

# Evaluation of the KindiLink Pilot Initiative in Western Australia

## Volume 2: Survey Data (2016-2018)

---

School of Education  
Early Childhood Research Group  
Edith Cowan University

**June 2018**





# **Evaluation of the KindiLink Pilot Initiative in Western Australia**

## **Volume 2: Survey Data (2016-2018)**

**Edith Cowan University, School of Education  
Early Childhood Research Group:**

Professor Caroline Barratt-Pugh	Project Director
Associate Professor Lennie Barblett	Chief Investigator
Associate Professor Trudi Cooper	Chief Investigator
Dr Marianne Knaus	Chief Investigator
Dr Susan Hill	Chief Investigator
Dr Cath Ferguson	Chief Investigator
Ms Cindy McLean	Project Manager

# Acknowledgements

This project to evaluate the KindiLink Pilot Initiative was funded by the Government of Western Australia, Department of Education. We are particularly grateful to Garry Hewitt (Assistant Executive Director, Early Childhood and Aboriginal Education), Dr Rosemary Cahill (Director, Early Childhood Education, Literacy and Numeracy), Anna Langley (Principal Project Consultant – KindiLink), Robyn Kinkade, (Manager, Early Childhood Branch), Sheridan Lister (Project Consultant Universal Access), Michelle Kriening (Manager Teaching and Learning), Samantha Brown (Administrative Officer) and the KindiLink team within the Early Childhood Branch of the Department of Education’s Statewide Services Division for their help and advice during the research process.

We have benefitted from the advice of members of our Advisory Committee – Dr Graeme Gower, Gail Barrow, and Rosa Napolitano-Lincoln - and we thank them particularly for their encouragement and support.

We thank the families, school principals, KindiLink teachers, KindiLink Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), and kindergarten teachers for taking time out of their busy schedules to complete the surveys. We are humbled by the vast number of comments the KindiLink teachers and AIEOs wrote in their reflective journal, providing such thoughtful responses and extensive examples, and giving us detailed insight into their experience of KindiLink. To the school principals on each case study site, we are particularly indebted for welcoming us into their schools and taking time to talk with us and introduce us to KindiLink and kindergarten staff and families. We are most appreciative of the families, KindiLink teachers, AIEOs and kindergarten teachers who allowed us to observe the complex relationships they had built up and to talk with them about KindiLink at great length. It was a pleasure to work with the families, KindiLink team and principals, and we have been privileged to share the richness of their experiences of KindiLink.

A special thank-you goes to Emeritus Professor Judith Rivalland, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, and Lisette Kaleveld for their written contributions to this report and deep insights into the interpretation of data. We would also like to thank Liz Walker and Dianne McKillop for their input into aspects of the data analysis and writing.

We would also like to acknowledge the lands on which this research took place and pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

# Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	vi
List of Tables .....	vii
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Instruments and Data Sources .....	1
1.1.1 KindiLink participant surveys .....	1
1.1.2 Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey .....	2
1.1.3 Pre-primary on-entry assessment data .....	3
1.2 Analyses .....	3
1.2.1 Surveys .....	3
1.2.2 Pre-primary on-entry assessment data .....	3
1.3 Survey Sample Sizes and Response Rates .....	4
1.3.1 KindiLink participant surveys (staff and families) .....	4
1.3.2 Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey .....	8
1.4 Report Structure .....	9
<b>2. Impact on Aboriginal Children’s Capabilities upon Entry to Kindergarten .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Improving Children’s Capabilities at KindiLink .....	11
2.1.1 Principals .....	11
2.1.2 Teachers .....	11
2.2 Improving Children’s Capabilities at Home .....	15
2.3 Improving Children’s Capabilities through Support Networks .....	18
2.4 Children’s Capabilities Reflected in their Transition to Kindergarten .....	18
2.4.1 Strategies to support transition .....	20
2.4.2 Building effective learners .....	20
2.4.3 Becoming familiar with routines and the environment .....	21
2.4.4 Building families’ confidence and a positive attitude to school .....	22
2.4.5 Making connections and building relationships .....	23
2.4.6 Offering more support .....	24
2.5 Kindergarten Teachers’ Perceptions of KindiLink Children’s Capabilities .....	24
2.5.1 Engagement and/or confidence of KindiLink children .....	25
2.5.2 Kindergarten teachers’ ratings of students’ capabilities .....	26
2.6 Pre-Primary On-Entry Assessment Data .....	31
2.7 Summary .....	31
<b>3. Impact on Improving Attendance .....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	34
3.2 KindiLink Enrolment and Attendance .....	34
3.3 Kindergarten Registration and Attendance .....	36
3.3.1 Kindergarten attendance risk .....	37
3.4 Insights into Enrolments and Attendance from the Survey Data .....	39
3.4.1 Attracting, engaging and retaining families in KindiLink .....	39
3.4.2 Reasons for non-attendance .....	43
3.4.3 Reasons for attendance .....	44
3.5 Summary .....	45
<b>4. Impact on Capacity and Confidence of Families/Carers as their Child’s First Educators .....</b>	<b>48</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	48
4.2 Overall Impact on Capacity and Confidence at KindiLink .....	49
4.3 Insights into Increasing Capacity and Confidence .....	51
4.3.1 Strategies for increasing parents’ capacity and confidence .....	51
4.3.2 Engaging in, initiating and extending activities .....	51

4.3.3	Varying levels of engagement in children’s learning .....	53
4.3.4	Increasing self-assurance and engaging in personal learning opportunities.....	53
4.3.5	Aboriginal families becoming leaders.....	54
4.3.6	Supporting confidence through building relationships .....	54
4.3.7	Varying levels of confidence .....	55
4.3.8	Confidence and attendance.....	55
4.4	Increasing Capacity and Confidence at Kindergarten.....	55
4.4.1	Interacting with school staff .....	56
4.4.2	Engagement in children’s learning .....	56
4.4.3	Confidence and attendance.....	57
4.5	Summary.....	57
<b>5.</b>	<b>Impact on Building Productive Relationships .....</b>	<b>59</b>
5.1	Building Relationships between Aboriginal Families, the School and the Community .....	59
5.1.1	Shared experiences.....	61
5.1.2	A social support network .....	61
5.1.3	Fostering a partnership between families and the school.....	62
5.1.4	Relationships to support transition to Kindergarten and beyond .....	62
5.1.5	Relationships with the community and long-term engagement.....	63
5.2	Reaching Aboriginal Community Members and Community Organisations .....	63
5.3	Communicating with Aboriginal Families .....	65
5.4	Listening to and Including Aboriginal Families’ Perspectives .....	66
5.4.1	Informal and formal communication.....	66
5.4.2	Responsiveness.....	67
5.4.3	Broader strategies .....	67
5.5	Incorporating and Learning about Aboriginal Culture, Language and Ways of Doing Things .....	68
5.5.1	Incorporating the language/dialect and culture of the Aboriginal KindiLink families .....	68
5.5.2	Gathering information and incorporating Aboriginal families’ perspectives into KindiLink.....	70
5.5.3	Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives through jointly creating the program.....	71
5.5.4	Aboriginal families’ perspectives .....	72
5.6	Challenges, Uncertainties and Overcoming Challenges .....	72
5.7	Summary.....	73
<b>6.</b>	<b>Benefits and Positive Outcomes and Stories .....</b>	<b>74</b>
6.1	Benefits for Families and Children.....	74
6.2	Positive Outcomes and Stories .....	75
6.2.1	Families experiencing the school in positive ways .....	75
6.2.2	Families’ involvement in the school community .....	76
6.2.3	Families engaging in their child’s learning.....	77
6.2.4	Families connecting to support and services.....	78
6.2.5	Families’ transition to Kindergarten .....	78
6.2.6	Children’s development and learning.....	79
6.2.7	Recognising Aboriginal culture .....	79
6.2.8	Connection between the school and community.....	80
6.3	Summary.....	80
<b>7.</b>	<b>Challenges and Suggestions for Change .....</b>	<b>81</b>
7.1	Challenges with Supporting KindiLink Implementation .....	81
7.1.1	Overall perceptions.....	81
7.1.2	Resources, staffing and venue .....	82
7.1.3	Competing programs .....	82
7.1.4	Location .....	83
7.2	Challenges with Supporting Families and Children .....	83
7.2.1	Recruitment and attendance.....	83
7.2.2	Engagement of families .....	84
7.2.3	Pedagogical differences .....	84

7.2.4	Family views.....	84
7.3	Overcoming Challenges .....	85
7.4	Suggestions for Change .....	85
7.4.1	Increased support.....	86
7.4.2	Re-consideration of operational guidelines.....	87
7.4.3	New ideas .....	88
7.5	Summary.....	88
<b>8.</b>	<b>Insights for the Future .....</b>	<b>89</b>
8.1	Improving the Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities of Aboriginal Children upon Entry into Kindergarten .....	89
8.2	Improving Attendance (through Kindergarten and Subsequent Years) .....	90
8.3	Building on the Capacity and Confidence of Families as their Children's First Teacher .....	90
8.4	Building Productive Relationships between the Family, the School and Community.....	91
8.5	Overview of Gains Made .....	92
8.6	Reflections and Future Directions .....	93
8.6.1	Making a difference .....	93
8.6.2	Growth and learning for schools .....	94
8.6.3	The influence of the local context .....	96
8.6.4	Looking to the future .....	97
<b>9.</b>	<b>Key Findings .....</b>	<b>99</b>
9.1	Improvement of the Social, Language, Cognitive and Emotional Ability on Entry to Kindergarten.....	99
9.2	Attendance .....	100
9.3	Capacity and Confidence .....	100
9.4	Relationships .....	101
9.5	Benefits and Positive Stories .....	102
9.6	Challenges and Suggestions for Change .....	102
9.7	Insights for the Future .....	102
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>104</b>

# List of Figures

Figure 2.1:	Teachers’ views of the effectiveness of KindiLink in supporting Aboriginal children’s capabilities (2016 and 2017).....	12
Figure 2.2:	Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ agreement about whether KindiLink had supported their child’s learning, 2016 and 2017 .....	13
Figure 2.3:	Responses by teachers and AIEOs to “How effective do you think your school’s KindiLink has been at supporting Aboriginal children and their family in transitioning to Kindergarten?” .....	19
Figure 2.4:	Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ responses to “Has participating in KindiLink supported you and your child in starting Kindergarten next year?”, 2016 and 2017 .....	19
Figure 2.5:	Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate social skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink .....	27
Figure 2.6:	Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate emotional skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink .....	28
Figure 2.7:	Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate language skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink .....	29
Figure 2.8:	Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate cognitive skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink .....	30
Figure 3.1:	Total hours of attendance at KindiLink by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in 2016 and 2017 (per cent per category) .....	35
Figure 3.2:	Proportion and number of 2017 kindergarten children in each attendance risk category according to the number of hours they attended KindiLink in 2016.....	38
Figure 4.1:	Comparison of principals’, teachers’ and AIEOs’ views of the effectiveness of KindiLink in building the capacity and confidence of Aboriginal families as their child’s first educator, 2016 and 2017 .....	49
Figure 4.2:	Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ agreement about whether KindiLink had increased their confidence in supporting their child’s learning, 2016 and 2017 .....	50
Figure 5.1:	Principals’, teachers’ and AIEOs’ views of the effectiveness of KindiLink in building productive relationships between Aboriginal families, the school and the community, 2016 and 2017 .....	60
Figure 5.2:	Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ agreement about whether KindiLink supported a positive relationship between the family and school, 2016 and 2017 .....	60
Figure 5.3:	Frequency with which principals met with Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal community organisations in 2016 and 2017 .....	64
Figure 5.4:	Teachers’ responses to the question ‘How does your school communicate with Aboriginal families about KindiLink?’ .....	66
Figure 6.1:	Views of principals, teachers, and AIEOs on “How beneficial KindiLink has been for Children and their families, 2016 and 2017.....	74
Figure 7.1:	Responses of principals, teachers and AIEOs to, "How challenging has implementing KindiLink been"? .....	81



# List of Tables

Table 1.1:	Sample sizes and response rates for the KindiLink participant surveys .....	4
Table 1.2:	Characteristics of the KindiLink parents/carers (rounded percentages) .....	7
Table 1.3:	Highest education level of KindiLink parents/carers (rounded percentages) .....	8
Table 1.4:	Responses received for the kindergarten children’s capabilities survey, 2017 and 2018.....	8
Table 1.5:	Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey: Usable data obtained for Aboriginal children enrolled at the participating sites according to attendance at KindiLink .....	9
Table 2.1:	Data sources used to assess the impact of KindiLink on Aboriginal children’s capabilities upon entry to Kindergarten .....	10
Table 2.2:	Activities from KindiLink that families mentioned being transferred to home .....	15
Table 2.3:	Number of KindiLink teachers that stated Aboriginal families reported doing particular KindiLink activities at home with their children .....	17
Table 2.4	On-entry assessment results of Aboriginal children enrolled in pre-primary at the 37 KindiLink sites in 2018 according to KindiLink participation in 2016 (means and standard deviations) .....	31
Table 3.1:	Number and proportion of 3-year-old Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children participating in KindiLink, 2016 and 2017 .....	35
Table 3.2:	Transition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children from KindiLink in 2016 to Kindergarten at the same school site in 2017 .....	36
Table 3.3:	Enrolment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the 2017 Kindergarten program at the 37 KindiLink sites by participation in 2016 KindiLink.....	36
Table 3.4:	Kindergarten average attendance rates at KindiLink sites, 2017 <sup>1</sup> .....	37
Table 3.5:	Percentage of Aboriginal children enrolled at the same site for KindiLink and Kindergarten according to 2016 KindiLink attendance and 2017 kindergarten attendance risk categories .	38



# 1. Introduction

This study is an evaluation of the largest educator-led playgroup initiative in Western Australia. The implementation and evaluation of KindiLink, a supported playgroup, targeted at Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> children and their families, is both timely and significant, given the current research on the education and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and their families. The *Closing the Gap* report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016) identified the importance of early education for Aboriginal children both in terms of participation and achievement. On purely economic grounds, Heckman (2011) found that the combination of early childhood education and parent support produced a 7-10% return for every dollar invested in saved social cost in later life. Although there has been improvement in some areas, research clearly demonstrates that in comparison with Australian children in general, Aboriginal children have lower levels of school attendance and poorer educational outcomes (Department of Social Services, 2015; Department of Education and Training, 2016).

This volume of the four-volume report of the KindiLink evaluation presents findings from the surveys undertaken in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Statistical and descriptive accounts of the findings are reported under the four research questions:

- Q1** How effective has KindiLink been at improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive ability of Aboriginal children upon entry into Kindergarten?
- Q2.** What impact has KindiLink had on improving attendance among participating children during their schooling?
- Q3.** How effective has KindiLink been in building the capacity and confidence of families/carers as their child's first educator?
- Q4.** What impact has KindiLink had on building productive relationships between the family, the school and the community?

## 1.1 Research Instruments and Data Sources

### 1.1.1 KindiLink participant surveys

#### *KindiLink families*

All families attending KindiLink (across all 37 sites) were invited to complete an online or paper-based survey. Information about the evaluation was given to families while attending KindiLink by the KindiLink teacher and/or Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO). Participants were given the opportunity to complete the survey with or without the support of the KindiLink teacher and/or AIEO. An interpreter was available if necessary. The survey was completed at the end of Term 4, 2016 (for the 2016 KindiLink cohort) and the end of Term 4, 2017 (for the 2017 KindiLink cohort).

---

<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term Aboriginal is used to mean Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and Indigenous. This is based on the decision made by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Justice and Race Discrimination Commissioner (in consultation with key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups) to use the term Aboriginal rather than Indigenous.

The first group of items in the questionnaire was designed to capture information about each family<sup>2</sup> attending KindiLink, including their cultural identity, language/dialect<sup>3</sup> most frequently spoken at home, the highest level of education in the family, and the respondent's relationship to the 3-year-old child attending KindiLink. The second group of items sought to gather perceptions of KindiLink and its impact on family/school relationships, parent confidence and the KindiLink child's learning. Respondents were invited to give examples to illustrate or elucidate their responses.

### **KindiLink staff**

School staff involved in KindiLink (principals, teachers and AIEOs) across all 37 KindiLink sites were invited to complete an online or paper-based survey. KindiLink teachers and AIEOs were invited to complete the survey individually or in collaboration. The survey was completed at the end of Term 4, 2016 and the end of Term 4, 2017.

The first group of items in the questionnaire was designed to capture information about the respondents' employment history and teaching experience. The second set of items asked about perceptions of the implementation of KindiLink and perceived outcomes for families and children in relation to the four research questions. The third group of items invited participants to identify positive moments and any changes they would undertake in light of their experience. Principals were asked to describe any aspects of KindiLink that they had changed over time, including their rationale for the changes and the outcomes.

As far as possible, the survey questions for KindiLink staff and KindiLink families were similar (with slightly different wording when necessary), providing opportunities for triangulation of results.

### **1.1.2 Kindergarten children's capabilities survey**

Kindergarten teachers working in KindiLink schools were asked to complete a capabilities survey about each individual child in their kindergarten class. This survey was completed as the children were commencing Kindergarten, in Term 1, 2017 (for the 2016 KindiLink cohort) and Term 1, 2018 (for the 2017 KindiLink cohort). The first group of items in this questionnaire was designed to elicit information about the kindergarten teachers, including: name, school, career phase, teaching experience, previous experience as a KindiLink teacher, and number of children in their class. The second group of survey items asked if they had met with the KindiLink teacher and/or the AIEO to discuss the KindiLink initiative and the children who participated in the previous year and whether they had made any changes to their practice based on their understanding of KindiLink. The third group of items asked about levels of engagement and/or confidence in Aboriginal parents and children who had participated in KindiLink compared with previous years. The final section of the survey focused on the kindergarten children: that is, all kindergarten children enrolled at the 37 KindiLink sites, including those who had participated in KindiLink and those who had not. Teachers were asked to complete questions about each individual child in their kindergarten class, including child's name, previous attendance at KindiLink, identification as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage, and the extent to which the child had so far demonstrated adequate social skills, emotional skills and behaviours, language-based skills and cognitive skills. Each skill group was measured using a 4-point Likert-type ordinal scale (i.e. 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often', or 'consistently'). In the 2018 survey, a question about the location

---

<sup>2</sup> The term 'family' is used to encompass many different carer roles, including parents, grandparents, aunts, custodial parents, and the wider community.

<sup>3</sup> Although the singular form 'language/dialect' is used throughout much of this report, we recognise that more than one language and/or dialect may be spoken within families and/or the local community.

of the school was added to the survey. Participants were asked to identify whether their school was classified as metropolitan, regional city, regional town or remote in order to identify any major differences in findings related to school location.

### 1.1.3 Pre-primary on-entry assessment data

The On-Entry Assessment program is administered by pre-primary teachers to all children at the beginning of pre-primary (during weeks 3-6 of Term 1). The main purpose of the On-Entry Assessment program is to provide teachers with information about the listening and speaking, reading, and numeracy skills and understandings that a child brings to school (Department of Education, 2015). The teacher works through a set of tasks and questions with each child in a one-to-one situation and records their responses online. The KindiLink research team was given access to the 2018 on-entry assessment data in the form of means and standard deviations of the raw scores for reading, listening and speaking, and numeracy.

## 1.2 Analyses

The following sections briefly summarise the methods of analysis and approaches used to display the quantitative and qualitative results in this volume of the report. More detailed descriptions of the analyses that were conducted for the evaluation are presented in *Volume 1: Overview and Key Findings*.

### 1.2.1 Surveys

**KindiLink participant surveys:** The responses to the fixed choice survey items were summarised and displayed as statistical summaries in the form of tables or graphs. The comments elicited from the open-ended survey questions were subjected to thematic analysis in order to identify common response patterns and themes. The statistical summaries and thematic analyses are presented under the relevant research question and/or overarching theme in Chapters 2-8.

Comparisons between remote, regional city, regional town, and metropolitan sites were also undertaken. However, no substantial differences were identified - with the exception of the highest level of education completed. The parents/carers of children at the metropolitan KindiLink sites were more likely to have attended university than those in the regional and remote locations. However, there were no clear differences in responses to survey questions based on level of education in families.

**Kindergarten children's capabilities survey:** Responses to fixed-choice and open-ended items relating to the Kindergarten teacher and KindiLink site were analysed as described above. The items relating to the individual KindiLink children's capabilities were aggregated and cross-tabulated according to whether the child identified as Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. As all variables were measured at only the categorical or ordinal level, inferential statistics were limited to non-parametric tests, namely Pearson's chi-square test. Statistical significance level was set at 0.05, as is standard practice in the social sciences.

### 1.2.2 Pre-primary on-entry assessment data

The results of the on-entry assessments were provided in the form of means and standard deviations grouped according to the children's Aboriginality and participation/non-participation in KindiLink. As only aggregate data were provided, inferential statistics were necessarily limited to independent *t*-tests, with significance level set at 0.05.

## 1.3 Survey Sample Sizes and Response Rates

The following sections indicate the sample sizes and response rates for the KindiLink participant surveys and kindergarten children’s capabilities survey. All analyses and findings presented throughout the remainder of the report are based on these samples from the 37 KindiLink sites.

### 1.3.1 KindiLink participant surveys (staff and families)

For the purposes of this report, Aboriginal families are defined as those where the 3-year-old KindiLink child identified as Aboriginal. We note that there were several parent/carers respondents (19% in 2016, 17% in 2017) whose child identified as Aboriginal, but they themselves identified as non-Aboriginal. Non-Aboriginal families are defined as those where the 3-year-old KindiLink child and their parent/carers did not identify as Aboriginal.

Table 1.1 provides a breakdown of the respondent groups and response rates for the surveys administered to principals, teachers, AIEOs, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal KindiLink (KL) families. Response rates for the KindiLink staff (principals, teachers, AIEOs) were higher in 2017 than 2016. It should be noted that the percentages of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families who completed the survey are based on the number of **registered** families attending KindiLink. Data from the surveys suggest that attendance of families was sporadic, and for some families, infrequent. Thus, it is possible that the survey response rates would be considerably higher than 24% in 2016 and 18% in 2017 for Aboriginal families, and 20% in 2016 and 24% in 2017 for non-Aboriginal families, if based on families who actually **attended** during Term 4.

**Table 1.1: Sample sizes and response rates for the KindiLink participant surveys**

	Completed Surveys		Response Rate	
	N		%	
Participants	2016	2017	2016	2017
Principals	28	31	75.7	83.8
Teachers	29	37	78.4	100.0
AIEOs	20	29	54.1	78.4
KL families – Aboriginal <sup>1</sup>	83	71	24.1	18.3
KL families - non-Aboriginal <sup>2</sup>	30	31	20.0	24.2

<sup>1</sup> 345 and 388 Aboriginal families were registered in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> 150 and 128 non-Aboriginal families were registered in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

## Profiles of KindiLink survey respondents

### Principals

Proportionately more of the principals that completed the 2016 survey were relatively new to their school, with over half (54%) having served less than 2 years in their school, compared to about one-third (35%) of the 2017 cohort. Only 14% of the principals in the 2016 cohort had served at least 9 years in their current school, compared with 23% of the 2017 cohort. To ascertain if there were any differences between KindiLink contexts, the 2017 participants were asked to identify their school classification: 29% classified their school as metropolitan, 13% as regional city, 52% as regional town and 6% as remote.

## KindiLink teachers

Based on the career phases described by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, the majority of teachers (59% in 2016 and 55% in 2017) identified themselves as 'proficient', while approximately a quarter defined themselves as 'highly accomplished' (24% and 26%), and small proportions identified as 'lead teachers' (7% and 8%) or 'new graduates' (7% and 11%). This was reflected in the teachers' collective years of teaching experience: more than half of the 2016 and 2017 cohorts (55% and 57%) had 9 years or more experience and only a few had 2 years or less experience (7% and 11%).

There were similar levels of staffing stability in 2016 and 2017, with 28% and 24% of teachers, respectively, having been at their current school for 9 years or more, and 38% and 30% having joined within the last 2 years. More than two-thirds (64%) of the 2017 KindiLink teachers indicated they had also been the KindiLink teacher in 2016.

Teachers were also asked: "What skills and knowledge have you needed the most in KindiLink?" Responses were received from all but one KindiLink teacher from the 2016 cohort. The teachers described a set of complex skills needed to be successful in their roles. In 2016, the most important expertise teachers identified was a good understanding of child development and age-appropriate activities. They felt it necessary to know how to plan for this age group because many had not previously worked with this cohort. In 2017, interpersonal and communication skills were identified by teachers as vital elements for enabling their work with Aboriginal children and families.

In 2016, the skills needed to work effectively with AIEOs were at the forefront of the minds of KindiLink teachers. They mentioned developing the teamwork needed for planning with the AIEOs, the school personnel and kindergarten teachers. However, none of the 2017 cohort mentioned this as being important. The key relationships mentioned were with families, community networks and support services such as health providers (health nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists). Cultural awareness, knowledge of the community and building community relationships were considered critical knowledge by teachers in both 2016 and 2017. In 2017, teachers also mentioned that they drew on their own experience as a parent in order to relate to the parents and the children.

## Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers

The majority of AIEO respondents (60% in 2016 and 68% in 2017) had at least 9 years of experience in the AIEO role, and at least half (50% and 54%) had worked in their current school for 9 years or more. Interestingly, 50% of the AIEOs in the 2016 cohort indicated they had a Certificate III in Education Support, compared to only 39% in 2017. However, 8 AIEOs (29%) from the 2017 cohort and only 1 AIEO (5%) from the 2016 cohort were actively working towards completing this qualification.

In 2017, the AIEOs were asked whether they had been involved in KindiLink since 2016. Over two thirds (68%) had been involved throughout 2016 and 2017, while 21% were only involved in 2017, and 11% indicated 'other' involvement (e.g. "since Term 2, 2017"). Given the relatively high continuity of AIEOs it is not surprising that the profiles of the 2016 and 2017 respondents are similar.

In 2016, 15 of the AIEOs described a range of essential skills and knowledge they needed in order to fulfil their role in KindiLink. These included: interpersonal and communication skills - essential for building and sustaining strong partnerships with families and the community; planning with the KindiLink and kindergarten teachers; building cultural awareness needed to work with families, teachers and communities; and recruiting, promoting and attracting families in order to gain their interest and sustain their participation.

Actively involving parents to support their children as first educators was viewed as a crucial skill. An understanding of early childhood development and age-appropriate skills was also identified and enabled them to introduce and demonstrate activities that parents could engage in with their children; observe parents as they took ownership of activities and demonstrate ways of teaching and learning. Preparing the children and their families for the transition to Kindergarten was also regarded as important by the AIEOs, who felt they needed to know how to: introduce the KindiLink families to the school environment and other community agencies; support the children and families to be comfortable in these new environments; build partnerships between the children's families, the schools, the KindiLink teachers, the kindergarten teacher and wider community support services; and involve parents in broader school events and activities.

In 2017, comments from 25 AIEOs about skills and knowledge needed touched on some similar themes but with different emphases. Communication again was key, although this time there were many comments about the importance of listening as being the critical skill: *"To have an understanding heart and ear – to be able to listen to and help those families who need it most"* and *"This year we have become counsellors for parents."* Planning with the teacher was not emphasised in 2017 (although team work was mentioned), perhaps reflecting the increasing confidence of AIEOs. Also, there were many comments in 2017 regarding the importance of using skills to get to know each family and child individually on a personal level, focusing on building personal connections with KindiLink children and families.

## KindiLink families

### Parents/carers of the Aboriginal KindiLink children

The profiles of the Aboriginal families participating in 2016 and 2017 were very similar. As shown in Table 1.2, in both cohorts, most participants (92-94%) identified as female and more than three-quarters identified themselves as the mother of the KindiLink child. Only a few fathers were represented (4% and 6%), while aunts and grandmothers (combined) made up 12% and 14% of the 2016 and 2017 cohorts, respectively.

In terms of languages spoken at home within families and by the KindiLink child themselves, there was slightly more diversity in 2016 than 2017. Table 1.2 shows that English was one of the main languages spoken at home by approximately 90% of the 2016 and 2017 families. Aboriginal English was the second most prevalent language, spoken by between 33% and 24% of families in 2016 and 2017, respectively. As might be expected, the languages spoken at home by the KindiLink children largely reflect those spoken within their families, with the exception of Aboriginal English which was less represented for the KindiLink children (26%) than for families (33%).

Information about the highest level of education achieved was provided by 71 parents/carers (i.e. 86% of sample) in 2016 and 62 parents/carers (87% of sample) in 2017. A breakdown of their responses is provided in Table 1.3 and shows that a slightly higher proportion of the 2017 cohort (50%) had completed Year 12 and/or achieved a tertiary qualification (e.g. trade certificate, diploma or degree) than the 2016 cohort (42%).

### Parents/carers of the non-Aboriginal KindiLink children

As with the Aboriginal families, the majority of respondents from the non-Aboriginal families were female (100% in 2016, 94% in 2017) and identified as the mother of the KindiLink child (80% and 87%, respectively). The other most commonly identified relationships were grandmother (11%) in 2016 and father (7%) in 2017.

Some differences between the 2016 and 2017 cohorts were evident in terms of the languages spoken at home by the family and the child attending KindiLink. In 2016, 97% identified English as a main language



spoken at home, compared to only 84% in 2017. Vietnamese, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu and Danish were among the 'other' languages spoken by the families and KindiLink children.

Information about highest level of education was provided by all but one of the respondents from the non-Aboriginal families. Education levels were somewhat higher than for the Aboriginal families, with 88% of the 2016 cohort and 62% of the 2017 cohort having completed Year 12 and/or achieved a tertiary qualification (e.g. trade certificate, diploma or degree). Almost a third (32%) of the 2017 cohort had a university qualification.

**Table 1.2: Characteristics of the KindiLink parents/carers (rounded percentages)**

	Parents/Carers of Aboriginal Children <sup>1</sup>		Parents/Carers of Non-Aboriginal Children <sup>2</sup>	
	2016 %	2017 %	2016 %	2017 %
<b>Gender of survey respondent</b>	%	%	%	%
Female	94	92	100	94
Male	6	8	-	6
<b>Relationship to KindiLink child</b>	%	%		
Mother	81	76	80	87
Father	4	6	-	7
Grandmother	10	4	13	3
Aunty	2	10	3	-
Carer	1	3	3	3
Other	2	1	-	-
<b>Language(s) spoken at home<sup>3</sup></b>	%	%		
English	88	91	97	84
Aboriginal English	33	24	-	3
Kriol/Creole	7	6	-	-
Regional Aboriginal language	9	3	-	-
Other	1	-	17	19
<b>Language(s) child speaks at home<sup>3</sup></b>	%	%		
English	91	90	97	84
Aboriginal English	26	28	-	3
Kriol/Creole	4	6	-	-
Regional Aboriginal language	9	1	-	-
Other	3	-	10	16

<sup>1</sup> 2016: n=83; 2017: n = 71

<sup>2</sup> 2016: n = 30, 2017: n = 31

<sup>3</sup> Multiple response item, hence total percentage is greater than 100

**Table 1.3: Highest education level of KindiLink parents/carers (rounded percentages)**

	Parents/Carers of Aboriginal Children <sup>1</sup>		Parents/Carers of Non-Aboriginal Children <sup>2</sup>	
	2016 %	2017 %	2016 %	2017 %
Primary school	1	-	3	3
Year 8	-	2	-	3
Year 9	3	-	3	-
Year 10	39	32	-	23
Year 11	11	11	3	10
Year 12	17	31	21	10
Certificate including trade qualification	17	14	31	10
Diploma	4	3	17	10
University	4	2	17	32
Other	3	5	3	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>1</sup> 2016 = 71 responses (86%); 2017 = 62 responses (87%)

<sup>2</sup> 2016 = 29 responses (97%); 2017 = 31 responses (100%)

### 1.3.2 Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey

Table 1.4 provides a breakdown of the sample for the kindergarten children’s capabilities survey according to number of kindergarten teacher respondents and number of KindiLink sites represented. The survey was administered early in Term 1 of 2017 and 2018. As with the KindiLink surveys, response rates were higher in the second year of the evaluation.

**Table 1.4: Responses received for the kindergarten children’s capabilities survey, 2017 and 2018**

		Completed Surveys	
		2017	2018
Kindergarten teachers	(n)	34	49
KindiLink sites <sup>1</sup>	(n)	21	34
KindiLink site response rate <sup>1</sup>	(%)	56.8%	91.9%

<sup>1</sup> Total KindiLink sites = 37

Table 1.5 provides a summary of the usable data obtained from the kindergarten children’s capabilities survey for the *Aboriginal children only*. Information was also collected for non-Aboriginal children participating in the Kindergarten program at the 37 sites. However, this volume of the research report is limited to data relating to the Aboriginal students.

Across the two years of data collection, kindergarten teachers provided usable data for 555 children enrolled in the Kindergarten programs who identified as having Aboriginal heritage. Of these, 278 (50%) had

participated in KindiLink. Overall, the group sizes were very similar. As teachers were not always able to provide complete data for every child, differences in totals are evident for the kindergarten student results presented in subsequent sections of this report.

**Table 1.5:** *Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey: Usable data obtained for Aboriginal children enrolled at the participating sites according to attendance at KindiLink*

	Aboriginal kindergarten students					
	Attended KindiLink		Did Not Attend KindiLink		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
2017 Survey	112	53.3	98	46.7	210	100.0
2018 Survey	166	48.1	179	51.9	345	100.0
TOTAL	278	50.1	277	49.9	555	100.0

## Profile of the kindergarten teachers

### Teaching experience

The kindergarten teachers were asked to identify their career phase, as defined by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Proportionately, the 2017 participants were somewhat more experienced than the 2018, with 52% and 33%, respectively, identifying as ‘highly accomplished’. Stability of employment was indicated by the number of years the teachers had been at their school. In 2017, 42% of the kindergarten teachers had been at the school for 9 years or more compared to 29% in 2018. More teachers completed the survey in 2018, so perhaps the increased participation in 2018 allowed for a broader range of experience to be captured. Overall, the 2017 and 2018 survey respondents were relatively experienced kindergarten teachers. (Note that there is considerable overlap of the 2017 and 2018 teacher samples, so it is not appropriate to combine and aggregate the data on teacher characteristics.) Almost a quarter (24%) of the 2017 kindergarten teachers had also been the KindiLink teacher in 2016, while 21% of the 2018 cohort had also been the KindiLink teacher in 2017 or both 2016 and 2017.

### Influence of KindiLink on kindergarten teachers’ practice

Most of the kindergarten teachers from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts had met with the KindiLink teacher and/or AIEO to discuss KindiLink and the children and families who had participated in the previous year (i.e. 79% in 2017 and 83% in 2018). The kindergarten teachers in 2018 (70%) were slightly more likely than the previous year (62%) to report having changed their teaching practice as a result of the KindiLink program.

## 1.4 Report Structure

In the following sections of the report we present the findings of the evaluation according to each research question (Chapters 2 - 5), followed by findings about benefits and positive stories (Chapter 6), challenges and changes (Chapter 7), and insights that inform the future of KindiLink (Chapter 8). The final section (Chapter 9) presents an overview and synthesis of the research findings.

## 2. Impact on Aboriginal Children’s Capabilities upon Entry to Kindergarten

**Q1** How effective has KindiLink been at improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive ability of Aboriginal children upon entry into Kindergarten?

This section presents data about the perceived benefits of attending KindiLink for children in terms of their improved social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities and the effectiveness of KindiLink in supporting their transition to Kindergarten. It is based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered through the sources shown in Table 2.1 below:

**Table 2.1:** *Data sources used to assess the impact of KindiLink on Aboriginal children’s capabilities upon entry to Kindergarten*

Survey	Year		
	2016	2017	2018
KindiLink participant survey - families	√	√	
KindiLink participant survey – principals, teachers, AIEOs	√	√	
Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey		√	√
Pre-primary on-entry assessment data			√

Respondents included all participant groups (referred to as ‘principals’, ‘teachers’, ‘AIEOs’, ‘Aboriginal families’ and ‘non-Aboriginal families’, with the term ‘all families’ used for families from both groups). The findings are drawn from several survey questions which reveal aspects of the way in which KindiLink may have contributed to children’s capabilities. For some questions, respondents were asked to comment specifically on Aboriginal children. Some participant comments (especially in the 2017 data) suggest that at the time of data collection some of the children attending KindiLink were 4-years old. This is because some children were already attending Kindergarten but occasionally came to KindiLink with their sibling. Thus some families commented on the way in which KindiLink appeared to influence the transition to Kindergarten.

Findings are presented under the following themes:

- Improving children’s capabilities at KindiLink
- Improving children’s capabilities at home
- Improving children’s capabilities through support networks
- Children’s capabilities reflected in their transition to Kindergarten
- Kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of KindiLink children’s capabilities in 2017 and 2018

## 2.1 Improving Children’s Capabilities at KindiLink

This theme is based on findings from the 2016 and 2017 surveys of the KindiLink principals, teachers, AIEOs and families.

### 2.1.1 Principals

In 2016 five principals mentioned the way in which KindiLink had facilitated specific ‘school’ skills, explaining that KindiLink had helped to “*bridge the gaps*” in learning. More specifically they described language development and basic social skills related to “*school behaviours such as sharing, sitting at a table to eat, and listening to instructions*”. Other principals mentioned the importance of KindiLink in giving families the opportunity to try out “*school type activities*” which facilitated a range of social and linguistic competencies. In 2017 four principals made similar observations about the impact KindiLink had on children’s’ key skills. For example:

*The children who did KindiLink last year were our most settled Kindy students this year... [they] adjusted to the routine of Kindy much more quickly than their peers, they were able to sit on the mat and concentrate longer than their peers and their communication and fine motor skills were stronger than their peers.*

### 2.1.2 Teachers

The teachers were asked how effective they thought their school’s KindiLink had been at developing (specifically Aboriginal) children’s capabilities. They were asked to differentiate in terms of the children’s social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities. In assessing KindiLink’s effectiveness in these four domains, teachers could choose ‘highly effective’, ‘moderately effective’, ‘slightly effective’ or ‘not effective’. As shown in Figure 2.1, the majority of teachers in both 2016 and 2017 indicated they believed KindiLink had to some extent supported Aboriginal children’s capabilities. Across all domains, approximately 50% or more of the teachers indicated KindiLink was highly effective.

The teachers’ comments in 2016 and 2017 reinforced their perception that Aboriginal children’s capabilities had improved.

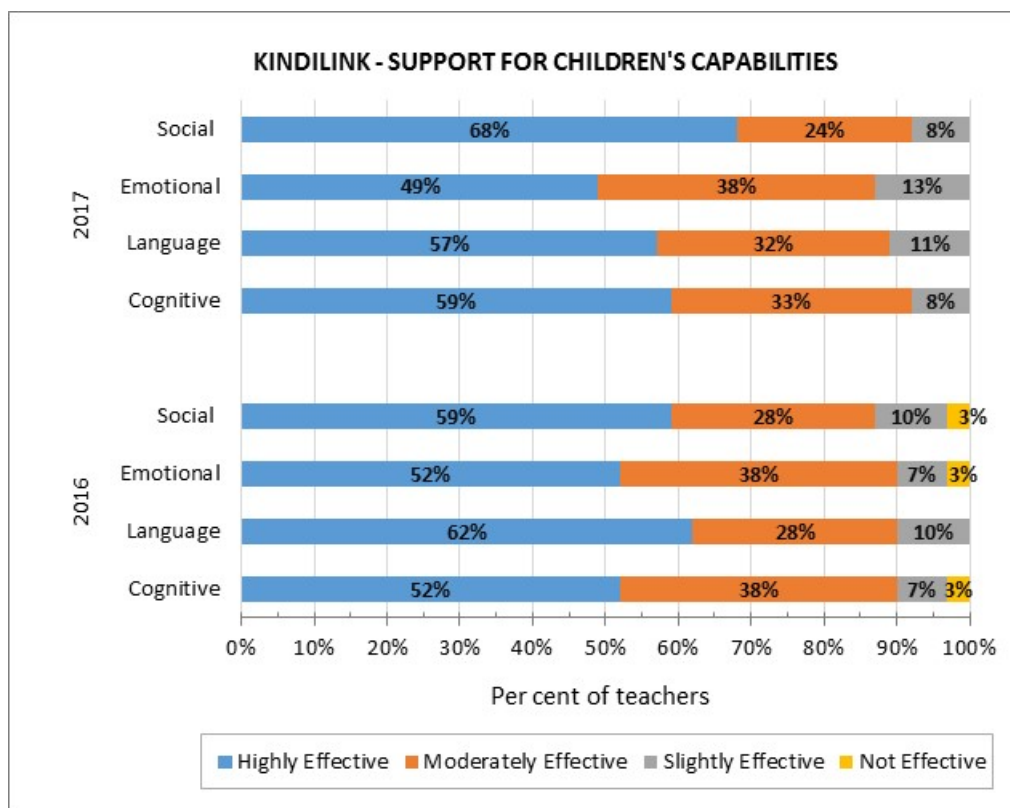
In 2016:

- Four teachers indicated that children had moved from being shy to being confident and socially engaged with other children, and more willing to join in activities with other children and adults.
- Two teachers noted an improvement in the clarity of spoken language and the amount of spoken words, as well as general engagement.
- One teacher commented on emotional capabilities, suggesting that children’s independence, resilience and problem solving improved.
- One teacher noted cognitive improvements based on evidence from the Early Years Learning Framework and developmental milestones.
- Three teachers commented on improvements across all capabilities:

*For the few Aboriginal children that attend regularly, we can see a massive difference in their development and capabilities over the year.*

*When they participated in the kindy induction program they were clearly ahead of many of their peers.*

- Eight teachers described the ways in which the children’s capabilities were supported, reporting that KindiLink had provided an opportunity to discuss milestones with families, initiate early intervention (e.g., speech therapy), model strategies and celebrate successes – all within a safe environment.



**Figure 2.1: Teachers’ views of the effectiveness of KindiLink in supporting Aboriginal children’s capabilities (2016 and 2017)**

In 2017:

There was a greater focus than in 2016 on the children’s cognitive skills (which may explain the increase in their view of the effectiveness of KindiLink in relation to cognitive skills (see Figure 2.1). Becoming familiar with routines and confident with school activities such as sitting on a mat listening to stories were mentioned by over half of the teachers. Some comments provided substantiation. One of the KindiLink teachers recalled a kindergarten teacher observing that KindiLink children had impressive listening and speaking skills and good parent and family engagement was also apparent in children that attended KindiLink.

Interestingly, the majority of KindiLink teachers across three regions (metropolitan, regional town and city) had all worked as teachers for 6 to 9 years. Only the KindiLink teachers in the remote sites would be considered new teachers. Therefore, it is likely that the experienced teachers had previously implemented early years’ educational programs and were experienced in assessing children’s growth, learning and development.

**AIEOs:** AIEOs were not asked to quantitatively assess the effect of KindiLink on Aboriginal children’s capabilities, but their comments reinforced the teacher data.

In 2016:

- AIEOs described ways in which KindiLink had created a positive attitude towards learning, partly as a result of the bonds formed between the children and their families as they engaged in enjoyable activities together.
- AIEOs particularly highlighted language development being noticeable, and for one AIEO developing ‘Two-way Learning’ through language was a significant success of KindiLink:

*Making Two-Way books for the children and also the teacher reads the SAE [Standard Australian English] sentences and I read the Aboriginal English sentences. This keeps the children more engaged in hearing the story in Two-Way.*

- Four AIEOs commented on the children’s growth, skills development and increased confidence throughout the year. For example:

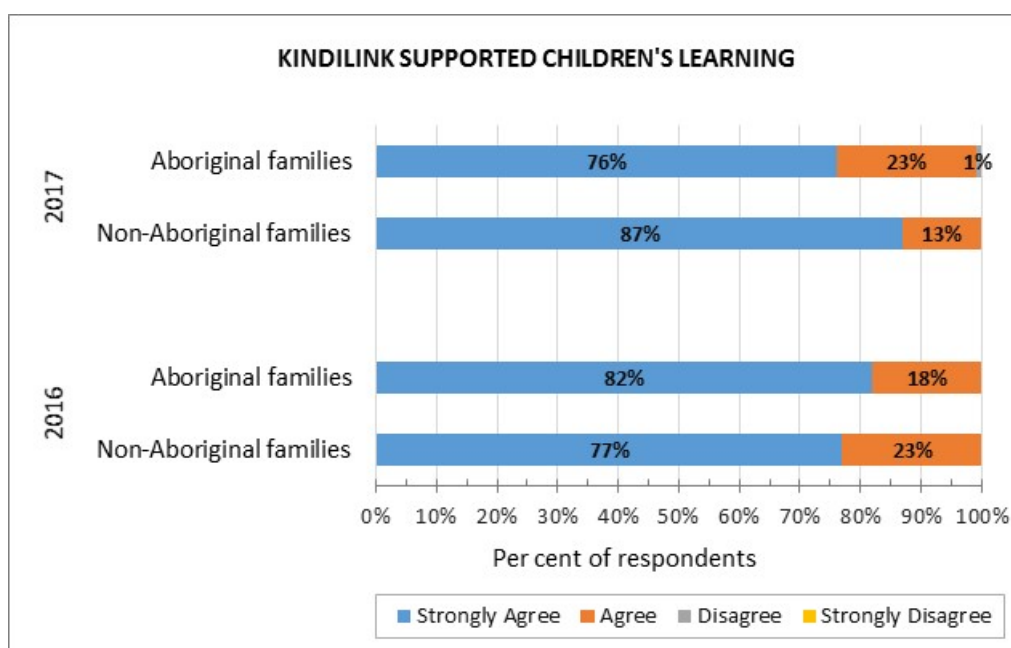
*Being with the children since the start and watching them grow throughout the year. They’ve grown into smart bright children and it’s amazing to see how far they’ve come.*

In 2017:

- AIEOs’ comments reflected similar observations about children’s capacities being nurtured through interaction with their parents:

*Seeing parents spending more time and talking with their children while doing activities.*

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** Although Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families were not asked directly about how KindiLink had improved specific capabilities, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt KindiLink had supported their child’s learning. As shown in Figure 2.2, there was almost 100% agreement (strongly agree or agree) across all years and families that KindiLink had supported their children’s learning. The only exception was one Aboriginal family representative in 2017.



**Figure 2.2:** Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ agreement about whether KindiLink had supported their child’s learning, 2016 and 2017

In 2016, Aboriginal families' comments reflected on how KindiLink provided opportunities for children to learn skills:

- Twelve Aboriginal families talked about building important social skills, such as sharing, manners, learning to listen, sitting on the mat for story time, following rules and being confident communicators:

*[They] use their manners and listen. They love to sing, can't stop them talking, more confident. Learning to share, and sitting to play with others.*

- Eight Aboriginal families identified fostering independence and overcoming shyness, while developing relationships with other children and families as important outcomes:

*He is now confident and completes activities when asked. My child has become more independent, happy to attend.*

- Over half the Aboriginal families referred to the development of specific skills, such as counting, recognising numbers, letters and colours, as well as painting, drawing, riding bikes, singing, craft and fine motor skills such as pencil grip, cutting and gluing.

- Development of language was also mentioned:

*Since commencing KindiLink, his language has changed; he enjoys reading and learning new things.*

*[Child's name] is learning to speak words.*

- Two Aboriginal families commented on the support provided by KindiLink for early learning.

In 2017, comments from Aboriginal families largely reflected the same themes as 2016. There were less comments about the specific activities undertaken, and more comments about social skills. A new theme that emerged related to the transfer of learning activities to the home (five comments):

*My husband is supportive of the program and is always interested in knowing what was taught and always tries to implement the same activities at home with our son.*

As in 2016, social skills (e.g., sharing and listening) and learning outcomes around certain activities (e.g., counting) were mentioned. However, in 2017 there were many more comments specifically about classroom behaviours, such as following instructions, sitting on the mat, becoming familiar with routines and using the toilet:

*At the start my son was very shy and didn't like to follow instructions re: activities. He is now confident and completes activities when asked. The teacher and AIEO helped immensely to make him feel welcome and build confidence and skills.*

Many Aboriginal families mentioned the opportunity to learn new things, or do activities they had not done, or do not do at home. Children becoming increasingly ready for Kindergarten was also a new theme:

*Having my child confident and ready to start full time kindy next year.*

Again, as in 2016, the development of language was highlighted as an area of impact:

*[Teacher's name] said that describing even the smallest thing in detail is good for language. [Child's name] talks heaps now.*

*KindiLink has become an integral part in our son's development. Since commencing the program, his language has changed; he enjoys reading and learning new things...*



In 2017, Aboriginal families indicated they actively sought advice from the teachers about progress and ideas to support their child, and also older siblings. Comments also indicated a sense of pride at participating in KindiLink:

*Our extended family are aware of KindiLink and are always excited to know what our son did at KindiLink.*

*...taking their colourful work home to hang around the house.*

## 2.2 Improving Children’s Capabilities at Home

**Families:** In order to explore the way in which families transferred activities from KindiLink to their home environment as a means of further supporting children’s capabilities and transition to Kindergarten, families were asked to comment about what KindiLink activities they do at home with their child. Comments were provided by 63 Aboriginal families and 21 non-Aboriginal families in 2016, and 61 Aboriginal families and 31 non-Aboriginal families in 2017. Table 2.2 provides a breakdown of the responses according to year and Aboriginality. Note that since many of the respondents referred to more than one activity, the sum of the percentages is greater than 100.

**Table 2.2: Activities from KindiLink that families mentioned being transferred to home**

	2016		2017	
	Aboriginal %	Non-Aboriginal %	Aboriginal %	Non-Aboriginal %
Reading or telling stories	52	62	41	45
Singing and rhymes	33	19	28	23
Painting and/or drawing/colouring	32	43	28	16
Outdoor play/water play/sand	21	14	18	13
Games and puzzles	19	29	26	42
Counting/numbers	14	5	11	-
Colours and shapes	14	-	7	-
Craft/art	13	29	10	32
Writing name/writing	11	14	2	6
Phonics/alphabet/letters	10	10	2	10
Cooking	10	5	18	22

The data presented in Table 2.2 were derived from an open ended question, so the results for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families are not directly comparable. However, despite this, some distinct patterns are noticeable:

- Reading books and telling stories was the most common activity transferred to home by both groups.
- Singing songs and rhymes were mentioned by both groups often in relation to those learned at KindiLink.
- Painting, drawing and colouring was also popular across Aboriginal families in 2016 and 2017 and non-Aboriginal families in 2016.

- Games and puzzles were more popular with both groups in 2017 which may reflect an increased emphasis on LearningGames® in the second year of the pilot.
- Learning colours and shapes seemed particularly popular with Aboriginal families, as was counting and numbers.
- A small proportion of families in both years mentioned specific aspects of early literacy which included learning phonics, the alphabet and letters as well as their child learning to write their name.

Individual comments included: iPad applications, pretend play and dress ups, as well as general comments about ‘playing and learning’, naming objects around the house and speaking in their family language.

In 2017 one Aboriginal parent described how they provided a learning environment based on KindiLink for their child:

*[Child’s name] has a space at home that is set up very similar to the set up at KindiLink so we try to do most of the same things at home like painting, colouring, reading. We love puzzles and dress ups. We have instruments at home so we make music and sing together. Every night we read a story together and [child’s name] loves to help cook at home as well.*

**Teachers:** One of the key aims of KindiLink is to support parents to enhance their children’s capabilities. Thus, encouraging parents to take KindiLink activities home was important in promoting their active role in their children’s learning. Teachers were asked: “Have Aboriginal families talked about how they have done KindiLink activities in their home?” More than four-fifths (83% in 2016, 89% in 2017) responded ‘yes’. Teachers were asked to describe the activities via a comment box (“What activities are these?”). Their comments are summarised in Table 2.3. In both years teachers reported that many of the KindiLink activities and ideas were being taken up by some of the families and used in the home setting.

Teacher comments in 2016 described parents being able to nurture their children’s skills at home while gaining an understanding of the importance of play. Encouraging families to engage in activities at home was also expected to support children’s transition to Kindergarten. Many suggestions for changes to KindiLink put forward by teachers were to do with providing take-home resources, to further facilitate this learning.

Teachers described the types of activities families typically enjoyed at home. The range of activities mentioned was greater in 2017. In 2016, 29 KindiLink teachers responded and mentioned 89 activities, in 2017, 32 responses mentioned 121 activities (these counts include repetitions). When repetitions were excluded there were 18 different activities tried at home in 2016 and 27 in 2017. This count is approximate only – as this was an open ended question, the way activities were expressed sometimes made it difficult to sort into discrete categories.

When comparing the teacher data with the family data on the most popular KindiLink activities that families did at home, both families and teachers reported that reading together was the most commonly transferred activity. Singing and dancing were also commonly mentioned by groups, as were drawing, painting and colouring. However, there were some discrepancies between the teacher and family survey data: playdough was mentioned many times by teachers but not by the families, and outdoor play was reported a great deal by families but not by the teachers.

**Table 2.3:** *Number of KindiLink teachers that stated Aboriginal families reported doing particular KindiLink activities at home with their children*

ACTIVITIES	Responses (n) <sup>1</sup>	
	2016	2017
Reading more together	17	17
Play dough	14	8
Singing songs learnt in class/dancing to music	11	10
Cooking (meals, snacks, pikelets, popcorn, damper)	8	9
Naming shapes, days of week, colours, sorting and matching	6	9
Craft	5	2
Counting	4	6
Drawing, painting, colouring in and collage	4	6
Nursery rhymes	4	4
Pretend play (home corner, cubbies, looking after baby)	3	1
Water play	2	1
Ball games	1	2
Looking for letters	1	4
Gardening	1	2
Cutting	1	1
Outdoor play		2
Talking more with the child		2
Finding items in catalogues and books		3
Creating a face		2
Learning and memory games	1	5
Obstacle course	1	
Blowing bubbles	1	
Finger plays		1
Pretend writing		1
Shopping list		1
Cornflour slime		1
Body awareness		1
Sequencing		1
Fishing game		1
<b>TOTAL # DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>

**Teachers:** In 2016, six teachers reported that KindiLink provided an opportunity for families and children to connect with health organisations, other support agencies and professionals (e.g., speech therapists, hearing specialists, occupational therapists, child health nurses, Aboriginal Medical Services, Child and Parent Centres, Bus Foundation WA, Continence Advisory Agency). Teachers considered the children better prepared for Kindergarten due to the extra support (and early intervention) received from these services. In 2017 teachers also mentioned the benefits of connection to support organisations. A related point that teachers also mentioned (in 2016 and 2017) was about the benefits of a community of KindiLink parents, as they formed friendships and networks of support. In 2017 a teacher described how these informal networks helped to support children’s capabilities:

*The children and their parents have made friends, assisted each other with their children, taught others things they know e.g., recipes. They have been there for their children as they learn routines and assisted their children's social and emotional wellbeing.*

## 2.3 Improving Children's Capabilities through Support Networks

**Principals:** In 2016, many principals noted how KindiLink had increased the confidence of families in seeking additional support, including developing supportive relationships with each other, accessing links to outside support agencies for early intervention, and asking for different levels of help. Principals felt that KindiLink staff were highly proactive in nurturing the health and wellbeing of families and promoting their trust and confidence in school staff, resulting in teacher-initiated referrals that supported early intervention and the potential to improve children's capabilities.

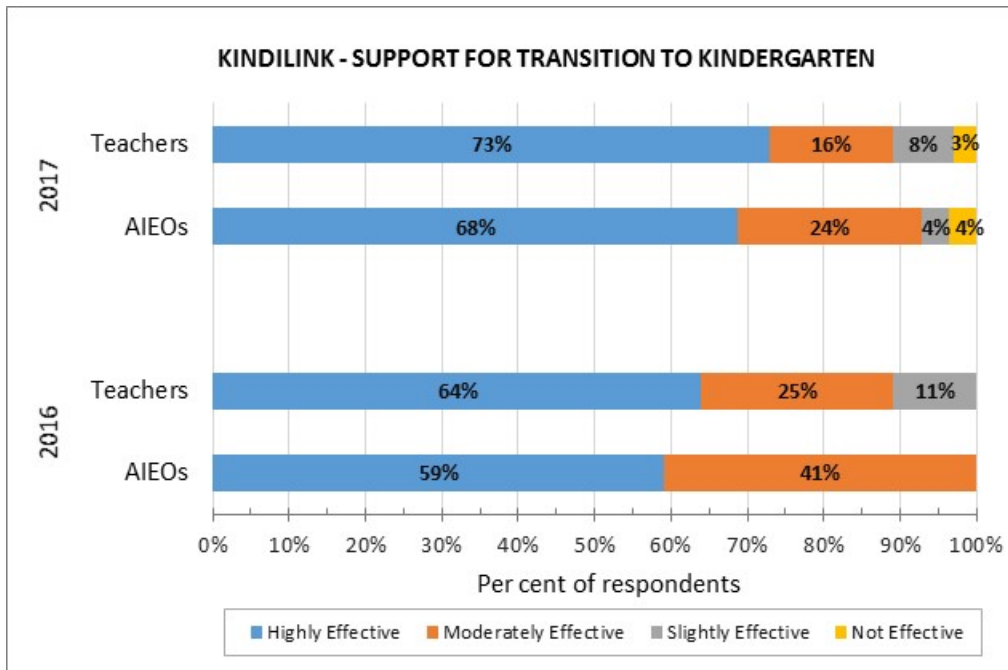
## 2.4 Children's Capabilities Reflected in their Transition to Kindergarten

A child's transition to Kindergarten is a multifaceted process supported by their families as well as other stakeholders such as the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO. Having some understanding of school norms and being able to engage in the school curriculum (in its broadest sense), as well as having a positive relationship with the school are important aspects of a successful transition. An effective transition also indicates the potential for future positive engagement with the school. All participant groups were asked to comment on how KindiLink supported the children's transition to Kindergarten.

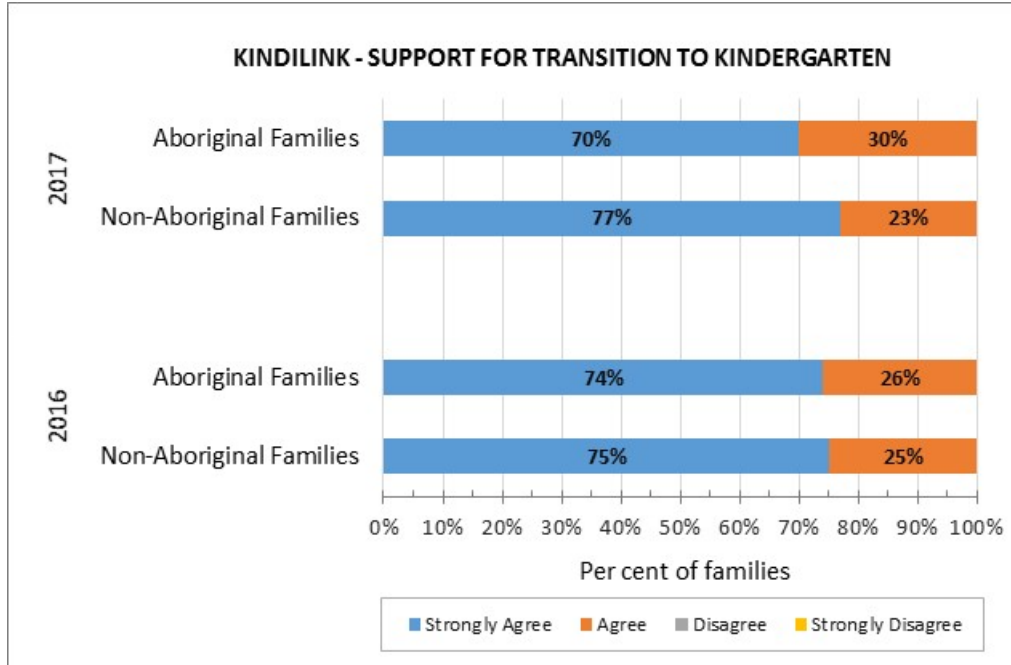
**Principals:** Generally speaking, in 2016 principals anticipated that KindiLink would have a beneficial effect on supporting the children's transition to Kindergarten and comments in 2017 confirmed this was the case, with direct observations.

**Teachers/AIEOs:** In 2016 and 2017 teachers and AIEOs were asked: "How effective do you think your school's KindiLink has been at supporting Aboriginal children and their family in transitioning to Kindergarten?" In evaluating effectiveness teachers and AIEOs could choose 'highly effective', 'moderately effective', 'slightly effective' or 'not effective'. These results are presented in Figure 2.3. Overall, teachers and AIEOs were more likely to indicate KindiLink had been highly effective in supporting the transition to Kindergarten in 2017 than the previous year. Only a small proportion of the 2017 teachers (3%) and AIEOs (4%) thought KindiLink had not been effective.

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families were also asked whether they perceived participating in KindiLink had supported them and their child in starting Kindergarten the following year. As shown in Figure 2.4, in both 2016 and 2017, all families agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case. In 2017, there was less strong agreement from Aboriginal families than in 2016, and as compared to non-Aboriginal family respondents, however there was still 100% agreement within this group.



**Figure 2.3:** Responses by teachers and AIEOs to “How effective do you think your school’s KindiLink has been at supporting Aboriginal children and their family in transitioning to Kindergarten?”



**Figure 2.4:** Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ responses to “Has participating in KindiLink supported you and your child in starting Kindergarten next year?”, 2016 and 2017

Apart from one or two teachers and AIEOs, participants from all groups seemed to agree that KindiLink supports children and families transition to Kindergarten. There were many comments that reinforced this. For example, AIEO data from 2017 substantiated the idea that KindiLink supported children to transition – with a number of comments indicating a great deal of confidence in KindiLink making a difference:

*All our KindiLink kids are well and truly ready for Kindergarten next year.*

The following themes emerged from the principals', teachers', AIEOs' and the families' comments about the ways in which KindiLink supported transition to Kindergarten. There was overlap in the themes of the comments and not all participants made comments that related to each theme.

## 2.4.1 Strategies to support transition

In both 2016 and 2017 many comments described strategies designed to support families' transition to Kindergarten, indicating how proactive KindiLink and school staff have been in supporting families in their transition to Kindergarten.

**All participants:** In both years, all participants mentioned hosting transition/orientation days with KindiLink children joining in kindergarten sessions, visiting the kindergarten room and becoming familiar with the kindergarten teacher. These were all described as positive ways for families to increase their knowledge and become familiar with the kindergarten environment.

**Teachers:** Assisting families with enrolments, answering questions and helping them to understand expectations were also identified as effective and practical ways that KindiLink families were supported in the transition to Kindergarten. In 2017 some teachers expressed that they felt that some students who may not have attended Kindergarten have now enrolled since attending KindiLink. In 2017 several KindiLink teachers referred to the way in which also being the kindergarten teacher enabled them to create continuity and establish trusting and effective relationships with families.

**AIEOs:** In 2016, AIEOs described other strategies they used to help with transition to Kindergarten:

*Through the school we made posters and flyers to have around the community and also give to the families of the child who attended KindiLink two weeks in advance to let them know about the transitioning to kindy.*

In 2017, AIEOs indicated that the connection between KindiLink and the Kindergarten was fostered either formally through organised visits or informally through sharing space. For example:

*We currently share a play area and introduce the parents and students to the Kindy staff.*

*We have set up time with the kindy teacher where we take the KindiLink kids across for an hour.*

## 2.4.2 Building effective learners

**Teachers/AIEO:** In 2016, 10 teachers identified behaviours in KindiLink children that helped them to become effective learners in Kindergarten:

*They are interested in learning, can sit and listen to a story and respond to questions, read along with familiar text and interact with the storyline, and can focus on short learning games and activities.*

Related to this, six teachers mentioned that KindiLink engages children in the school environment which makes them more active participants:

*The children who attend on a regular basis have shown an increase in social skills, more attentive to reading, better participation in singing and dancing.*

In 2017 six teachers mentioned the enhancement of children's social skills and language skills and several AIEOs mentioned that the enjoyment of learning instilled in KindiLink children will help them with coping strategies as they move into Kindergarten. In addition, in 2017 a KindiLink teacher who was also the kindergarten teacher reportedly observed that Aboriginal children entering Kindergarten were at the same level of capability as their peers:

*Pre-K end of year testing has shown that all children who were part of KindiLink have reached the expected level and are on par with their non-Aboriginal peers.*

Other comments in both years focused on how children's growing confidence enhanced their fine motor skill development in specific areas, such as cutting and gluing, painting and other art and craft activities.

### 2.4.3 Becoming familiar with routines and the environment

**Teachers:** In 2016, 14 teachers observed that KindiLink children could positively anticipate school as they were already familiar with the routines, physical environment, required behaviours and language used in the school:

*Consistent rules and routines and student participation in small group activities. Common language used, e.g., 'pack away time', 'fruit time', 'recess'. Encouraging students to be independent, e.g., toileting, washing hands."*

**AIEOs:** The AIEOs also made several comments about the transition to Kindergarten (13 comments in 2016, 18 comments in 2017). Many of their comments were speculative in nature:

*KindiLink enables the parent and child to engage in an environment in order to prepare them for Kindergarten. (2016)*

*...being familiar with the school and routines...will be things they already know. (2017)*

However, AIEOs also directly observed that KindiLink had helped children and families to become familiar with school and school routines in preparation for Kindergarten. Two comments in 2016 indicated an increase in regular attendance due to KindiLink, "We are now starting to see regular parents attending and children knowing routine" (AIEO, 2016) and one AIEO observed the confidence with which KindiLink children started Kindergarten:

*With those that have attended KindiLink you can see that they are school ready. I've seen some KindiLink children start kindy, they had no tears, were happy to stay and not clingy. (2016)*

**Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal families:** Both Aboriginal (four) and non-Aboriginal (two) families noted that becoming familiar with the school was of benefit to their children. Children met teachers and other students and experienced the same routines and structures as school children:

*My family and I enjoy KindiLink as it prepares my children for the school environment. (Aboriginal family, 2016)*

## 2.4.4 Building families' confidence and a positive attitude to school

**Principals:** Overall, in 2016 and 2017 the majority of principals believed KindiLink helped families to become more confident about interacting with the school. Additionally, the children benefited from their experiences at KindiLink, which enabled them to adapt well to Kindergarten. They also felt the children had a more positive attitude to Kindergarten due to their families' increased engagement with the school.

In 2016, many principals noted how KindiLink staff were highly proactive in nurturing the health and wellbeing of families and promoting their trust and confidence in the school. As a result KindiLink had increased the confidence of families in interacting with the school, asking school staff for different levels of help (including assistance with Kindergarten placements) and also linking to support agencies for early intervention. This confidence in parents assisted families to prepare for the transition to Kindergarten.

In 2016, several principals described how some families who were very enthusiastic about KindiLink had enrolled in TAFE to become AIEOs, and had subsequently acquired relief work at the school. One principal in 2017 mentioned KindiLink parents taking ownership of several projects around the school. Another mentioned:

*Parents have already established support groups and are helping out around the kindy, both each other and our staff.*

**Teachers:** In 2017, some teachers noted how parents becoming familiar with the school environment assisted with the transition. One teacher described this enacted in the kindergarten year:

*There is a very useful connection between school and home that has been developed through KindiLink. Indigenous parents are coming inside the classroom for transition and orientation days (which has not been seen in past years). It is known that the first connection with school has to be positive otherwise Indigenous families will be reluctant to come back. All ex-KindiLink children are attending school and getting dropped and picked up on time (which also has been a problem in the past), all parents come inside the classroom to help their child settle into the school day. Parents are also enquiring about school events such as school concerts, open days etc., that the community has usually been reluctant about in the past.*

In 2017, some new themes emerged from the teachers. One strong theme was about parents connecting to the school community and feeling more positive and confident towards their participation at school. Teachers mentioned that parents had a stronger voice in the community, felt confident to raise issues and ask questions. They had also noticed an increase in parents volunteering for the *Parents and Citizens Association* and helping out across the school. The following quote describes how this confidence has positively impacted on the transition to Kindergarten:

*Staff members have commented that there has been a greater engagement in parents, with parents helping in the classroom, providing lunch and recess (prominent issues) and speaking to teachers and AIEOs more freely. Pre-primary teachers were surprised at Kindergarten 2018 pre-primary handover, at the academic and social skills of the upcoming pre-primaries (original KindiLink children) and the parent involvement in regards to children being prepared for school.*



## 2.4.5 Making connections and building relationships

**Principals:** In 2016, eight principals commented on how KindiLink provided school staff with an early opportunity to make connections with families before their children formally enrolled for Kindergarten. This made the transition to Kindergarten much easier, and the strategies employed by the school (such as open days and transition days) were also effective in leading to positive outcomes.

On the first day at Kindergarten one principal observed:

*...children were very comfortable. Families were at ease and they felt a sense of belonging in the room and they were already engaging with each other and the staff in a positive and productive way. (2016)*

This observation was mirrored in the 2017 comments, with principals reporting KindiLink families feeling more at ease in the school environment and the children transitioning well. Principals observed that:

*The children who did KindiLink last year were our most settled Kindy students this year... [they] adjusted to the routine of Kindy much more quickly than they peers, they were able to sit on the mat and concentrate longer than their peers and their communication and fine motor skills were stronger than their peers.*

In 2016, some principals felt KindiLink sent an important message to the community, such as the value placed by the school on Aboriginal families and their contribution to their children's learning. In 2017, similar sentiments were expressed although they were more generally about engaging with the community.

In 2016 and 2017, principals reported that parent engagement in the school had increased through their connections with KindiLink, the kindergarten and the school. Comments included the following:

*Great opportunity for families to establish early connections with school and get a sense of the type of things they can do with their youngsters to ensure they are more ready for the kindy program requirements. KindiLink has provided a great structure to enable families to better acclimatise to the school environment...to make the transition into kindy more effective (2016).*

*The program has enabled our families to become engaged in the learning environment in a welcoming and positive way. It has developed great links between my staff and the parents and they have a much more developed understanding of each other's needs that I have ever witnessed for students coming into kindy. We have had our Kindy enrolment today and the atmosphere has been fantastic. Parents have already established support groups and are helping out around the kindy, both each other and our staff (2017).*

Improved connections between the school, community and outside agencies were seen as a significant outcome by principals in both years.

**Teachers:** In 2016 and 2017, many teachers felt that KindiLink provided an introductory experience that helped families feel at ease in the school environment. They indicated that KindiLink fostered a two-way partnership between families and the school, enabling families to find their voice in terms of what they wanted for their children. Teachers reported that building relationships with families enabled their learning about supporting Aboriginal children and families, and tailored KindiLink accordingly. Teachers expected the relationships that had formed to have lasting benefits as families moved through the school system. The relationship between KindiLink staff and the kindergarten teacher was also identified as an important aspect of the successful transition to Kindergarten. Similar to 2016, seven teachers also mentioned the benefits of a community of KindiLink parents, as they formed friendships and networks of support:

*The children and their parents have made friends, assisted each other with their children, taught others things they know e.g. recipes. Been there for their children as they learn routines and assisted their children's social and emotional well-being.*

**AIEOs:** In 2016, AIEOs described the pleasure of seeing the children grow throughout their time in KindiLink:

*One of the children from KindiLink was enrolled fourth term of school – when [the teacher] was taking a class the child said, ‘Look I’m at school without Mum. My mum dropped me off and left me’. He had a big smile on his face.*

Another AIEO commented:

*Being with the children since the start and watching them grow throughout the year. They’ve grown into smart bright children and it’s amazing to see how far they’ve come.*

AIEOs also commented on KindiLink’s help in building a good working partnership between families and the school:

*We provide everything we need for families and children to keep them coming. We work toward anything we need, build a good relationship with families and children, also give them the support they need.*

AIEOs felt children’s connection and familiarity with school served to enhance their learning when they got to Kindergarten:

*Having our kindy teacher working in KindiLink and rooms next door to each other, it is familiarising families with classes and knowing the teacher helps with transition, and a lot of the routine is very similar.*

*Where the KindiLink teacher was also the kindergarten teacher, the children were very confident,*

*The KindiLink teacher is also the kindy teacher, so it is also helping with transition from home to school for the following year, building relationships early. Families are willing to sit with their children and read to them now that their confidence has been on a high. Families telling us the children wake them early and pushing them to get them to, as they call it, ‘my school’.*

## 2.4.6 Offering more support

**Principals:** In 2016 several principals mentioned the way in which KindiLink had inspired them to offer more support to families to ease the transition to Kindergarten. For example, in response to the success of KindiLink, one school commenced a playgroup for three days a week. In addition, two principals commented on the support provided by the KindiLink team, describing the AIEO and teacher as “*excellent*” and “*highly committed*” with huge capacity to promote KindiLink in the community and encourage new young mothers to engage positively with the school. In 2017 several comments from principals described a partnership that the school and families were able to establish early through KindiLink. This occurred because parents are engaged in the learning environment at KindiLink which was seen as a valuable start for the education journey ahead.

## 2.5 Kindergarten Teachers’ Perceptions of KindiLink Children’s Capabilities

The kindergarten children’s capabilities survey administered in Term 1 of 2017 and 2018 asked kindergarten teachers at the 37 KindiLink sites to consider group-level differences between the children who had attended KindiLink compared to those who had not, and to provide individual ratings of the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities for each child. These results are presented in the following sections.

## 2.5.1 Engagement and/or confidence of KindiLink children

Kindergarten teachers were asked to indicate whether they had noticed differences in the level of engagement and/or confidence of the Aboriginal children who participated in KindiLink compared to those who had not participated. In 2017, just over two-thirds (68%) reported they had noticed differences, compared to 83% in 2018.

In their supporting comments, the kindergarten teachers particularly noted that the KindiLink children were confident about coming into class, less stressed about separating from their parents/carers, and more able to settle into classroom routines and activities. The following are some indicative examples of teachers' comments.

*Children are more confident in a school setting and the parents demonstrate an interest in their learning which in turn inspires the children. Some of my other Aboriginal children are overwhelmed by the sheer number of children and the idea of sitting on a mat in a group. The ones who have been to KindiLink are much more comfortable and at ease.*

*All of the KindiLink children settled into Kindy well and were relaxed and comfortable from day one. They were able to follow routines quickly and they separated from parents and carers well. I think their level of engagement is quite good for this time of the year. I wish all my students had been to KindiLink.*

*The KindiLink children who are now in Kindy have a greater sense of security and safety coming into the classroom compared to children who have just met me this year. The KindiLink children know me and trust me. I have had some parents say that their child could not wait to come to 'Big School'.*

*Yes, without a doubt those students who have the KindiLink experience are far more engaged and happy to attend school.*

*These students seem more confident to come into the class and ready to separate from parents/carers. They also seemed more confident to move between activities.*

*I have noticed a different level of engagement and confidence in the KindiLink participants. Five out of the six KindiLink children separated from their Mothers without separation anxiety. The other child soon settled in and only took two days to start participating in the classroom routines without feelings of being unsure. This is compared to the seven non-KindiLink students who needed a lot of support leaving their parents.*

*Separation anxieties are minimal. Each child has settled into the Kindy routines very well. Most of the children are eager to engage with the physical environment and with their peers and staff, much earlier than past years. I have noticed a shift in confidence and participation during our oral language games (given how early in the year it is). In previous years, it has taken most Aboriginal children much longer to engage with staff and other peers and definitely to engage in oral language games.*

*Students who attended KindiLink in the kindergarten classroom appeared more relaxed in the familiar environment and have settled in well to the routines... They are very aware of all the different activities that "school" has to offer and were asking when the painting and activities were going to start.*

*I consider these children to be more confident in the classroom. They have settled into the daily routine quickly and know what is expected of them. They seem to enjoy coming to School.*

The kindergarten teachers also described the KindiLink children as generally displaying more 'school readiness' skills and behaviours, such as listening and following instructions, being able to sit appropriately during mat-time, and showing appropriate social skills such as turn taking and sharing. Some teachers also

explicitly mentioned that KindiLink students had stronger oral language and/or fine motor skills and better understanding of basic concepts such as colour and shapes. These themes are illustrated in the following exemplar comments.

*Students that attended KindiLink in 2017 and have entered my class this year are far better at following directions and routines of school. They are confident and happy to leave their parents and have come to Kindy with some amazing skills which I believe they acquired at KindiLink. They are great at sharing and taking turns and their attention span when sitting during our mat sessions is great for the start of the Kindy year.*

*There is no question that the KindiLink children display a higher level of readiness than those who do not attend KindiLink. They come in with an additional skill set and knowledge of classroom routines. Children are more familiar with the outdoor play area, toileting and classroom environments. e.g. know the rules around hand washing, fruit time, uniforms from day one, prepared with booklist and resources, better at sharing and appropriate behaviours with peers. Able to sit more attentively on the mat and more engaged. It was very evident during mat times and times of instruction that the KindiLink responded first and appropriately (even those with limited KindiLink attendance). No first day tears. Children who attended KindiLink show a greater interest and engagement with books. This reflects the exposure to a range of different types of texts they had during KindiLink.*

*Definitely the children have been able to follow routines and structure of the classroom quickly and with more ease. We have found that the children are enjoying learning and have longer engagement and concentration with activities. Children who have attended the program appear to have more independence, confidence and resilience. It has also been noted that children who attended the program seem to have more confidence to communicate and have stronger oral language skills. I noticed that in comparison to previous years the children who participated in Kindy-link are also more ready to initiate play independently, especially role play. I also believe they show more turn taking and negotiation skills than previous years. It is very evident which children have and have not attended the program.*

*Some of the KindiLink students have also been helping to teach the students who have not attended KindiLink how to use different toys and follow procedures in the room. This includes holding their hands and leading them to tables or the fruit, mat, etc.*

*...The KindiLink cohort have also displayed more school ready behaviours such as following instructions, being able to sit on our learning mat and attend to tasks. By the end of 2017 my KindiLink children were familiar with a routine and sat down to listen to a story and sing Nursery Rhymes.*

*The students that attended KindiLink have come into the classroom with a stronger understanding of the school setting and how to follow the classroom rules and routines. They are able to identify their names and have already learnt how to use many of the toys and play spaces in the room with respect.*

*All of our KindiLink-ers are great role models for the newbies as they know how to sit on the mat, help out at pack away time and just generally follow the routines of the day.*

*Yes. These children are now in 4 year old Kindergarten and show more confidence with fine motor skills, attentive listening and following school routines. They are also showing good knowledge of basic concepts.*

## **2.5.2 Kindergarten teachers' ratings of students' capabilities**

Kindergarten teachers were asked to rate each child in their kindergarten class according to the extent to which they had so far demonstrated adequate social skills, emotional skills, language-based skills and cognitive skills. These were measured using a 4-point Likert-type ordinal scale with the categories of: 'consistently', 'often', 'sometimes' and 'rarely'. All results in the following sections are presented as

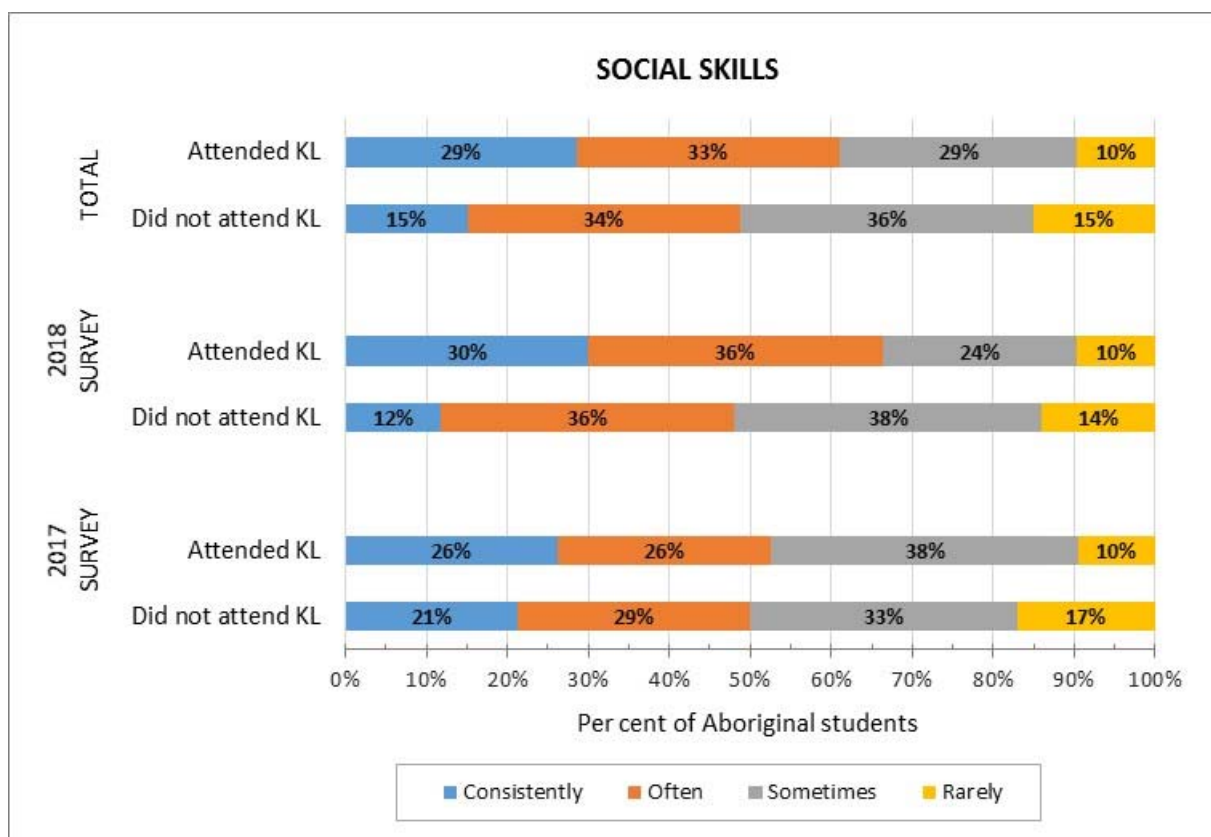
comparisons between the Aboriginal kindergarten students who had, and had not, previously attended KindiLink.

### Social skills

The kindergarten teachers' ratings of the Aboriginal students' social skills capabilities are shown in Figure 2.5. As teachers were unable to provide ratings for 41 of the students, the results are based on 514 students or 92.6% of the total sample.

It is evident from Figure 2.5 that the Aboriginal students who had attended KindiLink were more likely to be rated by teachers as having 'consistently' or 'often' demonstrated adequate social skills on entry to Kindergarten. This was particularly so for the 2018 Aboriginal cohort where 66% of the Aboriginal KindiLink children were rated as having 'consistently' or 'often' demonstrated adequate social skills compared to 48% of Aboriginal non-KindiLink children.

Results of chi-square statistical tests (appropriate for categorical and ordinal data) found statistically significant differences for both the total Aboriginal student sample (i.e. 2017 and 2018 combined) [ $\chi^2(3, 514) = 15.68, p = 0.001$ ] and the 2018 sample [ $\chi^2(3, 325) = 19.48, p < 0.001$ ]. The smaller observed differences between the Aboriginal KindiLink and Aboriginal non-KindiLink students in the 2017 sample were not statistically significant.

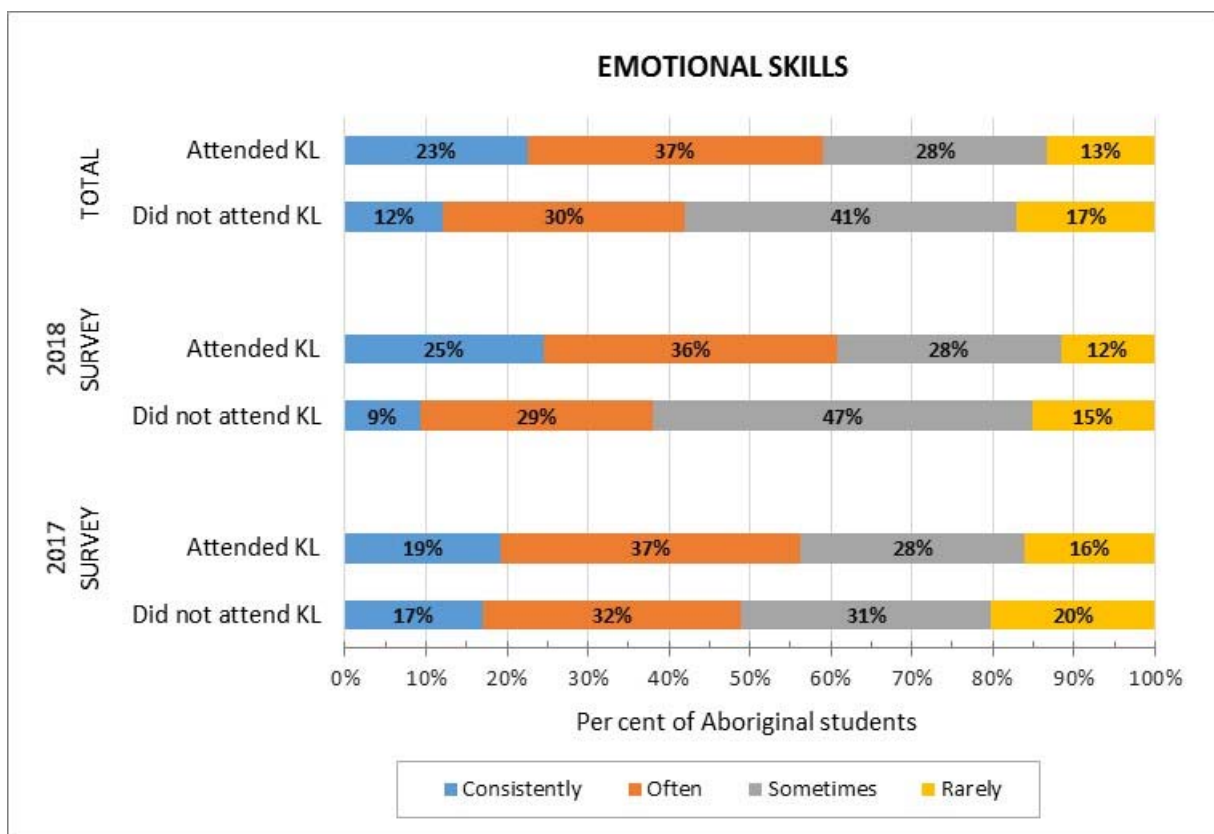


**Figure 2.5:** Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate social skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink

## Emotional skills

Figure 2.6 shows the teachers' ratings of the Aboriginal students' emotional skills on entry to Kindergarten (based on 514 students or 92.6% of the total sample). Whilst the overall ratings for emotional skills were not quite as high as for social skills, the differences between the Aboriginal KindiLink and Aboriginal non-KindiLink groups were slightly larger in magnitude. For example, in the 2018 sample, 61% of the Aboriginal KindiLink students demonstrated adequate emotional skills 'consistently' or 'often' compared to 38% of the non-KindiLink Aboriginal students – a difference of 23 percentage points.

Chi-square tests of independence (appropriate for categorical and ordinal data) revealed statistically significant differences for both the total Aboriginal student sample (i.e. 2017 and 2018 combined) [ $\chi^2(3, 514) = 17.75, p < 0.001$ ] and the 2018 Aboriginal student sample [ $\chi^2(3, 326) = 21.28, p < 0.001$ ]. The smaller observed differences between the KindiLink Aboriginal and non-KindiLink Aboriginal students in the 2017 sample were not statistically significant.

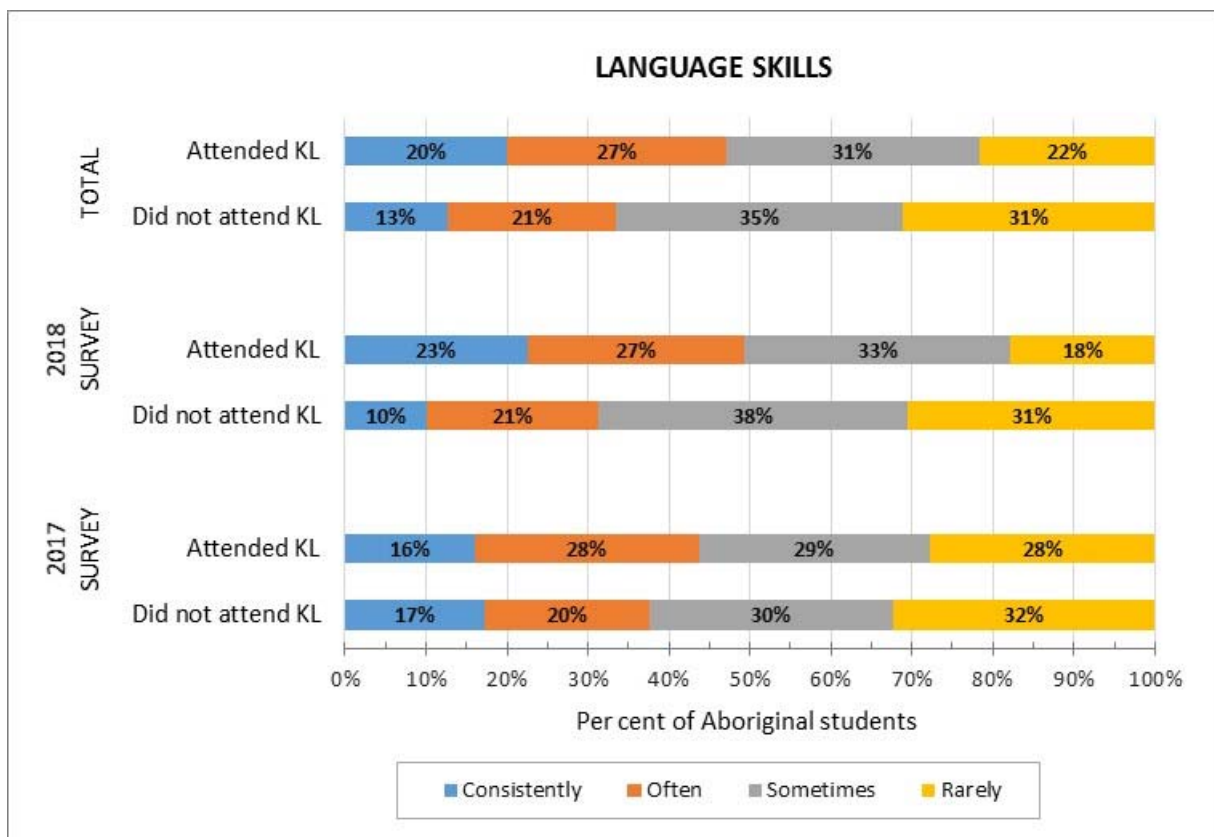


**Figure 2.6:** Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate emotional skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink

## Language skills

Data on language skills were obtained for only 500 of the Aboriginal students, or 90.1% of the total sample. In general, the Aboriginal students' language skills were rated less highly than their social and emotional skills. For example, only 47% of Aboriginal KindiLink students received high ratings (i.e. the top two categories) for language skills compared to 62% for social skills and 60% for emotional skills. However, as shown in Figure 2.7, within Aboriginal each cohort, larger proportions of KindiLink Aboriginal students were rated highly (i.e. 'consistently' or 'often') than non-KindiLink Aboriginal students.

Chi-square tests again revealed that the observed differences for both the total Aboriginal student sample (i.e. 2017 and 2018 combined) [ $\chi^2(3, 500) = 11.07, p = 0.011$ ] and the 2018 Aboriginal sample [ $\chi^2(3, 313) = 14.40, p = 0.002$ ] were statistically significant, but the smaller differences evident for the 2017 Aboriginal sample were not significant.

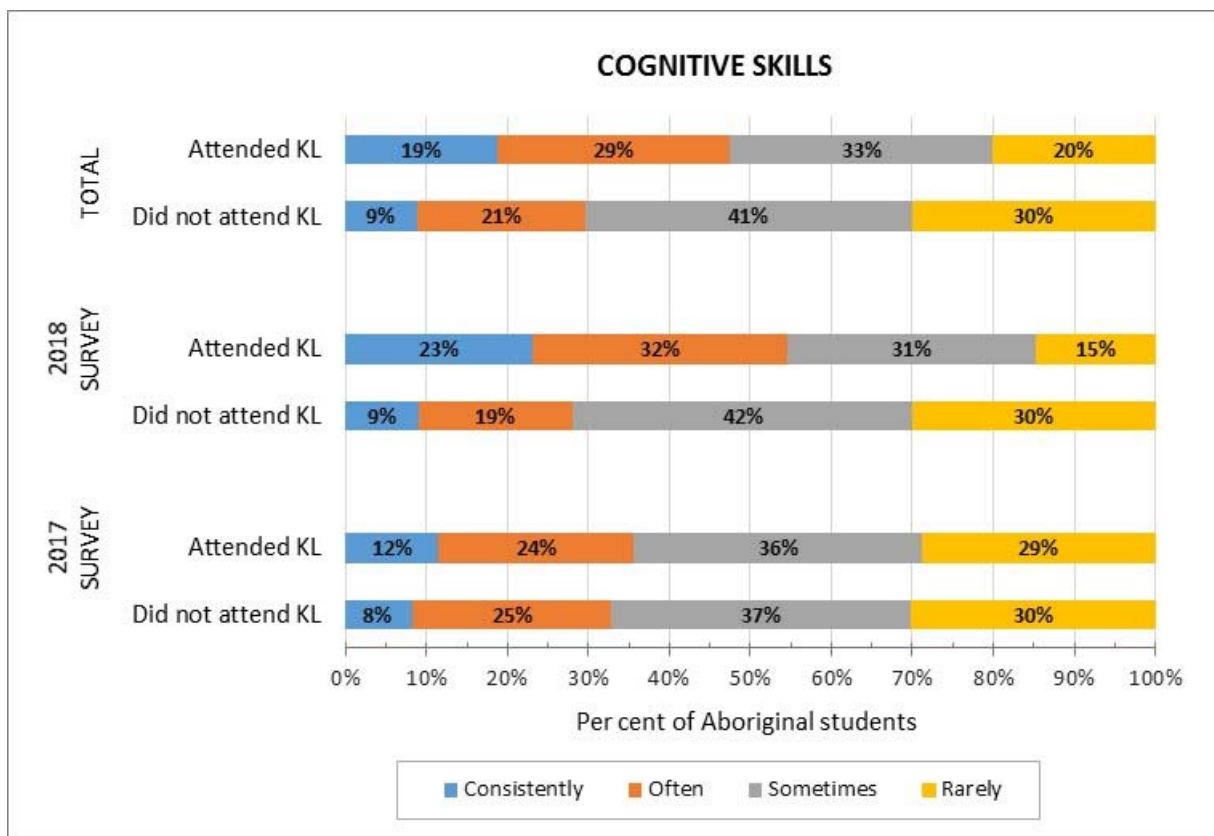


**Figure 2.7:** Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate language skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink

## Cognitive skills

Cognitive skills had the smallest response rate (i.e. 467 students, 84.1% of sample) suggesting the kindergarten teachers were less confident or willing to form a judgement about this aspect of their students' capabilities relatively early in the Kindergarten program. The results for the KindiLink Aboriginal versus non-KindiLink Aboriginal students are shown in Figure 2.8. Consistent with the other capability areas, larger proportions of KindiLink Aboriginal students were rated highly (i.e. 'consistently' or 'often') than non-KindiLink Aboriginal students. The differences are particularly marked for the 2018 cohort, where 55% versus 28% of KindiLink and non-KindiLink Aboriginal students, respectively, were rated as consistently or often demonstrating appropriate cognitive skills - a difference of 27 percentage points.

Consistent with the other capability areas, the results for cognitive skills were statistically significant for the total Aboriginal student sample [ $\chi^2(3, 467) = 17.90, p < 0.001$ ] and 2018 Aboriginal sample [ $\chi^2(3, 307) = 24.74, p < 0.001$ ], but not the 2017 sample.



**Figure 2.8:** Comparison of kindergarten teacher ratings of the extent to which Aboriginal children demonstrated adequate cognitive skills on commencement of Kindergarten according to participation in KindiLink



## 2.6 Pre-Primary On-Entry Assessment Data

Some insight to the longer term progress of the Aboriginal children who attended KindiLink in 2016 is provided by the **pre-primary on-entry assessment data**. Table 2.4 shows the average raw scores for reading, listening and speaking, and numeracy of the Aboriginal children enrolled in pre-primary at the 37 KindiLink sites, broken down according to prior participation in KindiLink (2016 cohort). Consistent with the pattern of results seen for the children’s capabilities on-entry to Kindergarten in 2017, KindiLink children had slightly higher average scores on-entry to Pre-primary (at the 37 KindiLink sites) than the non-KindiLink children. While the largest difference (i.e. 13.9) in the mean scores for the KindiLink (M=42.7) and non-KindiLink (M=28.8) children is evident for listening and speaking skills, the results of independent *t*-tests show that this difference was not statistically significant. Accordingly, the results for reading and numeracy are also non-significant.

It is not possible to generalise from these results, however, it is interesting to speculate whether the KindiLink children’s relatively higher average listening and speaking score in pre-primary is indicative of the emphasis on language development as reported by the KindiLink teachers and AIEOs in 2016. Given that the results of the Kindergarten children’s capabilities survey were more positive for the second year of the KindiLink pilot than the first year, it will be important to continue tracking the KindiLink children to determine the longer term impact of the KindiLink program on children’s social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities.

**Table 2.4** *On-entry assessment results of Aboriginal children enrolled in pre-primary at the 37 KindiLink sites in 2018 according to KindiLink participation in 2016 (means and standard deviations)*

	Reading			Listening & Speaking			Numeracy		
	N	Mean	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
KindiLink	137	<b>47.2</b>	115.7	137	<b>42.7</b>	129.1	141	<b>78.2</b>	100.3
Non-KindiLink	335	<b>41.5</b>	112.5	335	<b>28.8</b>	131.5	337	<b>67.4</b>	102.0
Independent <i>t</i> -test	$t(470) = -0.45, p = .621$			$t(470) = -1.05, p = .295$			$t(476) = -1.06, p = .289$		

## 2.7 Summary

Overall, the evidence suggests that the principals, teachers, AIEOs and families viewed KindiLink as effective in improving the children’s capabilities and supporting the transition to Kindergarten. Comments from the different participants indicated that KindiLink was successful because of the support it provided for families in building their confidence and making connections with the school system, community and wider support agencies, while helping children to develop specific skills. Many families had duplicated or extended KindiLink activities in their homes to further support their children’s capabilities.

In terms of children’s capabilities, although participants were asked about social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic changes in children, many of the comments about children’s capabilities focused on their social and linguistic skills. Perhaps these were seen as key elements of successful transition to Kindergarten. Or it may be that cognitive and emotional competencies were more difficult to identify. Participation in KindiLink was also cited as giving families access to advice, agencies and help for their children, potentially increasing children’s capabilities placing them in a stronger position as they commenced Kindergarten.

Regarding transition to Kindergarten, there was evidence in 2016 and 2017 that KindiLink staff were proactive in supporting positive transitions through a number of strategies they described as effective. In terms of outcomes many comments in 2016 were more speculative, but in 2017 there were many comments indicating a high level of conviction that KindiLink children had transitioned to Kindergarten with greater confidence and ease.

Comments from the principals, teachers and AIEOs in both 2016 and 2017 suggested that the success of KindiLink in supporting children's capabilities and their transition to Kindergarten had not been without its difficulties. Attracting, engaging and sustaining families' involvement was viewed as an ongoing challenge, and participants indicated that the benefits of KindiLink in supporting children's capabilities and transition to Kindergarten could not be realised without their regular attendance. In addition, a few teachers felt the pedagogical mismatch between KindiLink and Kindergarten was a barrier to successful transition between the two settings.

In 2017, just over two-thirds (68%) and in 2018, 83% of kindergarten teachers reported that had noticed differences in the level of engagement and/or confidence in the Aboriginal children who had attended KindiLink and those who had not attended. They noted that the KindiLink children appeared to have stronger social, language and cognitive skills and demonstrated an understanding of the routines and expectations of Kindergarten. They also noted that the KindiLink children appeared to settle quickly and were able to separate from their families with little anxiety.

In terms of the ratings of kindergarten students' capabilities, Aboriginal students who had attended KindiLink were more likely to be rated by teachers as having 'consistently' or 'often' demonstrated adequate social skills on commencement of Kindergarten. There was a statistically significant difference for both the total Aboriginal student sample and the 2018 Aboriginal sample. Whilst the overall ratings for emotional skills were not quite as high as for social skills, the differences between the KindiLink and non-KindiLink Aboriginal students were slightly larger in magnitude. Again, there was a statistically significant difference for both the total Aboriginal student sample and the 2018 Aboriginal sample.

In general, the Aboriginal students' language skills were rated less highly than their social and emotional skills. However, within each cohort, larger proportions of KindiLink Aboriginal students were rated highly (i.e. 'consistently' or 'often') than non-KindiLink Aboriginal students, and the observed differences for both the total Aboriginal student sample and the 2018 Aboriginal sample were statistically significant. The overall lower rating of (English) language skills may be due in part to multiple languages being spoken within families and/or communities which may initially delay the typical language milestones in early childhood.

Cognitive skills had the smallest response rate, suggesting that kindergarten teachers were less confident or willing to form a judgement about this aspect of their students' capabilities relatively early in the Kindergarten program. However, consistent with the other capability areas, larger proportions of KindiLink Aboriginal students were rated highly (i.e. 'consistently' or 'often') than non-KindiLink Aboriginal students. The differences are particularly marked for the 2018 cohort, where 55% versus 28% of KindiLink and non-KindiLink Aboriginal students, respectively, were rated as consistently or often demonstrating appropriate cognitive skills - a difference of 27 percentage points. Again, consistent with the other capability areas, the results for cognitive skills were statistically significant for the total Aboriginal student sample and 2018 Aboriginal sample.

On-entry assessment results for the Aboriginal children enrolled in the 2018 pre-primary program at the 37 KindiLink sites suggest attendance at KindiLink in 2016 may have contributed to greater school readiness in terms of reading, listening and speaking, and numeracy skills. However, the observed differences between the Aboriginal children who did and did not attend KindiLink in 2016 were not statistically significant. Given that the results of the Kindergarten children's capabilities survey for the second year (2017) of the KindiLink pilot indicated more positive results, it will be important to continue tracking the KindiLink children to determine the longer term impact of the KindiLink program on children's capabilities.

## 3. Impact on Improving Attendance

**Q2** What impact has KindiLink had on improving attendance among participating children during their schooling?

### 3.1 Introduction

This section examines evidence about attendance at KindiLink and Kindergarten based on the following data sources:

- **Attendance data:** Summary data on 2016-17 KindiLink registration and attendance (measured by number of hours), and subsequent kindergarten enrolments and attendance for 2017 at KindiLink schools as well as all schools, provided by the Department of Education (WA).
- **Survey data:** Quantitative and qualitative results of the KindiLink staff survey (principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs) and the KindiLink family survey completed by participants in 2016 and 2017.

Registration and attendance at KindiLink was a significant concern for all of the staff involved regarding attracting and recruiting families and supporting on-going and regular attendance. As attendance is linked to positive educational outcomes, staff were also mindful of possible benefits of KindiLink in terms of supporting kindergarten enrolments and improving attendance after KindiLink children transitioned to and beyond Kindergarten. Together, the data sources therefore provided important information and insights regarding:

- schools' foci and strategies that supported increased attendance and participation at KindiLink over time (between 2016 and 2017);
- schools' foci and strategies that supported increased attendance for the target group – namely 3-year-old Aboriginal children;.
- the role of KindiLink in supporting kindergarten enrolments;
- perceived effect of KindiLink on improving the attendance of ex-KindiLink children at Kindergarten. (It is anticipated that this can be tracked in later years as well as the cohort moves through the education system, in pre-primary and beyond).

Findings are presented under the following themes:

- KindiLink enrolment and attendance
- Kindergarten registration and attendance
- Insights into enrolment and attendance

### 3.2 KindiLink Enrolment and Attendance

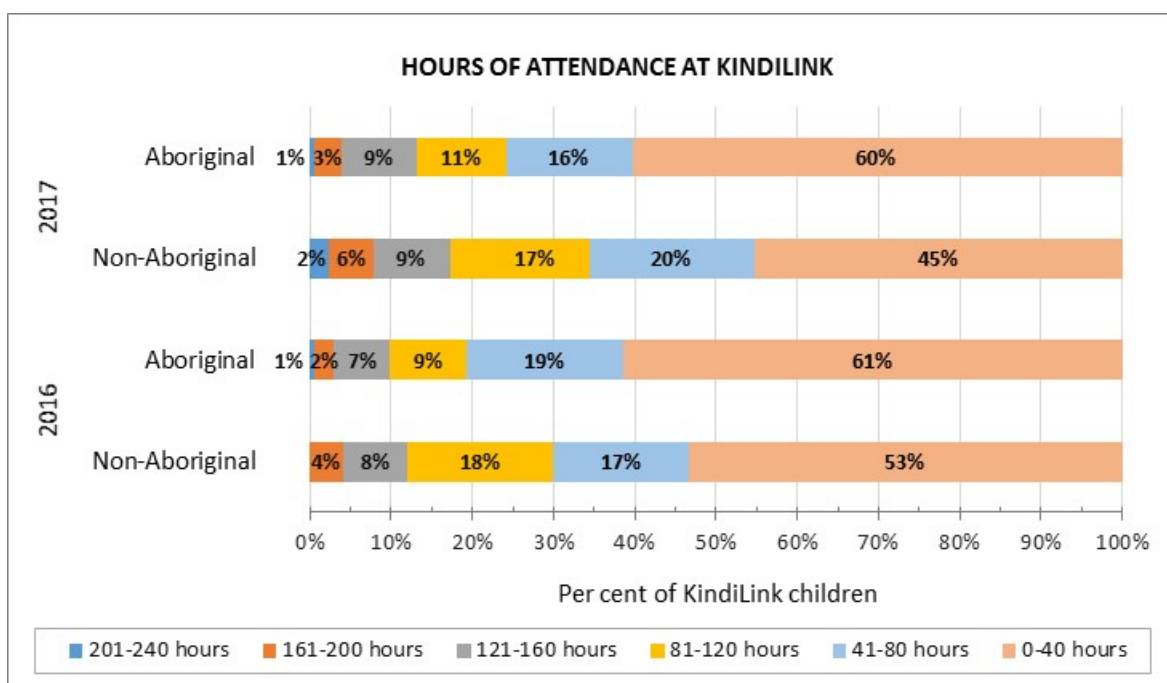
A summary of the number and proportion of 3-year-old Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children enrolled in KindiLink programs in 2016 and 2017 is provided in Table 3.1. There was a slight increase in overall enrolments from 2016 to 2017 (495 -> 516) and the proportion of Aboriginal children increased from 70% to 75%.

**Table 3.1: Number and proportion of 3-year-old Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children participating in KindiLink, 2016 and 2017**

	2016		2017		Total (2016+2017)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Aboriginal children	345	69.7	388	75.2	733	72.5
Non-Aboriginal children	150	30.3	128	24.8	278	27.5
Total	495	100.0	516	100.0	1,011	100.0

Figure 3.1 shows the total hours of attendance (up to a maximum of 240 hours) at KindiLink by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in 2016 and 2017. Attendance hours have been categorised into six groups: 0-40 hours, 41-80 hours, 81-120 hours, 121-180 hours, 161-200 hours and 201-240 hours. The order of the categories is reversed in the graph to aid in interpreting the proportion of children that had high levels of attendance.

From Figure 3.1 it is evident that fewer than 20% of the Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal children attended at least half of the KindiLink sessions (i.e. 121-240 hours). The majority of Aboriginal children attended only 0-40 hours in 2016 and 2017 (61% and 60%, respectively), compared to 53% and 45% for the non-Aboriginal children. The proportion of Aboriginal children who attended at least 81 hours of KindiLink increased from 19% in 2016 to 24% in 2017, and for non-Aboriginal children from 30% to 34%, suggesting a slight overall improvement in KindiLink attendance rates.



**Figure 3.1: Total hours of attendance at KindiLink by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in 2016 and 2017 (per cent per category)**

It is encouraging that high proportions of the Aboriginal KindiLink families, 90% in 2016 and 86% in 2017, indicated they had enrolled their child in Kindergarten. Of the non-Aboriginal families, only 69% of the 2016 cohort said their child was enrolled in kindergarten compared with 94% of the 2017 cohort.

### 3.3 Kindergarten Registration and Attendance

As seen earlier, in 2016 a total of 495 children (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) were registered for KindiLink. Of these, 258 or 52% were reported as having enrolled in Kindergarten at their KindiLink school site in 2017. Table 3.2 shows that the 'transition rate' from KindiLink to Kindergarten at the same school site was higher for Aboriginal KindiLink children (57%) than non-Aboriginal KindiLink children (41%). The proportions of KindiLink children enrolled in Kindergarten at the participating sites are presented in Table 3.3. Whereas ex-KindiLink children made up more than a third (35%) of the Aboriginal students enrolled in Kindergarten at the participating sites, they were only 7% of the non-Aboriginal students.

**Table 3.2: Transition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children from KindiLink in 2016 to Kindergarten at the same school site in 2017**

	2016	2017	
	Registered for KindiLink (KL) N	Enrolled in Kindergarten at same site N	Transition rate (KL to Kindy) at same site %
Aboriginal children	345	196	56.8
Non-Aboriginal children	150	62	41.3
Total	495	258	52.1

**Table 3.3: Enrolment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the 2017 Kindergarten program at the 37 KindiLink sites by participation in 2016 KindiLink**

	KindiLink		Non-KindiLink		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Aboriginal children	196	34.6	371	65.4	567	100.0
Non-Aboriginal children	62	7.4	778	92.6	840	100.0
Total	258		1,149		1,407	

The average attendance rates for 2017 kindergarten children at the KindiLink sites are presented in Table 3.4. The Aboriginal KindiLink children show a slightly higher average attendance rate than the Aboriginal children who did not attend KindiLink (73% versus 72%), however the difference is too small to be of significance. A bigger difference between KindiLink and non-KindiLink children is evident for the non-Aboriginal children (93% versus 89%), but further data would be needed to draw conclusions about the impact of the KindiLink program on kindergarten attendance.

**Table 3.4: Kindergarten average attendance rates at KindiLink sites, 2017<sup>1</sup>**

	KindiLink		Non-KindiLink		Total	
	Children Enrolled	Average Attendance Rate	Children Enrolled	Average Attendance Rate	Children Enrolled	Average Attendance Rate
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Aboriginal children	196	73.4	371	71.9	567	72.4
Non-Aboriginal children	62	92.2	778	88.9	840	89.1
All children	258	77.8	1,149	83.4	1,407	82.4

<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of Education, 7 June 2018

### 3.3.1 Kindergarten attendance risk

As part of Student Attendance Reporting (SAR), the Department of Education uses the following four categories to indicate students' kindergarten attendance risk:

- Severe attendance risk: < 60% attendance
- Moderate attendance risk: 60 to < 80% attendance
- Indicated attendance risk: 80 to < 90% attendance
- Regular attendance: ≥ 90% attendance

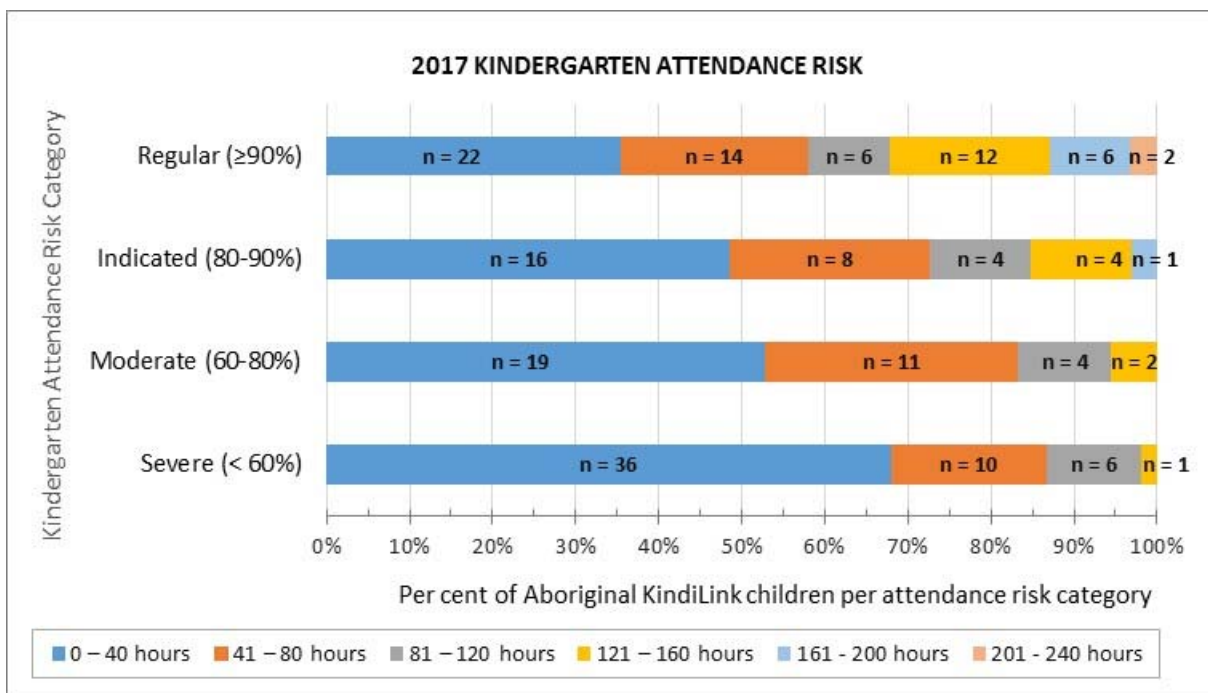
Kindergarten attendance risk data were provided by the Department of Education for 184 of the 196 Aboriginal children who participated in KindiLink in 2016 and subsequently enrolled in Kindergarten in 2017 at the same site. This was presented according to the six categories of KindiLink attendance (i.e. 0-40 hrs, 41-80 hrs, etc.) and four categories of kindergarten attendance risk in Semester 1, 2017. A cross-tabulation of this data is presented in Table 3.5. It is heartening that more than half (52%) of the Aboriginal children were considered to have 'regular attendance' or only 'indicated attendance risk' with attendance rates of 80% or greater. As might be expected from the pattern of results in Table 3.5, there was a statistically significant association between KindiLink attendance category and kindergarten attendance risk category [Chi-square:  $\chi^2(15, 184) = 29.88, p < .05$ ].

Figure 3.2 provides a visual representation of the attendance data (numbers and percentages) to more clearly illustrate the relationship between KindiLink attendance and kindergarten attendance risk. Here it is evident that children who had low KindiLink attendance (0-40 hours) were more likely to be classified as 'severe' kindergarten attendance risk in 2017. It is notable, however, that 58% of the students who had relatively low attendance at KindiLink in 2016 (i.e. 0-80 hours) were nevertheless categorised as 'regular attendance' at Kindergarten in the following year.

**Table 3.5:** *Percentage of Aboriginal children enrolled at the same site for KindiLink and Kindergarten according to 2016 KindiLink attendance and 2017 kindergarten attendance risk categories*

2016 KindiLink Participation (hours)	2017 Kindergarten Attendance Risk*				TOTAL %
	Severe (< 60%) %	Moderate (60-80%) %	Indicated (80-90%) %	Regular (≥90%) %	
0 – 40	19.6	10.3	8.7	12.0	50.6
41 – 80	5.4	6.0	4.4	7.6	23.4
81 – 120	3.3	2.2	2.2	3.3	10.9
121 – 160	0.5	1.1	2.2	6.5	10.3
161 - 200	-	-	0.5	3.3	3.8
201 - 240	-	-	-	1.1	1.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Based on Semester 1, 2017 data provided by the Department of Education



**Figure 3.2:** *Proportion and number of 2017 kindergarten children in each attendance risk category according to the number of hours they attended KindiLink in 2016*



## 3.4 Insights into Enrolments and Attendance from the Survey Data

Evidence from survey data (including the quantitative multiple choice and qualitative comment sections) is primarily based on participant perceptions and anecdotal data provided by principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs, and to a lesser extent for this research question, the KindiLink families.

Attendance was reported as an issue relevant across all KindiLink participants, although some survey questions asked specifically about attendance of Aboriginal families, and therefore a number of survey responses focused on Aboriginal families, as this is the target group for KindiLink.

An analysis of the survey data is presented according to the following themes:

- Attracting, engaging and retaining families
- Reasons for non-attendance
- Reasons for attendance and changes over time.

### 3.4.1 Attracting, engaging and retaining families in KindiLink

Survey data from principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs show a strong consensus that regular attendance is a critical factor for success. The survey captured much anecdotal evidence that those families who attended KindiLink regularly benefited significantly, and poor attendance was a significant barrier to achieving outcomes. In 2016 and through to 2017, the staff felt attendance was a significant challenge for them to address. They put a great deal of resources and strategies in place to encourage regular attendance. In many cases the efforts of the staff were determined, persistent and multifaceted. Strategies involved highly personalised supports, intensive liaison and a range of strategies. The AIEO was identified as central to this work.

**Principals:** In 2016 the majority of principals commented on low participation and difficulties with engagement and retention, however four principals indicated KindiLink had built participation and engagement throughout the year, *“We have seen a steady growth in numbers since the start of the year and the families feel more confident coming into the school”*. The 2016 principals also talked about *“persevering”*, *“having some wins”* and looking forward to building on their current success in 2017. Three principals talked about how hard-to-reach families who were not attending KindiLink would be targeted in 2017.

The 2017 data indicates that improvements have yet to be realised (for example, improvements were noted by four principals in 2016, however in 2017 there were only two references to noticeable improvements in KindiLink attendance – although two comments expressed optimism). The disappointment of the principals is reflected in the following comment:

*Fabulous, welcoming staff helped: but really, we did not overcome the challenge of poor, irregular attendance. (2017)*

Nevertheless, the following comment demonstrates the determination of the principals and their belief that in the long term KindiLink would help improve attendance at Kindergarten and years to come.

*It has been difficult and sometimes demoralising not being able to sustain regular attendance. In winter attendance fell off and we despaired of getting it back up. Some of our early year attendees fell away due to domestic violence and drug issues...I really believe that we will be playing the long game and that over time we will build a culture*

*where attending KindiLink with your child when they are three is the norm for an increasing number of families. (2017)*

Despite KindiLink attendance not dramatically improving, in 2017 four principals did report improvements regarding kindergarten attendance and attributed this to the good attendance of ex-KindiLink children. The principals felt that forming relationships with parents at KindiLink had improved the attendance of their children at Kindergarten.

Generally, the story of attendance, from the principals' perspective did not seem to change significantly between 2016 and 2017. The following summary points raised by principals in 2016 and 2017 provide some valuable insights:

- There was broad agreement that the benefits of KindiLink are greater for families with regular attendance.
- Difficulties were experienced with recruitment, engagement and participation, regular attendance and retention, in 2016 and 2017. Several schools in 2016 and 2017 reported relatively low participation:

*Great staff, excellent program, and students who attend benefit, however, numbers have fallen away and we only average two to three students. For the small number of children we have had attending, KindiLink has certainly been beneficial, but unfortunately we have not had a high number of families attend. (2016)*

- Schools have worked very hard to increase attendance:

*Lots of work initially to get the information out there etc. Also takes a lot of time to continually follow up with families and make attempts to get more families in. (2016)*

- Many strategies were trialled including partnering with other organisations and NGOs, transport services and advertising on social media:

*It has been difficult to attract families to KindiLink, even though we have utilised our AIEOs and the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy team. (2016)*

Overall, 2017 data indicated that schools are still struggling with the attendance – in the words of one principal (as mentioned above), “we will be playing the long game”. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence from 2017 indicates there have been some gains made where KindiLink children show regular attendance at Kindergarten. This perhaps reflects the fact that the majority of principals across remote, metropolitan, regional town and regional city sites had been at their school up to and over six years, suggesting they know the community and families and understand the way in which change takes time.

**Teachers:** Like the principals, the KindiLink teachers argued that attendance at KindiLink is critical for success. They also put a great deal of time and energy into strategies to attract, engage and retain families for whom KindiLink was designed. It was interesting to note that the reasons given for non-attendance for Aboriginal families were the same across all sites whether remote, metropolitan, regional town and regional city.

Recruiting new families and maintaining the participation of current families were mentioned as significant challenges in 2016. Recruitment drives for new families were only mentioned specifically a few times by the teachers in 2017, although perhaps this was implied in their general ongoing concern about low attendance.

The theme of low attendance continued throughout the data collection period. In 2016 two teachers commented on the lack of commitment from some participants. They explained that some families came to KindiLink for a “break”, or “drop their kids off with Nana and leave”. Others found irregular attendance

disappointing and claimed that some families did not engage in the activities. They expressed the view that the lack of attendance meant there was not enough time for development to occur. These ideas were also present in the 2017 data:

*Unfortunately very few of the children attend on a regular basis, or they come for a few sessions in a row and then do not attend for an extended period. (2017)*

Some new insights offered by teachers in 2017 included the impact that fluctuating numbers had on their ability to plan:

*Family attendance, trying to cater for the right number of craft activities. Not knowing who will turn up on the day. (2017)*

*...so much time went into carefully planning experiences that only a couple of children got to enjoy. (2017)*

On the other hand, one teacher pointed out that the low attendance made KindiLink easier:

*The program although not always well attended by families, the social development within families and the support through the activities and the opportunity to have conversations around Triple Parenting program is made easier with smaller numbers. (2017)*

Strategies teachers described to attract, engage and retain families were similar to those mentioned by principals, and were much the same in 2016 and 2017. They included home visits, promotional work online and through other community organisations, KindiLink in the park, the use of encouragement, support and communication with families and most importantly liaising with the families. It was apparent from their comments that this liaison work was intensive:

*Our greatest strategy for attendance is our Community Child and Maternal Nurse who goes to each of the families' homes and collects the children to bring them to the KindiLink sessions. When she is not in town (she is here three weeks on and one week off) the attendance decreases significantly. (2017)*

*I can't think of anything to change but the extra time given for liaison is essential and I am concerned what will happen when this is reduced. Each cohort of parents still need the same amount of encouragement and follow up to try and get them attending, especially in an area that is has so many community issues. (2017)*

Although KindiLink targets three year old children, teachers reported that younger siblings attend. When teachers were asked what they would change about KindiLink, in 2017 several mentioned changing the way attendance was recorded to capture all participants. The data templates provided were restricted to three year old children, but in reality teachers – in 2016 and 2017 – reported that they catered for many younger siblings as well.

*I would change the attendance sheets to show the total number of children who attended each session regardless of age. A few weeks ago I had 11 children at one of our sessions but I was only able to record two of them. I don't feel it gives a true reflection of what is happening in a KindiLink session. (2017)*

Some teachers explained that KindiLink assisted families to make connections with the school, which helped improve attendance and the engagement of older children in the school system. These themes were also present in the 2017 survey results. In 2017 one teacher commented that:

*Parents seem to be more comfortable in the school setting and their children are wanting to attend every day! (2017)*

Despite their best efforts the many teachers felt disappointed that in both 2016 and 2017 they had been unable to attract more of the families to attend KindiLink on a regular basis. They were also somewhat

frustrated by the fact that they were unable to attract more of the families that they felt would benefit the most, to attend KindiLink.

**AIEOs:** Like the principals and teachers the AIEOs were dedicated to encouraging families to register for and attend KindiLink. Many of the AIEOs felt that this was a major role for them and were disappointed when they were not more successful than they had hoped. In 2016 and 2017 comments from the AIEOs about KindiLink revealed that despite a concerted effort to recruit and retain families, they were not always successful. One AIEO commented:

*We have door knocked and put flyers out but we don't get the families here. (2016)*

Another AIEO commented:

*My own personal experience is that I find it hard to get the families in. You try your best and talk to them and they agree with you and they don't show up, and when you ask them why they just say next week, so you know it's not going to happen. You even go around there to see if they need any help to get there and ask if they want to be picked up and dropped off. They say 'yes', then they don't answer the phone or they're not there when you go around.' (2016)*

As attendance was seen as one of the central AIEOs' roles, the 2017 AIEO survey data provided rich insights into gains and losses on this issue since 2016. Generally, 2017 saw similar themes emerge to 2016 – that it was challenging and intensive to maintain attendance. At least one AIEO however reported that their strategies were working:

*Working in an Aboriginal Kindy with a bus service... At the same school, I have seen dramatic change in attendance and participation from our community. (2017)*

*The attendance in our classroom has increased due to a parent telling other parents about the program, and the fantastic teacher. (2017)*

Conversely there were some regressions:

*Starting KindiLink back in 2016 we did start off with a couple of [name] families who attended, not on a regular basis but they did come in...This year the challenge is far greater. We have spoken to some families, put up our KindiLink posters and spoken to various organisations that have regular contact with families. (2017)*

In 2017, AIEOs were asked what strategies they used to encourage attendance. Strategies mentioned were similar to 2016: promotion (flyers), home visits, encouragement, transport, and outreach (KindiLink in the park). One AIEO explained:

*[We] have not found an answer to this yet. Our numbers have not increased this year and that will be my main focus continuously....A lot of oral communication, shopping centres, cultural events, family and friends, Facebook page myself, my child and others wearing KINDILINK t-shirt when out in the community, posters, newsletters. My connect page regarding my role. Making a room a culturally quiet room where both parents/carers feel comfortable to come. (2017)*

Despite the efforts made by the AIEOs attendance at KindiLink did not dramatically improve. However, there were small pockets of success, which demonstrates that success was likely to improve slowly and as a result of continuing and consistent efforts.

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** In 2016 and 2017 the families who completed the survey were more likely to be the ones who fully participated in KindiLink, thus their survey responses were very supportive of

KindiLink and their responses made no reference to attendance being difficult for them. Family survey data did identify aspects of KindiLink the families liked and the activities they enjoyed, providing insights into some of the reasons for their ongoing attendance – for more detail see theme *Reasons for Attendance* in the final part of this section.

### 3.4.2 Reasons for non-attendance

**Principals:** Generally, in 2016 and 2017 principals expressed disappointment in the levels of attendance at KindiLink. However, many indicated how determined they were to keep working on this issue. Their responses to the survey offered the following insights:

- There were difficulties reaching Aboriginal families specifically, and principals acknowledged that the families who did not attend were more likely to be the target group for this initiative:

*We are finding it a challenge to really engage the families who need to be involved. We had great interest from non-Aboriginal families but only limited interest from Aboriginal families. (2016)*

*I believe that the families that readily engage with KindiLink are those most likely to have regular attendance once they enter Kindergarten anyway. The parents that already feel comfortable in the school, have morning routines established, are looking forward to their child being confident and successful at school are those most likely to come to KindiLink. (2017)*

- Community issues greatly impact on attendance (family violence, inadequate housing, drinking, fighting between families, and families from other cultures attending and impacting on Aboriginal attendance).

Most principals indicated that they were prepared to continue their efforts until KindiLink became a regular part of community life, in the hope that attendance would then cease to be a major issue.

**Teachers:** In 2016 and 2017 teachers were asked: “When Aboriginal families have not attended sessions, what feedback have they given?” They were provided with multiple choice reasons, including sickness, cultural reasons, holiday, financial, and too much effort. Overall, the pattern of responses was the same in 2016 and 2017. In both years “being sick” was the main reason cited for non-attendance and also almost all teachers also ticked “cultural reasons”. “Holiday” was a less commonly cited reason, and in both years only a few teachers chose “financial” and “too much effort”.

Teachers offered additional comments and again the responses of 2017 echoed those of 2016. These included transport challenges, court appearances, work commitments and children who sleep in or want to stay at home. Domestic or drug issues were also identified, “*Personal problems that the families have, create a big problem for numbers at our KindiLink. It is often the last priority for some of the families*” (2016). Other reasons included: having too many children to care for (or new-borns), moving house, school events and going out of town to visit family or community. In 2017 reasons such as: funerals, wet weather, a fly-in-fly-out partner at home, sorry business, Department of Community Protection intervention, rent inspections and shopping days were new inclusions.

When asked about why families withdrew from KindiLink in both years most responses related to families moving away, the child beginning day-care, or more serious issues related to the personal situations in which families found themselves. Job opportunities and further education were also cited.

It was evident that the teachers, like the principals, saw lack of attendance as a major obstacle to the success of KindiLink. When asked to identify barriers to effectiveness of KindiLink, six teachers commented that progress had been hindered by lack of attendance, and some teachers commented that the lack of attendance made it difficult to assess the outcomes. Like principals, teachers were also disappointed that their efforts to encourage Aboriginal families to attend had not been as successful as they wished.

**AIEOs:** In both 2016 and 2017, AIEOs reported that families faced pressures and competing commitments that impacted their attendance (e.g., sorry business, shopping days, families in transit). Others noted death and sickness in the communities led to a lack of interest and non-attendance for some families:

*It has been challenging due to family circumstances of our families that are out of our control. For not attending at times, it felt 'what are we doing wrong?' Until a few of our young mums explained to us: 'winter time is cold and with sickness and not being school age sometimes we just like to lay in because in two years we are going to have to get up every day no matter what' (families' words). I totally understand. Having families being able to relay how they are feeling and their reasons is also another big achievement of families feeling comfortable to open up to us. (2016)*

In both years transport was identified as an issue for families. One AIEO, when asked what they would change commented:

*Offer transport to pick up our families. This seems to be the biggest barrier to attendance. (2016)*

New insights from the 2017 survey data included cultural issues. In 2016 AIEOs' only comments about culture were about a commitment to being inclusive of all cultures. However, in 2017 some AIEOs reported that Aboriginal families were reluctant to attend alongside participants from other cultures, and this had the effect of discouraging the Aboriginal families. In 2017 there was more reflection about whether KindiLink should be a space just for Aboriginal participants, or not.

### 3.4.3 Reasons for attendance

Despite the general disappointment of many of the KindiLink staff, some accomplishments and positive outcomes were noted. It is important to acknowledge aspects of KindiLink that supported and encouraged attendance of KindiLink families.

**Principals:** In both 2016 and 2017 principals were thinking in a long-term way about any improvements in attendance that KindiLink might affect. Principals were confident that forming relationships with the families improved the attendance at KindiLink and in years to come. There was also anecdotal evidence from 2017 that indicated that gains made at KindiLink are passed onto kindergarten attendance.

**Teachers:** In 2016 and 2017 teachers were asked via a multiple choice question: "When Aboriginal families come a lot, what reasons have they given?" The results of 2016 and 2017 could not be compared due to a disparity in the data. Nonetheless the 2016 results are presented here as it provides insights into what made KindiLink worth attending for the families (and the 2017 comments did not contradict these findings). Reasons included, 'fun', 'child's learning', 'friends', 'something to do' and 'other'. Respondents could choose more than one answer. In 2016 the majority of the 28 teachers who responded ticked "child's learning" (100%), "fun" (96%) and "friends" (82%).

In 2016, comments focused mainly on the social networks of adults (linked to the high percentage of teachers who ticked "friends" as the reason why families attended KindiLink). Six comments expanded on the

importance of friends and socialising, which signalled that this is a significant reason for families to attend. Ten additional comments included families' views of KindiLink as having great benefits for their children, and children being very keen to come (with some not wanting to go home). KindiLink was seen as good environment to be in, and there was mention of library sessions offering a good link to resources.

In 2017, teachers' comments also mentioned the sense of belonging/community, networking and support among parents and the enthusiasm of the children driving attendance. As in 2016, teachers reported that parents valued KindiLink and the good start it provides for their children. New remarks included parents' enjoyment in engaging with their child and watching their children learn. The library resource was not mentioned in 2017, but in one survey the air conditioning was noted as being attractive on hot days.

Although the children's learning was the primary reason given for attending KindiLink it is apparent that building social networks for the parents was also an important dimension that made KindiLink enjoyable and meaningful for parents. The building of such networks can help encourage families to attend. It was also interesting that one of the reasons given was that it gave the families '*something to do*'. It appears that building relationships with the families and ensuring they play an active part in the process, is of critical importance when it comes to strategies for encouraging the families to attend KindiLink.

**AIEOs:** The AIEOs were not asked directly about why families attended KindiLink. However, their insights about attendance provided throughout the survey reinforced the comments on this issue that were provided by the teachers.

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** The 2016 and 2017 survey for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families did not ask directly about reasons for attendance. However, they were asked, "*What do you like doing at KindiLink?*" Many comments from families here and throughout the survey, in both years, indicate that families see value in KindiLink, as well as enjoyment, and that their reasons for coming involve personal satisfaction as well as aligning with KindiLink's objectives:

*KindiLink is always a pleasure to attend. I love the fact that [my child] is learning how to interact politely and engage with other children her age and learn about aspects of Noongar language and culture. The activities are always engaging and exciting, I love that [my child] does things for herself here and she is very familiar with the KindiLink routine. I also love that parents develop relationships as well as our children. (Aboriginal family, 2017)*

*Seeing my child have the freedom to explore different activities and learn new things. I like watching the interaction between the teaching staff and children and how they facilitate activities based on my child's interests. I also like the diversity of activities and the good relationships formed between parents and teachers. (Non-Aboriginal family, 2017)*

*My family and I enjoy KindiLink as it prepares my children for the school environment. (Aboriginal family, 2016).*

### 3.5 Summary

In 2016, principals, teachers and AIEOs expressed strongly that the regular attendance at KindiLink was critical for having an impact on individual families and children. It is evident from the survey data that attendance was a central concern for school staff in both 2016 and 2017. It was evident that an enormous effort was made by principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs to improve attendance, and that these efforts continued into 2017.

The strategies they described using were intensive and time consuming (liaison with the community, home visits, transport services) and did not considerably change in 2017 from 2016. Given their efforts, many of the staff were disappointed in the attendance of families, in particular the low attendance of Aboriginal families.

The survey data provided some insights into the difficulties faced by families to attend consistently – families facing sickness, needing to travel for cultural reasons, lack of transport, drug and alcohol issues and other pressures and competing commitments. The reasons cited for non-attendance of Aboriginal families did not differ on the basis of location (i.e. remote, regional town, regional city or metropolitan). Many of the factors affecting attendance are outside the school's sphere of influence.

School staff, especially principals, did express optimism that KindiLink would have longer-term benefits by supporting successful transition to Kindergarten, and the ongoing impact on attendance in later years at school. This link appears to be validated by attendance data, and 2017 anecdotal data (especially present in principals' surveys), where 2016 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal KindiLink children were described having better attendance at Kindergarten in 2017 than Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children who had not attended KindiLink.

It is interesting to note that in both 2016 and 2017 almost 90% of Aboriginal KindiLink families indicated that they had enrolled their child in Kindergarten. The percentage of non-Aboriginal KindiLink children enrolled in Kindergarten was slightly less in 2016, (80%) but increased in 2017 (91%). This suggests that the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families saw benefits in KindiLink and were committed to attending school after KindiLink.

Given the overwhelming support for KindiLink from the families that attended, it is possible that other families will come to see the benefits and feel more encouraged to overcome some of the challenges preventing them from attending KindiLink. However, there were ongoing concerns expressed about the difficulty of KindiLink attracting 'hard to reach' families, those families who were seen as potentially benefiting the most – and this concern seems to be present more in 2017 than in the 2016 survey.

Some principals, teachers and AIEOs expressed a sense of despondency. They felt that their best efforts had not been very successful. However, a few comments also conveyed a sense of optimism that the strategies would eventually work. At least once in all surveys there were comments that attendance was really good or improving.

There was feedback showing that some strategies worked, such as, transport services and word of mouth (i.e., current KindiLink participants speaking highly of their experience to others in their community). Some other feedback suggested that more Aboriginal families might attend if they were not working alongside the non-Aboriginal families. This of course could create other issues in the community although it may encourage more of the target group. The inclusion criteria and its effect on attendance is something that has become a more complex and visible issue in 2017, decisions were based on local circumstances and consultations between the principal, KindiLink staff, attending families and community, and is something with which schools are still grappling.

Principals, teachers and AIEOs indicated that tackling the issue of attendance will take time and continued effort. Several comments indicated a resolve to not "give up". One AIEO was particularly insightful in making sense of KindiLink attendance issues:

*Aboriginal families take a long time to trust and often observe from outside beforehand.  
Our metropolitan families are different to community as in community you have the drive*



*from one or more senior members who have that respect to get others to attend. Our Aboriginal population has changed in our area due to housing and more families entering the work force or going back to school. Do not look at number of attendance as success or not. One out of ten Aboriginal families attending is successful, as natural caregivers; it will extend back into community. (AIEO)*

The principals indicated they were “*playing the long game*”. They felt that cultural change is slow and schools would need to be persistent in order to see success. It was evident that even when the benefits of KindiLink become widely known in the community, persistence and resilience would still be needed. To facilitate further recruitment and to sustain participation, investment in supporting AIEOs and early childhood trained teachers would be necessary. It is interesting to note that many of the principals have been in their particular schools for an extended period, they know their communities very well and they seem determined to engage Aboriginal families in KindiLink thought an ongoing and multifaceted process in which families themselves, are one of the key ambassadors for KindiLink.

## 4. Impact on Capacity and Confidence of Families/Carers as their Child's First Educators

Q3. How effective has KindiLink been at building the capacity and confidence of families/carers as their child's first educators?

### 4.1 Introduction

Supporting and enhancing family and caregiver skills as their child's first teacher is a central element of KindiLink. Research suggests that family engagement in their child's learning is a critical factor in enhancing children's learning and wellbeing, the transition from home to school and increased school success. Increasing the capacity and confidence of families also has the potential to build relationships between home and school and for parents/carers to be active partners in their child's school education. KindiLink assisted families to build on and learn new skills, by observing how their child valued and enjoyed these experiences and by engaging in learning with their child. Additionally, KindiLink was shown to support parents to become more confident within the school setting, which ensures that what is learnt at KindiLink may be consolidated and extended at home. This also helps the child and their families establish a lasting connection between home and school. One AIEO explained:

*As an Aboriginal educator, we need to build the confidence of Aboriginal parents and carers as their child's first educator in getting their child ready for school, to build positive relationships with the families in the community and school, and to build the capacity of the parents and families is so very important. (AIEO, 2016)*

This section presents data about building the capacity and confidence of families/carers as their child's first educator, based on evidence from the principal, KindiLink teacher and AIEO survey in 2016 and 2017 and the family survey in 2016 and 2017.

Findings are presented under the following themes, focusing on Aboriginal families in particular:

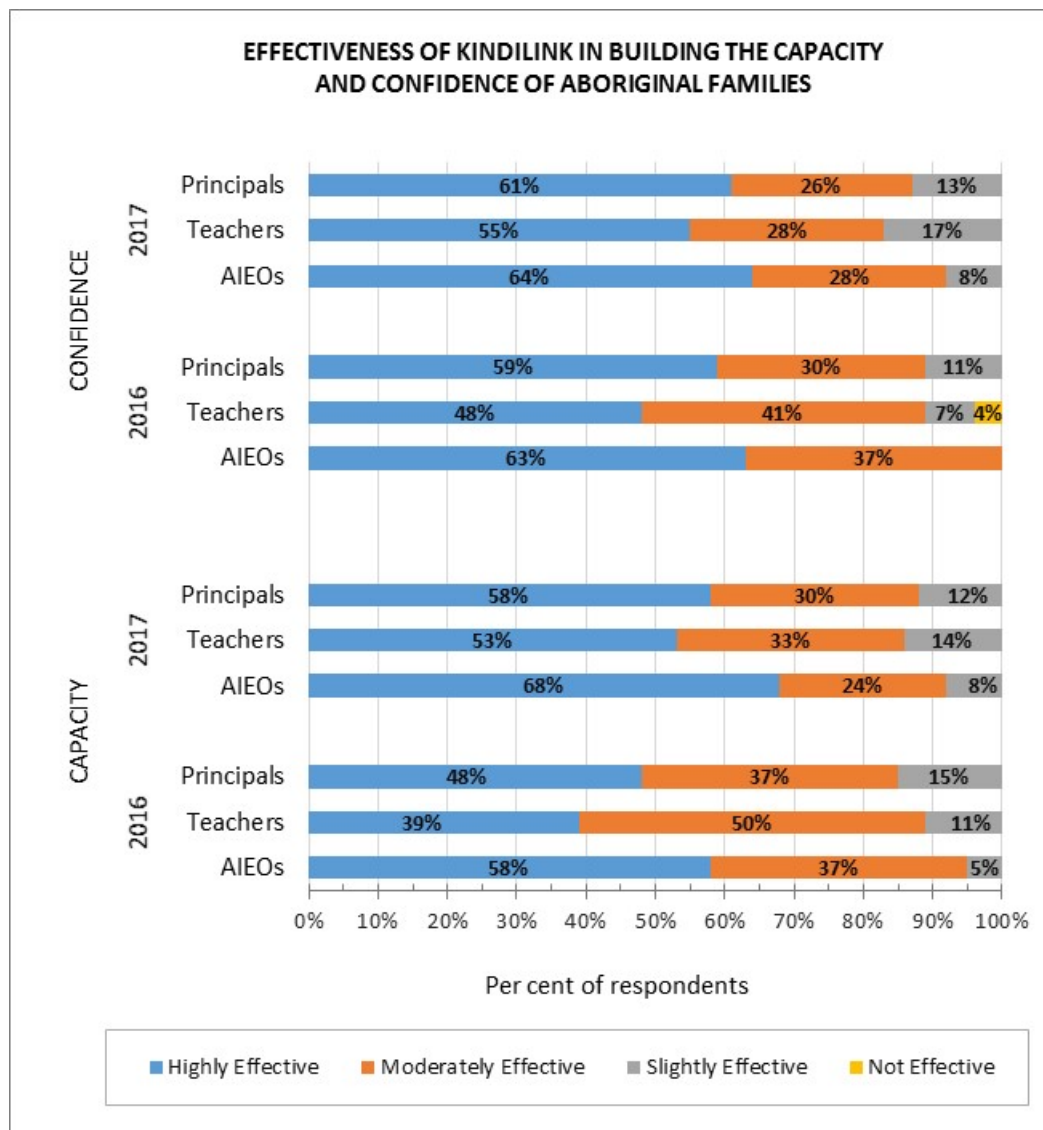
- **Building the capacity and confidence of families/carers as their child's first educators (quantitative evidence).** This reports on the findings from the quantitative data about the capacity and confidence of families/carers as their child's first educators.
- **Evidence of increased capacity (knowledge and skills) and confidence (qualitative evidence).** This presents the evidence of increased confidence and capacity based on participant comments. Although the participants were asked to comment on confidence and capacity separately many of the comments either referred to both concepts, overlapped, or were repetitious. Confidence and capacity were seen to be inextricably linked, thus in the reporting they have generally been combined. However, three themes emerged that related specifically to confidence.

## 4.2 Overall Impact on Capacity and Confidence at KindiLink

The following section is based on data from the KindiLink participant surveys, including principals, KindiLink teachers, AIEOs and families. Participants were asked multiple choice questions about the effectiveness of KindiLink in:

- building the capacity (knowledge and skills) of Aboriginal families/caregivers as their child's first educator; and
- building the confidence of Aboriginal families/caregivers as their child's first educator.

In evaluating effectiveness participants could choose 'highly', 'moderately', 'slightly' or 'not at all'. Results for the principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs are presented in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1:** Comparison of principals', teachers' and AIEOs' views of the effectiveness of KindiLink in building the capacity and confidence of Aboriginal families as their child's first educator, 2016 and 2017

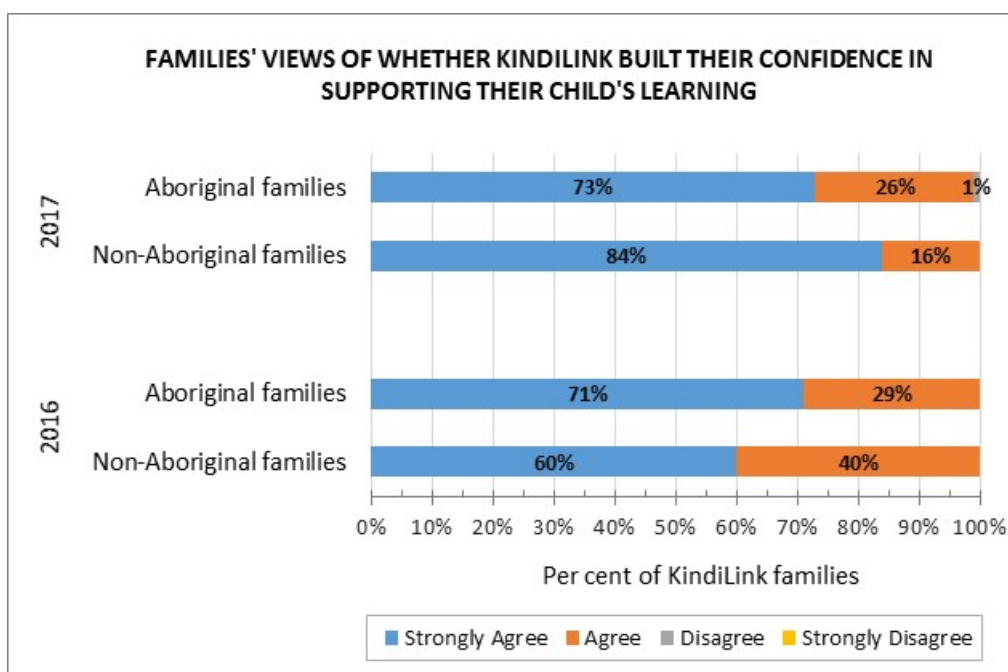
Some general patterns were observed in the responses of the principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs:

- Across all respondent groups for both 2016 and 2017 there was broad agreement that KindiLink is effective in building the capacity and confidence of Aboriginal families in supporting their child’s learning. Between 83% and 100% of respondents indicated it was ‘highly’ or ‘moderately’ effective in building families’ capacity and confidence. Only one respondent, a teacher, indicated it was ‘not effective’.
- Overall, the respondents’ assessments were more positive in 2017 than in 2016, especially in relation to the effectiveness of KindiLink in building capacity.
- In 2016, the principals, teachers and AIEOs were more positive about the effectiveness of KindiLink in building families’ confidence as their child’s first educator than their capacity.
- The most substantial change between 2016 and 2017 was in teacher’s views of Aboriginal families’ capacity. In 2016, 39% of teachers believed KindiLink was ‘highly’ effective in making a difference to families’ capacity, compared to 53% of teachers in 2017.

Low attendance at some KindiLink sites made it difficult for some participants to respond. For example, the principal of one KindiLink site in a remote region indicated that the impact of KindiLink on confidence and capacity was unclear, but did comment:

*I have noted that one family in particular who are more positively engaging and I’ve noted an improvement of the Kindy-aged sibling at the same time.*

The Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families enrolled in KindiLink were also asked to indicate their level of agreement as to whether KindiLink had increased their confidence in supporting their child’s learning. Responses were based on a 4-point Likert scale with the categories ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’. As shown in Figure 4.2, almost all families in both 2016 and 2017 were in agreement that KindiLink had increased their confidence. The only exception was one Aboriginal family participant (1.4% of sample) in 2017.



**Figure 4.2:** *Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ agreement about whether KindiLink had increased their confidence in supporting their child’s learning, 2016 and 2017*

## 4.3 Insights into Increasing Capacity and Confidence

The following section is based on qualitative data from the principal, KindiLink teacher and AIEO KindiLink survey. The following themes derived from the survey comments are presented below:

- Strategies for increasing parents' capacity and confidence
- Engaging in, initiating and extending activities
- Varying levels of engagement in children's learning
- Increasing self-assurance and engaging in personal learning opportunities
- Aboriginal families becoming leaders in a two-way process

Themes related specifically to confidence included:

- Building relationships
- Varying levels of confidence
- Varying levels of attendance

### 4.3.1 Strategies for increasing parents' capacity and confidence

A summary of strategies used to increase families' capacity (knowledge and skills) and confidence included (as described by teachers and AIEOs):

- Modelling teaching strategies and active listening
- Building consistency and repetition within KindiLink
- Offering resources to take home (and encouragement to do KindiLink activities at home)
- Building a supportive social network
- Providing information and professional development opportunities

### 4.3.2 Engaging in, initiating and extending activities

**Principals:** In 2016 principals indicated that Aboriginal families were beginning to move from observing their child to actively participating in activities. For example, families began to copy teacher and AIEO modelling of teaching strategies and active listening, and replicated KindiLink activities at home. In 2017 principals also presented evidence of increased engagement, and noted further development of skills, use of strategies and understanding of learning: *"Parents have been involved in reading stories, singing songs, doing art activities and cooking with their children and the teacher explains what she does as she goes to help the parents know the purpose of the activities. All activities are done with simple materials so families can do them at home."*

Gains in confidence was evidenced by one principal as families spent more time reading and talking to their children every week in shared book reading. One principal also commented that parents have begun to use the technical language associated with the activity (e.g., positional language, questioning). Several principals also noted that families were taking more initiative as their confidence grew; they were more willing to try new games and activities, singing and reading to a group, and proactively asking for activities for their child and taking them home. For example:

*It has given parents and caregivers a range of skills and strategies they can use to help students to engage in learning and further consolidate knowledge and understandings of key areas of childhood development and learning. They are given real examples and*

*resources to take home and use with their kids and are shown how to use and them to get the highest impact and results for the kids.*

**Teachers:** In 2016, teachers also noticed similar changes in Aboriginal families. They commented that at the start of KindiLink families were mainly observing their children. As the year progressed families were talking with their children more as they engaged in activities with them. Aboriginal families were also observed by teachers to use their initiative: *“Parents direct children to activities and reading. Parents have initiated learning moments through play”*. They participated in play and learn activities with their children, and modelled appropriate language and activities. As 2016 progressed Aboriginal families also assisted in setting up activities, cutting fruit, packing away, and occasionally managing activities.

In 2017, there were more comments on this theme as teachers were keen to describe how Aboriginal families had increased their capacity. Teachers reported that Aboriginal families often extended and added their own ideas to planned activities, used resources creatively and on their own initiative, put forward their ideas for programming, were leading activities and were more engaged in school events. Teachers indicated that once families were committed to KindiLink they enjoyed increased confidence in their own knowledge and skills and working with their children:

*Families that come consistently are more involved with the child's learning at KindiLink and also with the planning of what they want to see at KindiLink.*

**AIEOs:** Comments from AIEOs echoed and extended these findings. Several AIEOs suggested that Aboriginal families were developing a heightened sense of themselves as valuable contributors to the learning process and using their own skills to enhance their child’s learning while increasing their knowledge of learning through engagement in activities. AIEOs observed a positive increasing spiral effect; as families became more confident, this supported their increased involvement in KindiLink, which further enhanced their confidence: *“We notice that as they are more engaged in their child's learning, they participate more”*.

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** In 2016 and 2017, Aboriginal families described the many learning opportunities their children experienced and their engagement with their child and other children in these activities. They specifically identified as enjoyable singing, cooking, dancing, drawing and painting, outdoor play and water play, puzzles, art and craft, stories, reading books, playing with toys, play dough, building blocks, language classes (Aboriginal language) this was mentioned in both 2016 and 2017). Aboriginal families talked about the importance of sensory play, free play and outside play:

*We enjoy play dough, painting, building blocks, jigsaws, and outdoor play - with activities set up. (2016)*

*Music, story-time, outdoor play, water play, play dough, cooking, playing with my grandson, helping him learn. (2017).*

They also commented on the stimulation of a variety of interactive activities and the enjoyment of spending time with their children in learning. Several Aboriginal families mentioned how much they had enjoyed and learned from the incursions and excursions and felt they had taken some responsibility for supporting and implementing these. Engagement in these activities suggests that Aboriginal families were developing or increasing in capacity as their child’s first teacher.

Non-Aboriginal families also mentioned activities they found enjoyable. In addition to those mentioned by Aboriginal families, non-Aboriginal families mentioned phonics (not mentioned in 2017 Aboriginal families, although writing was).

### 4.3.3 Varying levels of engagement in children’s learning

**Principals:** In 2016 and 2017, principals and teachers mentioned how building capacity varied between families:

*All of our families are so different! I think KindiLink is really expanding the capacity of families who are already partially engaged. Some families are not necessarily gaining in capacity but rather in awareness that they CAN have this role with their children. (2017)*

*This response is an average. Participants vary enormously. Some have had great success, others less so. (2017)*

*Some of our parents viewed KindiLink as a child care provider and didn't engage with the service at a parent level. (2016)*

**Teachers:** In 2016, a few teachers suggested that families need more time to practice skills they have learnt and there were still a number of family members who “*simply*” watch how their children play with others. One teacher commented: “*Unfortunately at the moment it is a fairly passive role. Families tend to let educators tell them what is happening. Families go along with it for the most part, but offer little feedback or suggestions regarding KindiLink unless educators directly ask them for it, and feedback is usually just a 'yes' or 'ok'.*” In 2017 this was also mentioned by a few teachers. These observations might be illuminated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families’ comments about their enjoyment in sitting and observing their children learning – they describe this as a great source of joy, “*I like sit down and watch my kids grow*”. Although a key aim of KindiLink is to engage families in their child’s learning, it is important to note that for some Aboriginal families watching may be a significant way of learning and enhance capacity and confidence rather than detract from it, as suggested by some teachers. At KindiLink watching may be a first step in incorporating engagement into learning practices.

In both 2016 and 2017, there were several mentions of families who believe they can drop off their children and not attend with them. One teacher in 2017 commented that more needs to be done to communicate expectations to families.

### 4.3.4 Increasing self-assurance and engaging in personal learning opportunities

**Principals:** In 2016 and 2017, principals mentioned how families’ confidence had grown evidenced by an increase in parents sharing their concerns and problems about parenting issues, more confidence in their demeanour, more engagement with the school. Principals noted parents become more trusting and comfortable with staff, taking over and running sessions, asking questions about child development:

*The stable parent cohort are confident and teaching other parents by modelling this practice. They are proud of their participation in the program. Some were involved in the planning and conducting of NAIDOC Day in 2016 and 2017. (Principal)*

Principals commented that Aboriginal families demonstrated confidence in the way they approached them, “*to chat and also to come and see me with their concerns*”. One principal was adamant that KindiLink had made a difference, “*It is without question that the parent confidence has increased as a direct result of this program, (along with our 0-3)*” (Principal).

**Teachers and AIEOs:** Teachers and AIEOs noticed an increase in parents’ curiosity (they ask more questions) (2016) and more confidence in engaging with help and asking for support (e.g., for their child’s speech, toilet

training or behaviours such as unusual biting or sucking of hands) (2017). One comment described: “*They have become confident learners themselves and can therefore pass this on to their children*”.

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** An Aboriginal family member commented that they felt able to ask “*proper questions*” about their child’s learning and were developing a better understanding of development. They were comfortable in the environment and in asking teachers and staff for assistance and advice. In 2016 and 2017 principals, teachers and AIEOs all commented on the way in which some families were keen to take advantage of any personal development offered in school. Some families viewed teachers and AIEOs as a resource. They demonstrated curiosity about child development and early learning and asked for further information and advice. Take-home ideas were popular and regular parental feedback about implementing them at home indicated success.

Some schools supported Aboriginal parents’ development by offering a Certificate III in Education Assistant and providing information sessions on child development at family’s request. This was described by the comment:

*... many of our families have done the Cert III with TAFE and are now either employed as EAs or AIEOs at this school or on our staff relief list. Our relationships with the Aboriginal families have also improved significantly.*

#### 4.3.5 Aboriginal families becoming leaders

In 2016 and 2017 teachers’ and AIEOs comments reflected the ways in which families were involved in planning sessions and encouraged to provide feedback and initiate requests about what their children would like. Teachers valued family input and endeavoured to implement their ideas wherever possible. As Aboriginal families’ participation increased, so too did their confidence and capacity to help other families become involved. Families assisted each other to travel to the sessions. Teachers indicated the participation of Aboriginal families helped to make KindiLink a happy, positive and friendly place, and reported that they had taken ownership of KindiLink by promoting it to others in their community. Their contribution included managing a Facebook page, organising NAIDOC week events and making displays of KindiLink at the school. Some teachers and AIEOs hoped that eventually KindiLink would be a joint endeavour, with the added dimension that Aboriginal families would recognise themselves as the experts in their language/dialect and culture (with the school staff being the learners).

#### 4.3.6 Supporting confidence through building relationships

**Principals:** In 2016, 11 principals commented on how Aboriginal families’ confidence increased as they formed strong relationships with school staff, who also actively valued their existing strengths. Aboriginal families came to realise that much of what they already did with their children was valuable:

*I’ve seen a bit more of an increase in confidence, particularly in the idea that they are a valued member of a team for their kids’ education.*

One principal (2017), saw confidence as impacting on various aspects of KindiLink families’ lives and relationships:

*I believe the parents do gain confidence in a range of areas. Confidence in relation to:*  
*1. Educating and caring for their children; 2. Confidence in the school community; 3. Belief in the local teachers and staff; 4. Knowing how best to cater for the needs and interests of their children; 5. Confidence in developing a rapport with other families and community members.*



**Teachers and AIEOs:** In 2016 teachers and AIEOs commented on the way in which families and children connected to each other through yarning and storytelling. Children related to other KindiLink adults as aunties/grannies which suggested a strong social network that could support people to grow: *“They interact positively with each other and share resources from home (clothes, food, etc.) and made suggestions for activities at KindiLink”*. This strong social network helped build confidence and a sense of safety within the school environment.

Generally the 2017 comments about increased confidence were similar to 2016 comments. Many teachers and AIEOs described parents/carers who were very shy initially, who became active in KindiLink as their confidence increased. However, in 2017 participants’ observations extended this point, with observations of increased confidence in parents’/carers’ general demeanour, their more active contribution to KindiLink and a participation that extended beyond KindiLink to the school environment.

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** As indicated in a previous section almost all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families indicated that KindiLink had increased their confidence in supporting their child’s learning in 2016 and 2017 (see Figure 4.4).

### 4.3.7 Varying levels of confidence

**Principals:** In 2016 some principals commented that Aboriginal families did not necessarily have the confidence to attend KindiLink with non-Aboriginal participants. Confidence was viewed as being about *“trust”* in the school, not just personal confidence. One principal pointed out that there are a range of other pressures on families that can or may impact on their levels of confidence and participation.

**Teachers:** Some teachers in 2017 indicated that a few parents have not grown in confidence and that this was affected by outside influences, such as staff turnover and family circumstances.

### 4.3.8 Confidence and attendance

**Principals, Teachers and AIEOs:** In 2016 and 2017 principals, teachers and AIEOs all noted that regular attendance was critical for making a difference to confidence: *“Low numbers and lack of parental engagement inhibited the development of parental confidence”*. One teacher commented that the limited attendance from local families made it difficult to judge the impact of KindiLink on the confidence and capacity of families as their child’s first educator. One AIEO also commented that *“those coming every week have grown most in confidence”*, and they also added that the reverse was also true: developing confidence had the potential to result in increased attendance: *“I believe next year will be different as their self-confidence and ownership of the centre now taking place”*.

## 4.4 Increasing Capacity and Confidence at Kindergarten

As part of the kindergarten children’s capabilities survey, kindergarten teachers at the participating sites were asked to indicate whether they had noted differences between the KindiLink and non-KindiLink Aboriginal parents/carers in terms of their level of engagement and/or confidence in their children’s learning. The majority of kindergarten teachers (64% in 2017, 78% in 2018) reported they had noted differences.

The kindergarten teachers were asked to comment on the differences they had noticed between KindiLink and non-KindiLink parents/carers in their engagement and confidence in their child’s learning. Some of the key themes are presented below.

#### 4.4.1 Interacting with school staff

The most prevalent theme evident in their responses was that the KindiLink parents/carers were more confident and comfortable about interacting with the school and teaching staff than those who had not participated in KindiLink. Kindergarten teachers noted that the KindiLink parents/carers showed greater willingness to discuss and communicate their children's needs, progress or placement with teachers, as illustrated in the following examples:

*KindiLink parents more willing to enter the kindergarten room and approach staff and discuss progress and concerns with more honesty and openness.*

*The majority of families of the students who participated in the KindiLink program seem to be more comfortable in the school classroom and available to discuss and communicate their child's needs.*

*I have noticed parents have been more willing to speak with me and ask questions about Kindergarten and/or their student. They have been willing to listen to ideas of how to help settle their child with coming to Kindergarten.*

*The parents are interactive with myself at the start and end of the day and are happy to complete an activity with their child in the morning when school starts. They appear to feel confident leaving their children at Kindy this year. They are familiar with the school and the teachers and support staff at the school. They chat to each other and there is a relaxed feeling when I open my doors at the end of the day because the parents have been talking whilst waiting for their children to be dismissed.*

*The parents are more likely to engage in conversation with teachers when they want to find out information.*

*I think this is the most noticeable difference from KindiLink attenders: the parents/carers are comfortable with bringing their children to Kindergarten and are happy to be involved in the classroom as well as discussing their children. Building the teacher/parent/carer relationship usually takes a lot longer.*

#### 4.4.2 Engagement in children's learning

Kindergarten teachers also noted that the KindiLink parents/carers were more engaged with their children's learning, including participating in kindergarten morning activities and routines, attending special events, and being more organised in terms of school procedures and protocols. For example:

*KindiLink parents come into the classroom and help assist their children to remember the before morning routine. They ask questions such as: "Which name is yours?", "Can you find it?", and "Do you remember where the name tag goes?" Parents often sit with their children and do a table activity, helping them to complete the activity through modelling to them what to do. Parents also inform me of illness or reason for any absentees that their child has had. Part of the 2016 KindiLink program was the introduction of parents packing a healthy lunchbox for their child to eat during the KindiLink program. This year, the majority of KindiLink families have packed school lunchboxes for their kindergarten child, or chosen a healthy option from the canteen such as sandwiches and fruit.*

*KindiLink parents more willing to enter the kindergarten room and approach staff and discuss progress and concerns with more honesty and openness. Quicker return of notes and this has set a good example for non KindiLink families. These notes predominantly have involved outreach services such as speech and OT, historically before KindiLink began these forms were often difficult to have returned. KindiLink parents have less anxiety attached to leaving their children and they have greater trust in classroom and admin staff.*

*The parents expect to stay in the classroom for a period of time before leaving. In contrast, in the past, Aboriginal parents often did not enter the classroom at all.*

*On Tuesday 20th Feb 2018 I had four Aboriginal parents / grandparents stay for our morning session.*

*Parents feel more comfortable in coming into the room and talking to the staff. They are more supportive in sending their children to school and are more organised in terms of canteen accounts, uniforms and other daily needs.*

*Families who attended KindiLink also seem to be happier staying for a while to help out in the classroom and engage with the students during class time. I have had 3 parents stay for at least an hour to help out during class time and all of them attended KindiLink.*

*The parents seem to feel more confident to come into the classroom and participate if they have been to the KindiLink program. When we have events such as Mother's day morning tea, Christmas or end of term parties families are more likely to attend if they have been a part of the program.*

### 4.4.3 Confidence and attendance

Some of the kindergarten teachers also felt that participation in KindiLink had a positive influence on level of attendance in the Kindergarten program, as indicated in the following comments.

*...The parent and child are more confident with approaching the teacher and attendance is higher.*

*...The attendance of these children is also significantly higher than past siblings.*

*I observed a parent who had an older child in upper primary with poor attendance. After Mum attended KindiLink a few times with her younger children, the older child's attendance improved and her younger ones are very regular in Kindy and Pre-Primary.*

*Families who have had a lot of absences with older siblings have shown a more positive attitude towards attendance throughout KindiLink and when their child reaches 4 year old Kindergarten...*

*Parent engagement in morning activities compared to other Aboriginal children who did not attend. Regular attendance.*

## 4.5 Summary

Evidence from the principals, teachers and AIEOs suggested that KindiLink helped to foster families' confidence and capacity as their child's first educator. There appears to be slightly more emphasis on KindiLink's ability to increase confidence, perhaps because capacity is harder to quantify. Furthermore, confidence and capacity overlap and are interrelated to some extent. When participants speak of confidence they are often referring to families' ability to be actively engaged in the learning journey with their child – which also points to an increased capacity to support their child's learning.

In 2016, many comments about confidence were about families starting to be more engaged in the activities. In 2017, an extended view of confidence was reflected in the comments: one that encompassed the families' demeanour, their leadership abilities, increased curiosity and desire to better understand childhood learning, and their interest in events and assuming roles in the school outside of KindiLink, and taking on professional learning and development opportunities (such as gaining qualifications and exploring new career directions). Again, all of these changes can be linked to increased knowledge and skills.

As one teacher expressed, *"It is clear to me that our families have more capacity, confidence and a productive relationship with the school from the way that they attend so regularly, want to share things they've done with their child outside of school... and that a few of them are now looking at becoming AIEOs at the school now that their child will be in school. (2017).*

Almost all families agreed that they had gained confidence from participating in KindiLink and their comments indicate that they felt enabled to support their children while at KindiLink. Families expressed enthusiasm for (and enjoyment of) KindiLink activities and the widespread take-up of some activities in the home environment is indicative that Aboriginal families embraced this more active role in the early education of their children. In addition, and especially in 2017, the way parents/carers gave feedback to the teachers, suggested different activities and had become comfortable working with school staff also shows a growing confidence in their relationship with the school and their role within it.

## 5. Impact on Building Productive Relationships

**Q4. What impact has KindiLink had on building productive relationships with the family, the school and the community?**

This section presents data about way in which KindiLink fostered relationships between families, the school and community, based on evidence from the surveys of KindiLink staff (principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs) and KindiLink families in 2016 and 2017.

Findings are presented under the following themes, focusing on Aboriginal families in particular:

- Building relationships between Aboriginal families, the school and the community
- Reaching Aboriginal community members and community organisations
- Communicating with Aboriginal families
- Listening to and Including Aboriginal families' perspectives
- Challenges, uncertainties and overcoming challenges.

### 5.1 Building Relationships between Aboriginal Families, the School and the Community

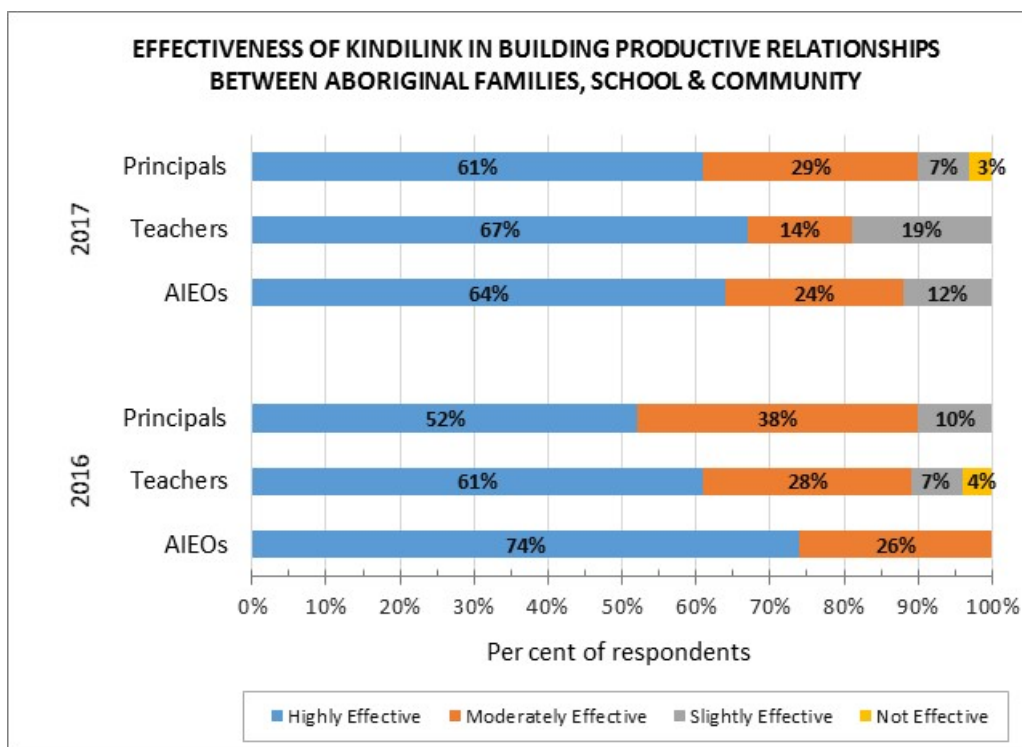
Principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs were asked how effective they thought KindiLink had been at building productive relationships between Aboriginal families, the school and the community. In evaluating effectiveness participants could choose 'highly effective', 'moderately effective', 'slightly effective' or 'not effective'. The results are displayed in Figure 5.1.

Some general patterns can be observed:

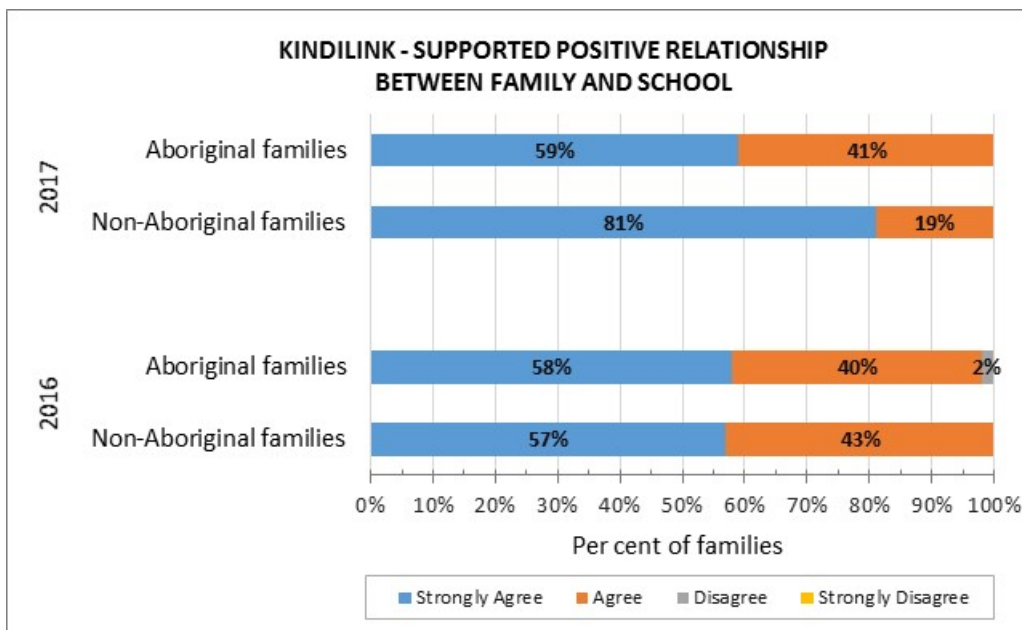
- Across all groups and years, substantial majorities of the participants considered KindiLink to be effective in building productive relationships. More than 80% indicated KindiLink was 'highly' or 'moderately' effective.
- Only one teacher (4%) from the 2016 cohort and one principal (3%) from the 2017 cohort indicated KindiLink was not effective in building positive family/school relationships.
- Proportionately more of the 2017 teachers and principals assessed KindiLink as 'highly effective' in building productive relationships than in 2016.
- The reverse was true for the AIEOs, with 100% indicating KindiLink was 'highly' or 'moderately' effective in 2016, dropping to 88% in 2017.

KindiLink families were also asked to indicate the extent to which they felt KindiLink had supported a positive relationship between families and the school. The results, presented in Figure 5.2, show that almost all families agreed or strongly agreed that KindiLink had supported positive family/school relationships. Only two of the 2016 Aboriginal families (2%) disagreed. Earlier it was noted that some of the AIEOs felt it had been difficult to sustain relationships between the Aboriginal families and the school, which might explain the negative views of these two families. It is interesting to note that the 2017 non-Aboriginal families were significantly more positive about the relationship between the family and the school than the 2016 non-

Aboriginal families. This may suggest that non-Aboriginal families had experienced more benefit from the strategies schools put in place to build relationships between 2016 and 2017.



**Figure 5.1:** Principals', teachers' and AIEOs' views of the effectiveness of KindiLink in building productive relationships between Aboriginal families, the school and the community, 2016 and 2017



**Figure 5.2:** Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families' agreement about whether KindiLink supported a positive relationship between the family and school, 2016 and 2017

Comments from principals, teachers and AIEOs about effective family, school and community relationships are presented in the following sections according to the following themes:

- Shared experiences
- A social support network
- Fostering a partnership between families and the school
- Relationships to support transition to Kindergarten and beyond
- Relationships with the community and long term engagement

### 5.1.1 Shared experiences

Although the research question focused on the relationship between the family and school, data indicates that families came to value the teachers and the school precisely because KindiLink was able to nurture their child, and involve families at the same time.

KindiLink gave families and their child the opportunity to learn together and to experience the school environment as fun and safe in a way that helped them bond. In 2016 one Aboriginal family pointed out a significant outcome for them was the involvement of other family members in KindiLink and then how this transferred to sharing that learning with children at home. They commented:

*As a family we've grown closer, we feel more connected to the community. (2016 Aboriginal family member)*

This idea was also present in 2017:

*Also helping build a stronger relationship with myself and my child. (2017 Aboriginal family member)*

It could be that KindiLink's ability to nurture the family/child relationship and offer enjoyable shared experiences provides motivation for the child and family to keep learning at KindiLink, and a strong foundation for other relationships to build.

### 5.1.2 A social support network

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** The social and relational aspects of KindiLink were mentioned enthusiastically by Aboriginal families in 2016 and 2017. Aboriginal families enjoyed:

- Watching their children;
- Helping the teacher;
- Getting to know the school environment;
- Socialising with other families and children, and seeing their children make friends;
- Becoming involved with other networks;
- Establishing a link between KindiLink, families and the community;
- The support of the AIEOs;
- Getting to know the teachers through their welcoming attitude and wonderful support;
- Getting to know the kindergarten teachers.

The non-Aboriginal families who participated in KindiLink reinforced the views of the Aboriginal families and were even more effusive in their praise for the relationship-building aspect of KindiLink. Families in 2017 also mentioned seeing their child grow confident interacting with others – children and teachers – was a great benefit of KindiLink.

### 5.1.3 Fostering a partnership between families and the school

**Principals:** In 2016 principals reported that families felt more comfortable interacting with the school. Even in schools where relationships were good before KindiLink began, KindiLink had reportedly strengthened links. Principals said the relationship between KindiLink teachers and families helped parents gain confidence in their own strengths, as teachers pointed out the value of what families were already doing with their children. Staff enjoyed seeing Aboriginal families in the school and endeavoured to make families feel welcome and valued. Strategies that served to improve relationships were involving the principal and rest of the school in KindiLink and including KindiLink in whole-of-school events. Participants described KindiLink as fostering relationships by being a welcoming environment for getting to know families. In 2017 principals said parents were more confident and comfortable in the school. One principal also pointed out that on a personal level, because of KindiLink they were able to visit the parents during KindiLink sessions to get to know them.

**Teachers and AIEOs:** In 2016 teachers and AIEOs commented on KindiLink families' improved connection to the school. As with principals they felt the KindiLink experience had helped families feel more at ease in the school environment, explaining that KindiLink had formed two-way partnerships between families and the school, and allowed families to find a voice in terms of what they wanted for their children. In 2017 teachers also pointed this out: *The families have all built a strong relationship with the school and comment in positive ways on the school.*

In 2017 there were also comments indicating great success in KindiLink engaging parents more in their children's education (and lasting effects):

*KindiLink has been very successful in supporting families' engagement and relationship with the school...Five out of six parents are engaging in the PACE room (an on-sight family engagement room on school grounds attending workshops, and parental engagement days).*

There was also evidence of families engaging in the teaching and learning at home, building on what they have been involved in at KindiLink:

*I have modelled language and question that parents can use during play and parent are now prompting children using questions and discussion. Parents have also stated that they are reading books at home as well as singing the songs that they have learnt at KindiLink, they have stated that they have seen a big difference in their child since doing this at home.*

### 5.1.4 Relationships to support transition to Kindergarten and beyond

**Principals:** In 2016, principals reported that families felt more comfortable interacting with the school which benefited children through increased school readiness. In 2017 there were many positive comments from principals about great success they had in building new relationships, trust in the staff and number of enrolments for Kindergarten.

**Teachers and AIEOs:** In 2016, several teachers commented on the importance of strong relationships between KindiLink teachers and kindergarten teachers to support transition. Continuity was seen as an important part of building and sustaining relationships. However, some teachers mentioned the potential



difficulties caused by the different pedagogical approaches in these environments, and emphasised the importance of communication between the teachers to help ease the transition. This was not mentioned in 2017, however teachers' comments from 2017 suggested positive transitions to Kindergarten based on the relationships formed during KindiLink:

*All ex KindiLink children are coming to school with healthy lunchboxes or families are ensuring there is a healthy option ordered from the school canteen (No lunch and recess has been a difficulty in the past). (Teacher)*

**Aboriginal families:** These views were validated by comments from families, such as:

*Connecting with the school, teachers and families to help make it easier for my child to attend school in 2018. (Aboriginal family, 2017)*

## 5.1.5 Relationships with the community and long-term engagement

**Principals and Teachers:** Principals indicated that positive relationships were developed through particular strategies which included outreach work by the KindiLink team. This forged deep knowledge of and links with the Aboriginal families in the area and surrounds. Teachers commented on the lasting benefits of relationships for the community, since families saw the relationship as ongoing and extending beyond KindiLink. As well as assisting with the transition to Kindergarten, some families made connections with the school by expressing an interest in improving attendance and engaging their older children.

**AIEOs:** In 2016, eight AIEOs felt their strong connections with the community were important in overcoming challenges, and good partnerships with families and children were essential. Four AIEOs proposed nurturing connections where no previous connections existed, which is not surprising given that the role of an AIEO is to provide a link between families, the community and the school.

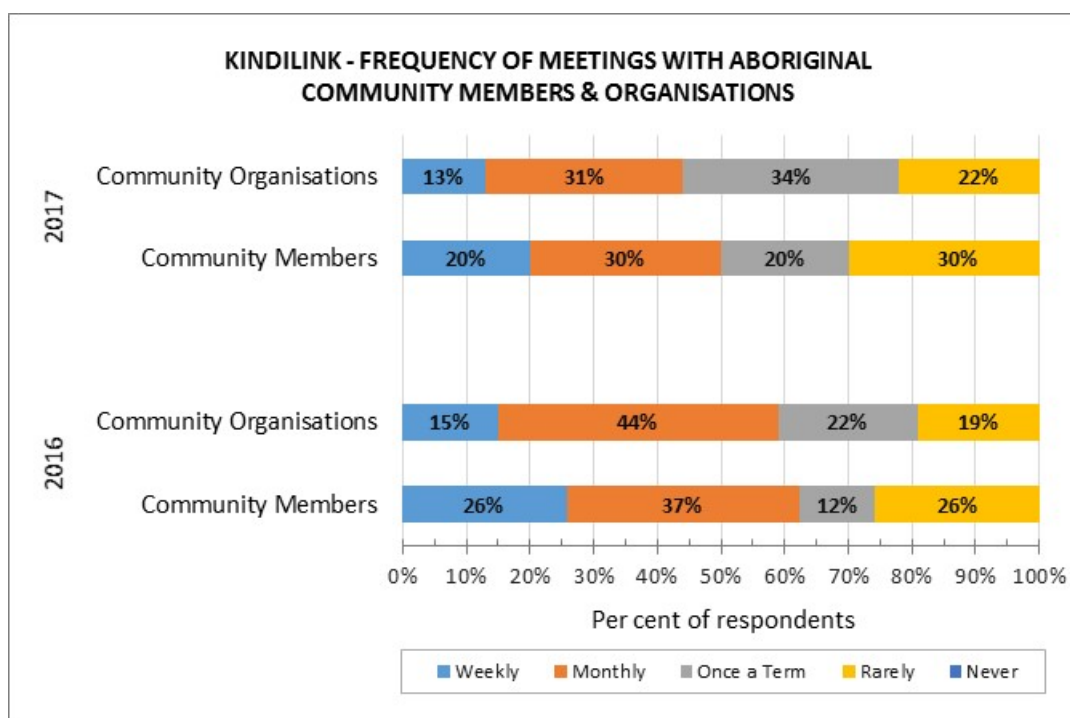
In 2016, AIEOs indicated that they saw KindiLink's role as broad and outlined strategies for reaching out and engaging community members. They mentioned home visits; welcoming all families, including those in transit and those from other cultures; and being aware and mindful of personal and community issues that may impact on attendance and engagement:

*At home and having the respect and trust to the KindiLink families and carers, and assisting them with support in their child education needs.*

**Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families:** Families indicated their enjoyment of KindiLink which fostered relationships with others and led them to bringing others along to KindiLink.

## 5.2 Reaching Aboriginal Community Members and Community Organisations

Data about meetings between KindiLink staff and Aboriginal community members and community organisations provided evidence of principals' determination to build relationships. Figure 5.4 shows the frequency with which principals met with Aboriginal community members varied, however principals met with Aboriginal community members more frequently in 2016 than 2017. The frequency with which principals met with community organisations also decreased slightly between 2016 and 2017.



**Figure 5.3: Frequency with which principals met with Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal community organisations in 2016 and 2017**

The difference between 2016 and 2017 perhaps reflects the initial engagement work that principals were undertaking as KindiLink was being established, as reflected by one comment: *“Initially there was a concentrated effort. I think this has diminished over the course of 2017”*. However, in 2017 the frequency of meetings did not decrease significantly, with half of principals meeting weekly or monthly. In 2016, many principals said they did not have regular meetings but informal conversations, for example, when community members visited the KindiLink classroom. Some principals included meetings with Aboriginal community organisations in this category rather than the community organisations category. Several principals provided general responses or discussed how other staff (KindiLink staff and/or other AIEOs) met with community members.

The comments in 2017 also reflected a mix of informal and incidental chats, and more purposeful regular engagement (e.g. regular meetings with the local Aboriginal leadership Engagement Group). At times, KindiLink was the central reason for meeting, other times it is part of a general engagement approach. Meetings with Aboriginal community members included meetings with members of the Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal interagency group, a request to attend a community Elders’ meeting, home visits, and general community meetings to report on school development.

In 2016, some principals discussed how others liaised with community organisations (teachers/administration) and described informal contact with other agencies. This was reiterated by teachers in 2016, commenting that KindiLink had provided opportunities to build relationships with other agencies outside the school, such as speech therapy, hearing, Occupational Therapist, health nurses, Aboriginal Medical Services, Child Parent Centres, EAR Bus Foundation WA, and Continence Advisory Agency.

One principal expressed concern about inter-agency meetings stating:

*There are very constant open lines of communication between the KindiLink program and inter agency support. We look forward to building on this next year, but are keen to not make KindiLink a forum for external agencies to liaise with parents at the cost of the benefits derived from the education priorities of KindiLink.*

One principal reported having very little opportunity to meet with members of the remote community. Advertising was their main method of disseminating information. Meetings with community organisations included Child Parent centres, a large charitable organisation volunteering in the school, liaison with the Remote School Attendance Strategy team, and attendance at an Interagency Action forum every six weeks to promote KindiLink. A range of similar types of agencies was mentioned in 2017.

### 5.3 Communicating with Aboriginal Families

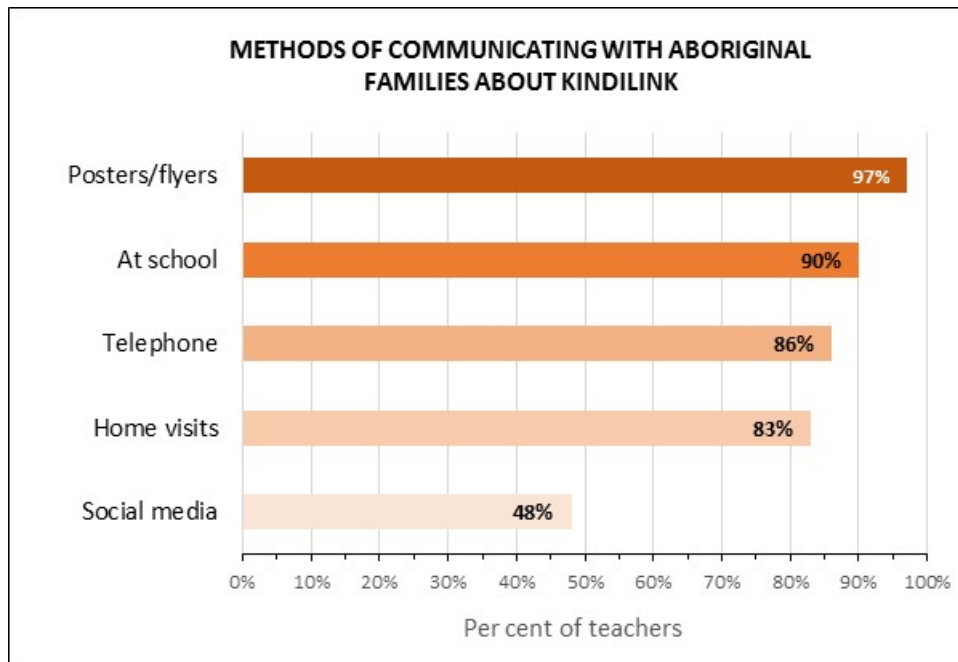
In 2016 teachers were asked how they communicated with Aboriginal families about KindiLink. Suggestions were provided in multiple choice format and participants could select more than one item. With the exception of social media/Facebook (only 48% of respondents chose this) the results show that all the suggested methods (at school, posters/flyers, home visits and telephone) were equally well utilised (above 80% for all).

Due to data discrepancies, data from 2017 could not be directly compared to 2016 data, however the findings are very similar to 2016, with 'at school' and 'posters/flyers' being highly utilised methods, followed by 'home visits' and 'telephone', and then social media to a lesser extent. An additional item 'Other or any comments' attracted 15 responses in 2016 and 10 in 2017.

In 2016, 11 comments described other methods used, including putting up flyers in the local shopping centre, libraries, infant health centre, community facilities, letter drops, and walking the streets looking for new family members. Word-of-mouth featured three times (*"families are constantly referring other families to KindiLink"*) as did contacting agencies such as ABC radio, hospitals, allied health services and Aboriginal corporations. Other schools and the Health Department were emailed and contact was made with occupational therapists, speech therapists, regional coordinators of Aboriginal Education liaison officers, Child Parent centres and the Aboriginal Medical Services contacts. Teachers also used bus wardens to deliver messages and flyers to families. In addition, notices were published in school newsletters and Aboriginal newsletters. Generally, teachers appeared to be promoting KindiLink proactively, for example:

*Going forward we are getting canvas banners made up to advertise to families walking past the school. One visiting family suggested advertising on Sunshine FM. I will look into costs.*

New comments from 2017 included using the Seesaw application/platform, and holding KindiLink sessions in the park. It seemed as if teachers and AIEOs had exploited every possible means of communication to recruit and engage families, including promotion through swimming lessons with YMCA and Swim for Life, offering once a month 'other services' including dental, hearing and speech, using photos of KindiLink children in the community and using community spaces such as the "soup kitchen", having a "cuppa" and "bar-bar-que" day. AIEOs reported communicating with families informally and through social media. Communication was seen as being at the core of building strong relationships. AIEOs explained that they *"...never pushed them or forced them in to sending their children. We always maintained a strong relationship within our communities and were always aware what was going on"* (AIEO). This included being flexible and following the families' lead.



*Figure 5.4: Teachers' responses to the question 'How does your school communicate with Aboriginal families about KindiLink?'*

As in 2016 word of mouth was again mentioned several times, and teachers reported using other encounters with families to communicate – such as at day care, in the community or when older students enrolled at school. In 2017, some principals endorsed this, suggesting that KindiLink provided the perfect platform for them to informally and regularly meet families. The meetings did not need to be pre-arranged or have a purpose, but when principals had a regular presence at KindiLink, the sessions could facilitate informal dropping in, having a chat and getting to know each other.

All these comments indicate the extent to which schools sought to reach Aboriginal families, which indicates a commitment to long term engagement with communities.

## 5.4 Listening to and Including Aboriginal Families' Perspectives

Part of the exploration of the impact of KindiLink on relationships involved asking teachers how they listened to and included Aboriginal families' perspectives in KindiLink. Their comments have been organised into the following three themes:

- informal and formal communication,
- responsiveness,
- broader strategies.

### 5.4.1 Informal and formal communication

In 2016, the most common response centred around the importance of creating opportunities for informal, incidental communication, as this was seen to work most effectively. Chatting in person – yarning – at

morning tea or outside at playtime was mentioned by several teachers as the most effective way of gaining Aboriginal families' perspectives, with the informality of the setting emphasised. A few teachers suggested structured or formal communication was not very effective. However, three teachers reported setting up structured, regular times to seek feedback from Aboriginal families, using various methods such as "parent surveys completed individually and as a group, and a "learning journal and yarn whilst inserting pictures and discussing each of the past events with a lead in of what else could we organise". Several teachers commented on the success of listening to Aboriginal families' perspectives because of their openness and willingness to communicate.

In 2017 there were similar comments from teachers who ensured they regularly chatted with Aboriginal families. There were several comments about teachers directly asking Aboriginal families what they wanted, and asking about their ideas in relation to specific aspects of KindiLink.

While AIEOs were not asked directly about this, they did comment that they used social media as a means of receiving feedback about KindiLink, and based on this feedback they reviewed and made changes where appropriate.

### 5.4.2 Responsiveness

In 2016, teachers indicated they were responsive to Aboriginal families' perspectives by incorporating their ideas for activities, observing how Aboriginal families responded to aspects of KindiLink, adjusting the structure of the day to suit their needs, and setting up activities to allow for choice. While some of these things happened naturally, at other times they seemed more strategic and structured. Five teachers mentioned the importance of AIEOs including families' perspectives, explaining that "their community knowledge is very important and valued".

In 2017, being responsive was a more significant theme that emerged in the survey data, and the example comments indicated a much deeper responsiveness to the Aboriginal families – e.g., not just including their perspectives, but encouraging them to lead aspects of KindiLink:

*I listen to the Aboriginal families using my ears (-: When the families sent a message to the school saying they wanted the KindiLink program at the local community 5kms from town, once each week, that is where the program was held when the weather was not too cold or too hot... I am always listening to the Aboriginal families' perspectives and when they make suggestions of things they would like to do, or see happening, I make sure they happen...*

*If someone suggests we do something, I always try to bring it in to the program. I identify children's interests and read stories about that particular theme. I will set up play experiences for them to develop their knowledge and for them to want to come back to KindiLink because their interests are taken into account.*

### 5.4.3 Broader strategies

In 2016, teachers reported they had tried to utilise links with other organisations to better understand what families wanted, including the language centre and the Child and Parent centres. Others mentioned they used home visits and took KindiLink to the park as a means of speaking to families. One teacher had made picture cards of activities as a way of engaging families with low English literacy. Another invited families to undertake some joint planning for KindiLink outside KindiLink hours. In 2017, broader strategies of contacting organisations were not mentioned, although flexible approaches were featured.

## 5.5 Incorporating and Learning about Aboriginal Culture, Language and Ways of Doing Things

In 2017, teachers and AIEOs were asked new questions that were more probing as to what strategies they implemented. The survey questions were:

- How do you incorporate the language/s and/or dialect and culture of the Aboriginal families that attend KindiLink into the session?
- How do you get information about your Aboriginal families' language/s and cultural background?
- To what extent do you talk with families to learn about their culture, language and ways of doing things with their children?
- How do you listen to and include Aboriginal families' perspectives into the KindiLink program?

In 2017, Aboriginal families were asked:

- The target group for KindiLink is Aboriginal children and their families. Do you feel Aboriginal language/s and/or dialects, and cultural practices are part of your KindiLink? This may include resources, songs, stories, posters, activities, events and/or ways of communicating.

The respondents' comments were thematically analysed and are presented in Sections 5.5.1-5.5.4 below.

### 5.5.1 Incorporating the language/dialect and culture of the Aboriginal KindiLink families

#### *Culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and activities*

Overall 29 teachers and 21 AIEOs mentioned using a range of culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and activities. These included visual text and images, oral language activities, musical activities, decorations, games, crafts and cooking. Of the resources used some were commercially produced while others were specifically created by staff and /or parents.

The examples of visual text mentioned included signs and posters (such as Early Years Learning Framework posters and alphabetic charts) which were in English and/or one or more local languages; traditional words of welcome displayed on the whiteboard; environmental print; and story books featuring traditional stories, including ones written in local languages. Some staff used books and picture cards that were two-way language resources, that is, English and an Aboriginal language. One teacher explained that an [*Aboriginal language*] dictionary was made available. With regard to visual images, teachers reported displaying Aboriginal artwork, pictures of Aboriginal children as well as photographs of the KindiLink children and their families. In one case it was mentioned the children's photos were displayed on a closed Facebook page.

Oral language activities using local languages included greetings, storytelling, learning numbers and colours, learning the names of animals and body parts, and focusing on a "word of the week". The AIEOs were particularly involved in oral language activities. Two AIEOs mentioned using their families' Aboriginal languages by introducing key words incidentally when identifying characters or objects in stories. Another AIEO said they had conversations with the children about the environment and about their spiritual connection to the land. One AIEO included traditional yarning as an oral language activity.

Musical activities encompassed singing songs and action/nursery rhymes in local languages, accessing songs on YouTube, and making music with Aboriginal musical instruments such as tapping sticks, didgeridoos. One AIEO said their LOTE teacher would help with translating songs into Language.

Staff reported decorating in ways that were culturally appropriate. For example, one teacher used the colours red, black and yellow to decorate the classroom and an AIEO said artwork around the building had been created by the children and their parents. Two teachers and one AIEO said they displayed the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag. One teacher said they had a framed government apology on display.

With regard to the games children played, one teacher reported using the resource *Let's Play! Aboriginal Games & Activities for Children*. Other teachers and AIEOs variously mentioned using Aboriginal mats for the children to play on, doing sand drawings, and providing stones, sticks, Aboriginal dolls and culturally appropriate puzzles for the children to play with. Some games involved the children with their parents in two-way language learning.

While a general mention was made of craft activities only dot paintings and Aboriginal designs were specified. With regard to cooking, a few staff said this was done with the children, and in some instance, with parents. Damper and kangaroo stew were typically mentioned. One teacher reported that they had a bush tucker garden.

### ***Promotion of and participation in community events and excursions***

In all, ten teachers made reference to the promotion of and participation in community events and excursions. The main community events mentioned were NAIDOC Day/Week, cultural days and cultural excursions, including visiting an art centre, or a local display, attending Aboriginal children's day events and a sorry event. Four comments from AIEOs echoed these and added more detailed information about trips out bush.

### ***Drawing support from parents, grandparents and other community members***

Overall 11 teachers mentioned the inclusion of community members, including, mothers, fathers, and grandparents, as well as other community guests and cultural performers. Some teachers spoke of this as a broad partnership across the whole program, which encompassed many activities, and included shared decision-making, whilst other teachers spoke of this in terms of a specific contribution made by parents (for example, parents making damper with the children), within an overall framework where the teacher maintained control of activities. Many teachers felt that Aboriginal community members enriched the cultural program in a number of ways. They contributed to language acquisition for children and staff, they contributed to resources like language displays, they explained culture, they cooked with children and they told stories from local history and culture.

Eight comments from AIEOs echoed these themes but also added that a father who had grown up in NSW contributed stories from his childhood about his life and his family connections in NSW, and an example of how parents organized a campfire. An AIEO also mentioned how one family had made an Aboriginal flag.

### ***Communication between KindiLink staff and parents***

Overall three teachers mentioned the inclusion of the local language as a means of communication within KindiLink. Two mentioned that the AIEO used the local language with parents. One mentioned that they

encouraged the use of the community language at KindiLink. Most did not discuss the use of the community language as a means of communication.

Four comments from AIEOs echoed these sentiments and added that speaking with parents in a familiar community language made parents feel more comfortable, even if it was only a few words. Some AIEOs also aided communication, where English was not the parent's/carer's first language.

### ***Barriers***

Three teachers and one AIEO noted barriers to incorporating the language/dialect and culture of the Aboriginal families into the program. The main barrier identified was that in some locations, families did not speak a local language and their first language is English. In other situations, not all parents spoke the same language, or in one instance the AIEO did not speak the local language and the parents who attended regularly were not interested in the local language. Another barrier identified was that even when community members spoke the local language they may not necessarily know how it is written or spelt. This is not unusual given the oral tradition of Aboriginal languages and fact that written language resources may not yet have been developed and/or made readily available within communities.

## **5.5.2 Gathering information and incorporating Aboriginal families' perspectives into KindiLink**

Thirty five teachers and 25 AIEOs responded to questions about how they gather information about Aboriginal families' perspectives on KindiLink and how they gained understanding of Aboriginal culture and language. The comments were thematically analysed and presented in the following section.

### ***Talking with families***

Overall 30 teachers nominated families as their primary source of information about family and community language/dialect and culture. Their approach varied. Some said they asked questions, whilst other said they listened to conversations about what families did in their everyday life. Five teachers did not name families as their primary source of information. One teacher's response implied she saw it as the AIEO's role rather than her role to make connections with families.

Twenty-three comments from AIEOs nominated the families as their main source of information. They supplemented this with their own relationships and connections within the community. They built their connection with newcomers by sharing who they were and where they were from, which invited others to respond in the same way. Two AIEOs did not nominate families as their main source of information.

### ***Talking with the AIEO or other Aboriginal staff***

Overall, 14 teachers mentioned the AIEO as a primary source of information about language and cultural background. For some this was in addition to their discussion with families. For some teachers the AIEO acted as a conduit between families and the teacher, which meant the teacher did not seek any information directly from families. One AIEO nominated other AIEOs in the school as her primary source of information about families.

### ***Other sources***

Overall seven teachers nominated other sources of information. These included the use of specialist resources like language centres, or their connections with local elders, or their own knowledge of local



language and culture. One indicated that she 'Googled' when she wanted information. In most instances, this supplemented information gained from families and the AIEO. Two teachers relied upon these sources rather than conversations with families or the AIEO. One teacher had been in post less than a week and was not yet sure how she would gather information. One AIEO nominated an Aboriginal teacher who taught in the school as the primary source of her knowledge about families and culture.

### **5.5.3 Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives through jointly creating the program**

This question was asked of teachers only. Overall, 36 teachers discussed how they collaborated with families to create the KindiLink program. Eleven teachers responded in general terms about how they maintained open communications with families, and asked for feedback from families. Twenty-two teachers discussed how their approach had had concrete outcomes in terms of the program. Some teachers did this formally with surveys, asking what families liked and what they did not like. Others approached this informally, asking for suggestions for the program or feedback about activities and events that had occurred. Some teachers made a point of talking with families at least once every time they attended. Other teachers tried to talk to all parents once a week. Still others consulted once a term. One teacher delegated all consultation with families to the AIEO, and discussed family feedback with the AIEO when they met for a weekly planning session.

The most usual things teachers said they asked parents for input about were special events (such as NAIDOC week) recipes (such as making damper) and cultural visits and performances of Aboriginal art and dance. They also asked about who to invite as a guest speaker, or where to go on excursions, or what special activities to do (such as a healthy eating demonstration). Other teachers indicated that families' suggestions had led to a change in the morning commencement time of one KindiLink program. Another had changed the venue in response to feedback. Many more stated they had received feedback and suggestions from families but were not specific about how they had incorporated feedback from parents. Some said they incorporated suggestions 'if possible' or if they thought they would be positive, without providing any examples. Others indicated that whenever families wanted to incorporate an activity, they thought it was important to respond immediately and were willing to readjust their planned program to accommodate change on the same day. One teacher said that there was limited input from families, and another said they did not consult families because Aboriginal families rarely attended.

Interestingly, one teacher spoke about the importance of the teacher having an explicitly equal role with Aboriginal colleagues and supporting parents to take leadership roles within parts of the KindiLink program, wherever they feel comfortable to do so.

#### ***Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives through using language and/or dialect***

There were a few examples of how the language/dialect of Aboriginal families were used to affirm Aboriginal perspectives, for example, one KindiLink had a 'word of the week', other KindiLink programs had bilingual dictionaries, translated songs into the local language or encouraged AIEOs to use whatever language was appropriate to the circumstance to ensure families felt comfortable. As mentioned previously, in some settings there were barriers to using language. These were identified as either because families who attended were from more than one language group, or because local language/dialect or Aboriginal English were not spoken.

Teachers generally indicated they saw Aboriginal families as experts and regarded them as such, however at times there was more of a partnership approach to incorporating Aboriginal resources:

*Every now and then, many families feel that they are lacking cultural knowledge especially language. We are trying to learn some basic language together. (2017 teacher)*

#### 5.5.4 Aboriginal families' perspectives

Sixty-six (93%) of the Aboriginal families responded to the 2017 survey item asking whether they thought that their perspectives of cultural and language/dialect were part of KindiLink. Of these, 89% responded positively and 11% did not think the program included their perspectives sufficiently. When asked how they thought their culture and language/dialect were positively represented, 12 respondents replied and nominated the same types of activities as the teachers and the AIEO, namely NAIDOC week "NAIDOC week activities, students from Aboriginal backgrounds visit and dance" and "We did our own language posters for NAIDOC theme this year"; songs and stories "some Language and songs; going bush; language "Language Nest- Aboriginal ladies teaching Language to children through songs"; puzzles, dance and art work "songs, pictures, puzzles, art work".

Some families elaborated about how they felt and the impact of inclusion: "Our language is around the room, in songs and we feel supported to talk language at KindiLink", "It encourages the kids to be confident in their own language" and "They learn about animals, bush tucker and songs in Aboriginal languages". Some families mentioned a desire to increase the incorporation of their language and culture as a means of learning, "Would like to hear some more Aboriginal songs to be sang with the children so they could learn". Others mentioned the need for more resources, "posters and some resources are available however more songs music and books would be great". Only one respondent elaborated upon why they felt the KindiLink program did not adequately incorporate cultural perspectives. In this instance, they indicated that there had been discussion, but nothing had been implemented.

When asked if they talked to the KindiLink teacher or AIEO about their culture, language/dialect and/or ways of doing things with their child, 62% responded 'yes' (and 38% 'no'). No comments were made about why they did not talk to the teacher or AIEO, but several comments were made about what this looked like and included information and sharing, "Yes I inform of some language words we use" and "we share information a lot"; speaking in Language; and linking home and KindiLink, "Yes if we've done this at home we talk about it in class if we do similar things". Two comments indicated the impact of sharing, "to learn more for myself" and the supportive nature of shared understanding, "So supportive and always do best for our families".

### 5.6 Challenges, Uncertainties and Overcoming Challenges

**Principals:** Challenges related to building relationships with the community appeared to be a major issue for principals in 2016 and 2017, and this manifested in issues around reaching and recruiting families to participate in KindiLink. In 2016 principals frequently commented on the difficulties of attracting families to KindiLink, which took significant efforts to continually follow up and motivate families to be involved. This was also indicated in the 2017 comments:

*Difficult to identify and foster a community link. Getting the word out to parents in a regional town with many different family groups is difficult.*

In both 2016 and 2017 four principals expressed caution about KindiLink having a significant effect on building relationships. Three principals in 2016 noted that the number of families was too small to judge the impact of KindiLink on family, school and community relationships. In 2017 there was caution about making the

claim that KindiLink helped build relationships. One principal indicated they did not agree that the relationships improved as a result of KindiLink, and another principal said they were unable to comment, another said it has improved relationships but only slightly, another said their community was hard to crack but they are working on it.

**Teachers:** In 2016 for teachers, engaging families and sustaining their interest involved considerable effort. Despite their endeavours seven teachers felt they had been unsuccessful in sustaining relationships with some families, and many commented on how the lack of opportunity to build effective relationships with the families and children had hampered their efforts. In 2017 there was one comment to this effect:

*Low attendance and lack of answering the door makes it very difficult to talk with families to learn about their culture, language and ways of doing things with their children.*

In 2017, some teachers expressed uncertainty about the relationship between families and the school, since some KindiLink families had not yet completed their enrolment for Kindergarten despite reminders and offers of assistance, or had enrolled in other schools. Also, in 2017 there were a few negative comments about relationships between KindiLink and the community. One comment was about staff turnover being a barrier to building solid relationships, the other was more general:

*The relationship between community and school has been difficult and tense for quite some time. Parents want KindiLink as a drop off centre for us to mind their children. These parents will refuse to come and so their children miss out.*

However, in general in 2017 it appears there were less teacher comments regarding challenges in building relationships. Most comments indicated a high level of confidence in communicating with the families who attend regularly, and this was embedded in practice.

## 5.7 Summary

Overall, Aboriginal families felt KindiLink gave them opportunities to build a stronger relationship with their own child, other children, the school community, the kindergarten teacher and the wider community. Building connections within the community and becoming aware of services for Aboriginal families were also viewed as important. KindiLink staff demonstrated an awareness of the value of relationships with families for enhancing educational outcomes. They also recognised that KindiLink provided a unique opportunity to build new relationships and sustain contact in an informal setting, outside of the usual demands and busyness of school life.

It was apparent that all the participants put a great deal of time and effort into building relationships across the whole community. The necessity to build and sustain productive relationships in order for KindiLink to succeed was highlighted. In addition, participants felt that good relationships between families, schools and the community provided an essential platform for ensuring the children's successful transition to Kindergarten. The feedback confirmed that KindiLink was successful for families who had fully committed to the KindiLink. Furthermore, it suggests that relationship-building is an essential part of any initiative of this nature, and absorbs considerable resources in both time and effort. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in some cases, building these relationships was challenging.

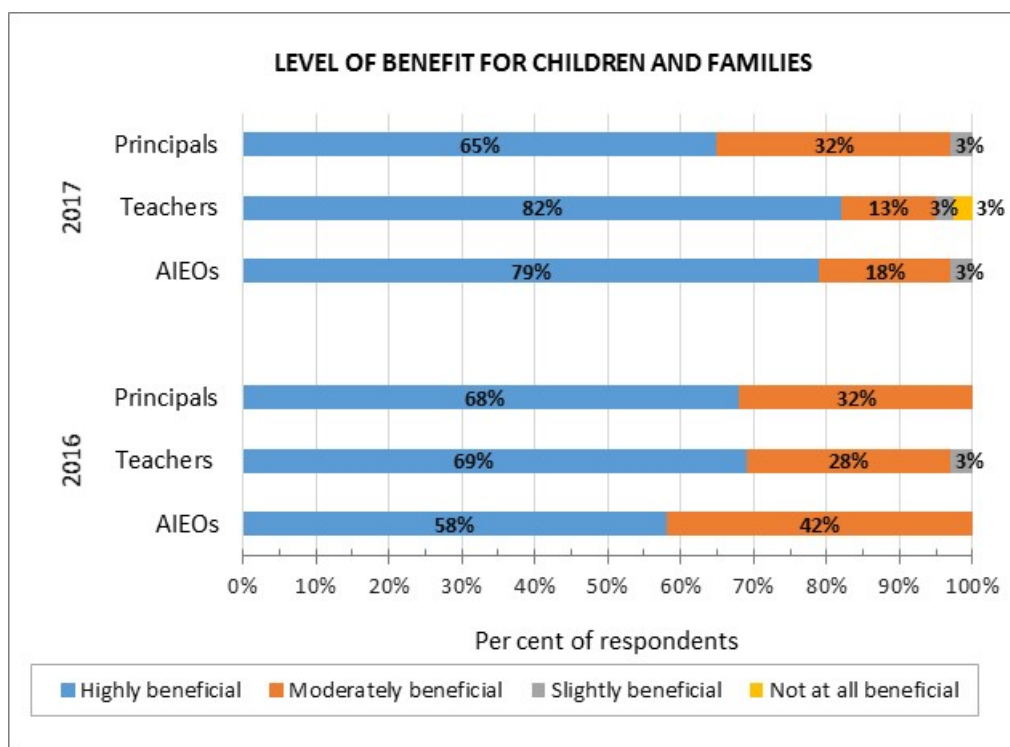
## 6. Benefits and Positive Outcomes and Stories

The principals, teachers, AIEOs and the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families were asked for general comments about overall benefits and positive stories observed at KindiLink. Although many of the comments reiterate and extend previous comments, they are included here because they highlight the benefits and outcomes of KindiLink that were significant to the participants, illustrated by positive stories. This section presents the findings under the following themes:

- Benefits for families and children
- Positive outcomes and stories

### 6.1 Benefits for Families and Children

Principals, KindiLink teachers, AIEOs and families were asked to consider the benefits of KindiLink for the children and families who participated. Firstly they were asked a multiple choice question about the extent to which benefits were passed onto children and families: *“Thinking about the children and families that have participated, how beneficial has implementing KindiLink been?”*



**Figure 6.1:** Views of principals, teachers, and AIEOs on “How beneficial KindiLink has been for Children and their families, 2016 and 2017

- Almost all school staff, in 2016 and 2017, indicated that KindiLink was ‘highly’ or ‘moderately’ beneficial for children and their families.
- Principals were consistently positive in 2016 and 2017. However, for teachers and AIEOs there was a change between 2016 and 2017, with higher proportions in 2017 indicating KindiLink was highly beneficial for children and families. It is possible that the teachers and AIEOs working at the interface

of KindiLink came to know the children and families well and families came to know KindiLink, leading to increased benefits and a recognition of increased benefits.

Staff provided comments to support their answer. Due to repetition and overlap between benefits and positive outcomes and stories, these comments have been integrated into the following section. However, it is also important to note that those participants that indicated KindiLink was only slightly or not beneficial at all made a number of comments about the difficulties of recruiting families, low participation and attendance. In particular, in a remote KindiLink site the principal explained that the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff meant they had to suspend KindiLink while recruiting a new and suitable teacher for KindiLink.

## 6.2 Positive Outcomes and Stories

This section outlines the positive outcomes for families and children, as well as broader outcomes described for the school and community. This section is informed by several data sources:

- The comment section from the multiple choice question about benefits for families and children
- The comments of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families when asked what they liked doing at KindiLink and what has been a good experience for them and their families (at KindiLink or doing something at home related to KindiLink)
- Comments from participants who were asked to describe positive stories – some stories will be presented in Section 3, but other responses that were not stories have been included in this section.

Findings are presented in the following themes:

- Families experiencing the school in positive ways
- Families involved in the school community
- Families engaging in their child's learning
- Families connection to support and services
- Families transition to Kindergarten
- Children's development and learning
- Recognising the language/dialect and culture of Aboriginal families
- Connections between the school and community

### 6.2.1 Families experiencing the school in positive ways

For families the experience of KindiLink was generally very positive, and there was no data to indicate otherwise. There were many comments about the enjoyment and the pleasure families got from being involved in activities with their child. In particular they enjoyed singing, cooking, but also just talking and engaging with their child and connecting one-on-one.

In 2016, nine Aboriginal families referred to spending quality time with their child, *"Helping my child and watching him learn new things everyday"*. Ten Aboriginal families took pleasure from seeing their child and other children learn and develop, *"My child learned new songs, learned how to make craft, wash hands. Since coming to KindiLink my daughter is not shy about singing songs, talking"*. Aboriginal families in 2016 and 2017 spoke of their satisfaction with seeing their child enjoy themselves, the fun involved and a love of *"everything we do here"*.

One Aboriginal family mentioned, “I like that I can come here and feel relaxed. It's like meditating” (2017). The intention to create a safe and welcoming space was reinforced by principals in 2016 and 2017 who commented that one of KindiLink’s benefits was provide this positive experience of the school, and to allow families to feel at ease in the school environment. In 2016 principals mentioned the benefits of regular attendance of families and them feeling positive about school. Principals in 2017 reported that they enjoyed the positive feedback from families, and the enthusiasm of children.

### ***Positive Story***

*In our first year of KindiLink, one of our mums had been very reticent about her younger children attending school. The second-youngest was home schooled for three years. When he returned to school... she started to bring the youngest to KindiLink. She was very nervous in the school environment. Many of her previous interactions with the school had been difficult and very aggressive. Over the course of the KindiLink year, she came to know the staff and me better. When incidents occurred with her older children, we were able to discuss issues in an increasingly calm manner. Her trust in me and in the other teachers in the school grew. In the second year of KindiLink, we invited her to keep coming with her daughter, even though she was now in Kindergarten. She did so and was a great mentor and model to other families. We have built a very productive relationship that benefits her and her children at our school. (Principal)*

## **6.2.2 Families’ involvement in the school community**

In 2017 a very strong theme emerging from the data was effective engagement of parents with the school. In 2016 many comments from AIEOS, teachers and principals were about generally helping families become familiar with the school. However in 2017, the second year of KindiLink implementation, it appears that the strong relationships built with families led to very tangible ways that KindiLink parents were now more involved with the school on a longer term basis. Changes in parents’ confidence were highlighted, especially for younger parents and fathers, who were initially anxious and were reportedly more engaged and relaxed about the education of their children. Examples given included:

- Parents now have a role on the school board
- Parents (at least three) enrolling to complete the Educational Assistant (EA) course at TAFE
- One parent collecting second hand uniforms and mending them for 2018
- One parent doing work experience at the schools’ CPC
- One parent taking courses in community services
- One parent assisting running a playgroup
- Parents painting a mural
- One parent taking interest in becoming an AIEO

### ***Positive Story***

*One of our [KindiLink] Dads ran an Indigenous games rotation during our NAIDOC celebrations. The positive feedback he received from the school principal, students, teachers and parents has prompted him to enrol in TAFE next year to train as an EA. (Teacher)*

### 6.2.3 Families engaging in their child's learning

Principals in 2016 and 2017 commented that KindiLink helped families to be more engaged in the learning environment. In 2017 especially principals noticed families had taken ownership of KindiLink and had greater understanding of their child's development: *better ideas of how their child is progressing developmentally* (2017 principal).

This theme was picked up and expanded on by other participant groups. Teachers in 2016 observed families taking ownership and using their initiative. They described the ways families placed greater value on shared reading and learning. In 2017 teachers noticed increases in parent skills (building confidence and competence as their child's first teacher). AIEOs also noted that the majority of families, *"have taken on board why we learn through play and how conversational reading, playing etc...is important for shaping our future in school life."*

Aboriginal families mentioned the benefits of helping their children with activities and supporting their skills and learning, although they had a slightly different view, and highlighted the benefits of the whole family being involved: *"That the whole family participates and grows and learns together."* The excitement of transferring activities and skills learned at KindiLink to the family environment and the involvement of other family members in KindiLink, were viewed by families as positive outcomes in 2016 and 2017.

Families engaged particularly well with songs and shared book reading with their child. In 2016 there were many comments regarding families valuing the time they spent with their child, but in 2017 there were less such comments. However, there was more emphasis with a significant number of comments in 2017 regarding children's learning and parents' observations of their child developing new skills and social/behavioural skills. This perhaps indicates a change in the awareness of families as it appeared that were they were more aware of [or more able and willing to articulate] their child's development and learning outcomes.

#### ***Positive Stories***

*There has been many [positive stories], a parent who had an older child in the school never communicated with school and left it to her husband, now that parent has the confidence to speak up and communicate with her older child's class teacher and administration without coming to us first and sharing any concerns. Observing this parent in taking charge of her child's learning and participating, changing activity to what she would like to do that day, bringing resources in to share her ideas has been an amazing journey watching her grow. (AIEO)*

*The father of a Pre-Primary girl spoke to me last week and was relating the story of how well his daughter had settled into the first few days. He then went on excitedly and described how well she had enjoyed her kindergarten experience and drew connection back to the positive start she had been given through her participation in the KindiLink program. He then went on to describe how he had learned so much about education and preparing his daughter for learning through his involvement in KindiLink. I jokingly suggested that we should video him saying such positive things about the program and he replied that he would love to do that. (Principal)*

## 6.2.4 Families connecting to support and services

Principals, especially in 2016, identified the benefits to families of their connections with other families. These relationships, and their relationship with school staff were fostered by the efforts of principals, and this helped nurture and support family health and wellbeing. Families also mentioned social connections to other families as a benefit.

Principals' in 2016 revealed that KindiLink enabled early detection and intervention for child health problems and helped parents make connections with outside support agencies. This seems to have been realised, as in 2017 families reported that KindiLink helped them to become more aware of services for Aboriginal families, and they liked "outsourcing services like speech and health in the community" (2017).

In 2017 there were also many detailed examples of KindiLink providing families intensive support (for families who needed it).

### *Positive Story*

*The Early Intervention we have been able to put in place working with a family on an individualised school entry program for a non-verbal 3 year old girl. Starting a transition program this year ensures she will have the best start possible to Kindy. We have had speech therapists involved and assessments completed. (Principal)*

## 6.2.5 Families' transition to Kindergarten

Several principals in 2016 and 2017 mentioned the benefits of KindiLink in relation to improved transition to Kindergarten, and in 2017 there were two comments about the increase in kindergarten attendance as a result of KindiLink.

In 2017, teachers also celebrated the achievements of KindiLink in making a difference at Kindergarten, and three teachers substantiated this with some examples:

*All KindiLink children are enrolled for Kindergarten in 2018.*

*The above 90% attendance of our KindiLink children.*

*A parent talking about how ready their child was for Kindergarten and attributing it to KindiLink.*

Families in 2016 mentioned they were pleased that their child was becoming familiar with school routines and that KindiLink had helped prepare their children for Kindergarten. One Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal family also mentioned in 2017 they enjoyed seeing their children mature as they became prepared for school.

### *Positive Stories*

*A child who regularly attends sessions spoke negatively about school and has heard of his sibling's negative school experiences. He began the school transition program with some trepidation. After the first session he reported being 'so smart' and that it was 'kind of like KindiLink' and now asks to go to school most days. (Teacher)*

*Getting feedback from the kindergarten teacher that our KindiLink students are well-behaved, join in every activity and can finish all tasks independently throughout the whole day than others students that do not attend KindiLink. Also feedback from the parents saying how much fun their children are having and learning therefore they are glad they are bringing their children here to KindiLink. (AIEO)*



## 6.2.6 Children’s development and learning

In 2016 the majority of teachers mentioned that the benefits of KindiLink included supporting children’s social and emotional development and growth in confidence. However, most evidence for this outcome came from families (2016 and 2017). Both Aboriginal families and non-Aboriginal families observed and reported their children growing in terms of their interactions with other children, social and cognitive confidence, independence and overcoming shyness. One wrote: *“I love the fact that [child’s name] is learning how to interact politely and engage with other children” (Aboriginal family, 2017).*

### **Positive Story**

*One little girl who has attended regularly was extremely shy and reserved...almost non-verbal. She now interacts comfortably with both her peers and the adults in the room. She is now more independent and does not need mum by her side ever second. (Principal)*

Families also mentioned the benefits of opportunities KindiLink presented for their children to learn different skills through their involvement in activities (and also that KindiLink reinforced this knowledge and understanding throughout the year). As described by teachers, these skills included learning behaviours as well as gross and fine motor skills.

During data analysis it appeared that references to learning and learning outcomes seemed to be mentioned more in the comments by Aboriginal families than non-Aboriginal families. A count was conducted to see if this observation could be substantiated. It was found that 18 of the 54 Aboriginal family comments (33%) mentioned the word ‘learning’, compared with seven of 40 comments (17%) of non-Aboriginal families mentioning the word ‘learning’.

### **Positive Story**

*The attendance of our ex KindiLink kids coming to Kindy this year. Also their fine motor skills and social skills being so strong upon entering school. Along with the families coming into the school more often and more confidently, like they belong (and so they should). (Principal)*

## 6.2.7 Recognising Aboriginal culture

One new theme emerged in the 2017 families’ data, to do with the incorporation of Aboriginal families’ language/dialect and culture in to the KindiLink. This was seen by families as a positive experience: *“learning more about our culture”*, and Aboriginal families mentioned the importance of recognising their cultural background, *“I love the fact that [child’s name] is learning how to interact politely and engage with other children..... and learn about aspects of Language and culture”*.

In 2016, feedback from AIEOs also referenced the “two-way” activities and the positive integration of stories, activities and content between home and school.

### **Positive Story**

*The early childhood educators wanted to make our early childhood play area richer and more imaginative. I talked to KindiLink parents about this. They said they would do it. They formed a committee who drew sketches of what they'd like to see. One of the mums went out and consulted with the Aboriginal community, others consulted with children. As a result we have a magnificent 'welcome' entrance to our KindiLink in a unique Aboriginal design. We also have a contemporary book characters design being completed over the school holidays which will wrap around our building with one side of the building having an interactive sensory wall. (Principal)*

## 6.2.8 Connection between the school and community

According to teachers (2016), positive outcomes of KindiLink included reaching out to families who would otherwise not attend and facilitating a connection with the Aboriginal community. AIEOs agreed that important connections between the school and the wider community were made as a result of KindiLink. They reported an increase in interest and attendance in 2017 as word about KindiLink spread to other parents in the community. In 2017, there were two comments from teachers about the positive reputation that KindiLink was gaining in the community:

*Parents have come along on the recommendation of family who have attended our KindiLink program.*

*Hearing how a young Mum has been telling all her friends how great KindiLink is and how they all should come too!*

In 2016 one principal mentioned the excellent work undertaken by an AIEO in promoting KindiLink within the community and encouraging young mothers to engage positively with the school. In 2017 a principal reported extending KindiLink to engage a broader range of participants: *“We have extended it to a Men on Board day once a fortnight when the dads come along with the children and two of our male AIEOs lead the program”* (2017).

There are several positive stories about adapting KindiLink to the local community to meet their needs, which indicates a community that has embraced KindiLink.

### ***Positive Story***

*Conversations have started with [day-care name], TAFE, the School and other key early childhood education organisations in [the area] about the starting of a 3-5yr old Bush Kinder program (expanding KindiLink). (Principal)*

## 6.3 Summary

In general principals, teachers, AIEOs and families reported benefits across similar themes, so the responses from all participants reinforced each other. There were differences in 2016 and 2017. In 2017 responses across all participants were more likely to directly reflect KindiLink’s purpose. For example there were comments that reflected KindiLink aims in terms of school readiness, *“...motivating for when he starts Kindergarten”* (Aboriginal family, 2017), and comments about giving families a sense that they are their child’s first teacher, *“Communicating with my child and understanding what he needs in learning at Kindy...”* (Aboriginal family, 2017)

There were also more reports and observations about the incorporation of families’ language/dialect and culture and the growth in skills of the children, and the effect of KindiLink on kindergarten enrolments and attendance. This may indicate that in 2017 the intended outcomes are being realised, and/or that participants had more awareness and a clearer understanding of the purpose of KindiLink, compared to 2016, and thus were more focused on observing these outcomes.

## 7. Challenges and Suggestions for Change

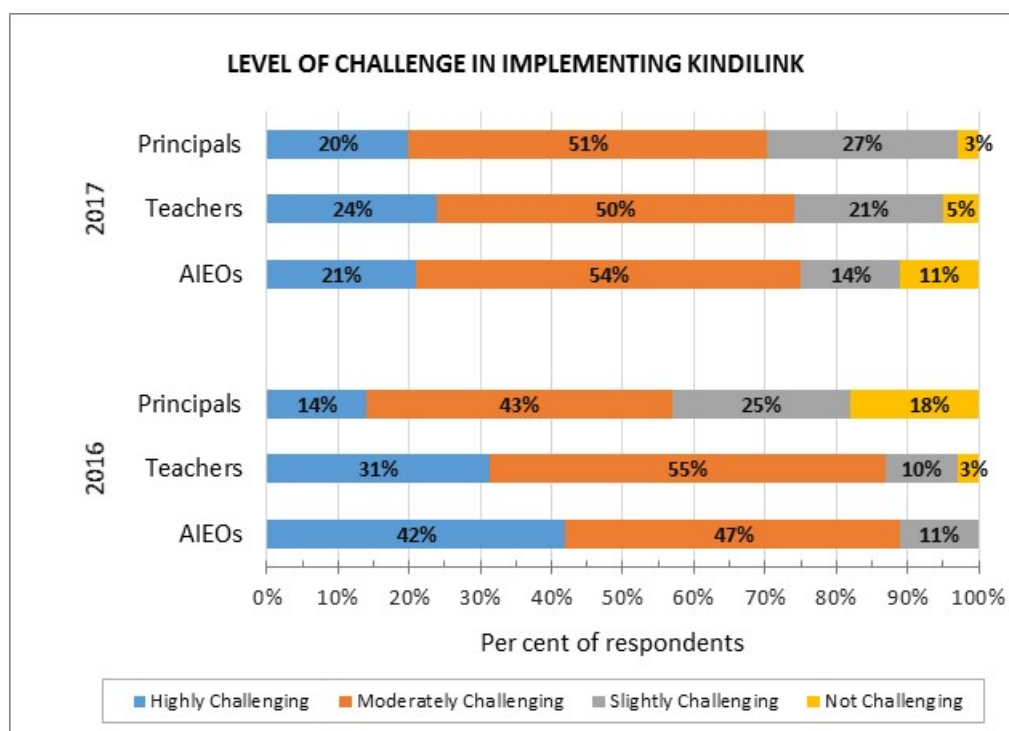
The principals, teachers, AIEOs and the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families were asked for general comments about the challenges of implementing KindiLink, how they overcame these challenges, and the barriers to success. Participants were also asked for their suggestions for any changes that might improve KindiLink in future. Although many of the comments reiterate previous findings, they have been included as an indication of the significance of these issues for the KindiLink participants. Findings are presented under the following themes:

- Challenges with supporting KindiLink implementation
- Challenges with supporting families and children
- Overcoming challenges
- Suggestions for Change

### 7.1 Challenges with Supporting KindiLink Implementation

#### 7.1.1 Overall perceptions

Principals, teachers and AIEOs were asked to indicate how challenging it had been to implement KindiLink, choosing from 'highly challenging', 'moderately challenging', 'slightly challenging' or 'not challenging'.



**Figure 7.1:** Responses of principals, teachers and AIEOs to, "How challenging has implementing KindiLink been"?

Some summary points from the survey data include:

- Most participants found implementing KindiLink moderately challenging.
- AIEOs and teachers found it easier to implement KindiLink in 2017 than in 2016.
- Conversely it seems principals overall found it more challenging to implement KindiLink in 2017 than in 2016.
- The 2016 AIEOs seemed to have found it the most challenging to implement KindiLink, with 42% indicating it was 'highly challenging'. However, this changed in 2017 when only 21% of the AIEOs felt implementing KindiLink was highly challenging. This suggests that perhaps relationships with families and the community were becoming established and there was a growing trust between the school and the community. In addition, it could be that some of the AIEOs' responsibilities were shared or less onerous as both the AIEO and teacher became more familiar with their role and responsibilities.

Principals, teachers and AIEOs were invited to comment on the challenges they faced in implementing KindiLink. Their comments regarding operational and program management issues are summarised under the following themes:

- Resources, staffing and venue
- Competing programs
- Location

### 7.1.2 Resources, staffing and venue

Some KindiLink teachers and principals raised a lack of resources as a barrier to fully implementing KindiLink. However, in general, others felt KindiLink was well funded. This suggests that the resourcing issue is perhaps best addressed in relation to the context of KindiLink, the community it is based in, and the differing needs of families. There may have been issues particular to certain school situations and not to others. The issue was raised more in 2016. In 2017 funding issues were only discussed in relation to the need for funding to continue KindiLink into the future.

In 2017 two principals mentioned staffing being a challenge, they had difficulty finding the right teacher for the role in terms of skills and experience:

*Staffing has been challenging - to find a good ECE teacher who understands families and complexity and poverty and can deliver side by side with parents.*

*At times it has been challenging to find the right person for the teaching role.*

Some principals also had trouble finding enough staffing resources to implement KindiLink. One principal also mentioned that their AIEO was not supportive of KindiLink.

In some contexts in 2016 and 2017, the lack of basic infrastructure such as a stable classroom or suitable indoor and outdoor area for KindiLink activities made it challenging, especially for teachers and AIEOs. Some KindiLink sessions were held in the park where families felt more comfortable than in a classroom.

### 7.1.3 Competing programs

In 2017, two teachers mentioned that KindiLink was competing with another 3-year-old program and so attracted less participants. Conversely, one teacher in 2017 mentioned that:

*We have no Playgroup or other group in town for Pre-school age children and their families so KindiLink is valued highly by those wanting something for the children.*

Thus, it appears that the presence or absence of other programs in the community impacts on how easily KindiLink can be established.

#### **7.1.4 Location**

Working in a remote community presented particular challenges for some KindiLink sites. One principal, one teacher and two AIEOs working in remote contexts mentioned the ongoing challenge of implementing KindiLink:

*The challenges come in terms of attraction of families, working with incumbent staff, the teacher and the AIEO working as a team, general cross-cultural working issues and staffing. As a remote school there are consistent challenges to successful programs which included limited housing, attracting (quality) staff and financial constraints. (Principal)*

Time and perseverance, coupled with a positive attitude to the potential benefits of KindiLink and shared cultural understanding were seen as strategies to overcome challenges in remote communities.

## **7.2 Challenges with Supporting Families and Children**

The following section was informed by some of the comments about the challenges implementing KindiLink presented. Comments in the survey about how KindiLink supported transitions were also analysed to provide insight into the barriers for success that were identified in this section. The themes identified here are significant in that they identify those factors that may prevent children from fully benefiting from KindiLink – that is successfully transitioning to the next phase of their education. The themes are:

- Recruitment and attendance
- Engagement of families
- Pedagogical differences

### **7.2.1 Recruitment and attendance**

Despite the effort that staff put into attracting and retaining families, principals, teachers and AIEOs were frustrated by not being able to engage more families in KindiLink (in particular those families they felt would benefit most), and also found that maintaining the regular attendance of those who registered was challenging:

*It has been incredibly difficult to motivate families to come. I have implemented free swimming lessons, I give them breakfast and lunch and have experienced no success from my struggles. (Teacher)*

Inconsistent attendance was a major barrier identified by staff that prevented children and families from fully benefitting from KindiLink. In 2016 principals reported trying to find ways to encourage registered families and new families to engage with KindiLink. In 2017 attendance was still at the top of the list of challenges identified by principals.

In 2016, six teachers commented on children's progress having been hindered by lack of attendance. In 2017 at least three teachers mentioned that the benefits to children were inhibited by lack of regular attendance.

*Even the children who only attended a handful of sessions showed improvement in most areas. It would easily be highly beneficial if attendance improved.*

Several teachers indicated that those children who would benefit the most are not attending KindiLink:

*I feel as though the families who attend our KindiLink program are not the target families that the program is intended for, meaning these families and children are not 'at risk' regarding schooling and attendance.*

In 2016, five AIEOs talked about the difficulty of getting families in the community to attend, noting that attendance was impacted by families in transit, death and sickness. They acknowledged the role of competing pressures and commitments faced by families in preventing regular attendance. The comments from 2017 were mixed in terms of progress on this issue with some communities reporting that attendance had improved since 2016 and other communities indicating that attendance had not improved, and in one community attendance had deteriorated.

## 7.2.2 Engagement of families

In 2016 and 2017 participants (especially teachers and AIEOs) commented that it was difficult engaging families who preferred to sit back and watch, or thought they could drop off their children and leave. This could be related to understanding cultural ways of being and doing, previous experience of an Aboriginal playgroup (Pre-Kindergarten model), or expectations of regular schooling (i.e., that the teacher is responsible for the children's learning and that that parents do not attend school with their children):

*It's been tricky getting the parents/carers to take the lead with their children. I am still seen as a teacher instead of a facilitator. (Teacher)*

Participants spoke of the need to communicate to families the expectations of KindiLink. One teacher noted the need for deeper engagement with families for KindiLink to be effective.

## 7.2.3 Pedagogical differences

A few teachers in 2016 mentioned pedagogical differences between KindiLink and the kindergarten as a barrier to continuity of children's learning:

*Pedagogically, KindiLink is quite different from the early childhood practices at the school, and it seems that not much consideration has been given to how KindiLink fits within a school community. (Teacher)*

*We offer play-based sessions. Our school, as well as many others, has stopped play-based sessions in favour of desks and rotations. (Teacher)*

In 2017 there was one comment about KindiLink not effectively supporting families to transition:

*...the most recent teacher I feel doesn't understand the KindiLink to Kindergarten transition, I also feel there isn't a lot of readiness in the classroom for our Aboriginal kids to actually be ready for Kindergarten. (Principal)*

## 7.2.4 Family views

Families were asked what they did not like doing at KindiLink as a means of identifying any barriers to participation or effectiveness, or difficulties they faced as participants.

In 2016 the majority of comments reflected a positive view – only three comments indicated concerns. One Aboriginal family member indicated their child had been restless on a trip to the library and that this had been very stressful. Another mentioned her child was not initially interested in the activities, but this had

changed over time and her child had started to participate. The third comment reflected a concern with a dish-washing roster that did not work.

The 2017 responses were similar, with most respondents reflecting a positive view. Four Aboriginal families highlighted concerns: one believed they should do more practice in writing, one found reading difficult because of their own dyslexia, one did not like talking negatively with mothers. The final comment was about the parent managing their child's behaviour (they were told their reaction was not helping). Non-Aboriginal families only identified two concerns: one did not like watching programs from the internet at KindiLink and the other believed that KindiLink does not encourage independence from parents, which is an important aspect of preparing children for Kindergarten.

## 7.3 Overcoming Challenges

The following strategies were mentioned by principals in 2016 and 2017 in discussions about overcoming some of the implementation challenges:

- Collaborating with other community organisations;
- Building productive relationships;
- Putting more effort into relationship-building and promoting KindiLink;
- Engaging with staff from the Early Childhood Branch;
- Using other funds to increase the resources available to KindiLink;
- Experienced and committed staff;
- Building good relationships between the KindiLink teacher, the kindergarten teacher and the school;
- Accepting younger children;
- Provision of transport; and
- Support from Central Office (mentioned only in 2017).

In their descriptions of overcoming challenges, teachers and AIEOs echoed much of what the principals said. They also mentioned they worked harder at:

- Building relationships with the Aboriginal community;
- Building stronger community engagement;
- Making use of external supports such as the Early Childhood Branch and other community organisations;
- Listening to families; and
- Being more resilient.

In 2017, they also mentioned the importance of working together as a team to plan and respond to issues, and also to communicate expectations to families.

## 7.4 Suggestions for Change

Principals, teachers and AIEOs were asked, "If you could change one thing about KindiLink, what would it be?" Families were not asked directly what they would change, but they were asked, "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about KindiLink?" and this section captured some of the families' suggestions for improvement. The findings are presented under the following themes:

- Increased support
- Re-consideration of operational guidelines
- New ideas

### **7.4.1 Increased support**

The suggestions for change indicated that some sites still did not feel their KindiLink was adequately supported in terms of some of the basic needs, as outlined in the following themes:

#### ***Media Promotion***

In 2016, principals suggested that the Department of Education could help by promoting KindiLink in the media. The idea behind this comment was reflected by other participants, with teachers suggesting more participants are needed (2016) and wider promotion (2017), AIEOs also suggesting the need to work on attendance and promotion (2017) and families in 2016 commenting that more children and families need to attend.

#### ***Dedicated KindiLink Venue***

There were at least six comments from teachers and AIEOs requesting a dedicated KindiLink classroom and/or suitable outdoor areas. A few of these suggestions were still present in 2017, so it seems in some sites the issue of providing a suitable venue was not resolved. There were also two comments suggesting it would be better to hold KindiLink offsite.

#### ***Connect to external support***

A new theme in 2017 was a teacher suggesting they would benefit from connecting to others in other KindiLink sites for training, guidance and clarifying expectations.

#### ***Transport***

Teachers and AIEOs pointed out the need for providing transport to families as a suggestion for change (in one comment it was linked to improving attendance). Some sites were able to do this, but it seems that in other sites it remains on the wish list. One family also suggested a bus.

#### ***More FTE***

Providing more FTE (this includes more time for the teacher and the AIEO) to engage with families and promote KindiLink was a common suggestion by teachers in 2016. In 2017 this was an even more significant issue, attracting seven comments from teachers and several from AIEOs. Comments indicated that FTE and funding for DOTT time was going to be reduced and there were concerns expressed about being able to manage KindiLink responsibilities; engaging families in a deep and meaningful ways, doing home visits and having adequate planning time with the AIEO.

Comments asked for more time for teachers and AIEOs to plan together and do home visits, or at least to not see reductions in time provided to staff of KindiLink. Again this suggestion was linked in several comments to addressing attendance issues.



## 7.4.2 Re-consideration of operational guidelines

In these comments participants explore changes to operational guidelines of KindiLink that might benefit participants, or adapt KindiLink better to the local area.

### *Inclusion criteria*

Although the decision to invite non-Aboriginal families is made through consultation between the principal, KindiLink staff, families and the community, the desire to re-visit the inclusion criteria was present in 2016 and 2017. In 2016, AIEOs and teachers suggested focusing more on Aboriginal families, or making KindiLink for Aboriginal-only participants. However in 2016 there were also some comments (AIEOs and principals) about offering KindiLink to non-Aboriginal families but this was not reflected at all in 2017 data. In 2017 two AIEOs explored offering KindiLink to Aboriginal only participants, to cater better for their specific needs; although one person added that it is “*hard just to say Aboriginal families only*”.

Other suggestions for changing access criteria were around changing the age range, to either involve older siblings, or have an option to start at a younger age (teachers and principals).

### *Involvement of parents*

There were various suggestions about what the ideal amount of parental involvement looked like. AIEOs expressed the need for parents and carers to be more engaged in their child’s learning, which reflects the KindiLink model. However principals and teachers questioned whether parents are needed all the time – suggesting children could have more independence from parents, or maybe parents are not required to stay at all. A family in 2017 suggested that time in the session without parents might be a good idea, to support independence.

### *Classroom activities and focus*

In terms of the content and programming of KindiLink sessions there were suggestions about how to incorporate more inclusive content, which included:

- bringing in a [language name] language teacher once a term (AIEO)
- adding more language to the program (Teacher)
- reviewing the LearningGames® to make them more suitable for Aboriginal families.

One Aboriginal family (2017) also mentioned that community consultation was needed to adjust KindiLink for different communities. In 2016 principals suggested changes around more activities parents can do with children and providing excursions. Generally in 2017 there were less comments about making changes to the KindiLink program. Although one AIEO suggested that children were ready for more structured learning and did not need so much free play (they added that they were not involved in a great deal of the planning).

### *Reporting requirements*

Principals and teachers in both years suggested changes to reporting and data collection that could better capture less frequent attendees, attendees in other 3-year-old initiatives, or younger siblings. In 2017, there was also interest expressed in data collection systems to track the attendance and progress of KindiLink children when they attend Kindergarten. One 2017 teacher comment also mentioned the time it takes to complete surveys was disrupting to KindiLink.

### ***Hours and days of operation***

Although the days and time of KindiLink sessions are offered in consultation with the community, variations in when KindiLink sessions would be held and how frequently were suggested by principals, teachers and AIEOs. Some ideas included:

- a later morning start time,
- running for more than 2 days per week (3-day KindiLink was mentioned by principals, teachers and AIEOs), and
- offering KindiLink for longer sessions and/or offering on 1 day only.

Some comments in 2017 about expanding the number of hours of KindiLink recognised that more funding would be needed.

### ***Changes related to local circumstances***

Other comments related to particular circumstances, for example:

- locating KindiLink on or off the school site,
- addressing problems when AIEOs are appointed by redeployment, and
- the need to be more flexible with staffing in remote areas (e.g. to enable the AIEO to deliver KindiLink if the teacher is away).

### **7.4.3 New ideas**

New ideas posed by Aboriginal families in 2017 included:

- a breakfast program,
- incorporating visits from a speech pathologist, the school nurse and health checks into KindiLink sessions, and
- a school uniform for KindiLink children.

## **7.5 Summary**

Overall, staff found implementing KindiLink moderately challenging and illustrated this with descriptions of issues they faced in providing adequate infrastructure to establish KindiLink and attracting and retaining participants. In some sites, the school faced substantial challenges working with the community to support families to attend, and some schools continued to face basic issues around obtaining appropriate staff, and a classroom in which to implement KindiLink. Responses indicated that principals, teachers and AIEOs had worked through their challenges in positive ways, and they described what they could change and what they could not. They expressed motivation to persevere in areas and not give up and showed a commitment to working to improve KindiLink, and carefully considered ideas about how this might look.

## 8. Insights for the Future

The final two questions of the surveys for principals, teachers and AIEOs invited participants to reflect on key insights that could help inform decisions beyond the pilot period and anything else they would like to say. Both questions elicited reflective thinking about how KindiLink outcomes were met, or how some areas could be addressed more effectively. Both questions also prompted general thoughts about successes, difficulties and future directions. The responses to both questions overlapped significantly therefore the comments were collated and presented under the following themes:

- Improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities of Aboriginal children upon entry into Kindergarten
- Improving attendance (through kindergarten and subsequent years)
- Building on the capacity and confidence of families as their children's first teacher
- Building productive relationships between the family, the school and community
- Overview of gains made
- Reflection and future directions

### 8.1 Improving the Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities of Aboriginal Children upon Entry into Kindergarten

Principals, teachers and AIEOs agreed that KindiLink is making a noticeable difference; Aboriginal children are increasingly ready to gain from the learning experiences at Kindergarten. They are confident in separating from their families (as observed by AIEOs) and are more relaxed and confident:

*The children are so ready for Kindy, socially and emotionally. We had no tears at all at the beginning of this year with children who attended KindiLink last year. (Principal)*

*Students entering Kindergarten are far more focused; able to follow rules and guidelines and more relaxed in our setting. They have settled far more quickly than other students. This has proven to be an outstanding initiative. (Principal)*

Children were also observed to have increased capabilities. AIEOs commented on the high level of fine motor skills, and teachers reported advanced skills in several domains:

*Children have more capabilities when entering Kindergarten as they have had more opportunities and experiences in group settings with both familiar and unfamiliar adults and children. We have immersed them in stories, song and dance to develop their cognitive, language and physical skills. We have allowed them to practice new skills in engaging and fun ways, with families alongside them to celebrate successes. We have witnessed development in all five domains for most children and are very proud of their achievements. (Teacher)*

Teachers also noted advanced classroom behaviours:

*As the Kindy teacher for 2017, I have taught the 2016 KindiLink children. I have noticed at the beginning of the year I did not need to focus solely on health and wellbeing routines and self-help skills as the children had already learnt these skills the year before in KindiLink sessions. The 2017 kindy students who attended KindiLink in 2016 were a lot quicker to settle at mat sessions for story time and followed instructions a lot quicker and*

earlier compared to the 2016 Kindy students who were not offered KindiLink in 2015.  
(Teacher)

## 8.2 Improving Attendance (through Kindergarten and Subsequent Years)

There were many detailed, insightful comments about KindiLink's ability to improve attendance. There seemed to be consensus that children and families who attended KindiLink go onto experience improved attendance at Kindergarten and subsequent years. One principal proposed that this may be due to KindiLink families already being predisposed to attending. However, others attributed improved attendance to the influence of KindiLink:

*A 0-3 program is essential in our school to engage both children and families early. Improves the capacity of Kindy children to have excellent attendance. As parents have a better understanding, it develops good attendance habits early. The children and parent connections are strong with staff and other families. (Principal)*

*Teachers are advocating that students who have been to KindiLink are better prepared for Kindy and succeeding more in pre-primary. The relationships with parents are already established through KindiLink and continues into Kindy etc. Attendance for Kindy has improved. (Principal)*

Others reiterate that success in improving attendance at KindiLink was limited:

*It has been difficult to attract regular attendance by all eligible children/families due to difficulties in getting to the site. Although we have had some transport support from [Aboriginal organisation] for several months, this has been restricted because of the lack of suitably qualified drivers and limitations of properly fitted car seats and restraints. (Principal)*

*KindiLink definitely does all of the above for the families that attend. The difficulty is getting families to attend in the first place. Attendance has grown over time, but is very easily affected by events within the community. In addition, our days and times of operation are dictated by our Kindergarten as they share the same space. As a result, the KindiLink suffers from being on Thursday (when families receive pay/benefits and often go shopping) and Friday (the day that most large events (such as funerals) occur). (Principal)*

As has been reflected in other sections of this volume, participants indicated their determination to not give up, and reiterated that providing transport might encourage same families (for schools who have not yet tried this) and experimenting with other changes to KindiLink.

*I believe that on a small scale we have achieved these outcomes. For our school, being able to get parents here will continue to be the major issue. Asking for two mornings a week is a big ask for some parents who have busy lives. In an ideal world, I think a combination of a playgroup scenario and a pre-K where kids stay by themselves would be ideal. (Teacher)*

## 8.3 Building on the Capacity and Confidence of Families as their Children's First Teacher

Principals, teachers and AIEOs reported gains in building families' confidence, "Confidence of families through KindiLink been amazing" (AIEO). They stated that KindiLink is valuable because it is as important for families as it is for children to get to know the school environment and routines, which builds their confidence:

*Our KindiLink is a room on the veranda beside other classes. The parents see the other children come out to recess, see them eat their play lunch and at play at close quarters.*

*They notice that the children are happy, playing well together, that staff are attentive and caring. It is confidence building (and great PR). (Principal)*

There were two teacher comments about gains in parents' confidence as their child's first teacher:

*Once parents felt comfortable at KindiLink, the participation in the LearningGames® improved and they began to talk about their children's development more openly. Confidence building for parents is so important. Once they realise how important their role is in their children's learning parents become more proactive. (Teacher)*

*Parent survey responses show that more of our families are aware of the learning potential of KindiLink activities and are replicating them at home in a fun way. (Teacher)*

## **8.4 Building Productive Relationships between the Family, the School and Community**

Building relationships was considered key. Not only was this aspect the most commented on, it also seems the area that participants express the most confidence about in terms of experiencing success.

*The relationships between the school and the families who have attended KindiLink have definitely been strengthened which has benefitted the whole family. (Teacher)*

*Keep KindiLink running. It is such an awesome program and I have really seen the benefits that it has, especially with the relationships between family, school and community. (AIEO)*

Building relationships was seen as the critical factor in achieving all other outcomes. Principals, teachers and AIEOs describe how good relationships are the central factor for instigating change:

*Building positive relationships with families is the most important aspect of building a successful program. Without this the rest does not happen. (Teacher)*

*Parents want to be able to trust you before they will allow any of these things to occur. Building the relationship is crucial, and it takes a long time. (Teacher)*

One teacher described the positive relationships formed at KindiLink having benefits for the whole school, and has assisted with early intervention:

*We have not had any anti-social incidents between school and families in 2017, and I believe that this is as a result of KindiLink, our transition program and the relationships formed with other teaching staff. Families have been very open to and positive about outside agency referrals which has not been the case in the past.*

KindiLink was seen as a unique way to nurture relationships because there is little pressure, families can relax and staff can spend the time needed to build trust. Also one principal pointed out the important fact that KindiLink allows this to happen early for the child:

*The earlier we can begin building relationships the more chance we have of engaging the family in their child's education. (Principal)*

*This initiative has really helped bridging the gap with some of our Aboriginal families, helping them to feel more comfortable being in our school. It has also taught us many things of our local Aboriginal culture as we get time to have conversations with our local families in a relaxed atmosphere. (Principal)*

Participants considered good open communication, and a warm and welcoming environment to be important:

*Giving them a big smile, and welcoming them in to the classroom. (AIEO)*

*Building of relationships is extremely important. Be welcoming and encouraging. Never assume. Remove any possible barriers. Get family input on decisions. (Teacher)*

Staff changes was noted as inhibiting this process and participants also pointed out that although there has been success in building relationships, KindiLink needs to be sustained over a long time to build on this success, allow word of mouth to reach others, and see this outcome fully achieved. This was seen as particularly important for Aboriginal families, providing time to building trusting and respectful relationships:

*Relationships with families take time to develop and therefore longer term commitment and funding are necessary for ongoing improvements in the program. (Teacher)*

*Word of mouth is huge if families are talking about your program then people will come to check it out and will hopefully keep attending. (Teacher)*

## 8.5 Overview of Gains Made

Asking school staff to reflect on all four KindiLink aims elicited some general comments about which outcomes KindiLink was having the most impact on. There was a sense from the data that there was a great deal of success around the outcome of building relationships, and that there were only limited (and hard won) gains for the outcome about improving attendance. A few comments confirmed this observation:

*The first three outcomes are being met, however, improving attendance remains a huge issue and I am at my wits end in thinking of ways to improve attendance. (Teacher)*

*I think the last two tasks [building the capacity and confidence of families, and improving attendance] have been a lot more difficult than the first two [improving the capabilities of children and building relationships]. (Teacher)*

One teacher comment described well how all outcomes reinforce one another:

*Creating a welcoming, informal environment where parents are accepted assists in building productive relationships between the school and families. This group are now a 'tight unit' and are looking forward to moving forward together through the school. Parents have commented that they will be sharing the journey together. I feel this will build capacity and engagement in families leading to improved social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities. Hopefully, as people are feeling comfortable, it will increase attendance. (Principal)*

The idea expressed in this comment, and expressed by others, is the view that building relationships is the foundation for change, and good relationships need to be established before making a difference in all the other outcome areas. Thus, it would seem that KindiLink needs time to sustain the gains made in the pilot and to have greater impact in the other aims of KindiLink.

One point made by an AIEO and a teacher in 2017 was about not assuming too quickly what success looks like, especially in Aboriginal communities. This teacher added that some KindiLink sites are influencing sometimes 10 or 20 years' worth of negative or unsure feelings towards schools, and KindiLink needs extensive time to establish trust in a community. An AIEO reinforced this point, pointing out that Aboriginal families take a long time to trust and often observe from the outside before.

## 8.6 Reflections and Future Directions

The data source for this section was 'other' comments from the 2016 and 2017 survey of principals, teachers, AIEOs and families, and any 'insights' sought from principals, teachers and AIEOs in the 2017 survey that were not directly related to the outcomes described above. Four themes were identified:

- Making a difference
- Growth and learning for schools
- The influence of the local context
- Looking to the future

### 8.6.1 Making a difference

#### *The need for programs like KindiLink*

In this section participants noted the ways that KindiLink interacted with their local context. In a few sites teachers described communities with a great need for support in terms of parenting skills and helping prepare young children for school.

*A lot of work needs to be done on helping the parents understand how important their role is in their children's lives in terms of them being their child's first teacher. Parents need to become more proactive about their children's education and understand that just spending time with them and talking to them is immensely valuable. We can keep giving the families resources and talking to them, but they actually have to want to help themselves, their families and their young children to break out of the poverty cycle so many of them appear to be in. (Teacher)*

For communities in great need of support it was felt that KindiLink is greatly beneficial.

*Our community is in crisis so any program is beneficial to provide relief and support to families. The children need this program desperately along with many other things to engage and occupy them. The big question is how to get families seeing the importance of rich childhood experiences. Many of the families have missed out on these themselves and have resorted to drugs, alcohol and use of social media to fill their time. The saddest times for us have been when we go on a home visit and the child is up and wants to come with us but the carer is still asleep or makes an excuse to not come. As depressing as this all sounds the program is still a huge positive. We have families with children from birth to 3 attending at some time or other. These families are all being contacted and have someone showing an interest in their children. When they do come they have a positive experience. When they feel like making the effort there is somewhere to go. Without KindiLink there is nothing here for under 3s. (Teacher)*

In 2016, AIEOs commented on the ability of KindiLink to cater for whole-of-family needs in ways that other services were unable to. In 2017 one AIEO added:

*The program in my eyes is needed now more than ever for our Aboriginal babies to make it in this world...*

#### *The value of KindiLink for families and children*

AIEOs, teachers and principals all recognised that KindiLink was making a difference in supporting families and children. For example, teachers noted:

*It does all that it is intended in the support of Aboriginal families and their children in the education setting. (Teacher)*

*This program is very powerful as we are creating lifelong learners and making children feel more comfortable to come to school. (Teacher)*

AIEOs made a significant number of comments describing the difference that KindiLink makes to Aboriginal families. As indicated by the comment below, AIEOs felt very strongly about this:

*The KindiLink program is one of the best things that has happened to Aboriginal people. It deals with family life and everyday life. It is their life and it needs to become a reality (education, strong relationships with school etc.). That is why I signed up as an AIEO. I could see what it was going to do for people that were struggling. KindiLink is helping my family and I know what it can do to help everyone. (AIEO)*

Many teachers in 2017 emphasised that KindiLink makes a difference:

*To watch children code switch both language and behaviours as they attend KindiLink with their parent close by and over the year gain confidence and Independence has been the highlight even parents have commented and noticed this in their children and others. (Teacher)*

In 2016 and 2017 most comments from families were about the value they found for their children in KindiLink. Families were enthusiastic about KindiLink, and said they would recommend it to other families.

## **8.6.2 Growth and learning for schools**

### **Staffing, training and skills of teachers**

In 2016 and 2017 families mentioned how welcoming and supportive KindiLink staff were towards them and their attentiveness to each child. They described the staff as “remarkable”, “wonderful” and “awesome”. Clearly the skills and attributes of staff are critical to success. One principal explains how a skilled or unskilled teacher in a difficult community can make or break KindiLink:

*The KindiLink community initially was quite large, but...the staff were discussing issues with parents which caused bias to develop and eventually many of these parents left after the initial teacher took sick leave last year... She is still on sick leave. The teacher who succeeded her, knew the surrounding Aboriginal families and was a good asset to the program, however much damage had been done the previous year and it hasn't been easy for this new teacher to make headway. I think there needs to be support in hiring suitable teachers for this position. [School name] has had tremendous support however in equipping a suitable building, and being a listening ear when staffing issues became contentious. (Principal)*

Principals expanded on this theme by referring to the need to have committed staff:

*Program is great but we need to ensure the teacher's main role and priority is KindiLink. (Principal)*

*Ensure the right people are involved through proper induction processes and resource allocation. (Principal)*

Teachers themselves explored the difficulties of the role for them, and the need to be well-supported, informed and trained. Although support was ongoing from the beginning of KindiLink, this was particularly important for a graduate coming into KindiLink as the third teacher:

*It would be good to have an info pack that details things like how to run mat sessions with parents where you can show them how learning games work and conversational reading. Things to say to get parents involved. As a new graduate teacher and being new to the [region] new to a school that is predominantly Aboriginal children and families, it would*



*be good to have some guidance on how the program should be run to best reach its objectives. I felt a bit awkward coming in as the 3rd teacher to KindiLink this year and by that time our program was being run basically as a kindy or pre-primary, I found it difficult to scale it back to a play based and hands on learning program that could be used at home (after speaking with [Early Childhood Branch member] about the aims and goals of the program and what it should look like) and then I felt like I was being judged by our families and AIEO for being 'lazy' if I did not run it as a Kindy or Pre-Primary. It would be good to take an overview from a KindiLink that runs a really good program, and see how they do it. (Teacher)*

Two teachers (2017) suggested training would have been useful on how to address issues that arise during KindiLink sessions (such as domestic violence, child development etc.), indicating teachers do not feel completely equipped for their role.

*It is really tricky to "teach"/"model" for parents and manage a large group of children of varying ages. Quite a different job to teaching a regular group of children without parents. (Teacher)*

Other comments about support for school staff included a teacher describing the need (and resources) for working effectively with the AIEO as a team:

*Equal time for AIEO and KindiLink teaching team. Having an early childhood trained teacher and an AIEO who work as a team, showing mutual respect and cultural awareness is the key to a successful KindiLink program. If families feel valued and welcomed into our KindiLink family the KindiLink outcomes are achievable. (Teacher)*

Many principals in 2016 and 2017 also took the opportunity to express appreciation for the excellent support from the Early Childhood Branch staff and expressed the view that they had received good support from the Department because of the knowledge, understanding and willingness of staff to work with them.

### ***Teacher growth and enhanced understanding of Aboriginal culture***

One unintended outcome identified by principals and teachers and AIEOs was the professional and personal growth of teachers and AIEOs after their experience implementing KindiLink. Teachers in 2016 mentioned they felt privileged to be involved in KindiLink and identified the opportunity to work closely with the AIEO as one of the most positive aspects of KindiLink due to the community connections, knowledge and insights gained into families' language/dialect and culture that was fundamental to the success of KindiLink. Teachers commented on their own personal learning and growth, and two mentioned how much they valued KindiLink resources, including the professional development workshops.

In 2016, AIEOs also commented on their own deep satisfaction from their involvement in KindiLink. In 2017, AIEOs made similar comments, and highlighted how KindiLink supported their role as AIEO in developing deep connections with families, and the value of the relationships they built with children and families and reinforced the purpose of their role:

*I think KindiLink is an amazing opportunity for early learning interventions of our young people. To me doing KindiLink is a much easier way to introduce education to Aboriginal families.*

## 8.6.3 The influence of the local context

### *Thoughts about schools that can benefit the most*

The 'other' comments section was a chance for participants to explore the complexities of how KindiLink interacted with their local community. There were responses from at least three sites indicating that KindiLink did not work well in their communities at this point in time for several reasons:

Low attendance and an inability to effectively reach the target group:

*[School name] PS should not have a KindiLink after 2018 – the funding should be used to support areas in which KindiLink participation is high. (Principal)*

*Schools with changing demographics like [school name] are not suitable for KindiLink programs. The program would have been more productive if the location had been at [school name] Primary. [School name] is quite low in Aboriginal numbers, compared to our once robust Aboriginal population. Relocation to another school in 2018 would be preferable. We understand this isn't possible because of the program being a Pilot. Our enrolments at KindiLink are between 4 children on a Friday and 10 on a Thursday. Most of the families are Non-Aboriginal. The enrolments in Kindergarten in 2017 were 1 Aboriginal child and 3 non-Aboriginal children and for 2018 we have 2 non-Aboriginal and 1 Aboriginal child. So the impact on Aboriginal families beginning school has been minimal and needs to be assessed. This is in an area where [school name] PS enrolments have increased from 142 -206 in 3 years. The enrolments from KindiLink are not reflecting this trend. (Principal)*

Other programs in the community meeting the same needs:

*Our established Pre-Kindergarten program targeted all of these areas prior to the pilot. (Teacher)*

*To be honest, in our community there is a lot for families to do with their child other than KindiLink. There are good quality daycares close by if the parent wants to return to work. There are a local library offering story-time once a week, they can take their child swimming, the parks are excellent close to this area, with bus and trains being very accessible it is hard to compete. (Teacher)*

A lack of commitment:

*Choosing schools that actually want to run the program and will fully support it. (Teacher)*

Two participants pointed out that KindiLink is ideal for remote areas, and less ideal for metropolitan areas:

*KindiLink appears to be more successful in rural areas. Metro schools are struggling. Perhaps we need to change the program for Metro schools. (Teacher)*

*Our metropolitan families are different to community as in community you have the drive from one or more senior members who have that respect to get others to attend. Our Aboriginal population has changed in our area due to housing and more families entering the work force or going back to school. (AIEO)*

### *Adapting KindiLink to local community*

Teachers in 2017 reflected on some ways that KindiLink could be more successful in their communities and noted some adaptations that could work:

- offering it only one day per week (usually determined through consultation between principal, staff, families and community)
- reviewing the LearningGames® to make them more suitable for Aboriginal people (they need to be less basic)
- some time with children on their own without the parents

## 8.6.4 Looking to the future

### *Resources and desire to continue or expand*

The majority of the ‘other comments’ provided by the KindiLink families were about the importance of KindiLink continuing. In 2016 families mentioned how “wonderful” KindiLink was, and shared the hope that KindiLink would continue as an important service to the Aboriginal community. Similarly, in 2017 most comments in this section were about the value they found for their children in KindiLink, also emphasising the importance of KindiLink continuing for others and other Aboriginal communities. The nature of the comments and the number of comments indicate that participating families were emphatic about KindiLink continuing.

The families’ views were echoed by principals, teachers and AIEOs:

*It is just a fantastic strategy and I would love to see it continue. We all talk about relationships being the key to success at school and this initiative does exactly that. (Principal)*

*We need to be committed to maintaining our 0-3 program beyond the KindiLink period. It has been important to give the students and parents that sense of belonging and comfort that this is their school. (AIEO)*

*The program needs to continue at [school name] PS in some format. (Teacher)*

Along with this wish, were also related concerns about continued funding:

*The uncertainty of funding after the pilot period is causing families and the school to feel slightly anxious. (Teacher)*

*We have built a sense of community value in this program and explained to parents and caregivers the importance they play in their kid’s development. I wonder if we stop the program and withdraw the support whether the impression to families is that this is a changing view. I feel that we will need to find a way to continue to fund this program if the pilot is not continued which will obviously impact on the schools capacity to expend resources where they are already required. (Principal)*

*This is a fantastic program, hard to fund from school funds though, if to continue it would need to be supported by the Department. (Principal)*

One AIEO indicated a larger budget was needed for resources and equipment, another said a new building was needed. Two principals had ambitions about expanding KindiLink:

*The power of the program and meeting the above outcomes can lead to having strategic and focused conversations with other organisations in town about expanding the program. (Principal)*

*As I have already mentioned I have seen the evidence to support extending this program to 0-3. Having it offered every day supports the families to attend. We have also thought that having some form of transport for families without a car would really increase the participation especially for the most needy families. (Principal)*

## ***The long- term potential***

Participants reiterated that KindiLink has the potential to make a difference in the long term, as many of the positive impacts of KindiLink are perceived to be long term benefits, and also benefits that may take some years to build on and fully realise:

*I really believe that we will be playing the long game and that over time we will build a culture where attending KindiLink with your child when they are three is the norm for an increasing number of families. (Principal)*

*I believe that if the pilot could be extended for a further period of time, we would begin to see the full benefit of the program within the community. (Principal)*

*I think the longer a program runs the more data can be collected the more confident the community gets. With a Pilot Program just like this, once the Pilot is taken off it will just be the normal thing to start KindiLink. (AIEO)*

Principals indicated curiosity and interest in monitoring the long-term benefit for KindiLink students. One principal reiterated that it will take time (and also more resources) to realise the full potential:

*The KindiLink position in our community could be great. The partnership of the school and the local medical service provide the perfect, wrap-around service needed for improving outcomes. Our local NGO, on paper, provides an important extra dimension to those services and supports that we can offer. It comes down to staffing and cost. We cannot fund the position with the current formula. I believe over time, attendance and capacity will improve. (Principal)*

## 9. Key Findings

This analysis of the survey data collected from families, KindiLink teachers, AIEOs and principals and kindergarten teachers on KindiLink sites in conjunction with the attendance data suggests KindiLink met with considerable success.

### 9.1 Improvement of the Social, Language, Cognitive and Emotional Ability on Entry to Kindergarten

It is apparent from the data that, overall, principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs agreed that KindiLink had to some extent been successful in improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities of Aboriginal children. In 2016 and 2017, across all domains, approximately 50% of KindiLink teachers indicated that KindiLink was 'highly effective'. However, in 2017 there was a greater emphasis on the improvement of cognitive skills. This may reflect the change of focus as the initiative matured from an initial emphasis on relationship building and engagement in the first year to a greater complementary emphasis on the learning program in 2017 once routines, community trust/expectations and relationships were established. However, the value of the social relationships that had been built in supporting the development of skills to prepare the children for the transition to Kindergarten was seen as important in both 2016 and 2017. In particular the participants described the way in which the support provided by KindiLink through relationship-building made it possible for both the families and children to gain increased confidence and make connections with the school and the Kindergarten.

The data from the kindergarten children's capabilities survey indicated that kindergarten teachers were more likely to rate Aboriginal KindiLink children as having 'consistently' or 'often' demonstrated adequate social, emotional, language and cognitive skills than non-KindiLink Aboriginal children on commencement of Kindergarten in both 2017 and 2018. The results of the comparisons between KindiLink and non-KindiLink children were statistically significant for both the 2018 Aboriginal KindiLink sample and the total combined sample (i.e. 2017 and 2018). It is important to note that cognitive skills had the lowest response rate, perhaps suggesting that kindergarten teachers found these hard to judge at the beginning of the kindergarten program. Kindergarten teachers in both 2017 (68%) and 2018 (83%) reported that they had noticed differences in the level of engagement and/or confidence in the Aboriginal children who had attended KindiLink and those who had not attended. They also noted that Aboriginal KindiLink children were more confident about coming to Kindergarten, less stressed about separating from their family and more able to settle into classroom routines and activities than Aboriginal children who had not attended KindiLink.

The majority of families indicated that KindiLink had supported their child's learning, with particular mention of language, social and cognitive skills. Over half of the Aboriginal families referred to specific skills their child had learned, and some mentioned how KindiLink activities were being replicated at home. Reading books and telling stories were mentioned, in particular. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that KindiLink had supported their child's transition to Kindergarten. In addition, the apparent increased confidence in and understanding of their child's learning may have led to enrolment in Kindergarten, as almost between 80% and 91% of Aboriginal families and non-Aboriginal families in 2016 and 2017 indicated they had enrolled their child in Kindergarten.

## 9.2 Attendance

Registration and regular attendance was identified as a critical feature of the success of KindiLink by principals, teachers and AIEOs. The attendance data indicates that between 2016 and 2017 there was an increase in attendance in terms of overall numbers of 3-year-old children participating in KindiLink, and in terms of the number and proportion of Aboriginal 3-year-old children participating in KindiLink. Almost half of all 2016 KindiLink children enrolled in Kindergarten at the KindiLink school site in 2017. A slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal KindiLink children (53%) than non-Aboriginal KindiLink (41%) children enrolled at Kindergarten in 2017. In addition, evidence indicates attending KindiLink had slightly positively impacted on Aboriginal children's attendance rates at Kindergarten. These positive outcomes were echoed in the survey data which suggests that once families had committed to KindiLink through good relationships which gave them the confidence to connect with the school, there was a high level of attendance. The outstanding feature was that for committed families, both the children and their families looked forward to attending with great excitement and enthusiasm. Clearly the principals, teachers and AIEOs were delighted to observe this enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, it was also apparent that attendance was a major concern in 2016 and 2017. Principals, teachers and AIEOs implemented a number of intensive and time consuming strategies to attract and sustain attendance, including liaison with the community, home visits, transport services. In particular, families that appeared to be experiencing a high degree of vulnerability were identified as the most difficult to reach. In addition, it was also apparent that some families who did attend found regular attendance difficult, and as a result their children only attended sporadically. The reasons for non-attendance were complex and multi-faceted often beyond the control of KindiLink. Personal, health and social issues as well as cultural events and weather impacted on families' attendance. The decision to invite non-Aboriginal was presented as a dilemma for some KindiLink sites, boosting numbers but potentially inhibiting Aboriginal families' attendance. Some principals, teachers and AIEOs mentioned transport as an issue, and in some cases a bus was provided. Others felt it was difficult not having a dedicated classroom for KindiLink, while others still found families more likely to attend when classes were held in a park, and organised to move KindiLink outdoors. As can be seen, both structural and relationship solutions were raised as a means of increasing and sustaining attendance. The teachers and AIEOs placed the development of deep and lasting relationships that fostered trust and commitment as central to engaging families, while others saw the need to provide permanent KindiLink classrooms and transport as a vital component of sustaining attendance.

It is important to note that many of the participants identified the importance of time and perseverance from everyone involved to ensure families and their children attend KindiLink and Kindergarten regularly – they indicated that they were committed to KindiLink into the future and would continue to find ways of increasing enrolments and attendance.

## 9.3 Capacity and Confidence

Across the 2016 and 2017 data there was strong evidence to indicate that the families who were committed to KindiLink and attended regularly gained confidence and enhanced capacity to help support and teach their children. There appears to be slightly more emphasis on an increase confidence, perhaps because capacity is harder to quantify. Furthermore, confidence and capacity overlap and are interrelated to some extent. In both 2016 and 2017 almost all Aboriginal families either strongly agreed or agreed that KindiLink had increased their confidence in supporting their children's learning. They described many learning opportunities their children had experienced and their engagement with their child and other children in these activities. It was apparent that the majority of families had gained confidence from participating in

KindiLink, indicating that KindiLink had enabled them to help and support their child's learning. It seemed apparent that this increased confidence and capacity was transferred to the home environment as families implemented some of KindiLink activities at home. Teachers and AIEOs noted the increased involvement of some families in KindiLink, contributing to, initiating and leading activities.

Participants acknowledged the contribution of good relationships to building capacity and confidence. Many families indicated gained confidence from the connections they made with other families and support groups, and were able to ask for help when they needed it. Principals also noticed a growing confidence in families to participate in school activities and a willingness to contact the school and ask for help when needed. Some families had taken on roles in the parent association and/or undertaken further education.

## 9.4 Relationships

Building productive relationships appears to be one of the most successful features of KindiLink. The principals, teachers and AIEOs identified developing, sustaining and extending positive relationships as central to the success of KindiLink. In particular, the AIEOs worked extremely hard to establish and nurture strong relationships with the community, in many sites they were the interface between the community and the school. As KindiLink became more established in 2017, this appeared to further enhance relationships, suggesting a cumulative impact of KindiLink. Those families who made a commitment to KindiLink clearly valued the relationships they formed. They frequently mentioned their enjoyment at meeting other families and were confident to access the agencies and organisations they had been introduced to throughout KindiLink. It was apparent that many families had built sufficient confidence through their connections with different personnel across the community to facilitate their access to the school and Kindergarten when they wished. Reciprocal relationships were developed through a range of internal and external strategies, the most powerful being active listening and face-to-face conversations. Meetings between the principal, the KindiLink staff and external Aboriginal organisation were also an important part of building trust and understanding. Recognition and incorporation of Aboriginal families' language/dialect and culture was seen as an essential to all KindiLink outcomes, and was particularly important in the first instance, to building relationships. The majority of Aboriginal families indicated that their perspectives and language/dialect were part of KindiLink and that this was an important part of learning and respect. Also mentioned was the need to build on this through continuing dialogue in which the families were perceived as the 'experts'.

Regarding transition to Kindergarten, there was evidence in 2016 and 2017 that KindiLink staff were proactive in supporting positive transitions through a number of strategies they described as effective. Apart from one or two teachers and AIEOs, participants from all groups seemed to agree that KindiLink supported children's and families' transition to Kindergarten. In particular in 2017 there were many comments indicating a high level of conviction that KindiLink children had transitioned to Kindergarten with greater confidence and ease than previous KindiLink children or children who had not attended KindiLink.

However, the perceived success of strong relationships and a positive transition to Kindergarten and was not without challenges and there were a small number of participants (including Aboriginal families, but excluding AIEOs) who in both 2016 and 2017 indicated that KindiLink had not been effective in building relationships. Attracting families to KindiLink and engaging and sustaining interest was difficult and for many KindiLink sites, contacting families took considerable time and effort. Maintaining contact was seen as particularly difficult in a regional town with many different family groups. This was also reflected in the number of children at KindiLink (although relatively small) who had not yet enrolled in Kindergarten at the end of Term 4, and in these cases teachers felt that relationships were not strong.

## 9.5 Benefits and Positive Stories

The majority of principals, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs indicated that KindiLink had been either highly or moderately beneficial for children and their families in both 2016 and 2017. In 2017 principals were consistently positive, whereas teachers and AIEOs were increasingly positive about the benefits of KindiLink. In 2016 comments about the benefits from all participants included increased engagement in children's learning, increased and positive involvement in the school community and awareness of support services (including Aboriginal support services) in ways that enhanced children's development. In 2017 there appeared to be a greater emphasis on awareness of learning and development and the impact of this on the transition to Kindergarten alongside the benefits of incorporating families' language/dialect and culture into KindiLink. In addition, greater connections between the school and the community was identified as increasing interest in and attendance at KindiLink and engaging a broader range of families. Families were seen to play an important role in encouraging other families to attend. This may indicate that in 2017 the intended outcomes are being realised, and/or that participants had more awareness and a clearer understanding of the purpose of KindiLink, compared to 2016, and thus were more focused on observing these outcomes.

## 9.6 Challenges and Suggestions for Change

The challenges reflect many of the themes identified in previous comments. Most participants found implementing KindiLink moderately challenging, with teachers and AIEOs finding it less challenging in 2017. These challenges included issues related to resourcing, finding appropriate staff, having a permanent venue and competition from other programs. Challenges also included recruitment and attendance, engagement of some families and pedagogical differences between KindiLink and Kindergarten. On the whole families were very positive about KindiLink and only seven Aboriginal families commented on the challenges they faced at KindiLink. Four were personal issues, but three aspects may have been more universal, one related to difficulty with reading to their child, another mentioned managing their child's behaviour and another was concerned about negative comments between families. Overcoming challenges was an ongoing process, building on and extending established strategies. Building strong and enduring relationships with families and being aware of families' cultural expectations was central to overcoming challenges, alongside involving families in the decision making process, accepting younger children, listening to families, providing transport, employing effective staff and gaining support from the Early Childhood Branch.

Suggestions for change included further support in promoting KindiLink, linking with other KindiLink staff, having more time to liaise with families/community and planning together and having a permanent venue. The further inclusion of Aboriginal language/dialect and culture, reporting changes to document the complexity of attendance patterns and flexibility of operating hours and days were also mentioned. Dilemmas were also identified in terms of possible changes, these included, the inclusion of non-Aboriginal families or making KindiLink exclusively for Aboriginal families, starting KindiLink at a younger or older age, involving families less to give children time to develop independence or more to develop family capacity and confidence and locating KindiLink on or off school sites. Remote communities also indicated the need to be flexible in staffing, to enable the AIEO to deliver KindiLink if the teacher was absent.

## 9.7 Insights for the Future

Principals, teachers and AIEOs reiterated the success of KindiLink in relation to the four key aims. They suggested that those families who fully participated in KindiLink, enjoyed KindiLink and gained considerable



capacity and confidence in working with their children. They felt KindiLink had supported the children's social, emotional, language and cognitive capacities, built their confidence and eased their transition to Kindergarten. They also confirmed their belief that strong and reciprocal relationships were a critical component of KindiLink. Attendance was again identified as a major concern, with some gains over two years, but a need for perseverance through-out the school to recruit families and sustain attendance. Interestingly, it was also suggested that measuring success was problematic in the short term and that it was likely that KindiLink had a ripple effect moving beyond the school into the community, which over time would lead to increased support for KindiLink and ultimately school in general.

In terms of future directions participants indicated that it was important to recognise and promote the success and value of KindiLink for Aboriginal families and the wider community. The impact of KindiLink went beyond the educational context into supporting families in their everyday lives. Families and participants highlighted the critical importance of well trained, experienced, knowledgeable and committed staff. Building trusting and reciprocal relationships formed the foundation of KindiLink and was central to the role of the AIEO. Teachers also mentioned the ongoing need for support and guidance in working alongside families, in ways that went above and beyond an educator. This was linked with insights into families' language/dialect and culture which teachers gained in working with families and the AIEO. Many teachers felt working with families was a privilege which had enabled them to grow in their understanding and incorporation of their language/dialect and cultural. Many saw this 'learning' as an essential component of KindiLink. The AIEOs also expressed deep satisfaction in their work with the families, feeling a sense of pride and achievement. In many cases the AIEO was the interface between the families and the school. Conversely some participants felt KindiLink would be better placed in other schools and communities. A range of reasons were given for relocating KindiLink. The uncertainty of on-going funding was a cause of anxiety and potential lack of continuity for staffing.

Many participants, including families, commented on the importance of continuing KindiLink as a significant service to the Aboriginal community and other non-Aboriginal families as a means of closing the gap and creating intergenerational change. The desire to extend KindiLink into the future was underscored by the need to monitor the long-term benefits of KindiLink for children, families and communities. While this will require investment in resources and effective personnel who are committed to such an initiative, potentially the outcomes will be of significant value.

# References

- Commonwealth of Australia. (2016). *Closing the gap: Prime Minister's report 2016*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved from: [https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/closing\\_the\\_gap\\_report\\_2016.pdf](https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/closing_the_gap_report_2016.pdf)
- Department of Education. (2015). *On-entry Assessment Program: Key messages for pre-primary parents*. Perth, WA: Department of Education Western Australia. Retrieved from: <http://det.wa.edu.au/educationalmeasurement/detcms/navigation/on-entry/information-for-parents/>
- Department of Education and Training. (2016). *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2015: A snapshot of early childhood development in Australia*. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from: [www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report](http://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report)
- Department of Social Services. (2015). *Footprints in time: The longitudinal study of Indigenous children – Report from Wave 5*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government, Department of Social Services. Retrieved from: [www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02\\_2015/3.\\_lsic\\_wave\\_5\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2015/3._lsic_wave_5_report_final.pdf)
- Heckman, J. (2011). The economics of inequality: The value of early childhood education. *American Educator*, 35(1), 31-47. Retrieved from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ920516>