

# Our experiences as Aboriginal carers

Findings from a 'yarning circle'  
held in  
Adelaide  
Friday 1st May 2015

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The 'yarning circles' were held as part of the Australian Research Council Linkage Grant





## 'Yarning circle'

The 'yarning circle' was an open discussion with Aboriginal carers, which allowed the carers to talk freely about their own experiences as a carer.

'Yarning circles' and the face-to-face presentation of findings was mostly made

# How we became carers

e became carers through a mixture of wanting to care, out of obligations and responsibilities to culture and family, and limited choices, opportunities and alternatives. In some cases we took on the carer role because there was no-one else in the family who could care, no-one else wanted to do it, and in these circumstances we knew that someone had to provide care.

## What care means for us

Caring for family members is just something that Aboriginal people 'naturally' did, or is part of our 'culture' and 'way of life' as Aboriginal people. Caring for people with disability, our old people, and people with chronic illness or long-term health needs is a part of our kinship networks and is not distinct from caring responsibilities for children and other family members, nor is it distinct from 'alternative care'.

*'We don't call it caring. That's part of our culture'*

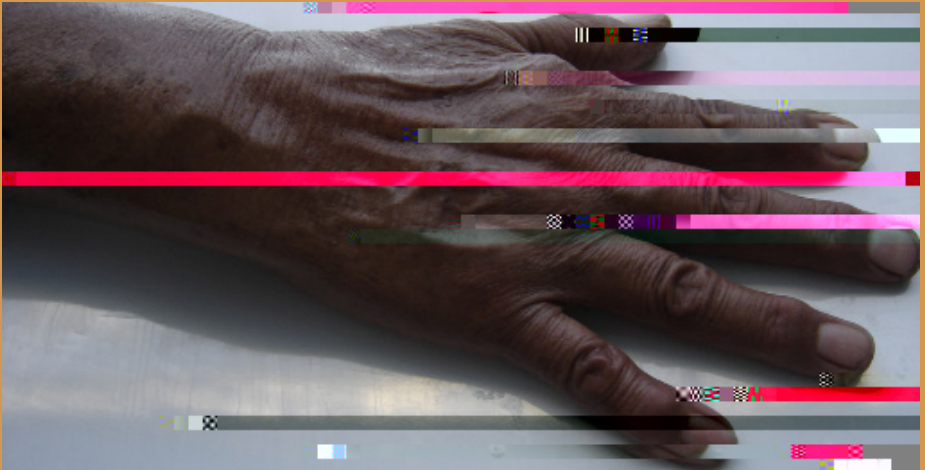
Caring is not distinct from healing either. Aboriginal carers carry trauma that is the direct result of colonisation. In our roles as Aboriginal carers we are faced with the challenges of supporting people who carry trauma, while also trying to heal our own trauma.

## We became carers because:

- It's part of our culture
- It's our way of life
- We are family orientated
- We found ourselves in that position
- We wanted to care
- No-one else in our family was able to do it
- We had limited choices



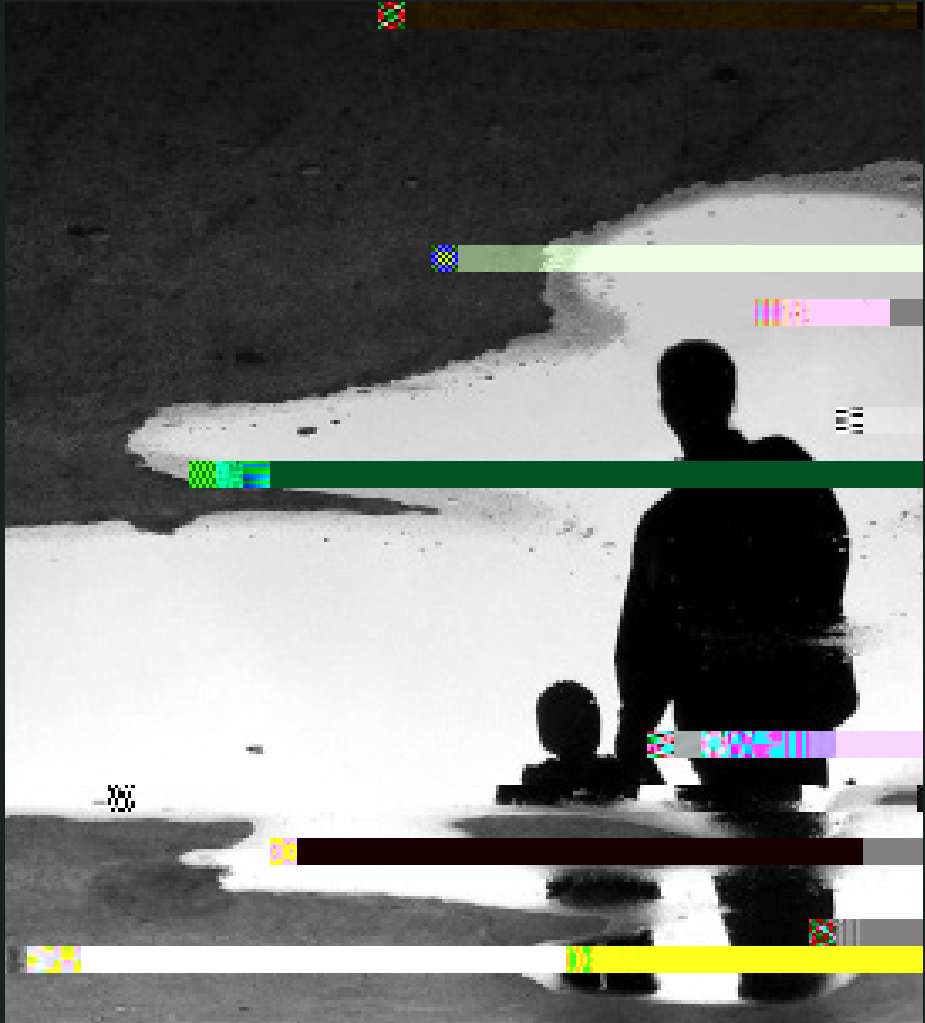
*'I did it because I wanted to. You know, if you're needed you're needed.'*



*'Family orientated with our culture it has always been there. It's in our culture.'*



*'A lot of people that we meet and we say 'oh you're a carer', 'no I'm not', and you go 'you are'*





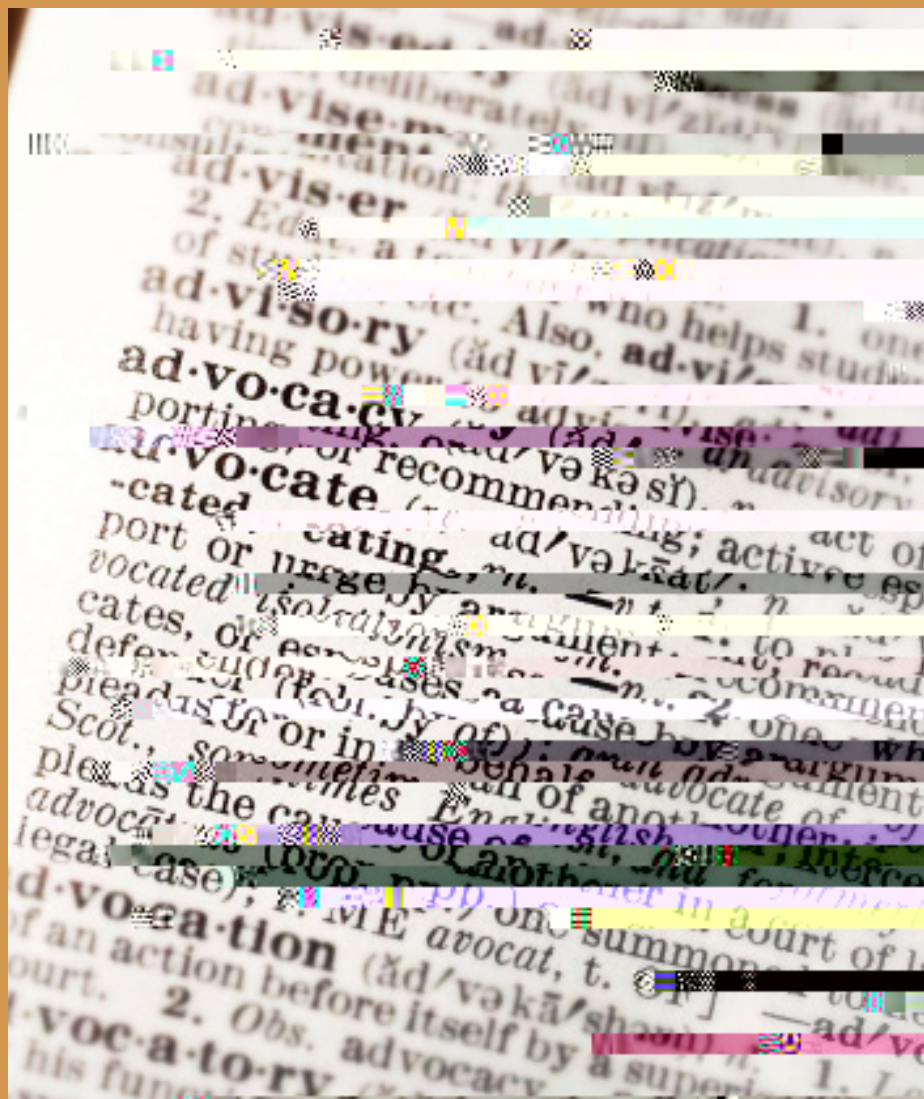
e, as carers, do not always recognise ourselves as 'carers', but consider the role that we play as a carer is just part of our normal role as grandparents, children, spouses or parents.

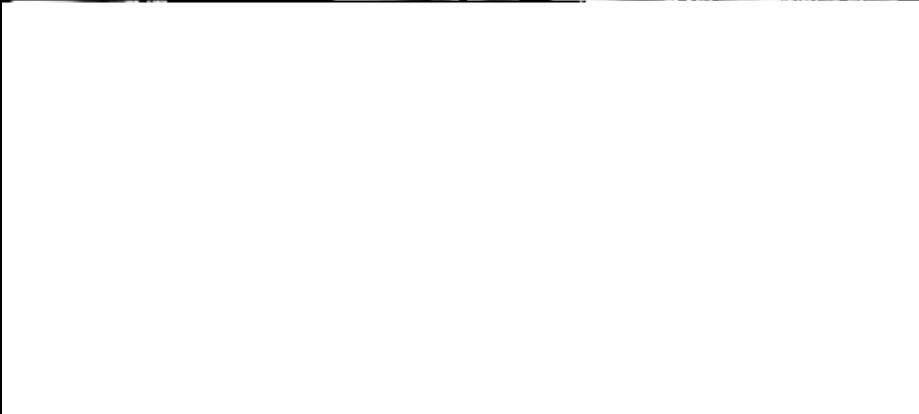
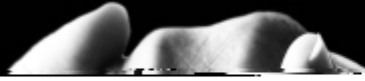
***'Some of them don't even recognise they're carers because of the marriage vows 'till death do us part.'***

The term 'carer' is also a term that we do not always identify with. It comes across as a very medical term, and not one that Aboriginal people readily



*'I still go to the doctors with him because I need to know what's going on. I need to know that he understands what they're saying. So it doesn't stop'*





*'What's happening is a lot of people are thinking about relinquishing their care of their people that they're looking after because they don't have the support structures and they don't have the financial backing.'*









*'sometimes it's only a group that you actually get to, to go out'*





# Who helps us in our caring roles

In our role as Aboriginal carers, we get support from our families, friends and neighbours, and the people we are caring for. We rely on our families to look after the care-receiver which allows us to do other activities such as shopping. We also rely on families to assist with household chores such as washing the dishes, hanging out the clothes and bringing the washing inside.

Care is not a one-way street. The people we care for, in our carer roles, also provide support and care for us.

*'We help each other. We're there for each other.'*

Our families and friends support us emotionally through being available to talk on the phone when we need someone to talk to, or taking over some of the responsibilities of our carer role to give us some personal time.

Our neighbours support us through watching out for us, or checking in with us to make sure that we are okay.

We also get support from government and other service providers such as carer and disability support organisations, which support us through providing home cleaning services and respite for the people we are caring for.



# What's important for us

It is important to us that government recognises the roles that we play in caring for our family members, and cost-savings that this role brings to the government.

## **Our human rights to be upheld and respected**

As carers we need our human rights to be upheld and respected which includes the right to adequate housing and health care. The government needs to set the relationship right between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia. A treaty, setting out the rights and responsibilities of the State it has for Indigenous Australians, could assist with setting the relationship right.

## **On-going funding for Aboriginal carers support groups and services**

We need access to continued and on-going funding for Aboriginal carers support groups which provide us with the opportunities to meet other Aboriginal carers, how we can care before the people we love, and to learn more about changes to government policies, programs and funding that affect us. This includes the need for appropriate counsellors, respite, appropriate education programs to support carers who are providing full-time care.

## **Advocates - employed on full-time and on-going basis**

We need advocates who are employed on a full-time and on-going basis who can either advocate for Aboriginal carers, or can assist us with advocating for our own rights and needs.

## **Support in our caring roles**

We need support in our caring roles such as assistance with household chores and respite for the people we are caring for. This type of assistance provides us, as carers, with opportunities to strengthen our own social and emotional wellbeing. This enables us to continue to provide the much needed care that our family members need. We also need support with how to work through our own trauma, and the trauma of the people we are caring for.

## **Access to information about changes to policies, services and funding**

In order to make informed decisions about the choices before us, we need timely access to information about proposed changes to Aboriginal, carer, and disability policies, services and funding.

There are a lot of layers to being a carer. The government and service providers need to listen to us when they devise and implement policies and programs that will impact directly upon us, or the people we care for.



The SPRC will bring together the different parts of the research into a report for policy makers and service providers about how to improve social inclusion for carers. This includes:

- findings from the literature reviews
- data and policy analysis
- findings from focus groups with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal carers.

To find out more about the research please contact: