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SOCIAL SUPPORT IN SMALL REMOTE TOWNS IN FAR NORTH
AND NORTH-WEST QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA: IMPLICATIONS
FOR HUMAN SERVICES

SOCIAL SUPPORT IN SMALL REMOTE TOWNS IN FAR NORTH
AND NORTH-WEST QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA: IMPLICATIONS
FOR HUMAN SERVICES.

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Submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy (Behavioural Sciences), James Cook University of
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ABSTRACT

The overriding aim of this investigation was to develop implications for providing a number of personal support services to people living in small remote service towns on the basis of a descriptive analysis of their anticipated support sources for a variety of needs.

186 children and childrearsers living in 45 non-Aboriginal and partly Aboriginal families in three similar small service towns in remote Far North and North-west Queensland, Australia, were interviewed about their anticipated supports for 26 different needs. Respondents were also asked about the anticipated contribution of these supports to resolving their problems and their reasons for choosing them. A cross-sectional census design was used, with most data being collected through partly structured individual interviews.

Needs investigated concerned: representation for five shared community concerns (deficiencies in health, education, child care and essential services, and the local unemployment problem); personal unemployment; legal, health and education problems; child development, emotional, psychological, social integration and childrearser relationship problems; temporary and prolonged, occasional and constant child care assistance; and temporary and prolonged assistance with household chores, destitution, accommodation, and in the event of the incapacity of one's partner.

Results were similar for the three towns, for different kinds of residents and for both the Dry and Wet seasons.

Respondents chose formal service organisations for needs requiring political representation, needs which are generally regarded in Australian society as requiring expert professional intervention, and those for which widely recognised and accepted formal services exist.

Among natural supports, respondents strongly preferred to seek help from intimate associates, usually close relatives or friends, especially for needs which were personally embarrassing, socially stigmatised, highly demanding of supports, and/or highly dependency creating.

Respondents chose both local and non-local supports, whether these were formal organisations or natural sources. Distance from supports neither left respondents without assistance nor reduced its effectiveness. They used locally available formal services. Distance did not affect support-seeking from natural supports for highly embarrassing, stigmatised, demanding and/or dependency creating needs. However, local natural sources were preferred for other needs where local availability was an important consideration. There were no local key helpers for these sub-populations.

Twelve principles for resourcing the provision of personal support to residents of these towns are presented and implications for a number of human services are developed. It is suggested that for Australian remote areas the concept of 'linking' formal services with natural and informal supports should be replaced with a more detailed, complex and extensive 'interweaving' model; and that a 'community oriented' model of service provision should not be entirely locality-based but should include relationships between residents and non-local people and organisations.