and protected, rather than just recognised for a short period of time. However, this input from Aboriginal Australians is the main area that the Prime Minister based his rejection on and that is a disappointment, as it indicates a lack of understanding and willingness to work with Aboriginal Australians in rectifying the past and the fragmented relationship that they have.

The Referendum Council's report and the Uluru Statement was a large political opportunity for Malcolm Turnbull, to enable him to approve legislation that would recognise Aboriginal Australians and give them a constitutionally enshrined voice, that in turn would protect and empower them within Australian politics and society. It was envisaged that the referendum for constitutional change, along with the other recommendations by the Referendum Council, was a chance for history to be changed and made, whereby Aboriginal Australians unite with the rest of Australia. Nevertheless, this was not the case when the Prime Minister rejected the report and Uluru Statement, even though his statement indicated that he is aware of the pain that Aboriginal Australians feel in regards to being silenced:

People who ask for a voice feel voiceless or feel like they're not being heard. We remain committed to finding effective ways to develop stronger local voices and empowerment of local people. (Turnbull, 2017: n.p.).

Despite stating that the Australian Government will continue to find a way of empowering the voices of Aboriginal Australians, Turnbull's rejection highlights the question of how this will be achieved. Aboriginal Australians were consulted and included throughout the Referendum Council's report process and their viewpoints were heeded and used to shape the final recommendations. During the conversations I had with Aboriginal participants who have interests in politics, they explained that the Aboriginal Australians' views about being voiceless remain unchanged and they will continue to agree with the Referendum Council's recommendations until steps are taken to empower them. This raises the additional question of what the Australian Government, specifically Parliament, consider as an effective means of developing and empowering the voices of Aboriginal Australians, whilst still respecting their views.

The verdict the Prime Minister delivered on the Referendum Council's report and the Uluru Statement was not in consensus with the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten. Shorten, who was the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, disagreed with the outcome, and instead recognised the importance of the recommendations for Aboriginal Australians and how they would impact their lives. Since the rejection from Malcolm Turnbull, Bill Shorten has highlighted his commitment to progressing the recommendations, including the Makarrata Commission and truth telling, following the next election:

It has been 10 years since the issue of Constitutional recognition was first raised. First Nations people have made it clear that their preferred form of meaningful recognition is a Voice to Parliament. We cannot ignore those calls...We will move quickly following the election to agree on a process with First Nations people – including a clear pathway to a referendum. We will also work with them in establishing a Makarrata Commission for agreement-making and truth-telling. This will be a genuine process of Government and First Nations working together to achieve meaningful change. (Shorten, 2018: n.p.)

Bill Shorten's enthusiasm and sense of commitment will be a reassurance to Aboriginal Australians, and other supporters of the Referendum Council's report. He not only recognises that the recommendations are shaped by the voices of Aboriginal Australians, but also the

necessity of the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians building a relationship which is effective in achieving meaningful change.

Following the rejection of the recommendations by the Prime Minister, the Joint Select Committee reviewed the Referendum Council's report and the Uluru Statement in order to produce their own report and final verdict on the recommendations. Following the public shock of the Prime Minister's verdict on the recommendations which was widely published in Australian media, many of the participants I spoke to remained hopeful that the Joint Select Committee may show greater support for all the recommendations, especially the First Nations Voice body. A positive aspect of the Joint Select Committee's final report is their endorsement of the First Nations Voice; they have recognised the necessity and value of the voice for Aboriginal Australians, in addition to the support for this proposal:

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee observed broad support for the concept of a First Nations Voice, both as a form of recognition and particularly as a mechanism to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a greater say in the policy and legislation that governs their affairs. (Joint Select Committee, 2018: 11).

However, whilst they are in support of a First Nation's Voice, the Committee rejected the proposal that there should be an imminent referendum to include this voice in the Australian Constitution. They outlined in their report that the main focus should now be on Parliament co-designing how the First Nation's Voice will be formed, with input from Aboriginal Australians. Only once this stage has been completed, in addition to the following stage of the legal formation of the body also being completed, then steps towards a referendum to enshrine this recommendation in the Australian Constitution can be taken. Although there was hope that the Joint Select Committee's report would be in support of holding an imminent referendum to add the First Nation's Voice in the Constitution, it should be highlighted that the report is still in support of the most important aspect of the Referendum Council's recommendations: Aboriginal Australians need to be empowered so that their voices are listened to and can assist with achieving meaningful change. A final note in the Committee's report that should be emphasised, is in regards to the Uluru Statement and the Referendum Council's recommendation of truth telling:

We believe there is a strong desire among all Australians to know more about the history, traditions and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their contact with other Australians, both good and bad. A fuller understanding of our history including the relationship between Black and White Australia will lead to a more reconciled nation. (Joint Select Committee, 2018: ix)

For a long time, Aboriginal Australians have stressed that there is a need for honesty from the Australian Government on historical events that have impacted them and their ancestors, and this was strongly supported by the Joint Select Committee whose response offers reassurance that this recommendation will be acted upon. Additionally, this may also set a precedent for the Australian Government to be transparent with information of future social policy legislation, and any new services or initiatives implemented through them.

### **Loss of Hope: The Impact of Re-Silencing Aboriginal Australians**

Due to the generally held expectation within Australia that the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, would accept the report and act upon the recommendations, not surprisingly both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians reacted to his decision vocally. Not only was there great frustration and disappointment across the country, the feelings were also reflected by individuals in power, including the Human Rights Social Justice Commissioner. She expressed her disappointment at the Prime Minister's response and his rejection to empower the voices of Aboriginal Australians:

I hope that one day, our political leaders will have the courage to honour the voices of our peoples as captured in the Uluru Statement and the numerous other processes related to constitutional reform that we have taken part in across the country. (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018)

The aim of the first recommendation by the Referendum Council was to empower Aboriginal Australians so that they no longer feel voiceless, but instead feel reassured that their voices are listened to and can be meaningful. However, because this recommendation of the First Nation's Voice was so significant, both in advancing recognition of Aboriginal Australians and

in being shaped by their voices and wishes, Aboriginal Australians felt particularly hurt, especially by the Prime Minister's rejection and the comments directly aimed at this specific recommendation. A Kurna woman (Appendix A: 10) who welcomed me to a museum in Adelaide talked with me about my visit to South Australia, and then in the ensuing conversation spoke to me about my research and explained how the active involvement of Aboriginal Australians throughout the Referendum Council's report gave hope that this could be the time when a positive change would be made in Australia:

The whole process had been so positive leading up to the release of the Uluru Statement and report. We knew that lots of Aboriginal people had been involved, getting our concerns and hopes heard so that the Council could come up with something that is meaningful for us and our voices. We felt like it was almost a taste of what it could be like having our voices heard and being encouraged to share our opinions. We were happy with the three recommendations, but the one giving us a voice was obviously the most important. It gave us hope that this could be a moment in history where there is a positive change for us. (Personal Communication: Kurna Woman, Adelaide, 15/03/2018)

Many people I spoke to throughout my fieldwork thought that the Uluru Statement would be a significant moment in history when Aboriginal Australians would be recognised through being given a voice enshrined in the Australian Constitution. The support for the Referendum Council's recommendations were not limited to Aboriginal Australians: one day whilst sitting in a shopping mall, a non-Aboriginal woman (Appendix A: 11) struck up a conversation with me when she realised I was British. This developed into an informal interview, and one of the topics we spoke about was the Uluru Statement when she expressed her disappointment for Aboriginal Australians and the country:

I think there is a real sense of disappointment in this country that Malcom Turnbull has outright rejected the idea of giving a voice to Aboriginal communities through having an advisory body to the Government. I find it strange that he was so negative about that proposal, especially as there have been similar advisory groups who have worked with the Government in past years. It's almost an embarrassment because he said that it wouldn't succeed in a referendum vote, but I think that's where he's wrong. I know that everyone I've spoken to has been in

support of it. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 21/03/2018)

This sentiment was echoed by another non-Aboriginal participant (Appendix A: 12). She was interested to hear that I was not on holiday but was in fact carrying out research, particularly because her daughter works in the welfare services handling Aboriginal welfare cases. She sympathised with Aboriginal Australians following the result of the report:

It actually makes me really angry. The poor people want a voice, that's the whole point of giving them a platform to be heard. But to then have our Prime Minister reject that specific proposal, not just reject it but say that it is a ridiculous idea, is appalling. Imagine how they must feel now, talk about rubbing salt in the wounds.

(Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)

The notion of feeling voiceless was a reoccurring comment in many of the interviews I conducted. Participants felt that the recommendations rejected by Malcolm Turnbull was another example of when Aboriginal Australians perceive that their voices are not being heard, and essentially they are being silenced. With the Australian Government being conscious of its fragmented relationship with Aboriginal Australians, they may deem the recommendation of an Aboriginal Advisory body too great a risk in current times. It could be argued that there is a sense of nervousness about empowering the Aboriginal voice, which would offer an explanation why Malcolm Turnbull's statement was so focused on the notion of power and the risk that this body would be seen as a third chamber in Parliament. One participant who I developed a good rapport with, the son of the Ngarrindjeri Elder in charge of an education centre in the Coorong region (Appendix A: 22), and who is quite active and knowledgeable on Australian politics, shared his thoughts with me before the Joint Select Committee released their final report. His words reflect the concerns of the non-Aboriginal woman, whose daughter works in the welfare services, regarding the impact of the rejection:

We were hopeful, really hopeful. We thought this was going to be the start of something good for us, but like in the past, we should have known this was too good of a thing. Of course, Turnbull is afraid of us having a voice. We've been silenced for so long, it's easier if it stays that way. We're now clinging onto the hope that the Joint Select Committee will support us, have our best interests at heart,

but we aren't certain that will happen. To be honest, trusting that they'll do the right thing isn't the easiest at the moment. Especially as Turnbull has made it clear that he doesn't think we should be allowed to be heard. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri man, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

As this quote evidences, without more detail on why an Aboriginal advisory body protected by the constitution is not suitable, many Aboriginal Australians simply view it as another detrimental decision by the Australian Government, further fragmenting their relationship and reinforcing their opinion that they are being silenced.

I talked to participants about the emphasis on the rejection of the recommendations to include First Nation's Voices within the Constitution, and many linked it back to being silenced, as they had been during historical events. They pointed out that throughout Australian history, circumstances have occurred because of the Australian Governments' actions, which resulted in detrimental repercussions for Aboriginal Australians. Specifically, participants told me that their interests had not been at the forefront of Government decisions during those historical events. They made these points to express their unease about the progress of the Australian Government in addressing concerns for Aboriginal Australians, as well as their feelings that this whole issue seems like another occasion when their best interests were not being considered. On one occasion, whilst having a 'yarn' over a cup of tea, two Ngarrindjeri Elder women (Appendix A: 27 & 5) explained to me how the impact of the rejection is tough on the community. One was visibly annoyed and frustrated at the rejection of the recommendations and Uluru Statement because of what it denies Aboriginal Australians, whilst the other woman explained the link with past events that have impacted them:

He said no because he thought we were wanting to create another section of Parliament, we weren't. All we wanted was to be advisors on matters that concern us and our communities, and that's what was written in the report. We know our communities better than anyone, you'd think they would want us to help them so that we can focus on improving the lives of Aboriginal Australians and have the same equal chances as whitefellas. But like many times before, they are silencing us and don't want our voices to be heard. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

We've been silenced for many years. Think of the Stolen Generation, not only did they want to silence us then, but they wanted to get rid of us and our culture. We then went through all the Apology and being told things would change and that us blackfellas would be valued the same as whitefellas. I want to ask them how. How are they doing that today? (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

Having spoken to participants about their views on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull rejecting the proposal of a First Nation's Voice, I wanted to gauge the impact that this had on people's perception of the Australian Government and, more importantly, the impact on Aboriginal communities. The Prime Minister's disapproval of the Uluru Statement and the Referendum Council's report was significant particularly for the Aboriginal population, as this was an opportunity to narrow the gap in equality and improve the perception of how they are valued in Australia. More importantly, it would have also restored some trust in the Government and started a new journey to rectify the past and work towards a relationship where the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians co-operate to achieve meaningful change. The Aboriginal participants I spoke to saw this opportunity as a lifeline for being heard and respected, however they now feel that the Australian Government has neglected their interests and they remain voiceless. The outcome of policies and legislations can have an impact on individuals, which are not entirely visible and in this specific case, I wanted to understand the extent to which some Aboriginal Australians may find the decision to reject these recommendations difficult to process. I spoke to a charity worker (Appendix A: 13) in Adelaide who is non-Aboriginal and works with young adults; whilst her charity is not specifically for Aboriginal Australians, she noted that the majority of her clients identify as Aboriginal. Some of her clients are from the Kurna community in and around Adelaide, whilst others are from different Aboriginal communities who have decided to move to the city. She explained how she can see a change in her clients when something as momentous as the rejection of the recommendations and Uluru Statement progresses over a long period of time, and then eventually when the long-awaited outcome is announced, it is not as positive as had been hoped:

It's like a flowchart; each stage of the Uluru Statement and the Referendum Council's report has an impact on our clients. It's been covered heavily in the media so they can see everything that happens, the good and the bad. Them seeing the Aboriginal advocates working on this statement and report has boosted their determination. If they can see a process like this one be approved, knowing that Aboriginal Australians have assisted in creating a significant change, then my clients have the realisation that they can push themselves to achieve their own goals. It's also really positive for them when they see the support starting to rally around specific events which will benefit Aboriginal Australians, like this one. Supporters often include politicians and famous faces, and my clients feel a sense of acceptance, that people are actually starting to see them and hear them. All of that really gives them a boost; these are people who have very little self-esteem, especially when it comes to them being accepted for who they are. You can imagine how it knocks them when something is being played out so positively across the media, and then the Prime Minister disagrees with the support and rejects it. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

The conversation with the charity worker was valuable in helping me to understand how the whole process of cases like the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report evolves and affects people so they feel they are on an emotional roller coaster, depending on the decisions made by the Australian Government. Moreover, it emphasises just how influential cases like this one can motivate some Aboriginal Australians to be proactive for their own interests and ensure they feel valued as Australian citizens. This participant explained that she works with many homeless Aboriginal Australians from Whitmore Square, a popular location for homeless Aboriginal Australians in Adelaide, and she revealed that motivation and self-assurance are two key elements in helping someone improve their life. When I visited Whitmore Square, it was a surprise to see so many items belonging to homeless people left under trees, such as sleeping bags, blankets and clothing (*Figure IV. 10*). The charity worker explained that a large proportion of homeless people often suffer from alcohol and drug misuse, which results in mental health being a significant aspect that she focuses on with her clients to support them to improve their lives and sustain the changes. In his response, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull stated that the First Nations Voice would not be voted through in a referendum, and therefore implied that Australian citizens would not support this notion. It

could be argued that the Prime Minister was suggesting that not only the Australian Government but also the majority of Australian citizens think that the Aboriginal voice should not be empowered through an advisory body. Drawing on the charity worker's conversation, this would only lower the self-esteem of Aboriginal Australians and be detrimental to their determination to improve their lives, in addition to any reconciliation in Australia.



**Figure IV. 10: Personal belongings in Whitmore Square in Adelaide**

*Whitmore Square in the centre of Adelaide is a popular location for Aboriginal Australians and homeless people to gather. At the base of several trees sleeping bags, blankets and bags of clothing were spotted. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)*

I did not appreciate the scale of additional impact that the whole Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report process and verdict would have on Aboriginal Australians. They have been haunted by Government decisions made in the past and how they are viewed in society because they are Aboriginal. Therefore, seeing recommendations written to positively

impact their lives and their visibility within society gain support from non-Aboriginal members of public and politicians from different parties, improves their self-esteem and instils a new sense of acceptance. That in itself is a form of empowerment that Aboriginal Australians feel, although they are still aware that they are voiceless, and no substantial change has occurred. However, to have this feeling of empowerment, through the support of political figures for their causes, crushed by rejection is disheartening. One young Ngarrindjeri woman (Appendix A: 14) whose family moved from the Coorong region and now lives and works in Adelaide explained the emotional rollercoaster they endure:

You go from seeing politicians on the TV saying that they are behind us and think that us having a voice is an important thing, to then hearing that the Prime Minister doesn't want us to have a voice, that's tough. You feel like you're getting knocked down again. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Adelaide, 06/03/2018)

When talking to participants, I learnt that giving Aboriginal Australians a voice is more than just giving them a platform to speak, it is also a means to achieve long-term goals. The Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report recommended the formation of an Aboriginal advisory body to work with the Australian Government on matters concerning their communities and people directly; this could enable more accurate policies and legislation, particularly in education, health and employment areas, being developed as a result of the inside knowledge gained from Aboriginal Australians. Additionally, it is likely that Aboriginal Australians would feel more confident and be more likely to receive legislation more positively, knowing that Aboriginal Australians had helped shape the legislation through advice and consultations. An Aboriginal man who works in an art gallery near Adelaide (Appendix A: 17) explained that, whilst the current situation is not the desired outcome, they will persevere in trying to get their voices heard:

A voice is something that we've been working hard to have, but being able to advise on policies which are going to impact our way of life is going to give us some reassurance that we can trust them and they are going to help us. It's a disappointing outcome, but we don't give up on things like this. We know we deserve better and we will carry on fighting. A signed bit of paper recognising us is a step, but we have learnt that our voices are more powerful than ink on paper.

And so, we need to persevere to try and achieve a sense that we are valued and our voices are valued. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 05/04/2018)

Although the Uluru Statement and the Referendum Council's report facilitated a way for a historical opportunity to be achieved, whereby Aboriginal Australians could officially have a representative body to voice their knowledge and concerns, and which in turn would give advice to the Australian Government, the rejection of such a proposal has evidently had a significant impact. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have expressed their disappointment at the outcome, and arguably the most important aspect of this is that Aboriginal Australians now feel more strongly that they have been silenced when the opportunity to empower them was rejected. Consequently, as the conversations with participants have indicated, this has led to many Aboriginal Australians feeling a sense of distrust, lack of self-worth and uncertainty in regards to whether the fragmented relationship between themselves and the Australian Government can be reconciled, which in turn is detrimental for the effectiveness of social policy legislation. If the Prime Minister's response expressed different explanations for the rejection which did not focus on the risk of empowering Aboriginal Australians voices, then the impact this has had may not have been as significant, although it would have still caused widespread disappointment.

### **Silenced Today: Being Spoken on Behalf of**

Aboriginal Australians feel silenced because they do not believe their voices are listened to or respected; in addition to this, there is also frustration due to the feeling that people are supposedly speaking on behalf of them without any consultation. The Australian Government causes further frustration because it speaks on behalf of the Aboriginal communities as it believes it can make the right decisions on Aboriginal Australian matters, and implement any relevant initiatives without seeking consultation or advice from Aboriginal Australians themselves. Moreover, Aboriginal communities are aware that the Australian Government is taking an active decision of not enabling a platform for them to be heard when legislation and initiatives concerning Aboriginal Australians are being discussed. This is evident through the

rejection of proposals which provide the opportunities for Aboriginal Australians' voices to be empowered and heard, for example the Uluru Statement.

I found a common theme emerged during conversations with different participants, that linked the annoyance of being spoken on behalf of with the success, or lack of success, with improving the lives of Aboriginal Australians through the Closing the Gap initiative. One participant, an Aboriginal man (Appendix A: 16) who travelled on the same bus as me on several occasions around Adelaide and who had moved from the Northern Territory (Figure V. 1), illustrated this theme:

For my whole life, I can't remember when us blackfellas haven't been spoken for. We aren't allowed to use our voice for anything because they don't listen to us, but they put words in our mouth and speak for us without even asking us what we want or think about something. It hasn't worked though, all you've got to look at is the Closing the Gap, I wouldn't say that it's thriving in improving our lives. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 27/03/2018)

This man referred to the failures of the Closing the Gap report, in which, at the time of speaking to him, three out of the seven targets focused on improving Aboriginal Australians' lives were on track to be met (Australian Government, 2018: 8). He believes that without input from Aboriginal Australians, their true needs and opinions are not known. Although the Australian Government is making attempts to bridge the gap in inequalities, having non-Aboriginal people make the decisions on how to address these needs with minimal Aboriginal voices has not proven to be a success. This Aboriginal man, who is in his early forties, told me that he moved to Adelaide in the hope that his job prospects would increase, compared to the limited options he had in his rural Northern Territory community. He gave me an insight into how his life had changed since moving to Adelaide, and how he was surprised that the same issues he faced in the Northern Territory were present in Adelaide:

I was shocked when I arrived because I thought things would be a lot better than home. It wasn't easy for me to decide to move down here, but you've got to do things to get a better life. That's why I did it, I need a job and there's more chance I get one here. I'm lucky because I know people here, but it doesn't make it a lot

easier. I thought things would be better, but I guess we're all struggling all over this country. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 27/03/2018)

His reference to 'I guess we're struggling all over this country' is particularly significant because he has lived in a community with a different State Government who can implement different local laws, but he finds the struggles that Aboriginal Australians face to be just as prominent in a State capital city as in the rural community in the Northern Territory outback. He further explained that the Australian Government's attempt to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is evidently just as unsuccessful in a large city as in his rural community, and he places the blame on the lack of the Aboriginal voice and the regular occurrence of being spoken on behalf of in the Australian Government:

Even if they don't like the idea that we have a voice, they have to see soon that nothing is working without our voices. We know our problems better than anyone, especially whitefellas, so them speaking for us is never going to work. They need to start asking us things, rather than just guessing what is best for us. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 27/03/2018)

The viewpoints of this participant were similar to those of the non-Aboriginal woman (Appendix A: 13), who is a volunteer at a charity that specialises in alcohol and drug addiction in Adelaide:

I've been volunteering here for about four years now, and even with the training that I've had, I wouldn't know what is best for an Aboriginal patient without talking to them. Something I learnt very quickly after starting was that you can never presume what they're thinking. I don't know why you would though to be honest, it would be like me assuming I can jump out of a plane without talking to the experts – you just wouldn't do that. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

The woman was clearly adamant that the best way to address issues that concern Aboriginal Australians is through talking to them and understanding the issues from their perspective. She initially joked about the situation with sarcasm because she finds it 'absurd' that the decision to address serious issues, where there is a large gap that needs bridging, is through the exclusion of the Aboriginal voice:

It's absurd really. They are the experts in the field of problems that Aboriginals face, they live through those problems on a daily basis. Trying to improve the quality of life of Aboriginals all across Australia isn't working, and I think that just shows why it is so valuable to include their voices to give perspective to a situation, rather than the Government speaking for them and thinking that they know everything. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

I understood that she was not suggesting that huge changes in the Australian Government are needed, but rather Aboriginal Australians should be empowered to speak out about concerns, and for the Australian Government to acknowledge their voices as a valuable resource that can provide perspective on a situation that many Australian Members of Parliament have rarely been in. She further explained that the true extent to which Aboriginal Australians are voiceless cannot be appreciated, until the concern that they are being spoken on behalf of is understood. There is an assumption that if the Australian Government talks about matters concerning Aboriginal Australians or if initiatives are being discussed or implemented, then Aboriginal Australians must have been consulted during the process. However, on numerous occasions when I raised this with different participants, I was told that this is not always the case and if they are included then it is usually a small proportion of Aboriginal Australians, something that an Aboriginal Advisory body could resolve as it would be more representative. The woman volunteered at a charity that was located in close proximity to Whitmore Square, which is known as a location where there are a lot of homeless Aboriginal Australians who are more likely to suffer from drug and alcohol misuse. In an attempt to illustrate to me the significance of the Aboriginal voice in understanding a situation, the charity volunteer explained a client's circumstances that she had dealt with:

During my first year of volunteering there was this Aboriginal man who came to us as a referral from authorities because he was a repeat offender, all minor crimes. He was a heroin user, and therefore being a drug addict was the reasoning for his crimes. But when you actually spoke to him, he was committing these crimes because his mother was ill and couldn't work anymore. Yes, he was an addict, but that wasn't the reason for his crimes and he was using drugs because of the stress of caring for his Mum. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

This participant's example shows the assumption that authorities made regarding the reason for why the crimes were committed; as the client's crimes were always minor thefts, the authorities assumed that it was to aid his drug addiction. The client was reticent to share the information about his mother with the charity volunteer, due to his concerns that his mother would be taken into care. However, once he had shared the information, it enabled the charity volunteer to fully understand his situation. Until the client understood that help for his mother could be arranged so she could continue living at home with him, he would have continued committing the crimes to earn enough money to support them:

The change in him after we reassured him that we could organise help for his Mum and that she didn't have to be taken into care, he was like a changed person. He was motivated to overcome his addiction and we even helped secure him a job at a small coffee shop. Voice is important in understanding a situation fully. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

Although this is a specific case, the participant highlighted the value of details and facts, rather than assumptions. Therefore, it could be argued that listening to Aboriginal Australians when considering future social policy legislation and its implementation through services could be beneficial. The immediate benefit is that the service providers can use the expertise of those with lived experiences to better understand the community dynamics and circumstances so that they can enable the services to be tailored to each community's specific needs (Sandhu, 2017: 15-19). However, the benefits are wider reaching; input by Aboriginal Australians during the design and implementation of services is also beneficial for their communities in other ways. While some benefits link specifically to the notion of service users being valued because their voices are being heard and they have the opportunity to participate in decisions on matters affecting them, there is also improved trust and understanding of the service within communities (Sandhu, 2017: 18-19).

Members of the Ngarrindjeri community made it clear to me that they believe the Australian Government should promote Aboriginal voices as a necessary resource, but instead they have been replaced with non-Aboriginal voices. Had the Australian Government been more successful in closing the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians,

implemented effective legislation and appeared more respectful of the Aboriginal voice, then the impact of people speaking on their behalf may not be as frustrating as it currently is for the Ngarrindjeri community. When I had a meeting with several Ngarrindjeri Elders, a female Elder (Appendix A: 3), who has represented the community on the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority in the past, shortly after discussing the rejection of the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report, explained that they find it more insulting that they are being spoken on behalf of by non-Aboriginal Australians who think they know Aboriginal Australians well, considering the rejection of enabling the Aboriginal voice in Parliament:

I think it's an insult that for so many years they think they know us better than we know ourselves, otherwise they'd have encouraged us to speak up. Little change has happened with the Closing the Gap reports, but they still want to talk on our behalf rather than have us people talking to the Government. The one main chance they had of making a change and letting us speak for ourselves, they rejected and it wasn't supported by even the Prime Minister. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

During the meeting, one of the male Elders (Appendix A: 21) pointed out that he considers the difficulties of achieving an effective workable relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians is more significant than the numerous struggles they have faced because of insufficient legislation and initiatives:

I find it sad that rather than asking us on what we think about decisions on things which directly impact us, they'd much rather make the decisions between each other and think that they know everything about our lives. We need to work together to achieve progress of some kind, but that just isn't happening. I don't know why they're so against us having a voice, but things aren't going to change without our voices. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

His passion for trying to improve circumstances for his community was noticeable. He thinks that at the forefront of fixing any problem is a relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal communities. However, the prospect of this relationship being established is hindered if there is no platform for the communities' voices to be heard and

there is a one-way form of communication, whereby the Australian Government is making decisions for Aboriginal Australians and speaking for them rather than engaging with them. An example that was mentioned by both participants is in regards to a staff replacement decision at the local school in Meningie. Whilst this example is a local government issue, it still illustrates the impact of decisions being made without consulting Aboriginal Australians.

A local Ngarrindjeri woman worked at the primary school in Meningie, where one of her roles was to teach the Ngarrindjeri language. She was the only member of staff able to do this, and therefore when she was unable to continue working at the school there was a period of time when the language was not taught. Although it was presumed that this would be a short interim period until a new staff member was appointed, it turned out to be a permanent situation because the new staff member could not speak the Ngarrindjeri language. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder explained the shock of the decision to employ a replacement that could not teach the language:

When [name removed] left the school, we thought that her replacement would teach the Ngarrindjeri language like she did. That's the point of replacements, they fill the role that the previous staff member had, and teaching the language was one of the roles. We were really disappointed to find out that the language couldn't be continued there, especially as that was the only place that they were taught.  
(Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

The male Ngarrindjeri Elder revealed how the decision not to employ someone who could teach the language was disappointing, especially as it made the value of the Ngarrindjeri language appear less important than other areas of the children's education:

You wouldn't employ a replacement teacher if they didn't have all the skills to teach what the previous one did, so if the previous one taught art you make sure that the new one can teach art. Had the importance of our language been spoken to us about, then we could have advised how valuable it is, rather than someone else make that decision for us. It made it seem like our language wasn't valued as much as we had thought. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

This example highlights a significant point where the local authorities and Government made the decision not to continue to support the teaching of the Ngarrindjeri language, despite the high proportion of Aboriginal children that attend the school. It identifies the risk of misunderstanding when the decision that influences the Aboriginal community are made on their behalf without consulting them. The Ngarrindjeri community Elders strongly believed that the Ngarrindjeri language should be taught in school to maintain that element of their culture, as it is less effective to teach the language outside of school because the children are less motivated and the opportunities to teach it are limited. The children's perception of the importance of the Ngarrindjeri language and its uses may explain the lack of motivation that the Elders have witnessed. It is suggested that Elders use the language more often at occasions, such as social events or ceremonies, whereas younger community members rarely need to speak it in public settings, in addition to them viewing the English language as a more beneficial language to use, in terms of economic value and educational attainment (Kroskrity, 2016: 274). The female Ngarrindjeri Elder further explained the difficulties of trying to teach the language to children outside of school at a youth centre (*Figure IV. 11*):

The school said that they could learn the language using a computer programme, but it's not the same as having a person teach you. You lose the option of being able to ask questions and make sure that you're saying a word right. We started holding afterschool clubs to teach the children, but they weren't enthusiastic to learn because they'd just had a whole day inside and they wanted to be out playing.  
(Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

The decision to employ the new staff member, who was unable to speak the Ngarrindjeri language, subsequently made the community feel that their needs were undervalued. However, this could also be linked to the local authorities and Government not fully understanding the importance of language in the Aboriginal culture, but instead in their view, employing the most suitable teacher for the role, without considering the language.



**Figure IV. 11: The community youth centre in Meningie, South Australia**

*The Ngarrindjeri community are actively involved with the community centre in Meningie, with a young Ngarrindjeri woman in charge of its running. It has not only been an important place for keeping children occupied in the area, but also for teaching the language after school. (Author's own image, Coorong Region, 03/03/2018)*

The example shared by the participants from the Ngarrindjeri community may have been focused on the local authorities and Government, however the questions that it highlights are relevant for the concerns of the Australian Government, specifically Parliament, speaking on behalf of Aboriginal Australians. Although it was also a concern mentioned by the charity worker in Adelaide, the Ngarrindjeri example evidenced that there is a risk of the wrong decisions being made as most non-Aboriginal Australians do not have the same level of understanding as Aboriginal Australians themselves. Whilst non-Aboriginal Australians may understand the importance of Aboriginal Australians speaking their language, the impact of depriving them of their language would not be fully understood without talking to an Aboriginal community. Moreover, the example also outlined how the delivery of a service may not be as effective as presumed as in this case, where the substitution of technology to teach the Ngarrindjeri language in place of a native speaker was received differently. The Ngarrindjeri community thought that the technology was not an effective means of teaching the language, and that it could not compensate for pronunciation and teaching how to shape the mouth to say certain words. However, the local authorities and Government thought they

were still providing the same service that was available when the native speaking teacher was at the school, as the children could still learn the specific language for the area where their school is located. These disparities can be drawn upon to understand why some areas that need improvement for Aboriginal Australians are not being met. If the Australian Government is making decisions for Aboriginal Australians without consulting them, it may think that it is implementing a service or initiative that is best equipped to solve the situation, when actually, as the above example illustrates, this may not be the case.

*Speaking Out on Silencing: Shareena Clanton's Speech*

During my fieldwork, the conversations surrounding Aboriginal voice increased following an appearance of an Aboriginal actress on a political programme called 'Q&A', where she was on a panel alongside two politicians and two prominent figures in publishing. Her passionate speech about Aboriginal Australians being voiceless and non-Aboriginal Australians making decisions for them made the headlines the following morning, which resonated with the feelings of Aboriginal Australians following the recent political events, where Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had rejected the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report. Shareena Clanton was responding to an audience member's question about the Australian Government's level of respect towards Aboriginal Australians, in addition to questioning whether closing the gap on Aboriginal disadvantage is really at the forefront of the Government. The audience member revealed that he believes the Government is trying to maintain the oppression of Aboriginal Australians through its decisions and actions, rather than trying to close the gap on inequality being its priority. Shareena Clanton highlighted the importance of an Aboriginal Advisory body within Parliament, which would not hold any political sway on Parliamentary decisions, to empower Aboriginal voice on social, cultural and economic issues that directly affect Aboriginal Australians. Furthermore, she highlighted some statistics from the Closing the Gap reports to illustrate that some of the targets were never met or even on track to be met, and in her opinion, the gap in equality has broadened rather than improved:

This Close the Gap initiative, which was meant to bridge, close the disparity, in terms of Indigenous health, welfare and education, has only broadened. (Q&A, 2018)

According to the reports, and from what I observed in the field, the odds are stacked against Aboriginal Australians and therefore the need to engage with Aboriginal communities and listen to them is greater than ever, a point that was echoed by Shareena Clanton. Moreover, through her criticism of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Shareena Clanton voiced her frustration at the lack of enthusiasm the Australian Government is showing towards Aboriginal Australians. In the weeks leading up to this broadcast, Malcolm Turnbull had made the decision not to attend an event organised to mark the tenth anniversary of the National Apology for the Stolen Generations, and this was widely criticised by public and politicians. In addition to explaining that this decision indicates the Australian Government's thoughts towards Aboriginal Australians, Shareena Clanton took the opportunity to highlight that the same Prime Minister had also 'walked out of the Close the Gap report, walked out of the Uluru Statement from the Heart' (Q&A, 2018). During the debate, it was clear that Shareena Clanton was exasperated by the current situation, with Aboriginal Australians being silenced whilst there is also little enthusiasm being shown by the Australian Government:

We want to be the voice because we are tired of non-Indigenous Australia thinking they know what is good for us and thinking that they can be the voice for Aboriginal Australia. So, they should all learn to keep their mouths shut and start engaging Aboriginal Australia into the conversation. (Q&A, 2018)

Being an Aboriginal woman, Shareena Clanton is fully aware of the impact the Australian Government's decisions have on Aboriginal communities in addition to the efforts communities make to try to rectify situations. It was clear throughout the debate that she does not think enough has been, or is currently being, done to help close the gap in equality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. She stated that the Aboriginal communities themselves are actually being more successful in closing the gap through their hard work and initiatives, not those of the Australian Government:

I'll tell you about closing the gap, because it is coming from Indigenous peoples, not from initiatives created in parliament. (Q&A, 2018)

Overall, it was evident throughout the debate just how passionate Shareena Clanton is about empowering Aboriginal voices and she made it clear that they would be a valuable asset in advising the Australian Government towards achieving successful initiatives that work for Aboriginal communities.

The presence of Shareena Clanton on the panel was significant for two reasons; firstly, she could speak about issues facing Aboriginal Australians through experience. Secondly, she could be an example to other Aboriginal Australians, showing that there is hope and by using her platform as an actress to try to empower Aboriginal voices and make their concerns heard. Her dialogue was passionate throughout and had an impact on Australia as a whole, as the headlines all suggested the following morning. However, arguably the most significant aspect of Shareena Clanton on the panel was the example she was setting and the impact she had on Aboriginal Australians; she enabled other Aboriginal Australians to see an Aboriginal woman on national television argue about and support their concerns. This was a positive attribute for Aboriginal Australians because someone was highlighting and voicing concerns that they want heard but are unable to achieve. Additionally, they also knew that the person speaking on their behalf and representing them on this panel was talking from her own, her family's and her community's experiences of how they have felt the impact of the Australian Government's decisions that other Aboriginal communities are also experiencing.

During my time in Adelaide, I discussed watching the programme during an informal conversation with an Aboriginal man (Appendix A: 17), who worked at an art shop and revealed that it was good to see an Aboriginal person speak passionately about the emotions and struggles that all Aboriginal Australians were experiencing:

I think it's been such a big thing because it's unusual to see an Aboriginal person speak so passionately on national TV surrounded by politicians. What was the most important thing to us, was the fact that she is one of us and knows exactly how we feel. She wasn't just telling the politicians on the panel that they need to start giving us a voice and listening to us, she was telling the whole of Australia. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 05/04/2018)

According to this participant, the most significant part of Shareena Clanton's speech was when she highlighted that any improvements being made have been achieved through the determination and work of the Aboriginal Australians:

The best part of the whole speech, apart from when she said we're fed up of being spoken for and having decisions made for us, was when she told everyone that we are trying really hard to improve things for ourselves. I think people sometimes think that we sit around waiting for the Government to fix all the problems and complain that they aren't doing anything. That isn't the case, we are bloody determined that we have to try and improve things ourselves, especially because the Government seem so incapable of doing it. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 05/04/2018)

This was an interesting point raised because without listening to Aboriginal voices, it is much harder for people to understand the exact changes that Aboriginal communities are making to improve or rectify issues concerning them. Moreover, if the changes the Aboriginal communities are implementing are successful, the Australian Government would benefit from fostering a form of communication with Aboriginal Australians rather than excluding them, so that the Government could learn from the Aboriginal Australians' successful initiatives and use them as a valuable resource for closing the gap on equality and making impactful changes to the lives of other Aboriginal Australians. During her speech on how Aboriginal Australians are making changes to improve their lives, Shareena Clanton gave the example of the decisions her family made to study at university to obtain degrees, including her mother who returned to education years after she finished school. A similar example was shared with me by the female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) who coordinates the community centre in the Coorong region, where the Ngarrindjeri share their culture with local schools and other educational institutions. She explained that her son was travelling to Sydney to gain work experience with a major airline operator:

He's going tomorrow, it'll be a big day for him. He's never done anything like this before, actually none of my children have but that's because these opportunities don't come around often. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

The way she explained the work experience opportunity to me, I assumed that her son must be excited because it was a unique opportunity for him to gain a valuable insight into what a job within a major Australian airline entails. When I asked her if he was excited, I was slightly taken aback by her response:

Well he's going, not going isn't an option. He needs to learn that for us blackfellas we don't get these opportunities every day and so we have to take them when we get them. University isn't for him, so this will give him good experience and hopefully help him get a job. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

The morning that I was having this conversation with the Elder, a male Ngarrindjeri Elder came to ask her to speak to her son because he had been out drinking until the early hours of the morning and his behaviour was not what was expected of him. You could see the disappointment, and embarrassment, when the female Ngarrindjeri Elder apologised to me and asked if it was ok for her to go and speak to him and then come back and continue our conversation. Obviously, there was no hesitation from me, I realised the necessity for her to go and speak with her son, and upon her return she explained that she thought he was playing up because he was nervous and was aware of how important this opportunity was for him:

Although he didn't get how important this one experience is for him at first, he knows now. I've explained it to him. For some people, they would probably think that we're overreacting, but honestly this is like gold-dust and we really pushed hard to get this opportunity given for him. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

Through applying for opportunities like these, Aboriginal Australians understand the steps that they need to take to instigate change themselves. However, although these conversations indicate how the small changes that Aboriginal Australians are making are successful, it is also evident that both the examples given by Shareena Clanton and the female Ngarrindjeri Elder are related to improving employment prospects. Whilst Aboriginal communities use their own initiatives and choices to better their prospects, they face limitations in making impactful changes across a number of areas that need to be improved. Some of the areas of concern where there need to be improvements are life expectancy and infant mortality rates.

However, both of these need initiatives and services implemented by the Australian Government as they are too extreme for Aboriginal communities to improve singlehandedly. Although small changes to lifestyle may contribute to the improvement of life expectancy, Aboriginal communities need experts in the field to provide them with relevant knowledge through services implemented by the Australian Government. This is not to say that the Aboriginal communities do not need to be included in discussions concerning these matters, but instead their voices would offer advice on a different aspect of the initiatives; for example, they could be included in structuring a service to ensure that it suits the needs of the Aboriginal communities. As Shareena Clanton stated, there are many areas of the Closing the Gap reports that have unmet targets and result in the gap that is still present between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, a point that was also raised in national newspapers (Appendix B: 6, 7 & 8). The frustration that she showed in discussing these figures was replicated when I spoke to two Ngarrindjeri men (Appendix A: 4 & 7). Like Shareena Clanton, they too could not understand why the Australian Government had not decided to start to empower Aboriginal Australians to act as advisors if the strategies they used that excluded the Aboriginal voice were not successful in achieving positive change:

Why make decisions for us, without us, why speak for us, when the whole time they've been doing this it hasn't worked. I don't understand what it's going to take in this country for us to be heard and for them to stop talking for us. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Man, Coorong, 01/03/2018)

This was a common theme throughout conversations with my participants. Having decisions made for them and being spoken on behalf of, despite it being evident that it is not a successful approach, is a frustrating reality that they continually face. To resolve issues with unsuccessful strategies is difficult, but is made more so by not including input from those with experiences (Durose et al, 2013). Aboriginal Australians' contributions could be very significant in addressing social issues concerning them due to their lived experiences and knowledge. Durose et al (2013) explains how communities are a positive asset in the decision making and design process of public services, and highlights how their expertise and experiences should be valued and trusted, rather than being dismissed (2013: 329). The exact reasons why the Australian Government decides to limit the contribution of Aboriginal

Australians, despite the benefits of their knowledge and lived experiences being evident, remain complicated. With each new Prime Minister, different excuses have been given. However, when Malcolm Turnbull was Prime Minister his reasoning for not wanting the Aboriginal voice as an advisory board was made clear through his rejection of the Uluru Statement and Referendum Council's report. This has since highlighted the conversation of empowering Aboriginal voices rather than silencing them and speaking on their behalf, and therefore explains why the speech by Shareena Clanton was so significant. Nevertheless, despite the ongoing confusion and debate surrounding the issues of Aboriginal Australians feeling voiceless and the Australian Government not willing to empower their voices, one thing that has been maintained is the feelings that many Aboriginal Australians share. If they are unable to use their own voices to advise on issues that directly impact them, then they do not want to be spoken for and have their opinions assumed. Aboriginal Australians are aware that they are not the experts in many of the areas where improvements are required to close the gap in equality, but they are aware of how they could offer advice, that paired with the knowledge of experts and the Australian Government, could in turn result in successful change being achieved. An Aboriginal woman (Appendix A: 9) in an art gallery in Adelaide further explained this point, of how they want to be included in the process, but not make all the decisions singlehandedly:

We're not experts in everything, we've never claimed we are. We're just saying that we want our voices to be heard. We think we're the missing piece in how the Government are currently trying to close the gap. If we could use our voices to give knowledge of our community and how we live, that could be used with the experts' knowledge to make the Government make the right decisions. Basically, we're just saying we want to be included not spoken for without us, we're not saying we want to be the only people dealing with our problems, we want to work with them.

(Personal Communication: Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 21/02/2018)

Essentially, Aboriginal Australians want to be heard and included on matters that directly impact them to ensure that a positive change can be achieved through working together with the experts in the field and the Australian Government. Community members being integral in any discussion about the design of public services has been highlighted as advantageous due to their experiences as service users. When discussing the need for co-production and co-

design of services, Durose et al (2013) refers to a 'golden triangle' whereby service users need to be included, alongside professionals and scientific evidence (2013: 329), with all three being equally valuable to the process. Fundamentally, the underpinning values of co-production are the notions of professional expertise, alongside the complementing expertise of lived experiences (Durose et al, 2017: 140). The Aboriginal voice is also a key tool of empowerment for Aboriginal Australians, providing them with a sense of positive identity, ownership and agency (Weedon, 2004: 50). Arguably, the articulation of the Aboriginal voice is the best method to represent the experiences of Aboriginal Australians (Weedon, 2004: 50), and therefore further amplifies the value of community engagement. This also reflects the idea of community engagement being an important element of future legislation and implementation of initiatives, as was highlighted in the earlier subchapter on the issues of drought. However, through the Australian Government's current decisions not to listen to the voices of Aboriginal Australians, it is limiting the opportunities of community engagement.

### **Concluding Comments**

Gaining an understanding of the significance of Aboriginal Australians feeling voiceless and why they feel that they are unable to be heard, highlighted several key areas that link to the efficacy of social policy legislation. Participants often mentioned that the Australian Government legislative decisions on topics concerning them were made for them without any consultation and that this would not happen if there was an Aboriginal advisory body to support the Government. Whilst the Australian Government has advisors who have an array of expertise, Aboriginal Australians think that their experiences are valuable in achieving accurate and effective legislation that concerns them. Without getting specific details from Aboriginal communities, assumptions have to be made by authorities and the Government which could subsequently limit the effectiveness of legislation. This point is reflective of the first aim of my research, which focuses on reasons for why there is continuing social inequality despite the Closing the Gap Report initiative. It suggests that the lack of inclusion of Aboriginal Australians in decisions relating to matters that concern them could be detrimental to legislation effectiveness because of the use of assumptions rather than details of experiences.

Moreover, this chapter has emphasised the necessity for community engagement. This was something that the Australian Government and the Aboriginal communities agreed on, and yet it was still a problematic area. Community engagement would help provide a means of communication between the Aboriginal communities and the Australian Government, whilst providing a platform for the Aboriginal voice to be heard. What became apparent in my research, and is highlighted in this chapter, is the misunderstanding of what community engagement entails. As Aboriginal communities differ, there has to be a tailored approach to suit the needs of each community, and this was obvious when the Australian Government thought that community engagement was achieved during the drought, whereas the community argued that there was no communication or community engagement. Therefore, with the Australian Government believing that it was achieving community engagement, it could not realise that the community was dissatisfied with their response. This suggests that a common understanding between the Australian Government and Aboriginal communities of what community engagement entails, is a critical issue and it is vital that they both hold the same understanding in order to achieve effective community engagement, and subsequently more effective implementation of legislation initiatives. On the whole, despite the issue of misunderstanding, a common agreement between both Aboriginal Australians and officials on the value of community engagement should not be overlooked, and instead can be offered as a tool which could support initiatives to close the gap in equality, as asked in my third research question. As some of the participants suggest through their conversations about the Australian Government, the issues surrounding their silenced voices has hampered the relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians. The next chapter will build on this insight by exploring the feeling of distrust, a concept that is an ongoing issue between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government and has caused a fractious relationship between them.

## Chapter V

# Absence of Trust: The Impact of Distrust on Aboriginal Australians

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*Whitefellas don't think of us very highly. If they don't trust us, why should we trust them. If they don't respect us, why should we trust them. This issue of trust is a two-sided, it isn't just us blackfellas. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)*

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The oppression of Aboriginal Australians' voices, which has resulted in Aboriginal Australians' feelings of being silenced, introduced the issue of distrust in the previous chapter. During conversations with Aboriginal Australians, it became apparent to me that they want their voices to be listened to and considered when the Australian Government makes decisions that concern them. At present, they find it difficult to trust that the Australian Government makes the best decisions for them and their communities, when Aboriginal voices are not being heard. Community engagement was highlighted as a significant method that could address this distrust. However, the overall concerns relating to distrust between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government span wider than just the issues associated with Aboriginal Australians being silenced, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Prior to my fieldwork, I already had a level of understanding of the distrust felt by Aboriginal Australians towards the Australian Government; however, it surprised me just how impactful it is on a daily basis. Through conversations with participants, I quickly became aware of not only how problematic distrust is in the willingness for many Aboriginal Australians to access services, specifically healthcare services, but also how their experiences with non-Aboriginal Australians are continually contributing to the issue of trust. The experiences that Aboriginal Australians endure on a regular basis are significant in reinforcing the negativity that forms the overall sense of distrust; however, events that have happened in the past are just as significant and influential because of their lasting impact on Aboriginal Australians, and

participants were keen to emphasise that the issue of distrust is a combination of both past and present actions of non-Aboriginal Australians.

### **Perceptions of Aboriginal Australians: The Realities of a Racially Fragmented Society**

A significant contributor to the issue of distrust is the perceptions towards Aboriginal Australians; although the attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians are varied, negativity and discrimination are more prominent than positive perceptions. These attitudes can be understood as forms of direct racism which have become embedded within Australian society as a result of a societal hierarchy that stems from when white privilege was enforced during colonisation. I became aware of the attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians not only from conversations with participants, but also through my observations. When I visited the Ngarrindjeri community, I observed fewer racial or discriminatory actions towards Aboriginal Australians; however, this does not mean that they do not experience the negative attitudes. In conversations with participants, they expressed the frustration and discomfort at the attitudes of non-Aboriginal Australians towards them and explained how it affects their overall trust towards non-Aboriginal Australians. During one of the weaving sessions I was invited to join, I had a conversation with the female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3), who has a prominent position in the community, whilst she was teaching me to weave in the Ngarrindjeri style. During the conversation, she spoke about the attitudes and assumptions that non-Aboriginal Australians exhibit towards them because they are Aboriginal:

Before we even speak people label us. We're lazy, get lots of handouts, don't work and just sit around, usually on drugs or are drunk. Because people have already decided that's what all us blackfellas are like, you can't change their minds. It used to be really upsetting, but for the Elders we're used to it, it still hurts but we can handle it better. But the young ones aren't and it really mucks with their behaviour.

(Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The Elder highlighted that the older generation in the community has become more resilient to opinionated comments and attitudes; however, the younger generation struggle when they fall victim to the negative perceptions. The impact on the young Aboriginal Australians' self-

esteem was evident to me through the Elder's comment on how their behaviour changes. If young Aboriginal Australians receive negative comments or attitudes from non-Aboriginal Australians on a comparatively regular basis, it is understandable that distrust towards non-Aboriginal Australians develops. They have the understanding that the negative perceptions are only apparent outside of their community, and therefore, are likely to presume that they are not equal to non-Aboriginal Australians based on their experiences. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder further expressed her concern of how the negative views of non-Aboriginal Australians are detrimental for young Aboriginal Australians' educational attainment and attendance:

We've been working hard on encouraging young ones to stay in school and think about what job they want to go into, but when you have comments saying that we aren't good at anything it makes it hard. If young ones are too affected by comments then they start rejecting everything and don't want to go to school or plan for the future, and that's difficult to change once they're set in their ways.

(Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The impact of the negative perceptions and racism on the Aboriginal Australians I met is twofold because on the one hand the viewpoints are listened to and adversely influence the self-esteem and decisions of the Aboriginal Australians; however, they are also detrimental to mutual trust as they increase the distrust towards non-Aboriginal Australians. Many Aboriginal Australians listen to the labels applied to them and associate those perceptions with all non-Aboriginal Australians rather than just those who voice them. As a result, this understandably causes Aboriginal Australians to deem non-Aboriginal Australians less trustworthy because of the viewpoints and the low expectations held of them by some non-Aboriginal Australians. As the Ngarrindjeri Elder highlighted to me, Aboriginal Australians become less determined to persevere and aspire to achieve more in education or employment when they learn that some non-Aboriginal Australians do not respect them for who they are, but instead tell them that they will not achieve a good education or be employed into highly respected jobs. Not all non-Aboriginal Australians hold these negative perceptions, but those who do, are people who speak the loudest and have the largest impact on Aboriginal Australians. There is enough negativity and disrespect towards Aboriginal Australians to impact their overall level of trust towards non-Aboriginal Australians.

*Witnessing Racial Behaviour: Aboriginal Segregation on Public Transport*

In Adelaide, the negativity towards Aboriginal Australians appeared more problematic compared to when I was visiting the Ngarrindjeri community. This arguably could be explained by the increased population and interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in the city. I observed a number of racial and discriminatory acts whilst I was in Adelaide, with the majority happening on public transport. In Adelaide, there is a free bus that enables people to get around the city easily. It was a very popular service, where a high proportion of the passengers were Aboriginal Australians. When I used the bus, I noticed that the vast majority of Aboriginal Australians made a clear decision to sit at the back of the bus. At first I assumed that it was due to seat availability, but when I started using the bus during quiet periods of time, I noticed that Aboriginal Australians still chose to sit at the very back of the bus, despite other seats being available. I thought it felt awkward because the bus passengers appeared segregated based on colour. However, no one else seemed to feel the same and instead non-Aboriginal passengers continued to sit at the front of the bus and Aboriginal passengers went straight to seats at the back. A further incident, which arguably is a clearer indication of the negative perceptions, resulting in indirect racism, which some non-Aboriginal Australians hold, occurred when the bus was busy and there were only three seats available, all next to non-Aboriginal Australians. When two Aboriginal Australian women got on the bus, one lady placed her bag next to her and the other two passengers with spare seats already had bags on the seats; no one offered a spare seat to either of the Aboriginal women and instead they stood for the remainder of the journey. I already found it shocking to see that someone actively made the decision to place a bag next to her when the Aboriginal women boarded to prevent them getting a seat; however, it became more shocking when a non-Aboriginal man boarded after the two Aboriginal women and he was offered a seat. I was surprised at the unwillingness of non-Aboriginal passengers to allow Aboriginal Australians to sit next to them; the Aboriginal passengers did not show any emotion throughout the journey or towards the passengers who had not offered them a seat, although it was evident that they had seen the spare seats.

Although this particular incident happened on one journey, it was not an isolated occurrence as I also saw it happen repeatedly on other bus journeys, indicating the normality of the racism. Interestingly, Aboriginal Australian passengers did not reciprocate this behaviour, and the opposite actually happened. One day when I was on a full bus with only one spare seat, I observed an elderly Aboriginal man move his bag from the empty seat next to him and verbally offer the seat to a non-Aboriginal man when he boarded the bus; nevertheless, this invitation was declined and the non-Aboriginal man opted to stand. Although there were occasions when non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal passengers sat next to each other, including myself, it was a rare occurrence. I spoke to a Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 15) who worked in an art gallery near Adelaide to try to understand why the seating arrangement seemed to be a common occurrence. It was only a brief conversation as he was interrupted by a customer; however, he explained that it was personal preference for many Aboriginal Australians:

It's personal preference, it's where we feel comfortable to sit because other people on the bus aren't always the friendliest. Usually it'll be Aboriginal people who are homeless or struggling that'll feel they have to sit at the back away from everyone else, but I've had it before where another person hasn't wanted me to sit next to them because I'm a blackfella. It's embarrassing, so I won't even ask now, I'll wait for a seat to be offered to me if it's not next to an Aboriginal person. (Personal Communication: Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 05/04/2018)

This conversation was significant, as it further highlighted the influence of the negative perceptions and racist actions of non-Aboriginal Australians towards Aboriginal Australians. In this case, the Kurna man explained that his one experience of asking to sit next to a non-Aboriginal passenger on a bus has led to him never asking again, unless the seat is next to an Aboriginal passenger. Additionally, this offers clarity for why I observed Aboriginal Australians sitting at the back of buses; it is not only where they feel most comfortable, but arguably where they feel most welcome to sit. I found the explanation of the seating arrangements a sad realisation of just how aware some Aboriginal Australians are that they are not respected by and equally regarded as non-Aboriginal Australians. I personally offered seats next to me to Aboriginal Australian passengers on numerous occasions, but after talking to the Kurna

man I realised why some of them declined the offer to sit next to me, and why the few who did accept the invitation appeared very shy and surprised when I offered them the seat.

There was one Aboriginal man, who had moved from the Northern Territory to Adelaide to enhance his job prospects, whom I got to know as a result of us both travelling on the same morning bus service on a regular basis (*Figure V.1*). Despite the photograph I took of the bus passenger being a side profile to help maintain his anonymity, it is still a particularly powerful image as it not only depicts the physical exhaustion he was experiencing, but also the loneliness and isolation that he felt as a result of how different his experiences were of living in Adelaide, compared to his community in the Northern Territory. He sat slumped in his seat and looked as if he had the world on his shoulders whilst staring out of the window at the hustle and bustle of the fast paced city. I wanted to capture this moment as it depicted the juxtaposition of his hopes of his move to Adelaide bringing him success with the strain that the reality of his move was having on him, emotionally and physically. His interactions with non-Aboriginal Australians in the city were additionally causing him to feel vulnerable and alone, leading to him questioning his decisions to leave his community, which understandably brought added weight to the strain he was enduring.

The first time I saw him was when the bus was particularly busy, and the only available seat was next to a non-Aboriginal woman behind me. He began to look at a map and asked the woman next to him for directions, which she asked me as she was not local to the city. Despite me only being able to offer some help to his query, this did not stop the three of us having a conversation about where we had come from and why we were in Adelaide. The following day when he boarded the bus, he sat on the seats parallel to mine and smiled and said hello; the more occasions we were on the same bus, the more confident he became talking to me, even though his English was not particularly strong as it was his second language. The community he was from in the Northern Territory spoke their Aboriginal language on a daily basis, and therefore he had a strong accent and occasionally struggled to think of a word; however, this did not hinder our frequent conversations. He seemed genuinely enthusiastic

and happy to sit on a seat near me and have a conversation, even if it was only brief about where he was going or how much longer I had left in Adelaide. During these talks, I learnt a lot about his life: where he lived, why he moved to Adelaide, and his struggles before and since leaving his community and moving to Adelaide. I felt very honoured that he was having these conversations with me and that he was confident enough to share his experiences, especially after my conversation with the Kurna man at the art gallery who had explained why most Aboriginal passengers sit alone at the back of buses. The Aboriginal man (Appendix A: 16) on the bus revealed that he had moved to Adelaide to find a job as he had not been lucky in securing one in the Northern Territory. However, his time in Adelaide had been challenging as there were not as many jobs as he had hoped for and he felt like an outsider in the city:

It's hard y'know, this doesn't feel of home. When I'm on country (his community's land in the Northern Territory) I feel I belong, but not here. I need a job as I don't want to be on the dole, so that's why I came. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 04/04/2018)

I don't belong here, I'm not a city guy. On country, you're with your people and you all get on, but not here. I see how whitefellas look at me, I'm not really used to that. You don't have it as much back home. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 04/04/2018)



**Figure V.1: Aboriginal bus passenger from the Northern Territory**

*This Aboriginal man had moved from the Northern Territory in the hope that his job prospects in Adelaide would be greater. During our conversations, he revealed to me that his experiences in Adelaide were not what he had expected, especially the unease that he feels when he notices how non-Aboriginal Australians look at him. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 16/04/2018)*

When I had these conversations with him during separate journeys, he had only been in Adelaide for just under three weeks. I was surprised that he had already become aware of the negative perceptions and personas of some non-Aboriginal people, and that this was shaping his judgement of non-Aboriginal people as a whole. When he first told me of how he does not belong in Adelaide and that he had noticed the attitudes of non-Aboriginal Australians, I became conscious as I am non-Aboriginal. However, it also made me question how he was distinguishing me from the other non-Aboriginal people because there was obviously a sense of trust that he felt, which was evident through our conversations. On my last day of taking the bus in Adelaide, our final conversation made me realise something that I had done that

many other non-Aboriginal people do not: I had spoken to him rather than ignoring him. Initially, I did not realise the significance of this, as I had interacted with this Aboriginal man as I would with anyone else. However, for him, it was much more significant. As I was about to disembark the bus, the Aboriginal man wished me luck with the rest of my research and thanked me for talking to him rather than ignoring him:

It's been nice talking to you. Normally people just blank us or look at us weirdly, it's been nice y'know, not having that. I don't think I've ever chatted to someone that's not a blackfella on the bus (he laughed). I'm going to miss talking you, thanks.

(Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 16/04/2018)

This man made me realise just how easy it could be for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to use the same bus without stigma or racism acting as a divide. When I used the bus service, I did not have negative perceptions, which shaped my decisions towards Aboriginal Australians, and as result I treated the Aboriginal man exactly the same as non-Aboriginal people who I interacted with on the bus. Equality was the main difference between myself and some other non-Aboriginal people with whom this Aboriginal man interacted; I did not look at him in a certain way or ignore him, as I had seen other passengers do, but instead, he realised that I regarded him the same as everyone else. As he highlighted, he is conscious of how many non-Aboriginal people perceive Aboriginal Australians, and therefore he appreciated me not having those perceptions, and that led to him trusting me and his willingness to have conversations.

The impact of the negative perceptions and racism is paramount; however, it is something that is a normality for Aboriginal Australians because of the considerable number of non-Aboriginal people who display negative behaviours and emotions towards them. An Australian mental health charity, Beyond Blue, conducted research in 2014 to indicate the severity of discrimination in Australia and its links to mental health. The research indicates that the actions of passengers I witnessed on the buses is a common problem, with 46% of the participants in the research not considering it a discriminatory act to move away from Aboriginal Australians if they sit next to them, and 35% thinking that intentionally not sitting next to an Aboriginal Australian on a bus was also not discriminatory (Beyond Blue, 2014: 4).

The research not only clarifies the severity of discrimination on public transport, but rather highlights that there is a significant lack of knowledge about what constitutes discrimination against Aboriginal Australians. Furthermore, the report supports a comment a Kurna Elder made in regards to the ways that Aboriginal Australians are looked at and made to feel uncomfortable, even if there is no communication. The female Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 18), who was volunteering at a coffee shop when we spoke, expressed the unease she feels when she visits shops, especially if she is just browsing and not making a purchase:

You don't have to talk to people to feel on-edge, it's the way they look at you. When I go to town I sometimes feel like a criminal just going into a shop, I can see how they look at me. They're probably thinking I'm going to nick something, they're just watching me all the time. Not shop workers, just other people shopping. If I buy something I feel like I'm rubbing it in their face, proving I'm actually using my own dollars to buy something, but if I don't, I'm sure some people think I've stolen things. (Personal Communication: Female Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 03/04/2018)

Echoing the experience of this Elder, the Beyond Blue research reveals that 48% of their participants have witnessed Aboriginal Australians being watched by people when in a retail environment, and 30% of their participants do not consider it discriminatory to watch the actions of Aboriginal Australians when shopping (Beyond Blue, 2014: 3-4). Similar to the behaviour many Aboriginal Australians experience on public transport, the lack of trust towards Aboriginal Australians when in a retail environment that leads to them being watched is also a common behaviour that they have to endure. During our conversation as she was serving coffee to me in the cafe, the Elder added that she gets angry with herself for being so paranoid of what non-Aboriginal people think of Aboriginal Australians; however, it is not surprising that she feels this way when Aboriginal Australians are knowledgeable of the negative perceptions and stereotypes which overshadow the more positive attitudes that some non-Aboriginal people believe.

*Realistic Perceptions of Aboriginal Australians: Positive Versus Negative Attitudes*

When considering how Aboriginal Australians are perceived, it is too simplistic, and arguably not realistic, to focus purely on positive attitudes towards them, rather than the negative stereotypes and attitudes which tend to be more dominant. During some discussions, participants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, highlighted that negative attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians can be accurate perceptions, as some live up to the stereotypes that many non-Aboriginal people hold. When I had conversations with members of the Ngarrindjeri community about these negative perceptions, and the labels that are often applied to Aboriginal Australians, they were very open and honest in acknowledging that there are some people who live up to these stereotypes and labels; however, they were also quick in highlighting that this does not mean the stereotypes apply to all Aboriginal Australians. On numerous occasions throughout my fieldwork I observed and overheard negative perceptions related to drugs and alcohol. I was surprised to find this viewpoint, and racist assumptions, reinforced on the front cover and in a national newspaper, where an article highlighted the issues between Aboriginal children and alcohol consumption (Appendix B: 8). When walking through Adelaide, especially at weekends, I often heard passers-by comment in a derogatory way about groups of Aboriginal Australians who appeared drunk or under the influence of drugs. Issues with drugs and alcohol were also mentioned by several participants I interviewed, both in Adelaide and in the Coorong Region. They expressed their annoyance that non-Aboriginal people often see an Aboriginal person intoxicated and behaving antisocially, but rather than understanding it as an isolated issue concerning an individual, there is the assumption that the intoxication and antisocial behaviour is representative of all Aboriginal Australians. The comments I heard on my walks seem to illustrate this point of view. On one of my visits to a small café, located near Whitmore Square, which is known as being a popular place for Aboriginal Australians to gather, usually those who are homeless, I spoke to a Ngarrindjeri woman (Appendix A: 19). Having visited the café several times, I was aware that she worked there and on this occasion, as it was quiet, I took the opportunity to ask her about living in Adelaide:

There are people who are alcoholics and go around misbehaving because of the alcohol. They need help, there's reasons why they are how they are. But people see them misbehaving and instantly blame it on them being Aboriginal. That's why we all get that tag, people see one Aboriginal on the bottle, and they think that's

what we're all like. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Adelaide, 06/03/2018)

During our conversation, she voiced her frustration that this behaviour overshadows the hard work of other Aboriginal Australians, such as herself; no matter what they achieve, people usually judge and make assumptions about them because they are Aboriginal. Moreover, she added that she finds it offensive that such little respect is given to Aboriginal Australians, based on the behaviour of the few who behave antisocially, when the same is not applied to non-Aboriginal Australians. This can be understood as an example of institutional racism because it suggests that it is the norm to associate all Aboriginal Australians with antisocial behaviour. Moreover, this can also relate to the notion of white privilege and the presence of racism in society, which is explained through the lasting impact of colonisation and the superiority that settlers had over Aboriginal Australians (Behrendt et al, 2009; Carlson, 2016; Sutton, 2011). My participant (Appendix A: 19) pointed out that there are also non-Aboriginal people who have alcohol and drug issues, but they are looked at as individuals who need help rather than their cultural group or ethnicity being blamed for their behaviour:

It's not just Aboriginals that are drug addicts, alcoholics and homeless. They might be the most, but there are also white people with the same issues. But yet they don't get looked at and told it's because they're white, people are more sympathetic. It's unfair. I also find it really offensive that we aren't respected more because we're Aboriginal, and as there's a lot of Aboriginal people who are on the streets and have issues all Aboriginals must be like that. Why can't we be individuals too? (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Adelaide, 06/03/2018)

The Ngarrindjeri woman's exasperation made it clear to me how desperate she is for Aboriginal Australians to be viewed as individuals and shown more respect, rather than the issues facing some Aboriginal Australians shaping the negative perceptions applied to everyone. Additionally, I realised how her understanding of this lack of respect contributes to the issue of distrust towards non-Aboriginal people by Aboriginal Australians.

The views of the Ngarrindjeri woman in the café were echoed by others I spoke to, who were very frank when discussing the issues and behaviours that some Aboriginal Australians display in public. Although they are aware that some people can be intimidating and have alcohol and drug misuse issues, they find it unfair and demoralising that they are not seen as individuals but are judged on the public behaviour of some Aboriginal Australians. During my fieldwork in Adelaide, I observed both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who were either homeless, intoxicated, acting antisocially or a combination of all three; however, there was a substantially larger number of Aboriginal Australians compared to non-Aboriginal people (*Figure V. 2*). Passers-by reacted very similarly to these individuals by either ignoring them, or frowning and showing disapproving facial expressions.



**Figure V. 2: Homelessness in Adelaide city centre**

*This Aboriginal man was sleeping rough in Adelaide city centre and he was just one of many Aboriginal Australians who appeared homeless in the city. The reaction to him sleeping on the streets*

*was clear: this scene was met with frowns and disapproving sighs from non-Aboriginal Australians who passed him. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)*

There was one particular case that clearly shows this lack of respect and racist attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians. I was shocked to see a display of such blatant racist attitudes, especially when it involved a young girl, as it seemed to be reinforcing institutional racism on the next generation. One day, whilst I was waiting for a bus, an Aboriginal woman approached me and then a mother with a young daughter to ask for money. The Aboriginal woman was clearly in ill health, which was evident through the yellowness of her eyes, poor oral health and overall appearance, in addition to the smell of alcohol being prominent (Figure V. 3). My response to the Aboriginal woman and that of the mother were very different: I apologised and said that I did not have any money, but the mother spoke in a very dismissive tone and said, 'I'm not giving you any of my money'. Furthermore, the Aboriginal woman was not wearing shoes, which prompted the young girl to ask her mother why and whether that was why the Aboriginal woman wanted money, to which the mother responded in a contemptuous tone, 'No, it's just another Aboriginal'. The mother's response to the Aboriginal woman and her daughter surprised me, although I understood that she did not wish to be asked for money; however, her tone and the response she gave her daughter clearly indicated that she did not think very highly of Aboriginal Australians. It was evident that this mother assumed negative perceptions of Aboriginal Australians, as her tone and response to her daughter suggested that the Aboriginal woman was representative of all Aboriginal Australians. Aboriginal Australians are aware that, unfortunately, many non-Aboriginal people base their judgement and views of Aboriginal Australians on incidents of this type. Homelessness is another prominent issue in Adelaide, which was evident through both the number of people I observed sleeping on the streets and the number of charities which specialise in homelessness and drug and alcohol misuse situated around Whitmore Square. Despite the work of these charities, I saw a significant number of Aboriginal Australians drinking alcohol or intoxicated, which then reinforces the negative stereotypes that some non-Aboriginal Australians hold.



**Figure V. 3: An Aboriginal man and woman in Adelaide**

*This Aboriginal woman was evidently in ill health, through the yellowness in her eyes, she had very few teeth and her overall appearance, as well as her intoxication being evident through the smell of alcohol. After she asked myself and another woman for money at a bus stop, she then called the Aboriginal man to cross the road, before they walked off together. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 04/04/2018)*

I spoke to a non-Aboriginal woman (Appendix A: 13) who volunteers at one of the charities, which specialises in alcohol and drug addiction in Adelaide. This woman overheard me talking about my research when I was sitting in the café one day and she introduced herself. She went on to explain that there is a lot of stereotyping of Aboriginal Australians which can be damaging to them all, no matter what their achievements are or whether they are suffering from medical or mental health conditions:

A lot of Aboriginal people use our services because they have reached a turning point and want to get better. Alcohol and drugs are a big issue for a large proportion of Aboriginal people, but I think a bigger issue is that non-Aboriginal people don't ask why people are in the situation they are. Even here (in Adelaide) you see a lot of homeless Aboriginal people on the streets who are intoxicated and look in ill health, but people jump to conclusions rather than stop and think how sad it is that someone is living in that state and questioning how that person has got to where they are. Unfortunately, the negativity that a lot of Australians show Aboriginal people is a big problem and makes our job very difficult. It contributes to peoples' poor mental health and addictions and hinders recovery because it lowers confidence and self-worth. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

Another time, I came across a shy Aboriginal couple in Whitmore Square who were sitting on the pavement in the shade under a tree and were not bothering anyone (*Figure V. 4*). The Aboriginal man was playing his guitar, whilst the Aboriginal woman was going through her belongings that she had been carrying in a plastic bag. Even though they were not interacting with anyone who passed by, I noticed they were still attracting disapproving looks from non-Aboriginal Australians.



**Figure V. 4: An Aboriginal couple near Whitmore Square in Adelaide**

*I noticed this Aboriginal couple by Whitmore Square. They were very quiet and shy and decided to sit down on the pavement under a tree; she went through their belongings in a plastic bag whilst he played his guitar. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)*

The charity volunteer, who I quoted earlier, also drew my attention to a reoccurring detrimental impact of the negative attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians that was mentioned by other people I spoke to throughout my fieldwork: low self-esteem. Like others who I spoke to, the charity volunteer clarified that these negative attitudes lower Aboriginal Australians' self-worth. She felt that this makes it more difficult for those individuals with low self-esteem to persevere to improve their lifestyle and health when they are conscious of how they are valued in society for being Aboriginal. This detrimental impact further explains how these negative perceptions reinforce the issue of distrust between Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal Australians. Aboriginal Australians are aware of the negative views about them, and therefore have an understanding of the level of respect shown towards them by some non-Aboriginal Australians. It could be argued that with this knowledge, many Aboriginal Australians struggle to trust non-Aboriginal people, as they believe that non-Aboriginal Australians will apply the negative perceptions to them. It has been suggested that the role of family and community are essential in providing a counterweight to the negative stereotypes attached to Aboriginal Australians (Weedon, 2004: 52), however not all Aboriginal Australians have those strong connections with their families or communities and thus are likely to feel the impact of the negativity more harshly. When I stayed in the Coorong, during a conversation with a female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) outside her office, a Ngarrindjeri man (Appendix A: 7), who is a prominent political activist and spokesperson for the community, interrupted us when we were talking about the fragmentation of trust and clearly stated the link between the issue of distrust and negative perceptions:

If anyone was treated how us blackfellas get treated, they wouldn't want to trust whitefellas either. I think people sometimes think we're being difficult or something, but we're not. We don't trust whitefellas, including the Government, because of everything we have to go through every day. Being called names, even just the way people look at us sometimes, it doesn't help us want to trust people. It's obvious what they think about us. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri man, Coorong, 13/02/2018)

The female Ngarrindjeri Elder reiterated that it is only some and not all non-Aboriginal people who have negative views of Aboriginal Australians. Nonetheless, it was very evident how frustrating most Aboriginal Australians find the issues of distrust and negative perceptions.

During my time in Australia, conversations with participants gave me an insight into their experiences within the areas of education, health and employment. It became apparent to me early in my fieldwork that distrust is a common issue that underpins many of the experiences that participants shared with me, regardless of whether they were talking about education, health or employment experiences. I was told by many of my participants that Aboriginal Australians are all too aware of the negativity towards them, and the stereotypes that are

presumed to be relevant to all Aboriginal Australians. This awareness has significantly contributed to the issue of distrust: Aboriginal Australians often struggle to trust non-Aboriginal people, due to their knowledge that a high proportion of non-Aboriginal people do not trust them. I became aware that this was a common understanding and feeling amongst my Aboriginal participants from both Adelaide and the Coorong Region, despite their experiences of negativity being different. When I spoke with Ngarrindjeri Elders, I realised that their community, who are situated in a rural location, are less likely to experience racism or discriminatory actions in person, but instead are more likely to be faced with the assumptions about Aboriginal Australians and the negative views held by some non-Aboriginal people, including the Australian Government, through the media. When referring to the media which influences the Ngarrindjeri community members' understanding of these assumptions, it is a term that includes radio, television programmes, social media, websites and newspapers. This is not to say that members of the Ngarrindjeri community do not experience racism or derogatory behaviours towards them where they live; as the female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3), who has a prominent position in the community, explained, they are still subjected to it in their small home town, albeit not very frequently. However, she revealed that when they visit Adelaide and large towns it can be a shock, as the issue is more problematic for them there as they are exposed to the negativity more regularly:

We're lucky because there are quite a lot of us that live here, or near here, so we get on well with everyone, including whitefellas. But that can make it harder sometimes when we do go to the city because we're not used to how blackfellas are treated, so it's a bit more of a shock. We know but we don't, if that makes sense. Like, we understand how we can be mistreated and what people think of us, but we haven't had the experience of it. For us, when we're not in the city we probably hear more of the negative stuff on TV, especially when it comes to politics.

(Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 13/02/2018)

During our conversation, the Elder laughed when saying that she experiences more negativity through media; nevertheless, she made it clear that the mistreatment and negativity that Aboriginal Australians experience in public is something that concerns younger community members. As they do not witness this behaviour on a regular basis, it makes them more worried about the prospect of leaving their small town and community when they are older,

and this in turn, for some of them, limits job prospects to the local area. Additionally, this leads to younger community members being more hesitant to trust non-Aboriginal Australians when they hear about the negative views and actions towards Aboriginal Australians, which causes a greater sense of distrust to be instilled. Whereas it is more common for the Ngarrindjeri community to experience the negative perceptions and stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal Australians through the media, I learnt that the Kurna community and Aboriginal Australians who live in Adelaide endure the negativity in person more frequently. Because Adelaide is a more urban location, there is a higher proportion of non-Aboriginal people mixing with Aboriginal Australians. In addition to this, there are more charities and centres that offer support for those Aboriginal Australians who are suffering poverty or some sort of addiction which, in turn, leads to the presence of more Aboriginal Australians who reinforce the stereotypes through their behaviour. This supports the Beyond Blue research, which also concluded that Aboriginal Australians in metropolitan areas are significantly more likely to experience discriminatory actions from non-Aboriginal people (Beyond Blue, 2014: 4). The non-Aboriginal woman (Appendix A: 13), who volunteers at a charity in Adelaide, explained that before her current role in the city she worked at a charity in a more rural location. She revealed to me that she herself has noticed how location can impact the treatment of Aboriginal Australians, although the issue concerning the level of trust remains the same:

I was shocked when we first moved to the city and saw just how differently they're (Aboriginal Australians) treated. I remember turning to my husband and saying I don't think I can live here, when we were having brunch and heard some teenagers laughing and joking about an Aboriginal guy. It was horrible, but in fact it actually made me more determined to stay here and help at the charity and prove that we aren't all racist or disrespectful to them. It's weird though because the trust issues are exactly the same as where I worked, even though the clients I help now have more racism hurled at them than the Aboriginal people living where I used to live, which was rural. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

Although their location impacts how Aboriginal Australians experience the negative perceptions, one aspect that is constant is how the negativity of some non-Aboriginal people

contributes to the distrust that is felt by many Aboriginal Australians. Understanding and acknowledging the impact of negative perceptions towards Aboriginal Australians is important because, as participants expressed, it is a significant contributor to the ongoing issue of distrust which causes a divide within society. Many Aboriginal participants revealed that because the negative perceptions are dominant in their lives, the issue of distrust is problematic in wider society and can therefore also contribute to the effectiveness of legislation, specifically in relation to how trustworthy Aboriginal Australians view new legislation and services to be. It was apparent from the conversations I had with my participants that without Aboriginal Australians feeling that they are trusted and respected, which could be achieved by minimising the negative attitudes and perceptions held by non-Aboriginal people, they will not feel able to reciprocate the trust towards non-Aboriginal people. Therefore, with the ongoing problem of some non-Aboriginal peoples' attitudes and views of Aboriginal Australians, the issue of distrust is going to continue and be embedded from both sides.

### **Historical Past: The Stolen Generations**

One of the most significant moments throughout Australian history is the event of the Stolen Generations, when Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and placed into care due to Government policies concerning assimilation and child welfare. The forcible removal of Aboriginal children took place from 1910 until 1970, although this is an approximation because it is thought that the removal of Aboriginal children in some states began during the 1890s. When the children were removed, they were either placed in institutions, foster care or adopted; families who fostered or adopted Aboriginal children were non-Aboriginal, white Australians. After the children were removed, they were not allowed any interaction with Aboriginal culture and were often refused information about their families, both of which were an attempt to deny Aboriginal culture and force the children to adopt the non-Aboriginal culture and views in Australia at the time. Many Aboriginal families were affected, and the success of the Australian Government at cutting cultural ties and depriving the Aboriginal children of any knowledge of their families has resulted in a lasting

impact which spans across generations of Aboriginal Australians. This impact is a prominent factor that contributes to the level of distrust felt by Aboriginal Australians towards non-Aboriginal people and the Australian Government. I was aware of the influence that the Stolen Generations still has on Aboriginal families and the emotional pain that some are still trying to comprehend, but I did not realise how influential it is in their daily lives. During my fieldwork, many Aboriginal participants mentioned how their families had been directly impacted by the events of the Stolen Generations, with others revealing that if their families were fortunate enough not to have been subjected to the removal of Aboriginal children themselves, they still knew at least one Aboriginal family within their community who was less fortunate than theirs.

*One Family's Experience of the Stolen Generations: Pain Overrides the Ability to Trust*

When I had a 'yarn' over a cup of tea with a Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3), she told me about her late husband's family, as his father's family had originated from England and she thought that was an interesting commonality between myself and him. Having briefly explained about his family, she gave me a book (Appendix B: 2) entitled 'They took our land and then our children: Ngarrindjeri struggle for truth and justice' (2007) which explains the history of the Stolen Generations and its impact on the Ngarrindjeri community. She then disclosed that her husband's family were 'victims' of the Stolen Generation and detailed how their lives were never the same again after it happened. I felt honoured that the Ngarrindjeri Elder, with whom I had built a strong rapport, was willing to be so open and explain the case of her late brother-in-law who was taken from his family, despite the emotional heartache that was evident in her sombre expression and cracked voice. She began by explaining that her brother-in-law was only an infant of thirteen months when he was taken to Adelaide hospital because he had an upset stomach by friends of his parents, as his parents did not own a car and needed to care for their other children. However, the details recorded on his file by the hospital were not true; these stated that the infant was admitted with symptoms that had developed due to being neglected by his parents:

The hospital said he was malnourished and neglected, and that his Mum had left the home and his Dad was an alcoholic and was looking after all the kids alone. None of that was true, but because the hospital wrote that on his file, that meant the welfare officers could take him. The whole reason [name removed] was taken to hospital was because he couldn't eat because he was ill. It turned out he had gastro, which explains all his symptoms. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

The Ngarrindjeri Elder recognised that her husband's family was not perfect, and that his parents argued and ended up separating; however, she adamantly insisted that they always looked after the children and it was unjust for her brother-in-law to be taken into care. Part way through explaining what happened, the Ngarrindjeri Elder paused and said that she had forgotten to highlight an important point to me:

They weren't only Aboriginal, they were half-caste. So [name removed] had lighter skin than me, and most other blackfellas. They were still blackfellas, but they had lighter skin which authorities favoured when taking children. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

After clarifying that lighter skin was a favoured trait by welfare authorities during the Stolen Generations because it made it easier to rehome the children into non-Aboriginal families, the Ngarrindjeri Elder sighed and then continued to explain how events unfolded. At the time, I was still in shock at how the hospital staff had lied on the hospital record, but as our conversation continued I realised that was just the beginning of everything and the situation became much more unjust and deplorable.

Throughout the child's time in hospital, his mother tried to keep updated on her son's progress by writing to the Aboriginal Protection Board, who corresponded with the hospital and provided updates to the family, as the family had no telephone. The Ngarrindjeri Elder pointed out that her brother-in-law's mother was still asking how he was and when could they take him home five months after he was admitted, although, unbeknown to her, the infant had already been sent away with non-Aboriginal foster parents, only twelve days after he was admitted:

[Name removed] kept asking when they were going to get him home, but the protection board kept saying soon, but he just needed to be there a bit longer. But he had already been taken. They lied to his mother not only whilst he was in hospital, but after he was taken. All those months she thought he was still in hospital, but he wasn't. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

The Ngarrindjeri Elder then lent forward in her chair, getting closer to me, and said that the removal and fostering was done illegally. The infant's parents had not been consulted prior to him being taken into care, and the paperwork that was required to be completed in advance when fostering out Aboriginal children was completed six weeks after he had been placed into care:

They didn't even do the right legal paperwork for him. The white couple went to the hospital and took him. That was it. That Christmas Day when he went to hospital was the last time [name removed] would ever see his Dad, and it was ten years before he saw his Mum. It was tough and unfair. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

Unfortunately for the father, the last time he saw his child was when his friends took the infant to hospital; the father died eight years later. It was not until ten years after that the child was reunited with his mother. When the word 'reunited' is used, it is often perceived in a positive manner as the word has positive connotations about people being overjoyed that they are back together after being apart. However, as the Ngarrindjeri Elder explained, that was not the case when her brother-in-law saw his mother again. In the ten years that her brother-in-law was in foster care, he grew up struggling with his identity, knowing, but not understanding why, he was different to the other non-Aboriginal children at his school and his foster parents. His behaviour deteriorated, he began stealing, and he suffered from mental health problems. At the same time his foster mother developed psychological problems and she was hospitalised. This resulted in the breakdown of the foster arrangements and authorities decided to return him to his mother, having had two visits before the reunion. I was told by the Ngarrindjeri Elder how her brother-in-law only spent a year with his mother because he continually got into trouble due to his poor behaviour, before his mother told him to leave. During his youth, the brother-in-law had intermittent stays with his mother and was also

fostered by a different non-Aboriginal family; however, they were unsuccessful like his first foster family because of his behaviour and mental health. He ended up spending time in different institutions; some focused on troubled youths or mental health and others were reformatories. When explaining this period of her brother-in-law's life, the Ngarrindjeri Elder appeared sympathetic and sorrowful because of how troubled his upbringing was as a result of the damage done when he was taken as an infant:

As a kid, he was really troubled. His behaviour kept getting him caught up with the police and people saw him as an out of control kid, rather than understanding why. He was basically having a crisis with himself, not knowing who he is or where he belongs. He was in and out of different homes, prisons and his Mum's and foster family's houses. I mean, it's not a surprise really. When he was three years old he was pulling his own hair out because he was so distressed. Imagine how bad it must've been to live with those emotions and feelings your whole life. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

It was evident from what the Ngarrindjeri Elder was telling me that a lack of stability and identity had a large impact on her brother-in-law throughout his childhood, and when he was an adult his challenging behaviour became more severe and resulted in him committing crimes.

During the conversation with the Ngarrindjeri Elder, it was obvious to me that the family loved her brother-in-law dearly, but this did not stop her detailing the struggles he had as an adult, including his own dysfunctional relationships, his inability to secure long-term employment and his battle with alcohol. Part of his mental health struggles were heavily impacted by the emotional trauma he had suffered throughout his childhood, and to help him cope he relied a lot on alcohol and cigarettes. This in turn, alongside the other struggles he faced because of being taken from his family as an infant, saw him unable to secure employment and have successful relationships, which both of his siblings, who were not removed from the family, achieved:

He had a tough time, no a tough life. His whole life was a battle for him. If he didn't know who he was or how to handle the emotions of everything he'd been through,

how could anyone else help him. He couldn't keep down a job and he had a lot of failed relationships, I think because he didn't know how to cope with his emotions. He turned to the bottle a lot, I think that numbed everything for him. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

The level of detail about her husband's family experience of being part of the Stolen Generations that the Ngarrindjeri Elder shared was harrowing, and clearly illustrates why most Aboriginal Australians want to see evidence that the Australian Government has changed and can now be trusted with issues concerning Aboriginal Australians. Having an identity is crucial in a person's sense of self as it enables them to connect with some people, whilst separating them from others (Appiah and Gates, Jr., 1992), in addition to enabling individuals to understand characteristics that they share with others, which in turn provides a sense of solidarity (Hall, 1996: 2). Thus, it is evident how confusion surrounding their identity can be damaging for people, such as the Ngarrindjeri Elder's brother-in-law who did not understand who he was or where he belonged. He did not have the filtered outlook referred to by Appiah and Gates Jr. (1992); he could not comprehend with whom he did or did not connect, and the repercussion of this was his feeling of being isolated within society and not belonging anywhere. The process of how one's identity is constructed, including what constitutes as an identity, and the importance of having an understanding of one's identity differs between societies (Mitchell, 2010). In this specific case, the upbringing of the Ngarrindjeri Elder's brother-in-law was essential in him establishing his identity, but this was also the stage in his life where such trauma was inflicted upon him and why he encountered issues with his identity later in life. The Ngarrindjeri Elder recommended I read *Kick the Tin* (Kartinyeri, 2000), a personal testimony of another member of the Stolen Generations; the author explains how her upbringing caused her to miss out on the bonding process within her family (Kartinyeri, 2000). Essentially, for these two individuals, the bonding stage during childhood is pivotal in the process of how their identity, as Aboriginal Australians, is constructed, and therefore being denied that stage in their lives was incredibly detrimental. This is one family's testimony; however, it is without question that the experiences of other families who are part of the Stolen Generations are just as harrowing.

*Justice through Financial Compensation: Can Trust be Bought?*

After the Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) finished telling me the details of her brother-in-law's upbringing, she explained that a specific situation helped him and his siblings grow closer, after they struggled to become close when they were initially reunited. About ten years before her brother-in-law died, he began legal action against the South Australian Government. Through the gathering of evidence and court cases, his family were able to gain a better understanding of what he had been through as a child and how significant the lasting impact was on his life. During the legal case, evidence proved that not only did the hospital falsely claim his parents were neglecting him and his father was a drunkard, but in fact, police reports stated the opposite and highlighted that his family lived in a clean and tidy metal shack:

We were really lucky because so much evidence was still kept, that's unusual as most Stolen Generations victims either never had papers or they have been lost or binned. We had everything, including the police report about his Mum and Dad's clean and tidy shack that they lived in. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

The Ngarrindjeri Elder shared that the most important part of this legal case was to clear her brothers-in-law's parents' names and for there to be recognition of how damaging the removal was for him. Their family was successful, and not only did the Supreme Court state that he had been wrongfully removed from his family, but he was also awarded compensation. This specific case is particularly significant in the history of the Stolen Generations as the Ngarrindjeri Elder's brother-in-law was the first, and currently is still the only, Aboriginal Australian who has been ruled by the court as being wrongfully taken from their family and awarded compensation by the South Australian Government. After we got another cup of tea and moved outside to enjoy the late afternoon sunshine, the Ngarrindjeri Elder wanted to expand upon a comment she had made earlier about the compensation, saying that for the family, the court's verdict was the important outcome, not the money:

We've cleared their names, and so on file they are now good parents rather than ones who neglected their child. And as for [name removed], this has proved that

the authorities and Government in South Australia caused him to live such a tragic life, it wasn't just him being him. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

I asked the Ngarrindjeri Elder how their family reacted to the verdict after hearing that they had won the case and that justice had finally been granted to their family, especially her brother-in-law:

We were all shocked. We didn't think we were going to win, never. Aboriginal cases always lose, so we thought that this one especially would lose. We were all so shocked that [name removed] finally had justice and we have shown to all the others who were taken from their families that there is hope for them. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

Despite this momentous ruling and the happiness that the family felt when they achieved justice, it was clear to me that the issue of distrust towards the Australian Government was still prominent. I questioned whether the court ruling and compensation assisted the family and wider Ngarrindjeri community, to bridge the issue of distrust which is felt so strongly by Aboriginal Australians:

We won and he got money, but money doesn't fix things. Not the trauma and pain that [name removed] went through his whole life, and the struggles the rest of the family went through. We'll always feel some pain for what happened. I'm not sure that will ever go away, I think it'll just get passed down through generations. I'm not sure we'll ever trust the Government, they did a lot of damage. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 23/02/2018)

The Ngarrindjeri Elder pointed out that even though they won their court case, received compensation, and received positive media coverage on their case, the emotions from the trauma that was caused by her brother-in-law being forcibly removed from his family are still very raw. The intensity of the Stolen Generation events alone explains why there is an immense struggle for Aboriginal Australians to trust non-Aboriginal people and the Australian Government, with the sense of distrust continuing through generations. The emotional pain associated with the Stolen Generations is felt by younger generations despite them not

experiencing the trauma themselves, as the emotional connection is passed down through oral stories and the strong cultural bonds.

*The Impact of History on Present Day Lives: Perspectives of Aboriginal Australians*

The case of the Ngarrindjeri Elder's brother-in-law was just one circumstance of how a family was affected by the Stolen Generations that I learnt about. All the cases I heard about were personal and slightly different, particularly the circumstances leading to the removal of children. However, two factors that were clearly the same in all cases was the impact on the individual removed as a child and their family, and the lasting issues of trust outside of their Aboriginal communities. After hearing the accounts of how families were impacted, I understood why there is such a resistance to trust the Australian Government; there is an element of fear felt by Aboriginal Australians. The lasting impact of the Stolen Generations is not just emotional, but also physical. Some of the children that were forcibly removed from their families have been reunited with their Aboriginal families. I was visiting a museum in Adelaide that had been recommended to me by a Ngarrindjeri Elder because of the sympathetic approach taken to exhibit the Stolen Generation content. Whilst I was at the museum, a Kurna woman (Appendix A: 23) who worked there introduced herself and when she was explaining some of the exhibit content to me, she told me of the difficulties people have faced when they have attempted to be reunited with their families and how being reunited does not necessarily warrant a 'happy ending':

Authorities weren't bothered in filing information carefully; some documents were even destroyed on purpose. I guess they never thought what they were doing was wrong, and so didn't think there was any need for the information. Either that, or they just wanted to make it as hard as possible for the victims to find out who the real them is and be reunited with their families. But even if someone is lucky enough to have all their papers, that doesn't mean it's a happy ending. For some people, the struggles for people to be reunited with their families are just as hard as being taken. (Personal Communication: Kurna Woman, Adelaide, 15/03/2018)

The difficulties associated with the incorrect records, and lack of records, have also been significant in the issue of distrust. People who I spoke to made it very clear that the blame, not only for the Stolen Generations, but for the challenges individuals faced when tracing their families, lies with the Australian Government and other key authorities. Those involved in the child removal were not concerned in preserving personal information or documentation relating to the children and their families, which has resulted in the difficulty, and in some cases inability, for people to trace their families and be reunited. Therefore, there is still a high proportion of Aboriginal Australians who are not only living with the trauma of being forcibly removed as a child, but also the pain of still not being reunited with their families, and in some cases having no knowledge of who their family even is. For the individuals who can access information about their families, it does not always end happily for them either, as was first mentioned to me by the Kurna woman at the museum in Adelaide. She expanded on this point and explained the difficult emotional journey that Aboriginal Australians, who were part of the Stolen Generations, embark on when attempting to be reunited with their families, and why a reunion is not always the answer to healing the pain and trauma that was endured by many Aboriginal Australians:

Even when victims find that their information was kept, that doesn't guarantee a happy ending. Because it's usually a long task before they can even start tracing family because they need to make sure they've got everything, all the papers and records. But sometimes family members have died before having the chance to reunite and so they never get a chance to see them. My friend took about eight years trying to find all the documents she needed to find her Mum and Dad, and she was so happy when she found out that her records were kept and she had everything she needed. But then she was shattered when she was told both of them had died. She never got to see them one last time, or to say goodbye. She's really struggled with that and blames the Government for denying her that time with them. (Personal Communication: Kurna Woman, Adelaide, 15/03/2018)

The difficulties reuniting with families are not limited to the pain of discovering that family members have died before being reunited, but also expands to cultural issues.

The issues relating to cultural identity and clashes as a result of the Stolen Generations was brought to my attention by two participants, one from the Ngarrindjeri community and the other who is a Kurna Elder in Adelaide. As part of the Stolen Generations, children who were forcibly removed were prohibited from any involvement with Aboriginal culture; this resulted in individuals struggling with their cultural identity, which meant they found it difficult to know who they were. It has been suggested that the strict prohibitions of Aboriginal culture causes questions to be raised about what it means to be Aboriginal when isolated from Aboriginal communities, especially traditional tribal communities (Weedon, 2004). Hall states that symbolic resources are required to sustain one's identity (1996: 2), therefore it could be argued that through the Stolen Generations being denied Aboriginal culture, this is denying them from the necessary symbolic resources needed to identify as Aboriginal. As Mitchell (2010) explains, the understanding of what identity means for different people needs to be understood, and it became apparent during my conversations with participants just how crucial Aboriginal culture is in the identity of Aboriginal Australians. It was evident that many Aboriginal Australians view culture as being part of themselves, rooted in various aspects of their lives, such as the complex wider kinship ties, their spirituality and its connection to the land, as well as in their language. However, when participants explained the difficulties faced by those who were part of the Stolen Generations in understanding their connectedness with Aboriginal culture, it illustrates the different way in which some non-Aboriginal Australians view the term 'culture' superficially, rather than acknowledging it as a process that is entwined in Aboriginal Australians' lives. A Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 2) who grew up near the Coorong told me of the difficulties associated with Aboriginal culture for those who were part of the Stolen Generations when we had a conversation about the importance of the Ngarrindjeri language and the oral teaching of culture:

It really depends how long they were taken for and how old they were. Some were given back a lot earlier than others, but for most they grew up without their culture but at the same time knowing there was a blank gap in their life where culture was missing. Without culture, us blackfellas haven't got an identity. It was really tough for those who found their families and communities because they didn't understand our culture, they'd been raised as whitefellas. It was crueller for the older kids that were taken, they'd started to learn the culture, language, stories

etc., then it was taken from them, but they always knew it existed. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 08/02/2018)

My conversation with the Kurna woman in Adelaide resonated with the conversation I had with the Ngarrindjeri Elder, with her specifically categorising some of the emotional pain as being the feelings of an 'identity crisis':

A lot of those who were taken have suffered an identity crisis knowing they aren't whitefellas but also don't think they're blackfellas. So, who are they? And that's the question they ask themselves, and have done their whole life. They grew up being told they're not Aboriginal but they knew they were different to whitefellas, so aren't white either. If you don't know who you are, how can you live your life, or in this case if you are distressed from being taken and then at eighteen you are shoved out onto the streets because you're an adult, how can you start living and trying to process everything that has happened if you don't know who you are. I know people who have gone through these thoughts and its scary and lonely. I think it's important to know that the Stolen Generations pain is more than just being taken. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 08/02/2018)

I became aware that in an attempt to fully understand the extent of the distrust associated with the Stolen Generations, knowledge of what Aboriginal Australians endured is key. However, as I was told by one participant, unless you have been through the trauma of the Stolen Generations you will never understand the true extent of the violations and ongoing pain that is felt daily by individuals, their families and communities. Nevertheless, the trauma associated with the Stolen Generations is obvious and clearly accentuates the ongoing issue of trust between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians. In 2007, the Australian Government attempted to rectify the past wrongdoings and the distrust between them and Aboriginal Australians by giving a formal apology for the Stolen Generations. I was told on several occasions that this was a momentous occasion and Aboriginal Australians were pleased with the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, for persevering and making the apology when previous Prime Ministers had refused. Unfortunately, the positivity was short-lived when the promises made in the apology speech, aimed at improving the everyday lives for Aboriginal Australians and closing the gap in equality, were not upheld and subsequent Prime Ministers have not been successful in achieving them.

As my knowledge of specific details and the impact of the Stolen Generations broadened through conversations with Aboriginal Australians, I realised that the issue of distrust is not just between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians. There was a combination of services involved in the Stolen Generations which are referred to in literature as authorities and were also referred to as authorities to me during conversations. The authorities, and the services which formed them, were the people that essentially put the Government's policy into practice and therefore, also have a considerable amount of blame placed on them by Aboriginal Australians. Child protection services, the police and hospital staff were all involved in some form during the Stolen Generations; the level of involvement of these three services vary by case, but the impact on the ability for many Aboriginal Australians to trust these services is still present. I had a conversation with a British woman in Adelaide (Appendix A: 12), who had emigrated to Australia and whose daughter works in child welfare services. We originally started talking after she noticed I was British, but our generalised conversation about us both being from England became more specific when she learnt about my research:

My daughter works with Aboriginal teenagers and young adults, and her job is to help support them. How they behave towards her is shocking, but understandable. She gets shouted at, spat at, sworn at, you name it, it's probably happened. She spends weeks, actually more like months, building up trust because they just take one look at a white woman working in welfare services and there's no trust whatsoever. But that's not surprising when you think what role welfare services played during the Stolen Generations. They were supposed to be making decisions to improve the lives of Aboriginal families, but it was actually the opposite and everyone remembers that. Fortunately, my daughter is thick-skinned and understands where the attitude is coming from; she knows they're just scared and it's her job to reassure them and support them, but unfortunately not everyone is like that. (Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)

There is no doubt that the impact of the Stolen Generations is still present today and plays a role in the reluctance of many Aboriginal Australians to trust the Australian Government and the services implemented through legislation. From what some participants revealed through

conversations, the pain and trauma of what Aboriginal Australians went through is just as raw today as when it happened.

Throughout my fieldwork I was surprised, and appreciative, of how willing people were to openly discuss the emotional trauma of the Stolen Generations because of the level of distrust which stems from it. The experiences of those involved in the Stolen Generations are very personal, but it was evident that those to whom I spoke wanted to make it clear to me how influential the Stolen Generations is in regards to distrust. However, one particular Elder not only wanted to inform me on the issues of trust, but appeared to try and justify the consensus of Aboriginal Australians towards their lack of willingness to trust the Australian Government and authorities. At the end of a conversation with the Ngarrindjeri Elder she asked me if I would trust any legislation or services that came from a Government who had put my relatives through the same experience as those of the Stolen Generations. She was attempting to place me in her situation to explain why she, and many other Aboriginal Australians, have a strong sense of reluctance to rectify the issue of trust between themselves and the Australian Government. My honest answer, particularly after hearing the personal accounts and the ongoing emotional distress of some Aboriginal Australians, is no, not without understanding that change has happened. In other words, I personally would want to have the knowledge that my best interests were genuinely at the forefront of the decision-making of the Government. The Elder who asked me this question nodded and expressed that my response is how they all feel. They believe they have not seen adequate progress since the Stolen Generations, despite the National Apology, to suggest that Aboriginal Australians are equal to non-Aboriginal Australians and that they can trust the decisions and actions of the Australian Government and the services who were involved with the forced removals. Due to the severity of the trauma inflicted on Aboriginal Australians throughout the Stolen Generations, there is caution and reluctance towards services and legislation directed at Aboriginal Australians.

### **The Impact of Distrust on Medical Care and Health Policy**

The healthcare service was one of the prominent authorities involved in the Stolen Generations, specifically hospitals and their staff. Because of this and the lasting impact of the Stolen Generations, many Aboriginal Australians do not view the health service positively, which therefore amplifies the issue of trust towards them. The lack of trust that Aboriginal Australians have towards the healthcare system was evident throughout my fieldwork, both when discussing the Stolen Generations and during conversations with Aboriginal Australians about their experiences of accessing health services. The health of Aboriginal Australians has been widely researched, with much of it looking at specific health concerns related to them. A key concern that research has raised is that Aboriginal Australians are more susceptible to certain health limitations. Although literature is often focused on the lifestyle choices of Aboriginal Australians, specifically smoking habits and diet, it became evident to me that a prominent concern should be the issue of trust towards healthcare services as I found that it impacts the willingness of Aboriginal Australians to access relevant health services. The need to address the health of Aboriginal Australians is essential because it could be argued that they fall into the 'illness poverty trap' (Whitehead et al, 2000). As some Aboriginal Australians experience poverty, they could be more susceptible to falling ill as it is suggested that poverty produces ill health which is then exacerbated by poverty (Nguyen and Peschard, 2003: 463).

In Meningie, the main town for the Ngarrindjeri community, there is one hospital which provides services for acute health concerns, has an accident and emergency service and can accommodate in-patients. However, as would be expected in a small town, it lacks the technological advances that other major hospitals have. If any surgery or specialised treatments are required, the patients are transferred to other hospitals, such as the Royal Adelaide hospital, which are equipped to offer more advanced treatments. The two towns near the Ngarrindjeri community who have the most advanced hospitals are Murray Bridge, which is on average a fifty minutes' drive from the community, and Berri, which is more than two and a half hours' drive from Meningie. Despite the distance of the major hospitals from the Ngarrindjeri community, there are medical services located near them. In addition to the hospital in Meningie, there are health services provided in Raukkan at a walk-in centre (*Figure V. 5*). The centre has been decorated with a mural which depicts Aboriginal faces, making the

centre look less clinical and more approachable (*Figure V.5, 6 & 7*). The photographs of the murals on the health centre not only capture the talent of the local Aboriginal artist who painted them, but also show the significance, both in scale and in purpose, of them being so prominent in the small community, and I wanted to try and capture the emotion that the mural creates when you see it. Firstly, it should be noted that the mural is valuable in giving a literal message through art to encourage community members to access the health service, through the images representing recognition and respect for Aboriginal Australians. Of the three faces painted, one stood out as being particularly meaningful in shining positivity within the community. The image of the elderly Aboriginal woman with a beaming smile, which was directly next to the centre, appeared to be powerful in giving the message and encouragement for Aboriginal Australians to accept themselves as Aboriginal and encourage self-worth and pride for being who they are. The image radiated positivity, acceptance, pride and self-worth, which for Aboriginal Australians, particularly the younger generations, is not always easy to accomplish because of racism and negative assumptions. When talking to the community, it was apparent that the reluctance to access the health services is widespread, and they often delay accessing a service until the situation has reached its worst or until they are unable to delay it any further. A Ngarrindjeri man (Appendix A: 2), who grew up visiting the Coorong with his parents, revealed that his family only access health services when all other options have been tried:

If we're sick, we'll wait a bit to see if it goes. We won't go to the hospital straight away, that's only if nothing else works. Sometimes it'll be months before we decide that we have to go. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Man, Coorong, 03/03/2018)

This statement by the Ngarrindjeri man was surprising, because I was aware that the Ngarrindjeri community have lost a number of influential Elders in close succession over recent years, which has resulted in a testing time for the community members who are still trying to gain a sense of normality without them. One of the Ngarrindjeri Elders was a man in his fifties and was held in high regard for his continuous work that focused on improving the lives of the Ngarrindjeri community and other Aboriginal Australians across Australia. He was a prominent figure in advocating for justice and fairness and was committed in achieving

purposeful reconciliation. His wife, the female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) quoted previously, who has a prominent position within the community, expressed the shock of his death:

His death was such a shock, we didn't expect it. He was sitting here (the participant pointed at a desk in the corner of the room) whilst I was up at the house. I needed to ask him something and when I came in I just saw him slumped over. He wasn't talking, nothing. We called the ambulance but it took too long to get here. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

Her husband died of a fatal heart attack and she explained that he had no other health conditions prior to his death. In addition to her understandable grief, she was visibly frustrated and pointed out that many questions were on peoples' minds because he died at a much younger age than the average life expectancy age of non-Aboriginal Australians. One question was asked more than any other: why was he unable to live as long as those who are non-Aboriginal? This question illustrated the frustration provoked by the feeling of unfairness that an Elder who was so young was unable to see his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up:

It's such an unfair world. He gave so much to everyone, to our land, to our future. But yet he couldn't even make it to sixty, why? Why couldn't he live as long as a whitefella? He spent his life working for us, even on the day he died he was working at his desk. We miss him; I miss him dearly. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

Because of the level of frustration and sadness felt in the community following the deaths of the Elders, I presumed that members of the community would be more willing and enthusiastic to access the health services. They made it clear to me that they realise that health complications can arise without any prior warning and therefore it is a necessity to look after one's health, so I was surprised that they seemed hesitant to access health services.





**Figure V. 5, 6 & 7: The Moorundi Health Service centre in Raukkan**

*The Moorundi Health Service walk-in centre that is located in Raukkan provides an array of medical and social support to the Aboriginal families living in Raukkan, in addition to other Ngarrindjeri community members who live nearby. The murals of Aboriginal Australians which are painted on the sides of the Moorundi Health Service clinic in Raukkan help to make the centre as welcoming as possible for the Ngarrindjeri community, and clearly indicate the dedication that the service holds towards Aboriginal Australians. (Author's own image, Raukkan, South Australia, 10/02/2018)*

In Australia, Medicare is the publicly funded healthcare system that is available to all citizens and provides access to free and reduced cost health services. However, whilst it enables individuals to be treated free of charge at a public hospital, it is a relatively complicated system as the free and reduced cost services are usually achieved through reimbursement. Health services have the capacity to choose how they bill patients, either accepting to bill the insurance company or Medicare directly or by charging the patient who then claims the charges back. Moreover, the distinction between what is available free of charge and what is a billed service is not easily understood; for example: appointments with some doctors, specialists, dentists and optometrists incur some form of charges (Australian Government Department of Human Services, 2019). Because of the combination of charges and free services available in Australia, it is increasingly common for individuals to have health insurance as well as Medicare to help cover the fee-paying services and access private healthcare. It is argued that those who are considered wealthy are better able to shield

themselves from elements that are detrimental to their health and protect themselves through good medical care, whereas those who are poor are increasingly vulnerable as they are deprived of the protection based on their social mobility (Nguyen and Peschard, 2003: 464). Therefore, the implications of the Australian medical system needing to be subsidised in some areas by payments or medical insurance, reinforce Nguyen and Peschard's argument, and subsequently influence many Aboriginal Australians' access to medical care. However, within Medicare there are also specific services for Aboriginal Australians, which are led by culturally trained professionals who help and encourage Aboriginal Australians to sign up for Medicare and claim incurred costs, educate Aboriginal communities on the benefits of healthcare, and help to train and support health services within Aboriginal communities (Australian Government Department of Human Services, 2018). However, despite the healthcare services' efforts to make access more straightforward for Aboriginal Australians, through enlisting a specific department within Medicare to assist them, participants in both the Ngarrindjeri and Kurna communities explained that it is a complicated system for them to use.

Like the Ngarrindjeri, members of the Kurna community in Adelaide are hesitant to access health services. Despite Adelaide having a major hospital and a variety of health services across the city, the participants I spoke to deemed accessing healthcare a 'hassle' and therefore, were more likely to ignore any health symptoms or wait until the issue was serious. From my observations when staying in Adelaide, it was clear to me that a higher proportion of those Aboriginal Australians I saw were not accessing health services; their appearances suggested that they were suffering from liver problems, poor dental health and mobility issues. These observations could also be signs of poverty, and therefore, because of the 'illness poverty trap' (Whitehead et al, 2001), may further accentuate the need for the specific Aboriginal Australians who I observed to access healthcare services. However, it should not be ignored that some Aboriginal Australians appeared in good health. I spoke to a female Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 18), who volunteered at a charity coffee shop who explained that a lot of Kurna people and members of other Aboriginal communities feel overwhelmed by the paperwork that is associated with access to health services:

There are so many forms that we're handed when we go to the hospital, even though we don't have to pay there. If we go to the clinic or see a doctor who isn't at the hospital, it's more complicated as we have the form at the clinic and then we have to pay there and fill out other forms at home to get the money back from Medicare. It's a whole lot of hassle. It really isn't the easiest. (Personal Communication: Female Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 03/04/2018)

Given the complicated scheme of billing and reimbursement for services of the Medicare system, it is evident that a number of forms have to be completed, both at the health service and afterwards when claiming reimbursements. With the added knowledge that a higher proportion of Aboriginal Australians often achieve lower attainment levels than non-Aboriginal Australians, it suggests that this could be a barrier to understanding the forms and this level of confusion is an added element for why accessing health services can be overwhelming for Aboriginal Australians. When I mentioned the concerns surrounding the confusion over these forms to a senior academic (Appendix A: 20) at a university in Adelaide, she was not surprised that I had come across this finding, as she had also been informed of these concerns:

I too have been told of the overwhelming emotion that comes across many Aboriginal people when they are handed a clipboard with the forms at the hospital, doctors and other healthcare services. The forms take time to complete and you need to not only ensure that you understand the questions being asked, but also have the correct information needed to complete them. (Personal Communication: Senior Academic, Adelaide, 13/04/2018)

Clearly the Australian Government is aware of these concerns, or at least aware of the risk of complications surrounding the forms, because one of the services provided by Medicare is liaison officers to support Aboriginal Australians. It therefore raises the question of why Aboriginal Australians do not ask for assistance with the forms or have conversations with the liaison officers to highlight their concerns and difficulties in completing the forms. It was brought to my attention that embarrassment and shame are some reasons why Aboriginal Australians choose not to attend health services, rather than get help with the forms. The senior academic was also aware of this from when she talked with Aboriginal Australians:

I think we forget how undervalued a lot of Aboriginal Australians feel on a daily basis, and for them to have to ask for help with forms that they haven't seen anyone else in the waiting room struggle to complete is hard. I was told by an Aboriginal woman in her forties that she felt embarrassed and ashamed that she was the only person just staring at these forms not understanding what is being asked, when everyone around her had completed them within five minutes. (Personal Communication: Senior Academic, Adelaide, 13/04/2018)

This is an important point to highlight for two reasons: firstly, many Aboriginal Australians feel embarrassed and ashamed to ask for assistance regarding their difficulties, so they are less likely to disclose this information to people. Secondly, this situation would impact on the effectiveness of a service because it is off putting for Aboriginal Australians and, as is evident in my fieldwork, they would prefer to not use the service instead of speaking up.

Whilst it is clear that the requirement for completed forms contributes to the reluctance of Aboriginal Australians to access some health services, it became clear to me through conversations that the lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture was another concern. In Aboriginal culture, there are many herbal remedies and a more natural approach to curing some illnesses. Some Aboriginal Australians felt that not including this approach in general healthcare contributed to why they do not trust the health services. Initially, I thought that the Aboriginal participants who told me this were implying that they wanted the health services to provide this type of healthcare, which would be a very niche area, and understandably difficult for the Australian Government to offer through public hospitals and services supported by Medicare. However, when I asked the question regarding the viability of this service, the participants further explained what they were actually suggesting. Firstly, the male Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 15), who I met and interviewed in an art shop in Adelaide, elaborated on what he had originally told me:

What I mean is they need to recognise it, if they could offer it then that would be even better. But we both know that won't happen. Like with most things in life, we don't feel like we're respected for who we are. Having our culture and practices acknowledged would be a big step in us realising that people are being genuine and

want to help us. (Personal Communication: Male Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)

He emphasised that he believes that recognition of Aboriginal culture will be a reassurance in trust that staff within health services understand Aboriginal Australians for who they are and that they have some knowledge of their cultural practices. The second participant who vocalised his opinions on the link between acknowledging Aboriginal culture and trust towards health services, was the male Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 21) who took me on a bushwalk in the Coorong and pointed out various plants used as remedies by the Ngarrindjeri:

I went to see a nurse after trying some of our own remedies first and she told me that I should've gone straight to the hospital and not bother using our stuff. She didn't understand what we used and how it has been used for generations as a medicine. I understand that sometimes we need medicines from the hospital, but I also know the importance of our own stuff too. It made me realise that she doesn't get us, she doesn't get how we're different. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

Similarly to the Kurna Elder, the underlying reason that this participant mentioned Aboriginal remedies is because he had an experience where he did not feel that his culture was respected. He did not have much trust in the service, due to his perception that the nurse did not understand him as an Aboriginal person. Knowing how the Stolen Generations impacted the Aboriginal Australians' trust of different authorities, it is viable to question how significant that is in relation to the health service. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) whose brother-in-law had been taken, explained how trust with the health services needs to be built up after it was violated for many Aboriginal Australians during the Stolen Generations:

We trusted too easily when children were taken from their families and we don't want to make the same mistakes again. We need to see something that tells us we can trust people in healthcare. I used to work in a hospital, but even I struggle to go and see a doctor when I need to. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

Reflecting on both the thoughts of the participants who explained that they want Aboriginal culture to be recognised, and the female Ngarrindjeri Elder's comments concerning the risks

that Aboriginal Australians associate with trusting healthcare professionals, it highlights the need many Aboriginal Australians have to see some form of respect towards themselves. This would enable them to understand that the health services are trustworthy and safe to use. As with any form of trust, it takes time to gain; however, it has become apparent to me through my fieldwork that many Aboriginal Australians require more than just time, but instead need a more substantial evidence-based form of trust. If this was to occur, it would mean that Aboriginal Australians would experience the respect towards their people and feel valued, as has been suggested by participants; acknowledgment or knowledge of their culture is an area that they would feel comfortable to build their trust upon, as their culture is integral to them. By obtaining this trust, it would encourage the use of health services, and thus resulting in them becoming more successful.

#### *Medical Misdiagnoses of Aboriginal Australians: Fuelling Distrust Further*

When I spoke to participants, they emphasised the reluctance of many Aboriginal Australians to access the health service, due to their distrust that has developed in response to the historical past and the lack of recognition of Aboriginal culture. However, it was also revealed to me that misdiagnoses were another aspect that influences their willingness to access healthcare. Initially, I thought this was an issue that was only affecting a couple of people from the Ngarrindjeri community. However, a female Ngarrindjeri Elder explained that it was an ongoing problem, which impacts a number of Aboriginal Australians across Australia, not only in the Ngarrindjeri community. Hearing the disclosure that Aboriginal Australians are being misdiagnosed, I can understand another reason why Aboriginal Australians are hesitant to access health services; it adds to the level of distrust that is already present in Aboriginal communities. I was told how the Ngarrindjeri community initially had a greater trust in the health services, and therefore they did not question the need for second opinions unless someone became seriously ill. However, as the level of distrust increased as more people were misdiagnosed, the community felt it was necessary to obtain second opinions sooner and more frequently. The female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) who I quoted earlier gave a specific example that occurred within her community:

He was suffering with pain in his chest. He didn't want to go to the hospital, but we kept saying he had to. Eventually he went, but the doctors sent him home saying it was only a chest infection. Seeing how much pain he was in, I thought it was going to be something worse than that. But that night we had to call an ambulance because the pain was so bad, and the hospital said he was having a heart attack, and that the pains earlier were the warning signs. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

Her voice began to crack as she became emotional describing the situation to me, and then explained that this particular misdiagnosis was hard hitting on the community, as it happened soon after her husband had died of a heart attack. Whilst it was fortunate that the ambulance service arrived quickly and took the Aboriginal man to the hospital, it was evident just how much this one situation had an impact on the Ngarrindjeri community. This was not the only case that was explained to me: I was also told of how a brain tumour was misdiagnosed as headaches, and how a patient had been diagnosed with an abscess when it was in fact a tumour. All the misdiagnoses that I was told of were not only significant because of their frequency, but also because the correct diagnoses were far more severe than originally thought. Before my fieldwork, I was only aware of misdiagnoses through the research by Purdie et al (2010); their research showed misdiagnoses of Aboriginal Australians in regards to mental illnesses and mental health services. Therefore, it was only when I talked to the Ngarrindjeri community that I became aware of the range of misdiagnoses and the true severity of cases, as well as the full impact it was having on the issue of trust. According to community members, this had been a problem for many years. This was confirmed by a senior academic (Appendix A: 20) in Adelaide, who explained that she first became aware of this problem when she was conducting fieldwork with Aboriginal communities across Australia more than two decades ago. When I mentioned the misdiagnosed patients in our conversation, I expected her to be surprised, but her reaction was the complete opposite. She expressed that she was not surprised, as she has not seen any noticeable change to rectify this issue:

I'm not surprised the community revealed that to you. I was first told about people being misdiagnosed over two decades ago when I was undertaking research with Aboriginal communities from different states. I'm not surprised it's still a problem

as I am yet to see any significant changes. (Personal Communication: Senior Academic, Adelaide, 13/04/2018)

Many participants who I spoke to are reluctant to access healthcare as they see it as a ‘bother’ and are afraid of how they will be treated. The misdiagnoses within their community have only further cemented those perceptions in regards to accessing the health services. Because Aboriginal communities are particularly close, something which I observed during my time with the Ngarrindjeri community, this information spreads rapidly between community members. Therefore, if a community member receives poor treatment or is misdiagnosed, other community members will learn of it quickly and be influenced by that information when they need to access health services. Consequently, this could impede the effectiveness of health services for Aboriginal Australians, even if the service is new and there are no known misdiagnoses of Aboriginal Australians at that service. An important point to highlight here, something that I learnt from my conversations with Aboriginal participants, is that the sense of distrust is shared amongst the community; therefore, even if an individual has never experienced a misdiagnosis or mistreatment, they may still be influenced by others’ experiences and distrust the health services. Any form of misdiagnosis is going to have a negative impact on an individual, whether they are Aboriginal or not. However, along with other reasons contributing to the level of distrust that they feel towards health services, it is apparent just how damaging these misdiagnoses are to Aboriginal Australians’ confidence when they require healthcare services. Unsurprisingly, a common question on the minds of many participants in the Ngarrindjeri community that I spoke to was ‘Why?’. They struggled to comprehend why so many people from their community were being misdiagnosed, along with other Aboriginal people across Australia. Soon after arriving in the Ngarrindjeri community, I met the son (Appendix A: 22) of the female Ngarrindjeri Elder who I have previously quoted, when we were having a general conversation about the community over a cup of tea. He expressed that he thought the misdiagnoses were happening in their community because they are Aboriginal:

We all wonder why us, why can we not be given the right diagnosis when we go to the hospital? If we weren’t blackfellas I don’t think we’d have this problem. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Man, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

The participants from the Ngarrindjeri community believe that Aboriginal Australians continue to be misdiagnosed because their community has experienced a number of cases. Because only some of the community access healthcare due to their reluctance to use the health services, it makes the number of Ngarrindjeri people being misdiagnosed seem more significant.

When trying to ascertain why this community has experienced a significant number of individuals being misdiagnosed, two possible areas that may be contributing factors were prominent: communication and cultural understanding. Firstly, as some participants expressed that many Aboriginal Australians have a strong sense of distrust towards health services, it is likely that they are particularly wary when talking to health professionals. They may not realise the level of detail they need to provide, or there may be some information that they may withhold for risk of embarrassment or repercussions. Therefore, health professionals have to be aware that Aboriginal Australians may not be very forthcoming with information, so they need to ask specific questions to obtain the necessary facts about an individual's symptoms. This was echoed in a conversation with a young Kurna woman (Appendix A: 23) who I met on a visit to one of the Adelaide museums:

If we have to see a doctor it makes us on-edge, we don't want to be there long and just want to get treated and leave. I know that they're experts, but that doesn't make it easier to trust them because they have a lot of power. We get worried about what we have to say to them. They might think we aren't looking after ourselves or our family, that's happened before. (Personal Communication: Kurna Woman, Adelaide, 15/03/2018)

This conversation was particularly important as it gave me an insight into not only an understanding of the level of distrust towards the health services, but also the attitudes towards health professionals as people who hold a lot of power. Although the participants I spoke to from the Kurna community did not express any personal experiences of being misdiagnosed, they did reveal that they know people who have had misdiagnoses, which impacts their level of trust towards the health services, the same as in the Ngarrindjeri community. If Aboriginal Australians are more hesitant to openly talk about their symptoms

and lifestyle, two necessary pieces of information required by healthcare professionals, then the healthcare professionals only have limited information to use when they form a diagnosis. This could be an issue which may contribute to misdiagnoses, that could be averted by asking more questions.

The second aspect that may help to explain why the misdiagnoses occur is the understanding of Aboriginal culture. Knowledge of Aboriginal culture could be valuable to health professionals to assist them with understanding how it influences Aboriginal Australians' lifestyle. For example, knowledge of certain diets, herbal remedies and cultural activities provide useful information that health professionals could use to shape the questions they ask their Aboriginal patients to gain more of the necessary information for a diagnosis. In addition to this knowledge providing useful information to health professionals, it would also provide some reassurance to Aboriginal Australians that their culture is respected. For example, if health professionals could demonstrate knowledge, or acknowledgment, of herbal remedies that are used within Aboriginal culture, it would be a reassurance when health professionals discuss treatment. Lack of both communication and cultural understanding may contribute to misdiagnoses of Aboriginal patients; however, the opposite could also help achieve a level of trust whereby Aboriginal patients feel confident to be more open with health professionals.

Participants who spoke about misdiagnoses may be unaware as to why so many people they know have been misdiagnosed, but one issue that is evident is the impact it has had on the attitudes of Aboriginal Australians towards health services. Specifically, in the Ngarrindjeri community, the misdiagnoses, and lack of explanation of them, has diminished the confidence and trust that community members have towards the health services. Overall, the detrimental impact of Aboriginal Australians being misdiagnosed highlights the importance of trust between communities and health services. The impact has emphasised how trust is necessary for more Aboriginal Australians to feel confident to access health services and to talk to health professionals openly, which subsequently could make health policy initiatives more effective.

*A Case Study in Community Engagement: Moorundi Health*

When participants spoke about the distrust they felt towards the healthcare services in Australia, one service that kept being mentioned to me was the Moorundi Health service (*Figure V. 5, 6 & 7*). The Moorundi Health service is an Aboriginal community controlled service; therefore, the Aboriginal community has a strong influence on decisions and protocols concerning the service. It has three clinics that provide an array of services and each one is conveniently located in small towns where members of the Ngarrindjeri live. The ease of access to the Moorundi Health service is an important factor to highlight, as that can be a barrier for some Aboriginal Australians trying to use healthcare services. In Adelaide, an Aboriginal Australian volunteer (Appendix A: 24) at an alcohol and drug rehabilitation charity was introduced to me by one of the non-Aboriginal charity workers, and he explained how ease of access can influence the decision to get medical treatment:

Sometimes the difficulty of getting to a hospital or clinic is too much for some people, especially Aboriginal people who don't live in a large city. But even here in Adelaide it can sometimes be a struggle if you have to see a specialist that's on the outskirts of the city, and we've got it the easiest as we're in the capital. (Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 13/04/2018)

Although the participant lived in Adelaide city centre, he highlighted that rural communities, such as the Ngarrindjeri community, would find it harder to access the health services. Although the Ngarrindjeri community can access hospital treatment at the small hospital in Meningie or further afield in Murray Bridge and Berri, they can also visit one of the Moorundi Health service clinics. The Moorundi Health service has not only positioned conveniently located clinics that community members can attend, but it also assists with travel logistics and helps to make arrangements. For example, if a community member needs to see a specialist or attend a hospital that is not local, the service helps to organise transport so that the individual can receive the medical treatment needed.

Like the mainstream health services, the Moorundi Health service has a board of members who oversee the running of it. Any community member can apply to be on the board, which is currently formed of community members, and people who have strong connections to the community that can benefit from the service. This is an example of peer leadership, whereby an individual is an 'expert by experience' and an active member in the community through developing and applying resources, or in this case a service, which supports the community's needs (Crepaz-Keay, 2017: 186-187). Peer leadership and networks are beneficial because local people, through their lived experiences, understand the barriers and social issues within the community which need to be supported by services, and therefore are able to shape and influence services and policies which have a direct impact on their own and their local community's lives (Department for Health, 2013: 8). Through the community involvement in the establishment and running of the service, there is significant knowledge of the community, including lifestyle, that has enabled a tailored range of services for the Ngarrindjeri community to be offered. An important aspect of the Moorundi Health service, which sets it apart from the mainstream health services in Australia, is its holistic approach to Aboriginal health. A reason for the distrust in health services expressed by participants was the lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture and way of life, but because the Aboriginal community controls the service, this concern is eradicated, or at least minimised. The range of services offered by the Moorundi Health service is particularly significant because it covers general health, chronic disease care, Aboriginal health and healing, nutrition, mental health, community engagement and educational outcomes. When I had a conversation with the female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) who has a prominent position in the community and lost her husband recently, she was particularly animated when talking about the Moorundi Health service:

Moorundi is brilliant. It fills the gaps of everything that we needed and we couldn't get at other hospitals. Sometimes we still have to go to the big hospitals, but Moorundi is where we go most. What makes Moorundi so good is that it's part of our community, we usually know some of the people working there, they're just like us and they know us. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The participant explained how there is a sense of reassurance towards the service; it is viewed as part of the community because of the services it offers, in addition to most of the employees being Ngarrindjeri or Aboriginal.

A central aim of the Moorundi Health service is to 'Bring Community Together' (Moorundi, 2018), and it recognises that the clinical approach to healthcare services that the majority of mainstream health services offer, is not the most effective approach to healthcare for the Ngarrindjeri community because of cultural implications. Instead, the Moorundi Health service understands that the best approach to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians is through cultural connectedness to their culture and community. Whilst some non-Aboriginal Australians do not always understand the strong ties Aboriginal Australians have with their culture, it is of upmost importance to them due to the connectedness between land, ancestors and kin. Therefore, this specific health service initiative looks not only at the health of an individual, but also their lifestyle and environment; this approach enables the healthcare professional to construct their advice to focus on a long-term solution to improving the individual's health and wellbeing. The services that the Moorundi Health service offers, in addition to primary health services, support this holistic approach to Aboriginal health, specifically through the community engagement and education services, which are focused on the future of the community. The structure of Moorundi Health service reflects asset-based community development approaches, as it places an emphasis on promoting factors which support good health and wellbeing. As a result of The Marmot Review (2010), asset-based community development focuses on long-term positive health and how it can be achieved, including mental health and other social aspects, both of which contribute to positive health and wellbeing, rather than focusing primarily on deficit targets (Rippon and Hopkins, 2015). Included in the community engagement branch of the Moorundi Health service is mental health, alcohol and drugs counselling, yarning groups, support for the language and partnership with the Department for Child Protection, all of which support and promote positive health and wellbeing of the Ngarrindjeri community. These services illustrate how the needs of the community, outside of primary health, have influenced what the Moorundi Health service offers. Although the alcohol and drugs counselling is a credible service to be

offered in response to the levels of drug and alcohol misuse amongst Aboriginal Australians, the yarning groups and language support are two specific services that would not normally be offered through mainstream health services but are particularly important to the Ngarrindjeri community. The yarning group is focused on the emotional and social wellbeing for the community, ensuring that there are regular groups that community members can attend primarily for socialisation purposes. Moreover, the language support groups are beneficial to the community to support the preservation of the Ngarrindjeri language, and also offer patients the opportunity to communicate in their language when accessing services through the Moorundi Health service. Both the yarning and language support groups, along with the Aboriginal health and healing services, offer a form of cultural recognition which counters the criticism highlighted by participants, when discussing the distrust of health services due to the lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture. A Ngarrindjeri man (Appendix A: 7) implied that this acknowledgment of culture is a significant feature. In a brief conversation with this participant, when I was introduced to him during a conversation with a female Ngarrindjeri Elder, he pointed out that he trusted the Moorundi Health Service more than other health services because of the cultural recognition:

Culture is such a big part of us, who are we without it? So, if there's a clinic that understands who we are, I trust them a lot more than other hospitals. The yarning groups are something that we do as part of our culture, they're a big thing for us. Having a yarn and socialising is really important, especially for you (pointing at an Aboriginal Elder). Having Moorundi help organise them shows that they understand us and what we need. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Man, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The female Elder (Appendix A: 5) was nodding as the man spoke, and then she turned to me to explain the value that the Moorundi Health service has to their community:

It's so important for us. Moorundi is bringing the healthcare to us; they have three clinics, one's in Raukkan. And people actually want to use it, so many people are really happy with it. I think it's what's been missing here for quite a while now. It's wanting to help us as a community, not just as people. So, the school support for Mums so they know it's important for their kids to go to school is to help the

attendance of kids here, because it hasn't been great. I think other hospitals and the Government could really learn from Moorundi. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

It became apparent during my fieldwork just how positively the Moorundi Health service was viewed compared to the other health services that participants accessed. Every occasion that health services came up in conversations and interviews, I was informed that a major factor in trusting the services is cultural recognition.

The Moorundi Health service is predominantly a healthcare initiative; however, the aim of improving the community and wellbeing of community members has led to a specific programme that is dedicated to the development of young children, including school attendance and educational attainment. The programme covers all ages of children, from pre-school to Year 12, when mandatory education finishes. There is a specific team within the education programme which targets families with children aged seven or under, whose aim is to educate parents on the necessity of preparing their children for school and emphasise the importance of childhood development, both leading up to school and in school. The dedicated team is an outreach based service that visits families and runs childhood development activities for families to attend with their young children, such as playgroups. Moreover, because the staff are predominantly Aboriginal, this service enables all ages of Aboriginal children to interact with positive Aboriginal role models in the community, whilst continuing to be educated on and encouraged to embrace Aboriginal culture. An important aspect of this specific programme is the continuation of it during school holidays, which enables children to maintain a routine and attendance. Participants explained that there is little to occupy children in the community outside of school because the town is small, something which the Moorundi Health service obviously considered when the education programme was implemented. I met a young Ngarrindjeri youth worker (Appendix A: 25) at a local community centre. I knew she worked at the local youth centre in Meningie, which had been set up by the Ngarrindjeri community themselves so that the children had somewhere to go after school. We spoke about her work and she illustrated just how important it is for children in the community to have engagement and activity opportunities outside of school:

There really isn't much for them round here, sport is a main thing that they get involved with. It's actually really good for them as it gives them something to do because otherwise they would get up to no good. Having good role models is important and PKT (the name of a team involved with the Moorundi education programme) is really good at making sure they have that. In the holidays that's when it can be a struggle to keep them busy, but we manage, we have to. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Coorong, 13/02/2018)

It is evident how significant and beneficial the Moorundi Health service is for the community; the holistic approach to health and wellbeing and the community involvement with the overall initiative are key in its success. The understanding of health determinants for this community, culture, environment and education has helped to form a well-rounded and successful initiative to healthcare for the community, according to community members. Arguably, one of the most significant successes of this service is the willingness for the Ngarrindjeri community to access it; with the ongoing issue of distrust of the mainstream health services, the community members' enthusiasm is a positive indication that the Moorundi Health service is an effective initiative for the community. The level of cultural recognition and involvement of the Aboriginal voice in the running of the service is a plausible explanation for its effectiveness, in addition to the holistic approach that the initiative offers to meeting the community's needs.

### ***The Implications of Closing a Successful Employment Scheme: CDEP Versus CDP***

As highlighted by the success of the Moorundi Health service, many Aboriginal Australians favour a holistic approach to be delivered by a service because it illustrates the knowledge the service has of Aboriginal Australian culture and it recognises the interconnectedness of issues that individuals face. Another example of where a holistic approach has been used to address social policy, and has been considered successful, relates to employment support. The scheme, the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP), was a Government implemented initiative for improving employment and welfare, and was received positively by Aboriginal Australians. However, not all Government employment initiatives have been

perceived positively, with the Community Development Programme (CDP) being criticised by Aboriginal Australians.

*CDEP and CDP: Understanding Government Initiatives*

CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects) ran from the early 1970s until 2015, initially starting as a pilot programme and gradually expanding its initiatives and services over the years to make it more beneficial for Aboriginal Australians. The Australian Government distributed block grants to local organisations and Aboriginal community councils, which enabled Aboriginal Australians who were on the CDEP scheme to engage in various projects which were considered as part-time employment (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 2). CDEP paid participants for their engagement in these projects, which resulted in Aboriginal Australians engaging in a form of employment and receiving a wage so that they were considered to be employed. Even though the payments were viewed as wages, they were also recognised as social welfare payments because the scheme was considered a means for unemployed Aboriginal Australians to still receive social welfare payments whilst getting prepared for sustainable employment. The grants given to the councils and organisations by the Australian Government were deemed fair and not only covered costs for the wages, but also the costs of administration and resources which supported the employment projects and local councils and organisations which managed them. The projects offered to CDEP participants were expansive, varying from local community development to social economic enterprise (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 2). The overall structure of the scheme was flexible, with participants expected to work fifteen hours a week at a rate that was comparable to the social welfare payments they would have received if they had not signed up to CDEP, in addition to having access to opportunities for extra paid working hours (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 6-7).

When CDEP was first established it was aimed at remote Aboriginal communities, in response to their geographic location being a contributing factor to unemployment levels. Nevertheless, with the scheme delivering successful outcomes for Aboriginal Australians and their

communities, it was expanded to include both rural and urban communities. Overall, CDEP was considered a very successful Government initiative, which assisted individual Aboriginal Australians and also gave support to the development of Aboriginal communities' cultural practices (Altman and Sanders, 2008). The specific element of CDEP providing the financial grants to local organisations and councils in Aboriginal communities to design and run the employment projects, enabled Aboriginal communities to have greater opportunities to develop and to be more sustainable. This is particularly significant as it permitted the flexibility of projects to be related to aspects of Aboriginal culture, such as working on the land; however, the employment projects were not limited to culturally specific opportunities, but instead were varied. Despite those who were involved in the running of CDEP on the ground expressing how beneficial the scheme was to Aboriginal communities, CDEP was closed in 2015 in response to criticism, including the questioning of the type of employment offered to participants. Critics argued that the part-time employment projects were not proper jobs but were in fact encouraging more people to join CDEP as a long-term venture, instead of the initial aim of CDEP, a short-term scheme, which was preparing people for long-term employment so that they would not rely on social welfare payments (Altman, 2010: 259-260; Jordan and Altman, 2016; Sanders, 2016: 35-36; Rowse, 2004).

The Australian Government has since implemented a new scheme to replace CDEP but the response to it is yet to be as positive as that of CDEP; the CDP (Community Development Programme) replaced CDEP in 2015 following its closure. However, whereas CDEP was fundamentally a scheme preparing people for employment whilst paying them a wage, CDP is structured as a 'Work for the Dole' scheme where people get social welfare payments for working, but are now required to work more hours. The lack of flexibility is a significant difference between the two schemes, with CDP including financial income penalties if participants in the scheme fail to show up to appointments and activities (Haughton, 2016). Since the introduction of CDP, a large proportion of Aboriginal Australians enrolled in the scheme have faced penalties, with each day missed incurring additional penalties, resulting in their social welfare payment being reduced (Jordan and Altman, 2016: 9). Prior to the CDP financial penalties being implemented, any previous penalties for non-employment schemes

had been proportionate for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians; however, Aboriginal Australians receive more penalties than non-Aboriginal Australians through the CDP scheme (Fowkes & Saunders, 2016).

*The Reception of CDEP: Closing a Trusted Initiative Instils Distrust*

CDEP was first mentioned to me by a senior academic (Appendix A: 20) at a university in Adelaide, who praised the success of the service and highlighted the significance of its broad approach to Aboriginal employment. She explained how the scheme was initially welcomed with caution by Aboriginal Australians, but through engagement, participation and witnessing positive results, trust was affirmed and it was considered a positive initiative:

As with many new programmes there was a sense of reluctance that it would work, but, on the whole, it was a brilliant programme. Aboriginal Australians welcomed the flexibility of it as it could fit around their other commitments. The main commitment outside of employment for them is normally childcare and caring for older family members, so the flexibility was an advantage and made the scheme attractive. There was real sense of 'this is actually working' when seeing the level of engagement within communities, it not only got them into employment, but it focused on teaching people the necessary skills to make them more employable. It really was a fantastic scheme, and it's such a shame it's gone. (Personal Communication: Senior Academic, Adelaide, 13/04/2018)

An important point discussed during our conversation was the need for flexibility which is something the new CDP scheme does not encourage, as is evident through the financial penalties. Moreover, the acknowledgement of a sense of reluctance until the successful outcome of the service is witnessed is an interesting point to emphasise. As with CDP, if a new initiative is not proving to be a success within the first six to twelve months of implementation, then it is likely that it will be difficult to fully engage Aboriginal Australians. Essentially, the trust of a service is established through its effectiveness. I spoke to a male Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 26) in Adelaide shortly after hearing about CDEP because I was intrigued to understand his perspective of the scheme, and to establish if he, and others in his community,

were as positive about CDEP as the senior academic. He mentioned two key points in response to my query about CDEP being effective for Aboriginal Australians, the suitability of it for Aboriginal Australians and the convenience:

It recognised that we don't normally have that great school grades or experience from jobs. So basically, the projects you could do would be a good level for us to start out in and learn the ropes to get better and learn new skills. CDEP didn't feel like you were on the dole, it was more like training to get into a job but you were still working too. I guess a bit like an apprenticeship because you learn, work and get paid. A lot of the projects were really local too, so you didn't have to move or anything. It just seemed like it was right for us, and it worked. (Personal Communication: Male Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)

The suitability and convenience of CDEP were indicators to Aboriginal Australians that their needs were understood, which subsequently led to an effective initiative which they trusted and were happy to engage with. Moreover, through focusing on educating individuals on appropriate skillsets that are required for an array of jobs, rather than one specific job, the scheme supported individuals' development to become more widely employable. This offers an explanation why CDEP was considered a scheme which focused on long-term solutions; it provided individuals with skills required by employers, therefore making long-term employment for Aboriginal Australians less of an issue. This contrasts with CDP where the aim is to immediately secure a job, which individuals may potentially leave, before learning new skills.

When I was in the Coorong region, I discussed employment with a group of Ngarrindjeri Elders to discover how employment is viewed within the community. One of them explained the benefits of working locally and how CDEP supported this concept through their projects being based in, or near, Aboriginal communities. Furthermore, the Elder (Appendix A: 1) outlined how the scheme had a holistic approach to unemployment amongst Aboriginal Australians because of the focus on the individual rather than only on employability skills:

CDEP wasn't just about getting a job, it was about making people ready for a job. Not just teaching them skills needed for jobs, but also skills needed to make them

a better person. Personal skills I guess, you know like being independent and confident. Also ambition; we get a negative label because we're blackfellas but CDEP taught people that they can achieve more than just a small job here. It taught them to push themselves. It was the best thing we'd had. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 16/04/2018)

I was also told of this advantageous aspect of CDEP by the senior academic in Adelaide. The suitability and convenience of the scheme illustrated an understanding of Aboriginal Australians' needs, through the attention given to ensure that individuals had the necessary personal skills, as well as greater employability, to guarantee that they were prepared for employment. The improvement of these skills also proved to be beneficial in their everyday lives. To some people, the necessity of teaching someone the skill of confidence may not seem overly important, however, as the Elder, backed up by the rest of the group, and the senior academic both expressed to me, the lack of confidence amongst Aboriginal Australians can be a hindrance to more than just employment:

We get told regularly that we aren't as good as others because we're blackfellas. That's not a new thing, we've been being told that for a long time. For people who aren't confident because they're Aboriginal, they don't think they can achieve anything, including a good job. So learning how to be confident and that being Aboriginal isn't bad, makes them think that they can achieve stuff. And that's not just good for getting a job, but also for their mind. CDEP taught people that, especially in the projects where they could see themselves achieving things. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 16/04/2018)

It became clear during my fieldwork that CDEP was a highly valued scheme, and there was much disappointment when the Australian Government made the decision to replace it with CDP. Alongside the disappointment was frustration, because, in the eyes of many Aboriginal Australians, CDEP was a highly successful scheme that they trusted, and they genuinely believed that it assisted with issues surrounding unemployment for Aboriginal Australians. This frustration was voiced by one of the Elders in the meeting I had about employment:

I don't know why they scrapped CDEP, it was the best thing the Government has given us. What makes it worse is CDP, the programme replacing CDEP. It's no way as good as what CDEP did for us, but yet they still think that's better for us. It wasn't even just us that said it was really good, even the places that ran the projects said how good it was. But the people who never visited communities where CDEP was good decided that it needs to be replaced. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 16/04/2018)

The closure of CDEP illustrates why the issues surrounding trust between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians is ongoing. The Aboriginal Australians who I spoke to expressed that their best interests were either not fully understood or were ignored, the same feeling they experience about being spoken on behalf of or being silenced. In their opinion, the service that is now available to assist with unemployment issues is not as effective as the service they had previously actively engaged with. As a result of the replacement of CDEP by CDP, the feeling of distrust towards the Australian Government was amplified by it not making the best decision, as far as many Aboriginal Australians were concerned.

### **Concluding Comments**

Through focusing on the issue of trust and, more specifically, offering an understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government, this chapter has addressed my second research question and has explained how the issue of trust between them could be improved. The lack of trust between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians is a factor that directly impacts the success of social policies and thus, the experiences of many Aboriginal Australians. However, gaining an understanding of the extent of distrust currently felt by many Aboriginal Australians has shed light on the actions that lead to further distrust, in addition to aspects that could improve the level of trust. The negative perceptions and attitudes held towards Aboriginal Australians was a significant point that was present throughout my fieldwork in various conversations with participants. For me, the most problematic, and arguably most shocking, element of this negativity is the lack of understanding of what is considered unacceptable behaviour towards Aboriginal Australians.

For example, until there is a more common consensus that refusing to offer a seat to an Aboriginal Australian on a bus is not acceptable, it will be challenging to improve the highly proportionate amount of negativity to which Aboriginal Australians are subjected. However, this negativity and racism is compounding the disrespect that many Aboriginal Australians feel, and therefore accentuates the trust issues. In addition to this negativity, the damage created through the historical events remains influential on the issue of trust, as the Aboriginal Australians I spoke to do not think that their people have witnessed enough meaningful change. I realised through my research that many Aboriginal Australians base their trust heavily on evidence; in other words, they want to physically see change or improvements before they develop some form of trust towards the Australian Government, other services and non-Aboriginal Australians, rather than just being told that they can trust. Essentially, an evidence-based form of trust is what a large proportion of Aboriginal Australians are forming their judgements on, and as they do not consider enough change has occurred since historical events took place, the level of trust is still significantly low.

A further point highlighted in my research, which links with an evidence-based form of trust, is the notion of a holistic approach to services or initiatives for Aboriginal Australians, and, as my third research question asks, is an approach that has been highlighted as creating positive experiences for Aboriginal Australians. This approach is favoured by Aboriginal Australians, as it demonstrates an understanding of their needs, which subsequently indicates to them that they, and their culture, are respected and understood through tailored initiatives. Many of the issues facing Aboriginal Australians are interconnected, and they themselves recognise this, therefore, holistic approaches which combine lifestyle, culture and community when addressing a specific issue would be particularly advantageous. It was obvious through the conversations I had with participants that knowledge helps to build trust and can help improve the relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians, which is referred to in my second research question. Therefore, these holistic approaches to services which demonstrate understanding would be a valuable step in obtaining trust between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government and other services. Aside from the positives associated with the Moorundi Health service being an Aboriginal led service, its

holistic approach was praised by the Ngarrindjeri community and is an example of how an initiative to address one aspect of social policy can be more beneficial to an Aboriginal community if it is structured to encompass a broader area than just the one need. For example, the Moorundi Health service also supports childhood education and mentoring, and CDEP, which was also considered holistic by participants, provided support and education on both employment and personal skills.

Evidence-based trust and a holistic approach to services are interlinked, with the holistic services illustrating Aboriginal cultural knowledge and understanding for issues facing Aboriginal Australians, resulting in the services offered being tailored to their needs. For them to trust different authorities, organisations and services, Aboriginal Australians fundamentally require to feel respected and truly understood through evidence that their best needs are being considered. They have learnt over the years that words are not enough, and therefore time is a significant factor in the issue of distrust. Nevertheless, the Aboriginal Australians who I spoke to, think that with the right approach to helping improve issues they face, and with time and change, trust can be achieved.

## Chapter VI

### Aboriginal Culture: The Impact on Everyday Life

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*Culture is who we are, it's like our wheel of life that keeps turning through generations. Our ancestors lived by it, we live by it and our future generations will live by it. It's a bond that we all have, and without it we lose a part of us and who we are. (Personal Communication: Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)*

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Aboriginal culture was a reoccurring topic throughout my fieldwork, and I soon understood its significance for Aboriginal Australians. Indeed, Aboriginal Australian participants explained that their culture is the core of who they are as people. The events of the Stolen Generations are examples which illustrate the necessity of culture for Aboriginal Australians and the challenges faced by those who have been denied it. When considering Aboriginal culture, 'culture' needs to be defined. A widely accepted definition is 'The learned ideas, values, knowledge, rules and customs shared by members of a collectivity' (Holmes et al, 2012: 9). However, the term 'culture' is complex due to the different interpretations of the word and its linguistic uses by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, as can be seen in the works of Magowan (2000) and Povinelli (1993). The difference between the interpretations of culture by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is the understanding of the deeper connections and meanings that cultural processes entail. Fundamentally, Aboriginal Australians consider culture to be present across many aspects of their lives, even when it may not be noticeable to others at first. However, it is not only the understanding of Aboriginal culture that is important to Aboriginal Australians but also its preservation, as Aboriginal Elders feel the pressure to preserve their culture and pass it down through generations. It was often suggested by participants that their culture needs to be included more broadly in Australian society, as some consider it to be invisible at present.

I have already highlighted the close link between Aboriginal culture and different areas of this research, including the issue of distrust between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government, and between Aboriginal Australians and education, employment and health services and initiatives. Additionally, I have discussed the importance of understanding Aboriginal culture to illustrate how it can offer further knowledge about the needs, opinions and perceptions of Aboriginal Australians, and thereby support essential community engagement. Given how Aboriginal Australians view their culture, it is understandable that the influence of cultural knowledge on the effectiveness of education, health and employment services is considerable. The inclusion of Aboriginal culture more widely across society is not only a symbol of acknowledgment and recognition of Aboriginal culture, but also of Aboriginal Australians themselves.

### **Culture as an Identity: Its Importance to Aboriginal Australians**

Aboriginal culture is a broad term that encompasses the spiritual beliefs and practices of Aboriginal Australians, in addition to their art, dance and music, knowledge, lifestyle, language and ancestral connections which are specific to Aboriginal identity. Essentially, art, songs and dances are an additional form of cultural narrative for Aboriginal Australians which reinforce the strong spiritual connections they have with their ancestors, the environment and kinship. The relationship Aboriginal Australians have with their land and the environment in which they live is particularly meaningful, with their belief that they belong to the land (Magowan, 2007: 462); this is illustrated through their strong spiritual connections to their surroundings, which includes cultural ties between ancestors and the environment. These strong ties are emphasised through art and Dreaming narratives, as well as through songs and dances which symbolise the journeys ancestors travel throughout the land (Magowan, 2007: 468). It became evident early on during my fieldwork that Aboriginal Australians view their culture as something far greater than simply a word that categorises their knowledge and traditions. They perceive it as their identity, as it is an integral aspect of their lives and a strong awareness of this culture in their lives gives Aboriginal Australians the opportunity to identify as Aboriginal. Having an identity not only ensures people understand with whom they share a

connectedness, but it also enables them to make sense of their everyday settings, activities they participate in and the shared dispositions they have with others (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). This explains why Aboriginal culture is important to the identity of Aboriginal Australians, as it provides them with the ability to understand and value the community settings and cultural practices most Aboriginal Australians partake in. Aboriginal communities have a strong sense of connectedness, and it could be suggested that it stems from the notion of a collective identity which is influenced by Aboriginal culture. Collective identity provides a strong sense of sameness between group members, and this provides clear boundaries between the connected group of people and those outside of the group (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Two Ngarrindjeri Elders (Appendix A: 3 & 5), who were two of the first people I spoke to in the Coorong region, mentioned the prominence of Aboriginal culture in their identity during our initial conversations:

Our culture makes us who we are. Being Aboriginal, we have spiritual connections and learn certain things that others don't have because it's part of who we are. It's our culture, it's who we are as blackfellas. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 07/02/2018)

I'm not just Aboriginal because of blood and who my parents are, but because of the values I follow in life, the skills I've been taught, like weaving, and my spiritual connection to my ancestors. Without this, I would look Aboriginal, but I don't know. I don't know if I would identify as Aboriginal if I didn't have our culture. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 07/02/2018)

This conversation was of particular interest when I reflected on my fieldwork, as it was different to later conversations because the participants questioned whether they would identify as Aboriginal if they did not have Aboriginal culture in their lives, although their physical features visibly indicated their Aboriginal heritage. In later conversations I had about identity, the Aboriginal Australian participants focused on identifying as Aboriginal when their Aboriginal heritage was not necessarily clear through their appearance. Therefore, this early conversation was significant in highlighting just how important culture is for an Aboriginal person's identity.

Aboriginal culture is enriched with ancestral connections, unique knowledge and traditions that maintain a cultural bond between Aboriginal Australians themselves. An example that illustrates these connections are the songs and dances that Aboriginal Australians perform during different rituals. When discussing performative emotions of these songs and dances, Magowan explains how the emotions expressed during performances at funerals relate to the environment, including animals and atmospheric shapes, which in turn provide symbolic and emotive connections for Aboriginal Australians with the environment (2007: 465). Additionally, the songs and dances performed during rituals form a connection between Aboriginal kin and clans who can be separated by a significant distance, through the common cultural knowledge they share, including Dreaming narratives, songs and dances (Magowan, 2007: 463-465). Brubaker and Cooper discuss the influence of kinship and categorical attributes on a person's identity (2000: 15), both of which are specifically relevant to how Aboriginal culture supports the identities of Aboriginal Australians. The role of ancestors and kinship ties within communities are important aspects of Aboriginal culture, specifically in terms of spirituality, and language is considered a categorical attribute for identity, thus further indicating the strong link between Aboriginal culture and the influence it has on identity. An Elder informed me of the role that ancestors play in Aboriginal Australians' lives; although Aboriginal culture enables people to have a connection with their ancestors, the spiritual importance of ancestors also forms part of their culture today. Stories of ancestors and how they developed into different forms of nature and landscape formations have clear messages that are used as an educational tool to teach people the norms of life, as well as the cultural practices and rituals specific to Aboriginal culture. Whilst a Ngarrindjeri Elder was teaching me how to weave (Appendix A: 5), she explained about the role of ancestors in Aboriginal culture, and how vital it is to teach the younger generation about them:

We have a close bond with our ancestors, both those from many years ago and those we've lost recently. The Dreaming stories talk about ancestors and explain how our landscape was created through them, and they teach the young ones valuable lessons about how to behave. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 07/02/2018)

Through my conversations, it became evident just how meaningful Aboriginal culture is for Aboriginal Australians, and how their interpretation of the term differs from that of more westernised understandings; many believe cultural processes shape who they are from an early age and are a source of comfort and guidance for adults. A female Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 5) explained to me how Aboriginal culture is just as important for children as it is for the older generations:

Our culture is everything to us, it shapes who we are as people. Growing up we learn from our culture and when we're older we turn to our culture to guide and support us. Without our culture, we are no one. Our culture is everything to us, it is us. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 08/02/2018)

Aboriginal Australian participants in both Adelaide and the Coorong region were keen to highlight during conversations with me the important roles that Aboriginal cultural processes and discourses have and how they are an essential aspect of their identity. Several participants gave the example of the Stolen Generations to illustrate this.

The events of the Stolen Generations had a traumatising impact on the Aboriginal children involved, through the Government's aim to assimilate Aboriginal children into a white, non-Aboriginal culture by removing them from an Aboriginal culture. It could be argued that the Government showed an understanding of how important Aboriginal culture is in an Aboriginal identity through its decision to eradicate culture in an attempt to remove Aboriginal identity in Australia. The accounts of relatives' experiences shared by a Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) who has a prominent position in the community and a Kurna woman (Appendix A: 23) who lives in Adelaide reveal the devastating torment that individuals went through after being denied Aboriginal culture, especially during their adolescence when they developed a greater sense of independence. The Kurna woman told me of the hardships that her aunt endured when she was in her early twenties, which resulted in her turning to alcohol that eventually left her with long-term kidney damage. The woman's aunt was placed into a white foster family when she was seven years old, which the woman explained was only possible because of the paleness of her aunt's skin. As her aunt was seven years old when she was taken, she was old enough to remember certain aspects of their culture from when she was with her

Aboriginal family, including Dreaming stories, songs and some Kurna language. She lived with her foster family until she was eighteen years old and was not allowed any interaction with Aboriginal culture during that time, and was also actively discouraged from talking about it. The Kurna woman explained that her aunt's adult life was made extremely difficult by this cultural confusion because the exposure to the two different cultures meant she was unable to understand her own identity and so did not know where she belonged:

She was conflicted, the damage of being taken has lasted because of the emotions she's been going through her whole life trying to figure out who she is. She's always known she wasn't white; she didn't fit in with her foster family, skin colour or anything else. But she doesn't feel Aboriginal either. Her looks might say she's Aboriginal, but that's all she has and that's not enough. Our culture teaches us about life, basically our existence, and she was taught some of that before being taken but then told to forget all of it. She couldn't remember any of the language she'd been taught before being taken and that was difficult, she felt like an outsider, especially as we say the odd word in the family, kind of like slang, and she doesn't always understand. She's got a little better, but sometimes there's things she still doesn't know and that takes her back to the question of 'Who am I?'. At her worst, her twenties and thirties I'd say, she hit bottle after bottle trying to escape everything in her head, she actually got really ill from it all, she didn't know who she was or where she fit in. The pain that goes with those feelings must be tough. (Personal Communication: Kurna Woman, Adelaide, 22/03/2018)

Because the woman's aunt was denied interaction with Aboriginal culture, she was unable to establish a sense of collective identity with her family or community; therefore, she did not have the emotional sense of belonging to a specific group or a sense of solidarity with group members with whom she has commonalities, crucial aspects of an identity (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 19). The repercussions of the woman's aunt feeling that she was not Aboriginal, nor identifying as non-Aboriginal, resulted in her using alcohol as a form of antidepressant to numb the emotional pain she felt, which the participant believed eventually led to alcohol addiction. This testimony was harrowing, not least because I saw the mixture of sorrow and anger in the Kurna woman's emotions as she told me of her aunt's experience. However, the woman was adamant that she wanted to tell me of her aunt's ordeal as she believes it

illustrates how pivotal culture is for an Aboriginal Australian's identity. Had her aunt have been brought up in the same way as the woman's mother, surrounded by her family and their culture, she believes her aunt would have a clear idea of her identity instead of the internal conflicts of trying to understand who she is.

In her account about her family member, the Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 3) revealed her relative experienced the same difficulties of trying to understand who he was and how he identified. He was the only member of the family to be taken away and thus was the only member of the family who did not grow up immersed in Aboriginal culture. As an adult, he felt isolated and frustrated not knowing who he was and, as the Ngarrindjeri Elder explained, there were repercussions due to this. Although he was reunited with the rest of the family, they were never able to form a close bond because of the strain of his trauma and his continuous need to understand who he was:

He told us he didn't feel like family, no matter how many times we told him he was, he said he couldn't be because he didn't understand us. For him, he was missing a bit of him and that was taken when he was taken. He was very confused about who he was, and that made his life hell. We honestly believe that the run-ins with the cops was down to him not knowing how else to deal with his frustration and anger, you know, he had so many emotions going on and he found it hard to work through those. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 03/03/2018)

The necessity for Aboriginal Australians to have a strong bond with their families and communities is because they are both support mechanisms which counteract the racism and negative stereotypes towards Aboriginal Australians (Weedon, 2004: 52). Additionally, Weedon explains that positive conceptions of identity, which can help distance Aboriginal Australians from the negativity aimed at them in society, are achieved through the need for Aboriginal Australians to have a sense of belonging (2004: 52). This sense of belonging is rooted through forms of culture, which in turn reinforces alternative values of the westernised world which are specific to Aboriginal culture. However, because he struggled to form relationships due to a lack of identity, the Elder's relative did not have the support of family or community, nor a connection to Aboriginal culture, and these factors would no doubt have

caused emotional struggles at both a societal and personal level. The Elder revealed that although it was upsetting that they were never able to restore the close family bond, the family were grateful that they got the chance to be reunited, as other families are not so fortunate. The Ngarrindjeri Elder explained that her relative's cultural confusion led him to live a life that was very different to other family members, just as happened to the Kurna woman's aunt. Committing crime was his outlet for his anger, frustration and sadness that he felt due to not knowing who he was. These accounts show the influence that Aboriginal culture has in the identity of Aboriginal Australians, especially through understanding the difficulties that individuals have experienced when they have been denied interaction with it.

### **Knowledge and Understanding: Interactions with Culture**

Whilst carrying out my fieldwork, I saw how Aboriginal culture influenced many aspects of daily life, reinforcing the significance that it has for many Aboriginal Australians. With this in mind, it could be considered self-explanatory that there is a vital need to understand and consider Aboriginal culture when matters concerning education, health and employment for Aboriginal Australians are being discussed. Considering Aboriginal culture enables authorities to develop a more tailored approach to specific services or initiatives for communities, which could lead to a more positive reception because of the cultural acknowledgement. When I spoke to Aboriginal Australian participants, they were forthright in expressing the need and want for Aboriginal culture to be acknowledged and respected more widely across Australia, including within services and the Australian Government. However, it was also highlighted that it is not just the Australian Government or services that need to show more consideration to Aboriginal culture, it is Australia as a country.

During my time in Australia, I noticed efforts to acknowledge and include Aboriginal culture, with the highest profile example being at the Adelaide Fringe Festival opening ceremony. South Australia is considered the Festival State of Australia, so the Adelaide Fringe Festival is a highly regarded event that people travel from all over the country specifically to attend. When I was there, a large proportion of the opening ceremony was focused on an Aboriginal

performance and smoking ceremony which was performed by a local Aboriginal dance group called Yellaka, formed by the Kurna people (*Figure VI. 1, 2 & 3*). The dance group is well known for its emphasis on storytelling by performing Aboriginal stories through songs, music and dance which focus on the creation spirits of the land and entwine the elements of fire, water, earth and wind. They provide an authentic Aboriginal cultural experience for people, which is not only a mesmerising performance but is also informative. The performance at the opening ceremony for the Adelaide Fringe Festival was impressive, with everything from the costumes and props through to the storytelling and music showing the richness of Aboriginal culture.





**Figure VI. 1, 2 & 3: The Yellaka group performing at Adelaide Fringe Festival 2018**

*The Yellaka performed at the Adelaide Fringe Festival 2018 to officially open the festival. Dressed in traditional attire, they performed rituals and dances to accompany their storytelling. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 16/02/2018)*

Once the performance had ended, in an atmosphere of real excitement amongst the audience of several thousand people, the full capacity for the performance, I heard people express how impressed they were at the spectacle. One couple who were standing next to me said that they had never seen anything like the performance before and specifically drew attention to how magnificent the costumes and face paint were, which were traditional Aboriginal attire and body paint. My photographs of the Adelaide Fringe Festival opening ceremony (Figure VI. 1,2 & 3) are important as they illustrate what I saw when I attended the ceremony, not only the Aboriginal dance and ceremonial display and the authenticity of it, but also the audience, who they were and how they reacted. It is valuable to this thesis to offer evidence of how Aboriginal culture is displayed at a large arts event in Adelaide; however, it is arguably more valuable to offer an understanding of who was in the audience and how they reacted to the performance when discussing the knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal Australians. The photographs illustrate how the audience mainly consisted of non-Aboriginal Australians and show how the audience were clapping along, smiling and taking videos and pictures, all of which demonstrate the extremely positive reception, and support, to the performance. Having attended this event, I felt that performances such as this one are important as they provide a platform where Aboriginal culture can be introduced to a wider audience who would not normally have actively chosen to attend a specifically Aboriginal performance. This was an opportunity for the Aboriginal Australian performers to illustrate the cultural importance of aspects of their performance such as the spiritual meanings of their body paint and the smoking ceremony. From a previous experience of a smoking ceremony when I visited the Coorong, I knew that the ceremony was a 'Welcome to Country' ritual, which is used to highlight the cultural significance of the surrounding area. Ngarrindjeri Elders also explained Aboriginal body painting carries deep spiritual meaning for Aboriginal Australians. The body painting is specific to each Aboriginal community, so the designs the Yellaka use are specific to the Kurna people and each element shows the relationship they have with ancestors and family groups, as well as their environment. When I spoke to some Aboriginal Australians about the performance at the opening, I was surprised by the mixed response as not everyone viewed it as positively as I had. It became apparent that this was not due to the performance itself, but instead because it was an occasional one-off

acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture. In conversation with a young Ngarrindjeri woman (Appendix A: 14) who lives in Adelaide, she expressed that although any acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture is considered to be a positive by most Aboriginal Australians, there is also the sense of disappointment because it seems to be a rarity:

I mean, it's great that they're given a platform to show off our culture. So many people come to the Fringe and there's always loads of people who watch the Yellaka, so I mean it's a great way to show them who we are. But I know not everyone thinks like that, especially the older ones, you know. I guess the best way to describe it is disappointment, that's not me saying that it isn't a great thing because it is, but the Fringe happens once a year. Maybe there's a couple of other performances too, but generally speaking, there's so few chances for us to tell people about our culture through these performances. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Adelaide, 06/03/2018)

I was grateful to hear this Ngarrindjeri woman's explanation for why this particular performance was received with mixed responses by Aboriginal Australians because I had not considered any negativity; in fact, I had assumed that it was a good opportunity to showcase Aboriginal culture. However, having had this conversation, I understood the possible reasons for the mixed reception amongst Aboriginal people. I was intrigued whether she thought people went to watch the performance, specifically because it was an Aboriginal performance or because it was part of the opening ceremony for the Adelaide Fringe Festival:

I honestly don't know. I don't know if they watched the performance because they were at the Fringe and it's something different or if it's because they are interested in our culture and specifically wanted to see it. Do you know what I mean, I don't want to be completely down about it because it's a great thing that there is a performance there and people watch it, but you know, sometimes we just try to look at the bigger picture and we have these questions and doubts that we need to show more of our culture more often. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Adelaide, 06/03/2018)

She was conscious that she did not want to appear unappreciative for the opportunity that the performance gave to illustrate Aboriginal culture, especially as large crowds of people were in the audience. Nevertheless, she made it clear that she too feels the same

disappointment that she said the older generation of Aboriginal Australians feel, when she suggested that this one performance is not adequate in demonstrating the importance of Aboriginal culture. From this conversation, it could be suggested that the notion of disappointment was alluding to the fact that the performance only partially demonstrated the importance of Aboriginal culture, as it was staged. Through performing mainly at large events, such as the Fringe Festival, Aboriginal culture is being preserved to a certain extent, but in a more artificial manner. I know from previous conversations with Elders in the Coorong that in the past the smoking ceremony was usually conducted to ritually cleanse after childbirth or initiations, but is now often used as part of a 'Welcome to Country' ceremony. This could be considered an example of how cultural traditions have evolved whilst being preserved. Essentially, the artificial preservation is taking place because the practice of cultural ceremonies and traditions are becoming less visible in their traditional, and arguably natural, contexts. Therefore, the disappointment stems from the lack of cultural preservation in traditional contexts, which is what many Aboriginal Australians deem as being more meaningful and important.

When I spoke to several Ngarrindjeri Elders, I revisited this topic to further understand the viewpoints of Aboriginal Australians. I mentioned the point the Ngarrindjeri woman in Adelaide had raised that some of the older generation feel a greater sense of frustration and disappointment in regards to the lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture, which can deter them from seeing the positives in events, such as the Adelaide Fringe. These conversations reflected the woman's comments when the Elders expressed their sense of frustration that effort is only put in to acknowledge and focus attention on Aboriginal culture on an occasional basis, instead of a continuous approach. One comment in particular by a Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 27) stood out for me because although the point had not been mentioned before, I could instantly understand their sentiments:

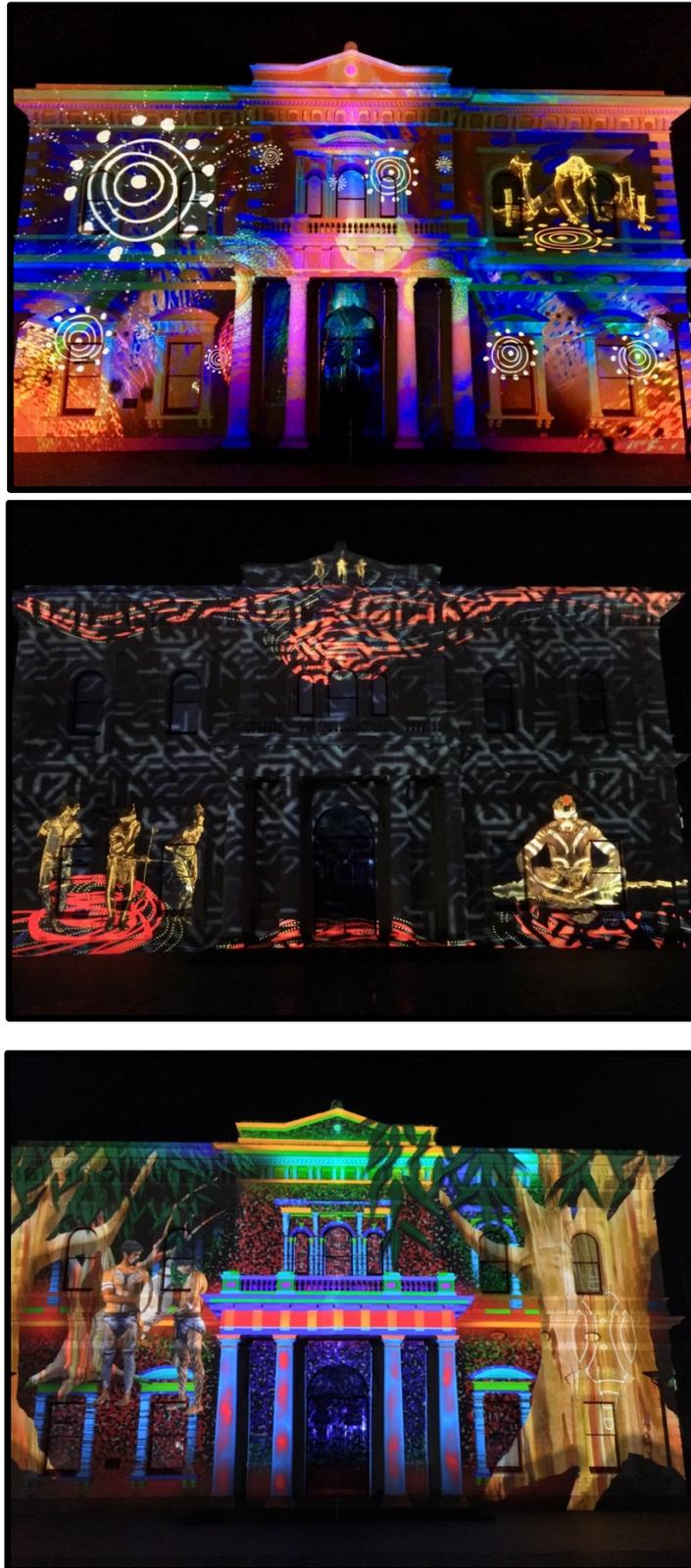
Sometimes I think it seems like they just want us to do our rituals and performances when it's convenient for them. So the Fringe, people come from all over to attend it and so it's convenient for them to show our stuff because it's different and benefits them. But we're more than just the odd performance. Our culture is who

we are and we want people to know about it and respect it all the time, not just at the Fringe, you know, or whenever there's a performance at some event. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 15/04/2018)

The Elder expanded further to say that this is not her or other Elders being spiteful towards the Fringe, because they are always happy to see that there is an element of Aboriginal culture included at the festival. After she jokingly said that she can be a 'grumpy old woman' at times, we then had a long conversation about the light installation at the Adelaide Fringe Festival. This included the projection of several Aboriginal art designs onto a building as part of a larger light installation project (*Figure VI. 4, 5 & 6*), something which we both agreed was brilliant, especially as it was displayed for the whole duration of the Fringe and was considered an event in itself:

It's so good to see that one of the buildings with pictures being shone onto them was of Aboriginal art. And it wasn't just one picture, there were quite a few that got projected. This is what I mean by it's great that the Fringe includes these, and are slowly including more of our culture but, outside of that needs more work. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 15/04/2018)

This conversation reiterated that there is a sense of gratitude that Aboriginal culture is included at the Adelaide Fringe Festival, but it also emphasised that outside of the event there is very little being done to acknowledge or educate people on Aboriginal culture.



**Figure VI. 4, 5 & 6: The 2018 Adelaide Fringe Festival light illuminations**

*Every night of the Adelaide Fringe Festival light installations were projected onto buildings along North Terrace. One building was dedicated to the projection of Aboriginal installations. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 17/02/2018)*

I was aware that the criticism about the Adelaide Fringe Festival was not directed at the event itself, but rather that the event, whilst including elements of Aboriginal culture, emphasises the lack of acknowledgment of the culture at other times. The Elders voiced their frustration and disappointment that their culture does not seem to be spoken about or appreciated outside of large events and it makes them question how their culture is valued.

On various occasions, it was made clear to me that because their culture is so important to them, some Aboriginal Australians feel passionate that non-Aboriginal Australians should have some knowledge of it. This was exemplified on an occasion when I was in an art shop and I asked the Aboriginal man (Appendix A: 8) who was working there, if he knew the story that was being told in one of the paintings on display, as I recognised a couple of the symbols that were used in it. He was surprised that I knew that Aboriginal paintings often depict stories, and even more shocked that I recognised some of the symbols used. After he explained the story in the painting, he went on to express his sadness that Australia as a whole has not taken the time to be more invested in Aboriginal culture, even if it is just acknowledgement. He made an interesting comment, which linked to some of the issues which had arisen in other conversations regarding education, health and employment, where he connected the acknowledgment and understanding of Aboriginal culture to trust. He expressed that, in his opinion, knowledge of Aboriginal culture is a tool of trust. He highlighted that an extensive level of understanding is not necessarily needed to form a sense of trust with Aboriginal Australians, because the fact that someone acknowledges and has some sense of understanding about Aboriginal culture indicates that there is a level of respect towards it, and consequently Aboriginal Australians:

It's crazy because this is such a simple thing to realise, yet people, especially politicians, have yet to cotton on to it. When we talk about people understanding our culture, we don't expect everyone to be an expert in it. But just the bare minimum of acknowledging that our culture is valuable and its importance to us shows that you respect who we are and what we believe in. In this country there are so many faiths and spiritualities, us blackfellas aren't experts on them all, but

we know enough to know that they're important to people and that's the way of life that they follow. It's not fair that we respect others' way of life but they don't know about or respect ours. We just want the same. We just want people to say that they know of our culture and that it's important to us as people, but being genuine and not just saying it because they think that's what we want to hear.

(Personal Communication: Aboriginal Man, Adelaide, 05/04/2018)

Aboriginal culture is one of, if not the most, important things in Aboriginal Australians' lives, and this was a point that the Aboriginal man in the art shop clearly stated. He voiced how many Aboriginal Australians feel that their culture is ignored and is not considered as important as other faiths or spiritualities in Australia, which they consider unfair because they make the effort to respect others' beliefs. Arguably the most useful and interesting point raised in terms of this research is the possibility of cultural knowledge being a mechanism to build trust with Aboriginal communities.

With Aboriginal culture being paramount to the lives of many Aboriginal Australians, seeing people show a certain degree of knowledge of Aboriginal culture within services or the Government, would give them the indication that there is respect and acknowledgment to who they are and their culture. Additionally, this display of knowledge could also suggest that people not only understand Aboriginal culture, but also have an improved understanding of Aboriginal Australians as people. This knowledge may include not only their way of living, but also an awareness of certain needs that Aboriginal Australians require because they are Aboriginal. During my fieldwork, I learned that there is an issue of trust between some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and examples that I was told about clearly link to the lack of understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal culture and way of life. In relation to services which support education, health and employment, employees may not necessarily agree with all aspects of Aboriginal culture or have the same priorities, for example the importance of their own language or the use of bush remedies. Nevertheless, through having knowledge of Aboriginal culture it will at least provide employees with an understanding of where Aboriginal Australians' beliefs and preferred approaches may lie and subsequently enable them to tailor their approach to be more considerate of Aboriginal culture.

When I was in the Coorong I spoke to a Ngarrindjeri Elder, who has extensive knowledge of the land, and he explained that because their culture is so entwined with the land and the significance of land formations where their community reside, it is very different to other beliefs that people in Australia may have. He expressed that this is another reason why it is important that non-Aboriginal Australians try to understand some aspects of Aboriginal culture. He spoke about the issues the community had when they experienced the severe drought, because he believes that had authorities been more informed on the cultural significance of land and specific locations and landforms, then maybe there would have been an improved rapport between the Aboriginal community, the authorities and specialists. As I have highlighted in a previous chapter, the severity of the drought was so significant that wildlife was dying and Aboriginal remains started to be revealed, both of which had large cultural implications on the Ngarrindjeri. The Elder did not link the knowledge of Aboriginal culture to how the drought itself could have been dealt with, but instead to the authorities' response to the community and the support they gave throughout it. Several people made it clear to me that during the drought many members of the Ngarrindjeri community felt isolated and that there was a big communication issue between themselves and the authorities. However, this Elder (Appendix A: 1) explained that he thought that there could have been a more sympathetic and reassuring approach to the drought, if those in authority had a greater understanding of why the drought caused upset for cultural and spiritual reasons:

If they knew us a bit better and how important our land is to us, and all that's on it, they might've been able to have understood why it was so awful for us. It was traumatic. It might've been possible for us blackfellas to have worked better with the authorities. Them knowing who we are, what our land means to us, they could've been more, I don't know, I guess more sympathetic to how we were feeling and why we were feeling like that. Understanding. That's it, they could've been more understanding. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

Whereas my previous conversations with this Elder had been quite intense because of how passionate he feels about the Ngarrindjeri land, and how openly angry and frustrated he was about the situation concerning the drought, this conversation seemed different to me. He was subdued and came across as disappointed but also hopeful at the same time; he was indicating that there would have been a more positive approach to community engagement if there had been a better understanding of Ngarrindjeri culture. This Ngarrindjeri Elder echoed what other Aboriginal Australians told me, when he stated that nobody is expecting everyone who works with Aboriginal Australians to be experts in Aboriginal culture, but instead to have enough knowledge to better understand Aboriginal communities, and Aboriginal Australians as individuals. Additionally, my conversation with the Elder implied that a knowledge of Aboriginal culture could have helped with the issues of distrust that were present throughout the drought. He did not specifically state that knowledge and understanding could have improved trust; however, by pointing out that the community could have had a better rapport and been able to work closely with authorities, if the authorities had understood Aboriginal culture more deeply, it suggests that levels of trust would have been improved. For the community to have an improved relationship with the authorities, they need to trust the authorities and the decisions they make, and this has to come from better engagement with the community, improved through knowledge and understanding.

*Racism and Acceptance: The Role of Aboriginal Culture in Reconciliation*

It was not only Aboriginal Australian participants who expressed the opinion that improved knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture could lead to Aboriginal Australians having a greater sense of trust towards social policy services and initiatives. When interviewing a non-Aboriginal woman who is a support worker at a charity in Adelaide, she echoed this opinion and expanded on it by explaining her reasoning that as well as supporting issues of trust, it could also lead to greater mutual respect and counter racism. There is a significant issue of racism in Australia, which strongly influences Aboriginal Australians' ability to trust certain people, and I was aware that this has been ongoing since the colonisation, or as some Aboriginal Australians see it, the invasion of Australia. Racism in Australia has been linked with

the historic dispossession that Aboriginal Australians were subjected to when the Europeans settled. It has been suggested that Aboriginal Australians are more likely to recognise racism and the inequality between themselves and non-Aboriginal Australians because of the cultural privilege for non-Aboriginal Australians which came about during the colonisation of Australia (Dunn et al, 2010). When Europeans first settled, there was a hierarchy based on European culture instilled, whereby the European settlers were at the top of the hierarchy, and therefore privileged, and Aboriginal Australians were subordinate to them and at the bottom of the hierarchy (Behrendt et al, 2009: 3-19; Carlson, 2016: 17-28; Mattingly and Hampton, 1988: 2-12). It is argued that this hierarchy and subordination of Aboriginal Australians has contributed, if not caused, the ongoing racism that is still being experienced by Aboriginal Australians (Dunn et al, 2010).

In the interview with the charity worker, she referred to some of the worst forms of racism today as 'casual racism', which she explained as some people no longer being aware of what constitutes as racist. When I mentioned that I had seen non-Aboriginal people making comments and gestures and behaving in ways which could be classed as racist, the charity worker described it as casual racism because she believed that people do not understand that what they are doing is an act of racism. She continued to point out that not all racist behaviour can be explained through the lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, but there are certain racist behaviours or comments that are specific to appearances, traits or ways of life for Aboriginal Australians. One example that the charity worker highlighted was the choice of whether to wear footwear, although this example is not applicable to all Aboriginal Australians. Little has been written about the reasons for Aboriginal Australians going barefoot, with Davidson (1947) explaining traditional footwear was worn for spiritual occasions rather than as a necessity. However, a Ngarrindjeri Elder explained that walking barefoot allows spiritual connection to the land and reflects how their ancestors lived; it was not until colonisation after 1836, that Aboriginal Australians were forced to wear clothing, including footwear, when they were put into the missions (Mattingly and Hampton, 1988: 13-18). I recounted to the charity worker an example of racism I witnessed when a woman commented to her daughter about an Aboriginal Australian going barefoot. The charity worker

(Appendix A: 13) explained how this type of racism could be minimised, if those who make such remarks about Aboriginal Australians were more informed about Aboriginal culture and the reasons for choosing to go barefoot. She commented that she could understand why some people might think it is strange for an Aboriginal person to be barefoot, particularly in Adelaide where it is not as common as in rural locations. An interesting point she mentioned was that at Aboriginal ceremonies or performances, Aboriginal Australians are often barefoot and very few people make a comment in that situation, whereas numerous remarks are made if an Aboriginal Australian is observed walking down a street without shoes. This illustrates how the lack of cultural understanding could lead people to make racist remarks about barefoot Aboriginal Australians, whereas people watching a performance understand that it is an element of culture and therefore accept how the performers look:

I get that it would be seen as weird if I was to walk down a street barefoot, but for Aboriginal people they have a connection with their land, a spiritual one. Shoes aren't always seen as a necessity. Some like to feel the warmth of the land, or the dirt under their feet, but that's linked with their culture. When they perform dances or ceremonies, they're often barefoot because that was what was normal for their ancestors when they danced, or whatever, in the red dirt, but yet no one would watch an Aboriginal performance and say 'look, they're not wearing shoes'. Do you know what I mean? But they do when they see them walking in the street.

(Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

The overall point that was being made in this conversation, which seems a viable argument, is that with more knowledge of Aboriginal culture amongst non-Aboriginal people, there may be a chance that racism could be lessened because people would understand that some behaviours or appearances are culturally influenced. With this being said, even with cultural knowledge, people may choose to still voice their opinions, if something does not appear to adhere to their perceived norm, in a racist comment.

In the same way as how the knowledge and understanding of culture could contribute to lessening racism, it could also influence respect for Aboriginal Australians. The charity worker in Adelaide highlighted that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are aware of a

divide between them and due to this, Aboriginal Australians feel suppressed and undervalued in society. She suggested that through making an effort to show a greater acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture in Australia, this division could start to be bridged, making Aboriginal Australians feel more valued in society. The idea of respect and knowledge are linked: understanding a person and their beliefs and way of life is an indication of respect because they are acknowledged for who they are. This idea was originally mentioned by the charity worker in Adelaide when she was talking about the difficulties that her clients endure when they are rehabilitating and trying to integrate back into society. She felt that the lack of respect towards some Aboriginal Australians contributes to their sense of worthlessness, but at the same time they would readily interpret small acts that recognise them as Aboriginal Australians as expressions of respect:

Aboriginal people don't feel valued, they feel invisible. They very much feel like outsiders in their own country because they don't get shown respect, so that makes them feel very small and isolated because they're Aboriginal. And this makes it tough you know, when you're trying to help reintegrate people. Rather than being ignored, which is how a lot of them feel at the moment, seeing that their culture, which you know is so, so important to them, seeing it be acknowledged makes them feel like they're respected. They're not asking for much, they just want to be treated the same as everyone else and understood for who they are, for being Aboriginal. They basically just want to be respected for the person that they are.  
(Personal Communication: Non-Aboriginal Woman, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)

A clear statement that was presented by the charity worker is that respect can be achieved through acknowledgment, and acknowledgement is achieved through knowledge. She reiterated that Aboriginal Australians do not want to be treated differently to other Australians, but they want to be understood and respected like everyone else. I have learnt through my fieldwork that one of the most effective ways to understand people is through learning about them as a person, including their beliefs and stances on life which are encompassed within Aboriginal culture. Additionally, the relationship that I built up with the Aboriginal communities was based on trust, and that was gained through taking the time to get to know them as people, including their culture. Learning about cultural aspects within their community was not only valuable to my research, but also to the trust that community

members felt towards me. For Aboriginal Australians to understand that their culture is acknowledged and understood provides them with a sense that they are not invisible, and instead are respected just as highly as other people and other cultures and beliefs within Australia.

*A Case Study of Cultural Understanding: The Power of Cultural Recognition in a Health Service*

After conversations highlighted the importance of the acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture in forming a sense of trust and worth for Aboriginal Australians, I wanted to gain a greater understanding of how the Moorundi Health service is influenced by culture. When exploring the issue of trust, I had been told briefly about the work and success of the Moorundi Health service, an Aboriginal led initiative. However, I wanted to understand how the cultural element of the service contributes to its success within the community, especially as its success is such a contrast to the negativity and distrust that many Aboriginal Australians associate with the national healthcare services. I spoke to two Ngarrindjeri community members, one of whom was an Elder and has a prominent position in the community and is known for her dedication to improving the opportunities for the Ngarrindjeri people. Following her husband's death, she has become particularly concerned in ensuring there is medical support for the community. The other member works with children in the community and oversaw the running of the local youth centre. The two Ngarrindjeri community members and I were having a 'yarn' and cup of tea together when we began talking about the Moorundi Health service after the Elder gave me a brochure (Appendix B: 1), which is normally given to community members to advise them of the health service and what it offers. The Elder mentioned that she meant to give me the brochure the previous time we spoke and then both participants went on to explain that the Moorundi Health Service had been a long time coming and was a very necessary welcome for the community. I asked them both about the cultural elements of the service, knowing how integral Aboriginal culture is in daily life for Aboriginal Australians. I assumed that it would be a pivotal aspect of the Aboriginal led health service and embedded more widely across the service than just in the traditional healing clinics that they offer. The participants confirmed this assumption, saying that not only was

that one of the main differences from the national health services, but also a reason why it is received so positively by community members. They explained that aspects of Aboriginal culture are embedded across the whole range of services, even when it may not be visibly evident; sometimes just the knowledge of certain information specific to the Ngarrindjeri is evidence of their culture being present in a service. One aspect that is inclusive across the whole of the Moorundi Health Service is the acknowledgement and support of language groups. The Elder (Appendix A: 3) thought that because the majority of the practitioners and workers are Aboriginal, the inclusivity of Aboriginal languages throughout the service can be achieved more easily than in other services where Aboriginal employees may be in the minority:

For us language is important, we see it as our responsibility to teach the younger generations to make sure that it's continued. Moorundi understand this concern and include it in their programmes for children, which is great. Most of the staff are able to speak it too, so we have that same understanding. We could have a conversation in our language if we wanted, they know it that well. That level of understanding shows dedication for our culture. There's more to our culture than language, but it is important. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The other participant (Appendix A: 5) in this conversation added that culture is not seen as a detached aspect of the health service: it is part of it. For example, although educating children on the Ngarrindjeri language is part of an educational programme aimed at enriching and supporting children in the community, the Moorundi Health service also provides language enrichment through its 'yarning' groups, as well as ensuring the language is spoken in other parts of its service, such as the traditional healing:

What I like is that it isn't something that's separate, it's there in lots of different areas of Moorundi. From bush medicine names to community programmes, it's there. Do you know what I mean? I don't know how to say it. It's valued, well all of our culture is valued, it's not like you have the health service plus you can learn our language. The language is part of Moorundi and I think that's how you know that we've helped create and run Moorundi. You can tell it's run by us for us. And

anyone who's had a bad time elsewhere, knows that seeing a doctor here will be different. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The fact that the role of language has been integrated throughout the service and is not an add-on programme, community members are reassured that the Moorundi Health service understands the importance of their language. Moreover, the Elder also indicated the link between knowing that their culture is understood and community members having confidence to access the service. She explained that those who had a bad experience elsewhere and, as a result, refused to use national health services again, were easily persuaded to access the Moorundi Health service because Aboriginal Australians are at the forefront of the initiative, which also means there is familiarity of Aboriginal culture.

In the Elder's opinion, an outstanding and unique attribute of the Moorundi Health service which is often commented on, is the integration of the Ngarrindjeri language, given it is such an important element of their culture. In addition to this, she informed me of how the overall inclusivity of Ngarrindjeri culture across all the programmes and services offered by the Moorundi Health service fills community members with confidence and reassurance because practitioners and staff understand them as Aboriginal individuals. The participants explained that community members can always identify elements of their culture no matter what service is being accessed, whether it be assistance with managing a chronic disease, attending one of the various clinics or joining a community engagement programme. The Ngarrindjeri community members take comfort from Aboriginal culture being included rather than ignored when they are trying to improve their health, both physical and mental. The younger Ngarrindjeri woman emphasised that the reassurance of being understood and the health professionals' ability to sympathise removes the feeling, and worry, of being judged because of cultural differences, but instead encourages trust. Pilgrim et al (2011) explain that the complexities of trust within healthcare can be understood theoretically on three different levels: intrapersonally, interpersonally and systematically. The most relevant is interpersonal as it relates to the inner confidence one has to trust themselves and others (Pilgrim et al, 2011). It is suggested the ability to trust is influenced by both rational and emotional aspects of relationships in lived experiences (Pilgrim et al, 2011). Therefore, whatever experiences,

negative or positive, Aboriginal Australians had when accessing health services in the past, these will influence their trust of a service. The Ngarrindjeri woman (Appendix A: 25) went on to say that the community engagement work, which is one branch of the Moorundi Health service, is culturally led and acts as a positive mechanism to indicate to Ngarrindjeri community members that health services are not always negative experiences:

Sometimes it can be as simple as us knowing that the staff get us, they understand us and our worries. It's not just because they're Aboriginal, but they know us, our culture, our way of life, you know. The community engagement programme is also really good, and culture is a big part of that. I think having these services and groups, it makes people realise that it isn't all doom and gloom when you think of Moorundi. It isn't just for when you're really crook. For example, yarning groups, for us that's important culturally and that's something that they help organise. It's great. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

The participants gave a further example, which illustrated the benefits of Moorundi Health Service having practitioners and staff who have advanced knowledge of the Ngarrindjeri culture. They recognised that mental health is an ongoing concern within all Aboriginal communities, including the Ngarrindjeri community, and cultural knowledge is a particularly useful tool for practitioners to combine with their medical knowledge. The youth worker (Appendix A: 25) explained that the services the Moorundi Health service offers to support mental health can be more successful than some of the national health services due to its inclusion of culture. Cultural activities and certain cultural understandings can be spoken about and included during appointments with practitioners, which is only possible because they have that cultural knowledge. She made a point of highlighting that mental health affects both younger and older members of the community, before telling me an example of how culture was included in counselling sessions through talking about messenger birds:

Part of our culture is the belief that certain birds deliver certain messages, some good and some not so good. But no matter whether it's a good messenger or not, when we see them we know they're telling us something. In a counselling session that my relative had, she said they spoke about messenger birds for ages, most of the session in fact. Now, that wouldn't happen in a session with a counsellor who doesn't understand our culture, it just wouldn't be possible. And she said that the

best thing was that she didn't feel stupid talking about the messengers she saw or anything. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Coorong, 10/02/2018)

This example made me realise that the knowledge of Aboriginal culture within health services, such as in this case within the Moorundi Health service, provides comfort and reassurance at a time when Aboriginal Australians need it the most. When individuals are seeking help, whether from health clinics or community engagement programmes, they will have concerns and therefore, the last thing that they want to feel is alienated or uneasy because the medical professionals are not aware about cultural aspects. For someone who does not understand Aboriginal culture, seeing a particular bird on their gatepost is going to mean very little to them. However, for an Aboriginal Australian, seeing that bird can lead them to be worried that something bad has happened or someone is unwell, or it could be positive too. Whichever it is, if they are undergoing counselling to improve their mental health, it is something that warrants being spoken about because of its cultural significance.

It was clear during my conversation specifically about the role of culture in the Moorundi Health service, and from previous conversations about health services which highlighted trust issues with other services and initiatives, just how positively the Moorundi Health service is received. There is no doubt that the Ngarrindjeri community members have the confidence to access the service, and, as this conversation highlighted, cultural understanding plays an important role in that confidence. Essentially the role of culture for the Moorundi Health service fulfils two needs: instilling confidence in individuals to access services, and providing a level of understanding which expands beyond the minimum description of health symptoms. In other words, the practitioners and staff members have advanced knowledge of the Ngarrindjeri culture which they can utilise when diagnosing, treating and explaining information to the patient, in addition to being able to have conversations with patients which may be laden with specific cultural elements. These aspects are not only relevant to the specific services offered for health, but to all the services, programmes and initiatives offered at the Moorundi Health service, including community engagement.

### **Preserving Aboriginal Culture: Honouring Differences**

Although many Aboriginal Australians believe there is a significant lack of acknowledgement and understanding of Aboriginal culture in education, health and employment initiatives and services, they also understand that the problem is much broader than in just these three areas. The preservation of their culture is a role that many Aboriginal Australians take on themselves, as they feel it is their responsibility to protect it and ensure its continuation through educating younger generations of the community. The importance of preserving culture was raised as a concern by a Ngarrindjeri Elder whilst she was guiding me on the first of several visits to the cultural museum in the Coorong. She explained that the older generation feel a great sense of responsibility to preserve Aboriginal culture, especially in the current situation where they believe the lack of acknowledgement and understanding of Aboriginal culture means that educating children about their culture is even more critical. The Elders are keen to educate not only the younger Aboriginal generations but also non-Aboriginal Australians. In addition to this cultural teaching in the Ngarrindjeri community, there are two other forms of cultural preservation in the Coorong region: a small museum of Aboriginal culture and a culture walk. During my first stay in Adelaide before heading out to the Coorong, I visited the South Australian Museum, owned by the South Australian Government several times. I decided to visit it to attempt to identify the considerations being made when preserving Aboriginal culture. I was aware on my first visit that most of the other visitors were tourists. This led me to question whether the museum's purpose of preserving Aboriginal culture was influenced by the need of educating people, acknowledging Aboriginal Australians or meeting the needs of tourists. This question is reflected in the work of Weedon (2004), who acknowledges that recent images of Aboriginal Australians have become romanticised and used in the tourist industry, with images showing Aboriginal Australians living in harmony with nature through images of body decorations, bark paintings and tribal people with boomerangs. At the museum, a prominent sign stated that the Aboriginal cultures section was sponsored by a large mining company. The section contained many artefacts and the focus of it appeared to be historic as there were few photographs of Aboriginal Australians in Western clothing and very little information about current Aboriginal life and culture. There was scarce acknowledgement of events which deeply affected Aboriginal Australians, such as The Stolen

Generations. Reflective of my findings, it has been identified that there is a reoccurring issue of how the history of Australia is portrayed, as it is only recently that it has been told from the perspective of Aboriginal Australians, in addition to the issue of dominant images of Aboriginal Australians depicting primitive and tribal people, which are arguably the result of a colonial gaze (Weedon, 2004). It could be suggested that due to the museum having a very high profile in the South Australian tourist industry, it is unlikely that the local government would want an exhibition to focus on a controversial event, but instead create a much more optimistic view of Aboriginal culture. However, without acknowledging that the culture is just as important today, or how the culture may have evolved over the years, it appeared to me that it mainly portrays Aboriginal culture as something of the past and not of today. Considering that Museology highlights the value of the relationship between people and objects through understanding the specific relationship between people and reality (Latham and Simmons, 2019), it would suggest that it is of high importance for accurate depictions of Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginal culture in museums. I was informed later that although the museum holds one of the largest collections of Aboriginal artefacts in Australia, there is only a limited amount on display and furthermore, the museum has not responded to some requests by the Ngarrindjeri to return artefacts to their original owners. It could be argued therefore, that the museum's intentions of preserving Aboriginal culture does not necessarily put the Aboriginal Australians' needs at the forefront of the process, but instead maybe consider tourism as a greater priority.

The Ngarrindjeri community's cultural museum in the Coorong is very different to the South Australian museum. Although, it is physically very small, there are a significant number of artefacts on display ranging from paintings and whale bones to carved wooden tools and a wooden canoe, all of which are specific to the Ngarrindjeri culture (Figure VI. 7, 8, 9 & 10). The photographs show how the community museum is not structured in a typical layout that I found in large national museums, where there were lots of display cabinets with strong lighting lining the walls. Instead, it offers a more informal and hands-on setting, which I thought was very welcoming and had elements of feeling homely. I wanted to capture how the wall colours, the displays, specifically the lack of formal structure, and the positioning of

artefacts all illustrate the values that the Ngarrindjeri community hold when it comes to educating people on their culture and are significant in creating that informal and welcoming atmosphere. It is important to the community that people feel welcomed and able to pick up artefacts so they can gain a better understanding, in addition to having a variety of artefacts on display, from paintings and cultural tools through to historical photographs. This approach enables the Ngarrindjeri community to offer a more rounded understanding of who they are and their culture, which is particularly important for community members. On my visit, the Ngarrindjeri woman showing me around, explained that the museum is visited by families and tourists, in addition to them hosting school and work trips. The Ngarrindjeri pride themselves on having a different approach to teaching about Aboriginal culture; rather than observing the artefacts through glass, visitors are strongly encouraged by the Ngarrindjeri community members who assist with the museum's running, to have a hands-on and immersive experience. Visitors can touch and pick up different artefacts so that they can observe them more closely, experiencing different textures, weight and smells of cultural items. This hands-on approach is purposeful because it allows people to have realistic and authentic knowledge of different cultural practices and objects, which is what the community is keen to share. This is arguably a better approach than presenting artefacts behind glass, as the meaningful exchange that takes place when people interact with objects is important because it can enable the same significant transaction as people keeping family heirlooms (Latham and Simmons, 2019). For example, visitors can feel the weight of boomerangs and spears and so can imagine more realistically how they were used, rather than looking at them in a glass cabinet. I was introduced to the Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 27), who oversees the museum, and she expressed how the necessity for their museum is growing as the community feel that their culture continues to be ignored:

Our museum allows people to come and learn about our culture in a different way, you know, we'd say a better one. You can't be too precious about things, it's better for people to pick this up [showing a wooden club] and get a good feel of what it's like to hold it and use it, they can learn a lot more by holding things and feeling them, not just looking at them in glass. And it's more fun! We've gotta encourage people to learn about it, if it's not us doing it, who will? We get ignored so much, so if we want people to learn about our culture and who we are, then it's got to

come from us. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

The Elder explained to me that although the sense of responsibility to preserve Aboriginal culture has always been felt by Aboriginal Elders, this feeling has increased in response to the realisation that their culture is not acknowledged and therefore, if they want their Ngarrindjeri culture to be preserved, they have to be at the forefront driving this action. It was evident that all the Elders I spoke to agreed that they, and fellow Elders in the community, feel the same sense of responsibility to preserve their culture in some form. However, I also knew from visiting the museum in Adelaide that museums and galleries who exhibit Aboriginal culture artefacts receive funding and sponsorships from the Australian Government and businesses. I asked two Elders involved in running the Aboriginal cultural museum if they were aware of this funding. It could be suggested that this Australian Government funding is a form of acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the two Elders (Appendix A: 3 & 27) answered that the funding is often allocated to large museums in major towns and cities instead of small rural locations, and they were quick to link this with tourism revenue:

You're right, there is money but not for small places like ours. The big ones, like the State Museum in Adelaide get money but they have a lot more people, more tourists, you know. We, we struggle to keep this place running. We actually applied for funding several months back, but we didn't get it. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 04/03/2018)

The running costs of the cultural museum are causing the most difficulties for the community as it relies solely on donations from visitors, but the costs are proving to be higher than the income they are currently receiving. The difficulties that the Elders face in running the museum, paired with the responsibilities and necessity of preserving their cultural heritage through the museum, was evident on their faces. Both of them looked despondent and shrugged their shoulders at each other at the end of the conversation; however, one of the Elders turned to me and mentioned that the culture walk is far less stressful but just as important and effective.





**Figure VI. 7, 8, 9 & 10: The Ngarrindjeri community museum in the Coorong Region**  
*The local Ngarrindjeri community museum in the Coorong region is an act of cultural preservation and education. Various forms of cultural art are on display in addition to whale bones, a wooden canoe and carved clubs. (Author's own image, Meningie, South Australia, 04/03/2018)*

The culture walk, named Pelican Path, is the second tool of cultural preservation and is located in Meningie alongside Lake Alexandrina. Meningie is a small town that has a lot of tourist traffic as it is on the route to the popular Great Ocean Road, therefore making it an ideal location to have a source of information on Aboriginal culture. I came across the path on my journey in the Coorong when I stayed overnight in Meningie on my way to visit the Ngarrindjeri community. I was interested by some signposts standing tall along the water's edge and went to investigate. Pelican Path is an informative walk, which has detailed information posts with text and images covering the topics of early settlement, the environment and Ngarrindjeri culture (Figure VI. 11, 12 & 13.). I found that it combines an array of cultural aspects, from

historical through to contemporary, including explanations for why the environment in the Coorong region is so pivotal for the Ngarrindjeri. I visited Pelican Path several times, as well as driving past it on the way to and from visiting the community, and every time, I saw at least a couple of people stopping to read the signposts or walking along the path. A Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 1), who has extensive knowledge of the land, explained that it was important to create Pelican Path because, now it is there, people will always know who the Ngarrindjeri people are and will see how the land they are driving through is significant to them. He mentioned that it makes the Ngarrindjeri community feel more acknowledged and hopes that it will continue to educate people about their community and culture:

For us, it makes us feel a little bit less invisible. When people get out of their cars to take a picture of the pelicans or the beautiful water, they walk past these posts and can read about who we are and what's important about the land they're standing on. That's important for us, that land and the nature on it is us, it's our culture and that's who we are. So, we want to tell people that, and that's what Pelican Path does. (Personal Communication: Male Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 09/02/2018)

The community museum and Pelican Path are both methods of cultural preservation, which is undeniably a fundamental role that the Ngarrindjeri community have taken on and feel responsible to oversee. During conversations about cultural preservation and the steps the Ngarrindjeri community are taking, it struck me that there was also an element of wanting to make themselves more visible. This is not a negative observation, but rather one where a community are desperate to be seen for who they are and to redress feeling ignored and less valued than non-Aboriginal Australians.





**Figure VI. 11, 12 & 13: The Pelican Path cultural walk in Meningie, South Australia**

*Pelican Path is an informative walk along Lake Alexandrina in Meningie, providing information which links historical events to the present day, and explains the importance of the environment around the Coorong to the Ngarrindjeri community. The choice of name was influenced by the Pelican being the totem animal of the Ngarrindjeri people and the imprint of the woven artwork on the path was designed by a Ngarrindjeri Elder. (Author's own image, Meningie, South Australia, 09/02/2018)*

The notion of the community wanting to preserve their culture and make themselves more visible to the rest of society both stem from the same issue: as people of Aboriginal heritage they do not feel understood or respected. I broached this in a conversation with the Ngarrindjeri woman (Appendix A: 25) who runs the youth centre near the community. I wanted to understand how interlinked preservation of culture and visibility are, as this is a viable indicator of how important it is to include Aboriginal culture in education, health and employment initiatives and services. The Ngarrindjeri woman explained that, with the lack of

visibility comes a feeling of worthlessness and inferiority within society, but the preservation of Aboriginal culture is a mechanism that enables Aboriginal Australians to feel more positive through taking actions themselves. She reiterated just how significant culture is to Aboriginal Australians and how damaging it would be to lose it; therefore, the importance of Aboriginal culture is always the dominant reason for mechanisms of cultural preservation. However, the Ngarrindjeri woman then continued to clarify that mechanisms of cultural preservation, such as the community museum and the Pelican Path walk, make the community feel less invisible and more empowered, to a certain extent, because they are not only achieving preservation of their culture but also continually educating people about who they are. Additionally, the drive to take action was also mentioned in our conversation; the community believe that they are not valued as highly as non-Aboriginal Australians and therefore realise that they must be the ones to preserve their culture:

I mean, we shouldn't have to be doing things because the Government aren't doing them, but that's where we are, and because our culture is who we are, we will do what we can to keep it going. It's very downhearted to know that something so important to us, it pretty much is us, isn't respected as much by others, and you know, that includes the Government. But that's why we're doing what we can. Pelican Path tells everyone that goes past it, who we are and what we live by. Before it, people could've driven through and not even known we live here and this is our land. It's recognition of us, the Ngarrindjeri. (Personal Communication: Ngarrindjeri Woman, Coorong, 13/02/2018)

This conversation made it clear that there is a link between the preservation of culture and the sense of being visible in society; the community do not want or aim to be more visible than anyone else, but they do not want to be invisible. Through mechanisms, such as the community museum and Pelican Path, they are achieving the preservation of culture and recognition of their community. The community members I spoke to strongly feel that without the community's own efforts to preserve culture, nothing meaningful would happen due to the lack of knowledge that the Australian Government and authorities have about the importance of Aboriginal culture. The preservation of culture is deemed a necessity to Aboriginal Australians, understandably because of how integral it is to them as individuals;

however, it could be argued that the Australian Government do not deem it as highly important because of the need to prioritise other issues above it.

Aboriginal culture is very broad, and specific to different Aboriginal communities; however, the preservation of it can be challenging because of the oral aspect of the culture. In addition to the cultural practices and forms of cultural preservation already discussed, the oral aspect of Aboriginal culture essentially overarches the culture as a whole and could be described as a verbal map, specific for each Aboriginal community. The oral element of Aboriginal culture encompasses an array of stories and songs that are passed down through generations by Elders. The stories and songs are significant because they describe the travel and creations of ancestral beings, and therefore, explain the existence and the importance of the land and land formations surrounding the community. Therefore, it is not just physical artefacts related to Aboriginal culture that are important to preserve, but also Aboriginal languages which carry these stories and songs. During a weaving session, a Ngarrindjeri Elder (Appendix A: 5) explained how the attempts to preserve Aboriginal language is a lot more challenging and needs to be included across an array of areas, such as storytelling when weaving, to be successful, rather than relying on more organised forms of preservation, such as large museums or cultural performances. This offers an additional explanation for why the language aspects of services and initiatives are received positively by Aboriginal Australians, such as those offered through the Moorundi Health service. However, this also highlights the significance of the exclusion of Aboriginal language. The Elder explained how the exclusion of Aboriginal language in day-to-day life not only makes it more difficult to learn the language, but also to preserve it as there is not a constant interaction with it:

It's like any language I guess, if you're not using it then you forget it. And that's the same with ours. If we don't have a use for it and don't speak it, we'll lose it and that's so bad for us because so much of our culture is dependent on it. But we need to use it more than to just tell our stories in our community. Speaking our language more is better because it's that regular use that helps us keep it alive and remember it, you know. Things like language groups or school clubs are great for

learning it and things, but we also need to use it more than that, like each day really. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 03/03/2018)

To emphasise the argument of how services and initiatives not encompassing Aboriginal language creates an additional strain on preserving it, the Ngarrindjeri Elder mentioned the example of when the local primary school in Meningie had to resort to using technology to teach the Ngarrindjeri language. Although I had also been informed of this example by another Elder when discussing the community feeling undervalued and silenced, this Elder was keen to highlight the repercussions of the school using technology to teach the language in an afterschool club, rather than employing a new teacher who could speak it. It should be acknowledged that measures were taken by the school and authorities to ensure the continuation of Aboriginal language when the replacement teacher was not qualified to fulfil this role. However, by raising this example the Elder was emphasising how the approach to teaching the language changed, from being taught alongside other lessons during the school day to an afterschool club. The Ngarrindjeri Elders considered this change significant because learning their language became an additional option, whereas before it was mandatory and taught by a teacher during the school day which ensured that all children were engaging with an Aboriginal language. The Ngarrindjeri Elders noticed a change in engagement levels when the technology was used after school. Pupils, including Aboriginal children, were choosing not to attend sessions to learn the Aboriginal language and this has subsequently heightened the stress and concern of the Elders for the preservation of their language. Although the decision by the school not to employ a teacher who spoke the Ngarrindjeri language was frustrating for the Ngarrindjeri community, the point that this Ngarrindjeri Elder wanted to concentrate on, is the need for the inclusion of Aboriginal language to be incorporated more broadly and integrally rather than as an 'add-on':

It needs to be acknowledged more than an afterschool club, or you know, it's kind of an add-on. But for us it's more than that, and if it keeps being looked at like it's not that important then the struggle to keep it going is going to get harder. I was talking to a friend the other day, and she was saying how good it would be to have the options for things to be in an Aboriginal language, like I don't know, like forms at hospitals or whatever. I mean, some aren't even fluent enough themselves that

they'd be able to read it, but others are. (Personal Communication: Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, Coorong, 02/03/2018)

The Elder mentioned that the inclusion of Aboriginal language more widely may be an incentive for people to maintain their knowledge of it; she also acknowledged that whilst many Aboriginal languages are community specific, there are enough common words between them that would make a common Aboriginal language feasible. She explained that although their culture is visibly present in their community, the Elders only teach the younger generation about it, including the language, up to a certain point in life which is usually age dependent. Therefore, she suggested that if there was the necessity to speak their language more, the benefit of maintaining the knowledge of the Ngarrindjeri language would make it easier to preserve. She also highlighted that there are generational differences which make cultural preservation more difficult, and thus making the demand greater to include Aboriginal culture more broadly in Australia. The concerns of the Elder are echoed in literature focused on Native Americans, with an explanation for the generational divide being explained through economic value (Kroskrity, 2016: 275). Kroskrity outlines that heritage languages, such as Aboriginal languages, are valued as a gateway for cultural knowledge, but lack economic value whilst the English language is understood as being useful and linked to educational success (2016: 275). Moreover, it is argued that the need to retain indigenous languages is essential to prevent the loss of associated cultural knowledge which can occur when languages are no longer spoken (Kroskrity, 2016: 274). Learning an indigenous language is more than just learning the words, it is also important that the cultural understanding is recognised (Kroskrity, 2016: 274); for example, being able to recount rituals or Dreaming narratives in the Aboriginal language is just as important as being able to have a conversation in an Aboriginal language. This argument illustrates the dilemma faced particularly by some younger Aboriginal Australians: their Aboriginal language is integral to their cultural knowledge, yet they associate English with educational and economic success.

As I was sitting having a conversation with the Ngarrindjeri Elder, a car pulled up outside and another Elder came over to see how the weaving was going. He was prompted to explain how the younger generation today differ to when they were younger. He identified that the main

difference is how regularly their language is spoken; he mentioned that when they were both younger, they were far more engaged with their culture and therefore, it was a more natural process to preserve and maintain their language because they would regularly speak it. However, both Elders have noticed that the younger generations in their community are more disengaged and it is consequently more challenging to maintain their language, as it is spoken less regularly which leads to the risk of the younger generations forgetting it. With this in mind, it is understandable why the Elder mentioned the benefits of including Aboriginal language more broadly within Australian society, whether it be a choice of language when completing forms or the way that Aboriginal language is taught in schools. It is evident that Elders understand that the preservation of culture and language needs to span beyond the community themselves.

#### *Cultural Preservation in Adelaide: The Kurna Perspectives*

The importance of cultural preservation and the reasons for it are not only felt by the Ngarrindjeri community, but also resonate with the Kurna people in Adelaide. Whereas the Ngarrindjeri had the two specific mechanisms of cultural preservation in the community museum and cultural walk, forms of cultural preservation in Adelaide were not as noticeable, particularly because of the size and business of the city. However, in addition to the main museums and art galleries in Adelaide, which display some Aboriginal artefacts and cultural information, I noticed the use of dual Aboriginal and English words on some signs around the city, specifically names of squares or park land (*Figure VI. 14 & 15*). The use of dual names is a result of an agreement that the city council signed as a form of reconciliation, whereby the council vowed to take actions which recognise the Kurna people and their heritage. The naming project, of which the dual names are a part, saw the council work with communities and authorities to endorse the Kurna and English naming of all park lands and squares in Adelaide.

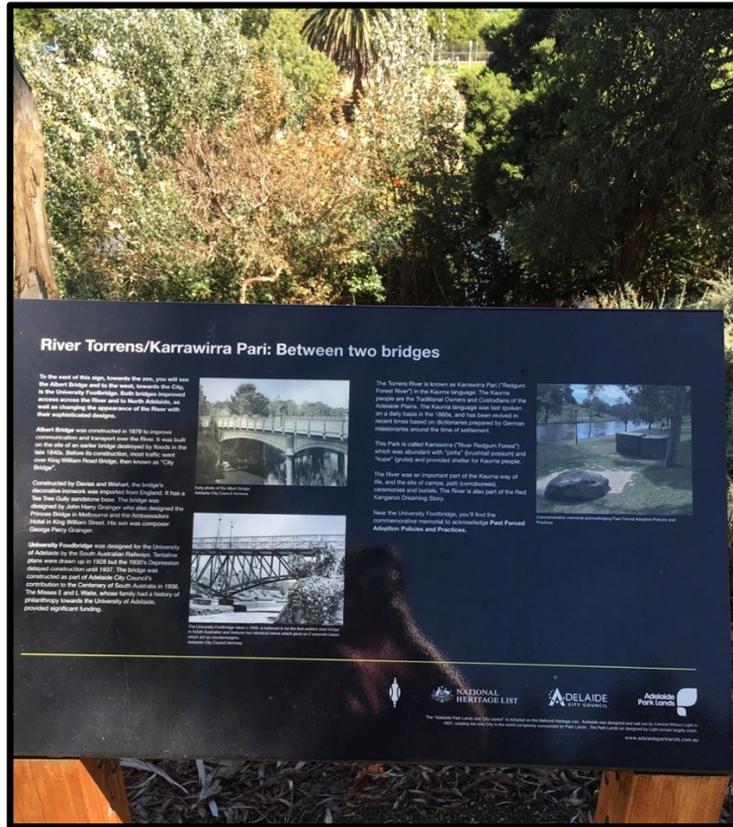


Figure VI. 14 & 15: Dual language signs in Adelaide using the Koori and English language

*These are two examples of the dual language naming of rivers and park lands in Adelaide. This initiative is a token of recognition to the Kurna people and their land. (Author's own image, Adelaide, 12/04/2018)*

At first I assumed that these were the only indicators of Aboriginal culture and were used to highlight areas of significance for the Kurna people; however, after a conversation with a Kurna Elder who volunteered at a charity coffee shop, it became apparent that there were more than just the few signs that I had come across. She informed me of the Adelaide Kurna Walking Trail that the city council have created together with the Kurna people; the trail guides you around the city and visits areas of cultural significance for the Kurna people. Although there are some signposts on the trail that have information about the different sites, the accompanying leaflet provides detailed information about each area and explains its links to the Kurna people. There are seventeen sites across the city that the trail visits and these range from riverbanks to murals. Once I learnt of the walking trail and looked at the information when I followed it, I thought it appeared to be a positive and beneficial act of cultural preservation, in addition to being an educational tool. However, if I had not been informed of the trail by the Kurna Elder, I think it would not have been easy to find out about it as there was very little, if any, advertisement of it around the city, including in museums and galleries. Additionally, it should also be noted that this walking trail was funded solely through a grant from the city council, and therefore, indicates an act of support for Aboriginal culture and its preservation. This was not the only example of cultural preservation that I was made aware of by Kurna community members. On one of my visits to the art gallery in Glenelg, a suburb of Adelaide, I was given a leaflet about another walking trail, which included sites of cultural significance and corresponding Dreaming narratives (Appendix B: 9). It is important to emphasise the funding of both of these projects because of the criticism that was voiced by Ngarrindjeri Elders about the lack of support from their local council regarding the preservation of their culture. This indicates potential differences in the approach or prioritisation of Aboriginal culture and its preservation by local councils. In addition to my own personal view on the Kurna Walking Trail being a positive tool in the education and preservation of Aboriginal culture, it is also viewed positively by members of the Kurna community.

When I was first informed of the trail, the Kurna Elder (Appendix A: 18) in the charity coffee shop was extremely enthusiastic when explaining what the trail was and how it allowed people to be guided through their land with explanations of its importance. I had this conversation after talking to the Ngarrindjeri community about the lack of support they received for their culture, so was taken aback by how positive the Kurna Elder was, as I had been expecting my conversations about cultural preservation to be similar to those with the Ngarrindjeri Elders. A significant part of my conversation with the Kurna Elder was when she expressed that the trail enabled people to learn about the Kurna community and their land:

The Kurna trail takes you all over the city, visiting things which are important to us. Some of it's history, but others are important areas of the city for us. It shows parts of our Dreaming stories, and the leaflet thing, the guide, it has lots of stuff in there. It really is good. We're really happy that there is something that can show people that the land in this crazy busy city is our land and why it's so important to us. (Personal Communication: Female Kurna Elder, Adelaide, 14/04/2018)

Although this may not seem a particularly impactful moment in a conversation, it illustrated the Kurna community's support for the trail and the trust that they have in it being an effective tool, fulfilling cultural acknowledgement and preservation. The walking trail was a result of a collaboration between the Peace Foundation, an organisation promoting peace through art forms, and the Kurna community with support of the city council through a grant. With different organisations working together on such an initiative there could have been a risk of mixed communication or understanding; I was aware through conversations I had during my fieldwork this is what had happened in some other initiatives. However, from the conversations I had with Aboriginal Australians in Adelaide, some of whom were Kurna people, undoubtedly the project to create this walking trail has been highly successful. It is not only a tool for educating and preserving Aboriginal culture, but also clearly acknowledges the Kurna people in Adelaide.

When discussing cultural preservation with the Kurna people and members of the Ngarrindjeri community, it became apparent how the different approaches to cultural

preservation by other organisations impact the overarching emotions that the communities feel towards the preservation of their culture and the need to sustain it. It was clear that when assessing cultural preservation, it should be done on a case by case basis as the actions of local councils can differ and this subsequently alters the opinions of the communities. Whereas the Kurna people appear to be content with the mechanisms of cultural preservation currently in Adelaide and appreciate the acknowledgement of their community and culture in the city, the Ngarrindjeri community's perspectives are very different, as they feel a sense of desperation that they as a community need to be the driving force behind the preservation of their culture. This is not to say that the Kurna people do not feel the need to contribute to cultural preservation because the passion that both communities displayed towards that were equally as evident. However, the main difference between the communities in relation to cultural preservation is that the Kurna people feel their culture has been supported by city authorities to a certain extent, whereas the Ngarrindjeri feel isolated and under stress to fulfil the need of cultural preservation single-handedly as a community. In addition to the passion towards cultural preservation being a commonality between the two communities, the necessity for Aboriginal culture was undeniably valued by everyone I spoke to from both communities, and this was communicated through the emphasis and explanations of Aboriginal culture being integral to their identities.

### **Concluding Comments**

Aboriginal culture was a topic that continually reoccurred throughout my fieldwork, whether it be during discussions on issues related to trust or feeling voiceless, it was mentioned by different participants. The term 'culture' can be understood differently; Aboriginal Australians interpret culture as a way of life, linking to all aspects of their being, whereas some non-Aboriginal Australians understand it as a set of characteristics, such as customs and arts, which Aboriginal Australians partake in. With the understanding of how integral culture is to the lives of Aboriginal Australians, and the challenges that are caused when it is denied, it is not surprising that it appears to be embedded in many aspects of life. Culture is a strong component of the identities of Aboriginal Australians, and without it, many struggle to

understand who they are. Therefore, because of the importance of their culture to them, Aboriginal Australians want it to be included, or at least acknowledged, in education, health and employment initiatives and services; this would also aid the development of trust and rapport between Aboriginal Australians and the Government and authorities. My second and third research questions focus on how trust between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians can be improved and what can be done to support the success of initiatives. Therefore, the acknowledgement of culture in the social policy areas contributes to the answers of these questions through establishing trust and creating positive experiences for Aboriginal Australians. An example of this is the different levels of support that the local councils have given to the Ngarrindjeri community and the Kurna people; as a result of the support from the Adelaide city council, the Kurna people have a more positive view of the council compared to the Ngarrindjeri and their perception of their local council who have not been so forthcoming in supporting the preservation of Aboriginal culture. Moreover, the findings from my fieldwork have indicated the association between the acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture and the levels of mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. As this research has highlighted, there is a significant feeling amongst some Aboriginal Australians of worthlessness and disempowerment as a result of feeling invisible within the wider society. It is not being suggested that big gestures of cultural acknowledgement are wanted or needed by Aboriginal Australians for them to feel more valued, but recognition and respect of Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal Australians have been indicated as steps that can be taken so that Aboriginal Australians feel more empowered and valued.

It could be understood that the focus or inclusion of Aboriginal culture is overlooked by the Australian Government and local authorities because there is the need to prioritise other matters; for instance, educational, health and employment issues may be considered more urgent than cultural preservation. However, the role of culture in the lives of Aboriginal Australians means that culture is integral in some format to educational, health and employment matters for Aboriginal Australians, whether it be through how Aboriginal language is learnt in schools, the types of jobs that are culturally specific being as highly

regarded as others or the inclusion of cultural support in medical services. Culture, its inclusion and respect shown for it, can be influential on the decisions made by Aboriginal Australians, as can be seen in the positivity towards the Aboriginal led Moorundi Health service, compared to the national health services, and therefore can also have an impact on the success of initiatives and services. Aboriginal culture is not necessarily the most significant factor in the effectiveness of initiatives and services; however, it clearly needs to be considered because of the influential links it has to trust, acknowledgment and essentially the willingness of Aboriginal Australians to access these services and initiatives. Issues relating to education, health and employment that I spoke about with participants all had some link with Aboriginal culture, either through the cause of the issues or suggestions for rectifying them. Aboriginal culture is a very valuable asset that could be considered useful when understanding initiatives and services which are not wholly effective; Aboriginal Australians understand the acknowledgement and respect of their culture as a means of acknowledgment and respect towards themselves. Therefore, attaining mutual respect through cultural recognition could facilitate the dialogue to continue to improve the effectiveness of education, health and employment services and initiatives; however, by excluding Aboriginal culture it could cause tension and resistance, as my participants indicated.

## Chapter VII

### Conclusions

The voices of the Kurna and Ngarrindjeri communities have been at the forefront of this research; it is through them that the impact of silencing, distrust and culture on Aboriginal experience in the context of education, health and employment in contemporary South Australia can be understood. Writing this thesis more descriptively and analytically has ensured the focus of this research to be primarily on the experiences of participants, shown through thick description of the findings. The ethnographic element of the research enabled me to collect rich data through conducting unstructured interviews and conversations, and gave me the opportunity to observe the environment, and the body language and emotions of Aboriginal Australians. Through this approach, and the application of grounded theory, my research has identified common factors in the lived experiences of my participants that may not be immediately visible. These factors are essential in acknowledging and understanding the experiences of many Aboriginal Australians in relation to health, education and employment. Furthermore, they could be considered applicable when assessing how social policies relating to these areas can be made more effective in closing the gap in equality. My research revealed three explanations:

1. The Aboriginal voice is a form of empowerment and crucial in understanding Aboriginal Australian matters.
2. Trust is not formed through words alone; actions enable evidence to be the basis of a trustworthy relationship.
3. Perceptions are formed based on trust and understanding, in which culture is a significant component, and they are paramount to the decisions people make.

*Silenced: The Unheard Aboriginal Voice*

This research focused on empowering the Aboriginal voice, with the experiences and opinions of Aboriginal Australians shaping its findings. Amongst both the Kurna and Ngarrindjeri communities, the feeling of being silenced was prominent when discussing their experiences of education, health and employment initiatives and services, because the Australian Government and other authorities have ignored their concerns and there is no platform for their voice to be heard in Government. Moreover, attempts to establish such a platform have been rejected, such as the Referendum Council's report and the Uluru Statement, which reinforces to many Aboriginal Australians the notion of not having a voice within Australia. Through my fieldwork, I gained a greater insight into many Aboriginal Australians' disappointment and frustration, as well as understanding why they are so certain that a First Nations Voice, as recommended in the Referendum Council's report and the Uluru Statement, is key to improving their experiences of education, health and employment outcomes for Aboriginal Australians.

My research shows that my Aboriginal Australian participants feel that regardless of the extent of governmental research into Aboriginal matters, until the Aboriginal voice is included, heard and respected with the necessary level of authoritative empowerment, there will be no full understanding of Aboriginal matters. Thus, while the Aboriginal Australians who discussed this topic were not arguing that present research does not offer some level of understanding, they instead emphasised that more personal and cultural understanding would enable the Government and other authorities to have a more accurate insight into Aboriginal matters. This finding resonates with the Closing the Gap report 2018, which stated that the Government needs to engage closely with Indigenous bodies and grassroots campaigners (Australian Government, 2018: 15-16). Although the report makes reference to working together, those people I spoke to felt that there was little of that engagement, and that until there is such engagement they will not see any improvement in their lived experiences of health, education and employment services. In conversations, my Aboriginal Australian participants indicated that if there was more formal or informal engagement around social policies, they would feel reassured that their best interests were being considered to reach

the best outcome for them, including better experiences of education, health and employment services and initiatives, because the services would be more closely tailored to their specific needs. This view of feeling heard by the authorities was echoed nationally by an Aboriginal actress on a television panel show, when she expressed their frustration about decisions being made for and about them by people who are detached from their communities. The actress reflected the passionate emotions I encountered throughout my fieldwork and further highlighted the significance of feeling silenced and being heard to Aboriginal Australians. My research has highlighted the importance that Aboriginal Australians place on being heard, and this clearly links to how the relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians could be improved, as raised in my second research question.

My participants' personal experiences of feeling silenced also highlighted the importance of community engagement. The specific example, which was frequently raised during conversations with the Ngarrindjeri community members, was the severe drought they experienced. Although links between feeling silenced and a drought may not seem immediately evident, I found that the lack of communication between the community and authorities was significant in accentuating the severity of the drought. The drought and its impact on the experiences of the Ngarrindjeri affected their overall health, not only because of the lack of water and food resources, but also due to the stress it caused them. I found that the impact of the lack of engagement by the authorities with the Ngarrindjeri community, who in turn did not understand the actions being taken to address the drought, was a highly emotive situation due to its cultural impact and implications for their daily lives. The Ngarrindjeri felt frustrated that they had no voice. Another example I heard from Ngarrindjeri community members regarding a lack of community engagement was the failure to employ a replacement teacher who could teach the Ngarrindjeri language in the local school, which meant the community felt that their language was not valued and that they were excluded from the decision making. The impact of both these instances of ineffective community engagement by the authorities emphasised the extent of mutual misunderstanding and highlighted the necessity of clear communication and engagement.

From my research, it is clear that community engagement is particularly beneficial in supporting and empowering Aboriginal Australians by including them in matters that directly impact their daily lives and experiences, including those related to education, health and employment. My research has demonstrated how community engagement can be a key factor in supporting positive experiences, an area which my third research question focuses on, and the benefits of community engagement can be seen through the positive outlook that the Ngarrindjeri community have towards the Moorundi Health service. The Ngarrindjeri community work together with authorities to enable a successful Aboriginal-led health service to be maintained. Yet whilst this research indicates the critical value of community engagement, it is also important to highlight that community engagement cannot be enforced through one single framework for all communities. Because Aboriginal communities are all different, despite certain shared cultural connections, a more individualised approach is needed to accommodate the different needs and circumstances specific to each community. When considering how to develop forms of engagement with different communities, the Australian Government and authorities could find it helpful to explore peer leadership and expertise, co-production and asset-based community development responses, through engaging with international public policy debates and research (The Marmot Review, 2010; Durose et al, 2013; Durose et al, 2017; Sandhu, 2017; Crepaz-Keay, 2017; Department for Health, 2017; Rippon and Hopkins, 2015) to understand more fully the benefits of working together with Aboriginal Australians. In this way, community engagement can be an effective mechanism for collaboration between Aboriginal Australian communities and authorities, thereby ensuring their inclusion and thus giving them a platform to be heard and valued (Mooney et al, 2016; Durey et al, 2016; Kowanko et al, 2009). This, in turn, can minimise the risk of misunderstanding or miscommunication between communities and authorities, and thus achieve more effective initiatives and services, so that Aboriginal Australians have more positive and meaningful experiences across a variety of areas, including health, education and employment.

*Distrust: The Impact of Fractured Relationships*

When considering the concept of trust in relation to the Aboriginal communities I visited, it became clear how influential it is on the education, health and employment prospects of my participants and those known to them. In answer to my second research question, the issue of trust comprises of two elements: failed responsibility and integration within Australian society. These are both significant contributors to the issue of trust being so paramount in shaping the perceptions and opinions of Aboriginal Australians.

Firstly, data from my fieldwork shows that the element of failed responsibility was placed directly on the shoulders of the Australian Government and authorities, with little distinction made between state and national levels. Participants' feelings towards the Australian Government were clear in conversations and interviews, not solely in the words they used but also through emotions. Facial expression and vocal tone were strong indicators of the extent to which they felt unable to place their trust in the decisions and actions made by the Australian Government and authorities. When participants shared emotive experiences of past events, it was easy to see what a substantial effect these had on their ability to trust and believe that decisions made by the Australian Government, or services and initiatives implemented by authorities, are for the best interests of Aboriginal Australians. One particular historical event was dominant throughout my research: The Stolen Generations. The impact that this specific event had on Aboriginal Australians is widely recognised within Australia, with the impact being captured in the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), and other research projects, memoirs and literature (Haebich, 2000; Mellor & Haebich, 2002; Terszak, 2007). I saw evidence of this in Adelaide where charities and initiatives offer support and assistance in the healing process for Aboriginal Australians and communities. However, my research highlighted that the impact of historical events on trust extends beyond the individual, and in fact the grief and trauma are embedded within their wider family and community, as was found by Baxter and Meyers (2019) in relation to education. I found that those Aboriginal Australians, who were not directly impacted by the events themselves, perceive them to have been directed towards all Aboriginal Australians, and therefore, hold the same perception about the Australian Government. I was aware during my fieldwork that this has led to a level of distrust throughout both communities. My research indicates that no matter how beneficial independent victim and family support agencies are, actions of the Australian Government

and authorities which are absent, as effective community engagement and recognition, need to be in place in order for many Aboriginal Australians to change their perception of the Australian Government and view them as trustworthy.

Significantly, this research has not only provided further understanding to the extent to which historical events are influential on the Aboriginal Australians' perception of the Australian Government, but has outlined communities' needs in order to build up rapport and trust in the decisions of the Australian Government and authorities on Aboriginal matters. An area of my findings which is significant in answering my second research question on improving the trust between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians is the necessity for many Aboriginal Australians to see evidence of change before they can begin to trust the Australian Government and authorities; this is because their experiences within education, health and employment have repeatedly made them feel undervalued and disrespected. With a history of past disappointments and broken promises, my participants emphasised the power of actions over words by the Australian Government and authorities in order to build rapport. They require actions and need to experience initiatives and services that are beneficial in supporting them, and that essentially have their best interests at the forefront of decision-making. Participants gave the examples of acknowledgment and understanding of Aboriginal culture as actions which they consider to be necessary as evidence of change and that can assist in forming a trustworthy rapport with the Australian Government, authorities and services. Aboriginal Australians' distrust of the Australian Government affects their experiences of education, health and employment services and I found that there is a strong resistance to having a positive outlook on the benefit of these initiatives and services, which in turn, contributes to individuals' reluctance to access them, or at the very least to prolonging their decision about whether to use them. Therefore, this indicates the need for the relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians to be improved through evidence-based trust before a more positive perception of services can be developed.

Another issue relating to the distrust that many Aboriginal Australians feel towards to the Australian Government and authorities is the lack of integration within Australian society,

which results in some viewing themselves as 'outsiders'. I learnt of this, and its impact, through my participants' experiences of racism and observations I made during my fieldwork. It was obvious that the attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians that some non-Aboriginal Australians display are not only discriminatory, but also damaging to Aboriginal Australians' self-esteem and their ability to trust non-Aboriginal Australians. Whilst not all non-Aboriginal Australians hold negative opinions of Aboriginal Australians, the discriminatory actions and words are considered more intimidating, and therefore more influential on the issue of distrust. What was evident, particularly through observation, was the normality of discriminatory behaviours towards Aboriginal Australians; this was clear to me through the numerous occasions that I witnessed racist behaviour and was also reflected in personal testimonies that I heard. What is particularly problematic about this aspect, is the impact that it has on Aboriginal Australians' motivation to access services and initiatives, especially those with minimal staff who identify as Aboriginal. The experiences of how they have been treated has shaped many Aboriginal Australians' views of non-Aboriginal Australians and these negative stereotypes reinforce their reluctance to trust non-Aboriginal Australians, including those who work in education, health and employment. The impact that the lack of integration has on Aboriginal Australians in deciding to access education, health and employment services can be offered as a reason for why there is still a gap in equality, as raised in my first research question. My research suggests that some Aboriginal Australians may not be using the initiatives put in place to help close the gap in equality and are therefore not receiving the full support available to them to improve their prospects.

My observations revealed that the discriminatory behaviour was based largely on the appearance of Aboriginal Australians, for example clothing, hygiene and health. However, the lack of understanding that many non-Aboriginal Australians have regarding some Aboriginal Australians' social circumstances was clearly exacerbating the situation and led to discriminatory behaviour being perceived as the norm and acceptable. On the occasions when I observed racist behaviour, the perpetrators showed no regard to why individuals had health issues, were wearing certain outfits or had poor hygiene, and this was echoed in comments by both Aboriginal Australians and a charity worker. My research shows that some non-Aboriginal Australians need a greater understanding of the lived experiences of many

Aboriginal Australians, as this would lead to improved integration in Australia. This could be achieved through gaining knowledge about the daily lives of Aboriginal Australians and the challenges they face, alongside the more generic knowledge regarding their culture and history. Although these aspects are important to Aboriginal Australians, without knowledge of their daily lives and the challenges they face, the depth of understanding that non-Aboriginal Australians can obtain is limited, and subsequently the levels of integration would be less. Additionally, education on racism is also required; it was apparent to me that there is a gap in knowledge about what is deemed racist behaviour and, thus, Aboriginal Australians are subjected to it more frequently. This research highlights the necessity of addressing the issues of racism and discrimination in Australia because without these being improved, it is evident that Aboriginal Australians are going to continue to feel isolated from wider Australian society, in addition to the sense of distrust towards non-Aboriginal Australians being reinforced and the knock-on effect this has on the overall improvement to the gap in equality. A focus on changing the discriminatory perceptions held by some non-Aboriginal Australians and their behaviours towards Aboriginal Australians would encourage a more balanced behaviour towards them. Fewer incidents of racism would lead to a more neutral society than is currently present and would enable Aboriginal Australians to feel more integrated.

The lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians indicate the influence that the issue of trust has on their education, health and employment prospects, specifically with the lack of trust shaping negative perceptions of education, health and employment initiatives and services and causing reluctance to access them. This research offers a substantial understanding that whilst the issues of trust are related to the Australian Government, societal integration and, as a knock-on effect of these, access and perceptions of services, the most significant of these is the distrust of the Australian Government. Therefore, this research indicates that the rapport between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians is the initial focal point for improving the overall issue of distrust, and that can only be achieved through actions that evidence positive change for Aboriginal Australians, thus allowing trust to be gained.

*Culture: The Value of Aboriginal Cultural Traditions*

My research has indicated the significant role that culture has in influencing the decisions and opinions of Aboriginal Australians. Culture has been an underlying factor throughout the whole research project, not only as a separately defined factor but also in underpinning issues related to trust and Aboriginal Australians feeling silenced. In the past, culture has not been deemed as significant as education, health and employment which have been prioritised in order to improve the prospects and outcomes for Aboriginal Australians, as evidenced in the Closing the Gap reports (Australian Government, 2017; 2018; 2019). However, my research has indicated how culture can impact on the experiences of Aboriginal Australians related to these areas through its acknowledgment and inclusion. Additionally, culture is relevant to my three research questions: the inclusion of it throughout education, health and employment is significant in persuading engagement and access to services; it influences the establishment of trust between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government and authorities and it underpins the positive experiences of Aboriginal Australians.

Because Aboriginal culture is so integral to the identities of Aboriginal Australians, when they experience acknowledgement of it in initiatives and services, they consider it a form of personal respect. Therefore, consideration of Aboriginal culture within initiatives and services is a beneficial mechanism that can aid the building of trust, as my research shows that services which widely recognise Aboriginal culture are perceived more positively by Aboriginal Australians. An example that illustrates this point was raised in the conversations I had with the Ngarrindjeri community members about accessing medical services. Whilst there was a significant amount of tension displayed towards the national health services available to them, there was an overwhelming sense of positivity towards the Aboriginal led Moorundi Health service in their community. My fieldwork highlighted the importance of culture in shaping the community members' perceptions, as their conversations outlined that the strong cultural element makes the Aboriginal led service appear more welcoming and less intimidating for them to access. In contrast, testimonies about bad experiences of national health services revealed their frustration that the importance of cultural medicines was not understood and raised the issues of a series of misdiagnoses within the Ngarrindjeri community. These findings emphasise how important professionals' knowledge of Aboriginal culture can be in engagement between Aboriginal Australians and professionals. Additionally, cultural

acknowledgement is influential in the access of a service by Aboriginal Australians; the desire of Aboriginal Australians for people to have a comprehension of their culture is related to them feeling understood, leading to them feeling more confident to reach out to the services rather than feeling fearful. During my fieldwork, it was apparent to me that the inclusion of culture within health services was most important for the older generation, as they were the group who appeared most hesitant and told me of their bad experiences that obviously shaped their perceptions and reluctance to attend medical appointments. In several interviews, participants suggested that if there was greater demonstration of support towards Aboriginal culture by services and initiatives, then it would subsequently indicate acceptance of Aboriginal Australians for who they are. It is this type of respect and evidence that is required to build trust and open dialogue between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government and authorities. The role of culture in developing rapport between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is valuable, as evident during my fieldwork through my personal experience of gaining trust with the communities by participating in cultural activities and demonstrating knowledge of Aboriginal culture in conversations.

My research illustrates that aspects of culture can be influential on the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians in education and employment, as well as health. For example, the Australian Government's Community Development and Employment Programme (CDEP) was viewed positively because it demonstrated how cultural understanding was interlinked with employment by enabling support and flexibility for jobs that revolved around the traditional land of Aboriginal Australians. This in itself was a trait that encouraged enrolment onto the programme, because Aboriginal Australians perceived that the cultural importance of land and the connection to it was understood. When the programme closed, there was immense criticism because many perceived it to be proof that Aboriginal culture was not valued. An example of the influential role of culture within education that came to light during my fieldwork involved the teaching of the Ngarrindjeri language. The community emphasised that this was a necessity, to the extent that Elders tried to fill the teaching role outside of school when it was not being fulfilled within the school environment. The important point that the research raises with this example is that the inclusion or exclusion of Aboriginal culture is a vital component that affects how positively initiatives are viewed by Aboriginal Australians. As

well as being a form of recognition, many Aboriginal Australians believe that the inclusion of culture is an act of preservation, which for them is vital, as culture is so integral to their lives. Therefore, this research identifies the role of culture in enabling Aboriginal Australians to feel visible and empowered, rather than invisible and silenced, which is clearly a response to the Australian Government and authorities speaking on behalf of them.

This research indicates that if culture is acknowledged more widely by the Australian Government and authorities, and it is referenced or included in services and initiatives, this will eventually lead to greater engagement and thus more effective education, health and employment initiatives and more positive experiences for Aboriginal Australians. The recognition and inclusion of their culture not only boosts Aboriginal Australians' confidence through the change in perception they have about a service, but it can also increase the sense of trust towards services and people. These ultimately increase the opportunities for education, health and employment services and initiatives to be more effective through encouraging access and opening dialogue, both in terms of talking about personal circumstances with professionals to improve their prospects and about ways to improve the effectiveness of services and initiatives. Therefore, a significant point that the research highlights throughout is that whilst culture may not necessarily appear a priority at first, it should not be overlooked because of the hidden influences it can have on education, health and employment. Whether it be through aiding the development of rapport or for persuasion to trust a service or initiative, it can impact on the decisions that Aboriginal Australians make, and subsequently their education, health and employment prospects.

Since the completion of my fieldwork, the Ngarrindjeri community has become an Empowered Communities region. This is a collaborative initiative between Aboriginal Australians, the Australian Government and corporate Australia, which focuses on reforming how policies and initiatives for Aboriginal Australians are developed and implemented (Empowered Communities, 2018). The Coorong region was one of only eight regions within Australia where this initiative became active at the end of 2018. It not only focuses on the partnership between Aboriginal Australians and the Australian Government, but also on empowering Aboriginal Australians to support their own development opportunities in education, health and

employment. This initiative seems to resonate with the findings of my research, specifically how imperative culture, trust and Aboriginal voice are on influencing education, health and employment initiatives. It would be beneficial to understand how the agreement changes perceptions, and how it influences the lived experiences of the community members in relation to education, health and employment initiatives.

### **Reflection on the Research**

On reflection, the conclusions drawn from the findings offer answers to the research questions that were posed. In answering the first research question, this research has highlighted that there are significant areas of influence that affect the decisions made by Aboriginal Australians regarding education, health and employment. As these factors are not necessarily visible, it could be argued that they are more likely to be overlooked, compared to visible determinants when focusing on improving the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians and their educational, employment and health prospects. Whilst the more dominant determinants that are already acknowledged in literature and governmental reports are important, my research has emphasised the significance of the factors outlined in it that need to be understood and considered in order to improve the lived experiences of social policy areas for Aboriginal Australians. The second research question focused on the importance of the relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians in influencing successful initiatives in education, health and employment. This research has not only concluded that the state of the relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians is a key influence on education, health and employment initiatives, but also has a knock-on effect on services that are associated with the Australian Government. The lack of trust felt by Aboriginal Australians towards the Australian Government is instrumental in shaping their perceptions, and in turn has substantial influence on the success of initiatives and services aimed at improving education, health and employment outcomes which are experienced by Aboriginal Australians. Specifically, the issue of trust contributes to decisions on how positively initiatives and services are viewed within Aboriginal communities, and subsequently has an influence over their decisions to access them. The research outlined that the establishment of a trusted rapport between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians would be a

beneficial mechanism to improve the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians for many reasons, particularly through changing their perceptions. The final research question concentrated on steps that could be taken to improve the education, health and employment prospects for Aboriginal Australians, and subsequently help to close the gap in equality. Whilst the rapport between the Australian Government and Aboriginal Australians has already been outlined, the importance of community engagement and the inclusion of Aboriginal culture were also identified. Community engagement is not only vital in improving the respect that Aboriginal Australians feel through being consulted, included and listened to in discussions on matters that directly impact them, which also supports the continuation of trust being maintained, it additionally enables greater understanding of needs and situations to be determined. Therefore, this could aid the development of initiatives and services for education, health and employment by understanding what elements of a service may need improving or what format is particularly advantageous for the community concerned, based on their experiences. The role of culture in improving the effectiveness of the social policy areas is focused more on symbolic purposes for Aboriginal Australians, specifically knowledge and preservation. Its inclusion symbolises to Aboriginal Australians that their culture, which is fundamental for them, is acknowledged and respected and this enables them to take a more positive outlook towards services and initiatives. However, it also provides the opportunity for Aboriginal Australians to feel understood, which in turn facilitates improved communication within education, health and employment services accessed by them.

Overall, this research has presented findings and explanations which offer an insight into three main factors which are influential on the experiences of Aboriginal Australians within education, health and employment. The role of the Aboriginal voice, trust and culture have been identified as being complex, yet significant, factors that influence the effectiveness of initiatives and services of education, health and employment for Aboriginal Australians. These findings were possible through the strong presence of Aboriginal voice throughout the research. As the factors are arguably not visible, it was essential for participant observation, conversations and unstructured interviews to empower the voices of Aboriginal Australians in order for these findings to be identified and, arguably more importantly, understood and explained. Through applying grounded theory to the experiences and testimonies of

Aboriginal Australians, the set of explanations given in conclusion of this research are a direct reflection of the voices of Aboriginal Australians. I applied grounded theory to my data in order to present explanations that are broad enough to be relevant beyond the people being researched. Therefore, having carried out research in South Australian communities to form the grounded theory explanations in this research, undertaking further research with Aboriginal communities in different states and territories of Australia would enable the explanations to be tested. This would offer an understanding of local governments' influence through comparing differences of local government support and initiatives, in addition to providing a platform for more Aboriginal voices to be heard.

Through focusing on the lived experiences of my participants, my research offers originality by addressing education, health and employment as interconnected aspects of Aboriginal Australians' lives. The research found that the Aboriginal voice, or lack of it, the issue of distrust and the importance of Aboriginal culture are three main determinants of these areas. This in turn has enabled me to understand how considering the experiences of Aboriginal Australians is valuable in addressing the gap in equality, specifically in relation to education, health and employment prospects, as doing so provides insight into key aspects that will encourage Aboriginal Australians to successfully engage with services and initiatives. The originality of addressing education, health and employment as one area and my research being driven by the voices of Aboriginal Australians, has enabled a detailed set of findings which offer an understanding of the positive and negative experiences of these areas that many Aboriginal Australians in South Australia have encountered.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant Descriptors

|   | Participant Descriptor Referenced in Thesis   | Participant Details   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Male Ngarrindjeri Elder who has extensive knowledge of their land                               | The Elder is in his late sixties and was in the Navy when he was younger. He made a point of telling me that although he has fair skin, he is still Aboriginal. He spends a lot of his time managing the land around the community to ensure that the wildlife and environment is as healthy as it can be, and continues to work with academics to monitor the environment. During the drought, he was one of the key people who attempted to communicate with authorities.   |
| 2 | Ngarrindjeri Elder who visited the Coorong regularly with his parents when he was younger       | The Elder, who is in his sixties, has a deep respect for the Ngarrindjeri land as he used to go to the water frequently when he was a child. He is now keeping this tradition up by taking his grandchildren, and other younger community members, to the water to show them the wildlife and educate them on the cultural importance of their land.  |
| 3 | Female Ngarrindjeri Elder who has a prominent position in the community and is a skilled weaver | The Elder is in her mid-sixties and helps to coordinate the community centre that her niece, who is a youth worker, runs. She has also represented the community at the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority. She has seven children with her late husband, and several grandchildren. She is a skilled weaver who actively teaches the weaving skill to younger community members and her family. Some of her weaving has been exhibited in museums and galleries, and she has also been involved in writing a community book about Ngarrindjeri weaving. The Elder was my gatekeeper and first point of contact in the Ngarrindjeri community, and was therefore the first person I spoke to when I arrived. |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 4 | Ngarrindjeri Man  | The Ngarrindjeri man is in his fifties and was very shy. He often joined group conversations that I had with other Elders and occasionally spoke up once he built up some confidence. He has a particularly close bond with the female Ngarrindjeri Elder, who introduced me to him, with them both describing their relationship as being like siblings.  |
| 5 | Female Ngarrindjeri Elder   | The Elder, who is in her sixties and has spent her whole life in the Coorong region, was one of the first two Elders to welcome me to the Ngarrindjeri community. She grew up with the other Female Ngarrindjeri Elder, who has a prominent position in the community, after her grandmother taught them both to weave when they were children. She regularly helps at the community museum and educates the younger Ngarrindjeri community members on how to weave, collect rushes and speak the Ngarrindjeri language. |
| 6 | Politically active Ngarrindjeri woman who was excited at the prospect of the Uluru Statement                                  | The Ngarrindjeri woman is in her forties and is regularly involved with the local weaving sessions. She also speaks out about political matters and occasionally helps the Male Ngarrindjeri member who oversees political and legal matters.  |
| 7 | Male Ngarrindjeri community member who had the responsibility for overseeing political and legal matters for the Ngarrindjeri | The man lives in the Coorong region with his young family and regularly involves himself in Ngarrindjeri community events. As a result of his level of education, and his dedication towards the community, he has taken on the role of managing political and legal matters that concern the Ngarrindjeri, including the recent case of the Ngarrindjeri's Native Title Claim.  |
| 8 | Aboriginal man whom I met when visiting an art gallery near Adelaide  | The man was friends with the owner of the art gallery, who is a Kurna Elder. He has regularly visited the Coorong region as he has helped the Ngarrindjeri community with some of their  |

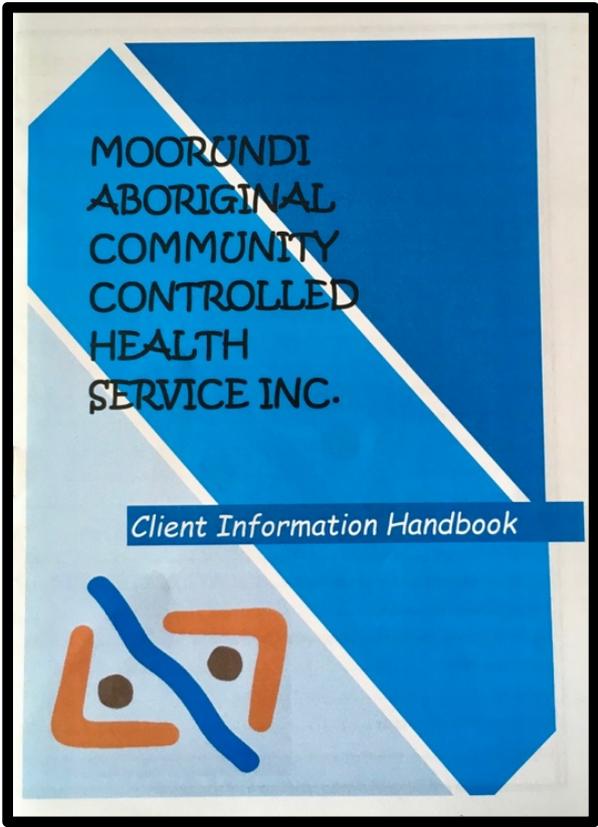
|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
|    |   | local events, which they run to educate people on Aboriginal culture.  |
| 9  | Kurna woman from Adelaide at Tandanya   | Tandanya is an Aboriginal art gallery in the centre of Adelaide. An Aboriginal employee spoke to me about her heritage and connections of being a Kurna woman. Although she is not an artist, her role at the gallery is to inform people about Aboriginal art and its wider connections to Aboriginal culture.  |
| 10 | A Kurna woman who welcomed me to a museum in Adelaide   | The Kurna woman works at the welcome desk of a museum in central Adelaide, and her pride of being Aboriginal was evident through her decision to wear a lanyard which was printed in an Aboriginal art design. She revealed that she is a Kurna woman and has always lived near Adelaide. She has grown-up children and is also a grandmother, and she is passionate about keeping the Kurna culture alive through sharing stories of ancestors with them. |
| 11 | Non-Aboriginal woman in a shopping mall   | The woman was on her lunch break when we spoke and works for a bank in the central business district of Adelaide. She is in her early forties and lives in North Adelaide with her husband and son.  |
| 12 | Non-Aboriginal woman whose daughter works in the welfare services handling Aboriginal welfare cases | The woman, who is in her late sixties, is originally from England and emigrated to Australia about fifteen years ago. Her daughter works in the welfare services and often manages welfare cases concerning Aboriginal Australians.  |
| 13 | Charity worker in Adelaide who is non-Aboriginal and works with young adults                        | The non-Aboriginal woman, who is in her mid-fifties, works with young adults at a charity near Whitmore Square in Adelaide which specialises in alcohol and drug addiction. The woman only recently moved closer to Adelaide, having previously lived in a more rural location, and because of this has been able to notice the difference in attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians.  |

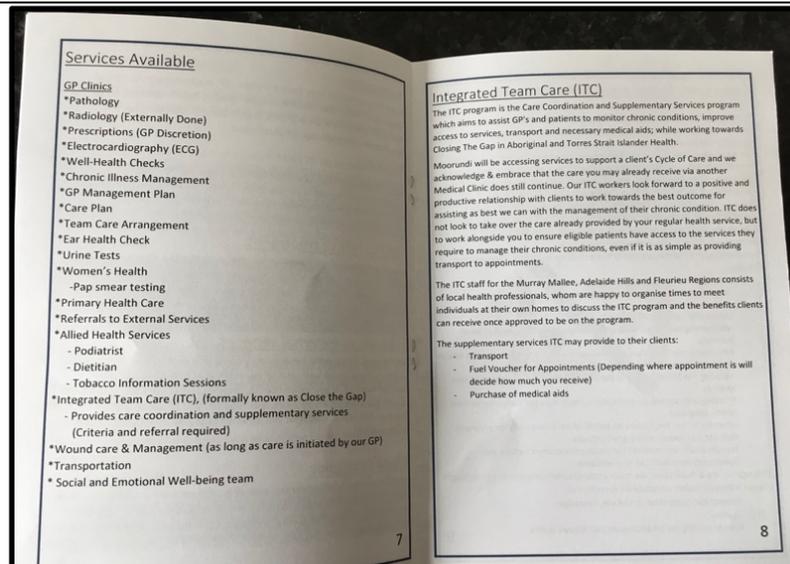
|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 14 | Young Ngarrindjeri woman whose family moved from the Coorong region and now lives and works in Adelaide | The Ngarrindjeri woman grew up in the Coorong region and had a lot of interaction with the Ngarrindjeri culture, which she is keen to pass onto her children. She and her husband moved to Adelaide when he got a new job that is based in the central business district of Adelaide. She has two young children, one of which has just started school.  |
| 15 | Kurna Elder who works in an art gallery near Adelaide   | The man owns an art gallery which is situated in a suburb of Adelaide popular with tourists. The gallery was very small and looked more like a painting studio. The Kurna man, who is in his forties and lives near Adelaide, is also an avid painter and was very keen to discuss the different narratives being told through his canvas paintings.   |
| 16 | Aboriginal man who travelled on the same bus as me  | The Aboriginal man, who is in his early forties, recently moved to South Australia from the Northern Territory, where he left his family and Aboriginal community. He struggled securing a job in the Northern Territory, and therefore, made the decision to move to Adelaide, where he has relatives, in a hope to find a job. He explained that he completed most of his schooling but thinks the struggle to find a job is related to the lack of opportunities in his rural community rather than because of his education level. |
| 17 | Aboriginal man who worked at an art shop near Adelaide  | The Aboriginal man owns an art shop in a suburb of Adelaide. Although he is not an artist himself, he is a successful entrepreneur who focuses on selling artwork for Aboriginal communities who do not have the ability to sell their own work. He sells artwork both within Australia and internationally and is passionate that his work can help spread the knowledge of Aboriginal art and culture.   |
| 18 | Female Kurna Elder who was volunteering at a coffee shop  | The Elder was volunteering at a charity coffee shop and explained that she is part of the Kurna community in Adelaide. The coffee shop is run purely as a means of income for a  |

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
|    |   | homeless charity. The woman occasionally teaches homeless people, who are being helped by the charity, the skills needed in hospitality through mentoring them in the coffee shop.   |
| 19 | Ngarrindjeri woman working at a café that I visited in Adelaide             | In her late-twenties, the woman has always lived in Adelaide, but identifies as being part of the Ngarrindjeri community as her parents are both Ngarrindjeri. She was a barista in a small café in Adelaide, which was situated away from the busy centre of the city.                              |
| 20 | Senior academic at a university in Adelaide.                                | The academic is a senior lecturer in Indigenous Cultures and Australian Society at the University of South Australia. She has worked with Aboriginal communities for 25 years and has a specific interest in oral histories. Prior to becoming an academic, she worked in the Australian Government. |
| 21 | Male Ngarrindjeri Elder who took me on a bushwalk in the Coorong            | This Elder has a keen interest in the Ngarrindjeri's traditional land and takes visitors and young community members on bushwalks to share his knowledge of the land. He has also been part of the regional council, and therefore had a lot of involvement managing the land during the drought.    |
| 22 | Son of the female Ngarrindjeri Elder  | The Ngarrindjeri man is in his early forties and is the son of the Female Ngarrindjeri Elder who has a prominent position in the community. He spends his time fixing old cars, which is a keen hobby of his.  |
| 23 | Young Kurna woman who I met on a visit to one of the Adelaide museums       | The Kurna woman, who is in her twenties, works at a museum in Adelaide as an informative guide. Her Aunt was part of the Stolen Generation.  |
| 24 | Aboriginal man who volunteers at an alcohol and drug rehabilitation charity | The Aboriginal man, who is in his early thirties described his role as a mentor at an alcohol and drug rehabilitation charity in Adelaide. He had been a client at the charity about five years ago and successfully overcame his addiction to alcohol. He decided that his own experiences,         |

|    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
|    |  | specifically being Aboriginal and having an addiction, are valuable in him being a mentor as he can relate to the struggles of daily life. He is using his volunteer mentoring role as a means of gaining experience, and in the future wants to become a support worker.   |
| 25 | Young Ngarrindjeri youth worker at a local community centre in the Coorong | The Ngarrindjeri woman is the youth services coordinator for the area and played a key role in establishing the community youth centre, with the support of her Aunt. As the only paid staff member, she is responsible for running the youth centre, which on average has about fifteen children attending each evening. She is the niece of the female Ngarrindjeri Elder who has a prominent position in the community, and she assists her with the community weaving sessions. |
| 26 | Male Kurna Elder in Adelaide   | The Elder is in his early seventies and I was introduced to him by the female Kurna Elder who volunteered at a charity coffee shop.   |
| 27 | Ngarrindjeri Elder who oversees the running of the museum                  | The Ngarrindjeri woman lives in the Coorong region and works at the community museum (in a voluntary role) and helps to maintain the overall running of it. She is also an avid weaver and regularly joins other Ngarrindjeri women for evening weaving sessions.   |

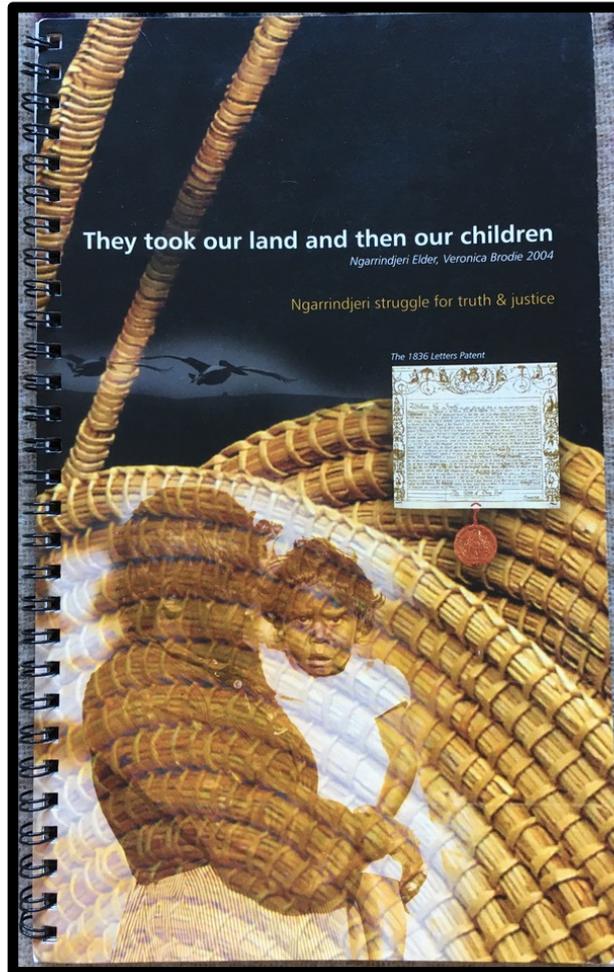
Appendix B: Artefacts Log

| Item Number | Image of Item   |
|-------------|---|
|             | <p><i>Items Received from Participants:</i></p>                                     |
| <p>[1]</p>  |  |



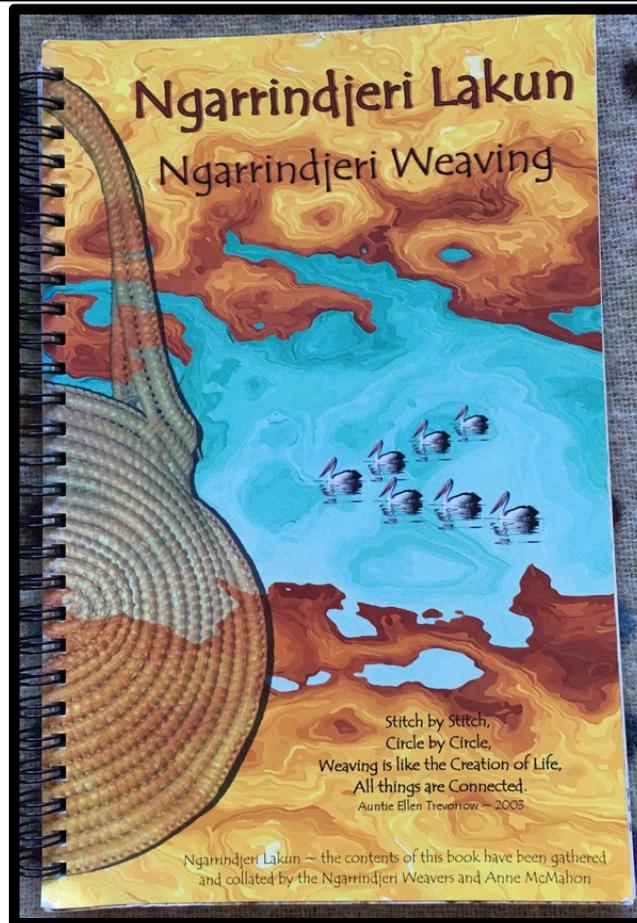
- This is the Moorundi Health information booklet that I was given by a participant.
- It outlines details of all the medical and community services that are provided, in addition to contact details, opening hours and staff photos. There is detailed information on how patients' health information is stored, billing and costs of services, with reassurance that there is no cost for patients, and a clear statement about advocacy and how patients can take an additional person into appointments if they are unclear what is happening or if they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious.

[2]



- This book was given to me by a Ngarrindjeri Elder. It gives an insight into the historical past of the Ngarrindjeri community and the struggles they endured as a result of Government policies, including the Stolen Generations and Land Rights. The document includes copies of historical photographs and authoritative documents to support the testimonies.

[3]



- When I was weaving with Ngarrindjeri Elders, I was gifted this book to accompany the small basket that I wove. The book is focused on the significance of weaving for the Ngarrindjeri community, the importance of land and how their community traditionally lived off the land. Additionally, it provides biographies on many of the Ngarrindjeri community members, which include their journeys to becoming weavers.

[4]



- This is a small basket that I wove with a group of Ngarrindjeri Elders. During my visit, myself and some Ngarrindjeri Elders would gather to weave and 'yarn' in the afternoons and some evenings.

*Newspapers and Leaflets:*



[6]



- This was the Australian newspaper on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2018.
- The newspaper had two main articles relating to the disadvantages of Aboriginal Australians. One, which is referenced through the headline on the front page, is about the situation of overcrowding in Aboriginal Australians' houses in remote Aboriginal communities. The second article focuses on the amount of funding the Australian Government have spent on the Closing the Gap initiative, despite them not achieving significant progress against the targets, and the problem of inequality for Aboriginal Australians still being a paramount issue.





- This was the Australian newspaper on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2018, which was exactly ten years after the national apology for the Stolen Generations.
- The newspaper had three articles which all referenced the Closing the Gap initiative and the promise made in the Stolen Generations' national apology on how the lives of Aboriginal Australians would improve. Despite one article explaining a positive and successful journey of an Aboriginal woman who had support to go through an elite schooling system and is now doing a law degree, it emphasises the lack of progress made to the Closing the Gap initiative.

[8]



# Removed indigenous kids 'exposed to further abuse'

**BRIDGING THE GAP**  
EXCLUSIVE

Indigenous children removed from their homes for the Stolen Generations were exposed to further abuse, according to a new report by the Australian Human Rights Commission. The report, released on Tuesday, says that many of the children were exposed to physical and sexual abuse, and that some were even sexually abused by their adoptive parents.

## Drinking, truancy, STIs 'normal' for remote Aboriginal children

An trendy issue we all should be talking about

**Child abuse and neglect**  
627 notified to police

**Child sexual abuse**  
100 notified to police

**Child physical abuse**  
100 notified to police

**Child emotional abuse**  
100 notified to police

**Child neglect**  
100 notified to police

**Child sexual abuse**  
100 notified to police

**Child physical abuse**  
100 notified to police

**Child emotional abuse**  
100 notified to police

**Child neglect**  
100 notified to police

# Who will protect the children?

Indigenous plight in the Top End is horrific and entrenched

Underage Aboriginal girls in the Northern Territory are almost 60 times likelier to contract syphilis than their non-indigenous counterparts. Our reporting unearthed this shocking statistic, but more shocking still is the fact the underlying reality—sexual abuse of children on a large scale—has been suspected since well before John Howard's 2007 intervention.

communities become dysfunctional, and predators go unchecked. The shadow cast by the Stolen Generations has meant authorities (not only in the Territory) are extremely reluctant to remove at-risk children from their families, and preferred placement with relatives may not eliminate the risk.

Logical measures have been urged: better supply of out-of-home care for at-risk children; better monitoring and help for troubled families; more child welfare officers for outreach areas and efforts to ensure they do not become inured to the abuse around them. But what confidence can we have in the administration that must bring about such changes? Former Territory health minister John Efferkin has said he felt "largely powerless" in the face of a "tsunami" of child sex abuse.

This is just one manifestation of the misery afflicting many indigenous lives in towns and remote areas. For people with a history of dispossession and little meaningful work, life appears purposeless. Too many children grow up amid violence and heavy abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Some

12 THE AUSTRALIAN, TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2018

## THE TRUTH AND CHILDREN JUST SWEEPED UNDER THE CARPET

Convenient distractions cover up the plight of sex crimes in Aboriginal communities

JACINTA NAMPIJNJA PRICE

It is gut-wrenching to picture a woman manning a two-year-old, but for many it comes easier to ignore it than to be enraged. Catherine, who are many of our Aboriginal leaders now pushing out to other nations? It is because

### COMMENTARY

where Aboriginal (Australian) about the 2007 intervention. Those who complained loudly were for removed from the actual circumstances, which were laid out in the Little Children are Sacred report that sparked the government's response.

On the same day, ABC's Four Corners host and presenter Ian Dunbar was interviewed by a woman who has been known for years to be trying to reveal the truth about the sexual abuse of children in remote Aboriginal communities. Many of those who have been interviewed to shut us down. A class of "racist" and "misguided" politicians have been the very distraction from this disgraceful situation, which is all too prevalent in remote Aboriginal communities. I have heard the ongoing complaints made (mostly by young

plan was the alleged stigma imposed on the children following the intervention, along with the dissemination of Aboriginal news. All of these complaints, which were laid out in the Little Children are Sacred report that sparked the government's response, were aimed at adults in a bid to sweep the truth, along with the lives of children, under the rug.

And despite the Little Children are Sacred report, no arrests of predators were made, while the rates of reporting of sexual abuse that led to the implementation of mandatory reporting increased dramatically.

One has to ask why government is continually to take the blame for what is largely the failings of some Aboriginal leaders. These are our children and we have failed them. Why is there not the same inquiry from the Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal leaders for this two-year-old's circumstance as there was for the circumstances regarding the deaths in the wake of children. The only answer was the replication of the same old story.

Why did Mick Gooda not publicly shed tears for this two-year-old and why, when he was paid a six-figure salary as member of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, did he not further investigate child sexual abuse as a likely cause for high incarceration rates of Aboriginal youth? His comments in the newspaper yesterday in the report on the "trauma" of children whose cases in the Northern Territory appear as a handful for the too-hand basket. "We didn't really have time to go deeply into a whole lot of that stuff." That's what we said that it could further investigation. "Gooda said. "We were concerned." If he was so concerned, why did he not endeavour to follow this up and demand it be investigated?

Why have our federal Aboriginal leaders, Malvern, McCarthy, Pat Dodson, Linda Burney, and Aboriginal Northern Territory Minister Melissa Chaney, Sandra Nelson, Ngarru Ah Kij, Lawrence Cassa, Kim Voith and Selena Liba, not been more outspoken and demanded that we take responsibility and action for the sake of saving the lives of our children. Hence, it is seemingly placed everywhere else but on the shoulders of the perpetrators or the families whose responsibility it is provided, care and stability for their children.

Social Justice Commissioner Janet Chaney's response to the horrifying ordeal of the two-year-old was to first acknowledge the pain of the Stolen Generations rather than the pain of the child.

There has been a culture of silence for far too long. The culture has permeated communities and the workplaces of communities. Put up with it and shut up. The culture of silence has allowed via criminal sexual behaviours to flourish while the human rights of children have been obliterated.

It is well past time for all who are concerned with the welfare of our children to have open, honest and confronting discourse about the truth. No more can we point the finger elsewhere.

Government departments have been known to reinforce this culture of silence by acting in the best interests of children, but rather to maintain peace in communities. If this is the fear felt by non-Aboriginal professionals working in remote communities, then imagine how the professionals in this has become the norm for Aboriginal victims of sexual abuse.

The fear of violent retaliation, long and just to bring you out of a community has often been the deterrent for people to keep quiet

### BARNABY DOESN'T WANT PRIVACY, IT'S ALL AN ACT

Narcissist Joyce feeding the media he says he is trying to silence

JANET ALBRECHTSEN

### IT MAY NOT BE THE SMARTEST TO OVER-INVEST IN OUR KIDS

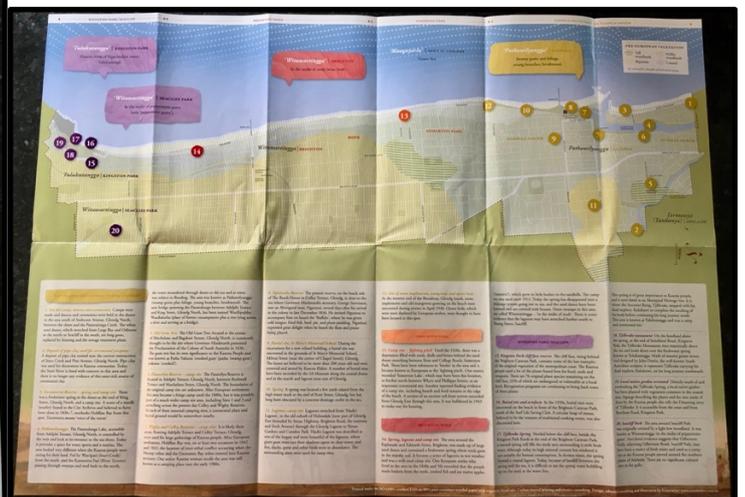
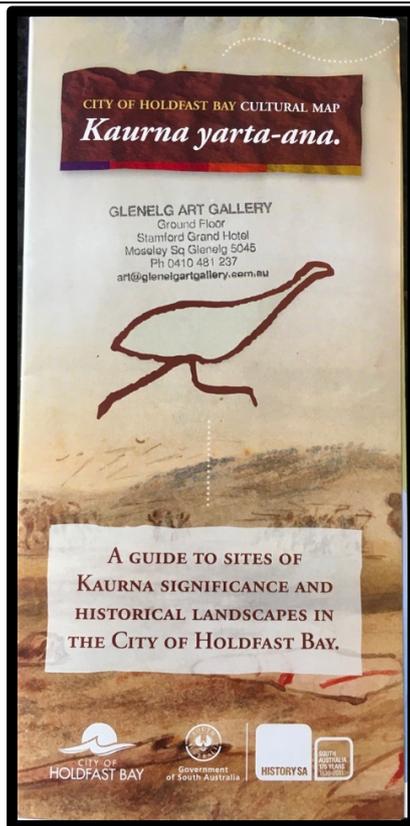
There is slim evidence taxpayer-funded early intervention makes much difference

JUDITH SLOAN  
CONTRIBUTING ECONOMICS EDITOR

to be rolled out in the early 2000s. Researchers found that a 10 percentage point increase in three-year-olds covered by free places improved literacy and numeracy scores by less than 1 per cent.

The estimates suggest that the effects are larger for children from more disadvantaged families, but they are not statistically significant.

- This was the Australian Newspaper on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2018.
- The newspaper had four articles written about Aboriginal children. Specifically, the articles are about the protection, or lack of protection, of the children in Aboriginal communities, making reference to their lifestyle, including alcohol consumption, and the sexual and violent crimes that involve Aboriginal children. The articles also comment on how the Government is reinforcing the silencing of the crimes and lifestyle choices through not acting in the best interests of the children.



- This booklet was given to me at an art gallery in Glenelg, a suburb of Adelaide.
- It is an informative guide on the Kaurna culture, which includes a map of the local Glenelg area, details areas which hold cultural significance for the Kaurna People. Additionally, it also provides some translations between the Kaurna language and English, in addition to telling two Dreaming narratives which are relevant to the area.

**Appendix C: Analysis Coding Example**

*Example 1:*

| Analysis Coding   | Transcript   |
|---|--|
| <p>Nature and landscape are part of everyday life and is important to the community.</p> <p>Long-term damage to the land and wildlife.</p> <p>Anger and blame towards the Australian Government.</p> <p>Importance of land. Feelings of unjust and victimisation.</p> | <p><i>We used to watch the fish and the pelicans from the shoreline, we'd sometimes spend hours down there. But not anymore. The Ngarrindjeri won't see water, fish or pelicans like they used to. It will never be the same. Time won't fix the damage that's been done, bad management by the Government contributed a lot to the extent of the drought and water conditions. They did this to us and to our land, it's an unfair world.</i></p>   |
| <p>Importance of land for Aboriginal community.</p> <p>Strong connection to land through ancestors – cultural connection.</p> <p>Consequences of the drought heightened by cultural importance of land.</p>   | <p><i>It's so important to us, our land and everything that inhabits it is important. Our ancestors lived off the land and we still use plants for medicine and carry out practices that have been passed down through generations. I mean we obviously don't live off the land as much as they did, but it's still important. And you know, it's not just the wildlife and plants you see that's important, we have strong cultural connections with it. I think that's why the whole drought situation was so tough on us.</i></p> |
| <p>Fragmented relationship with authorities. Lack of trust.</p>   | <p><i>Do you know what, the drought itself was tough, but dealing with the authorities was the hardest part, I think. They just didn't seem to care. We tried telling them of the warning signs that we'd spotted, we know our land, the Ngarrindjeri have</i></p>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Community understand there to be lack of respect for their concerns.</p> <p>Connection to land, cultural knowledge of land.</p> <p>Not listened to by authoritative figures/organisations.</p>   | <p><i>lived off it for years, so we know when things are changing and aren't looking good. But they ignored us, they didn't respond to any of our calls or letters. We tried, but what else could we do?</i></p>   |
| <p>Lack of support felt by Aboriginal community.</p> <p>Change of normality – change of cultural practises.</p> <p>Drought impacted health.</p> <p>Feelings of frustration and lack of trust towards the Australian Government.</p> <p>Actions of the Government show lack of knowledge of the situation.</p> <p>The drought was a critical situation that the community were at the centre of.</p> | <p><i>We were really tested during the drought. We had to change what we ate because we couldn't eat the fish anymore, and that (Coorong) water we used to drink. It was really testing on our health, we were pushed to our limits. But even so, the Government decided to up the baby bonus, which would persuade our people to have children because of the money. The Government were focused on building up the population in a crisis.</i></p> |
| <p>Anger and frustration towards the Australian Government.</p> <p>The community were not listened to.</p> <p>Lack of wealth within the community, financial incentives are very persuasive to community members.</p>   | <p><i>The baby bonus was the most frustrating time I think, it's one thing being ignored but then they go and up the amount that they're paying mothers. They were paying for mothers to have more children. It's a big incentive to people here, we don't have a lot of it.</i></p>   |
| <p>Anger towards the Australian Government.</p> <p>Australian Government's knowledge questioned.</p>  | <p><i>I don't know if they were just trying to make us more angry or if they didn't know what was going on. Because I tell you, if they knew what we were coping with here then they should've known that encouraging people to have more children was the last thing we needed. Maybe they did know but ignored it and didn't care, I mean that wouldn't be a first for us!</i></p>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Daily resources for the community were stretched.</p> <p>Distrust towards the Government. Community feel that they are not listened to.</p> <p>Reference to past situations of when they were ignored.</p> <p>Ongoing issues of trust and being listened to.</p>   |   |
| <p>Community are emotive about the handling and ramifications of the situation.</p> <p>Lack of communication and engagement with the community from authorities.</p> <p>Lack of awareness by the community that work was being done to help the situation.</p> <p>Lasting damage.</p> <p>Not listened to. Being ignored made the situation worse.</p> | <p><i>The whole situation was awful. Even when they were actually working to try and fix everything, we didn't know what was happening. We didn't realise they were even in the area, you know. We felt invisible, yet they were actually trying to sort it all out. It was just so bad, we'll have to live with impact of it, but yeah, if only they'd listened to [name removed] and [name removed] when they first contacted them. Things would be different you know.</i></p>   |
| <p>They want to be listened to.</p> <p>Not being listened to is a regular occurrence for Aboriginal Australians.</p> <p>Lack of trust towards the Government.</p> <p>Aboriginal Australians don't feel respected by the Government.</p>   | <p><i>Do you know what, through the Government and authorities just listening to us would've made a big difference. But we're blackfellas aren't we, so if that happens it's a one-off. I know what sounds harsh and all, but that's how it is. People ask why we don't have much trust for the Government, well this is it. They show such little respect for us, they'll say that's not true but just look at this example. They wanted to encourage people to have children when they weren't listening to us and we were barely getting by. It's hard, but we've got used to it. And I think that's sad, but that's just how it is, you know.</i></p> |

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| <p>The feeling of not being respected and not being listened to is a norm for Aboriginal Australians.</p> <p>Upsetting situation, but realistic understanding.</p> |  |
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*Example 2:*

| <b>Analysis Coding</b>   | <b>Transcript</b>  |
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| <p>Negative association to accessing healthcare, causes anxiety.</p> <p>Past experience influences willingness to access healthcare.</p> <p>Word of mouth is present in the community and informs peoples' knowledge.</p> <p>Bad healthcare experiences.</p> | <p><i>It's not the easiest for everyone, some find it really stressful going to hospital or sometimes even just making an appointment to see a doctor. People have had different experiences, you know, and word travels fast between us so you soon hear about stuff. Very few good experiences too, and people remember that.</i></p>  |
| <p>Bad experience has been a reoccurrence within the community.</p> <p>Administration procedures are not viewed positively.</p>  | <p><i>Umm, it's not just one thing. There's lots of things that have happened or just the stuff that you have to do when you go to the hospital.</i></p>   |
| <p>Required paperwork at health services is not clear.</p> <p>Poor reading and writing ability.</p>  | <p><i>Oh yeah, the paperwork is really confusing for some. Some people can't read and write that well, so you can see how the forms would put them off going. But it isn't just that you know, it's also how the staff are with us. I know [name removed] felt really stupid when he was explaining to a nurse about some traditional medicine that he'd taken, and she didn't</i></p> |

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| <p>Lack of trust towards healthcare staff.</p> <p>Feeling of degradation</p> <p>Little respect or understanding towards Aboriginal culture is shown by healthcare staff.</p> <p>Poor experience has caused feelings of frustration and upset.</p>  | <p><i>understand. Well she said that she wasn't surprised that it hadn't helped, or something like that. I can't really remember, you should ask him about it though. I just remember she wasn't very open to our traditions and he found that frustrating, I think upsetting too but he wouldn't admit it.</i></p>   |
| <p>Enthusiastic that Aboriginal Australians are included in the running of a service that is for them.</p> <p>Aboriginal-led service is viewed positively.</p> <p>Fulfils needs of the Aboriginal community that other services aren't.</p> <p>Aboriginal-led service is considered integrated into the community by community members.</p> <p>Knowing healthcare staff is reassuring.</p> <p>Aboriginal healthcare staff understand the needs of Aboriginal patients.</p> | <p><i>Oh yeah, Moorundi. I've been meaning to tell you about Moorundi, let me get you the booklet, we've just had them made. So it's run by us for us, it's an Aboriginal-led service. Moorundi is brilliant. It fills the gaps of everything that we needed and we couldn't get at other hospitals. Sometimes we still have to go to the big hospitals, but Moorundi is where we go most. What makes Moorundi so good is that it's part of our community, we usually know some of the people working there, they're just like us and they know us.</i></p> |
| <p>Location for mainstream hospitals could be problematic. Important for community members that Aboriginal-led service has a clinic that is close.</p>   | <p><i>It's so important for us. Moorundi is bringing the healthcare to us; they have three clinics, one's in Raukkan. And people actually want to use it, so many people are really happy with it. I think it's what's been missing here for quite a while now. It's wanting to help us as a community, not just as people. So, the school support for Mums so</i></p>  |

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| <p>Positive reception to the service.</p> <p>People are happy with Aboriginal-led service, especially because they understand the service as wanting to help the community.</p> <p>Community focused health service.</p> <p>A rounded service that expands beyond only medical services, provides community support.</p> <p>Parental support to boost school attendance viewed as a success.</p> <p>Other health services do not fulfil everything Aboriginal-led service covers.</p> <p>Aboriginal-led service considered a positive example to improve other healthcare services for Aboriginal Australians.</p> | <p><i>they know it's important for their kids to go to school is to help the attendance of kids here, because it hasn't been great. I think other hospitals and the Government could really learn from Moorundi.</i></p>   |
| <p>Culture is integral to Aboriginal Australians.</p> <p>Need for knowledge of Aboriginal culture for services to effectively help Aboriginal Australians.</p>   | <p><i>Yes, culture is part of who we are. So really if we need to use a service, for them to help us they need to understand us, and you know, that includes culture.</i></p>  |
| <p>Language is an important part of culture.</p> <p>Responsibility for Elders to pass on cultural knowledge to younger generations.</p>  | <p><i>For us language is important, we see it as our responsibility to teach the younger generations to make sure that it's continued. Moorundi understand this concern and include it in their programmes for children, which is great. Most of the staff are able to speak it too, so we have that same understanding. We could have a conversation in our language if we wanted, they</i></p> |

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| <p>Aboriginal-led service has a high level of knowledge about Aboriginal culture.</p> <p>Appreciation for Aboriginal-led service recognising cultural importance and incorporating it in their programmes.</p> <p>Staff have good knowledge of culture and can speak the language. This is an indicator to community members that staff understand them.</p> <p>Level of cultural knowledge is viewed positively and provides reassurance.</p>                      | <p><i>know it that well. That level of understanding shows dedication for our culture. There's more to our culture than language, but it is important.</i></p>   |
| <p>Broad range of services offered by Aboriginal-led service is recognition of the determinants of health.</p> <p>Cultural and community needs met through one healthcare service.</p> <p>Service is viewed positively and valued within the community.</p> <p>Cultural recognition within the service is a key influence for encouraging prospective patients.</p> <p>Community involvement offers reassurance to those who are hesitant to access healthcare.</p> | <p><i>What I like is that it isn't something that's separate, it's there in lots of different areas of Moorundi. From bush medicine names to community programmes, it's there. Do you know what I mean, I don't know how to say it. It's valued, well all of our culture is valued, it's not like you have the health service plus you can learn our language. The language is part of Moorundi and I think that's how you know that we've helped create and run Moorundi. You can tell it's run by us for us. And anyone who's had a bad time elsewhere, knows that seeing a doctor here will be different.</i></p> |
| <p>Trustworthy staff.</p>   | <p><i>I mean, it's kind of easy to trust the staff because we know most of them and we're included in the running of Moorundi. But even if we didn't know</i></p>  |

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| <p>Level of knowledge is evident to see through the services and programmes available.</p> <p>Trust is gained through community members experiencing the different services tailored to their needs and culture.</p> | <p><i>the staff, we can see they're concerned about our best interests through what's on offer for us. Do you know what I mean, they're not just saying to us that they get us or might be able to help with certain things, we can see that they get us and can help us more than just giving us medicine. By signing up to programmes or talking about our culture, we know it's a good service.</i></p> |
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## Appendix D: Interview Transcript Example

### *Transcript 1:*

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018

**Location:** Community Museum, Coorong

**Participants:** E.T. (Aboriginal Elder)

**Me:** I noticed in the museum that you have newspaper articles about [name removed], he was [name removed]'s brother, I think you said didn't you?

**E.T.:** Yeah babe, those are about the court case. There was a lot about him in the news when we won, it was the case about him being taken away as a child. I think I mentioned [name removed] and what happened last week...

**Me:** You said that he was [name removed]'s brother and that their family were part of the Stolen Generation.

**E.T.:** Yep, that's right. [name removed]'s case was quite a big thing, he was the first person who was a Stolen Generation who got compensation through a legal case. To be honest, we were all shocked. We didn't think we were going to win, never. Aboriginal cases always lose, so we thought that this one especially would lose. We were all so shocked that [name removed] finally had justice and we have shown to all the others who were taken from their families that there is hope for them. It wasn't easy, you know, it was something that we wanted to do as a family. The lies, we needed to know that the truth about [name removed] parents was known. They loved their children and didn't neglect any of them.

**Me:** I guess the legal case was more about the truth being heard, that was a priority for you as a family?

**E.T.:** Yeah, I think so. But also, you know, everything that happened to [name removed] and his parents was tragic. I mean, really there's no words for it. Like other blackfellas that were taken, it's something that'll never leave us. Not the pain of it, or why. You know, why the kids were taken, we remember that too.

**Me:** If you don't mind me asking, how old was [name removed]?

**E.T.:** No babe, that's fine. Ask anything you want. Talking about everything, you know what happened to [name removed] is important to us, we want people to know what we've been through. It's not always easy, you know, talking about it, but we have to. So yeah, he had just turned 1, I think he was 13 months, yeah that's right because he was taken around Christmas time.

**Me:** That's so young.

**E.T.:** Yep, exactly. But you know, the younger the better because it made it easier for the kids to fit in with white families. That's also why [name removed] was an easy pick, his skin was light. They weren't only Aboriginal, they were half-caste. So [name removed] had lighter skin than me, and most other blackfellas. They were still blackfellas, but they had lighter skin which authorities favoured when taking children. This was a good thing for authorities because it was easier to foster out kids with lighter skin. No family wanted their child looking like an obvious blackfella, you know, they wanted them to look like the rest of the family.

**Me:** Am I right in saying that some of the children were placed in missions and others were fostered or adopted into new families?

**E.T.:** Yep, so a white family fostered [name removed] but usually the older kids went to missions. You know what, he only got taken because [name removed] and [name removed] were worried about him being ill and so got him to the hospital. The opposite of the neglect that the authorities said, it was the hospital staff too you know,

**Me:** Were his parents aware of what was happening when he was in hospital?

**E.T.:** No. So, let me tell you more about what happened and everything. So [name removed] couldn't take [name removed] to the hospital because he had the other kids to look after, he asked relatives to take him to Adelaide and they were told that [name removed] had to stay in hospital but could go home in a few days. This was different to what the hospital put on file, and you know, this is where it all started I guess. The hospital said he was malnourished and neglected, and that his Mum had left the home and his Dad was an alcoholic and was looking after all the kids alone. None of that was true,

but because the hospital wrote that on his file, that meant the welfare officers could take him. The whole reason [name removed] was taken to hospital was because he couldn't eat because he was ill. It turned out he had gastro, which explains all his symptoms. That actually shows that his Dad did the right thing in getting him to the hospital, but you know it was also the worst because of what happened.

**Me:** That's awful. But his parents would have gone to the hospital to have visited him, or at the very least been in contact with the hospital staff to see how he is. What were his parents told when they spoke to staff?

**E.T.:** Well, no...

**Me:** Did they find out before they went to pick him up from the hospital when he was discharged?

**E.T.:** So [name removed], his Mum, kept trying to find out what was going on, they couldn't get to the hospital easily, they didn't have a car, or a phone actually, but they kept trying to get updates on him. They made contact through the Aborigines Protection Board and it was an ongoing thing for months. A lot longer than the few days they said he needed to be kept in for, you know. [Name removed] kept asking when they were going to get him home, but the protection board kept saying soon, but he just needed to be there a bit longer. But he had already been taken. They lied to his mother not only whilst he was in hospital, but after he was taken. All those months she thought he was still in hospital, but he wasn't. [name removed] had already been fostered by a white couple, even though his Mum was still trying to find out if he was better. It was just, well you know, it was...

**Me:** Awful.

**E.T.:** That's one word for it.

**Me:** For [name removed] to carry on contacting the board and still being given the same response despite [name removed] not being in the hospital for weeks is shocking. So how did they manage to place him in a foster family? Was that to do with the incorrect details on his paperwork when he was first taken in?

**E.T.:** Yep. His file in the hospital saying that his Mum wasn't around and that his Dad was a drunk, that shows that it isn't safe for a child to go home. Which you know, I'm not saying that's not right, no kid should live in that kind of home. But that was all lies. [name removed] was not a drunk. But that caused welfare officers being called and that's why he was fostered into a white family. It was all deliberate, you know, they were accidental lies. They knew what they were doing and what they wanted to achieve. Do you know what, paperwork and correct information was something that the authorities really weren't bothered about, including when he went to live with [name removed] and [name removed]. They didn't even do the right legal paperwork for him. The white couple went to the hospital and took him. That was it. That Christmas Day when he went to hospital was the last time [name removed] would ever see his Dad, and it was 10 years before he saw his Mum. It was tough and unfair. [name removed] died, so [name removed] never got to see him again, luckily he was allowed to see his Mum. But, you know, because he was taken so young, it was like the first time he'd met her because he couldn't remember anything and that was a difficult meeting for him and [name removed].

**Me:** It must have been traumatic for everyone, his family and him. Growing up with such uncertainty and then meeting his mother for the first time at the age of 10, how was his upbringing? How did this affect him as a child?

**E.T.:** As a kid, he was really troubled. His behaviour kept getting him caught up with the police and people saw him as an out of control kid, rather than understanding why. He was basically having a crisis with himself, not knowing who he is or where he belongs. He was in and out of different homes, prisons and his Mum's and foster family's houses. I mean, it's not a surprise really. When he was 3 years old he was pulling his own hair out because he was so distressed. Imagine how bad it must've been to live with those emotions and feelings your whole life. It was obvious that everything that happened with him, you know being taken and then put into a white family, that all caused him to behave how he did. None of his siblings suffered the same, they were the opposite, completely different behaviour. But it wasn't his fault, you know. I think that just shows what the Stolen Generations did to kids. We supported [name removed] throughout his life, well as much as we could, we're his family so that goes without saying, but it was hard. He had a tough time, no a tough life. His whole life was a battle for him. If he didn't know who he was or how to handle the emotions of everything he'd been through, how could anyone else help him. He couldn't keep down a job and he had a lot of failed relationships, I think because he didn't know how to cope with his emotions. He turned to the bottle a lot, I think that numbed everything for him.

**Me:** With you saying that as a family you supported him throughout his life, he obviously reunited with you all more permanently as he got older. Was that a difficult transition for him?

**E.T.:** Definitely, yeah. Yes, that was a tough one. If I'm being honest, I think he just struggled with everything in life. We all welcomed him back into the family, that's a given, and we wanted to help him

as much as we could, but sometimes we just couldn't. he found it hard, because he knew he was a blackfella but also didn't feel like one all the time, do you know what I mean? So he was, I don't know...

**Me:** So he was conflicted? He was conflicted about who he was.

**E.T.:** Yes, and where he belonged. And he had issues with commitment and trust, but then I guess if you've been through what he did, you know, who wouldn't.

**Me:** You said that the legal case was about the truth being heard, and you obviously achieved that through not only having the case heard in the court, but also the attention from the media. Because of the complexity of [name removed]'s circumstances and his situation, it must've been a really long process leading up to the court. I think the newspaper articles said it was at the Supreme Court?

**E.T.:** Yes babe, that's right. It was the Supreme Court in Adelaide. So yeah, quite high profile! No, being serious it was a big deal and we spent a long time preparing for it. We were really lucky because so much evidence was still kept, that's unusual as most Stolen Generations victims either never had papers or they have been lost or binned. We had everything, including the police report about his Mum and Dad's clean and tidy shack that they lived in. Having the papers and evidence made sure that [name removed] and [name removed]'s names were cleared, so that people knew they were good people, good parents. If [name removed]'s papers hadn't been kept, I think it would've been a lot harder. We were lucky that we had a lot of support and a good legal team.

**Me:** I read in the museum that [name removed] was the first person who was part of the Stolen Generations who received compensation for what he went through? That must have been a really big milestone for you as a family, and as a community.

**E.T.:** [name removed] never decided to go ahead with the legal case for the money, he wanted answers. He deserved those answers, you know, it wasn't just his childhood that was affected by what he went through, his whole life was. And his family actually, his siblings and his parents especially. They lived tough lives not knowing when, well I guess if, they didn't know if they would see him again. But the legal case gave some answers and got the truth heard. We won and he got money, but money doesn't fix things. Not the trauma and pain that [name removed] went through his whole life, and the struggles the rest of the family went through. We'll always feel some pain for what happened. I'm not sure that will ever go away, I think it'll just get passed down through generations. I'm not sure we'll ever trust the Government, they did a lot of damage.

**Me:** It must have been really impactful on not just [name removed] and the rest of the family, but also other Aboriginal communities and families who have gone through the same situation as you all have. Did things change at all after the compensation ruling, did things improve for him and the rest of the family?

**E.T.:** It was, I think it gave people a bit of hope about what they could achieve and the answers that they could find out. But moving on, that's a hard one you know. It'll always be part of us, the family and community. It was such a big thing, really traumatic, you know, it'll never be forgotten. It's very hard to move on because it made him who he was, and it was a part of our lives. We'll carry this for the rest of our lives. [name removed] and [name removed] both did before they died, and it's something the whole family will remember. We've cleared their names, and so on file they are now good parents rather than ones who neglected their child. And as for [name removed], this has proved that the authorities and Government in South Australia caused him to live such a tragic life, it wasn't just him being him. It was sad that [name removed] didn't have longer after the ruling, he died young. He was only 52 when he died, and it was only a couple of years after the court case. But at least he made it through everything and he got to know the outcome, you know.

**Me:** I can see how important the case was for you all, especially in recognising the untruthful portrayals of [name removed]'s parents. But also for it to be given as an explanation for his own behaviour and the struggles he went through.

**E.T.:** Yes babe, he went through a lot of struggles, and he wasn't proud of them or how he behaved. But this ruling, you know the evidence all showed how that he was how he was because he was taken from his family and went through so much stress and trauma when he was growing up. We knew that, you know we didn't need the evidence to tell us that because he's family and we know that there's a reason for him to behave how he did. But for the judge to say that [name removed] being an alcoholic and his mental health and everything, you know they agreed that was because of him being taken. Basically they said the trauma he went through caused his problems when he was older, and that was a good thing for him I think. I think that helped him realise it wasn't just him, do you know what I mean?

**Me:** Yes, so it was kind of an explanation that explained why he experienced the troubles and difficulties that he went through. I'm sure it doesn't make the trauma any easier for you, or him, but I imagine it is a comfort that other people understand that he had struggled with alcohol and with his mental health because of the traumatic events in his childhood.

**E.T.:** Definitely. As blackfellas we are so quickly judged for what we do, but why we are how we are isn't talked about. You know, you see a blackfella with some grog in his hand and people say stuff and judge him. And this would've happened to [name removed], you know. But at least people knew at the end that his behaviour was because of what he had gone through and the mental struggles he was still going through, you know, he wasn't how he was because of who he was. Does that make sense, the bad was brought out because of the Australian Government taking him away.

### *Transcript 2:*

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> April 2018

**Location:** Coffee Shop, Adelaide

**Participants:** L.N. (Non-Aboriginal Charity Worker)

**Me:** Thank you for finding the time to have a chat with me, I appreciate you must be busy.

**L.N.:** No, not at all. After bumping into you and hearing what you're working on I would be more than happy to have a chat with you and let you know what I do and the type of challenges we face when supporting clients and the challenges our clients face as Aboriginal people.

**Me:** So you mentioned that you work for a charity, it isn't a specific charity for Aboriginal Australians is it?

**L.N.:** That's right, so I'm a support worker for [name removed] and we're based here in the city to support people who suffer from addiction, this is both alcohol and drug. Addiction is a broad issue, because people who have an addiction usually have other issues that they also need support with, including housing issues, mental health and employment. Essentially we not only want to help them recover from their addictions and become rehabilitated, but also help set them on a positive path where they have stability. This is important because they need a form of stability to maintain the progress they make here, so, for example, it would be important to help a homeless client find a home and some form of employment or education otherwise there is a high risk the progress they've made here will be wasted and they'll get sucked back into addiction.

**Me:** It's a rounded form of support that you provide then. It isn't just for Aboriginal Australians is it, you also have clients who are non-Aboriginal?

**L.N.:** Oh, no no, we welcome any clients who need help with addiction. But we do see a lot of clients who are Aboriginal.

**Me:** Why do you think this is? Do you think there is a particular reason why you've had, or got, a lot of clients who are Aboriginal?

**L.N.:** I mean, that's a tough one. There's such a broad spectrum. I think it ranges from the level of disadvantage that they are more likely to be subjected to, so homelessness is an example and unemployment. Then you've also got mental health, and I think alcohol and drugs can sometimes be an easier, although often a last resort, but an easy way to cope with things in their life. And then you've got the issues of how they feel like they don't belong.

**Me:** Really?

**L.N.:** That's actually a big contributor. Aboriginal people don't feel valued, they feel invisible. They very much feel like outsiders in their own country because they don't get shown respect, so that makes them feel very small and isolated because they're Aboriginal. And this makes it tough you know, when you're trying to help reintegrate people. Rather than being ignored, which is how a lot of them feel at the moment, seeing that their culture, which you know is so, so important to them, seeing it be acknowledged makes them feel like they're respected. They're not asking for much, they just want to be treated the same as everyone else and understood for who they are, for being Aboriginal. They basically just want to be respected for the person that they are. So, well I guess you would call it the attitudes that people have towards them, the attitudes are a struggle because they contribute to the issues that cause them to need our support in the first place, but they also pose a risk for them when we work through integrating as rehabilitated people.

**Me:** This isn't my first time coming to Adelaide, but this time, and every other time I've been, I've noticed some really harsh behaviour towards Aboriginal Australians. It makes you feel awkward because you don't agree with what someone is saying or doing, but you don't know what you can do to help.

**L.N.:** Yeah, definitely. I was shocked when we first moved to the city and saw just how differently they're (Aboriginal Australians) treated. I remember turning to my husband and saying I don't think I can live here, when we were having brunch and heard some teenagers laughing and joking about an Aboriginal guy. It was horrible, but in fact it actually made me more determined to stay here and help at the charity and prove that we aren't all racist or disrespectful to them. It's weird though because the trust issues are exactly the same as where I worked, even though the clients I help now have more racism hurled at them than the Aboriginal people living where I used to live, which was rural. Unfortunately, the issue of attitudes is really big, but such little progress is being made to fix it.

**Me:** I actually had a bit of an awkward experience the other day when I was waiting at a bus stop. There was a woman standing with me and she had a daughter, probably about 10 years old I'd have guessed. An Aboriginal woman walked up to us and asked for change, we both said we didn't have any to give but the woman said it in a tone that was full of attitude. The Aboriginal woman was clearly in poor health and she didn't have any shoes on, which I know can be down to personal preference sometimes as Aboriginal Australians have explained before how it is to do with connection to the land. Anyway, the woman's daughter noticed and asked her Mum why the woman was barefoot, the woman's response was 'Because she's Aboriginal'. But it was said in a tone that was really derogatory, and their conversation was loud enough that the Aboriginal woman heard it. I just feel like the response to her daughter could have been slightly less critical because that will influence her daughter's attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians.

**L.N.:** Oh really, I would say that's a surprise but unfortunately it isn't. I get that it would be seen as weird if I was to walk down a street barefoot, but for Aboriginal people they have a connection with their land, a spiritual one. Shoes aren't always seen as a necessity. Some like to feel the warmth of the land, or the dirt under their feet, but that's linked with their culture. When they perform dances or ceremonies, they're often barefoot because that was what was normal for their ancestors when they danced, or whatever, in the red dirt, but yet no one would watch an Aboriginal performance and say 'Look, they're not wearing shoes'. Do you know what I mean, but they do when they see them walking in the street. I think this actually shows how limited knowledge contributes to the racism and attitudes. But then having said that, I'm not sure whether there is also an element where people are unfair towards Aboriginal people because they are Aboriginal, do you know what I mean?

**Me:** That's an interesting point actually. Do you think that sometimes people are too quick to judge Aboriginal Australians, especially if they notice them sleeping rough or begging for money?

**L.N.:** So many Aboriginal people find themselves in the situation they are because they have hit rock bottom, they don't choose to be homeless or ask for money, they don't have any choice. At least they think they haven't got a choice, sometimes they don't know how to get the help. They do want to get better, they don't want to live their lives on the street being racially abused, you know, it's not a life they choose for themselves. A lot of Aboriginal people use our services because they have reached a turning point and want to get better. Alcohol and drugs are a big issue for a large proportion of Aboriginal people, but I think a bigger issue is that non-Aboriginal people don't ask why people are in the situation they are. Even here (in Adelaide) you see a lot of homeless Aboriginal people on the streets who are intoxicated and look in ill health, but people jump to conclusions rather than stop and think how sad it is that someone is living in that state and questioning how that person has got to where they are. Unfortunately, the negativity that a lot of Australians show Aboriginal people is a big problem and makes our job very difficult. It contributes to peoples' poor mental health and addictions and hinders recovery because it lowers confidence and self-worth. I would love to try and understand how, and why really, some people don't consider why someone is how they are, do you know what I mean. I guess maybe my job clouds my judgement for me to try and understand that because I'm used to instantly trying to understand the bigger picture of a situation. I don't know, I just find it annoying that people can be so narrow-minded at times when it comes to understanding Aboriginal Australians.

**Me:** I think you make a really good point that the bigger picture isn't always understood, or as you said, there's a lack of want to try and understand it. I guess it isn't just people on the streets, I imagine the media doesn't really help either, especially with everything going on with the Uluru Statement at the moment. Because it is such a significant situation and ruling, no matter where you look or go you constantly see or hear reports about what is going on. For Aboriginal Australians it must be really tough, the people I've spoken to have said how disappointing and hurtful the decision is and so it must be a constant reminder for them.

**L.N.:** Definitely. I think everyone in Australia was hoping it was going to be a different verdict, or at the very least for the Prime Minister to not be so blunt with his response, but it must be the most difficult for the Aboriginal population.

**Me:** How impactful is something like this on the work that you do? Do you notice that the actions of the Australian Government or things that are published in the media are influential on Aboriginal clients that you work with?

**L.N.:** Yes, without a doubt they have an impact on Aboriginal clients, I guess actually just Aboriginal people in general. Recently, looking specifically at the coverage of the Uluru Statement, it has an impact on confidence levels and just the overall motivation that they

have to be in society, if that makes sense. It's like a flowchart; each stage of the Uluru Statement and the Referendum Council's report has an impact on our clients. It's been covered heavily in the media so they can see everything that happens, the good and the bad. Them seeing the Aboriginal advocates working on this statement and report has boosted their determination. If they can see a process like this one be approved, knowing that Aboriginal Australians have assisted in creating a significant change, then my clients have the realisation that they can push themselves to achieve their own goals. It's also really positive for them when they see the support starting to rally around specific events which will benefit Aboriginal Australians, like this one. Supporters often include politicians and famous faces, and my clients feel a sense of acceptance, that people are actually starting to see them and hear them. All of that really gives them a boost; these are people who have very little self-esteem, especially when it comes to them being accepted for who they are. You can imagine how it knocks them when something is being played out so positively across the media, and then the Prime Minister disagrees with the support and rejects it. It's a bit confusing to try and explain it, but you know what I mean. Basically, in answer to your question, what is shown in the media and the decisions of politicians both are influential on Aboriginal people.

**Me:** I mean it isn't surprising really when you think about it. As you say they constantly get reminded what is happening because let's face it, in a city like this, news is everywhere. And with this particular example, it's talking about Aboriginal voice and I know that is something that they are very passionate to achieve.

**L.N.:** Oh definitely, Aboriginal people have been spoken for a long time about wanting, and I suppose they also feel like they need to speak for themselves. They're annoyed and fed up of people speaking for them, especially if it's represented in the media as Aboriginal people wanting or saying something, when actually those words have been put together by a non-Aboriginal person without any input from Aboriginal people. That happens you know, it's shocking, especially when it isn't actually what Aboriginal people think. I've been volunteering here for about four years now, and even with the training that I've had, I wouldn't know what is best for an Aboriginal client without talking to them. Something I learnt very quickly after starting was that you can never presume what they're thinking. I don't know why you would though to be honest, it would be like me assuming I can jump out of a plane without talking to the experts – you just wouldn't do that. Sorry, I know it's not a funny thing so I shouldn't be so sarcastic, I just find it infuriating, you know.

**Me:** I find it really infuriating, so for you to be supporting Aboriginal people who are impacted by what is being said and the decisions, and seeing first-hand the problems these words and actions are causing, must be incredibly frustrating for you.

**L.N.:** It's absurd really. They are the experts in the field of problems that Aboriginals face, they live through those problems on a daily basis. Trying to improve the quality of life of Aboriginals all across Australia isn't working, and I think that just shows why it is so valuable to include their voices to give perspective to a situation, rather than the Government speaking for them and thinking that they know everything. I think the wider picture of a problem isn't always understood, but then that's also why I think voices of Aboriginal people are so powerful. To be honest, whether it be about Aboriginal voice or the voice of other minorities, basically the voice of the people who are going to be impacted by decisions have to be taken into account. And that's something that is rarely happening. Actually, I have an example of a client who hadn't been listened to or actively encouraged to talk over many years by different authorities. During my first year of volunteering there was this Aboriginal man who came to us as a referral from authorities because he was a repeat offender, all minor crimes. He was a heroin user, and therefore being a drug addict was the reasoning for his crimes. But when you actually spoke to him, he was committing these crimes because his mother was ill and couldn't work anymore. Yes, he was an addict, but that wasn't the reason for his crimes and he was using drugs because of the stress of caring for his Mum. This isn't me criticising police and social workers as a whole by the way, I'm just talking about this specific case, and in this specific case they could have dealt with it better. Assumptions about him were made and that meant that some key information that helped with his recovery were constantly being ignored. And the best thing was seeing how quickly he seemed to change once we started talking to him about his Mum. The change in him after we reassured him that we could organise help for his Mum and that she didn't have to be taken into care, he was like a changed person. He was motivated to overcome his addiction and we even helped secure him a job at a small coffee shop. Voice is important in understanding a situation fully. I think that just needs to be understood and respected, and I guess that's why I was desperate for a different verdict to be made about the Uluru Statement.

**Me:** What you've said reflects conversations that I have had with people in the Aboriginal community that I have been visiting in the Coorong area. They think that they are the best people to understand issues concerning them, which I think is a logical argument. It's just a shame that this isn't understood or respected at higher levels.

**L.N.:** But this isn't new, and I think that's what makes this really frustrating. Aboriginal people aren't seen on the same level as non-Aboriginal people, and that's unfair, really unfair. Something needs to be done to fix the unfairness that Aboriginal people are facing, and that includes the attitudes towards them. I can't imagine what it must feel like to live in a world where you are constantly reminded of how worthless you are compared to everyone else around you. It's really sad actually when you think about it like that.

**Me:** I couldn't agree more. That's why I have been so certain to make the voices of Aboriginal Australians the centre of this research.

**L.N.:** And I think that's brilliant. No, honestly I do. This shows that you understand the importance of their voice, and I can imagine that they really appreciate that. Have they been happy to talk to you and open up?

**Me:** Thank you. Yes, I have actually been surprised how quickly they opened up and were happy to talk to me. But like you said actually, the elders said that they are happy that I actually appreciate listening to their experiences and opinions. It's been so lovely being able to sit down with them and have conversations about so many different things. I actually feel really honoured to have had some of the conversations I've had.

**L.N.:** And how brilliant are they at storytelling? I love nothing more than having a good chinwag with Aboriginal clients.

**Me:** Oh, definitely. As well as conversations being really useful for my research, the experience of some conversations I've had are personal highs which will stay with me.