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*Report of
an Evaluation
of the
Department of Social Security's
Support Network for
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Parents
Program*

Family Programs and Services Division
Department of Social Security
Canberra

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April 1995

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Support Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents (SNAP) Program was announced in the 1989 Federal Budget as a Department of Social Security (DSS) initiative aimed at actively addressing child poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It began operating in May 1990 with 14 SNAP Officer positions, the majority based in DSS offices in northern Australia. An additional nine full-time and four part-time SNAP Officer positions were announced in the 1993 Budget.

The original objectives of the SNAP Program were:

- to improve the take-up of DSS family and child-related payments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;
- to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents gain access to other government agencies' family and child-related programs and services; and
- to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents identify and use existing community resources in ways which would meet the health, nutrition and other needs of their children.

Background to the Evaluation

An interim evaluation of the SNAP Program was carried out in mid-1991. It found that the Program was "producing some early, encouraging results in coordinating Aboriginal community development issues affecting families" but, at that stage, it would be "premature to make judgements about the [Program's] long term success".

The current evaluation was undertaken as part of a broader evaluation of DSS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services included in the 1993 DSS Portfolio Evaluation Plan (PEP) and carried over into the 1994 PEP.

The evaluation was undertaken to:

- assess and report on the efficiency of the current operation of the SNAP Program and (to the extent possible) its effectiveness in achieving positive and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities; and
- make recommendations to the Minister for Social Security and senior executive of the Department of Social Security regarding future directions for the Program.

An absence of readily collectable performance information in regard to the SNAP Program's effectiveness led to a decision that the current evaluation would concentrate primarily on efficiency aspects of the Program, with a more rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness being postponed until after performance indicators had been established

and reported on over a sufficient period. The current evaluation would focus on the indicators of effectiveness that could be collected mainly through the types of qualitative methods to be used also for assessing the Program's efficiency. These included:

- an examination and analysis of existing documentation concerned with the development and establishment of the SNAP Program, including the rationale both for the Program itself and for its being administered by DSS;
- interviews (including focus group interviews where appropriate) with as many as possible of the SNAP Officers occupying the original 14 positions, their supervisors, other DSS staff (in particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers [AILOs]) who have had some involvement in the Program, the staff of other government agencies with whom SNAP Officers have worked and representatives of the communities and groups which SNAP Officers have endeavoured to assist; and
- an examination and analysis of reports by SNAP Officers summarising their activities during 1993-94.

The evaluation was undertaken by the Family Programs and Services Division of the Department of Social Security and overseen by a steering committee comprising representatives of DSS, the Office of Indigenous Women in ATSIC and the Department of Finance (DoF) and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representative.

DoF was invited to be part of the Steering Committee late in the process (May 1994). By this time this data gathering phase of the evaluation was complete and DoF did not have input to the evaluation methodology or the structure of the questionnaires.

Data collection and analysis were undertaken over the period February to June 1994. Following this, SNAP Officers and other staff involved in management of the Program met in Canberra to examine the evaluation's findings and likely recommendations with a view to strengthening the future operation of the Program. Areas examined included management and coordination of the Program, reporting arrangements, promotional methods, training and resources issues. The conference recommended, among other things, that the wording of the Program's objectives be updated to more accurately reflect the actual operation of the Program and to facilitate the development of measurable performance indicators.

SNAP Program Background

The SNAP Program, particularly in respect of its second and third objectives, represented a new and innovative direction for DSS in its approach to assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Its approach, however, was consistent with that of several other outreach-oriented programs initiated by DSS around that time (such as the Jobs, Education and Training [JET] program for sole parents) which acknowledged that the social security system had social justice responsibilities to its customers beyond ensuring that they received their correct social security entitlements.

The SNAP Program's focus on actively addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family poverty was also consistent with DSS's primary role in Australian society of directly assisting low income families and was intended to build on DSS's already extensive and well regarded network for delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers.

The idea for the SNAP Program arose against the background of the then Prime Minister's 1987 election commitment to eliminating the need for child poverty by 1990 and the publication, in the mid- to late- 1980s, of several Parliamentary and other reports dealing with, among other things, the causes and effects of poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These reports all highlighted the lack of a coordinated approach by governments in the range of programs established to address the social and economic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and a lack of access to such programs by these families.

Additionally, there were concerns within DSS at that time that some of these families might be missing out on part of the social security payments to which they were entitled.

The SNAP Program's objectives were developed to address these various needs and concerns. With its combined role of improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' access to both DSS and other government funding programs and existing community resources, the Program was seen as having the potential both to better coordinate and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government assistance and community infrastructure available to, and ultimately used by, these families and their communities.

The active involvement of families and community groups in identifying their needs and the solutions to them by use of appropriate funding programs and community action was also seen as integral to the operation of the SNAP Program.

Defining and Measuring SNAP Program Effectiveness

In terms of working towards implementing the SNAP Program's objectives, SNAP Officers are normally involved in the following types of activities:

- promoting awareness of DSS family payments on the part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;

- assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to identify and articulate particular needs in areas such as nutrition, child care, youth training, or support services for elderly family members;
- identifying possible relevant funding programs administered by other agencies;
- assisting family and community groups to apply for funding from these agencies and to form incorporated bodies to administer the funds;
- ensuring that the funding agency is aware of the community's needs for which the funds are being sought, which may include arranging meetings between agency staff and community representatives;
- once the funds have been granted, assisting the family and community groups to set up and operate the program being funded.

As a first attempt to define what might constitute meaningful and measurable indicators of the SNAP Program's effectiveness in relation to its objectives as implemented by these means, it is suggested that, for the first of the SNAP objectives, a significant (and readily measurable) indicator of effective performance could comprise the numbers and types of activities promoting awareness of family payments undertaken by SNAP Officers. A supplementary performance measure would be 'before and after' surveys of members of the SNAP Officer's 'audience' to gauge their awareness of their entitlement to the relevant payment and, as appropriate, their intention subsequently to claim their entitlement.

Performance measures for the second and third of the SNAP objectives could include:

- the number and types of activities of SNAP Officers intended to assist family and community groups identify and address their needs;
- the number and types of activities on the part of SNAP Officers associated with developing and implementing the means chosen by the group concerned to meet their needs including, for example, the number of submissions for the funding of projects intended to address identified needs that are prepared, submitted and ultimately successful; and
- the appropriateness and effectiveness of the SNAP Officer's involvement in the process as perceived both by the group assisted and by any funding agency or other organisation involved.

Evaluation Findings (I): Effectiveness and Appropriateness Issues

Since the introduction of the SNAP Program in 1990, SNAP Officers have assisted the initiation and implementation of projects addressing a broad range of family needs including, for example, child care, family health and nutrition, youth support groups, training and employment for young people and women, the establishment of women's groups, women's resource centres and domestic violence shelters, and home and community care for elderly and disabled family members.

According to reports prepared by SNAP Officers summarising their activities during 1993-94, projects aimed at supporting women, followed by child care and nutrition-related projects, were the most common types of projects in which SNAP Officers were involved during this period.

Representatives of family and community groups interviewed for the evaluation consistently placed a high value on the assistance SNAP Officers have given them, the responsive ways in which SNAP Officers provide this assistance and their ongoing involvement and commitment in working with them to help them address their needs. The approach and methods of SNAP Officers were also contrasted very favourably with those of staff of other agencies which also have major responsibilities in providing assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The staff of other agencies with whom SNAP Officers have worked saw SNAP Officers as being useful to them in such ways as promoting awareness of their agencies' programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and keeping them informed of community needs which were relevant to their agencies' program and service delivery responsibilities.

Approaches by SNAP Officers which have proved ineffective or inappropriate appear to result from one or other of two main factors:

- a lack of adequate background research and/or consultation with the community or group concerned in regard to the need for, type of and likely support for the project proposed or initiated; and
- the inability of the SNAP Officer to continue his/her involvement in the project over the longer term or to have a sufficient degree of involvement at crucial stages in the life of the project.

The concept of SNAP Officers having access to small amounts of 'seeding funds' to help initiate or support potentially viable projects was planned as a strategy to enhance the effectiveness of the SNAP Program at the time the Program was conceived and was allowed for in the original Budget allocation for the Program. While this strategy has never been implemented, most SNAP Officers continue to regard it as a useful concept, but would prefer to have access to larger amounts of such funds (up to \$1000 a year) than was originally envisaged in order to maximise the strategy's effectiveness.

The need for additional SNAP Officers to expand the reach and effectiveness of the Program was raised as an issue in many of the locations visited for the evaluation. Suggestions as to interim or 'low cost' ways of expanding the Program included combining SNAP Officer positions (where appropriate) with other DSS positions such as JET Advisers and Disability Support Officers and employing members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as 'SNAP agents' to assist and support the work of SNAP Officers in those communities.

Evaluation Findings (II): Efficiency Issues

The combination of the unique nature of the Program relative to other DSS programs, the types of approaches and working methods (including community development) which DSS managers generally have little experience in and the continuing demands of the DSS income security programs on managers' time and attention make SNAP a challenging program to manage at the local level.

Both SNAP Officers and local managers of the SNAP Program considered that, in the past, there had been a lack of consistent support and guidance from National Administration in regard to the implementation and management of the Program at the local level.

This situation had been made more difficult by the lack of Departmental guidelines in regard to setting objectives for and measuring the outcomes of SNAP projects and activities and the lack of an agreed reporting system.

The intended working relationship between SNAP Officers and AILOs has never been made particularly clear by the Department and it appears now to be mainly limited to cross-referrals and occasional joint field trips.

The types of working relationships which SNAP Officers have developed with the staff of other agencies seem to differ quite widely across the Program. Some, for example, do joint visits to communities and have fairly regular contact with other agency staff, while others make contact on only an *ad hoc* basis.

At the time the SNAP Program was established, it was envisaged that the Department would aim to establish local SNAP support/advisory committees involving DSS management and representatives of other agencies and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. It appears, however, that no committees along the lines originally proposed have been established (or, at least, are functioning currently). The closest approximation to them in which some SNAP Officers have an involvement are local Aboriginal Employment Development Program committees. Some SNAP Officers have also taken steps to develop alternative networking forums involving the local staff of other agencies and organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Varying views were expressed during the evaluation as to how well SNAP is known throughout the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community generally. SNAP Officers were concerned that it not be over-promoted because of the risk of raising unfulfillable expectations, while some others, in particular AILOs, believed that wider promotion is needed.

All SNAP Officers expressed the need for new promotional products, with video being the most preferred medium. The need for products suitable to the needs of local communities and which give practical examples of the range of assistance and support that SNAP Officers could offer was also stressed.

The staff of other agencies who participated in the evaluation saw a need both for further promotion of SNAP within their agencies and for promotion to be an ongoing activity in order for awareness of SNAP to be maintained.

There appears generally to be very little awareness, understanding and appreciation of the SNAP Program throughout DSS, including in the Regional and Area Offices where SNAP Officers are based. The need for much greater efforts in internal promotion of the Program was raised by both SNAP Officers and other DSS staff.

The specialised nature of the SNAP Officer's role requires that SNAP Officers either already possess or be given training in the special skills needed in this role. Over the life of the Program, however, the Department has taken very much an *ad hoc* approach to training for SNAP Officers. The need for a national approach to providing training, in particular in community development and in other areas such as nutrition awareness, conflict resolution and publicity and media skills etc, was raised continually throughout the evaluation. The first step in establishing this process would be a training needs analysis for all SNAP Officers.

It was also suggested that SNAP Officers do short placements with relevant funding agencies, such as ATSIC and DEET, to get to know their personnel and programs, as well as with other agencies involved in community development work for on-the-job training and experience.

SNAP Officers also stressed the need for regular meetings with their fellow SNAP Officers at both the Area and national levels for the purposes of, for example, exchanging information and ideas and for mutual support.

Only a minority of SNAP Officers reported having no problems relating to resources. The two most frequently mentioned resource-related needs were laptop personal computers and priority access to a vehicle. It was also suggested that the efficiency and effectiveness of SNAP Officers could be improved by providing them with clerical/administrative support. Some SNAP Officers expressed the need for being more involved in and/or being kept better informed of how the resources attached to their position are allocated and disposed of.

A number of SNAP Officers and their managers spoke of the occupational health and safety implications of different aspects of SNAP Officers' work, expressing their concern that the issue is yet to be acknowledged and seriously addressed by the Department. Unlike most other staff, SNAP Officers have no 'ready-made' peer support group for the purposes of, for example, debriefing or emotional support and advice, nor are their supervisors necessarily suited to or equipped for taking on such a role.

There have been periods in previous years when the national SNAP coordinator position (based in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Section in National Administration) has been perceived by SNAP Officers as not providing strong and visible support for or coordination of the Program. All SNAP Officers participating in the evaluation expressed concern at this situation, which they saw as

being at least partly responsible for the lack of national focus they felt the Program had been suffering from in recent years.

Conclusions

From the information available to the evaluation, it appears that the SNAP Program's objectives, the general direction in which the Program has been heading and the working approaches and methods employed by SNAP Officers to implement the Program's objectives are producing effective and appropriate outcomes in regard to a range of social and economic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families whom SNAP Officers have endeavoured to assist.

The working approaches used by SNAP Officers appear generally to be consistent with what was envisaged in this regard at the inception of the Program, although their focus has broadened from addressing the needs of children in poverty to include all family members affected by poverty. Necessarily, their working approaches include the ability to respond flexibly and sensitively to the expressed needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and community groups and to the ways in which these groups wish those needs to be addressed.

Both the working approaches of SNAP Officers and the outcomes which they appear to be producing are highly valued by the groups they have assisted.

More support for and from local managers of the Program is required in such areas as assisting SNAP Officers with setting objectives for and planning their activities, measuring and reporting on the outcomes of their activities, initiating and maintaining effective working relationships with the management and staff of other relevant agencies and coping with the particular occupational health and safety effects of their working roles and environment.

Clarification of the working relationships of SNAP Officers and AIOs and other DSS Regional Office staff has the potential to provide additional support for SNAP Officers and a greater understanding of their role throughout the DSS network.

SNAP Officers need to be provided with the means to more effectively and appropriately promote the SNAP Program and its potential benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, the staff of other relevant agencies and within DSS.

The specialised training needs of SNAP Officers are yet to be addressed appropriately and systematically by the Department.

Access to resources in the form of clerical/administrative support, laptop computers and suitably equipped vehicles should allow increased operational efficiencies.

Recommendations

Effectiveness and Appropriateness Issues

SNAP Program Objectives

1. The SNAP Program's objectives should be changed to more clearly reflect the Program's community development focus, while acknowledging the need to continue to promote the take-up of DSS family and child-related payments. The objectives should also more clearly reflect the Program's now broader focus on the needs of families and not solely the needs of children. It is recommended that the objectives be reworded as follows:

"In recognition of the need to more actively address continuing poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the aim of the SNAP Program is to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in improving their access to income and community resources by:

- promoting and assisting the take-up of their correct DSS payments;
- assisting them to gain access to other family support programs; and
- contributing to the improvement of other related community support structures in ways that meet the needs of families."

Seeding Funds

2. In consultation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should trial making small amounts of seeding funds available to SNAP Officers to support the establishment of particular projects for which other funds are temporarily unavailable before consideration is given to full implementation.

Expanding the Reach of the SNAP Program

3. Consideration should be given to establishing SNAP Officer positions in locations where there is a demonstrated need and which cannot be effectively serviced from within existing Program resources.

4. Depending on the outcome of the evaluation of the SNAP/JET pilot scheme, the possibility of combining some SNAP positions with other DSS program positions such as JET Advisers and Disability Support Officers should be further explored within the context of an overall expansion of the SNAP Program. The concept of employing community members to assist SNAP Officers and support the development of the Program in their communities should also be examined in this context.

Measuring the SNAP Program's Effectiveness

5. In consultation with SNAP Officers and local managers of the SNAP Program, National Administration should develop quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to enable more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the SNAP Program's effectiveness. Work on the development of such performance indicators should begin without delay to enable SNAP Officers and their managers to begin collecting the necessary performance information from the beginning of 1995-96.
6. A further evaluation of the SNAP Program's effectiveness should be carried out in 1996-97 after sufficient relevant performance information has been collected.

Efficiency Issues

Management of the SNAP Program

7. In cooperation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop a detailed guide for SNAP Officers and local managers of the SNAP Program providing information on, for example, the Program and its aims, its role as a DSS program, community development methodology, examples of best practice, project planning and monitoring etc.
8. In cooperation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop a system for monitoring the Program at the local level, incorporating aspects of project planning, setting objectives, and monitoring outcomes via a regular reporting system. SNAP Program activities and projects should be included in Regional or Area Office business plans to facilitate coordination of project planning and monitoring at the local level.
9. In cooperation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop a standardised, flexible reporting format, preferably systems-based, which would allow SNAP Officers to report quarterly on their activities, the progress of projects and their outcomes and their planned activities and objectives for the following quarter. Such reports should be used by:
 - Regional Managers to monitor the progress of projects and their outcomes at the local level and as a basis for providing regular feedback to SNAP Officers on their work and issues raised;
 - Area management and/or the Area SNAP Support Committee (see below) for planning, monitoring and providing feedback on Program activities at the Area Level; and
 - National Administration for monitoring and reporting on the Program at the national level, and providing feedback both to individual SNAP Officers and their managers on particular issues raised and to all SNAP Officers and their managers on the progress of the Program nationally.

10. In order to provide ongoing support for SNAP Officers and local managers of the Program, where appropriate, Areas should examine the possibility of establishing Area SNAP Support Committees involving SNAP Officers and their managers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit Manager and Area management representatives. Consideration should also be given to including local representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities as members of these committees. Such committees could meet quarterly with the overall aim of planning and coordinating the operation of the SNAP Program in the Area. The committee currently operating in Area North Australia could be used as a model.

11. The working relationship of SNAP Officers and AILOs and the extent of involvement of AILOs in SNAP Program activities should be further explored and clarified with a view to maximising the impact of the SNAP Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

12. As a first step in addressing the particular occupational health and safety aspects of the SNAP Officer's role, the Work Environment Unit in National Administration should be approached for advice and assistance in establishing Area and Regional-based support systems to assist SNAP Officers to deal effectively with these matters.

Promotion of the SNAP Program

13. The production of new promotional material for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities should be planned without delay, with an emphasis on the use of video and simple printed material showing practical examples of the types of assistance SNAP Officers can provide. Areas or groups of Areas with similar needs and customer populations should produce promotional material to suit the needs of those groups and the direction of the Program in those Areas, with National Administration playing a coordinating role. The production of SNAP promotional material to be directed at other agencies should be planned and produced along similar lines.

14. Managers and SNAP Officers should work cooperatively in promoting awareness and understanding of the SNAP Program within the Regional/Area Office, using such avenues as Regional Office Management Team and other staff meetings and cultural awareness training for this purpose.

15. In consultation with SNAP Officers, National Administration should investigate avenues at the national level to promote the Program throughout the DSS network via such means as contributing articles and customer stories on SNAP to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services newsletter and the DSS *National News*, having SNAP featured on the Department's satellite broadcasts etc.

Training of SNAP Officers

16. In consultation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop and implement an appropriate competency needs analysis for all SNAP Officers, covering both the specialised skills required for the SNAP Program and generic skills required for working in DSS, including in management positions.

17. As part of their initial training and induction, newly commencing SNAP Officers should spend a minimum of two weeks working with an experienced SNAP Officer (where possible from the same Area) to gain first-hand knowledge in, for example, establishing local networks, planning and managing workloads, preferred approaches to establishing SNAP projects etc.

18. All SNAP Officers should meet as a group once a year. Meetings of SNAP Officers at the Area level should preferably be held quarterly via Area SNAP Support Committees foreshadowed in Recommendation 10. Such national and Area level meetings are necessary for the purposes of mutual support, information exchange and keeping up-to-date with new developments in the SNAP Program and in other programs and policies relevant to it.

Resources Issues

19. While the allocation and use of administrative funds for the SNAP Program remain the responsibility of the respective Area or Regional managements, it is recommended that SNAP Officers be provided with personal computers and have primary access to suitable vehicles to enable them efficiently and effectively to perform their duties and with due regard to their health and safety.

20. In consultation with Areas, National Administration should examine the possibility of providing ongoing clerical/administrative support to SNAP Officers, similar to that provided for JET Advisers.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 The SNAP Program

The 1989 Federal Budget contained a number of Department of Social Security (DSS) initiatives aimed at enhancing its delivery of services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Among these initiatives was the Support Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents (SNAP) Program, the aim of which was to address child poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a more effective and coordinated way than had been occurring previously.

The original objectives of the SNAP Program were:

- to improve the take-up of DSS family and child-related payments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;
- to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents gain access to other government agencies' family and child-related programs and services; and
- to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents identify and use existing community resources in ways which would meet the health, nutrition and other needs of their children.

The SNAP Program, particularly in respect of the second and third of its objectives, represented a new and innovative direction for DSS in its approach to assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Such an approach was, however, consistent with that of several other outreach-oriented programs initiated by DSS around that time which acknowledged that the social security system had social justice responsibilities to its customers beyond ensuring that they received their correct social security entitlements. The SNAP Program's focus on actively addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family poverty was also consistent with DSS's primary role in Australian society of directly assisting families in poverty.

The SNAP Program began operating in May 1990 with 14 SNAP Officers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities in different locations around Australia. As a result of a 1993 Budget decision, the original 14 positions have recently been increased to a total of 23 full-time positions and four part-time positions, some of which are currently being used in a pilot project combining the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) scheme with SNAP. SNAP Officer locations are shown at Attachment 1.

1.2 Background to the Evaluation

A proposal to evaluate SNAP was included in the 1990 Social Security Portfolio Evaluation Plan (PEP), with the evaluation originally proposed to start in November 1990. Because of a later than anticipated start to the Program due to delays in recruiting suitable staff, however, it was decided to postpone the PEP evaluation to allow more time for the Program to establish itself. In the interim, a combined post-

implementation review/preliminary evaluation was carried out between May and September 1991.¹

The report on the interim SNAP evaluation published in December 1991 stressed the need to take a long-term view when looking for positive and visible results in the "difficult operational environment" in which SNAP Officers work. The evaluation found, however, that the Program was "producing some early, encouraging results in coordinating Aboriginal community development issues affecting families" and that SNAP Officers were able to "perform a useful role as a neutral facilitator and catalyst in bringing together Aboriginal family interests and those [government agencies] with the resources to help" (p 1).

Among other findings, the interim evaluation cast some doubt on the continuing relevance of the first objective of the Program (that of improving the take-up of DSS payments) and made a total of 15 recommendations covering such areas as the management of the Program, training of SNAP Officers, promotional activities and resources issues.

A conference of SNAP Officers and their managers was held to discuss the findings and recommendations of the interim evaluation in November 1991. Efforts were made subsequently to address a number of these in such areas as improving supervision and support for SNAP Officers at the local level and better coordination of and support for the Program at the national level.²

Following the interim evaluation, SNAP was next scheduled for evaluation as part of the 1992 PEP. The evaluation was not conducted in 1992 because of other priorities and is now part of a broader evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services included in the 1993 PEP and carried over into the 1994 PEP.

1.3 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The report on the interim evaluation of SNAP concluded that, while preliminary results were encouraging, at that stage "it would be premature to form a judgement about the longer-term effectiveness of the Program" and recommended that a "full review be deferred until at least the middle of 1992 by which time sufficient tangible outcomes should have occurred with sufficient concentration in particular communities to enable a judgement to be made about its effectiveness" (pp 23-24).

In the preparatory work undertaken to establish the current evaluation, it appeared that there was considerable anecdotal evidence pointing to the SNAP Program's producing effective and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Unfortunately, however, it also became clear that no substantial effort had been made since the interim evaluation to define, in measurable and reportable terms, what

¹See Department of Social Security *Post-Implementation Review and Preliminary Evaluation of the Support Network for Aboriginal Parents (SNAP) Program* DSS, Canberra, December 1991.

² As was found during the course of the current evaluation, however, many of the issues raised in the interim evaluation remain to be acted on fully.

constituted effective outcomes for the Program, nor had there been any systematic or consistent recording of SNAP Officers' activity reports from which indications of effectiveness may have been able to be derived.

Given the difficulty of collecting substantive indicators of effectiveness during the relatively brief time frame for the current evaluation, it was decided that this evaluation would concentrate primarily on efficiency aspects of the SNAP Program, with a more rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness being postponed until after performance indicators had been established and reported on over a sufficient period. The current evaluation would focus on the indicators of effectiveness that could be collected mainly through the types of qualitative methods (see below) to be used also for assessing the Program's efficiency.

The aims of the evaluation were thus to:

- assess and report on the efficiency of the current operation of the SNAP Program and (to the extent possible) its effectiveness in achieving positive and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities; and
- make recommendations to the Minister for Social Security and senior executive of the Department of Social Security regarding future directions for the Program.

Following from this, the desired output from the evaluation included:

- an assessment of the value of the SNAP Program to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities;
- an assessment of the continuing relevance and suitability of the original objectives of the Program (in particular the first objective relating to DSS family and child payments) in light of the Program's actual operation and achievements;
- a clearer definition of the role and functions of SNAP Officers, including their working relationships with other DSS staff (in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers [AILOs]) and with the staff of other government agencies;
- an analysis of management and staffing issues such as: the adequacy of supervision for SNAP Officers, the need for more specific guidance and support for SNAP Officers and their supervisors, the need for more effective reporting mechanisms and management information, the adequacy of current training and possible strategies for meeting outstanding training needs, and the adequacy of current administrative resources allocated to the Program;
- an examination of what might constitute mechanisms for measuring program outcomes; and
- where appropriate, following up on the recommendations of and other issues raised by the 1991 interim evaluation of SNAP.

1.4 Evaluation Methodology

The lack of readily available quantitative information on the SNAP Program's performance (as discussed above) necessarily limited the evaluation to using a predominantly qualitative methodological approach. Given the decision (also referred to above) to postpone a more rigorous evaluation of the Program's effectiveness until additional (mainly quantitative) performance indicators become available, the use of such a predominantly qualitative approach for the current evaluation was not seen to be problematic and, indeed, both the evaluation literature and previous DSS experience in the successful use of such methodology in evaluations suggested such an approach to be valid and appropriate.³

Factors such as the small number of staff involved in the Program (thus reducing the value of sample surveys), the working approaches used by SNAP Officers in achieving the objectives of the Program (ie assisting families and communities mainly through the use of community development methods rather than, for example, through easily quantifiable individual payments or individual casework interventions) and the diverse range and nature of the projects developed by SNAP Officers in response to the expressed needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities (which could not be adequately described or analysed by quantitative methods) all pointed to the need for and validity of qualitative methods in collecting and analysing the data needed to meet the aims of this evaluation.

Accordingly, it was planned to use the following data sources:

- existing documentation concerned with the development and establishment of the SNAP Program;
- interviews (including focus group interviews where appropriate) with as many as possible of the SNAP Officers occupying the original 14 positions, their supervisors, other DSS staff (in particular AILOs) who have had some involvement in the Program, the staff of other government agencies with whom SNAP Officers have worked and representatives of the communities and groups which SNAP Officers have endeavoured to assist; and
- reports by SNAP Officers summarising their activities during 1993-94.

The Interviews

The interviews for the evaluation were carried out with 11 SNAP Officers and approximately 75 other individuals and groups in the regions where these SNAP Officers are based. Locations visited (and their corresponding DSS administrative Areas) included Townsville, Cairns, Pormpuraaw, Thursday Island, Moa Island and Werriber Island (Area North, Queensland), Alice Springs, Utopia, Darwin, Melville

³See eg Cook, T D & Reichardt, C S (eds) *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Evaluation Research* Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1979; Patton, M Q *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* Newbury Park, Cal: Sage Publications, 2nd ed, 1980; Chambers, D E, Wedel, K R & Rodwell, M K *Evaluating Social Programs* Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1992.

Island, Oenpelli, Broome, Bidyadanga, Fitzroy Crossing and Bayulu (Area North Australia), Perth, Kalgoorlie and Coonana (Areas North and South, Western Australia), Adelaide and Port Augusta (Area North, South Australia), Warrnambool, Horsham and Melbourne (Area West Victoria), Queanbeyan (Area South-West, New South Wales) and Coffs Harbour and Bowraville (Area Pacific Central).

A semi-structured approach was used for the interviews. Interview schedules covering the evaluation outcome topics listed above were developed for each of the different respondent categories. The focus group approach used with community representatives was adapted from that used previously by the Department's former North Australia Development Unit in its extensive qualitative research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and in a recent wide-ranging evaluation of DSS access and equity strategies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.⁴

Data obtained in the interviews were categorised and analysed according to the range of evaluation outcome topics and analysed (using, in part, a case study approach and, as appropriate, methods described by Patton as 'content analysis', 'inductive analysis' and 'logical analysis'⁵) to provide a picture of how the SNAP Program is currently operating and to suggest future directions for the Program.

1.5 Evaluation Management

The evaluation was conducted by the Family Programs and Services Division of the Department's National Administration. The evaluation strategy was developed by staff of that Division's Evaluation and Special Projects Section in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Section staff, who also carried out the data gathering and data analysis for the evaluation.

The evaluation team was able to draw on the Department's considerable experience and expertise both in undertaking high quality research and evaluation and in consulting with and providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Also important were the evaluation team members' experience and expertise in the special skills and sensitivities needed for successfully undertaking research of this nature with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups, as well as the Department's widely acknowledged credibility among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around Australia (see the following section) which facilitated access to and the cooperation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents.

Conduct of the evaluation was overseen by a Steering Committee chaired by the Assistant Secretary, Client Service Programs Branch in Family Programs and Services

⁴See North Australia Development Unit *Where to Now? Department of Social Security and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in North Australia* NADU Research Paper, DSS, Darwin, September 1990; and Department of Social Security *Continuous Improvement: Report of the Evaluation of the Social Security Access and Equity Plan 1990-91 to 1992-93* Family Programs & Services Division, DSS, Canberra, December 1994.

⁵Patton *op. cit.* pp 381-414

Division, and comprising also the DSS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Manager of Area Central Queensland, the SNAP Officer based at the Geraldton DSS Regional Office in Western Australia, the Manager of the Office of Indigenous Women within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, a representative of the Social Security Division of the Department of Finance and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representative from Bowraville, New South Wales.

Work on the evaluation commenced in November 1993. Interviews were conducted over the period early February to late April 1994 and data analysis and preparation of the evaluation report carried out during May and June 1994.

Approximate resource requirements for the evaluation were:

Staffing

<i>Task</i>	<i>Person-weeks</i>
drafting issues paper, strategy	2
servicing steering committee	2
developing methodology, interview questions etc	5
organising itinerary, contacts, travel for field work	3
field work	14
analysis	2
draft report	6
finalise report, organise clearances, publication	6
Total	40

Salary costs for the evaluation are estimated at approximately \$45,000.

Administrative Costs

The only significant administrative costs beyond those normally incurred were for the substantial travel involved in field work and steering committee meetings. The cost for this was \$27,790, comprising \$17,240 for fares and \$10,550 for Travelling Allowance.

1.6 Post-Evaluation SNAP Planning Conference

Following completion of the fieldwork and data analysis for the evaluation, SNAP Officers and other staff involved in management of the Program met in Canberra to examine the evaluation's findings and likely recommendations with a view to strengthening the future operation of the Program. Areas examined included management and coordination of the Program, reporting arrangements, promotional methods, training and resources issues.

The conference recommended the establishment of a working group to develop detailed guidelines to improve support for SNAP Officers and the efficiency of the Program in each of these areas.

The need for the development of realistic performance indicators for the SNAP Program was also discussed by the conference, as were the Program's original objectives. There was agreement that all of the Program's objectives remained relevant, but that their wording needed updating to more accurately reflect the actual operation of the Program and to facilitate the development of measurable performance indicators. The updated form of words recommended by the conference is included among the recommendations from the evaluation.

1.7 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report comprises four sections and related attachments as follows:

- **Section 2** provides:
 - an explanation of the SNAP Program's objectives and how it was envisaged (at the start of the Program) that SNAP Officers would work towards achieving them;
 - background information on the development of and rationale for the SNAP Program; and
 - the reasons for the Program's being administered by DSS;
- **Section 3** comprises a discussion on how effectiveness of the SNAP Program might be defined and measured;
- **Section 4** presents evaluation findings in relation to effectiveness and appropriateness aspects of the SNAP Program; and
- **Section 5** presents findings in relation to efficiency aspects of the operation of the Program.
- **Attachments** include:
 - the locations of SNAP Officers;
 - a list of individuals and groups interviewed for the evaluation; and
 - interview schedules used for the evaluation.

Section 2: SNAP Program Background

2.1 SNAP Program Objectives and Proposed Working Approaches: Background and Rationale⁶

As previously stated, the objectives adopted for the SNAP Program were to:

1. improve the take-up of DSS family and child-related payments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;
2. help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents gain access to other government agencies' family and child-related services and funding programs; and
3. help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents identify and use existing community resources in ways which would meet the health, nutrition and other needs of their children.

The objectives, as adopted, were not set in priority order, but reflected a progression of concern and potential activity for SNAP Officers and the communities they would work with. They were to be viewed as building blocks, with each of the second and third objectives being supported by the one(s) preceding it.

Of course, DSS already had in place a number of service delivery programs with objectives similar to the first of the SNAP objectives. For example, AILOs, Remote Visiting Teams (RVTs) and DSS-funded Community Agents all had direct and major responsibilities for ensuring people's access to DSS payments. There was no plan for SNAP to replace or duplicate these schemes, although it was recognised that SNAP Officers would invariably come across situations where they needed to provide information about DSS programs and help parents get their correct entitlements.

In the selected communities in which SNAP Officers would work, it was thought that a number of their initial community visits would be devoted entirely or substantially to DSS information provision and ensuring people were receiving their correct family and child entitlements. The entitlements situation, however, should subsequently remain relatively stable (with the ongoing input of AILOs, RVTs and Community Agents). The importance of the first SNAP objective would then constitute only a very minor aspect of SNAP work, with the exception of situations requiring a major SNAP involvement such as in publicising new or changed programs and payments.

Another important rationale for the first objective was that an adequate personal income flow is necessary for parents to care for their children and, for many, their only source of income is DSS payments.

⁶The following discussion on the background to the development of the SNAP Program objectives and proposed working approaches of SNAP Officers draws heavily on an internal DSS paper on the early history of the Program prepared recently by Margaret Kilpatrick, one of two senior DSS officers involved in formulating the original proposal for the Program.

The second objective (help with accessing other governmental assistance) took that initial activity several steps further. SNAP Officers were to look at the programs and services offered by other Commonwealth Government agencies and by State and local governments, and help families gain access to, for example:

- the specific education and training programs offered by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) - aimed at both individuals and groups;
- child care assistance offered by the Department of Human Services and Health (DHS);
- health-related programs offered by Commonwealth and State Governments. (This had the capacity to address issues like child and maternal nutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse, hygiene etc); and
- local government services such as the provision of sanitation, water supply and recreational facilities.

It was thought that this stage of the process would take some time to work through. Firstly, it was at this stage that intensive community consultation would have to begin (or to escalate rapidly). The parents in the community would have to decide for themselves what their most pressing needs were. The SNAP Officer would be a facilitator in the process, perhaps by listing some problems that individual parents had raised and helping with the priority setting discussions to ensure there was an adequate level of agreement.

The SNAP Officer would then take the priority problem, as agreed by the parents, and identify acceptable ways of solving it. This would involve discussions with other agencies about their possible roles and acting again as a facilitator in helping the parents decide which of a number of options would best achieve the solution to the problem. The SNAP Officer would then embark on helping the parents to put the preferred solution into place. In some communities, this might involve the preparation of a submission to a funding agency or helping get a community group incorporated to enable it to receive and administer a funding grant; in others, it might involve merely providing advice and generalised assistance for parents themselves to do this.

Throughout, the decisions were to be made by the parents and, wherever possible, the implementation of the solution was to be done by the parents, because those processes themselves were part of the third objective (using existing resources) and would contribute to the community's overall skills base and self confidence. To a very large extent, there were no prescriptions as to precise outcomes as each group of parents would have different need priorities, different desired means of addressing those needs and different levels of skills and confidence.

The third objective does in fact overlap with objectives one and two, but was seen initially to be more sustainable when these earlier objectives had been substantially achieved. The types of projects and activities envisaged in relation to the third objective included, among others, before-school breakfast programs, the establishment

of vegetable plots and food-buying cooperatives, garment manufacture and arts and crafts activities, CDEP participation particularly in activities related to children and families, 'parenting' tuition provided by experienced community members, and home maintenance.

Outcomes which stretched the family dollar by home production or better purchasing methods or which productively circulated money within the community, as well as projects which simply raised the standard of family living by ensuring domestic equipment and appliances were effectively used and maintained were all considered desirable. It was not planned that all or even a majority of such activities be income producing. If any were, then that would be an added bonus.

In terms of objectives two and three, the basic belief was that there were already resources (both financial and personal) in communities or potentially available to them through various government funding programs. What the SNAP Program needed to do was to coordinate those resources and improve access to them to achieve the outcomes that parents wanted for their families.

2.2 The Development of the SNAP Program: Historical Context and Rationale

The idea for the SNAP Program arose against the background of the then Prime Minister's 1987 election commitment to eliminating the need for child poverty by 1990, along with several contemporaneous Parliamentary and other reports dealing with, among other things, the causes and effects of poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.⁷ These reports all highlighted the lack of a coordinated approach by governments in the range of programs established to address problems in this area and a lack of access to these programs by the families they were intended to assist.

Additionally, in the context of DSS's role in alleviating child and family poverty, there were concerns within the Department at that time that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families might be missing out on part of the social security payments to which they were entitled.

The SNAP Program was developed in response to these needs and concerns. With its combined role of improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' access to both DSS and other government programs and existing community resources, the Program was seen as having the potential both to better coordinate and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government assistance and community infrastructure available to, and ultimately used by, these families and their communities. The active involvement of families and community groups in identifying their needs and the

⁷These include, for example, *Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs: Report of the Committee of Review* (The Miller Report) 1985; *National Women's Health Policy* (Report by the Department of Community Services and Health to Australian Health Ministers) March 1989; *A National Aboriginal Health Strategy* (Report of the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party) March 1989; and *A Chance for the Future: Training in Skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Management and Development* (Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs) 1989.

solutions to them by use of appropriate funding programs and community action was seen as integral to the operation of the Program.

More recent inquiries (the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' inquiry into the implementation of the Commonwealth's Access and Equity Strategy) have further reinforced the need for a program with a coordinating, cross-program role such as that of SNAP.⁸ As with the reports referred to earlier, the reports of these inquiries were also critical of the uncoordinated approach by governments to the provision of services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and of the number of different agencies involved in this process. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, for example, referred to the situation in the following way:

Departments and agencies are constantly coming to communities with programs, proposals to do assessments and feasibility studies. I heard of communities dealing with up to thirty-five bodies. They are submerged in people wanting to consult... This is obviously very frustrating for communities and appears to be inefficient. One can also see very well the difficulty... about control and setting priorities... when funding comes from so many scarce sources and is tied in so many ways. But above and beyond this the whole process can only tend to take decision-making power out of Aboriginal hands. The communities are constantly responding to agendas promoted from outside, rather than setting their own agenda and then negotiating about relevant matters...

The multiplicity of funding agencies, the obvious overlap between many programs from one department to another, the apparent competition for programs to be adopted by Aboriginal communities all present a grossly complex and unwieldy environment which is hardly conducive to effective self-determination and self-management... (pp 13-15)

In its 1993 report on access and equity implementation by government agencies, *Rhetoric or Reality?*, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs also referred to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's frustration at the

... lack of coordination by Government departments and agencies, at all levels, in the provision of services to their communities. The causes of this frustration include the large number of departments involved in the delivery of services, the lack of coordination, the lack of a clear identification of who is responsible for such services and the lack of services in particular communities. (p 95)

2.3 SNAP and DSS

While there was seen to be an obvious need for the SNAP Program at the time of its introduction for the reasons just discussed, there were also good reasons for its being administered by DSS.

⁸Commonwealth of Australia *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report*, Vol. 4, Canberra: AGPS, 1991. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs *Access and Equity - Rhetoric or Reality? Report of the Inquiry into the Implementation of the Access and Equity Strategy* Canberra: AGPS, November 1993.

Although intended to be different from most other DSS programs in its approach to assisting people - employing, as it would, a more family/community-based approach along with a continuing concern for ensuring families' access to income support - the SNAP Program's role in addressing family and child poverty was seen to be clearly consistent with the primary role that DSS has within Australian society of providing direct assistance to low income families.

SNAP is also one of a number of innovative programs and approaches introduced by DSS in recent years (including, for example, the JET program for sole parent pensioners, the Jobsearch/Newstart programs for unemployed people and the Disability Support program for people with disabilities) to assist people on low incomes to play a more active role in achieving greater financial independence and self-sufficiency.

There was also seen to be clear justification for the SNAP Program's being administered by DSS rather than by other agencies which also have major responsibilities for providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), DEET and DSHS.

Because DSS - unlike these other agencies - does not administer project funding programs (in such areas as child care, nutrition, job skills training etc), SNAP Officers could approach the addressing of families' and communities' needs in a flexible and holistic way. In other words, they would act as 'neutral facilitators' between communities and funding agencies. The need for such an approach was referred to in the Parliamentary Committee's report *Rhetoric or Reality?* in the following way:

It was a common complaint heard in virtually every place that the Committee visited that simple, modest project or service proposals for which there was an obvious need were rejected because "it doesn't meet the guidelines". The quote could have been the title of the [Committee's] report as it sums up the all too frequent mismatch between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and the provisions made for mainstream service delivery.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community organisations frequently adopt a holistic approach to resolving problems and their solutions often cut across several mainstream service delivery categories. More flexible service delivery mechanisms are necessary to avoid the reliance by organisations on multiple agency funding and the differing reporting requirements that go with such funding, together with the uncertainty of future funding when a variety of programs are involved. (pp 118-119)

SNAP Officers' ability to take a flexible, 'cross-program' approach would allow them to be much more responsive to the expressed needs of families and communities across a range of concerns than could the individual funding agencies, which are unable to offer assistance beyond the bounds of the particular programs they administer. This flexible and responsive approach was seen to have the potential to increase both the efficiency (by linking particular community needs with the most appropriate available means of addressing them) and effectiveness (by ensuring community acceptance and 'ownership' of the proposed solution) of the delivery of government programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

The other important reason for SNAP to be administered by DSS rather than by other agencies was that it would be built on both the long experience that DSS has had in the

delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the high degree of credibility (including relative to other agencies) which DSS enjoys among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people because of the extensiveness and generally high quality of its service delivery network.

The strength of DSS's performance and reputation in this area has been confirmed recently by both a major evaluation of the Department's 1990-1993 Access and Equity Plan and the aforementioned Parliamentary Committee's 1993 inquiry into access and equity. This Committee's *Rhetoric or Reality?* report made several references to DSS's good reputation among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and its responsive approach to service delivery including, for example:

The Department of Social Security (DSS) has made considerable advances in access and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples... It was almost universally accepted that there is a strong commitment by DSS to achieving access and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (p xvi)

The Department [of Social Security] was almost universally identified as being the most responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (p 82)

By comparison, the Committee cited several examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members being critical of the type and level of service provided by agencies other than DSS. For example:

While there were complaints in relation to departments not co-ordinating visits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, there were also many instances where there was a lack of services (from various departments) and absence of field visits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Communities also expressed frustration with the lack of action following visits. (p 95)

... it was stated that the Eva Valley Aboriginal community in Katherine had not seen a DEET field officer for 12-18 months and that there were about 100 more areas in the Northern Territory which were not being serviced by DEET. It was not solely a problem with DEET but of most departments.

At an open meeting of Aboriginal organisations in Bowraville, NSW, there was also [reported to be] a lack of communication between the community and the Regional Office of ATSIC. The Committee was told there appeared to be an unwillingness of Regional Office staff to visit the community to resolve issues and explain programs. This had led to problems in funding and the late lodgement of applications. It also highlights the need for all departments and agencies to provide timely and accurate advice to their or potential , especially when there have been changes to funding procedures and guidelines.

As previously mentioned... there were significant communication problems between the Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation at Kempsey and the responsible funding bodies [in particular DHS], in the negotiations for the development of an aged care facility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There appeared to be a lack of communication between the community and the Lismore Regional Office of ATSIC. It was of widespread concern to the community organisations visited in this area that their needs and concerns were not being adequately addressed by this office. (p 96)

In evidence to the Committee, the then Chief Executive Officer of ATSIC acknowledged the leading role taken by DSS in ensuring access and equity in its delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

I should say also that ATSIC itself has scarcely led the Commonwealth Public Service in access and equity. I think it is fair to say that we are only now appreciating its importance in our own organisation. To be frank with you, I believe we have a lot to learn from a mainstream agency like the Department of Social Security...(p 99)

In summary then, the SNAP Program was developed in response to the clear need to address continuing child and family poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by, among other things, ensuring more effective and efficient access to and use of the existing infrastructure of government and community services and programs. It was intended to build on DSS's role as the major arm of government assisting families in poverty and on the Department's extensive experience and credibility (including in relation to other service providers) in providing responsive and appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Section 3: Defining and Measuring SNAP Program Effectiveness

Defining what constitute effective, measurable outcomes for the SNAP Program is far from straightforward. A program's effectiveness must, of course, be judged in terms of how successfully it is achieving its objectives (to the extent of course, that these are both appropriate and achievable in reality). In looking at the SNAP Program's objectives in turn, for SNAP to be considered effective in regard to its first objective ("improve the take-up of DSS family and child-related payments"), a literal interpretation would require a *measurable* increase in the number of family/child payments being received by eligible families in a particular location as a *direct result* of the efforts of the SNAP Officer working in that location.

Given that the Department's existing service delivery infrastructure has the major ongoing responsibility for ensuring maximum take-up of social security payments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the consequent impossibility of directly attributing increases in the take-up of family payments solely to the work of SNAP Officers makes such a literal interpretation nonsensical. This was certainly the view of SNAP Officers early in the life of the Program: as stated in the report of the 1991 interim evaluation of SNAP, many SNAP Officers "expressed the view that any increase in ...[family payment]... claims would be difficult to attribute to the promotional efforts of the SNAP Program, as distinct from the endeavours of the Department's other staff, in particular, ALOs."⁹

Additionally, it seems, from the explanation of the origins of the SNAP Program's objectives in the preceding section, that work in the area of *promoting awareness* of family payments and how to access them was intended to be the main way in which SNAP Officers would work towards achieving the first objective. An individual casework approach to ensuring that people were receiving their correct entitlements (as used, for example, by AIOs) was not seen as appropriate to the family/community group approach to be used by SNAP Officers.

Such an interpretation allows the establishment of a more meaningful and measurable indicator of performance for this objective. The provision of information on social security entitlements in ways that are most likely to be accepted and understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (ie in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to them) has been shown to be a crucial factor in ensuring their awareness of and take-up of their entitlements.¹⁰ From this, it could be argued that the involvement of SNAP Officers in this activity should have a direct effect on the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families maximise their take-up of family payments. A significant (and readily measurable) indicator of effective performance for this objective could therefore comprise the numbers and types of activities promoting family payments undertaken by SNAP Officers. A supplementary (though more expensive and difficult to obtain) performance measure would be 'before and after' surveys of members of the SNAP Officer's 'audience' to gauge their

⁹Department of Social Security 1991 *op. cit.* p 9.

¹⁰See Department of Social Security 1994 *op. cit.*

awareness of their entitlement to the relevant payment and, as appropriate, their intention subsequently to claim their entitlement.

The second and third of the SNAP objectives generally involve SNAP Officers in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to gain better access to and make more effective use of existing government and community funding programs and resources. As indicated previously, this can often require the participation of SNAP Officers in the following types of activities:

- assisting families and communities to identify and articulate particular needs in areas such as nutrition, child care, youth training, or support services for elderly family members;
- identifying possible relevant funding programs administered by other agencies;
- assisting family and community groups to apply for funds from these agencies and to form incorporated bodies to administer the funds;
- ensuring that the funding agency is aware of the community's needs for which the funds are being sought, which may include arranging meetings between agency staff and community representatives;
- once the funds have been granted, assisting the family and community groups to set up and operate the program being funded.

In examining the SNAP Program's effectiveness in relation to the second and third of the SNAP objectives, one possible way of measuring tangible outcomes for families and communities as a result of the SNAP Officer's involvement might be, for example, to count the number of meals provided to malnourished children by a nutrition program which the SNAP Officer has been instrumental in establishing (or, in the case of other projects, the number of child care places, or the number of young people involved in an employment training course, or the number of families being assisted to care for their elderly relatives through the Home and Community Care program etc) or to measure the reduction, since the introduction of the program, in the incidence of malnutrition among children in the community.

(A case in point is the nutrition program at Milikapiti on Melville Island in the Northern Territory established two years ago through the persistent efforts of the Darwin-based SNAP Officer to address, among other needs, a high level of malnutrition among young children in the community. The local medical practitioner recently reported that there are now virtually no Milikapiti children suffering from malnutrition. This program also recently received public recognition of its success through the receipt of the Heart Foundation's Northern Territory and national 'Healthy Nutrition and Environment Program' awards in the Foundation's 1994 *Healthy Hearts Local Government Awards* program.)

All such program outcomes represent quantifiable benefits to the families and communities involved which likely would not have been achievable (at least in the short to medium term) without the intervention of the SNAP Officer. It may,

however, be argued that such outcomes should be directly attributed to the funding program and family/community group involved, rather than to the SNAP Program.

A more direct way of assessing the performance of the SNAP Program in this area (if it is accepted that the types of SNAP project activities, as listed above, are the key to appropriately and effectively assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address their families' and children's needs through the achievement of such outcomes) would be to measure, for example:

- the number and types of activities of SNAP Officers intended to assist family and community groups identify and address their needs; and
- the number and types of activities on the part of SNAP Officers which are associated with developing and implementing the means chosen by the group concerned to meet their needs including, for example, the number of submissions for the funding of projects intended to address identified needs that are prepared, submitted and ultimately successful.

The necessary qualitative corollary to this would be to measure (probably by means of a survey) the appropriateness and effectiveness of the SNAP Officer's involvement in the process as perceived both by the group assisted and by any funding agency or other organisation involved.

Collecting the necessary quantitative data in order for the SNAP Program's effectiveness to be monitored and evaluated along these lines would require the development of adequate reporting and recording mechanisms at local and national levels of the Department, as discussed further in Section 5 of this report.

Section 4: Evaluation Findings (I) - Effectiveness and Appropriateness Issues

This section reports on the findings of the evaluation in relation to effectiveness and (to a limited extent) appropriateness aspects of the SNAP Program. The findings in this and the following sections are based mainly on interviews with SNAP Officers, their managers, other DSS staff, the staff of other government agencies and representatives of family groups and communities with whom SNAP Officers have worked. Relevant extracts from the records of interviews are used to highlight and illustrate the issues raised.

The findings cover the ways in which SNAP Officers interpret and work towards implementing the Program's objectives, the types of projects and activities in which they have been involved over the life of the Program and the value of these projects and activities as perceived by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and community groups whom SNAP Officers have assisted.

Approaches used by SNAP Officers that have ultimately proved ineffectual are examined, as is the concept of 'seeding funds' (small amounts of discretionary funds with which SNAP Officers may be able to assist the initiation of potentially viable projects) - allowed for in the original Budget allocation for SNAP but never actually used. Finally, suggestions of where and how the SNAP Program might be effectively expanded are examined.

A summary of the main types of project and outreach activities in which SNAP Officers were involved during 1993-94 is presented in a number of tables. The information in the tables is indicative rather than comprehensive (in terms of both types and numbers of activities of all SNAP Officers), but is presented, along with the findings based on qualitative information, as a first step in providing the sort of additional information needed more broadly to assess the SNAP Program's effectiveness.

4.1 Defining and Applying the SNAP Program Objectives

SNAP Officers interviewed for the evaluation generally saw SNAP as being a family/community focussed program, broader in its scope than what was envisaged when the Program was initiated in 1989/90 with its original focus on child poverty. This broadening of focus has occurred both in response to communities' views about the types of assistance they required and following the recognition by SNAP Officers that a broader approach was needed in addressing the effects of poverty in families - particularly given that all members of families, from infants through to elderly people, can be affected.

SNAP Officers tended to define the first objective of the Program as involving mainly the need to promote awareness of family payments and to ensure, to the extent possible, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with whom they are in contact are receiving their correct DSS family- and child-related entitlements. While not being seen by SNAP Officers as the *major* focus of their role (given the emphasis,

as described below, on community development in their approach to assisting families), work of this nature remains an ongoing activity for them. Some SNAP Officers also saw value in their being involved in promoting, in particular, the less well-known family/child payments such as Child Disability Allowance. Underlying the need for SNAP Officers to continue to be involved in promoting the take-up of family payments is the recognition by them that a continuing stable source of family income is fundamental to addressing family poverty.

In regard to the second and third of the SNAP Program's objectives, SNAP Officers saw themselves generally as using the principles and methods of community development to help communities and groups articulate their needs and then to help them address those needs through, for example, linking them to appropriate project funding sources, make more effective use of existing community resources etc. They regarded their use of a broadly-based, flexible and responsive approach as the best way to assist and empower people to meet their needs and to enhance their self-sufficiency. As discussed earlier in the report, this approach contrasts with that of other government service and funding providers who, in general, seek to fit people's needs to their agencies' programs rather than *vice versa*.

DSS managers and AILOs interviewed for the evaluation generally had a similar understanding of the Program and the role of SNAP Officers to that of the SNAP Officers themselves. Understandably, staff of agencies and organisations with whom SNAP Officers have worked tended to have a less in-depth knowledge and understanding of the role of SNAP Officers than did DSS staff. In broad terms, however, their views generally reflected those of SNAP Officers and other DSS staff.

4.2 SNAP Officers' Working Approaches and Projects

In addition to their continuing involvement in promoting awareness and take-up of DSS payments, over the past four years SNAP Officers have been involved in instituting and supporting the implementation of projects covering a very broad range of family needs. These have included, for example, child care, family health and nutrition, youth support groups, training and employment for young people and women, the establishment of women's groups, women's resource centres and domestic violence shelters, and home and community care for elderly and disabled family members.

The length of involvement and commitment required of SNAP Officers in getting projects established ranges from several months to (more commonly) years. The type and level of involvement depends on a number of factors including the type of project, the degree of involvement requested or needed by the group/community being assisted and the role of other agencies in providing funding for the project.

The information in the following tables is based on summary reports by a large sample of SNAP Officers on their main activities during 1993-94. Tables 1 to 6 provide an indication of the types of projects in which SNAP Officers have been involved and the length of their involvement over the twelve month period, while Table 7 provides information on SNAP Officers' promotional activities during the same period.

Table 1: SNAP Program Nutrition Projects 1993-94

Community/ Location	SNAP Officer Involvement in 93-94*	Status as at 30.6.94
Bayulu, WA	Long term	Completed
Doon Doon, WA	Short term	Completed
Collie, WA	Short term	Ongoing
Bunbury, WA	Short term	Ongoing
Halls Creek, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Burringurrah, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Perth, WA	Medium term	Completed
Hilton Park, WA	Short term	Completed
Milikapiti, NT	Long term	Completed
Pularumpi, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Pularumpi, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Peppimenarti, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Peppimenarti, NT	Short term	Completed
Nguiu, NT	Medium term	Completed
Oenpelli, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Numbulwar, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Yarralin, NT	Medium term	Ongoing
Port Augusta, SA	Long term	Ongoing
Port Augusta, SA	Short term	Completed
Adelaide, SA	Short term	Completed
Coffs Harbour, NSW	Short term	Completed
Coffs Harbour, NSW	Medium term	Ongoing

**Table 2: SNAP Program Youth Support, Recreation
and Training Projects 1993-94**

Community/ Location	SNAP Officer Involvement in 93-94*	Status as at 30.6.94
Geraldton, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Numbulwar, NT	Short term	Completed
Ayr, QLD	Long term	Long term
Ingham, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Townsville, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
Charters Towers, QLD	Short term	Completed
Kennedy, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Yass, NSW	Short term	Ongoing
Warrnambool VIC	Long term	Ongoing
Warrnambool, VIC	Long term	Ongoing
Horsham, VIC	Long term	Ongoing
Western Victoria	Medium term	Ongoing
Melbourne, VIC	Short term	Completed

*Short term = 1-2 months / Medium term = 3-6 months / Long term = 6 months+

Table 3: SNAP Program Child Care/Play Group Projects 1993-94

Community/ Location	SNAP Officer Involvement in 93-94*	Status as at 30.6.94
Beagle Bay, WA	Short term	Ongoing
Halls Creek, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Murray District, WA	Long term	Completed
Perth, WA	Medium term	Completed
Perth, WA	Short term	Completed
Cockburn, WA	Short term	Completed
Albany, WA	Short term	Completed
Geraldton, WA	Medium term	Completed
Carnarvon, WA	Long term	Ongoing
Burringurrah, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Cue, WA	Long term	Ongoing
Milikapiti, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Pularumpi, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Peppimenarti, NT	Short term	Completed
Oenpelli, NT	Medium term	Ongoing
Hodgson Downs, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Jilkminggan, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Ceduna, SA	Medium term	Completed
Townsville, QLD	Long term	Completed
Wilcannia, NSW	Long term	Ongoing
Yass, NSW	Short term	Ongoing
Queanbeyann, NSW	Short term	Ongoing

**Table 4: SNAP Program Support for Aged and Disabled Family Members
Projects 1993-94**

Community/ Location	SNAP Officer Involvement in 93-94*	Status as at 30.6.94
Fitzroy Valley, WA	Medium term	Completed
Carnarvon, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Milikapiti, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Peppimenarti, NT	Short term	Ongoing
Yarralin, NT	Short term	Ongoing
Hodgson Downs, NT	Short term	Ongoing
Jilkminggan, NT	Short term	Ongoing
Kubin, Moa Island, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
St Paul's, Moa Is, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
Badu Island, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
Mabuiag Island, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
Cairns, QLD	Short term	Ongoing
Charters Towers, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Tully, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Ingham, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing

*Short term = 1-2 months / Medium term = 3-6 months / Long term = 6 months+

Table 5: SNAP Program Women's Issues Projects 1993-94

Community/ Location	SNAP Officer Involvement in 93-94*	Status as at 30.6.94
Muludja, WA	Long term	Completed
One Arm Point, WA	Long term	Ongoing
Beagle Bay, WA	Medium term	Completed
Halls Creek, WA	Short term	Ongoing
Carnavon, WA	Long term	Ongoing
Geraldton, WA	Medium term	Completed
Burringurrah, WA	Long term	Ongoing
Bandiup Women's Prison, WA	Short term	Suspended
Milikapiti, WA	Medium term	Completed
Pularumpi, NT	Medium term	Completed
Pularumpi, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Peppimenarti, NT	Long term	Completed
Nguiu, NT	Short term	Completed
Nguiu, NT	Short term	Completed
Nguiu, NT	Medium term	Completed
Nguiu, NT	Short term	Completed
Oenpelli, NT	Medium term	Completed
Oenpelli, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Numbulwar, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Yarralin, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Hodgson Downs, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Jilkmिंगgan, NT	Long term	Ongoing
Horn Island, QLD	One-off	Completed
Napranum, QLD	Medium term	Completed
Pormpuraaw, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
Cairns, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Tully, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Mareeba, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Charters Towers, QLD	Medium term	Ongoing
Mount Isa, QLD	Long term	Ongoing
Bowraville, NSW	Long term	Ongoing
Yass, NSW	Short term	Completed

Table 6: SNAP Program Health-Related Projects 1993-94

Community/ Location	SNAP Officer Involvement in 93-94*	Status as at 30.6.94
Geraldton, WA	Short term	Completed
Geraldton, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Pia, WA	Medium term	Ongoing
Wiluna, WA	Short term	Ongoing
Nguiu, NT	Short term	Completed
Cairns, QLD	Short term	Ongoing
Cairns, QLD	Short term	Completed
Warama, QLD	Short term	Completed

*Short term = 1-2 months / Medium term = 3-6 months / Long term = 6 months+

Table 7: SNAP Officers' Information and Outreach Activities 1993-94

Community/Location	Topic	Format/Medium
Halls Creek, WA	CDA & HCCA	Community meeting
Halls Creek, WA	SNAP	DSS Information Day
Kununurra, WA	CDA & HCCA	Community meeting
Kununurra, WA	SNAP	Local radio
Kununurra, WA	SNAP	DSS Information Day
Perth, WA	CDA	Aboriginal agencies info workshop
Kondinin, WA	Family Payments	DSS Information Day
Gnowangerup, WA	Family Payments	DSS Information Day
Tambellup, WA	JET & SNAP	Information seminar
Katanning, WA	JET & SNAP	Information seminar
Albany, WA	Family Payments	DSS Information Day
Pularumpi, NT	Family Payments & DSS services	Community meetings × 3
Peppimenarti, NT	SNAP	Council meeting
Katherine, NT	Nutrition	Community workshop
Nhulunbuy, NT	Family support	Health Dept seminar
Oenpelli, NT	SNAP	Community meeting
Oenpelli, NT	Family Payments & DSS services	Community meetings × 3
Borroloola, NT	SNAP	Community meeting
Adelaide, SA	SNAP	Information seminars × 5
Ceduna, SA	SNAP	Information seminars × 5
Ceduna, SA	JET	Information seminar
Port Augusta, SA	SNAP	Information seminar
Kubin, Moa Is, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
St Paul's, Moa Is, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Badu Island, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Mabuiag Island, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Darnley Island, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Murray Island, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Stephen Island, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Dauan Island, QLD	Family aged care	Community meeting
Horn Island, QLD	Women's issues	Community meeting
Mareeba, QLD	SNAP	Community meeting
Townsville, QLD	SNAP & DSS services	DSS Information Day
Mount Isa, QLD	CDA, DSP, SNAP & JET	Indigenous Women's Conference
Mount Isa, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Cloncurry, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Julia Creek, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Richmond, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Dajarra, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Boulia, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Birdsville, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Bedourie, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Gununa, QLD	CDA	Community meeting
Doomadgee, QLD	CDA	Community meeting
Burketown, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Alpurrurulam, QLD	CDA	Community meeting
Winton, QLD	CDA	Information seminar
Normanton, QLD	CDA	Community meeting
Melbourne, VIC	DSS programs	Interagency info seminar
Western Victoria	DSS payments & ABSTUDY	Community meetings × 8

The tables indicate that projects aimed at supporting women (for example, the provision of training in areas such as family health and nutrition and financial budgeting, the development of women's resource centres and the support for victims of domestic violence) were the most common, followed by child care and nutrition-related projects.

From Table 7 it is clear that SNAP Officers' information and outreach activities cover the broad range of DSS family payments and other programs and services, as well as topics related to SNAP Officers' community development and assistance work.

Case Studies

The following 'case studies' exemplify the types of approaches taken by SNAP Officers in their work and include descriptions by family and community groups from selected locations of the types and perceived value of the assistance SNAP Officers have provided them with.

Cairns, Area North Queensland

"The first step taken in the SNAP role is to make the people aware that I am here to assist them in whatever way they want - not to charge in and impose myself and the program upon them. The next step is virtually up to the people. I have had various requests from community people, such as 'How do I go about forming an incorporated organisation?', 'Where do I get funding for a particular type of project?' or 'Do you know if a certain government agency has any Murries working for them who we can talk to about a certain problem?'.

I then utilise my network of various government and non-government contacts to access the relevant information. One of the most time-consuming tasks of the SNAP role is that of information gatherer and disseminator."

Among a range of tasks and approaches, this SNAP Officer's work has included assisting families in distress to obtain emergency relief, assisting the formation of women's groups in Cape York communities and acting as their spokesperson with community councils and government agencies, assisting women to establish domestic violence shelters in communities and establishing a support network for victims of domestic violence in the Cape York and Cairns region. Recently she and the Cairns-based ATSIC Women's Issues Officer organised and ran a workshop at Naprunum which brought together two women from each community in Cape York to discuss problems and needs of women and their families in these communities and possible solutions to them. They intend to follow this up by bringing women to Cairns to look at relevant training programs as part of helping them to address some of their families' and communities' needs.

Pormpur Paanth Aboriginal Co-op, Pormpuraaw

Pormpuraaw is located on the remote western coast of Cape York Peninsula. It is poorly serviced by government and the cost of living is extremely high. The Pormpur Paanth Co-op was set up as a self-help organisation in 1991 by a group of local women who were concerned at the lack of family support services in the community. Co-op members had no previous experience in running such an organisation or knowledge of possible funding sources and it was not until the Co-op Coordinator made contact with the SNAP Officer in 1992 that they received assistance with this.

The SNAP Officer was able to provide them with information on other agencies' funding programs, advice on preparing submissions and help with properly setting up and incorporating their organisation. As a result of this assistance, they have so far been able to establish a women's centre, a support service for victims of domestic violence and a meals-on-wheels service for elderly

and disabled family members. They are about to set up a child care service which will also provide training in child care for local women. Members of the group said that the SNAP Officer and other DSS staff are the only government agency staff who visit the community regularly and provide the type of support they need in this remote location.

Darwin, Area North Australia

The SNAP Officer in the Darwin region has been concentrating on working with communities at Oenpelli, Port Keats/Wadeye and the Tiwi Islands on projects including nutrition programs, establishing women's resource centres, child care/play groups, family support networks and accommodation and support services for elderly family members. As well as working towards getting these projects funded from various sources, she has also concentrated on ensuring that local people are trained to work in and operate these services and are able to maintain them over the longer term. For example, she is trying to get parallel programs operating in the three Tiwi Islands communities so that people who get training in, say, child care at Milikapiti can be employed in that field if they move to Pularumpi or Nguui. Projects established in one community can also be used as models for showing people in the other communities how such projects operate and the benefits they can bring to communities.

The nutrition program at Milikapiti, established through persistent efforts of the SNAP Officer in response to concerns in the community about malnutrition among babies and young children and also to provide regular nutritious meals to elderly people, is now supplying 60 to 70 meals a day and providing training and employment for several women in the community. It has also achieved its major aim of eliminating malnutrition in the community and has recently received Northern Territory and national awards from the Heart Foundation in recognition of its achievements.

Gunbulunya Community Council, Oenpelli, north-west Arnhem Land

Community Council members reported that the SNAP Officer had been very helpful to the Gunbulunya community with her work on projects in the areas of health and nutrition, establishing a women's centre, child care and aged care. She was able to work well with both men and women of all ages and with other service providers on the community such as the health clinic staff. She was one of a very few staff of government agencies who could relate to and work properly with the community. People here were very shy and things didn't happen overnight, which was something that staff from other departments didn't always seem to understand, particularly when they were expecting quick responses or action on their proposals.

Community Council, Milikapiti, Melville Island

At Milikapiti, the SNAP Officer has been instrumental in getting other government departments to start working together on projects and reduce the bureaucratic inertia and narrow focus on their own programs which normally characterise the way these departments operate here. According to Council members, "If other departments supported communities the way the SNAP Officer does, they [communities] would be much better off."

Coffs Harbour, Area Pacific Central, New South Wales

The Coffs Harbour-based SNAP Officer sees the SNAP Program as needing to be dynamic in the way it operates and sees the SNAP Officer as a 'consultant' to family groups and communities with a needs-based level of involvement. Projects he has been involved in have focused on youth support, prevention of domestic violence and support for domestic violence victims, health/nutrition awareness (eg via local health committees, diabetes camps, programs in schools), 'wheels to meals' for elderly family members and community planning and development activities for family and community groups. The most successful have been the health/nutrition awareness projects and those involving community/group development such as the Bowraville Mimi Mothers group.

Miimi Mothers Aboriginal Corporation, Bowraville, New South Wales

Last year a group of women in Bowraville had decided that they needed to do something to address the widespread feelings of frustration and powerlessness among Aboriginal people in the community and to support Aboriginal children who were experiencing racial harassment at school. There were no readily accessible or appropriate government services and the women didn't know how to go about getting things going (eg in terms of providing counselling for the children, establishing themselves as a group etc) until the SNAP Officer first made contact with them in mid-1993. Their initial informal contacts with him led to their formally requesting that he help them set up a women's group which would also be involved in running health and nutrition programs, arts and craft activities etc. He helped the group to become incorporated, to contact other women's groups for ideas and information on their experiences, and to develop a community plan which established action plans for each of the eight priority areas the group wanted to work towards achieving. These include:

- establishing a community centre
- business management training
- cultural and spiritual renewal activities
- acquiring a community bus
- running lifestyle programs
- making and selling arts and crafts
- establishing a medical centre
- employing a youth counsellor.

With the SNAP Officer's help, the group has so far put together and submitted successful applications for funds to run a camp for local children and to run a management training course to enable them to properly administer their organisation and its activities. They are now working together on getting a multifunction community centre funded and established which will meet the needs of all groups in the community. They are also collecting information to put together a community profile of Bowraville and ways of meeting other community needs. The group is now being recognised as a significant and viable community organisation by both the local community and government agencies.

Townsville, Area North Queensland

The SNAP Officer in Townsville spent her first 18 months explaining her role to communities, gaining their confidence and finding out their needs. She didn't begin by presenting communities with predetermined solutions to their problems.

She keeps abreast of other agencies' funding programs and submission deadlines and keeps communities and groups informed of the programs relevant to their needs. She assists as required with the grant application process, getting groups incorporated and helping them establish forward plans.

She has worked with groups and communities in Tully, Jumbun, Ingham, Charters Towers, Hughenden, Bowen and Ayr, as well as Townsville. Projects that she has been involved in include, among other things, the establishment of a youth support group, a child care/play group and mobile kindergarten, needs assessment and planning for a Home and Community Care (HACC) project and planning the implementation of adult education classes to assist family members to play a greater role in instituting and managing self-help projects and more broadly to enhance their job prospects.

Jurragi Youth Organisation, Townsville

Jurragi is a community-based support organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the Townsville region. It began informally about six years ago operating out of a private home following concern by a number of families at the lack of existing support and recreation services for young people in the community. As the group's membership and activities grew, the

organisers saw the need to establish their organisation on a more formal basis to give it the chance of attracting government funding for accommodation, equipment and activities. It was at this stage that the group made contact with the SNAP Officer who was able to help the group draw up a constitution, take the necessary steps to become incorporated, carry out some medium-term planning and begin applying for funding grants.

As a result, Jurragi is now able to run regular activity programs for young people, it supports a dance group which gives regular performances in a range of venues, it assists young people in undertaking job skills training and finding employment, and promotes the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture among its members.

In the view of the organisation, the SNAP Officer played a crucial role in helping it develop from being a group that wasn't properly organised and had no clear idea of where it was going or how it should progress, to an incorporated organisation with a constitution, able to apply for government funding and with a much clearer idea of its future direction. The SNAP Officer had been able to offer practical help with all the various steps necessary to achieve this, resulting in clear benefits to many local young people and their families.

Thursday Island, Area North Queensland

The Thursday Island-based SNAP Officer works with communities on the outer islands of the Torres Strait and three Torres Strait Islander communities on the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula. As well as informing people about DSS payments, the main focus of her work initially was on advising people on the availability of funding for health and child care programs and investigating possibilities for establishing alternative supplies of healthy affordable food to families in these remote localities.

In the last six to nine months, she has been concentrating on getting the HACC Program established in the outer islands of the Torres Strait in recognition of the difficulties (resulting from remoteness and lack of access to services) faced by people in caring for their elderly and disabled family members. Apart from advising communities about HACC and consulting with them about their need for the program, she has assisted them to establish and get incorporated Health Action Committees to administer HACC and has helped with completing and submitting the funding applications.

She also tries to visit all the communities in her region at least twice a year, although climatic conditions, particularly in the wet season, and the problems associated with travelling in this remote and poorly serviced area can sometimes upset these plans.

Health Action Group, St Paul's Community, Moa Island, Torres Strait

Last year, people in St Paul's and other outer island communities approached the SNAP Officer about the need for home-based assistance for aged and disabled members of their families. The SNAP Officer then held a series of community meetings to talk to people about the HACC Program and sought their agreement and support to apply to have it established there as a way of providing the services they needed. She also organised and ran a successful two-day meeting with representatives of all interested communities in the outer islands and HACC Program officials from the Health Department in Brisbane to discuss in more detail getting the program established.

In regard to the St Paul's community in particular, the SNAP Officer helped set up a Health Action Group and get it incorporated and to plan for the introduction and operation of the HACC Program there. Health Action Group members said that it was good to have someone like the SNAP Officer helping them, particularly in the early stages of getting the organisation and program set up, because they had had no previous experience in this. More generally it was good to have the SNAP Officer to help them get information about government programs because it would otherwise be impossible to know what was available, particularly given the communication and access difficulties they experience in the Torres Strait.

As is clear from these case studies, family and community groups interviewed for the evaluation placed a high value on the assistance SNAP Officers have given them. The practical and tangible nature of the assistance, the way in which it is offered and provided (ie in response to the group's or community's expressed needs) and the ongoing involvement and commitment of SNAP Officers to working with the community/group are all highly valued.

Echoing the findings outlined in the Parliamentary Committee's report *Rhetoric or Reality*¹¹ about the high regard for DSS service provision among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in all areas visited for this evaluation SNAP Officers and their working methods were continually compared very favourably with those of other agencies who are responsible for administering service delivery and funding programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The sense of empowerment experienced by communities as a result of the intervention of SNAP Officers in their lives, for example as providers of valuable and otherwise hard-to-obtain information and as the communities' 'agents' in their dealings with other agencies, came through as a continuing theme throughout the evaluation.

The staff of other agencies who participated in the evaluation, such as ATSIC, State Health Departments and non-government organisations, saw SNAP Officers as being useful to them in a number of ways. For example, SNAP Officers could promote awareness of their agencies' programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and provide feedback to the agencies on the needs of those communities which they are unable to visit as frequently as they would like. SNAP Officers were also seen by these staff as a good source of information on the programs of other agencies which are relevant to them and their customers.

- The respondent sees the SNAP Officer as useful for giving feedback to organisations like the Legal Service about the needs of people in remote areas, especially women, in regard to issues such as domestic violence, women's shelters etc. The Legal Service also uses the SNAP Officer as a source of information on other departments' welfare programs and services. [Administrator, Njiku Jowan Aboriginal Legal Service, Cairns]
- The SNAP Officer provides her with 'on the ground' information about the situation of communities and their needs. The SNAP Officer spends more time on communities than do visiting Rural Health Services (RHS) staff, and people on communities are more likely to talk to the SNAP Officer than to them. She is therefore able to provide a more realistic picture of the situation than are the RHS staff. There is also value in her role as a liaison link with other departments. [Non-Government Liaison Officer, Rural Health Services, Darwin]
- The SNAP Officer is a good communicator and is well known throughout the Torres Strait. She has been helpful in advising people of Keriba Kazil's services and those of other agencies when she is visiting communities in the course of her work. [Coordinator, Keriba Kazil, Thursday Island]

¹¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *op cit.*

4.3 Unsuccessful Approaches

The outcomes that SNAP Officers work towards achieving in the majority of situations and projects they are involved in are dependent for their success on a range of factors over which SNAP Officers may have little or no control. These can include, for example, the priorities of funding agencies and their perceptions of the need for or value of a project being proposed, the efficiency of these agencies in responding to requests for assistance and the intra-community politics and rivalry between groups in a community which may frustrate the progress of a project in that community.

Obviously, a SNAP project which does not ultimately meet its aims as a result of such factors cannot be judged as a failure on the part of the SNAP Officer or the SNAP Program - it merely reflects the tremendous difficulties involved in achieving positive results in situations of gross disadvantage and hardship and in the face of the political and bureaucratic confusion and inertia inherent in the administration of many of the programs intended ostensibly to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This said, there have been instances in the life of the SNAP Program where the aims of SNAP-initiated projects have not been met largely because of the approach adopted by the SNAP Officer and others involved in those projects. Given that the Program is still very much in its infancy and is still very much an experimental venture for DSS with few established operating guidelines for either SNAP Officers or their supervisors, unsuccessful approaches of this nature are hardly surprising.

Such unsuccessful interventions and projects appear to result from one or other of two main factors:

- a lack of adequate background research and/or consultation with the community or group concerned in regard to the need for, type of and likely support for the project proposed or initiated; and
- the inability of the SNAP Officer to continue his/her involvement in the project over the longer term or to have a sufficient degree of involvement at crucial stages in the life of the project.

Examples of the first of these factors include the attempted implementation of a nutrition program in a north Queensland community and of a training course in family day care for sole parents in Perth.

In the former case, the idea for the nutrition program arose as the result of a needs assessment undertaken in the community by the SNAP Officer, followed by discussions with nutrition staff of the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Program and their agreeing to be involved in developing and implementing such a program. Discussions on the proposed program were also held with a small number of community members who supported the proposal. After implementation, however, it became clear that the majority of the community were not interested in supporting the program - reportedly because they felt that the community had other more pressing needs that should be addressed first - and the program was abandoned very soon after implementation.

The family day care training course in Perth was proposed by the SNAP Officer as a way of providing employment opportunities for sole parents from the local Aboriginal community and additional child care places for Aboriginal children. It was to be run by the local TAFE College with a Family Day Care Centre being used as the training venue. Despite apparent wide-scale interest in the course from prospective students, the small number of students who actually enrolled led to the cancellation of the course in its first week. The following extracts from the SNAP Officer's report on the project provide details of the background to it and possible reasons for its lack of success.

The course had operated successfully in other regions. The course content and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in the training area were adequately addressed and representatives from all agencies involved were consulted. However, the level of interest and commitment in the local community appears to have been overestimated.

This may have been due to the limited level of consultation with Aboriginal community groups in the region in the early stages. On the other hand, the SNAP and JET Officers devoted a considerable amount of time and effort [in the two months before the course was due to commence] canvassing sole parents in the region, resulting in a positive response from a sufficient number of potential participants to justify persisting with the course.

During information sessions run by SNAP and JET Officers, every attempt was made to ensure that adequate information was provided as to location, transport, child care facilities, course content and income support. Once the course started, however, very few actually attended. This seems to indicate a lack of ownership for the project, resulting in a lack of commitment by Aboriginal people.

A lack of community involvement and support appears to have been a significant factor in this instance and demonstrated the importance of assessing client needs as part of the planning process. There is little point in running a good course if it does not have the endorsement of the local Aboriginal community. In the future, the community should be invited to participate in the planning stages of such programs.

An example of the second of the factors involved in unsuccessful intervention by SNAP concerns an attempt by a Perth-based SNAP Officer to establish a presence for the Program in the Kalgoorlie region.

The SNAP Officer made several visits to the region for this purpose and had some initial involvement with a number of groups and communities there. According to the local DSS Regional Manager, the SNAP Officer had good ideas and useful projects under way, but could not visit regularly or lengthily enough to provide sufficient follow-up or to maintain the necessary support for them over the long term; nor could she get the full picture of what the local needs and community politics were or which local agencies and organisations were the best ones to work with.

The problems involved in servicing this region adequately on an *ad hoc* basis from Perth led to a decision by the Regional Office in Kalgoorlie and the Department's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit in Perth to suspend SNAP involvement in the region. Although this left hanging the projects already begun, the realisation that the Program was being too thinly spread, and therefore not being implemented effectively and efficiently leading to a loss of credibility for the Program, made the decision necessary.

While generally this proved to be an unsuccessful attempt by SNAP to become established in the Kalgoorlie region, the Program did achieve a successful outcome in one of its projects in this region - that of having established for a rural-based community a regular, safe water supply. Before terminating her involvement in the region, the SNAP Officer attempted to have the ATSIC office in Kalgoorlie take over responsibility for the other projects which she had begun working on. Subsequently, however, it was reported that ATSIC did not have the capacity to continue with them.

4.4 'Seeding Funds' for SNAP Officers

A strategy originally intended to be included in the Program was that of SNAP Officers having access to small amounts of funds (\$200 - \$300 a year), to be known as 'seeding funds' (and described in the Budget papers as "community assistance" funds), which they could use, in the form of either a small cash grant or a loan, to help get projects off the ground while waiting for grants from funding agencies to materialise. Despite implementation of this strategy being recommended by the 1991 interim SNAP evaluation and subsequent plans to trial its implementation, this has never actually occurred. One of the possible reasons for this was uncertainty on the part of some Regional Managers as to how such funds might be administered and accounted for at the local level.

When asked during the evaluation about the concept of seeding funds, most SNAP Officers expressed interest in having access to such funds, with some also expressing frustration at the fact that this strategy had never been implemented. In general, they would now prefer having access to larger amounts of such funds (say up to \$1000 a year) than was originally envisaged for the strategy to be worthwhile.

SNAP Officers gave the following examples of how seeding funds could be used effectively to support and sustain the development of projects in their early stages:

- Such funds would be useful in the early stages of helping groups become self-sufficient by, for example, providing them with phone cards so they can establish and maintain contact with funding agencies and with organisations providing needed information, fax machines so that they can receive information, application forms etc from these bodies, paying for incorporation fees, word processing and printing costs related to incorporation, developing constitutions and writing funding submissions etc. These sorts of things should be seen as an extension of the SNAP Officer's role - not a duplication of other departments' funding programs. They help increase people's feelings of ownership of their projects and also serve to enhance the positive image of DSS in the eyes of the community. [SNAP Officer (SO) Area Pacific Central]
- The SNAP Officer feels it is often easier for groups to access larger sums of money than it is for small amounts under \$500. As well, the submission process for most funds is lengthy and time consuming and is often done in annual funding cycles. Small projects and initiatives often need money relatively quickly and, when it is not forthcoming, participants lose motivation and incentive. Seeding money would help to alleviate this in the short term, while recurrent funding is being pursued. An amount of around \$1,000 annually would be useful as this could be spread over a number of projects. She gave examples of where such funds could have been used:
 - An outreach project that targeted young Aboriginal mothers was seeking a few hundred dollars to pay a local Aboriginal Elder to be part of this project. Accessing funding in time was a problem and the project was deferred.

Money was needed to provide simple lunches for children of women attending a women's group. SNAP could have provided a few hundred dollars for this while the group was awaiting the outcome of funding submissions they had made. [SO Area North SA]

Managers participating in the evaluation appeared generally not to be in favour of the idea of seeding funds, citing such problems as accountability requirements and the effect of the availability of such funds on the perceived 'neutrality' of SNAP Officers in the eyes of communities they work with.

Having regard to the reservations of managers, it is considered that provision of seeding funds should be trialled before full implementation.

4.5 Expanding the Reach of the SNAP Program

While the SNAP Program was expanded from 14 to 25 positions in 1993-94, the need for additional SNAP Officers, both to cope with current demands on the Program and to enable it to provide assistance to other communities and groups who could potentially benefit from it, was often raised during the evaluation. It was certainly the view expressed by SNAP Officers, AILOs, DSS managers, the staff of other agencies and members of communities in many of the locations covered by the evaluation. These include, for example, the Cairns-Cape York region of north Queensland, the Top End of the Northern Territory, Port Hedland and Kalgoorlie in Western Australia, Port Augusta in South Australia, and north-west and western New South Wales.

Some suggestions were made as to interim or additional 'low cost' measures that could be taken to expand the capacity of the Program. These included:

- combining, where appropriate to the needs of local customer groups, a part-time SNAP position with that of a JET Adviser or a Disability Support Officer until such time as funds were available for a full-time SNAP Officer position (a pilot program involving a number of combined SNAP/JET positions is currently being evaluated); and
- funding communities to employ a 'SNAP Agent' (along the lines of the existing DSS-funded Community Agent scheme) who could operate, for example, from a women's resource centre in the community and provide community members and groups with the more straightforward forms of assistance that SNAP Officers provide and also support the development and implementation of projects initiated by the SNAP Officer.

4.6 Summary and Conclusions

From the information available to the evaluation, it appears that the SNAP Program's objectives, the general direction in which the Program has been heading and the working approaches and methods employed by SNAP Officers to implement the Program's objectives are producing effective and appropriate outcomes in regard to a range of social and economic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

The working approaches used by SNAP Officers appear generally to be consistent with what was envisaged in this regard at the inception of the Program, although their focus has broadened from addressing the needs of children in poverty to include all family members affected by poverty. Necessarily, their working approaches include the ability to respond flexibly and sensitively to the expressed needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and community groups and to the ways in which these groups wish those needs to be addressed.

Both the working approaches of SNAP Officers and the outcomes which they appear to be producing are highly valued by the groups they have assisted.

As discussed earlier in this report, a more thorough assessment of the SNAP Program's effectiveness and appropriateness has not been possible in the context of the current evaluation. Such an assessment needs to await the development and systematic collection of more rigorous qualitative and quantitative indicators of the Program's performance in this regard.

4.7 Recommendations - Effectiveness and Appropriateness Issues

SNAP Program Objectives

The SNAP Program's objectives should be changed to more clearly reflect the Program's community development focus, while acknowledging the need to continue to promote the take-up of DSS family and child-related payments. The objectives should also more clearly reflect the Program's now broader focus on the needs of families and not solely the needs of children. It is recommended that the objectives be reworded as follows:

In recognition of the need to more actively address continuing poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the aim of the SNAP Program is to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in improving their access to income and community resources by:

- promoting and assisting the take-up of their correct DSS payments;*
- assisting them to gain access to other family support programs; and*
- contributing to the improvement of other related community support structures in ways that meet the needs of families.*

Seeding Funds

In consultation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should trial making small amounts of seeding funds available to SNAP Officers to support the establishment of particular projects for which other funds are temporarily unavailable.

Expanding the Reach of the SNAP Program

Consideration should be given to establishing SNAP Officer positions in locations where there is a demonstrated need and which cannot be effectively serviced from within existing Program resources.

Depending on the outcome of the evaluation of the SNAP/JET pilot scheme, the possibility of combining some SNAP positions with other DSS program positions such as JET Advisers and Disability Support Officers should be further explored within the context of an overall expansion of the SNAP Program. The concept of employing community members to assist SNAP Officers and support the development of the Program in their communities should also be examined in this context.

Measuring the SNAP Program's Effectiveness

In consultation with SNAP Officers and local managers of the SNAP Program, National Administration should develop quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to enable more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the SNAP Program's effectiveness. Work on the development of such performance indicators should begin without delay to enable SNAP Officers and their managers to begin collecting the necessary performance information from the beginning of 1995-96.

A further evaluation of the SNAP Program's effectiveness should be carried out in 1996-97 after sufficient relevant performance information has been collected.

Section 5: Evaluation Findings (II) - Efficiency Issues

This section reports on findings of the evaluation in regard to efficiency aspects of the operation of the SNAP Program in areas such as management of the Program, the involvement of AILOs in the Program, SNAP Officers' working relationships with the staff of other agencies, promotion of the Program, the training needs of SNAP Officers and the role of the national coordinator of the Program.

5.1 Management of the SNAP Program

With the SNAP Program representing for DSS a new and unique approach to addressing the needs of customers, there has clearly been a need for consistent support and guidance for local managers of the Program from DSS National Administration and Area Offices. Both SNAP Officers and local managers interviewed for the evaluation considered that this had not occurred on a consistent basis and that this lack of adequate high level support and guidance has meant that SNAP Officers and their managers had been left largely on their own in setting up and operating the Program at the local level.

The Role of Managers

The majority of SNAP Officers are based at DSS Regional Offices. Regional Managers are their supervisors and responsible for the Program within their Regions. In the case of DSS Area Office-based SNAP Officers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit (A&TSISU) Managers normally perform this role.

To properly manage the Program in their Region/Area, managers obviously need, first and foremost, a thorough understanding of the Program and its objectives. Following from this, they need to understand and appreciate the very different working methods and approaches that SNAP Officers are required to employ, compared to other DSS staff, in meeting their customers' needs. They should also understand that by assisting DSS customers in the way they do, SNAP Officers are working towards enhancing these customers' capacity for self-help and ultimately reducing their families' dependence on the social security system. From this, it should be clear that the SNAP Program is as legitimate and deserving of their attention and support as all the other DSS programs for which they are responsible within their Region or Area.

All of the managers who participated in the evaluation expressed their strong interest in and commitment to the SNAP Program but all spoke of the various challenges it presents for them as managers. These include, for example, the Program's community development focus and their lack of experience and training in this field, the problems involved in planning, monitoring and measuring the outcomes of the activities of SNAP Officers over the extended time frame that involvement in SNAP projects often requires, and the difficulty of giving the Program the attention it needs in the face of the constant attention demanded by the income maintenance programs which are central to and which constitute the bulk of the Regional Office's workload and responsibilities.

Managers acknowledged that SNAP requires a flexible, creative and different approach from what is required of most other DSS programs and spoke of their need for support and guidance generally in this area and specifically in regard to issues such as monitoring program outcomes.

- Managers need more support and education about SNAP, its value to DSS, how to manage it and how to link it to other DSS programs they are managing so that they will continue to regard SNAP as a priority in the face of all the other demands on their attention. The long-term nature of SNAP also makes it hard for managers to maintain their interest and involvement in it in the face of competing demands of other programs where outcomes are a lot easier to achieve and measure in the short term. Linking SNAP with other DSS programs should make it easier for managers to think of it as a 'genuine' DSS program and to see that it can achieve outcomes in terms they are familiar with. [Regional Manager (RM) Gosnells]

Setting Objectives and Measuring Outcomes

Setting objectives for and measuring the outcomes of SNAP projects and activities are among the more difficult of the issues involved in the management of the Program and where the lack of Departmental guidelines has been a particular problem.

In the absence of any such guidelines, managers suggested ways in which this issue could be addressed. These mainly involve establishing, with the SNAP Officer, objectives for the project which he/she should work towards achieving within certain time frames and then reviewing progress at those times based on the SNAP Officer's reports. Formalising this process by including SNAP projects and work plans in the Regional Office business plan was also seen as desirable.

- In regard to measuring outcomes for the Program, you need to have a long-term focus and not expect short-term outcomes. There is a need to set up a register of SNAP projects. Objectives and time lines should be established at the start of each project included in this register and these should be monitored at regular intervals. The register should be part of the Regional Office business plan. The Area A&TSI Services Manager should also be involved in this process. [RM Cairns]
- Performance indicators for SNAP need to be mainly qualitative and follow a normal project sequence, for example, needs assessment, proposed solutions, implementation, progress and outcomes, with reporting on each of these stages at appropriate times. To assist this process, standard descriptors of, for example, type of community/community group/project could be developed. [Area Deputy Manager, Area North Qld]

In addition to its use as a means of measuring the progress and outcomes of projects, the value of this approach in helping both to keep the SNAP Officer 'focussed' over the long term and not to take on an unrealistic workload was also noted:

- SNAP Officers need to establish work plans and set objectives for their work on a six or 12 monthly basis so that supervisors are able to manage the Program realistically. This should also prevent SNAP Officers from being diverted from their main roles and objectives by the agendas of other agencies they may be working with. As well, SNAP Officers need clear objectives and time frames to attempt to work to in order for them to stay 'focussed' in the face of the many difficulties and obstacles they are likely to encounter in their work. [RM Gosnells]

Reporting

Regular reporting by SNAP Officers on their activities is a necessary part of managing SNAP projects and monitoring and measuring their outcomes. Most SNAP Officers attempt to provide written reports to their managers at least on a quarterly basis, supplemented with more frequent verbal reports and *ad hoc* written reports on, for example, field visits or particular issues which require more immediate attention.

The original intention when the Program was established was for SNAP Officers' reports to be directed initially to their local managers, with copies sent to the Area Manager and the SNAP Program Coordinator in National Administration. The involvement of the national coordinator in this process was seen by the 1991 interim SNAP evaluation as an important part of coordinating and reporting on SNAP nationally.

It appears now, however, that most SNAP reports do not go beyond the SNAP Officers' local manager, with a few still occasionally finding their way to National Administration. This has come about, at least partly, as a result of the perceived lack of response to these reports by National Administration over a long period.

Originally also, a standard reporting format was developed for SNAP Officers' regular reports. It appears that this format is no longer seen as appropriate and, with a few exceptions, is no longer used.

SNAP Officers acknowledged the necessity of providing regular meaningful reports on their activities and projects, but pointed out the need for the development of a reporting system that was sufficiently standardised to allow program outcomes to be readily measured at both the local and national levels, but also flexible enough to cater for different project types and working approaches developed by SNAP Officers in response to local needs. The computer-based reporting system recently developed for use by DSS social workers was cited as a model that might well be adapted for use by SNAP Officers. All SNAP Officers stressed the need for regular and timely feedback on their reports both from their local managers and from National Administration.

The Role of A&TSI Services Units in the Management of the SNAP Program

The role in the SNAP Program of A&TSISUs in DSS Areas where SNAP Officers are based in Regional Offices has remained unclear throughout the life of the Program. Although some Regional Managers do (or are willing to) involve them in aspects such as planning and monitoring SNAP activities within the Area, most A&TSISUs appear to have only a peripheral role in the Program. The issue was raised during the evaluation by an A&TSISU Manager in the following way:

- Individual SNAP Officers produce their own work plans for their Regional Managers, but there is no formal requirement to do this or for copies of these plans to be provided to the A&TSISU Manager who would like to have more direct management involvement in the Program, both because Regional Managers are not provided with the training or support to properly supervise SNAP Officers (and A&TSISUs should be recognised as experts in the delivery of services to Aboriginal people) and to ensure that SNAP funds are used appropriately by Regional Offices. [A&TSISU Manager Area North WA]

5.2 SNAP Officers and the Regional/Area Office

As mentioned above, most SNAP Officers are based in Regional Offices, with the others generally being based in A&TSISUs in Area Offices. Both types of arrangements appear to work satisfactorily and to be appropriate to the locations concerned. Area Office-based SNAP Officers and their supervisors appear to be aware of the need to maintain good links and regular contact with the Regional Offices in their Area, in particular with Regional Managers and AIOs.

The extent of involvement and 'integration' of Regional Office-based SNAP Officers in the structure and activities of their Office varies. Generally, for example, they are members of the Regional Office Management Team (ROMT), but the regularity of their attendance at ROMT meetings seems to be governed by what other SNAP Program commitments they have at the time of the meetings and their interest in or perception of the value to the Program of attending the meetings. Managers participating in the evaluation tended to see more value in SNAP Officers' participation in the ROMT than did SNAP Officers themselves.

- The SNAP Officer reported that he can't often attend ROMT meetings because he is away from the Regional Office a lot. His work covers a much bigger area than the Region he is based in, so the usefulness of his attendance at ROMT meetings is limited to the extent that issues affecting the SNAP Program in this Region are discussed. [SO Warrnambool]
- The Regional Manager regards the SNAP Officer as part of the ROMT. The SNAP Officer can make a major contribution here because of her knowledge of local community needs which helps the ROMT in service delivery to the community. The SNAP Officer can also pick up information useful to her role from other ROMT members. [RM Townsville]

The question of SNAP Officers potentially acting in or being promoted to management positions within the Regional Office was raised during the evaluation. Although most SNAP Officers appear more interested in continuing to work in the SNAP Program and directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than in moving into management positions in the Department, the opportunity to do this was seen by some SNAP Officers and managers as important in the context of career development. The need for relevant training for these positions, given the quite different nature of the work involved, was stressed.

- The Regional Manager believes that the SNAP Officer should be able to act in other Regional Office management positions and sees her eventually being promoted to, for example, a section head position (she has previously acted in this position). This would expand her career path opportunities. [RM Townsville]
- Because the SNAP Officer's role is so different from other jobs in DSS, there is no obvious progression from the SNAP position to other types of positions. SNAP Officers generally are quite removed from positions requiring 'technical' knowledge which make up the bulk of jobs in Regional Offices. [A&TSIS Coordinator, Area Pacific Central]

5.3 AIOs' Involvement in the SNAP Program

The Department's view of the relationship between SNAP Officers and AIOs and the involvement of AIOs in the SNAP Program has never been made particularly clear.

For example, the handbook for SNAP Officers developed at the start of the Program contains only two significant references to these issues. They include, as part of the responsibilities the handbook lists for SNAP Officers:

- liaising with Regional Office staff (especially Aboriginal Liaison Officers, Remote Visiting Teams and Community Agents) to ensure that they inform parents about Family Payments and assist them to claim, ensuring that payments are received by the primary carer;

and, as part of planning SNAP Program activities:

- through contact with Aboriginal Liaison Officers and from outreach and consultative activities, identify particular needs of Aboriginal groups, in particular Aboriginal Parents.

One of the apparent results of this limited 'official' explication of the AILOs' role in the SNAP Program is the current variability in the nature of this role and in the understanding of different players as to what this role is or should be.

In the early days of the SNAP Program, SNAP Officers worked with AILOs on, for example, joint field trips to communities as a means of getting to know and being introduced to communities and community contacts. In more recent times, however, SNAP Officers (including both those who are based in Regional Offices and those in Area Offices) appear to have developed patterns of work and planning which largely exclude working closely with AILOs on a regular basis, although some joint activities, such as field trips and outreach activities, do occur. Cross-referrals between SNAP Officers (in regard to customer entitlement issues) and AILOs (in regard to community needs which the SNAP Program might address) continue to be seen by SNAP Officers as an important part of the working relationship.

Similarly to SNAP Officers, AILOs interviewed for the evaluation generally saw their current working relationship with SNAP Officers as to be mainly limited to cross-referrals with little overlap in their respective roles. Some AILOs felt that more cooperation was desirable and that AILOs' duties could be expanded to include SNAP-type work.

Managers tended to see quite definite links between the roles of SNAP Officers and AILOs, for example in doing cross-referrals, with some seeing the possibility and/or desirability of a greater level of involvement of AILOs in the SNAP Program. The need for Area-based SNAP Officers to maintain good communication with AILOs in their Area was stressed.

5.4 Working with Other Agencies

As previously discussed, a fundamental part of the SNAP Officer's role is to link communities and groups to relevant government agencies and their funding programs and to assist, as necessary, the submission of communities' and groups' funding applications to those agencies. For this to occur successfully, SNAP Officers need to develop effective working relationships and lines of communication with the relevant staff of these agencies. For example, they need always to have up-to-date information about their programs and submission requirements and deadlines and to ensure that the

decision-makers in these agencies are aware of the community and family needs which the SNAP Program is attempting to address through access to their agency's programs.

The types of working relationships which SNAP Officers have developed with the staff of other agencies seem to differ quite widely across the Program. Some, for example, do joint visits to communities and have fairly regular contact with other agency staff, while others make contact on only an *ad hoc* basis. The fact that the boundaries of the local administrative regions of the different agencies do not usually coincide means that SNAP Officers often have to work with the staff of different local offices of the same agency. The support of management of these agencies in ensuring the necessary cooperation of staff with SNAP Officers is obviously crucial.

At the time the SNAP Program was introduced, it was envisaged that the Department would aim to establish, in each Region or Area in which the SNAP Program was operating, a SNAP support/advisory committee involving local DSS management and representatives of these agencies and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. These committees would help determine priorities for the local operation of the SNAP Program and facilitate the inter-agency communication and cooperation needed by the SNAP Officer.

As was found by the 1991 interim SNAP evaluation also, it appears that no committees along the lines originally proposed have been established (or, at least, are functioning currently). The closest approximation to them in which some SNAP Officers have an involvement are local Aboriginal Employment Development Program (AEDP) committees whose effectiveness and usefulness to the SNAP Program was seen, at least by some SNAP Officers, to be fairly dubious.

As an alternative to using the AEDP forum, SNAP Officers in some areas are becoming involved in efforts to establish other processes aimed at enhancing networking and coordination between service delivery and funding agencies.

For example, the Coffs Harbour-based SNAP Officer has been involved in establishing (and is currently chairing) a Koori Networking group involving agencies and organisations working with Aboriginal people and communities in the New South Wales North Coast and Queensland Gold Coast regions. The SNAP Officer uses this group as a forum for articulating community needs and getting to know other agencies' programs and current priorities.

As well, the Warrnambool-based SNAP Officer has been playing a leading role in promoting the concept and development of cooperative measures and protocols to better coordinate service delivery among agencies providing services to Aboriginal people in Victoria.

5.5 Promotion of the SNAP Program

Promotion of the SNAP Program needs to be directed at three distinct audiences:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and family groups which the SNAP Program may be able to assist;

- government agencies whose services and funding programs are relevant to the needs of SNAP Program client groups; and
- DSS management and staff, particularly those in Regional and Area Offices where SNAP Officers are based.

Promotion of SNAP to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities and Family Groups

Promotion of the Program to families and communities and informing them of the sorts of assistance SNAP Officers could provide were among the major activities of SNAP Officers when the Program commenced and continues to be a major part of the initial role of newly appointed SNAP Officers.

Once the Program is established and promoted generally in an area and SNAP Officers have become fully occupied in projects and activities with particular groups and communities, the question of further promotion of the Program to other groups and communities needs careful consideration. There are obvious dangers involved in raising expectations of assistance from the SNAP Program which, because of their existing workload, SNAP Officers would be unable to respond to in the near future.

Varying views were expressed during the evaluation as to how well known SNAP is throughout the community generally. SNAP Officers were concerned that it not be over-promoted (for the reasons given above), while some others, in particular AILOs, believed that wider promotion is needed.

The question of the type of promotional material and approaches appropriate to local communities and groups was also raised. The original promotional material produced for the Program (featuring a picture of a sleeping Aboriginal baby in a coolamon) was considered by many SNAP Officers to be inappropriate to the locations they were working in and apparently not widely used. No other promotional material has since been produced nationally and SNAP Officers have generally had to make do with whatever material they could produce in-office and promoting SNAP through personal contact and word-of-mouth. Areas North Queensland and North Australia have recently produced new brochures about the Program and Area North Australia has also made a video about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services which includes a segment about SNAP.

All SNAP Officers expressed the need for new promotional products to be produced, with video being the most preferred medium. The need for products suitable to the needs of local communities and which give practical examples of the range of assistance and support that SNAP Officers could offer was also stressed.

- In regard to the original SNAP promotional products, the picture of the baby should be gotten rid of but the logo and colours should be retained. The message needs to be simple, reinforce the fact that SNAP is a DSS program and not limit the scope of what SNAP is about to specific issues such as child care and nutrition. There is also a need for different products for different areas/population groups that SNAP Officers work with. [SO Townsville]

- There is currently no promotional material and what there was in the past was not suitable culturally for the groups this SNAP Officer works with. There should be products such as videos, posters, pamphlets and fridge magnets suitable to the SNAP Officer's local area and communities and they should be presented in an easy to understand format. [SO Cairns]

Promotion of SNAP to Other Agencies

Along with their initial promotion of the Program to families and communities, SNAP Officers devoted a lot of time and energy early in the Program to introducing themselves and explaining the Program to staff in other agencies. Although personal contact plays a large role in initiating and maintaining awareness of SNAP within these agencies, again the lack of up-to-date and suitable promotional material has been a problem for some time. The staff of agencies who participated in the evaluation saw a need both for further promotion of SNAP within their agencies generally and for promotion to be an ongoing activity in order for awareness of SNAP to be maintained.

Promotion of SNAP within DSS

Consistent with the findings of the interim SNAP evaluation, it became obvious during the current evaluation that there is generally very little awareness, understanding and appreciation of the SNAP Program throughout DSS, including in the Regional and Area Offices where SNAP Officers are based. The need for much greater efforts in internal promotion of the Program was raised by both SNAP Officers and other DSS staff.

Raising awareness of the Program within Regional Offices was seen by managers, SNAP Officers and other DSS staff to be the responsibility of both Regional Managers and SNAP Officers through mechanisms such as ROMT and staff meetings and cultural awareness training sessions. Suggestions as to how this could be done more generally throughout the DSS network include using staff newsletters, a national SNAP newsletter and producing a video about SNAP.

5.6 Training and Related Issues

The specialised nature of the SNAP Officer's role requires that newly commencing SNAP Officers either already possess or be given training in the special skills needed in this role. The 14 SNAP Officers originally recruited for the Program underwent initial training and induction over a two week period in May 1990. No other training has been organised nationally since that time.

Individual SNAP Officers have, of course, participated in various in-office training courses offered to Regional and Area Office staff, for example in word processing, report writing, time management etc, and SNAP Officers in Area North Queensland last year attended a short course in community development. As well, a number of SNAP Officers have either completed or are in the process of completing a degree course in community development through Curtin University.

Against the background of this very much *ad hoc* approach to training by the Department, SNAP Officers and their managers were concerned that their training

needs be addressed in a serious and concerted way. While some of the training the Department already provides for other staff (as referred to above) can be useful to SNAP Officers (and should be taken full advantage of by them), the need for a national approach to providing training in the special skills they require, in particular in community development and in other areas such as nutrition awareness, conflict resolution and publicity and media skills etc, was raised continually throughout the evaluation. The first step in establishing this process would be a training needs analysis for all SNAP Officers, as was recommended by the interim SNAP evaluation in 1991.

Additionally for newly commencing SNAP Officers, it was suggested that they spend an initial on-the-job training and establishment period working with experienced SNAP Officers, who would provide practical support and advice in, for example, establishing local networks, appropriate approaches to use in initiating projects, avoiding common pitfalls etc.

It was also suggested that SNAP Officers do short placements with relevant funding agencies, such as ATSIC and DEET, to get to know their personnel and programs, as well as with other agencies involved in community development activities for on-the-job training and experience.

- DSS doesn't provide much training of relevance to the SNAP Officer role (such as in community development). Ideally, there should be a national SNAP training budget which could pay for, for example, relevant courses run by local TAFE and other training institutions. [RM Alice Springs]
- New SNAP Officers need structured on-the-job training covering aspects such as community development, media skills, public speaking, running meetings, getting organisations incorporated etc. They (and other A&TSI Services staff) also need training in managing their resources, using FINMIS etc, so that they can keep track of and ensure continued access to the funds and resources allocated for their program. [SO Townsville]
- SNAP Officers also need community development skills covering, for example, assertiveness, conflict resolution, lobbying and influencing political processes, running committees, time management, debriefing and 'switching off' outside working hours, knowing when and how to 'let go' of involvement in projects, basic nutrition awareness, public relations and marketing. [A&TSIS Coordinator, Area Pacific Central]
- Initially, new SNAP Officers need training in several different areas. They need to be provided with:
 - an overview of the SNAP Officer's role and how it operates both within DSS and *vis-à-vis* other agencies;
 - a range of possible scenarios SNAP Officers are likely to face and the resources available for dealing with them;
 - training in time management, report writing, listening skills, and publicity and media skills;
 - information on OH&S-related issues they will face such as the emotional stress involved in dealing with community politics and with people living in extreme hardship, travelling and working in remote locations, trying to manage a potentially infinite workload, coping with the pressures of being an Aboriginal staff member in a large non-Aboriginal organisation etc;
 - technical training in financial management so that they can manage/keep track of the funds allocated to the SNAP position. [SO Area Pacific Central]

SNAP Officers also stressed the need for regular meetings with their fellow SNAP Officers at both the Area and national level for the purposes of, for example, exchanging information and ideas and for mutual support:

- There should be regular (3-6 monthly) SNAP workshops in each Area (or appropriate groups of Areas such as North Queensland and North Australia) to enable SNAP Officers to exchange information, undergo training etc and these should have the same status and management recognition as training/recall sessions undertaken by other specialist Area/Regional staff. [SO Townsville]

Since the initial training and induction program at the commencement of the Program, there have been three SNAP 'recall' conferences - one each in Alice Springs and Melbourne attended, respectively, by SNAP Officers from northern Australia and those from southern Australia, and a national gathering held in Adelaide in November 1991.

Outside of these nationally-organised meetings, there have been Area-level meetings of SNAP Officers held more-or-less regularly in Areas North Queensland and North Australia. Area North Australia has recently formalised this process by establishing a SNAP Coordination Committee involving SNAP Officers, Regional Managers and Area Management representatives which meets on a quarterly basis.

5.7 Resources Issues

Only a minority of SNAP Officers reported having no problems relating to resources. Among those who did report problems, the two most frequently mentioned resource-related needs were laptop personal computers and priority access to a vehicle, both of which were raised as issues of concern to SNAP Officers in the interim SNAP evaluation. In the face of such resource access problems, some SNAP Officers expressed the need for being more involved in and/or being kept better informed of how the resources attached to their position are allocated and disposed of.

Other resource-related issues raised include the general one of the need to take account of the remoteness of the locations and the frequency of travel associated with many SNAP Officer positions when allocating travel funds for these positions, and that of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of SNAP Officers by providing them with clerical/administrative support.

Personal Computers

When SNAP Officers are doing field trips and visiting communities for extended periods (a regular part of work for many SNAP Officers), they often have 'free' time available to them in the evenings, some of which they could usefully employ in preparing reports, drafting funding submissions etc, if they were equipped with a portable computer. In addition, some SNAP Officers do not have ready access to a computer at their office, making report writing and other correspondence a problem for them. Providing SNAP Officers with laptop PCs would lead to increased efficiencies in both of these situations.

Access to Vehicles

Ready access to a vehicle is important for SNAP Officers given that the nature of their work requires them to spend much of their time out of the office visiting communities, attending meetings etc. There are also times when they need access to a vehicle at

short notice because, for example, communities or groups request their assistance urgently or change the time of planned meetings at the last minute. The flexibility and responsiveness of SNAP Officers in these situations contributes to the credibility of the Program in the eyes of communities and groups.

Although the administrative funds allocated to Area and Regional Offices for each SNAP Officer position are sufficient to cover the provision of a vehicle (and/or travel funds where geographical and climatic conditions require travel by air) for the primary use of the SNAP Officer, some SNAP Officers reported problems in getting primary access to a vehicle - often having to compete with and/or justify their need to other staff for use of the vehicle.

Control of Funds

Against this background of uncertain and unsatisfactory access to resources, a number of SNAP Officers and A&TSISU Managers expressed the need to have greater control over and/or better information on how to access and manage the funds allocated for the SNAP Program. One SNAP Officer pointed out the obvious irony of the situation where SNAP Officers assist communities and groups to plan and control the expenditure of large amounts of funds granted by other government departments for project development and, at the same time, find their access to or control over the administrative funds attached to their position heavily restricted.

5.8 Occupational Health and Safety Issues

A number of SNAP Officers and their managers spoke of the occupational health and safety (OH&S) implications of different aspects of SNAP Officers' work, expressing their concern that the issue is yet to be acknowledged and seriously addressed by the Department and despite its being raised as an issue of concern during the interim SNAP evaluation in 1991.

Situations with OH&S implications include, for example, working and travelling in remote locations and dealing with situations capable of causing high levels of personal stress, such as being regularly confronted with the distressing situation of people living in extreme hardship and the enormity of the task involved in helping those people to achieve positive changes in their lives, and having to work with communities and groups where there is internal conflict or division.

While stress is a part of many jobs in DSS, the particular stresses which characterise SNAP Officers' work are generally not experienced by other DSS staff (with the exception, to some extent, of other A&TSI services staff) and this situation is compounded by the fact that the position of SNAP Officers is generally a fairly isolated one in the office. Unlike most other staff, SNAP Officers have no 'ready-made' peer support group for the purposes of, for example, debriefing or emotional support and advice. While this role could be taken on by SNAP Officers' supervisors, not all managers have the necessary training, skills or inclination for this or the type of personal relationship with the SNAP Officer which would facilitate it.

There appears to be no immediate or simple solution to this problematic situation and it is one which needs to be addressed by the SNAP Program nationally with the assistance and cooperation of A&TSIS Units and Area and Regional management staff.

5.9 The Role of the National SNAP Coordinator

The original Budget allocation for the SNAP Program included provision for the position of a national coordinator of the Program to be based in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Section in National Administration. There have been periods in previous years when the national coordinator position has been perceived by SNAP Officers as not providing strong and visible support for or coordination of the Program - a situation at which all SNAP Officers participating in the evaluation expressed concern (as they did at the time of the interim SNAP evaluation in 1991 when the diminished role of DSS National Administration in coordinating the Program had also become an issue of concern) and which they saw as being at least partly responsible for the lack of national focus they felt the Program had been suffering from in recent years.

The various functions SNAP Officers would like to see included in role of the national coordinator include:

- maintaining regular contact with and providing support and a point of initial contact in National Administration for all SNAP Officers;
- coordinating and summarising SNAP Officers' quarterly reports for the purposes of
 - monitoring the progress of the Program nationally;
 - keeping relevant National Administration and Area senior executive staff informed of the progress of the Program; and
 - keeping all SNAP Officers informed of the progress of the Program nationally and in touch with the activities of their fellow SNAP Officers;
- initiating the referral of policy-related and other issues of concern raised by SNAP Officers in their reports to relevant Divisions within National Administration and, as necessary, to other government agencies and providing feedback to SNAP Officers on these issues;
- initiating and maintaining contact with staff in the national offices of other government agencies relevant to the SNAP Program for the purposes of facilitating a high level of awareness of and cooperation with the Program within those agencies;
- promoting throughout the Department a high level of awareness of the Program, of its role and function in the Department and of its value to DSS and to other service delivery agencies;
- coordinating the development at national and Area levels of information and promotional products for the Program;

- developing and maintaining a national data base of information and resource material on, for example, other agencies' services and funding programs relevant to the SNAP Program, community development literature particularly in relation to indigenous peoples and examples of 'best practice' in this area, and literature and resource material in such areas as nutrition, child care, women's issues etc;
- coordinating the implementation of a competency needs analysis of all interested SNAP Officers with a view to developing relevant Departmental training packages and developing and maintaining a national data base on external training courses of relevance to the SNAP Program, particularly in the field of community development.

5.10 Summary and Conclusions

Findings of the evaluation in regard to efficiency aspects of the SNAP Program's operation suggest that efficiency could be improved by across-the-board changes in the way the Program operates.

More support for and from local managers of the Program is required in such areas as assisting SNAP Officers with setting objectives for and planning their activities, measuring and reporting on the outcomes of these activities, initiating and maintaining effective working relationships with the management and staff of other relevant agencies and coping with the particular occupational health and safety effects of their working environment.

The role of Area Office-based Aboriginal and Torres Islander Services Unit Managers in managing and coordinating the SNAP Program in their Areas has remained unclear during the life of the SNAP Program, as has the role of the national coordinator of the Program and the working relationship of SNAP Officers *vis-à-vis* AIOs and other DSS Regional Office staff. Clarification of these roles and relationships has the potential to provide additional support for and coordination of the SNAP Program and understanding of the role of SNAP Officers within the DSS network.

Insufficient attention has been paid to providing SNAP Officers with the means of effectively and appropriately promoting the SNAP Program and its potential benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, the staff of other relevant agencies and within DSS.

Similarly, the specialised training needs of SNAP Officers are yet to be addressed appropriately and systematically by the Department. As well as training in aspects of community development, SNAP Officers require training in such areas as resource management to enable them to operate more efficiently. Access to resources in the form of clerical/administrative support, laptop computers and suitably equipped vehicles should also allow increased operational efficiencies.

5.11 Recommendations - Efficiency Issues

Management of the SNAP Program

In cooperation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop a detailed guide for SNAP Officers and local managers of the SNAP Program providing information on, for example, the Program and its aims, its role as a DSS program, community development methodology, examples of best practice, project planning and monitoring etc.

In cooperation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop a system for monitoring the Program at the local level, incorporating aspects of project planning, setting objectives, and monitoring outcomes via a regular reporting system. SNAP Program activities and projects should be included in Regional or Area Office business plans to facilitate coordination of project planning and monitoring at the local level.

In cooperation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop a standardised, flexible reporting format, preferably systems-based, which would allow SNAP Officers to report quarterly on their activities, the progress of projects and their outcomes and their planned activities and objectives for the following quarter. Such reports should be used by:

- Regional Managers to monitor the progress of projects and their outcomes at the local level and as a basis for providing regular feedback to SNAP Officers on their work and issues raised;*
- Area management and/or the Area SNAP Support Committee (see below) for planning, monitoring and providing feedback on Program activities at the Area Level; and*
- National Administration for monitoring and reporting on the Program at the national level, and providing feedback both to individual SNAP Officers and their managers on particular issues raised and to all SNAP Officers and their managers on the progress of the Program nationally.*

In order to provide ongoing support for SNAP Officers and local managers of the Program, where appropriate Areas should examine the possibility of establishing Area SNAP Support Committees involving SNAP Officers and their managers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit Manager and Area management representatives. Consideration should also be given to including local representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities as members of these committees. Such committees could meet quarterly with the overall aim of planning and coordinating the operation of the SNAP Program in the Area. The committee currently operating in Area North Australia could be used as a model.

The working relationship of SNAP Officers and AIOs and the extent of involvement of AIOs in SNAP Program activities should be further explored and clarified with a

view to maximising the impact of the SNAP Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

As a first step in addressing the particular occupational health and safety aspects of the SNAP Officer's role, the Work Environment Unit in National Administration should be approached for advice and assistance in establishing Area and Regional-based support systems to assist SNAP Officers to deal effectively with these issues.

Promotion of the SNAP Program

The production of new promotional material for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities should be planned without delay, with an emphasis on the use of video and simple printed material showing practical examples of the types of assistance SNAP Officers can provide. Areas or groups of Areas with similar needs and customer groups should produce promotional material to suit the needs of those groups and the direction of the Program in those Areas, with National Administration playing a coordinating role. The production of SNAP promotional material to be directed at other agencies should be planned and produced along similar lines.

Managers and SNAP Officers should work cooperatively in promoting awareness and understanding of the SNAP Program within the Regional/Area Office, using such avenues as Regional Office Management Team and other staff meetings and cultural awareness training for this purpose.

In consultation with SNAP Officers, National Administration should investigate avenues at the national level to promote the Program throughout the DSS network via such means as contributing articles and customer stories on SNAP to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services newsletter and the DSS National News, having SNAP featured on the Department's satellite broadcasts etc.

Training for SNAP Officers

In consultation with SNAP Officers and their managers, National Administration should develop and implement an appropriate competency needs analysis for all SNAP Officers, covering both the specialised skills required for the SNAP Program and generic skills required for working in DSS including in management positions.

As part of their initial training and induction, newly commencing SNAP Officers should spend a minimum of two weeks working with an experienced SNAP Officer (where possible from the same Area) to gain first-hand knowledge in, for example, establishing local networks, planning and managing workloads, preferred approaches to establishing SNAP projects etc.

All SNAP Officers should meet as a group once a year. Meetings of SNAP Officers at the Area level should preferably be held quarterly via Area SNAP Support Committees (referred to above). Such national and Area level meetings are necessary for the purposes of mutual support, information exchange and keeping up-to-date with new developments in the SNAP Program and in other programs and policies relevant to it.

Resources Issues

While the allocation and use of administrative funds for the SNAP Program remain the responsibility of the respective Area or Regional managements, it is recommended that SNAP Officers be provided with personal computers and have primary access to suitable vehicles to enable them efficiently and effectively to perform their duties and with due regard to their health and safety.

In consultation with Areas, National Administration should examine the possibility of providing ongoing clerical/administrative support to SNAP Officers, similar to that provided for JET Advisers.

LOCATIONS OF SNAP OFFICERS

	<i>Original Positions 1989/90</i>	<i>Additional Positions 1993/94</i>
Area North Australia		
Alice Springs	1	1
Katherine	1	
Broome	1	
Darwin	1	
Kununurra		1
Area North, Queensland		
Cairns	1	
Mt Isa	1	0.5
Thursday Island	1	
Townsville	1	
Rockhampton		1
Area Central, Queensland		
Beenleigh		0.5
Gympie		1
Area North, South Australia		
Adelaide	1	0.5
Area Pacific Central, New South Wales		
Coffs Harbour	1	
Goondiwindi		1
Area South-West, New South Wales		
Queanbeyan	1	
Dubbo		1
Wagga Wagga		1
Area North, Western Australia		
Geraldton		1
South Hedland		0.5
Area South, Western Australia		
Perth	2	
Areas North, South and East Victoria		
Shepparton (relocated to Melbourne in 1993)	1	
Area West, Victoria		
Warmambool		1

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS INTERVIEWED FOR THE EVALUATION

AREA NORTH QUEENSLAND

Townsville Region

SNAP Officer, Townsville Regional Office
Regional Manager, Townsville Regional Office
AILOs (2), Townsville Regional Office
Area Deputy Manager, Area North
Program Manager, Program Delivery, Area North
Outreach Manager, Area North

Nutritionist, Nutrition Unit, Aboriginal and Islander Health Program, Qld Department of Health
Women's Issues Officer, ATSIC
Coordinator, Jurragi Youth Organisation

Cairns Region

SNAP Officer, Cairns Regional Office
Regional Manager, Cairns Regional Office
Senior AILO, Cairns Regional Office

Women's Issues Officer, ATSIC
Health Worker, Sexual Health Unit, Aboriginal and Islander Health Program, Qld Department of Health
Administrator, Njiku Jowan Aboriginal Legal Service
Coordinator, Warringu Women's Organisation
Pormpur Paanth Aboriginal Co-op, Pormpuraaw

Torres Strait

SNAP Officer, Thursday Island DSSO

Coordinator, Keriba Kazil, Thursday Island
Mura Kosker Sorority, Thursday Island
Physiotherapist, Thursday Island Hospital
Secretary, Island Coordinating Council, Thursday Island
St Paul's Community Council, Moa Island
Health Action Group, St Paul's Community, Moa Island
Werriber Island Community

AREA NORTH AUSTRALIA

Alice Springs Region

SNAP Officer, Alice Springs Regional Office
Regional Manager, Alice Springs Regional Office
Acting Manager, Remote Area Services Unit, Alice Springs Regional Office
AILOs (3), Alice Springs Regional Office
Disability Support Officer, Alice Springs Regional Office

Vocational Officer, DEET
Health Worker, NT Department of Health and Community Services
Utopia Aboriginal Community

Darwin Region

SNAP Officer, Darwin Regional Office

Non-Government Liaison Officer, Rural Health Services, NT Department of Health
and Community Services
Community Council, Milikapiti, Melville Island
Coordinator, Nutrition Program, Milikapiti, Melville Island
Coordinator, Women's Resource Centre, Port Keats/Wadeye
Gunbulunya Community Council, Oenpelli, Western Arnhem Land

Broome Region

SNAP Officer, Broome Regional Office
Regional Manager, Broome Regional Office
AILO, Broome Regional Office

DEET Office, Broome
Muludja Community, Fitzroy Crossing
Maminwarntikura Women's Group, Fitzroy Crossing
Bayulu Aboriginal Community
Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community

AREA NORTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Perth

SNAP Officer, Area North
Area Manager, Area North
Program Manager, Program Delivery, Area North
Manager, Aboriginal Programs and Services, Area North

Yorga Myee Nutrition Program Inter-Agency Committee, Mirabooka

Kalgoorlie Region

Regional Manager, Kalgoorlie Regional Office
AILO, Kalgoorlie Regional Office

Coordinator, Djidjiku Pre School, Kalgoorlie
Coonana Aboriginal Community

AREA SOUTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Perth

SNAP Officer, Area South
Area Manager, Area South
Manager, Aboriginal Programs and Services, Area South
Program Manager, Program Delivery, Area South
Regional Manager, Gosnells Regional Office

Coordinator, Roberta Jull Family Day Care Centre, Gosnells
Coordinator, Armadale Family Day Care Centre

AREA NORTH, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Adelaide

SNAP Officer, Area North
Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit, Area North

Health Development Foundation

Port Augusta Region

AILO, Port Augusta Regional Office

Aboriginal Health Worker, Pika Wiya Nutrition Program

AREA WEST, VICTORIA

SNAP Officer, Warrnambool Regional Office
Regional Manager, Warrnambool Regional Office

Community Youth Enterprise Horticulture Project Management Committee,
Warrnambool

Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-op, Horsham
State Manager, Aboriginal Programs, DEET, Melbourne
State Manager, Aboriginal Employment Strategy, DEET, Melbourne
State Manager, CDEP, ATSIC State Office, Melbourne
Strategic Planning Officer, ATSIC State Office, Melbourne
Senior Field Officer, ATSIC State Office, Melbourne

AREA PACIFIC CENTRAL, NEW SOUTH WALES

SNAP Officer, Area Office, Coffs Harbour

Coordinator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit, Area Pacific Central,
Coffs Harbour

Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit, Area Pacific Central,
Coffs Harbour

Miimi Mothers Aboriginal Corporation, Bowraville

AREA SOUTH-WEST, NEW SOUTH WALES

SNAP Officer, Area Office, Queanbeyan

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES USED FOR THE EVALUATION

Personal and focus group interviews for the evaluation were conducted with SNAP Officers, their managers, other DSS staff associated with the SNAP Program, the staff of other agencies and organisations with whom SNAP Officers have had contact in the course of their duties and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and family groups which SNAP Officers have endeavoured to assist. Actual respondents are listed in Attachment 2.

The following schedules were used as a basis for the interviews. The schedules comprise mainly open-ended questions/discussion points and the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way and with the degree of formality/informality appropriate to the setting and the respondent/group.

Where possible (and particularly in the case of the focus group interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and family groups), interviews were conducted jointly by both (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) members of the evaluation team.

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

SNAP OFFICER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Understanding of the SNAP Program

1. What is your understanding of the SNAP Program/your role as a SNAP Officer?

Working as a SNAP Officer

2. Can you describe generally how you have been working as a SNAP Officer? eg
 - what sorts of communities/groups/organisations have you been working with?
 - what sorts of projects have you been involved in?
 - how often do you visit communities you are working with?
 - how much contact do you have with other government agencies and community organisations?
 - how much time have you spent promoting the SNAP Program to communities and other organisations/government agencies?
3. Which of the projects you have been involved in do you think were particularly successful (and why)?
4. Were any of them not so successful (and why)?
5. How relevant do you think the original objectives of the SNAP Program are in relation to the way you work as a SNAP Officer (eg do you think promoting Family Payments should be one of the main tasks of SNAP Officers)?
6. What do you think of the idea of SNAP Officers having 'seeding money' (say \$200-\$300 a year) to help get small projects off the ground?
7. Is there a local support/advisory committee for the SNAP Program involving DSS, other agencies and community representatives?
 - how effective/useful is it?
 - if there isn't one, do you think there is a need for one?

Promoting the SNAP Program

8. How well known do you think the SNAP Program is among the communities and agencies/organisations you work with?
9. Do people in the communities you work with know you are from DSS?
10. Can they distinguish your role from that of:
 - AILOs?
 - staff from other government agencies?

11. What is the best way to promote the SNAP Program to communities and other agencies/organisations?
12. Do you currently use any publicity materials to promote the SNAP Program?
13. What sorts of promotional materials do you think we need to develop for the Program?
14. What is your view of the need for a name change for the SNAP Program?

Working with Other Field Staff

15. Do you ever do joint visits to communities with:
 - AILOs?
 - staff from other government agencies?
16. Do you see any overlaps in your role and the role of AILOs?
 - Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
17. Do you think AILOs have a good understanding of your role?
18. Do you ever refer clients to AILOs and vice versa?

The SNAP Program and the Regional/Area Office

19. Do you think other staff in the Regional/Area Office have a good understanding of your role?
20. Do you attend management team meetings:
 - regularly?
 - sometimes?
 - never?
21. How do you see your role in relation to other staff in the Regional/Area Office?
 - as a specialist position?
 - as part of A&TSI Services
 - other (eg part of the management team)?
22. Do you ever have any problems getting access to the resources you need (eg travel funds, car, computer etc)?

Reporting and Supervision

23. What are the current supervision/reporting arrangements for the SNAP Officer position:
 - day-to-day?
 - other?
24. Do you think these arrangements need to be changed?
 - how?

25. How often do you provide written reports to your supervisor/A&TSI Services Manager?
26. Do you usually get feedback on these reports?
27. Do you think the current requirements for written reports need to be changed?
 - how?
28. Would you like to have more regular contact with the SNAP Coordinator in National Administration?

Training

29. What training have you had for your job as a SNAP Officer?
30. What other sort of training do you think you need:
 - in your role as a SNAP Officer?
 - to expand your career development opportunities?
31. Would you like to see SNAP Officers having the opportunity to act/work in management positions in the Regional/Area Office?
32. Since you have been working as a SNAP Officer, have you had OR have you wanted the opportunity to act in other positions in the Regional/Area Office?
33. Do you think experienced SNAP Officers should be involved in helping train new SNAP Officers?
34. Would you like to have more regular contact with other SNAP Officers?

Future Directions for the SNAP Program?

35. Do you have any (other) thoughts as to how you would like to see the SNAP Program/your role as a SNAP Officer changed?

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

AILO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is your understanding of the SNAP Program/the role of the SNAP Officer?
2. What is your view of how the SNAP Program has been operating in your Region?
3. How well known is the SNAP Program
 - in the communities you visit?
 - among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally in your Region?
 - among other agencies?
4. Can you describe your working relationship with the SNAP Officer?
eg
 - do you jointly plan your activities/field trips?
 - do you often do joint field trips?
 - do you refer clients to the SNAP Officer and vice versa?
5. Do you see any overlaps in the AILO and SNAP Officer roles?
6. Can people in communities distinguish your role as an AILO from that of the SNAP Officer?
7. Would you like to see the AILO role expanded to include some of the things SNAP Officers do?
8. Do you promote the SNAP Program in the communities you visit?
9. What do you think are the best ways of promoting the SNAP Program
 - to other agencies?
 - to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
 - within DSS?
10. How do you see the position of the SNAP Officer in the Regional Office structure? eg
 - as part of A&TSI Services?
 - as a specialist staff position (like social worker/DSO etc)?
 - as part of the management team?
11. Are there any changes you would like to see in the way the SNAP Program operates?

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

REGIONAL MANAGER INTERVIEW: DISCUSSION POINTS

- Your understanding of the SNAP Program and its objectives
- How the SNAP Program has been working in your Region
 - general description/assessment including strengths and weaknesses
 - general approach of SNAP Officer
 - types of communities/groups SNAP Officer has been working with
 - types of projects SNAP Officer has been involved in
 - extent of contact/involvement with other agencies
- Your perception of the profile/reputation of the SNAP Program
 - in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
 - with other agencies
- Your views on promoting the SNAP Program
 - to other agencies
 - to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
 - within DSS
- Your role in the SNAP Program, eg
 - setting objectives/developing work plan
 - supervision/reporting
 - assessing performance/outcomes
- The SNAP Officer and the Regional Office, eg
 - working relationship with AILOs/overlaps in roles?
 - position in RO structure
 - member of ROMT?
 - seen as specialist staff/part of A&TSI Services/other?
 - resources issues
- SNAP Program links with Area A&TSI Services Manager/National Administration
- Training/development needs of SNAP Officer
 - in role as SNAP Officer
 - for general career development in DSS
 - how should the training be provided?
- Your view of the idea of SNAP Officers having 'seeding money' (say \$200-\$300 a year) to help get small projects off the ground
- Your view of the need for a name change for the SNAP Program
- Future directions for the SNAP Program (*if not already covered*)

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR A&TSI SERVICES MANAGER (SNAP OFFICER'S SUPERVISOR)

1. What is your understanding of the SNAP Program/the role of the SNAP Officer?
2. Can you describe how the SNAP Program has been working in your Area?
 - general description/assessment including strengths and weaknesses
 - general approach of SNAP Officer
 - types of communities/groups SNAP Officer has been working with
 - types of projects SNAP Officer has been involved in
 - extent of contact/involvement with other agencies
3. What is your perception of the profile/reputation of the SNAP Program
 - in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
 - with other agencies?
4. Can you describe your role in the SNAP Program
 - eg
 - setting objectives/developing work plans
 - supervision/reporting
 - assessing performance/outcomes
5. Does the SNAP Program in your Area need more support from Area Management and/or National Administration? eg
 - in regard to overall planning
 - in developing and maintaining links with other agencies
 - in regard to resources
6. Can you describe the SNAP Officer's working relationship with AILOs?
 - eg
 - do they do joint field trips?
 - do they refer clients to each other?
7. Do you see any overlaps in the roles of AILOs and the SNAP Officer?
8. What do you think are the best ways of promoting the SNAP Program
 - to other agencies?
 - to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
 - within DSS?
9. What is the SNAP Officer's position within the Area Office structure?
 - eg
 - seen as part of A&TSI Services/as specialist staff/other?
 - understanding of the SNAP Officer's role by other Area Office staff
 - resources issues

10. What do you think are the training/development needs of the SNAP Officer eg
 - in his/her role as a SNAP Officer?
 - for general career development in DSS?
11. How do you think this training should be provided?
12. What is your view of the idea of SNAP Officers having 'seeding money' (say \$200-\$300 a year) to help get small projects off the ground?
13. What is your view of the need for a name change for the SNAP Program?
14. What are your views about future directions for the SNAP Program (*if not already covered*)?

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR A&TSI SERVICES MANAGER (NOT SNAP OFFICER'S SUPERVISOR)

1. What is your understanding of the SNAP Program/the role of the SNAP Officer?
2. Can you describe how the SNAP Program has been working in your Area?
3. What is your perception of the profile/reputation of the SNAP Program
 - in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
 - with other agencies?
 - with Area Management
4. Can you describe your role in the SNAP Program
 - eg
 - setting objectives/developing work plans
 - supervision/reporting
 - assessing performance/outcomes
5. Does the SNAP Program in your Area need more support from Area Management and/or National Administration? eg
 - in regard to overall planning
 - in developing and maintaining links with other agencies
 - in regard to resources
6. Do you see any overlaps in the roles of AILOs and the SNAP Officer?
7. What do you think are the best ways of promoting the SNAP Program
 - to other agencies?
 - to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
 - within DSS?
8. What do you think are the training/development needs of SNAP Officers eg
 - in their role as SNAP Officers?
 - for general career development in DSS?
9. How do you think this training should be provided?
10. What is your view of the idea of SNAP Officers having 'seeding money' (say \$200-\$300 a year) to help get small projects off the ground?
11. What is your view of the need for a name change for the SNAP Program?
12. What are your views about future directions for the SNAP Program (*if not already covered*)?

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAFF OF OTHER AGENCIES

1. What is your understanding of the SNAP Program/the role of the SNAP Officer?
2. Can you describe your working relationship with the SNAP Officer
eg do you do joint field trips to communities?
3. What value do you see in the SNAP Program
 - for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
 - as an additional source of referral to/information about your agency's programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
 - as a source of information for you on other agencies programs and on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in your region?
4. How well known is the SNAP Program
 - in your agency?
 - in communities you work with?
5. Do people in communities you work with know SNAP is a DSS program?
6. What do you think are the best ways of promoting the SNAP Program
 - to agencies like yours?
 - to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
7. Would you like to see any changes
 - in the SNAP Program overall?
 - in the way the SNAP Officer operates?
8. What is your view of the need for a name change for the SNAP Program?

SNAP PROGRAM EVALUATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

- (1a. What is your understanding of the SNAP Program/the role of the SNAP Officer?)
1. Can you describe the projects/sorts of things the SNAP Officer has helped you with?
 2. How did you first find out about the SNAP Program and the sorts of things the SNAP Officer could help you with?
 3. Are there other sorts of things you'd like the SNAP Officer to be able to help you with?
 4. Do people in your community/group know the SNAP Officer is from Social Security?
 5. How much contact do people in your community/group have with other people from:
 - Social Security?
 - other government departments like ATSIIC and DEET?
 6. What sorts of things do these people help you with?
 7. What do you think are the best ways for the SNAP Officer to let people know about the SNAP Program and the sorts of things the SNAP Officer can help them with?