



### **IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD**

Do stronger communities lead to stronger young people and a stronger society?

COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL CONFERENCE  
7 & 8 APRIL 2003

**FIONA STANLEY AC FAA FASSA**

(\*If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the **Communities in Control conference, convened by Our Community and Catholic Social Services.**)

#### **OUTLINE**

1. Pathways to stronger children and youth
2. Changes in contemporary Australian society impacting on children and youth
3. It takes a village to raise a child

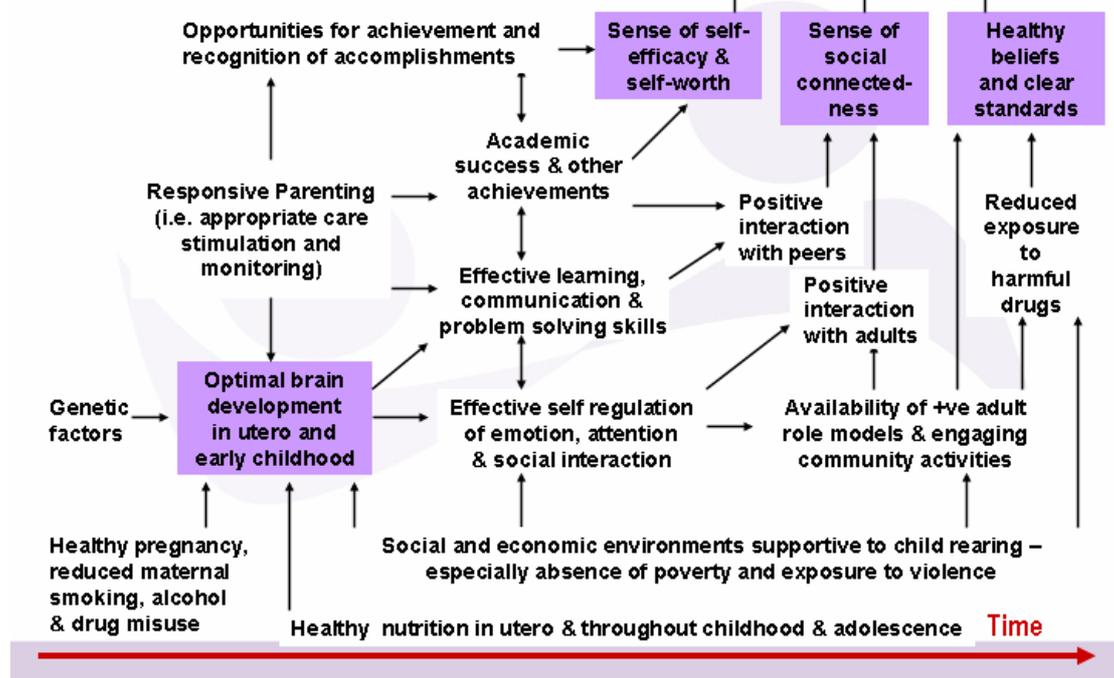
Role of community in ameliorating adverse effects of our contemporary society and enhancing child development

4. Towards a stronger society

# Pathways to resilience

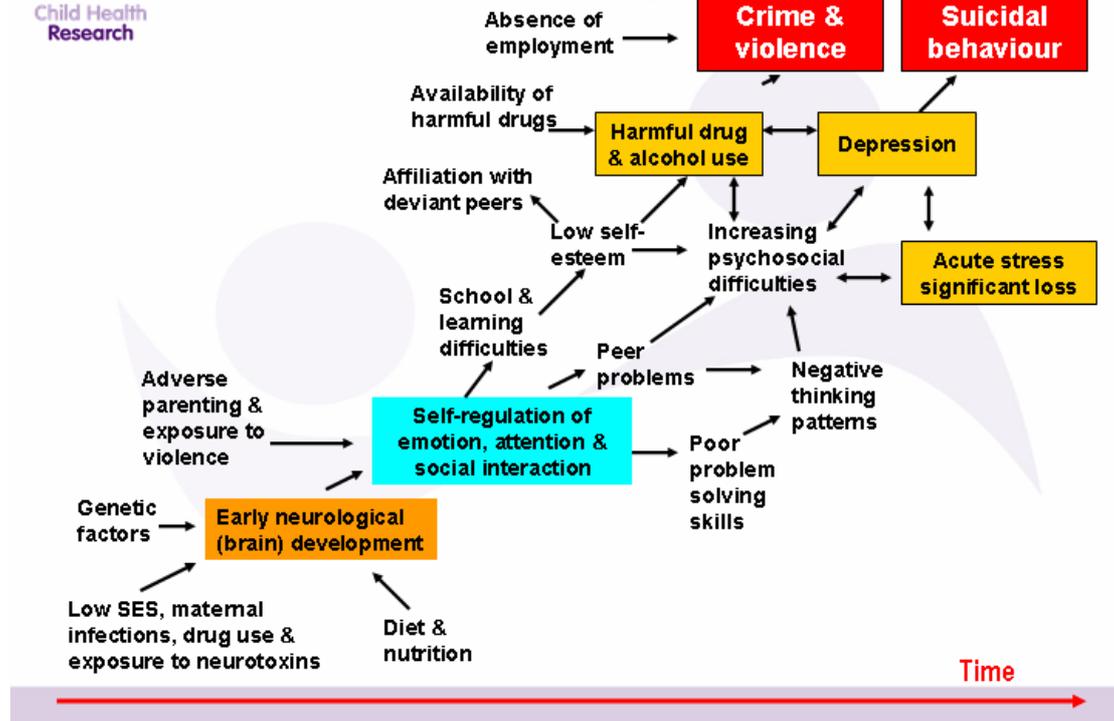
Personal achievement,  
social competence and  
emotional resilience

(Silburn, 2003)



# Pathways to vulnerability

(Silburn, 2001)

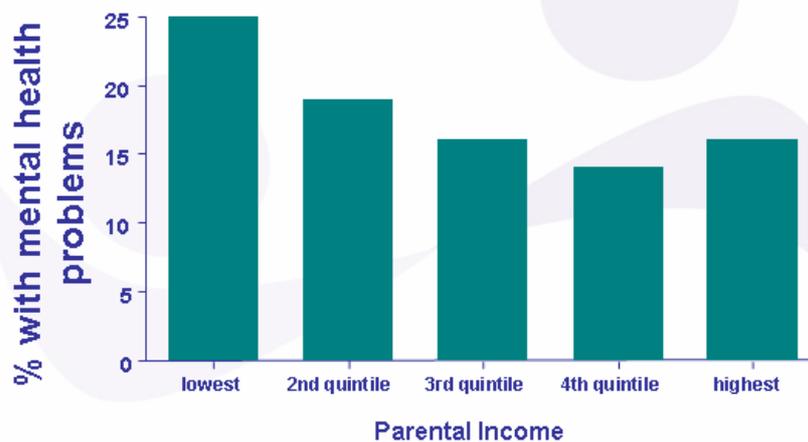


### **Canadian Studies on Childhood vulnerability**

(Index of cognitive & behavioural capacity D Willms, 2002 'Vulnerable Children')

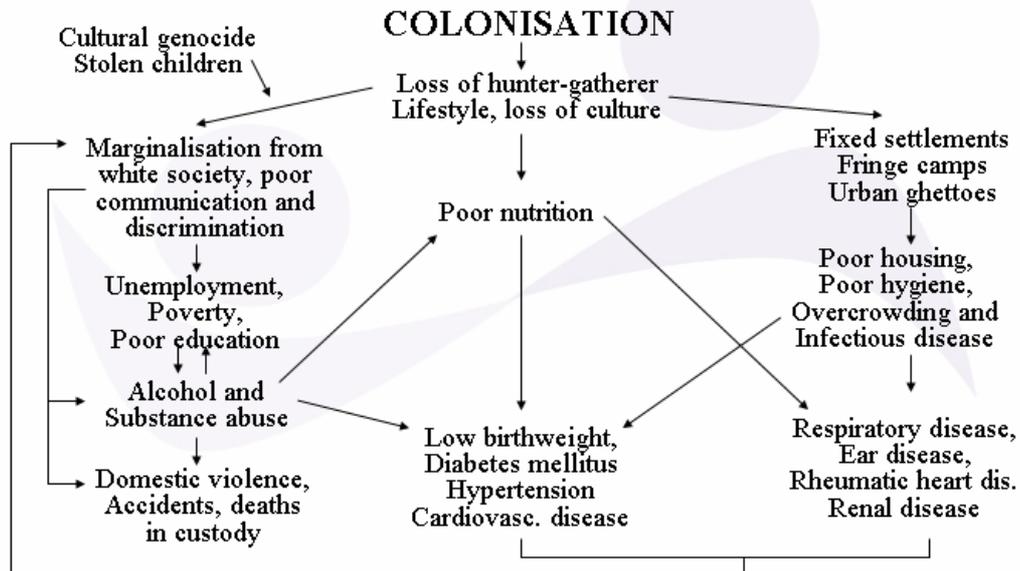
- 28.6% of all Canadian Children
- Association with family income less strong than previously believed
- Maternal education most important aspect of SES
- Good parenting far outweighs effect of low income
- Family environment far outweighs mothers working outside of the home
- Neighbourhood support important to enrich family and help parents
- Schools and communities very important
- Children from low income families benefit most from day care
- Considerable variability in vulnerability between communities

## Parental income and mental health problems in 4-16 year old children WA Child Health Survey



\*each quintile represents 20% income distribution across families

# Impact of white colonisation on Aboriginal health today



From Matthews 1997

## Changes in contemporary Australian society impacting on children and youth

### Changes in Australian Society

- Divorce, Single Parents, Blended Families
- Conflict, violence, isolation, homelessness
- Smaller families, contraction of the extended family
- Mothers working, childcare
- Children needing fostering
- Child Abuse and neglect
- Insecure neighbourhoods, decreased connections
- Decreased social capital (trust, cooperation, civic engagements & reciprocity)

## **Ecological Factors Influencing Disorganised Child Development**

<b>Distal effects</b>	<b>Proximal effects</b>
Market deregulation	Less stable attachments
Extended work preparation	Lowering parental skills
Increased mobility	Poor quality care
Increased levels of work	Biological dysmaturation
Increased family reformation	Extended adolescent dependency
Erosion of social capital	

## **Indicators of development, health and wellbeing in Australian children 1970s-2000s**

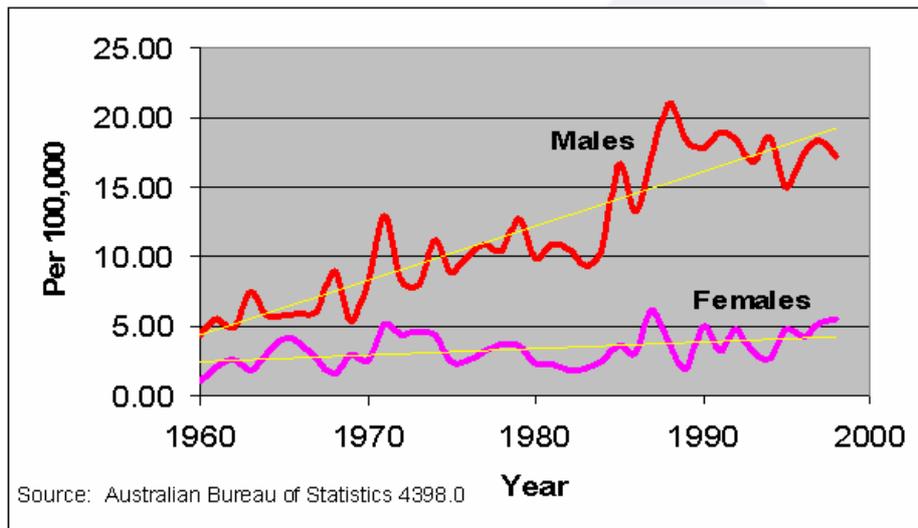
- Preterm & LBW births
- Developmental disorders
- Complex diseases (asthma, diabetes, obesity, autism)
- Behavioural problems
- Child abuse/neglect
- Mental health problems
- Educational problems
- Drug and substance abuse
- Juvenile crime
- Youth unemployment

## **Reasons for divorce in Australia**

The most common themes associated with marital breakdown:

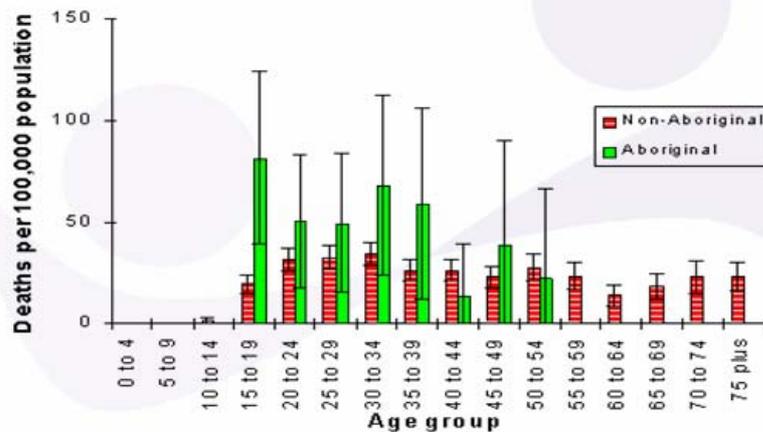
- Unemployment and work related problems
- High risk factors within marriages such as addictive behaviours, chronic illness, or death of a child
- Blended families
- Marriage and r'ship breakdown in the extended family
- A redefinition of gender roles and feminist agenda of equality
- The growth of individualism
- Poor communication skills
- Poor parenting skills
- Domestic violence, and
- Social isolation

## Suicides: 15-19 year olds 1960 - 1998



## Mental Health

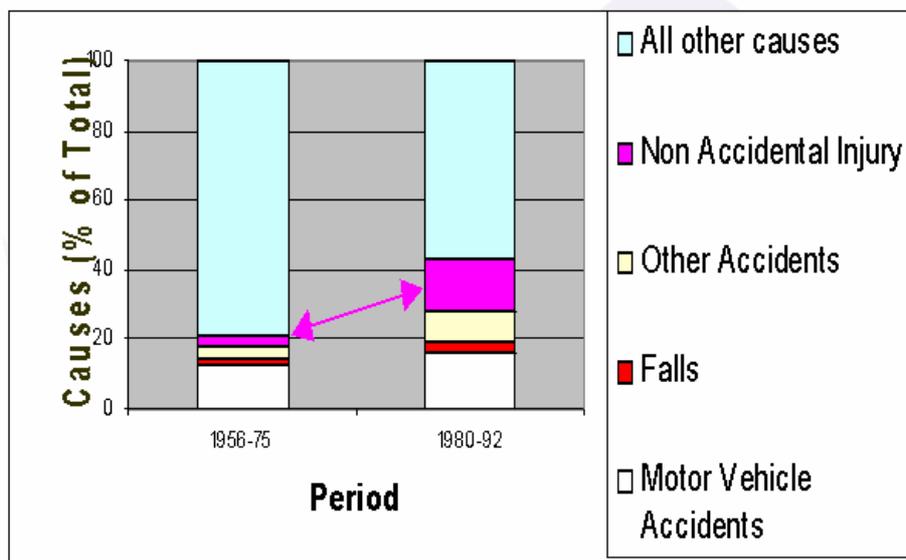
Age specific suicide rates 1996-98 (WA, SA & NT)



Source: Sven Silburn

## Increase in Child Abuse

### Causes of Child Cerebral Palsy in WA



## Juvenile Crime - Violent Assaults

### Males

1973-74

1993-94

### Adult : juvenile arrests

2.1 : 1

1.2 : 1

### Females

1973-74

1993-94

### Adult : juvenile arrests

3.4 : 1

1 : 1.9

### Juvenile

1973-74

1993-94

### Boys : girls arrested

24 : 1

4.4 : 1

# Literacy Disparity

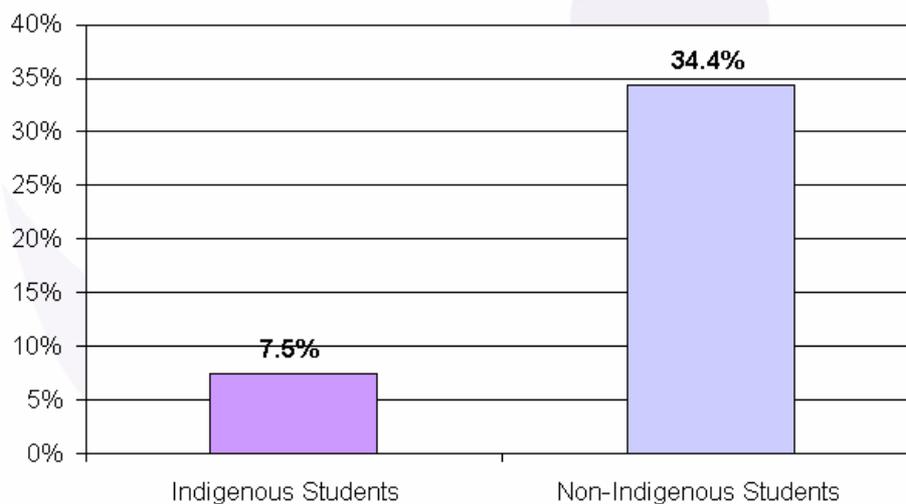
As children move from year 3 to year 5, the disparity among those meeting literacy standards grows



Ainley pc 2001

# Achievement of TEE

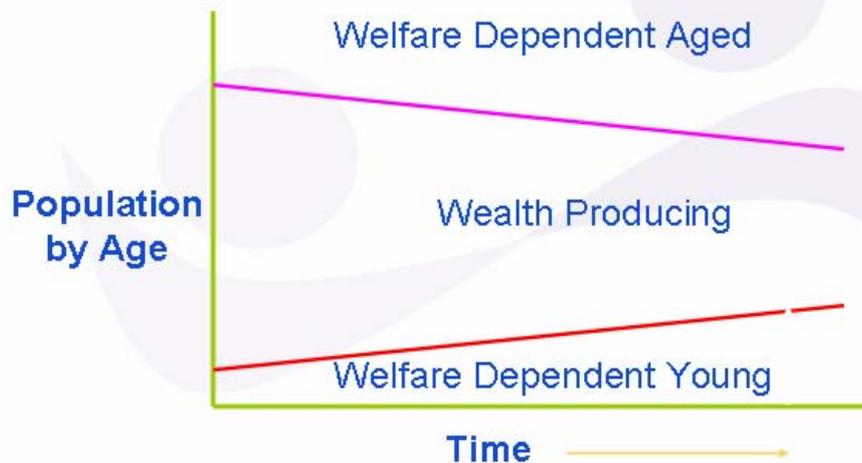
Students who achieved Tertiary Entrance Rank (required for entry to a WA public university)



SOURCE : P38 Department Education WA Annual Report 2001-2002

**Is there a common theme here?**

## The Welfare Squeeze



### **Contemporary Australia 1970-2000's**

Influences which disorganize developmental processes of childhood, such as:

- Violence-close, regular, long standing, particularly negative effects
- Patterns of family work – excessive hours reduce parental commitment
- Disengaged and inconsistent parenting
- Family mobility
- Few social supports

Their impact on child development strongly influenced by local community factors which collectively support child rearing.

### **It takes a Village to Raise a Child**

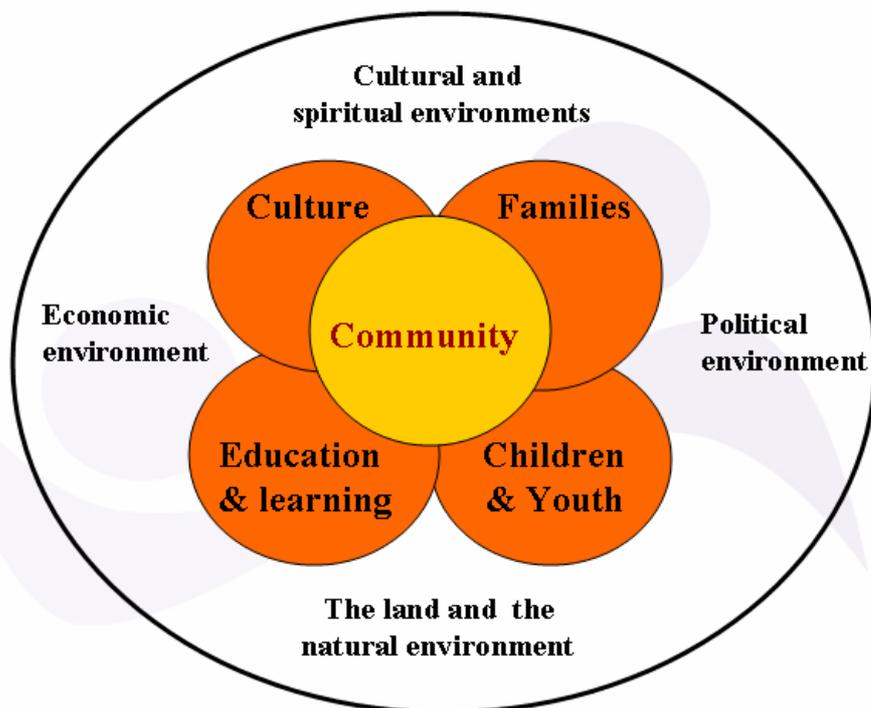
**Role of community in ameliorating adverse effects of our contemporary society and enhancing child development**

**COMMUNITY**

- Any group of people with interests in common-history, geography, culture, religion, particular interest or circumstance.
  - neighbourhoods
  - friends
  - schools
  - workplace

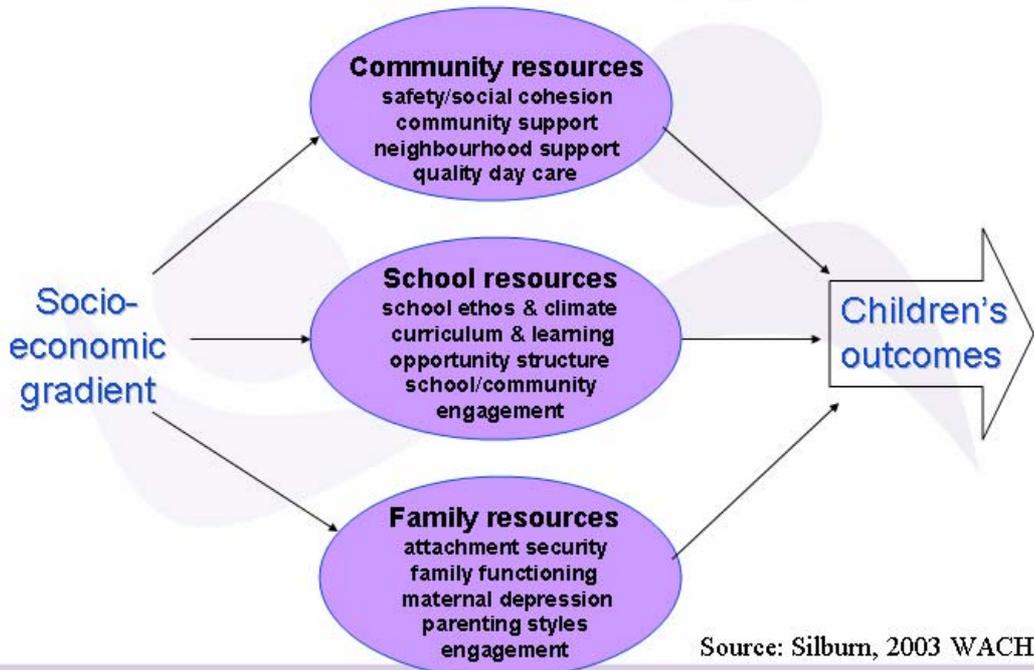
### **Role of Community**

- Social capital refers to the quality and depth of relationships between people in a family or community.
- Those processes and conditions are manifested by four interrelated constructs: trust, cooperation, civic engagement, and reciprocity.



## **Holistic view of community development**

# Local mediators of social gradients



## EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Ngunytju Tjitji Pirmi ( NTP)
- Jigalong & Burringurrah

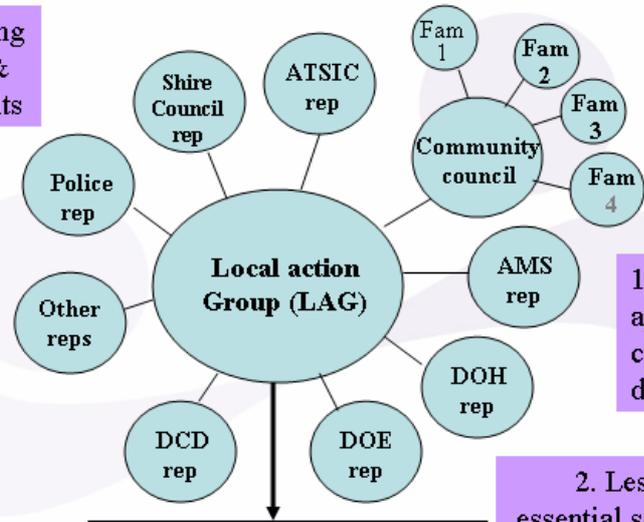
## Indigenous perspectives on prevention

1. Must be grounded in an Aboriginal worldview, be community driven, and focus on a 'whole-of-community-in-context' approach
2. Must acknowledge the relevant historical, cultural, social and political forces; and the implications these have had for child, family and community development
3. "It is the community that needs to develop ideas that address the educational, health and recreational needs of its people, so that individuals are empowered to engage in the solution of their own problems and those of their families and communities" (Noel Pearson 2000)

## Mobilising community action for better outcomes for children and the community

3. Realistic funding to achieve short & longer- term results

4. People and infrastructure to facilitate & maintain local action



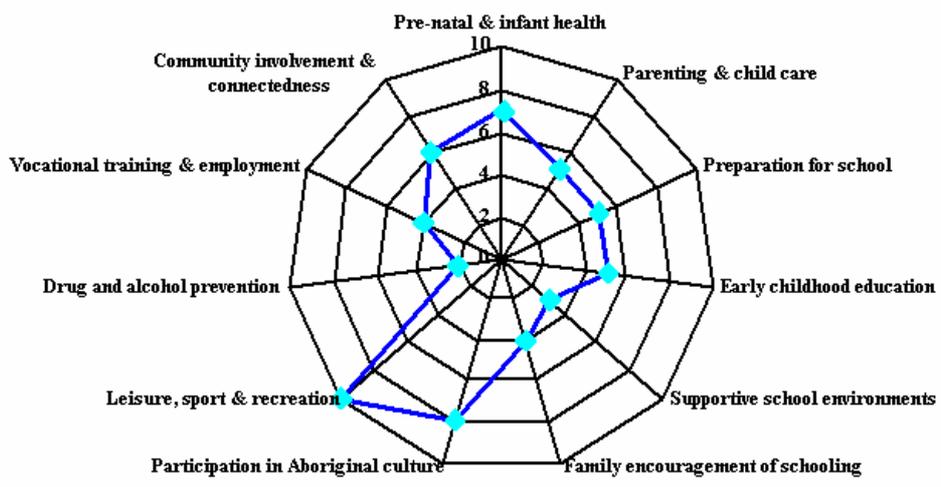
1. Culturally appropriate community democracy

2. Less fragmented essential social services

**5. Local action plan for children and community development**

Source: Silburn 2003

## Local Activities which promote child and youth health and community well-being



Source: Silburn 2002

## Towards a Stronger Society

### **Your Question :**

Do stronger Communities lead to stronger young people and a stronger society?

### **My Question:**

Can communities and society be strong if our children and young people are not?

## PURPOSE OF ALLIANCE

A National collaborative established to facilitate, coordinate and support the development of knowledge and its effective use to enhance the well-being and life chances of children and young people.

## ALLIANCE GOALS

- To promote collaborative research and agenda setting  
AND
- The application of research to policy and practice for children and young people

(\*If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the **Communities in Control conference, convened by Our Community and Catholic Social Services.**)