

# Evaluation of the KindiLink Pilot Initiative in Western Australia

## Volume 4: Reflective Journal

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School of Education  
Early Childhood Research Group  
Edith Cowan University

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**Edith Cowan University, School of Education  
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# Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Impact on Aboriginal Children’s Capabilities upon Entry to Kindergarten .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Supporting Children’s Development and Learning (57 comments) .....	5
2.1.1 Increasing language development and learning .....	5
2.1.2 Increasing social development .....	6
2.1.3 Increasing emotional development.....	7
2.1.4 Increasing cognitive development .....	7
2.1.5 Increasing physical development and self-help skills .....	7
2.2 Effectiveness of LearningGames® (62 comments) .....	8
2.2.1 Supporting multi-lingual learning.....	8
2.2.2 Developing language and cognitive capabilities.....	11
2.2.3 Developing early literacy and transferring skills.....	11
2.2.4 Developing vocabulary, short-term memory and shared conversations .....	11
2.2.5 Using language to make connections with everyday experiences.....	12
2.2.6 Creating opportunities for extended conversations and higher-order thinking .....	12
2.2.7 Lack of involvement in or need for LearningGames® (Term 2) .....	12
2.2.8 LearningGames® at home .....	13
2.3 Home Learning Environments (157 comments).....	13
2.3.1 Varied home lives and challenges families faced .....	14
2.3.2 Positive influence of KindiLink on learning at home .....	14
2.4 Changes to an Individual Family’s Home Learning Environment (24 comments) .....	15
2.4.1 Developing new learning opportunities at home.....	15
2.4.2 Developing parenting practices.....	15
2.4.3 Ongoing support.....	16
2.4.4 Learning at home with resources from other programs .....	16
2.4.5 Unaware of changes or no changes .....	16
2.5 Rewarding Moments in Relation to Learning and Development (37 comments).....	16
2.5.1 Increasing receptive and productive language.....	16
2.5.2 Increasing social and emotional competencies.....	17
2.5.3 Increasing concentration and level of engagement .....	17
2.5.4 Growing confidence, enthusiasm and enjoyment of children .....	17
2.5.5 Early intervention and accessing early childhood services .....	17
2.5.6 Positive transition to Kindergarten .....	17
2.5.7 Challenging moments in relation to learning and development.....	18
2.5.8 Changes in relation to learning and development .....	18
2.6 Summary.....	18
<b>3. Impact on Improving Attendance .....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Families’ Attendance (107 comments).....	19
3.1.1 Registration .....	19
3.1.2 Levels of attendance .....	19
3.2 Changes to an Individual Family’s Level of Attendance (97 comments) .....	20
3.3 Challenges to Attendance (115 comments) .....	21
3.3.1 Family and community issues.....	21
3.3.2 Lack of transport, weather and timetabling.....	22
3.3.3 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families .....	22
3.3.4 Opportunities created and taken up by families.....	22

3.4	Overcoming Challenges to Attendance (91 comments)	22
3.4.1	Feeling comfortable and making relationships at KindiLink	22
3.4.2	Overcoming obstacles and being supported by KindiLink staff	22
3.4.3	KindiLink children encouraging families to attend	22
3.4.4	Working with the community	23
3.4.5	Respecting cultural events and incorporating (where appropriate) into KindiLink	23
3.4.6	Being resilient	23
3.5	Summary	23
<b>4.</b>	<b>Impact on Capacity and Confidence of Families/Carers as their Child's First Educators</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1	Families' Levels of Engagement in KindiLink Sessions (127 comments)	25
4.1.1	Participating in activities with, and engaging with, their child	25
4.1.2	Families engaging with each other	26
4.1.3	Level of commitment of families	26
4.2	Aboriginal Families' Level of Engagement in KindiLink Sessions (65 comments)	27
4.2.1	Participating in activities and engaging with their child	27
4.2.2	Building relationships	28
4.2.3	Creating a supportive environment	29
4.3	Supporting Families to Facilitate their Child's Development and Learning (120 comments)	30
4.3.1	Modelling and explaining the purpose of activities	30
4.3.2	Supporting families when necessary	30
4.3.3	Families as partners	31
4.4	Changes Over Time (98 comments)	32
4.4.1	Communication	32
4.4.2	Confidence and empowerment	32
4.5	Summary	33
<b>5.</b>	<b>Impact on Building Productive Relationships</b>	<b>34</b>
5.1	Families' Relationships with the School (89 comments)	34
5.1.1	Improved relationships	34
5.2	Changes to an Individual Family's Relationship with the School (74 comments)	35
5.2.1	Confidence	35
5.2.2	More engaged in their child's education	35
5.2.3	Community connections	36
5.3	Examples of Relationship Building (75 comments)	36
5.3.1	Nurturing family's confidence and support networks	36
5.3.2	Familiarising families with school environment	37
5.3.3	Participating in community activities	37
5.3.4	Accessing community services	37
5.4	Rewarding Moments Regarding Relationships (122 comments)	38
5.4.1	Relationships with families	38
5.4.2	Engagement with education and support services	39
5.5	Challenges Regarding Relationships (17 comments)	39
5.5.1	Attendance and engagement of families	39
5.5.2	Staff capabilities	39
5.6	Changes to Enhance Relationships (102 comments)	40
5.6.1	Promotion	40
5.6.2	Strengthening relationships with families and improve attendance	40
5.6.3	Utilising and sharing expertise	40
5.6.4	Making stronger links to Kindergarten	40
5.6.5	Program	40
5.6.6	Staff	40

5.7 Summary.....	40
<b>6. Key Findings .....</b>	<b>42</b>
6.1 Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities.....	42
6.2 Attendance at KindiLink and Kindergarten.....	43
6.3 Capacity and Confidence of Families.....	44
6.4 Relationships between the Family, the School and the Community.....	45
6.5 Overall Reflections.....	46
<b>References .....</b>	<b>47</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1.1:	Areas of teacher reflection for each evaluation question .....	2
Table 1.2:	Percentages of teachers and AIEOs who wrote reflections across the three terms .....	4
Table 2.1:	LearningGames® mentioned by KindiLink teachers or AIEOs, identified by number.....	9
Table 2.2:	LearningGames® mentioned by KindiLink teachers or AIEOs, description only provided .....	10



# 1. Introduction

A key aspect of this study was to document the emerging nature and impact of KindiLink on families over time, through the work of the teachers and the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) in their everyday practices and experiences. Capturing the lived experiences of the teachers and AIEOs in ways that would facilitate a frank, deeply reflective and mutually beneficial exploration of outcomes and issues necessitated an ongoing and anonymous process that would not overwhelm and burden the participants in their already busy lives. After consultation, it was agreed that an electronic reflective journal would be adopted. This would enable teachers and AIEOs to capture and reflect on the rationale for and implementation of their practices and how this new knowledge can be used to develop their practice and achieve the most effective outcomes for children and families. This data would also augment the findings from the survey and case study data. Thus, the KindiLink teachers and AIEOs were invited to complete an online journal individually or jointly each week, which was then electronically downloaded in weeks 5 and 10 of Terms 2, 3 and 4.

To help guide reflections, the teachers and AIEOs were asked to describe particular aspects of KindiLink through comments or examples and/or scenarios. These aspects are: building relationships between the family, school and community; developing capabilities of the children; increasing capacity and confidence of families; and memorable/rewarding moments, challenges and any changes they would make in the light of their reflections.

The aspects of KindiLink to be described were structured around the following four research questions:

- Q1 How effective has KindiLink been at improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities of Aboriginal children upon entry to Kindergarten?
- Q2 What impact has KindiLink had on improving attendance among participating children during their schooling?
- Q3 How effective has KindiLink been at 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, school and community?

Table 1.1 documents the areas on which they were asked to reflect.

**Table 1.1: Areas of teacher reflection for each evaluation question**

Main Themes Described by Teachers	# Comments Across 3 Terms
<b>Q1 How effective has KindiLink been at improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities of Aboriginal children upon entry to Kindergarten?</b>	
1.1 Supporting children’s development and learning	57
1.2 Effectiveness of LearningGames®	62
1.3 Home learning environments	157
1.4 Changes to an individual family’s home learning environment	24
1.5 Rewarding moments in relation to learning and development	37
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>337</b>
<b>Q2 What impact has KindiLink had on improving attendance among participating children during their schooling?</b>	
2.1 Families’ levels of attendance (as a group)	107
2.2 Changes to an individual family’s level of attendance	97
2.3 Challenges to attendance	115
2.4 Overcoming challenges to attendance	91
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>410</b>
<b>Q3 How effective has KindiLink been at building the capacity and confidence of families/carers as their child’s first educator?</b>	
3.1 Families’ level of engagement in KindiLink sessions	127
3.2 Aboriginal families’ level of engagement in KindiLink sessions	65
3.3 Supporting families to facilitate their child’s development and learning	120
3.4 Changes over time	98
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>410</b>
<b>Q4 What impact has KindiLink had on building productive relationships between the family, school and community?</b>	
4.1 Families’ level of engagement in KindiLink sessions	127
4.2 Aboriginal families’ level of engagement in KindiLink sessions	65
4.3 Examples of relationship building	75
4.4 Rewarding moments related to relationships	122
4.5 Challenges related to relationships	17
4.6 Changes to enhance relationships	102
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>508</b>

The decision to invite Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families or only Aboriginal families to KindiLink was at the discretion of the Principal and KindiLink staff, based on consultation with the community about the most effective means of engaging Aboriginal families. By the end of 2017, out of the 37 KindiLink sites, 24 were 'open' to all families and 13 to invited Aboriginal families only. Although in the first instance, KindiLink aims to support Aboriginal families as their child's first teacher, it is recognised that it is also important to document the impact of KindiLink on non-Aboriginal families. Thus, the majority of descriptive sections encompassed comments about all families and children. However, as documented in Table 1.1, the following four areas were used to elicit reflections about the overall impact of KindiLink on Aboriginal families' engagement, confidence and capacity and the aspects that these families valued most about KindiLink. They are:

- Please give an example of how you recently facilitated an Aboriginal family's engagement with KindiLink.
- Describe an example where you were able to facilitate an Aboriginal family's engagement during a session.
- Describe a scenario with an Aboriginal parent that supported their capacity and/or confidence as their child's first teacher.
- Provide an example of what Aboriginal families have valued most about KindiLink.

As soon as the reflective journals were completed in weeks 5 and 10 in Terms 2, 3 and 4, the reflections were extracted, and each researcher took responsibility for the analysis of two or three questions. The reflections were analysed through a process of thematic analysis, which seeks to identify patterns or themes across the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each researcher undertook the following process:

1. counting the number of reflection entries to gain a sense of the significance of the question;
2. familiarising themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the reflections related to their first question and noting initial ideas;
3. creating initial codes by systematically identifying the same concepts across all the reflections and colour coding;
4. identifying potential themes by collating the codes under a theme;
5. checking for coherence by reviewing the *'fit'* of the codes under each theme and moving codes and/or noting overlap; and
6. naming the theme and writing a summary of each theme.

As far as possible, each researcher analysed the same or similar questions across each term to identify changes across time. Table 1.2 documents the percentages of teachers and AIEOs who wrote reflections across the three terms.

The commitment of the teachers and AIEOs to KindiLink is evidenced by the number and extensive nature of the reflections across three terms. The detail and complexity of their comments is testimony to their ongoing reflection on the outcomes for families<sup>1</sup>, the challenges they faced and their view of future implications. Although it is not possible to give voice to every reflection, the following sections attempt to capture and summarise the key findings that emerged from the reflections, encompassing the complexities and changes indicated by the teachers and AIEOs across the three terms. Quotations have been used to bring the findings to life and further honour the views of the teachers and AIEOs.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'families' includes parents, carers and extended family members, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents.

**Table 1.2: Percentages of teachers and AIEOs who wrote reflections across the three terms**

Term	Week	% KL teachers	% AIEOs	% KL teachers & AIEOs
2	5	33	3	64
2	10	40	3	57
3	5	37	6	57
3	10	42	3	55
4	5	47	3	50

The findings from the reflective journal are presented in the following sections under each research question. Each section begins with an indication of the areas that teachers and AIEOs were asked to reflect on, which is followed by a brief introduction to the area, including the overall number of reflections that informs the section. The findings are presented in themes, illustrated by quotations. Any significant changes identified across the three terms are described. A summary of the reflections is presented at the end of each section.

## 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?

The following analysis documents the findings from a total of 277 reflections about the effectiveness of KindiLink in improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities of Aboriginal children, and, in addition, 60 reflections about the rewarding and challenging moments noted by KindiLink teachers and AIEOs in their reflective journals across three terms. The emphasis was on the way in which the children’s capabilities were developing through KindiLink and the potential impact this had on entry to Kindergarten. This section draws on the following areas that participants were asked to reflect on:

- supporting children’s development and learning capacities (social, emotional, language and cognitive)
- effectiveness of LearningGames®
- home learning environments
- rewarding and challenging moments.

### 2.1 Supporting Children’s Development and Learning (57 comments)

KindiLink teachers and AIEOs were asked to describe a scenario that supported a family with their children’s development and learning. The scenarios and comments are presented in the following section under each capability identified by the teachers and AIEOs. The quotations provide examples of their perceptions of the outcomes of their practices. These are described in the following themes:

#### 2.1.1 Increasing language development and learning

- Encouraging interaction between families and children without being overwhelming, by providing a language-rich environment, modelling language strategies and encouraging families to talk with their child, while helping children to verbally express their needs: *“It is empowering for them to do the same. Families are now using the term ‘use your words’ or ‘share and take turns’ or ‘what else would you like to do’.”*
- Discussing language development and use with families and emphasising the importance of home/community languages: *“Another great discussion was generated between us and a parent around Aboriginal English/codeswitching. She asked us to clarify for her about AE and SAE (at school we have started running two-way classes across primary school). So I was able to reassure her that AE is a legitimate language with all its own rules and pragmatics and that children need to learn SAE as an additional language not change AE into SAE.”*
- Encouraging early intervention also supported language learning. Providing families with information about speech therapists, hearing tests and ways of accessing support for language development, as

well as inviting services to KindiLink and developing partnerships to help families gain trust in service providers: *“One of the 3-year-old Aboriginal children that attend KindiLink has speech and language delays. As part of our holistic approach to children's development and learning ... we have regular visits from the community health nurse/child health nurse as well as occupational health services, such as Speech Pathology/OT.”*

- Assisting children and families to use Speech and Hearing specialists through the Aboriginal Health Service: *“Families learn the different ways they can support their child's development whether it be physical, social/emotional or cognitive.”*

As the year progressed, teachers and AIEOs became more focused in their interactions with families and children around language learning and development by:

- Encouraging children to use more complex language when participating in play-based activities and providing language resources to boost confidence and help overcome shyness (e.g., puppets, dolls and dressing-up clothes): *“We have superhero capes at KindiLink and while they are wearing them they seem to have the confidence to speak to people they would not normally speak to.”*
- Encouraging families to interact with their child across all activities and build on their language experiences: *“Many families discuss where they have been and what they have done on weekends to provide their children with many and varied experiences. This then allows us the opportunity to continue to encourage oral language development as we have a bit of background knowledge to encourage further speaking and listening skills.”*
- Monitoring children’s language development and working with families to support each other: *“Two children and their mothers have created a close friendship through KindiLink and can often be seen engaging with their children together.”*
- Talking about parenting practices to support language development: *“I have mentioned that having the bottle is restricting his speech. Since this conversation, I have noticed that he did not bring his bottle to KindiLink.”*

### 2.1.2 Increasing social development

- Giving families time to settle in and become familiar with KindiLink to engage in learning: *“She has made friends, she engages fully in all of the activities, smiles and laughs, runs up to and hugs her teachers .... She is a changed child. Her great grandmother attributes this to KindiLink and the safe and supporting environment we offer with predictable routines.”*
- Encouraging children to learn to share and take turns through group activities, games and cooperative play.
- Developing routines and appropriate use of language *“manners”* and requests through shared experiences, such as morning tea and mat time.

As the year progressed, teachers and AIEOs encouraged more independence and leadership in children and families and discussed strategies for supporting positive behaviour by:

- Helping families build on their parenting skills to enable them to manage their children’s behaviour in acceptable ways, and without feeling *“shame”*, and *“cope ... quietly and firmly without getting upset”*.
- Talking with families about strategies for encouraging children at different levels of development and resolving their problems through talk.

- Encouraging discussion and self-regulation: *“This has helped him to understand that his needs can be met by explaining what it is he wants rather than becoming upset.”*
- Encouraging families to establish routines to lead to independence: *“The families do this without us prompting them now.”*
- Encouraging choice and ownership: *“For music and movement participation, I have given the families and children the ownership of choosing which musical instruments they would like to play and I simply provide the songs and the ‘moves’ to correspond with them.”*

### 2.1.3 Increasing emotional development

- Supporting children in gaining self-confidence: *“This child now walks into KindiLink and will confidently go and choose something to play with or join in with another child.”*
- Providing opportunities to build on the interests of the children: *“I decided to find out more about what really interests the child i.e. wild animals, tigers in particular and sourced books accordingly.”*
- Holding discussions with all the families about ways of supporting children who were not coping emotionally: *“We discussed giving warning times, using timers and how to get the kids involved in the transition.”*
- Providing home visits to some of the grandparents and older siblings to encourage all family members to support their children’s learning and development.

### 2.1.4 Increasing cognitive development

- In the early part of the year, comments were related to modelling and engaging families in learning about skills and concepts related to colours, shapes, counting and sharing books: *“The child by himself created a pizza using magnetic triangle pieces.”* Further: *“I observed the child mixing blue and red play dough together and she began kneading. She yelled, ‘I’m making purple’.”*
- In the later part of the year, families appeared to be proactive in helping children develop more complex concepts and making requests for information about learning: *“One of our families had a child that showed some interest in learning her letters and they wanted to know how they could encourage her and further her learning. We modelled some ideas with her family during our KindiLink sessions such as writing on little white boards, letter tracing, matching letters with pictures etc. Now each week we make up a little pack for her to take home and her family brings it back and very proudly shows us what she has done.”*
- As the year progressed, there was a notable change in the self-perception of the children and families as the children improved: *“It was great to see how proud her mum was of her and she said, ‘She’s smart’, with a huge grin on her face.”*

### 2.1.5 Increasing physical development and self-help skills

- Promoting self-help skills, such as brushing teeth and washing hands as well as other fine motor skills. Some families indicated that they had transferred these skills to their home environment, for example, by buying scissors so that their child could engage in craft activities at home and practice ‘cutting skills’.
- Providing opportunities for families to access support from a community agency for fine and gross motor skills through everyday activities. This was integrated into the program and utilised by families at home.

- Inviting an occupational therapist to talk to families: *“She set up some fine motor activities for the children to have a go at doing and she was also there to talk to any families who may have had concerns about their children with gross/fine motor development.”*
- Encouraging families to let their children try new activities and “have a go” at things rather than doing these for them: *“We provided lots of materials for the child to cut and used lots of encouragement and praise to model to her child that doing something new is fun and that she can succeed.”*

The following comment reflects the overall perceptions of many of the teachers and AIEOs:

*In many respects KindiLink is becoming a hub for families to learn the different ways they can support their child’s development, whether it be physical, social/emotional or cognitive.*

## 2.2 Effectiveness of LearningGames® (62 comments)

The LearningGames® were an important part of fostering children’s capabilities in a way that was structured, consistent, sustainable and, in some cases, easily replicable at home. In Term 2, week 10, there were 32 comments naming the LearningGames® used, how these were used, how effective these were and whether these were taken home. Twenty-five different LearningGames® were mentioned, although some were not identified by their official name or number. In Term 3, week 10, there were 30 comments naming the LearningGames® used, how these were used, how effective these were and whether these were taken home. Twenty-four different LearningGames® were mentioned, although some were not identified by their official name or number. These are listed below in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

The differences between LearningGames® identified in week 10 of both Term 2 and Term 3 show that the KindiLink teachers and AIEOs had varied their routines and choices of LearningGames®. The only clear difference between Term 2 and Term 3 was that all the comments in the latter were positive, whereas in Term 2, there were a few comments about the challenge of engaging families in LearningGames® (which are included at the end of this section). The extensive examples provided by teachers and AIEOs in both terms have been combined under the following themes. Each theme is illustrated by identifying the name of the game, followed by a quotation from the teacher and/or AIEO to exemplify how they perceived the games were used and how effective these were in supporting children’s capabilities. Although the examples overlap, these have been placed in what appears to be the most relevant themes, although this is, of course, open to different perceptions.

### 2.2.1 Supporting multi-lingual learning

#### **Body parts game (LG number not known)**

*‘The LearningGame® activity was the one where you put the sticker spots on all the body parts. We all sat out under the tree and did it as a group. The families/carers all participated and the children were really engaged. They learnt about all the different names for the body parts in English and Language (one of the local languages). We put the stickers on the children first and then they put them on the adults to reinforce the new words they had learnt.’*



**Table 2.1:** LearningGames® mentioned by KindiLink teachers or AIEOs, identified by number

LearningGames®	Term 2	Term 3	# comments
LearningGame® 13: Make a circle	✓		2
LearningGame® 75: Sharing rhymes with the children (3)	✓	✓	4
LearningGame® 77: Colour sorting (2)	✓	✓	5
LearningGame® 90: A fun path (1)	✓		1
LearningGame® 94: What's gone? (What's missing) (3)	✓	✓	4
LearningGame® 105: Match and name pictures (1)	✓	✓	4
LearningGame® 110: Shared family (1)	✓		1
LearningGame® 123: Painting with my hands. (2)	✓		2
LearningGame® 143: Remembering pictures (1)	✓	✓	2
LearningGame® 148: What will happen next? (2)	✓	✓	3
LearningGame® 157: Thinking about food (1)	✓	✓	2
LearningGame® 63: Scribbling		✓	2
LearningGame® 69: Making a face		✓	1
LearningGame® 78: Building blocks		✓	1
LearningGame® 109: Show what I know		✓	1
LearningGame® 112: Circle		✓	1
LearningGame® 115: Stories with 3		✓	2
LearningGame® 122: Looking for sounds		✓	1
LearningGame® 123: Painting with my hands		✓	2
LearningGame® 124: Different sizes		✓	1
LearningGame® 137: Doesn't belong		✓	1

**Table 2.2: LearningGames® mentioned by KindiLink teachers or AIEOs, description only provided**

<b>LearningGames®</b>	<b>Term 2</b>	<b>Term 3</b>	<b># comments</b>
Alphabet puzzle	✓		1
Bead threading	✓		1
Matching space pictures and objects hidden in the kinetic sand	✓		1
LearningGame®: What is it for?	✓		1
Learning game activity where you put sticker spots on all the body parts	✓		1
Singing: We sing 5 cheeky monkeys using props	✓		1
Activity was the letters of the child's name written on recycled milk lids	✓		1
Matching games	✓		1
Throwing a large rubber dice displaying numbers 1–10	✓		1
'Balancing on the line' game	✓		1
'Play with others' ball game	✓		1
'Packing a picnic'	✓		1
Playdough	✓		1
Nursery rhymes	✓		1
Choosing and threading		✓	1
Food catalogue (possibly LG 157)		✓	1
Matching magazines		✓	2
Cutting		✓	1
Toy cake		✓	1
Dice and memory games		✓	1
Peek-a-boo		✓	1

## 2.2.2 Developing language and cognitive capabilities

### LearningGame® 13: Make a circle

*Where the parent/carer cuts a circle apart and they talk about it with their child as they put the pieces back together. This was a great learning game for language development and also for introducing mathematical concepts too.*

*The children were mostly able to put 2 halves back together, but they struggled when the circle was cut up further. I plan to repeat this game later in the year.*

### Matching game

*The pictures on the cards are familiar to children as they are items that they see and buy when they visit the shops, so I believe this promotes a sense of identity (Early Years Learning Framework). It increases linguistic development as they name and discuss the pictures, cognitive development through the process of matching and determining whether something is the 'same' or 'different', social development through turn taking, fine motor skills using fingers to pick cards up. I also have laminated the game guidelines and suggestions from the Creative Curriculum LearningGames® book and place this on the table with the game.*

## 2.2.3 Developing early literacy and transferring skills

### LearningGame® 122: Looking for sounds

*We each carried a small stick and walked around the [Name] Centre tapping on various items and listening to the sound that they made. We talked about the sounds—whether they were loud or soft, long or short. We then lay down on the grass and listened to the sounds happening around us. We made a list of all the sounds. Finally we played a game of 'Sound Concentration'. In this game 6 identical little bottles had been filled with substances (2 each had in them rice, 2 had rocks and 2 had nuts). The children had to find the two bottles that made the same sound. The children really enjoyed this activity. It supported the children's learning by helping them to discriminate sounds. The long-term effect of this will show up in listening activities particularly those involving phonics. The transference of this skill will also occur when the child is learning to read and write and needs to discriminate letter sounds. I am not aware whether this activity was tried in the home environment.*

## 2.2.4 Developing vocabulary, short-term memory and shared conversations

### LearningGame® 105: Match and name pictures

*We had read Handa's Basket and had pieces of felt fruit. To increase vocabulary, we decided to do this game. We gave families and children 2 sheets of different fruit pictures and some card. Families and children worked together to make a game. There was lots of discussion about the fruit. Families and children chose 10 pairs and played the game together. Children learnt the names of fruit that they weren't familiar with. Children also had an opportunity to practice their cutting and gluing skills. We discussed other 'themes' that families could use to make more cards i.e. Transport, vegetables, symbols etc.*

### **LearningGame® 94: What's gone?**

*The game is to display some objects to the child, have them name them. The parent covers the objects and takes one away, the child is then asked what is missing. The families like this one as it is simple and easy to do at home. The kids also like to play the role of 'taking away' and getting their families to guess what is missing!*

## **2.2.5 Using language to make connections with everyday experiences**

### **LearningGame® 143: Remembering pictures**

*... game using shopping catalogues. We got two copies from the local store and cut out and laminated some cards to match on each page. We observed one child and parent doing this game really well—and other families observed this too and hopefully learnt from the great modelling. There was the matching part of the activity, but it was the discussion part of it which was really more valuable. They discussed if they buy the item when they go shopping, what it is used for, if it is liked/disliked, which members of the family use it/like it etc. There was so much great language being used and it was an activity that could be easily done at home with the next catalogue that comes in the mailbox!*

## **2.2.6 Creating opportunities for extended conversations and higher-order thinking**

### **LearningGame® 148: What will happen next?**

*This has engaged the children more deeply in the story and given them the opportunity to make comments about the story. This is a great way for them to develop their oral language speaking and listening skills.*

*A small of group of families were involved. We played with empty drinks bottles and slowly filled it with different materials. We spoke about what sounds we might hear each time. We made predictions and reflected on them afterwards. The children learned to think ahead and to make a good guess. They also learned that it is OK to be wrong and have the confidence to try again.*

### **LearningGame® 137: That doesn't belong**

*A mother working with her child; the child was particularly excited about the game and asked to play it several more times and with other materials. The game created lots of opportunities for conversation dialogue and talking about incidental things (e.g., the music CD had lots of songs on it the child knew and enjoyed and they sang one of them together).*

## **2.2.7 Lack of involvement in or need for LearningGames® (Term 2)**

*Few LearningGames® were completed by families during weeks 6–10. A trainee EA and I tried to encourage families by modelling a number of games, however, even with children's obvious engagement and interest the flow on effect did not occur.*

*It is evident that they are helping their children to achieve learning game outcomes as a general part of their parenting [and therefore do not engage in LearningGames®].*

## 2.2.8 LearningGames® at home

Numerous comments referred to the ways in which teachers and AIEOs had encouraged families to take LearningGames® home and the way in which families and children had used LearningGames® at home to consolidate and enhance their child's capabilities by:

- Playing the LearningGames® with other family members in Language: *"We also sent home packets of the stickers with a copy of the LearningGame® [Body Parts Game in English and Language] so that they were able to play the game in community as well. A couple of families came back the next session and talked about how they had played the game with other family members and they asked for more stickers to play again."*
- Using LearningGames® continuously at home: *"Our families took home their circle puzzle and one told us that they had played the circle puzzle game again and again at home."*
- Giving families a copy of LearningGames®: *"We created booklets of all the LearningGames® and songs that we sing in KindiLink and sent them home with the families. ... they are using them at home and ask to sing the songs all the time with their families."*
- Providing materials for families to use: *"We provided bottles for our families to have a go at home." In addition: "I got a heap of magazines from Coles and made a variety of memory match games by cutting out matching pictures from the magazines and sticking them onto coloured card. I made multiple copies of this and put them in snap lock bags for families to take home to encourage learning at home."*
- Replicating and extending at home: *"The families like this one as it is easy and simple to do at home." Further: "The mother said she could easily replicate the game at home and had ideas of other materials she could use."*
- Families not using LearningGames® at home: *"At this stage it seems that the families are only learning about the importance of engaging with their children and appear to only be doing this at KindiLink. Further encouragement needs to take place to get the families to try these activities at home."*

As the teachers, AIEOs and families became more familiar with the LearningGames® as each term progressed, there were many general comments that expressed a positive view of the impact and adaptability of the LearningGames®, as illustrated in the following quotation:

*I find all the LearningGames® really good at developing literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills. The game that my KindiLink families enjoyed most this term was Game 123 'Painting with my hands'. The families were able to talk about how primary colours make secondary colours and the students had lots of fun using their hands to do this.*

## 2.3 Home Learning Environments (157 comments)

The recording and reporting of the following comments reflect the teachers' and AIEOs' work with families in supporting their role as their child's first teacher and the ways in which this affects their child's developing capabilities and, subsequently, Kindergarten entry. It is argued that to support families effectively, it is important to develop shared understandings of some of the challenges they face at home and how KindiLink may have helped bridge home-school relationships. It is important to stress that the comments were recorded, and are reported, from a knowledge base (of the teachers and AIEOs), in a sensitive and non-judgemental way.

It is also recognised that while families may be willing to extend their ways of being in the world and embrace KindiLink when they are in the KindiLink environment, it is a different expectation to ask them to adapt their way of life at home to incorporate KindiLink activities. The key to success will lie in whether families consider the activities appropriate and meaningful, see value in the activities in terms of their own worldview and/or have the space and time to incorporate these into their lives.

The teachers' and AIEOs' comments are presented in the following themes:

### 2.3.1 Varied home lives and challenges families faced

Across each term, almost half of the teachers and AIEOs highlighted the varied nature of families' circumstances. These ranged from, *"positive, stable and resilient families, with great extended family support, well resourced, working towards securing a great future for their children"*, and included, *"single parent families, we have fly-in-fly-out fathers and partners, we have grandparents bringing up their grandchild, we have aunties and nans who bring their niece/grand-daughter, we have mums and dads that attend together"*, to families facing day-to-day challenges and an *"ever-changing home learning environment"*.

Comments identified some of the challenges families faced that influenced the home learning environment. These revolved around how many people lived in the home environment and social and health issues, such as domestic violence; drug, alcohol and substance abuse; financial stress; incarceration; and lack of family support: *"There are families affected by drug, alcohol and substance abuse; there are families affected by domestic violence."* Some families were also described as struggling to provide basic needs and were *"getting by day to day with no energy to support or provide home learning environments"*.

Another challenge for some families was also identified; it related to the lack of educational materials or access to them: *"Families in our community have little access to libraries (other than the school library), book shops or other stores. There are limited amounts of books, writing and drawing materials, educational learning equipment in the homes. Families have little access to adult education programs or workshops."* KindiLink was perceived as bridging this gap to some extent by providing *"take home resource packs"*.

However, it is also important to recognise that some teachers and AIEOs commented on the resilience of families to overcome some of these challenges and despite such difficult circumstances, continue to find ways of attending and engaging in KindiLink.

### 2.3.2 Positive influence of KindiLink on learning at home

Although some families faced very challenging situations, it was apparent from the comments that the teachers and AIEOs believed that KindiLink had made a difference to many families. There were detailed descriptions of the ways in which KindiLink had influenced home learning environments. These included families taking resources home to use and share, particularly books, nursery rhymes and songs. Several teachers mentioned that they had provided take-home calico bags, a KindiLink Nursery Rhyme Book for families to add to each week, a *"give and take [home] library"* and a *"LearningGames® Library"* with *"about half of the families taking these home"*. Others noted that families brought in USB sticks to copy songs for use at home. Families told teachers and AIEOs that they had made playdough and used recipes from KindiLink to cook at home. All these activities were viewed as positive outcomes for families and children: *"We have heard families discussing how children repeat stories and songs learnt at KindiLink at home. We send blu tack home with the paintings and art so hopefully children are discussing what they do at KindiLink with their*

families at home.” Further: “Lots of the group are talking about changes they have made in their homes with regards to language and things they are doing with their children.”

As the year progressed, some teachers and AIEOs commented on the ways in which families were making requests to take home resources or games to play with their children and sharing the outcomes: “The families have been sharing stories in ways in which the KindiLink activities and songs have been integrated and enjoyed at home.” In terms of outcomes, many comments were made in relation to improvements in children’s language development, book sharing and toilet training as a direct result of their involvement with KindiLink. Many children were enthusiastic about taking activities and books home and sharing with the KindiLink staff what they had created or learned.

## **2.4 Changes to an Individual Family’s Home Learning Environment (24 comments)**

### **2.4.1 Developing new learning opportunities at home**

Teachers and AIEOs explained how parental knowledge gained in KindiLink had changed some of the learning opportunities that children now enjoyed with their families. These comments were in addition to comments in the previous section describing KindiLink’s influence in home learning environments. Positive changes included sharing books, songs and nursery rhymes, and not only replicating some of the KindiLink activities but also extending the ‘reach’ of the influence of KindiLink activities. Teachers and AIEOs reported families engaging children in book-sharing activities while waiting for older siblings in the park and in the car, children singing songs/nursery rhymes by themselves at bedtime, children telling their own stories and some re-creating KindiLink: “Having a mat time with other siblings and doing singing and reading.”

One teacher explained how she had built on Auslan and [an Aboriginal language] taught at the school, with the KindiLink families through books and videos, and how one of the children in KindiLink now practices signing and speaking [Aboriginal language] words with her pre-primary sibling. One parent made a video recording of the KindiLink singing and reading sessions, which were then “played repeatedly” by her child at home. Other families asked to take things home to be worked on and proudly presented the end product to KindiLink staff. It was indicated that this behaviour then became “contagious” within the school Kindergarten.

Several teachers and AIEOs mentioned that the transient nature of some families meant that some resources may be lost or scattered between homes. However, they indicated that it was more important for families to have access to resources and see KindiLink as committed to their family rather than restrict such access.

### **2.4.2 Developing parenting practices**

There were also examples of how KindiLink had facilitated changes or developments in parenting practices. By Term 3, families were asking for information and advice to increase their own knowledge of how to assist children’s learning at home. Changes to lifestyle around food choices for children and cooking healthy eating options were mentioned. Positive behavioural and parenting changes were also observed. These were a result of the KindiLink team and other families supporting each other to establish routines and boundaries for children. There were comments on ways in which KindiLink had positively influenced children’s behaviour, generally through families’ eagerness to support their children and being open to trying new strategies and suggestions. Children had become more confident and were less reliant on their parents, leading to “improved behaviour” at home and greater engagement in activities. However, it is important to note some comments that revealed the “shame” some families experienced when they believed their child was not



behaving appropriately during KindiLink sessions. In one case, this was overcome by the staff working as a team to support and reassure families: *“She [the mother] is very receptive to advice and support, and although I know she is feeling shame by her child's behaviour. We as a team, her peers and the other children are working in a positive environment to support her child's learning.”*

Teachers and AIEOs provided examples of routines being established and successfully implemented at home (e.g., bedtime, mealtimes and putting toys away). This outcome had also resulted in children becoming more independent and using their initiative. Participation in excursions into the community, such as to the library or community health centre, had also assisted families in gaining more knowledge and resources.

### **2.4.3 Ongoing support**

While this reflection is not strictly about changes to learning in family environments, teachers and AIEOs mentioned the importance of continuing to support families in transition. Examples include situations such as a child moving from a home where her mother had mental health issues and a family moving into a refuge home. In the latter case, the KindiLink staff indicated that they, *“... provided some essentials and I will make sure they have a few books and colouring in equipment to use while they are in temp housing”*.

### **2.4.4 Learning at home with resources from other programs**

In addition, the ways in which other programs may have had some influence on the home learning environment was mentioned. These programs included the State Library of Western Australia *Better Beginnings* program that encourages families to share books and sing songs and rhymes from the CD at home and in the car; *Parents and Learning (PALS)* providing book packages; and community resources, such as the local library, gymnastics and community programs providing packs to support early learning.

### **2.4.5 Unaware of changes or no changes**

Some teachers and AIEOs were unaware, of any changes to an individual family's home learning environment. A few participants commented that there were no changes they were aware of in home learning environments.

## **2.5 Rewarding Moments in Relation to Learning and Development (37 comments)**

Teachers and AIEOs were asked to describe rewarding moments at KindiLink in Terms 3 and 4, and many of their comments reflected the view that the KindiLink children had made great progress in developing their capabilities. Although many of these comments are reflected in the earlier sections, these are included here as an indication of the significance of children's growing capabilities for the teachers and AIEOs. Their comments are described in the following themes:

### **2.5.1 Increasing receptive and productive language**

As the year progressed, teachers and AIEOs commented on the growth of children's skills and competencies, including speaking and listening skills, and the increase in cooperative social interactions: *“We have children who barely spoke when they first came to KindiLink but are now using full sentences and engaging with the activities.”* In addition: *“Most of the children are playing cooperatively with each other both indoors and outdoors. I have observed some lovely dramatic play situations where the children are interacting really well.”*



*One very reluctant speaker has been seen speaking enthusiastically to her peers.”* The increased love of books and stories was also perceived as a rewarding outcome.

## **2.5.2 Increasing social and emotional competencies**

Teachers and AIEOs emphasised the significant progress that children were making in terms of their understanding and involvement in routines and commented on children’s growing understanding of KindiLink expectations: *“Most children are developing socially and sharing and taking turns most of the time. A small group enjoy shooting hoops and are very keen about ensuring everybody gets a turn. One child who it seemed overnight developed a very keen interest in stories and this is now his most favourite thing to do.”*

## **2.5.3 Increasing concentration and level of engagement**

Rewarding moments were also described as those where children were absorbed in an activity, LearningGame® or outside play and engaging at an increasingly higher level: *“Seeing the children have those ‘light bulb’ moments when they are exploring and experimenting with others”*. Additionally, *“seeing them meeting developmental milestones”* and *“they go beyond our expectations”*.

## **2.5.4 Growing confidence, enthusiasm and enjoyment of children**

Teachers and AIEOs appreciated children’s growing commitment to KindiLink and stated that rewarding moments were when the children expressed their excitement and enjoyment: *“Today I had a child run up to me during outdoor play and say ‘Mrs X, I can finally do the fireman’s pole all by myself! Watch me’. The look on this child’s face was priceless. She was so proud of herself.”* They also enjoyed watching shy children gain confidence to gradually participate in activities and to see reluctant children *“blossom”* and take the initiative even when not at KindiLink: *“We have had children who can’t come to KindiLink because they are sick call up on the phone to tell us why they can’t come and to talk on the phone with the teachers because they are sad they can’t make the session.”* Ultimately, one of the most rewarding moments is when the children, *“rush in and just love coming to KindiLink”*.

## **2.5.5 Early intervention and accessing early childhood services**

Supporting families through early referrals and intervention strategies was cited as a rewarding experience. This was reflected in other comments describing how collaboration and networking with interagency staff and community members had enriched KindiLink and enabled early support for families, thus identifying any specific concerns about emotional, social, language and cognitive development.

## **2.5.6 Positive transition to Kindergarten**

Some children transitioned to Kindergarten while also attending KindiLink. Teachers and AIEOs identified the positive transition of the children to Kindergarten as being very rewarding since it suggested that children had benefitted from KindiLink in ways that would support their learning and development in Kindergarten.

Teachers and AIEOs were also asked to describe challenging moments and changes they had made as a result of their reflections. These included examples related to improving children’s capabilities and are documented under the following themes:

## 2.5.7 Challenging moments in relation to learning and development

Several teachers and AIEOs referred to the need for additional time to assist children with high support needs. Several teachers stated that engagement and behaviour of some children was a challenge and inhibited them from learning. They found it difficult to deal with a child's behaviour with their parent present. One of these teachers explained that she was unsuccessful in convincing the parent to discuss the issue of the child's behaviour, with the result that the parent decided to cease bringing the child to KindiLink.

## 2.5.8 Changes in relation to learning and development

By Term 3, teachers and AIEOs were aware of the activities that were most valued and enjoyed by families and children. They intended to build on these activities and to include more outdoor play, cooking and mat time activities, introducing science and excursions. An increased focus on developing early literacy concepts was also mentioned: *"A real focus on reading anything; instructions, recipes, words on objects etc. Preparing them that letters and words have meaning and giving them more exposure, ready for Kindy!"* Several comments related to focusing more on LearningGames®: *"We will continue to adapt the LearningGames® to use in small groups with adults and children, and slowly withdraw the adult support as we move forward to new games. The children have responded really well to this approach."*

## 2.6 Summary

Teachers and AIEOs identified an increase in children's capabilities across the year, which included physical and self-help skills. They incorporated many strategies into their everyday program to facilitate children's growing capabilities through interaction with their families and growing independence with families and children. The LearningGames® were accessed by families and children at KindiLink and at home as a means of supporting particular capabilities, although some families only engaged with them at KindiLink and others did not seem to want to engage in the LearningGames® with their child, even when their child showed interest and enthusiasm.

Home environments varied widely across families, with some families facing enormous challenges; however, teachers and AIEOs described ways in which some families embraced resources, ideas and strategies experienced at KindiLink to support their child's capabilities. This had a ripple effect since, at times, other family members and extended family members also engaged in new or extended ways of supporting the emotional, social, language and cognitive capabilities of the children in their family.

In thinking about rewarding moments at KindiLink, the teachers and AIEOs identified several moments related to the progress that children were making in all aspects of their development, with a particular emphasis on language and literacy as well as increased engagement in activities. However, although it appeared that the majority of children were progressing, the teachers and AIEOs identified some challenges that they believed inhibited children's learning and development.

As a result of their reflections, teachers and AIEOs described changes they had or would make to support further children's developing capabilities. These included building on the activities most enjoyed and embraced by children and families and an increased focus on developing early literacy and LearningGames®.

## 3. Impact on Improving Attendance

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

The following analysis documents the findings from a total of 423 comments made by KindiLink teachers and AIEOs in their reflective journals across three terms, which included comments about the challenges identified in relation to attendance at KindiLink. Although they had some knowledge of children who had transitioned to Kindergarten, they were not in a position to comment on these children's attendance, and therefore, their journal entries referred to KindiLink attendance rather than attendance during schooling. Key developments and/or differences between terms were identified. This section draws on the following areas that teachers and AIEOs were asked to comment on:

- families' attendance
- changes to an individual family's level of attendance
- challenges to attendance
- overcoming challenges.

### 3.1 Families' Attendance (107 comments)

#### 3.1.1 Registration

The majority of participants indicated that recruitment had been successful in that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families had registered, but that it was necessary to encourage more families to register. Participants indicated that over time, they had utilised several strategies and gained support from other agencies to reach out to the community to encourage registrations. These strategies also included inviting non-Aboriginal families to register to increase numbers and extend the reach of KindiLink. In Term 4, some participants indicated that there had been an increase in registrations. However, others indicated that they had tried to recruit new families without much success.

#### 3.1.2 Levels of attendance

In Term 2, multiple teachers and AIEOs indicated that many families attended regularly, suggesting that attendance had been consistent and that many families attended at least one session a week. In addition, some teachers and AIEOs indicated that attendance had improved as the semester progressed and since there had been a change in the timetable. Conversely, almost half of the teachers and AIEOs reported that attendance had been sporadic, varying from week to week. However, some of these respondents also noted that there had been improvements in attendance by some families: *"Attendance at the KindiLink Program by families is currently very erratic, although we are gradually beginning to see some children and a parent/carer attending the program at least once a week."*

In Term 3, half the teachers and AIEOs indicated that a core group of families attended regularly and that, increasingly, many families attended at least one session a week. Conversely, many teachers and AIEOs reported that attendance, apart from the core group, had been sporadic, varying from week to week, but

reiterated that there had been improvements in attendance by some families. Several participants noted that although only three-year-olds were marked on the attendance register, many more children attended, usually younger siblings, which participants believed extended the impact of KindiLink. Registrations were not an indication of attendance and families were removed from the register after missed sessions, although efforts to contact and support 'lapsed' families to attend were continued by the teachers and AIEOs.

In Term 4, over half of the teachers and AIEOs indicated that many families were attending KindiLink on a consistent basis and that other families had improved their attendance: *"As a group KindiLink has picked up from last term. We have two KindiLink age children attending every session and one KindiLink age child that can only attend one session a week but attends every week. We have had a new KindiLink age child register this term who has attended every session since enrolling. And we have also had an inactive registered child attending this term."* However, just under half of the teachers and AIEOs reported a decline in attendance or fluctuating attendance. Further, in one case the teacher explained that although the children's attendance had improved, that of the parents had not. She had had to make a difficult decision: *"Attendance has improved over the last five weeks because the Community Child and Maternal Health Nurse has taken responsibility to collect KindiLink aged children from the community. These children are attending without their parents. Some parents are bringing the children to the program and leaving them. We figure that the children will benefit from the program we are running and therefore we do not stop them from coming. We talk to the parents and encourage them to stay, but as yet we have not had any consistency in terms of commitment from any of the parents."*

### **3.2 Changes to an Individual Family's Level of Attendance (97 comments)**

In Term 2, several teachers and AIEOs believed that as families gained confidence and felt more comfortable at KindiLink, attendance had improved. For some families, self-confidence and commitment to KindiLink was such that in one case, the mother had applied for a position at the school to become more involved in the school. However, for many families attendance proved problematic. Some participants reported that travelling to KindiLink had proved challenging for many families. Some were dependent on others to drive them to the KindiLink session each week. However, several families had found ways of overcoming these problems by sharing lifts or walking: *"One family in particular used to depend heavily on transport to KindiLink but now will walk to KindiLink with her children to attend or find alternative transport to attend."* In another instance, a Community Child and Maternal Health Nurse who worked at an Aboriginal Medical Service had assisted the families; however, even this support proved difficult for some families: *"Unfortunately the Mum has health problems and she cannot always get her child ready for the KindiLink session in time for her to be picked up by the Community Child and Maternal Health Nurse or the Aboriginal Health Service who send out a bus to her community. As a result the child misses out on the sessions she enjoys so much."*

In another community, KindiLink was established with the agreement of members of the community, the school and the early childhood learning centre, which was believed to have increased attendance levels.

In Term 3, there was some very positive feedback in the responses from the KindiLink teachers and AIEOs regarding improvements in individual families' attendance. These included families who previously stopped coming but had returned when home circumstances had improved—*"she has had housing issues sorted out. She is in a better routine at home so she now includes KindiLink sessions as part of that routine"*—new enrolments and families who had moved to another area but still attended. A home visit to a family that had stopped attending resulted in the child becoming one of the regular attenders. In one case, when the staff

knew a mother was experiencing personal issues they encouraged a grandparent to bring the child to KindiLink, which also resulted in an older sibling improving attendance. Health issues in the family also prevented children from attending. Other reasons included court cases, a death in the family and two mothers having babies and being unable to attend owing to medical appointments.

Transport had become less of an issue in Term 3, with only a few reports of attendance hindered because of a lack of transport as opposed to multiple reports in Term 2. Families were now finding their own way to attend by walking or sharing a ride with other people: *“We have noticed that two families have come by themselves and no longer need regular picking up. It is good to see families finding their own way to KindiLink. One family that are coming regularly often say that they love coming and look forward to KindiLink days.”*

In Term 4, reflections focused more on reasons for a decrease in, or interrupted, attendance. These were owing to changes in family circumstances, such as illness, employment of family members or relocation to another house: *“Due to mother studying community services, attendance dropped as too much pressure placed on her partner. Another family’s attendance dropped due to extended family coming into care. Issues with behaviour and routines. Now one parent is bringing up to four children to the sessions.”* Even regular attendees sometimes found attendance difficult: *“One family that are regular attenders have had a big absence due to living on a station and having to muster.”* In several cases, attendance resumed as a result of KindiLink staff reaching out to the families. Most increases in attendance were because of greater engagement with KindiLink or practicalities to make attendance possible. Some families had moved back into the area and resumed attendance at KindiLink. Some teachers were unaware of reasons for nonattendance, and other teachers stated that their groups were stable with no changes in attendance numbers.

The following key reasons for fluctuating attendance and nonattendance were identified from the previous comments and comments about challenges families faced in attending KindiLink:

### **3.3 Challenges to Attendance (115 comments)**

#### **3.3.1 Family and community issues**

The teachers and AIEOs offered various reasons to explain why families stopped attending or did not attend KindiLink regularly. The majority were complex and multifaceted, relating to personal, family and community issues, such as appointments, cultural issues (*funeral/sorry business*), payday, visiting a relative in prison, community and cultural events or the illness of a parent, child or family member. Families assuming additional responsibilities, such as helping family members in another community manage their home and family, was also mentioned. Sometimes, there were children living with different family members and there was a case of the arrival of twins who needed intensive care. Several participants revealed that some families felt *“shame”* if they could not provide food, clean clothes or shoes. Even with a breakfast club at the school, these families did not feel they could attend.

Some teachers and AIEOs made reference to the challenge of trying to maintain attendance when families moved away from the community and were too far away to attend KindiLink owing to lack of transport. Several participants observed that once a family missed a KindiLink session, it was much harder to encourage them to return: *“As a multicultural group most of our Indigenous families come regularly at the beginning of the year. However, once they have a break for any reason, that is when we have noticed their attendance drop or stop.”* Competition with other initiatives for Aboriginal families was also cited as a barrier to participation.

### **3.3.2 Lack of transport, weather and timetabling**

Lack of transport was identified as a reason for nonattendance, in addition to cold and wet weather that prevented some families from going out. One comment suggested that the session times for starting the program from 8:30 am to 10:30 am could have been a reason for nonattendance, with some families finding it difficult to arrive at 8.30 am, even though families were encouraged to come to KindiLink later if they could not make it to the start of a KindiLink session. However, at this KindiLink site it was not possible to start later since the KindiLink teacher had other teaching responsibilities in the school.

### **3.3.3 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families**

Although this was only mentioned by a few teachers, it relates to the decision to invite non-Aboriginal families to KindiLink and suggests a degree of unease in the presence of non-Aboriginal families: *“We have a multicultural group. This has many nationalities. The group of indigenous caregivers and their children have come for one or two visits. We have worked towards making them feel comfortable and try not to overwhelm them. However, they are not regular attendees and in some cases have not returned.”*

### **3.3.4 Opportunities created and taken up by families**

Occasionally, lack of attendance was related to families taking up other opportunities that may potentially lead to positive outcomes for the children and family. These included families developing their skills through studying and taking advantage of job opportunities (necessitating some form of child care) or families being involved in other activities with their child (e.g., art and music classes).

## **3.4 Overcoming Challenges to Attendance (91 comments)**

### **3.4.1 Feeling comfortable and making relationships at KindiLink**

Many participants indicated that as families gained confidence and felt more comfortable at KindiLink, attendance improved. Teachers and AIEOs observed that regular attendance assisted in creating a sense of belonging to KindiLink. This was further enhanced by families that were related and formed an attachment to other families, creating a support network that made their regular attendance more likely. For example, some families become less reliant on needing provided transport, since they arranged lifts with other families or found their own way to attend by walking.

### **3.4.2 Overcoming obstacles and being supported by KindiLink staff**

Families often returned as a result of KindiLink staff reaching out to them and assisting them to reconnect or to overcome particular obstacles that had prevented their attendance. In particular, home visits by KindiLink staff to re-engage families in KindiLink was identified as a successful strategy, often involving the AIEO as a well-known and respected community member. In one case, the staff explained that a mother was experiencing personal issues, and hence, the AIEO encouraged a grandparent to bring the child to KindiLink, which also resulted in an older sibling improving attendance at pre-primary.

### **3.4.3 KindiLink children encouraging families to attend**

In addition to KindiLink staff reaching out to families, it seemed that children also played an important role in attendance. In some cases, the children encouraged their families to attend: *“One of our families were very irregular in their attendance but they have slowly been coming more regularly and now they rarely miss a session. They told us that their child wakes up asking for school and cooking.”*



### 3.4.4 Working with the community

In one community, with the agreement of community members, the school and the early childhood learning centre, KindiLink was implemented in the heart of the community for one day a week, which boosted levels of attendance and maintained links with the school.

In another community, families worked in partnership with community agencies to support attendance. In one instance, a community child health nurse who worked at an Aboriginal Medical Service had assisted individual families to attend KindiLink by helping families to organise shared transport.

### 3.4.5 Respecting cultural events and incorporating (where appropriate) into KindiLink

Teachers and AIEOs also recognised the significance of cultural events and sought to find ways of encouraging families to return to KindiLink; where appropriate, they incorporated cultural events in the KindiLink program: *“Attendance can fluctuate significantly dependent on what is happening in families own lives, cultural events, events in the town and events in the region.”* Others felt that the KindiLink pilot needed to be extended beyond three years to gain momentum and become an established part of the community.

### 3.4.6 Being resilient

It was clear from the comments by the teachers and AIEOs that even in the most difficult circumstances, the importance of KindiLink to some families and their resilience was evident: *“Another young Mum was admitted to hospital due to mental health issues. However, her husband continued to attend with their two young children, and she returned to KindiLink after a stay in Perth at the ‘mother and baby unit’.”*

## 3.5 Summary

By Term 4, many families were attending KindiLink on a consistent basis and other families continued to improve their attendance. Several attendance support strategies had been implemented, along with support from other agencies to reach out to the community. Families were also involved in recruiting and maintaining attendance, from promoting KindiLink in the community to sharing lifts to KindiLink. Those sites with stable or increased attendance throughout the year cited community stability and access to transport as the contributing factors. Some strategies were more successful than others in relation to the community context and their duration and sustainability.

However, a significant part of implementing KindiLink involved a struggle to encourage more families to attend, to ensure the regular attendance of participants, to work around the effects of limited or sporadic attendance and to implement methods to overcome the barriers to attendance. The general consensus among KindiLink staff was that maintaining constant levels of attendance of children was difficult. Some journal entries revealed that although families indicated that they enjoyed KindiLink, certain challenges related to personal, family and community issues made attendance difficult.

Several teachers and AIEOs observed that once a family missed a KindiLink session, it was much harder to encourage them to return. It appeared at a couple of sites that the teachers and assistants had not sought information from families about their nonattendance. If they did not see them, then it did not appear there was a systematic way to re-establish contact and encourage attendance. It was suggested that more time for staff to make home visits and assist families in overcoming obstacles that prevent attendance would be

welcome. Another suggestion was that the KindiLink pilot needed to be extended beyond three years to gain momentum and become an established part of the community before it could be properly evaluated.



## 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?**

The following analysis documents the findings from a total of 381 comments made by KindiLink teachers and AIEOs in their reflective journals across three terms. The data included relates to both Aboriginal families as well as non-Aboriginal families in relation to the increasing capacity and confidence of **all** families as their child's first educator. A separate section relates solely to Aboriginal families. This section draws on the following areas that participants were asked to comment on:

- families' levels of engagement during KindiLink sessions
- Aboriginal families' confidence and capacity as their child's first teacher
- support provided to all families to facilitate their child's development and learning (as well as any from rewarding, challenging and changes sections)
- changes over time.

### 4.1 Families' Levels of Engagement in KindiLink Sessions (127 comments)

#### 4.1.1 Participating in activities with, and engaging with, their child

KindiLink teachers and AIEOs encouraged family members to engage with their children and participate in activities from the start of the year. Some early journal entries reported that many families enjoyed completing activities with their children, playing together, interacting and generally spending quality time together. Families engaged by participating 'side-by-side' with their child, although some families occasionally completed the children's activities for them. Other families assisted with the everyday running of activities: by tidying up and packing away and by ensuring that their children remained engaged (especially during transition times). Teachers and AIEOs commented on the families' preferences for certain activities over others. A common theme throughout was that families enjoyed art and craft and shared book reading and cooking with their child.

However, other journal entries reported a reluctance by some families to participate. It is interesting to note one teacher's comment: *"Although I encourage the use of the language games, demonstrate how and why, our families are not taking up the games. Whenever I talk about the outcomes for games, I feel that families are glazing over."* Another teacher recorded that although families enjoyed observing their child and other children fully engaged in activities such as singing, dancing and movement, there was some reluctance on the part of the adults to participate themselves.

The engagement of families increased throughout the year. By Term 3, over a third of the comments referred to the increase in participation from families and their willingness to join in activities. The same number of

comments described family members being able to focus more on their child and therefore have enhanced interaction with them. A few comments indicated that children were also becoming more active participants. One reason for increased engagement was that the pub had closed and a family was coming to the venue where the KindiLink sessions were held so that they could have a cup of tea, use the showers and wash their clothes, while their child enjoyed the activities being offered at KindiLink. Often, they arrived a considerable time after the session had started.

By Term 4, almost half of the comments were about the increased levels of family engagement in KindiLink. Families were also increasingly proactive (helping themselves to resources or bringing in their own resources). The increase in children's concentration spans allowed for greater engagement. One reference was made to greater social and cultural connections.

Families having to tend to younger children was the main reason given as to why family's engagement at some sites was somewhat difficult: *"Sibling (baby) tends to take the mother's attention therefore the KindiLink child misses out on the engagement."* Other distractions for families were identified as their phone or chatting with other families.

However, overall, it would appear that KindiLink had achieved its aim of engaging families in their children's learning at the KindiLink settings. Familiarity with KindiLink, such as understanding the routine and expectations along with the development of trusting relationships, appeared to have cemented positive engagement.

#### **4.1.2 Families engaging with each other**

Another positive outcome entered into the journals was the relationships being forged between the families. A few journal entries indicated that interactions between families had the potential to interfere with the level of engagement with their children. However, all other comments suggested that socialising at KindiLink was a positive experience and enhanced everyone's learning, confidence and enjoyment.

#### **4.1.3 Level of commitment of families**

As with the families' level of engagement, their commitment levels increased over the course of the year. Some of the reasons given for the families' early lack of commitment included a *"lack of parental [school based] skills and becoming easily distracted"*. Families' commitment increased over the year as their understanding and appreciation of KindiLink and its benefits grew. This was apparent in the families' increased confidence, improved school-based skills and greater trust in KindiLink staff.

One example given here demonstrates the way family members were becoming more confident and comfortable, enabling them to be proactive and engaged and to use their initiative: *"One mother in particular used to sit back a lot in the sessions and seemed unsure or not confident in how to play and engage with her child. I have seen positive growth in her confidence and she is more actively involved with her child during the sessions. I see her encouraging her child to do the LearningGames® with her and using more of the conversational reading that she has seen modelled in the KindiLink sessions."*

Another teacher discussed the difference that just one term had made to the partner of a mother attending the sessions: *"Initially he sat quietly in the corner on the lounge and was extremely reserved. However, he did sit and read the parenting books we have on our bookshelf. As the weeks went on and we continued to*

welcome, chat with and encourage him, he began to sit with his children and play, and read to them and say hello to us.”

Another teacher described families’ willingness to alter arrangements to accommodate KindiLink into their schedules.

As a result of improved confidence and familiarity with KindiLink, some family members took on leadership roles, demonstrating a sense of responsibility and making active contributions. Families began to bring their own strengths and skills to the sessions.

Some teachers and AIEOs referred to the increasing trust and communication between school staff and some families. This relates to the theme *building good relationships with the school*, but specifically highlights the opportunities that KindiLink gives families to discuss issues and gain support.

## **4.2 Aboriginal Families’ Level of Engagement in KindiLink Sessions (65 comments)**

Many of the descriptions explicitly or implicitly described family uncertainty about engagement. Families (and children) were frequently described as “shy”, “reserved” or “unconfident” by the teachers. Some recognised the family’s discomfort in the social setting and described steps they took to make the situation more comfortable for the parent, by commenting on how they were supporting their child. The observations are presented in the themes of participating/engaging with their child, building relationships and providing a supportive environment.

### **4.2.1 Participating in activities and engaging with their child**

KindiLink teachers and AIEOs explained that families were engaged when activities were organised that they enjoyed because these met their needs and interests. Several comments showed that play activities, incursions, art, craft and cooking were very popular activities, and thus, these activities enhanced engagement. Perseverance was necessary in some instances when families were reluctant to engage. Ongoing and consistent positive feedback and encouragement eventually had the desired results. Only one comment indicated that there were no opportunities for parental engagement.

Several comments described how the teachers and AIEOs used their relationship with the children to encourage parental engagement. In one instance, the AIEO asked the child to invite their parent to participate in a mural activity. In another instance, a teacher asked the child to invite the parent to participate in a mat session. One described how they provided resources that could be taken home as a means of promoting connection.

On a few occasions, the teachers and AIEOs tried to involve shy and/or reticent families by giving them a role in a teacher-planned and led activity. In one instance, the families were asked to hold props and puppets for a story session. Another teacher encouraged a parent to sit on the mat so that her child would participate in the mat session. However, this strategy was not always successful and took time to establish.

Teachers and AIEOs asked families about their child’s interests and had arranged for the child to be offered this activity first. Others mentioned how they had valued and taken an interest in the lived experiences of families and grandparents.

On occasion, teachers and AIEOs invited families to complete special tasks with the children. One was to cook damper with them and another task was to assemble a small cubby house for the children to play in:

*I suggested the two dads might want to have a go, and they both got to work and got to know each other while completing this task. The excitement the children showed towards their work definitely made them proud of what they could contribute to KindiLink!*

One example was of how a teacher and the AIEO had changed the parental engagement strategies in KindiLink following advice from the Department advisor:

*I was encouraged to restructure my KindiLink Program to include shared reading between families and their children. I began to incorporate this by reading a story on the mat to children, and then asking them to go and choose their own story and take it to their 'adult' (parent/caregiver) to read to them. This got families who previously sat on the sidelines more engaged in the learning program.*

## 4.2.2 Building relationships

From the responses, it was clear that building positive relationships with Aboriginal families was a priority for teachers and AIEOs. They emphasised the importance of taking a genuine interest in families and extending their efforts into their homes and communities. Many made significant efforts to build relationships: making courtesy calls, conducting home visits and initiating conversations on matters relevant to each family. It was evident that they were mindful of being inclusive and determined to work with families to overcome any barriers to engagement. This meant engaging with shy family members or families with low levels of English literacy and supporting children with special needs. The journals revealed that KindiLink staff were deliberative and strategic about being inclusive. Many of the comments indicated improvements in engagement as a result of their efforts.

Teachers and AIEOs indicated how important it was to create a shared program in which families had ownership, through welcoming ideas, skills (leadership), knowledge and cultural perspectives. This included promoting activities in Language, creating resources together and also encouraging and acting on feedback about activities.

Some described how they tried to promote aspects of Aboriginal families' culture, seeking to understand and incorporate it into the curriculum. An example was the provision of song sticks to families to promote engagement. Another comment mentioned the use of social media, phone calls and home visits to keep families informed about excursions and other out-of-session activities that could have been of interest.

One participant mentioned how they had used a referral to other support services as a means to engage a parent with KindiLink:

*K wanted to know how to go about getting M enrolled for Kindergarten next year and also wanted to find out how to get some help for M who has speech issues. When it was explained to K that all of those kinds of services would be provided to M for free through the school, she was really happy. K came to the next session and let [Name] (our AIEO) know that she had no towels or shampoo. [Name], the Community Child and Maternal Nurse provided her with a package of items to help K look after her own and M's health. Over the weeks K has become more relaxed and open to hearing ways she can support M in his physical, mental and cognitive growth. She may become our first 'regular' parent.*

Almost two-thirds of the participants mentioned the importance of ‘yarning’ [informal chats] with families, which were undertaken throughout the sessions as moments became available. Some of the conversations revolved around seeking advice about what families would like to see and do at KindiLink. For example: *“I am constantly talking with the families about what they would like to see at KindiLink and providing feedback about what is on offer.”* Other occasions focused on talking families through learning outcomes and skill development when co-constructing activities and experiences together. For instance, one teacher wrote: *“I have been talking to families further about foundation literacy skills and what skills are important to learn before children learn letters and sounds.”*

### 4.2.3 Creating a supportive environment

Teachers and AIEOs ensured that they created a sense of warmth and safety, particularly for new participants. The comfort (physical and emotional) of families was considered, and efforts were made to be inclusive and address any concerns. A few comments described how the teacher had used the local language to build connections and show respect for Aboriginal culture and language.

KindiLink teachers and AIEOs also found it important to validate families through comments that affirmed that their child was progressing well, perhaps ahead of the milestones, and making supportive comments when families might feel uncomfortable, for example, when the child became angry or distressed.

Teachers and AIEOs described how they deliberately establish the environment to facilitate or promote parental involvement and participation. This mainly focused on the placement and arrangement of furniture to signal the expectation that families would sit with their child for the activity, for instance, by placing a *“big chair next to a small chair”*. One comment described how they arranged the children’s activities to occur closer to a couch, so that a family member with limited mobility was able to engage with the children. One comment provided details about how they establish a range of activities to ensure that families and children could choose which activities they engaged in. Shared activities were used to encourage families to become involved with children’s activities. The shared activities listed included families and children singing together or playing with playdough together, families reading to children or doing puzzles with children, collaborative painting, collaborative parachute games, families and children making dough beads together and families making playdough with children for the use of the whole group. Teachers and AIEOs modelled their expectations to families. This involved individual modelling, where the teacher modelled collaborative educational play to one parent and discussed its educational importance.

In several cases, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs developed strategies to include carers with multiple children. Families with siblings of different ages, or a new baby, faced challenges to full engagement—for them and their child—and therefore, staff provided the family and children with additional support. Sometimes, teachers and AIEOs felt the need to focus on an individual child as a way to prompt engagement of the family member.

Overall, a wide variety of strategies were used to facilitate Aboriginal family engagement in KindiLink, ultimately increasing their capacity and confidence.

## 4.3 Supporting Families to Facilitate their Child's Development and Learning (120 comments)

### 4.3.1 Modelling and explaining the purpose of activities

Half of the teachers and AIEOs reported that they had invested time in modelling how families could interact, read, play and teach their children. Teachers and AIEOs found it beneficial to model activities and explain the purpose of activities:

*I have sat down with families who are completing NT LearningGame® cards with their children. I have explained to them what the games purpose is, and demonstrated how we can make kids learning fun, while they are preparing for school entry. I have explained about the pink box on the back and why the games are so powerful. I then had one mum ask if I could get her copies of the games for her to do at home with her child for activities to keep him entertained while learning.*

Other teachers also emphasised the importance of explaining the purpose of the activities in terms of the learning outcomes as well as developmental milestones, and the value of the families' roles in supporting their child to learn. Teachers communicated this in a variety of ways: using picture cards, explaining at the start of the day and facilitating play or guiding play. Practical information was also exchanged to inform and engage families in activities (e.g., explaining why vinegar is added when dyeing pasta). The teacher and AIEO at one KindiLink site had a structured starting point where the child and the family member worked together and went from one area to the next: tracing their name and then completing a counting board and the days of the week chart; this activity became a routine for them.

By Term 3, respondents reported that their modelling to families the ways in which to interact, read, play and teach their children was having a noticeable effect. Participants reported that families were explicitly supporting and modelling activities for their child and also assimilating skills and information from teachers about conversational reading, questioning and helping children with simple rules, such as taking turns. There were reports of families taking advantage of teachable moments and opportunities for learning spontaneously. Half of the journal entries reported that the families were developing their own initiative to implement with their children some of these practices at home as well as at KindiLink.

The provision of materials to use for learning at home was one of the strategies used with success. One teacher assisted the families in making a numeracy game using recycled goods to take home for home learning. She said: *"All families made a set, and played the game with their children before the end of the session. A great result."*

These reports that families had increased their skills in supporting, guiding and interacting with their children is evidence of them effectively becoming their child's first teachers. Families used strategies they had observed being modelled at KindiLink, were increasingly interested in participating in activities with their children and became more responsive to their children's interests over time.

### 4.3.2 Supporting families when necessary

Allocating time to having conversations with families was mentioned as an engagement strategy. This was achieved through home visits or being available to talk outside KindiLink hours. Several teachers and AIEOs found ways to assist families in their personal lives as a natural way of building trust and facilitating

engagement. The needs that arose were diverse and included a request for more learning resources, supporting with parenting strategies and organising transport and breakfast.

KindiLink staff used a variety of strategies to support families, including offering advice, encouraging families and providing resources. One of these resources supplied from a school included a calico KindiLink bag containing some story books from the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, a *Say Hello To School* and a *Learning At Home* booklet, a laminated sheet with the alphabet and numbers on it, information about helping their child develop the correct pencil grip and a KindiLink card detailing the times and locations of the various sessions. Another resource was a LearningGame® pack that was established as a lending library.

One comment spoke about one KindiLink site organising visits from a school psychologist to the service to talk to families about developmental milestones. One site organised a parenting workshop: *“We had a Positive Parenting Program meeting at KindiLink. Fantastic seeing all my usual mums in there, as well as a few new members of the community all coming together. There were cakes and soup, a beautiful way to spend a cold day. Our kids were so beautifully behaved the whole time playing quietly in the back while their mum is listening to the presentation.”*

### 4.3.3 Families as partners

Although only a few comments in week 5 of Term 2 illustrated how staff enabled families to assume leadership roles and accept responsibility for tasks, they provided powerful examples of engagement, with families being asked to draw on their strengths and expertise to contribute to KindiLink activities. One teacher explained how she sought feedback from families as a means of giving them *“a voice”* by incorporating their feedback into the KindiLink sessions. By the end of Term 2, several teachers and AIEOs described how families were involved as partners in planning and leading activities. One comment described how families had led dance sessions when the teacher was absent and a relief teacher was taking her place. Other comments described how families had planned and run cooking sessions, how they had suggested new songs and activities that were incorporated into the session and how they had collaborated with the teacher to try to recover a failed *‘slime’* making experiment. One comment described collaboration on National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) activities.

A description of how staff supported family partnerships and ownership of KindiLink is provided by the following example:

*The best example of engagement for us is when we do our weekly cooking sessions. Initially we planned this ourselves and the families/carers just helped with the making and a bit of the clean-up. However, now the entire session is planned by the families/carers. They go through the cookbooks each week and decide on a recipe that is both reasonably healthy and within our budget and time constraints. Once it is planned they turn up the next week and run the entire session.*

Several teachers noted that families contributed through suggesting new ideas and giving feedback about the activities they and their children prefer.



## 4.4 Changes Over Time (98 comments)

### 4.4.1 Communication

Participants reported the gradual increase in trust and communication between school staff and families. Tangible changes had resulted, such as increased attendance, families participating in other school initiatives, a child having the appropriate 'supplies' when they started school (unlike his older siblings), a family member taking on a volunteer role at the school and the children making smooth transitions to Kindergarten.

### 4.4.2 Confidence and empowerment

Confidence was demonstrated by the families' belief in their own abilities as well as confidence to engage in learning activities with the children. There were several responses indicating that KindiLink is encouraging the social and emotional wellbeing of families.

One teacher wrote: *"Families are more willing to ask questions about the activity and its purpose. They are suggesting activities for the next lesson."* The engagement of fathers was also a key point since it not only increased the engagement of families but also of family members. A teacher described: *"One Dad has become more involved. He has grown in confidence and is keen for his children to do well."*

In some cases, this meant that they had the confidence to ask the teacher and AIEO for help with positive parenting or the purpose of activities and how they could help their children. Some families took longer to build the confidence to initiate interactions with children at activities.

Not only were some families becoming more confident in interacting with the children but were also supporting the children to interact with their peers and other adults. They were increasing their interaction outside of the structured activities. There were examples exhibiting building capacity and included contributing ideas, resources and suggestions as well as showing leadership, helping to organise sessions and by being a role model to others. Comments reported that families gradually fostered children's learning, scaffolded learning, developed language and used questioning to promote further learning. Also demonstrated was the improvement in their skills to teach acceptable behaviours, provide consistent instructions and follow through with predictable consequences.

Families' increased engagement carried over into the home environment, where they were able to use the strategies with siblings, and to the community, where they could share this knowledge with others. Examples were provided of families cooking at home with their children and using the KindiLink recipe to make playdough; finding KindiLink songs on the internet; replicating table top activities; sharing books; re-telling stories using animation; using resources at hand to play games at home; and buying similar resources to those used at KindiLink for home use.

A few specific examples were of families demonstrating pride in their improved capacity and confidence. Comments also demonstrated that the families were developing a sense of pride about their children's abilities and achievements.

By Term 4, teachers and AIEOs commented that increased confidence, knowledge of routines and connections to others had increased the capability and confidence of families to be their child's first teacher. It would appear that there is some correlation between attendance and increased engagement. One teacher wrote: *"Engagement levels have increased throughout the whole group. We are finding that the more*



*frequent attenders are now telling the other families what to do and showing them how.”* The families that had been attending regularly throughout the year displayed high levels of engagement with their children in the sessions. Some families had different engagement patterns since they are described as still *“sitting back”* at times. It could be that engagement is connected to confidence, and families who are not confident of routines, their role or the role of others may observe first before participating. A description of this was given by one teacher when she wrote: *“Slowly beginning to read more to their children but are likely to stop if they see me or another person watching them.”* There are still some families across the sites that were described as *“partially engaged”* and one reason that was given was the cultural sense of *“shame”* if they joined in on the mat with their children. A teacher wrote: *“Families have mentioned that it is ‘shame’ to sit with their children on the mat and sing nursery rhyme songs with the group.”* It also appeared that as the skills of the children grew as they matured across the year, it may have been a reason for families joining in more. For example, it was suggested: *“Engagement in the group/mat sessions has improved. We believe this is due to the children being older and more ready for these mat sessions.”*

## 4.5 Summary

It was particularly apparent that supporting Aboriginal families to become their child’s first teacher was central to the teachers and AIEOs commitment to KindiLink. They created an environment and curriculum (in its broadest sense) that was optimal in engaging and involving children and families. This included adapting the activities, demonstrating and modelling for the families, involving families in the decision-making process (where appropriate and possible), obtaining extra help where needed and, at times, making home visits to support the families. Over time, the teachers and AIEOs felt they had developed the confidence of families; increased levels of engagement; built partnerships with families; developed pride in the achievements of children and families; supported the families to use KindiLink activities at home; and increased the capacity and confidence of families to be their first child’s first educator. This had led, in some sites (to a limited extent), to a shared program as KindiLink families initiated, led and informed the program, ultimately taking some ownership. In addition, their cultural and linguistic knowledge was perceived as an essential component of KindiLink—they were the experts and the teachers the learners. Many families supported the development of the capacity and confidence of other families as they formed relationships and worked together.

Conversely, some families wanted to watch their child grow and develop and took great pleasure in this; however, they were perceived as not fully engaged in KindiLink, and thus, it was difficult to see evidence of them increasing their capacity and confidence. In addition, some families found that their circumstances prevented them from attending or attending regularly, giving them little opportunity to develop their capacity and confidence at KindiLink. The teachers and AIEOs were often disappointed by this, but it was evident that some of these families may have been dealing with several issues that prevented them from fully engaging with KindiLink.

## 5. Impact on Building Productive Relationships

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

The following analysis documents the findings from a total of 360 comments made by KindiLink teachers and AIEOs in their reflective journals across three terms. This section draws on the following areas:

- families' relationships with school
- changes in relationships
- examples of relationships
- rewarding moments and challenges (and change) related to relationships.

### 5.1 Families' Relationships with the School (89 comments)

#### 5.1.1 Improved relationships

The majority of the comments from teachers and AIEOs suggested that families had a good relationship with the school, enjoyed being at the school and were beginning to see the benefits of school. Families were comfortable in the environment and appeared to feel safe and supported: *"Our families feel comfortable here and feel a sense of belonging and ownership. They have verbalised how proud they are of KindiLink."* By Term 3, relationships between the school and families were improving because of KindiLink, because families who found it hard to attend regularly were beginning to emulate relationships demonstrated by families attending regularly: *"The families who regularly attend have built strong and culturally responsive relationships with the KindiLink teacher, AIEO and the school. The families that come infrequently are beginning to develop these relationships."*

KindiLink was also perceived as the bridge between the families and the primary school. KindiLink teachers and AIEOs described overwhelming improvements in terms of family engagement in the school, which they attributed directly to KindiLink: *"Our leadership team has commented on how the families that have engaged with KindiLink are becoming much more involved with their other children who attend the school."* Relationships were then fostered by school leaders, either Principals, their deputy or a lead teacher in the primary school, who made them feel welcome on enrolment or who reached out to KindiLink families. Families responded well when they felt that the school cared about them and that encouraged them to participate in special school activities, such as Book Week, sports days and NAIDOC celebrations.

Some families had become confident enough to engage and, in some cases, voice their opinions. This had led to an increase in families attending school events, contributing to the school Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) and raising issues with the Principal and/or Deputy Principal: *"Families are more engaged with the school P&C. They are more proactive. When they are not happy about something, I encourage them to have a voice and do something about it. This year has seen my group of families become more empowered and confident when dealing with the school. They realise that it is supportive, and they can have a say."* Other connections were nurtured through family members working in the school or older children attending the school. Some of the KindiLink families had secured employment in the school in a range of occupations. School events were advertised to KindiLink families as a conduit to engage more families.

Transition programs to introduce the children to Kindergarten were undertaken by many KindiLink teachers and AIEOs in Term 4. This increased the interaction between families and the school and one teacher wrote: *“As we are gearing up for the transition to Kindy for most of our children at KindiLink the families are becoming more aware of the things that happen at school and becoming more receptive to why we do each activity at KindiLink.”* Another teacher wrote: *“Becoming more proactive. I have found the families are asking a lot more questions, and I encourage this.”* Another teacher’s comment emphasises the change of the relationships over the course of the year: *“Families currently think positively of [school name] which have improved from opinions at the beginning of the year.”* In addition, families were described as being happy to be at school and having fun with their children and staff.

## **5.2 Changes to an Individual Family’s Relationship with the School (74 comments)**

Some KindiLink teachers and AIEOs recorded no change, and one teacher recorded difficulty re-engaging a family after they returned from time away from the area. Several comments mentioned that families had disengaged because of factors beyond the control of KindiLink, such as personal or family issues. For one family, the outcome was positive for a father, who had volunteered at KindiLink and could no longer assist because he had found paid employment. At the end of the year, some teachers and their assistants did not know about the relationships families had with them or the school. Most changes recorded were positive.

### **5.2.1 Confidence**

KindiLink teachers and AIEOs commented that involvement with KindiLink tends to help many family members grow in personal confidence, enabling them to discuss their problems or ask for help, resulting in greater access to existing support at the school and the initiation of referrals to other agencies.

The growth in personal confidence also allows them to develop a relationship with the school: *“An Aboriginal parent who appears to be confident, but who suffers from anxiety and doesn't like to be around people she isn't comfortable with, has volunteered to make damper for NAIDOC Week.”*

### **5.2.2 More engaged in their child’s education**

The teachers and AIEOs commented that the majority of families who participated in KindiLink subsequently took a more active role in the school and were generally more engaged with education and learning: *“One family has two older children in Year 2 and 4. Mum has previously commented that she doesn't see the need to meet with their teachers during three-way conferences and learning journeys. Through participating in KindiLink and chatting about language skills (as an example) she has since commented that she is interested to go and see what the older children are doing in class.”*

Another example of the effect of positive relationships between KindiLink and families: *“One particular parent has now started to help within her older child's classroom on a regular basis due to the growing positive relationship encouraged by her attending KindiLink with her 3-year- old.”*

In one instance a change of Principal was reported as being important to re-engaging with families and building trust between the school and families: *“Families have said they feel comfortable coming back to the school since a change in management has taken place.”*

In addition, families had sought assistance from KindiLink staff on issues regarding older siblings, enquired about working at the school, made an effort to remain at their KindiLink school, committed to attending KindiLink with younger siblings in 2018 and on one occasion, applied for a scholarship for their older child.

### 5.2.3 Community connections

Community connections fostered by KindiLink staff were also perceived as beneficial. An example was given of how the KindiLink network supported one family's reconnection with the school:

*Over the last term, one family wasn't engaging or attending. We were unable to contact the family due to change of contact details ... Through family connections we were able to re-engage the family. They have been in attendance and engaging in the program since.*

School referrals to support services, such as the Psychologist and Chaplain, resulted in very positive outcomes for some families. For example, a teacher described how an *"angry non-attending school student made a complete turn around and became a regular attender"*. In another example, the school Chaplain organised a food hamper for a family experiencing financial difficulties.

One teacher felt this was because of the school reaching out to families and families feeling less intimidated in the school environment, and she said: *"The families are more confident and realise the big school is not a scary place."*

## 5.3 Examples of Relationship Building (75 comments)

The following four themes emerged from the comments:

### 5.3.1 Nurturing family's confidence and support networks

KindiLink has boosted the self-confidence of families, enabling some to trust the care of their children to non-family members. According to one participant, this was achieved *"through ensuring that the general feelings of the sessions are of openness, inclusiveness and flexibility"*. The staff recognise the *"importance of families and caregivers in children's education"* and they ensure that the families are aware of this. Numerous examples were provided of individual family members growing in confidence because the KindiLink staff had encouraged them to participate, sought and valued their opinions, incorporated their views in sessions and then drawn upon their strengths to deliver KindiLink.

Families enjoyed socialising and sharing information in a safe environment. This casual, friendly atmosphere helped dispel concerns of Aboriginal families that *"teachers can be seen as quite intimidating"*. Families who may have previously felt isolated found that they were part of a community once they began to associate with KindiLink.

Teachers and AIEOs wrote about successful outcomes that they attributed to KindiLink with great pride. One family member was completing an online course, with the work experience component in the school, because KindiLink had inspired her goal to work in community services. She was actively involved in KindiLink and an inspiration to staff and other families. A few families were able to work as volunteers or AIEOs in another school. Several fathers confidently brought their children to KindiLink, enabling their partners to attend other courses within the school or at university.

As their confidence grew, families began to share their opinions, thoughts and problems with the KindiLink staff, becoming more open to building school and community relationships. Community and school social

events, such as NAIDOC celebrations, provided opportunities for friendships among the KindiLink families to deepen. From these, support networks and social connections on which families could rely upon in the future developed as the children continued through school together.

### **5.3.2 Familiarising families with school environment**

In preparing the children for school, KindiLink participated in many school activities, interacting with the school staff and gently building relationships in the process. Small steps taken, such as timing KindiLink outdoor play sessions to coincide with the Kindergarten play time or inviting families to attend school events, were subtle and safe introductions to school life. One teacher who accompanied a student, who was delivering dinosaur biscuits to a school administrator, was extremely proud to see her student confidently describe the biscuit-making process. At one site, a Kindergarten teacher replaced the KindiLink teacher whenever she was absent, and in another, the administration staff helped a family member apply for a scholarship for her older child, both being positive experiences. KindiLink provided an opportunity for families to observe how much schools had to offer their children, to engage in enjoyable activities, interact with the staff and feel comfortable in the school environment. Relationships with families were also facilitated when family members worked in, or were actively involved with, the school. As a result, teachers and AIEOs observed families who had previously been reluctant to venture near the school attending school activities, such as parent–teacher and AIEO meetings and book fairs. Some families wanted to enrol their children in the associated school. One teacher commented that the draw of KindiLink was so great for one family that they were seeking accommodation within the school catchment area to continue their child’s attendance at the school.

### **5.3.3 Participating in community activities**

Through their inclusion in KindiLink, families were engaging in, contributing to and in some cases even leading, community activities, thereby facilitating relationships between their families and the community. Examples of community activities mentioned in the journals were NAIDOC week, NATSI Children’s day, Sorry Day, Colour Fun Day, Harmony Day, Shire Community Expo Day, the Biggest Morning Tea and visits to the library. For example, during NAIDOC week, one father organised traditional games, while other families made damper or joined in face/boomerang/calico painting activities. Through an opportunity for the KindiLink group to visit an Aboriginal Association, the families were able to meet the staff, have free hearing tests and share their resources with their children. When KindiLink needed some art work, they called upon their families and former and current students of their partner school to assist, providing a project with potential for relationships to develop among community members of all ages.

Involvement in community activities increased the confidence of the families and their capacity to build relationships with others in the community. The boost to the confidence of an initially reluctant mother who proved to be skilful at face painting was noted. Similarly, the pride of the families was evident when KindiLink visited a library and the children willingly responded to their families’ requests to listen quietly. While the families developed relationships with the community during the activities, at the same time, KindiLink was showcasing its program and its families to the community.

### **5.3.4 Accessing community services**

Once the KindiLink staff gained the trust and confidence of the families, problems were shared and the staff was able to facilitate family access to community services. One previously shy family member gradually increased her engagement with KindiLink and asked for assistance with her daughter who had poor attendance at school. The mother was put in touch with Parent and Community Engagement and attended

parent workshops. At the end of the year, her daughter received the award for most improved attendance and attended school every day. Other families sought assistance regarding their child's behaviour in various communities and were guided to workshops, which had very positive results.

For one community of children who travelled to KindiLink by bus, a Family Support Worker arranged a detour to the Salvation Army to collect food each week. Another site arranged for a speech pathologist to observe the children in their play environment and provide the service in a setting where families felt comfortable. Other incursions included the local dentist, doctor, firefighters and police officers.

Many KindiLink staff had helped their families develop invaluable relationships with community service providers, such as One Tree (mental health service), the Community Child and Maternal Health Nurse, the occupational therapist, *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS), Child and Parent Centre, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Parent Assisted Learning (PAL) program and Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS).

One KindiLink community has four back-up options to assist in transporting children to, and from, home. These included the Wirrpanda Foundation, the Community Health Service, the [community name] Centre and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officer.

One example of a situation presented as a challenge in Term 2 had been rectified by Term 3. In Term 2 the teacher commented:

*On Thursdays there is no one coming to the designated KindiLink spot at [community name] and I feel very sad that we are unable to offer a suitable venue for the young children and their mothers in this community. I also feel confused by the [community name] community because they asked us to come to conduct the program there, but they do not attend. I would love to be able to consult with them and find out what it is they would like to be doing during the KindiLink time.*

By Term 3, the [name] community were having KindiLink one day at school, one day in the town [name] community centre and one day out at [community name]—a camp outside town.

## **5.4 Rewarding Moments Regarding Relationships (122 comments)**

Teachers and AIEOs were asked to describe rewarding moments at KindiLink in Terms 3 and 4. Although many of their comments are reflected in the earlier sections, these are included here as an indication of the significance and strength of the growing partnership forged through emerging relationships between KindiLink, the school, the community and families. These comments are described in the following themes.

### **5.4.1 Relationships with families**

Many comments referred to the development of strong and enduring relationships between families, children and staff and children forming friendships. The creation of trusting relationships with the families, who gained the confidence to participate in sessions, allowed them to share concerns and ask for advice. Teachers and AIEOs valued the wealth of knowledge gained from Aboriginal families, which gave them the capacity to tailor KindiLink to meet the needs of each family. The engagement between families and their children and between different families, the achievement of positive educational outcomes and the creation of bonds while watching their children grow and develop were identified as very rewarding aspects of



KindiLink by the teachers and AIEOs. Several teachers and AIEOs observed a sense of personal growth in many families.

## 5.4.2 Engagement with education and support services

Many KindiLink teachers and AIEOs were rewarded by engaging families and children more with the school, support services and external agencies. Some were rewarded by families participating in parenting workshops. Seeing families who had initially been shy and reserved become involved and having families take ownership of session elements were also noted. Several teachers and AIEOs felt that they had made a strong and significant contribution by building a sense of community.

## 5.5 Challenges Regarding Relationships (17 comments)

### 5.5.1 Attendance and engagement of families

Building strong and sustainable relationships was perceived as problematic when faced with challenges early in the year related to recruiting families, maintaining in terms of attendance and encouraging regular attendance. This was despite the implementation of several strategies and support from other agencies to reach out to the community. Even in Term 4, some teachers and AIEOs described the constant challenge of using different methods, such as letterbox drops, to find families. As one teacher describes: *“Finding families in the community who have 3-year-old children continues to be my focus and most difficult challenge.”* Another participant declared: *“The occasional community attitude that it is unfair that KindiLink only caters for Aboriginal children is challenging.”* A few teachers declared that family attitudes to KindiLink were a challenge but did not elaborate.

Assisting some families to engage with outside agencies and engaging with families from other cultural groups and visitors to KindiLink also proved to be challenging for some teachers and AIEOs. Multiple journal entries revealed that building trust with some families and helping them understand the value and aims of KindiLink had been difficult. Supporting families to understand their role in KindiLink and expectations, while being sensitive to cultural norms, has also been stressful for some KindiLink staff.

### 5.5.2 Staff capabilities

Working with families in crisis and facing extreme difficulties was challenging for some teachers and AIEOs. Lack of knowledge, resources and time for supporting children with additional needs or in need of sleep or nourishment were nominated as concerns by a few teachers.

*Teacher feels that she is not trained enough on how to help these families/ families? Maybe getting a social worker in to facilitate a session during the next workshop teaching KindiLink staff what the most appropriate action would be.*

A few teachers and AIEOs described challenges with obtaining appropriately skilled relief staff for KindiLink. It was not only difficult to source and train staff, but also changes in staff were disruptive to the relationships established with families. The AIEOs were perceived as central to the success of KindiLink, and almost all participants mentioned that the AIEO they worked in partnership with was indispensable, *“the backbone of the program”*; however, in one comment a teacher expressed her concern about inexperienced staff: *“We have not engaged with the community at all this year. I have an AIEO that is very inexperienced and lacks the confidence to be able to complete home visits and interact with people she does not know.”*

Several teachers and AIEOs referred to the need for transport or a dedicated building as presenting challenges.

## **5.6 Changes to Enhance Relationships (102 comments)**

### **5.6.1 Promotion**

Promotional work was mentioned as being a focus in Term 3 for some teachers and AIEOs. They acknowledged the need to reach more families and came up with specific ideas for continuing promotional activity. One comment put forward the idea of inviting non-Aboriginal children to join KindiLink for the first time. Visiting homes and the community was considered one option for Term 3 to remain visible for potential participants and increasing interest in KindiLink.

### **5.6.2 Strengthening relationships with families and improve attendance**

Teachers and AIEOs expressed the need to build on their relationship with participating families. Home visits featured strongly as a strategy to increase registrations and attendance.

### **5.6.3 Utilising and sharing expertise**

Comments acknowledged the value of resources and expertise, such as visits by health professionals, school services and Aboriginal organisations, to enhance the program.

### **5.6.4 Making stronger links to Kindergarten**

Some teachers intended to invest more time and effort into preparing KindiLink families for the 'Kindy-ready' program by, for example, beginning to transition play with the Kindergarten children.

### **5.6.5 Program**

A few teachers intended to increase the number of excursions, and one comment was about an incursion.

### **5.6.6 Staff**

In a couple of cases, the AIEO role was identified as something that could be enhanced and better utilised; in one case, they were seeking to employ an AIEO.

## **5.7 Summary**

KindiLink is successfully implementing a variety of ways to strengthen relationships between schools and families, especially Aboriginal families, and the relationship between schools and the broader community. This process began with KindiLink teachers and AIEOs actively building the self-confidence of the families and their trust in other school-based adults. This allowed families to feel confident to share family issues that may be affecting their children with the teacher and/or AIEO. At its best, trust also enabled teachers to have open discussions with families about how they can best support their child's progress through school and to offer the support of welfare and other services where applicable. Staff fostered relationships by seeking the opinions of families, valuing and including them in the program, recognising their strengths and then utilising their expertise to add quality to the delivery of the program. Some families were inspired to study, seek work or volunteer in the school as a result. Opportunities for friendships, social networking and support had been



made available through KindiLink, school and community activities. Through participation in school activities, families had interacted with school staff and become familiar with, and comfortable in, the school environment. Confidence and relationships gave families a voice in the school, enabling them to actively participate in their older children's education. KindiLink also engaged the families in the community, through regular participation in activities, such as NAIDOC week and Harmony Day. Engagement in community social activities helped to boost confidence, gain social recognition for the families' skills, build friendships, and acquire knowledge of, and access to, community resources and services. By accessing community services, vital relationships were built with service providers, who were also members of the community.

Some KindiLink sites seem to be fully embracing these possibilities enthusiastically, while other sites appear to be less proactive in taking advantage of these possibilities. A few reports mentioned that families had disengaged because of personal or family issues beyond the control of the KindiLink staff.

It seems apparent that the majority of families who participated in KindiLink subsequently took more of an active role in the school and were generally more engaged with education and learning. Families responded well when they felt that the school cared about them, and that encouraged them to participate in special school activities. They displayed a sense of belonging to the school and wider community. Ultimately, teachers and AIEOs indicated that these relationships formed the foundation of a productive and sustainable relationship that has the potential to influence families' attendance at school in the future.

## 6. Key Findings

### 6.1 Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities

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

Participation in KindiLink has positively contributed to children’s learning in the areas of social, emotional, language and cognitive development. Multiple comments from teachers and AIEOs also noted the increased confidence, independence and engagement of children in daily experiences. Teachers and AIEOs indicated that the growth in development and learning they had observed over time would assist children in their effective transition to Kindergarten and in their future schooling.

The provision of a language-rich environment and the modelling of language strategies were key aspects to the reported improvement of language skills. Parents were encouraged to interact with their child throughout all experiences to foster oral language and speaking and listening skills. As the year progressed, teachers and AIEOs became more focused on language learning and development, encouraging the use of more complex language. Attending KindiLink enabled early intervention by providing information to parents about speech therapists, hearing tests and ways of accessing support for language development. Services were invited to KindiLink to develop partnerships and to help families gain trust in service providers.

Improvements were also recorded in social development with children developing friendships and prosocial skills, such as sharing, turn taking, cooperating and displaying “*appropriate manners*”. Teachers reported that these skills took time to develop as children and families gradually settled in and became comfortable in the environment. Throughout the year, teachers and AIEOs talked with families about parenting skills and discussed strategies for supporting positive behaviour and self-regulation. In a safe and supported environment, parents practiced managing children’s behaviour, developing independence.

KindiLink participation assisted children’s emotional growth particularly in the development of self-confidence and agency. As children became familiar with the environment and aware of regular routines, they were able to make choices in their play and participate comfortably in music and language group times. During transition times, parents were also supported in how to manage children’s emotions and how to involve children in transitions.

Regular engagement in planned experiences, including the LearningGames®, enabled gains in cognitive development. Teachers and AIEOs reported that children were involved in learning about concepts related to colours, shapes, matching, memory games and counting. Immersion in a variety of opportunities supported children’s competency, development and learning. Comments were made about children’s enjoyment in learning, self-satisfaction and a sense of achievement and pride.

KindiLink also provided opportunities for children to practice and develop their fine and gross motor skills. Families initiated some of these physical skills in the home environment, including cutting and craft activities. Self-help skills, such as hand washing and brushing teeth, were practiced in the KindiLink setting and also encouraged in the home.

Some families faced more challenges than others, and one aspect that was emphasised in the reflections was that of an “*ever-changing home learning environment*” for some children. Some of the challenges include social and health issues and the number of people living in the home. It was noted that some families had limited access to educational materials, libraries and writing and drawing materials. However, KindiLink was able to bridge the gap through the lending and sharing of resources. Some of the initiatives included “*give and take [home] library*” and a “*LearningGames® Library*”. KindiLink became a positive influence in the home, with teachers and AIEOs commenting that families began engaging children in book-sharing activities, singing songs/nursery rhymes and telling their own stories. There were many comments on how KindiLink enhanced parenting practices, including a positive influence on children’s behaviour and routines being established and successfully implemented at home.

LearningGames® were reported to be effective, with many comments on how they were used and the development of literacy and numeracy skills. The LearningGames® supported the children’s growing capabilities, particularly their social, emotional, language and cognitive abilities. Parents were involved in these games fostering dual language learning and opportunity to engage in a wide variety of new and challenging cognitive experiences. This was especially evident as children and families became more confident and familiar with KindiLink and was reflected in journal entries in Terms 3 and 4. Copies of the LearningGames® were provided to parents, who then used or adapted them in the home environment to extend learning and development.

Participation in KindiLink has supported children’s development through the provision of a carefully planned program, resources, language-rich environments and modelling by teachers. KindiLink teachers and AIEOs noted that many of the experiences during involvement in KindiLink were later replicated in the home environment, further enhancing children’s social, emotional, language and cognitive abilities.

## 6.2 Attendance at KindiLink and Kindergarten

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

The reflective journals focused on questions regarding families’ level of attendance at KindiLink and the reasons for changes in the level. Making the link to school attendance cannot be established at this early stage of the implementation of KindiLink. However, some of the reasons for nonattendance may be contributing factors to future participation and need to be considered.

Attendance and registration at some KindiLink sites had improved over the year and most comments indicated there was a central group of families who regularly attended. Apart from this core group, attendance at most sites was intermittent and teachers and AIEOs reported on the difficulties of encouraging families to attend. However, the number of registrations was not representative of the overall participation in KindiLink since the attendance register only included three-year-olds. The registrations did not include the significant number of younger siblings in attendance. Many families indicated they would not be able to attend with their three-year-olds if they could not bring the babies and toddlers. The inclusion of non-Aboriginal families also boosted the numbers of those attending. This was a decision made by the Principals on some sites.

Encouraging families to attend regularly and recruiting new participants was problematic for some teachers and AIEOs. Talking to families and determining why they were unable to attend was necessary to actively maintain enrolments. Suggested ways to overcome sporadic attendance included promoting a sense of belonging, home visits, developing attachments and friendships between families, changes to timetable and starting times to accommodate families, providing regular transport and having the influence of a third person involved for support, such as a community health nurse. Over time, families recognised the benefits of attending and encouraged others to do so, and in some instances, the children prompted the parents to attend. There were reports of families organising their own way to attend by walking or arranging lifts, indicative of tenacity and determination to participate in KindiLink.

Many significant challenges influenced attendance owing to a range of complex personal, social or community issues. These involved incidents of illness of a parent, child or family member, assisting other family members, visiting a relative in prison and going on holidays. There were reports that some families did not want to attend because of lack of food, shoes and clean clothes resulting in “shame”. Some cultural reasons included travelling away for funerals, attending “sorry day” or going “out bush”. Other issues that prevented attendance were lack of transport, moving away from the community, attending appointments and inclement or cold weather.

Other more positive reflections consisted of improvements in attendance. There were reports of families who had previously stopped attending but have since returned. There were new enrolments recorded throughout the year and a report of a family who moved to another community but continued attending KindiLink, although they had to travel a significant distance. There were instances where families began studying, took on a new job or were involved in other activities with their children, such as art classes. Although these events result in families being unable to attend KindiLink, these may potentially lead to positive outcomes for the children and family.

## 6.3 Capacity and Confidence of Families

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

Families’ levels of engagement changed over the course of the year from limited participation to self-initiated participation by Term 4. In Term 1, KindiLink teachers and AIEOs encouraged family members to engage with their children and participate in activities. They enjoyed completing activities with their children, playing together, interacting and generally spending quality time together. Families particularly liked art and craft, shared book reading and cooking with their child. There were reports that some parents were not willing to participate, in particular, in the LearningGames®. Other families were happy to watch their children engage in singing, dancing and movement, but not to join in. However, there was an increase in participation and commitment from families later in the year and by Term 4, many comments indicated a willingness to join in activities. Families also began to be more hands-on in the everyday running of activities and demonstrated this by helping out with routines, packing away, bringing in resources and maintaining their child’s engagement during transition times. Teachers and AIEOs noted some distractions, such as tending to siblings and talking on the phone or to other parents. Nonetheless, KindiLink had achieved its aim of engaging families in their children’s learning at the KindiLink settings owing to parents’ increased confidence, improved skills and greater trust in KindiLink staff. Another positive aspect was the overall enjoyment of families who attended KindiLink and the increased interaction between families towards building strong relationships.

KindiLink staff reported that building positive relationships with Aboriginal families was a priority to contribute to their capacity and confidence as their child's first teacher. Initially, many of the Aboriginal parents were shy, reserved and not comfortable in the new environment. Teachers and AIEOs stressed the importance of taking a genuine interest in families to build relationships, and they did this by making courtesy calls, conducting home visits and initiating conversations on matters relevant to each family. They also noted that improvements in attendance and engagement occurred when they made a deliberate effort to be inclusive. This involved becoming more culturally aware and increasing their knowledge and understanding of the local culture. Regular conversations with parents was important to seek their ideas and feedback and to encourage skills and knowledge. Creating a supportive environment was imperative to facilitate and promote parental involvement and participation. An environment that was warm and welcoming, showed respect for culture and encouraged the use of the local language/dialect all assisted in building and strengthening connections.

Teachers and AIEOs provided support to families to facilitate their child's development and learning by explicitly modelling how to interact, read, play and teach their children. By Term 3, families were initiating these skills of their own accord. KindiLink staff would explain the purpose of activities and talk parents through learning outcomes and skill development as they co-constructed activities and experiences together. They used a variety of strategies to support families, including offering advice, providing encouragement to families and through the provision of resources. There were reports of parents taking advantage of teachable moments and opportunities for learning spontaneously. Another way of providing support was to have discussions with parents to confirm that their child was progressing well. Examples were provided where parents were involved as partners in planning and leading activities in dance sessions and cooking experiences. They were beginning to take ownership through their involvement and suggestion of ideas. Families began to develop confidence to implement at home with their children some of the practices that they were learning at KindiLink. Parents over the year had improved their skills in supporting, guiding and interacting with their children, increasing their capacity and confidence to be their child's first educator.

## **6.4 Relationships between the Family, the School and the Community**

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

Attendance at KindiLink enabled teachers and AIEOs to develop strong relationships and a sense of community with families. KindiLink was the bridge between parents and the primary school as trust and confidence in the school community grew. Principals and other school leaders were able to make connections with families and develop relationships that otherwise may not have occurred if not for participation in KindiLink. The schools had made efforts to include Aboriginal families in special school activities, such as Book Week, sports days and NAIDOC celebrations, and these efforts were well received by these families. Families were described as being happy to be in the school environment and having fun with their children and school staff. Involvement in these events provided opportunities for friendships and social networking. Teachers and AIEOs commented that some families felt empowered by their increased engagement, which led to some of them contributing to the school Parents and Citizens Association (P&C). Growth in personal confidence assisted parents to have more of a voice in the school, to approach the teachers and Principal and ask questions. Families that took more of an active role in the school were also more engaged with education

and learning. The teachers and AIEOs provided instances where parents were now helping in the classrooms of their older children and more prepared to attend parent/teacher meetings. The building of relationships with KindiLink staff, Principals, school leaders and administrative staff assisted parents to relax in the school environment and not feel intimidated. It was reported that families felt a sense of belonging to the school and the wider community.

Liaisons with the community were common in all the KindiLink sites. NAIDOC week, NATSI Children's day, Sorry Day, Colour Fun Day, Harmony Day, Shire Community Expo Day, the Biggest Morning Tea and visits to the library are some examples of community events. KindiLink fostered wider engagement with the community and connected families to community resources that they otherwise did not know existed or had not used before. Relationships with community service providers, such as One Tree (mental health service), the Community Child and Maternal Health Nurse, the occupational therapist, *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS), Child and Parent Centre, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Parent Assisted Learning program (PAL) and Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS), was encouraged. Involvement in the community helped in building the confidence of parents and facilitating access to community organisations. KindiLink has helped strengthen relationships within the school and the community.

## 6.5 Overall Reflections

KindiLink teachers and AIEOs reported that KindiLink has contributed positively in many ways in the lives of families and children. In particular, the forging of relationships between the KindiLink staff, school and community has been evident. Participation in the everyday opportunities provided at each site has contributed to gains in children's social, emotional, language and cognitive development. The children have become more confident and engaged in learning and have developed a wide range of skills. Parent engagement in children's learning has increased and was assisted by the dedication of KindiLink staff through modelling and discussion. Many of the skills learned at KindiLink have been transferred to the home environment, and parents are more proactively engaging in their children's learning and more confident to try new things. The teachers and AIEOs commented that KindiLink increased the capacity and confidence of families to be their child's first educator. The families who participated in KindiLink took on a more active role in the school and developed a sense of belonging to the school and wider community, which led to a positive transition to Kindergarten for many families. A core group of families regularly attend KindiLink, and it was suggested that KindiLink be extended to gain momentum and be established as part of the community.

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