

Youth Development in Central Australia Beyond 2012

Discussion Paper

Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service, September 2011



“There has been lots of break in’s recently, 12 kids were involved. Nights when the youth program is on are quiet nights, there’s not as much trouble”.

Male 26 Central Australia

“Youth program is good for kids and teenagers, it keeps them busy. One good thing is they take old ladies and young girls on bush trips to share cultural teaching and teach hunting”.

Female 50 Central Australia

“They do a good job but we need more. There was no disco last week. We need more night time events, even on school nights because the older teenagers still need things to do and if the little kids are kept busy they sleep well and are ready for school the next day”.

Female 35 Central Australia

Synopsis

Options and supports for young people and their families have improved considerably in many Central Australian Communities in recent years. Youth Services, the roll out of Opal fuel¹, school nutrition² programs and other supports for families have meant that day to day young people in many communities have a greater range of options, a safer environment and better access to food than the young people of 10 years ago. However major challenges still remain: unlike populations around the world these young people face the likelihood of being less literate (in both western and local language and culture) and dying younger their grandparents generation. Without a determined effort this generation may be less able than those past to meaningfully participate in the governance and administrative affairs that determine many aspects of their lives. The implications of the work that is done and the decisions that are made now will last well beyond the lives of these young people themselves.

This discussion paper is from the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service, an agency with its feet firmly on the ground in remote Central Australia. It proposes some concrete ways forward that build on what has been working. It proposes that effort needs to be made now to identify and plan to fill gaps in youth program funding in order to ensure that existing momentum is maintained and not lost when current programs end in 2012. We are proposing that youth services should be considered 'essential services' in the same way as services such as schools, clinics and power stations which are considered basic and necessary parts of remote community infrastructure. We argue that programs that support the recreational social and emotional needs of the next generation need to be present in all Central Australian remote communities, with ongoing rather than episodic funding.

Background

When CAYLUS started in 2002 services for young people in Central Australia were thin on the ground. With the exception of the Mt Theo Program at Yuendumu, youth development services were often run quietly on the side of sport and rec or after-school programs without clear support for this from funders. They suffered from inconsistency due to funding and staffing issues and were often compromised by a lack of regional coordination and quality control.

¹Peter d'Abbs and Gillian Shaw 2008, Executive summary of the Evaluation of the Impact of Opal Fuel, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra

²Tristan Ray and Gillian Shaw 2011, Community Safety and Wellbeing Research Study, Alpururulam Community Analysis Report, FAHCSIA, Canberra

In the 9 years since, there has been an increasing recognition of the tenuous situation of youth and children in remote communities. Through government initiatives such as the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, The Youth Alcohol Diversion Measure, the NTER and associated programs and finally The Youth In Communities Measure a model of integrated and regionally managed Youth Services has emerged in Central Australia. These programs have been the first occasion in which discreet specific youth programs with a development focus have been funded in the region.

The Youth In Communities Measure has been the most recent of these targeted youth funding measures from the Australian Government. Funding under this measure runs out in June 2012, and there is currently no commitment to continue the programs it has supported. In Central Australia the Youth in Communities Measure has considerably improved services to young people in the West Macdonnell Communities through funding services delivered by the Macdonnell Shire and NPY Women's Council and in Warlpiri Communities through the Mt Theo Program.

Where kids have missed out

The Youth In Communities Measure has been a limited pool of funding, and consequently many Central Australian Youth missed out on support through the program. Notably in the Barkly Shire youth in the larger communities of Ampilatwatja, Lake Nash, Arlparra and Ali Curung received no services through the measure. In the Central Desert Shire youth in Harts Range, Ti Tree, Mt Allen, Engawala, Nyirripi, Willowra and Laramba also missed out. In the MacDonnell Shire, Santa Teresa, Amoongana and Titjikala are all sites that have not been supported through Youth In Communities funding. The situation in these communities continues to be sub-optimal, with insufficient services, delivered in a poorly coordinated way using patchy funding.

The case for continuing and expanding support for youth development programs

The situation of remote Central Australian communities is not great: people suffer from the effects of unemployment and poverty, isolation from services, decaying infrastructure, low levels of English language literacy, and leadership and governance structures that are under great pressure. In this environment the Recreational, Social and Emotional needs of youth often get lost. Youth programs where they exist are often seen as not having clear and quantifiable results. However as young people increasingly

become the largest population in many communities (38% under 14 years of age³) and take on leadership roles and responsibilities the need to have young people who are valued and capable in both the eyes of their families and the eyes of wider Australia is increasingly apparent. Education in schools while fundamental to this is only part of the answer. Programs that support the recreational, cultural as well as social and emotional needs of school age children and their young parents and older siblings, uncles and aunts are also necessary.

Youth services in Central Australia provide the following positive outcomes,

- increased school attendance
- improved child and maternal health
- better child nutrition
- reduced prevalence of youth substance misuse
- reduced levels of crime
- better uptake of employment opportunities by young people
- local support and coordination for visiting child and family services
- faster and coordinated response to emerging local child welfare issues
- better family and community involvement in child and youth services
- emergency and crisis support for young people and families
- practical support for emerging young community leaders

The evidence base

The 2010 Strategic Review of Indigenous expenditure acknowledges the value of youth services⁴

“Research⁵ consistently points to the benefits in engaging young people, especially youth at risk, using a ‘strengths’ based approach, rather than a ‘deficits’ based paradigm. In practice, this means utilising approaches that recognised and value the inherent resilience, strengths and capabilities within each person (or family or community) and building on those, rather than the standard approach of focusing on gaps, weaknesses, vulnerabilities and risks – these approaches do not ignore risks, but acknowledge that

³ Population characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006, Catalogue no. 4713.0, ABS, Canberra, 2008.

⁴ p.124 Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure, Australian Government, Canberra

⁵ W Muller, *A Strength-Based Approach to Building Resiliency in Youth, Families and Community* (2005); W Hammond, *Nurturing Resiliency in Youth and Community*, Canada (2005); A Kalil, *Family Resiliency and Good Child Outcomes: An Overview of the Research Literature* (2003); Youth Mentoring Network, *Building connections for youth mentoring in Aotearoa New Zealand*.

individuals and communities have a combination of risk factors and protective factors which shape their development.

In this context, evidence⁶ supports the experiences of local youth workers and service providers (in Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts) that demonstrates that developing and nurturing connections with their cultural heritage – connection to country, ceremony, music, dance, language, lore, etc – as well as modern culture – music, dance, media and technology, sport and recreation – are protective factors for young people as well as ‘soft entry points’ for engaging with those most at risk including those already marginalised and disengaged. This approach can also reinforce the position of traditional elders in Indigenous community life and become mutually strengthening.”

The value of youth development is also recognised in the Key Indicators Report on Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2011⁷. The report states

“The indicators in this strategic area for action focus on the key factors that contribute to safe and supportive communities, as well as some measures of the implications of breakdown in family and community relationships: participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities — participation in sport can contribute to good physical and mental health; confidence and self-esteem; improved academic performance; and reduced crime, smoking and illicit drug use. Indigenous people’s participation in artistic and cultural activities helps to reinforce and preserve living culture, and can also provide a profitable source of employment.”

The Report goes on to quote the evidence for this statement (text has been modified to show full references as footnotes)⁸

“Participation in sport and recreational activities from an early age has the potential to widely benefit individuals and communities⁹ by:

- strengthening the body and preventing disease — regular physical activity helps to build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints and control body weight. Physical activity can also help prevent chronic diseases and assist those with chronic diseases in their health programs¹⁰

⁶ SR Zubrick, SR Silburn, DM Lawrence, FG Mitrou, RB Dalby, EM Blair, J Griffin, H Milroy, JA De Maio, A Cox, & J Li, *loc. cit.*

⁷ p.596 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2011 Key Indicators, Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Australian Government, Melbourne

⁸ p.598-9 Ibid

⁹ UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) 2004, *Sport, Recreation and Play* United Nations Children’s Fund Division of Communication, New York, August.

¹⁰ Fereday, J., MacDougall, C., Spizzo, M., Darbyshire, P. and Schiller, W. 2009, “‘There’s nothing I can’t do — I just put my mind to anything and I can do it’: A qualitative analysis of how children with chronic disease

- preparing infants for future learning
- reducing the risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties — the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS 2005) found that young Indigenous children who did not participate in organised sport were twice as likely to be at high risk of emotional or behavioural difficulties than Indigenous children who participated in sport (16 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively)¹¹
- reducing symptoms of stress and depression¹² A US study found that active children were depressed less often than inactive children¹³
- improving confidence and self-esteem — a study of year seven students found that students involved in organised sports reported higher overall self-esteem and were judged by their teachers to be more socially skilled and less shy than students who did not participate in organised sports¹⁴
- improving learning and academic performance — studies have found that the quality and quantity of physical activity affects children's attention levels and academic performance at school. Barber, Eccles and Stone¹⁵, reported that high school students who participated in organised sports in year 10 completed more years of schooling and experienced lower levels of social isolation than non-participants
- preventing smoking and the use of illicit drugs — Carinduff¹⁶ suggested that involvement in sport and recreation has the potential to reduce levels of substance abuse and self-harm

and their parents account for and manage physical activity', *BMC Pediatrics*, vol. 9, no. 1, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2636806/?tool=pubmed> (accessed 5 November 2010).

¹¹ Zubrick, S.R., Silburn, S.R., Lawrence, D.M., Mitrou, F.G., Dalby, R.B., Blair, E.M., Griffin, J., Milroy, H., De Maio, J.A., Cox, A. and Li, J. 2005, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.

¹² Street, G., James, R. and Cutt, H. 2007, 'The relationship between organised physical recreation and mental health', *Health Promotion Journal Australia*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 236–239.

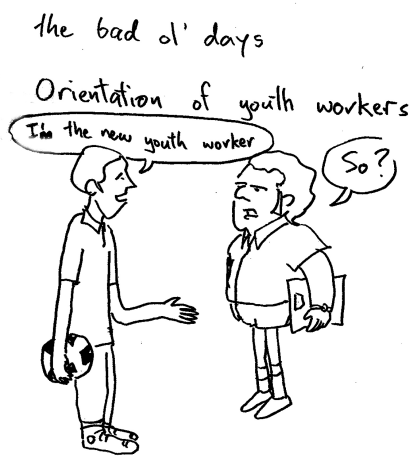
¹³ ACF (Administration for Children and Families) 2002, *Early Head Start Benefits Children and Families: Research Brief*, ACF, United States Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴ Bush, L., McHale, J., Vinden, P., Richer, D., Shaw, D. and Smith, B. 2001, 'Functions of sport for urban middle school children', paper presented at the American Psychological Association's 109th Annual Conference, San Francisco, California, 25 August.

¹⁵ Barber, B.L., Eccles, J.S. and Stone, M.R. 2001, 'Whatever happened to the jock, the brain, and the princess?: Young adult pathways linked to adolescent activity involvement and social identity', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, vol. 16, no. 5, September.

¹⁶ Carinduff, S. 2001, *Sport and Recreation for Indigenous Youth in the Northern Territory*, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health and the Australian Sports Commission.

- reducing and preventing crime — the Australian Institute of Criminology found that participation in sport and physical activity programs reduces antisocial behaviour (such as engaging in drug and alcohol use and criminal offences) and improves the protective factors (such as leadership and self-esteem) that prevent young people becoming involved in antisocial and criminal behaviour¹⁷



¹⁷ Morris, L., Sallybanks, J., and Willis, K. 2003, *Sport, Physical Activity and Antisocial Behaviour in Youth*. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Continuing and Expanding The Youth In Communities Measure

When the Youth In Communities Measure expires in June 2012 there is a danger that the activities it funds in Central Australia will either cease or have to dramatically downscale, losing staff and along with them the working relationships that have been developed.

As such CAYLUS suggests the following:

That the Australian Government commits to refunding the Youth in Communities Measure for a further 3 years. That the measure is refunded at least the same level with allowance for indexation.

That priority is given to maintaining continuity of services in Central Australia in order to minimise disruption in Communities as funding arrangements transition.

That the Australian Government recognise the importance of maintaining services through the high-risk June/July school holiday period and funding arrangements are settled well in advance of this period in 2012.

Further that it is recognised that all youth in Central Australia should have access to at least basic youth services and as such additional funding is made available through the continued Youth In Communities Measure to support the development of new services in Central Australia.