



2 November 2012

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the House of Representatives inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring.

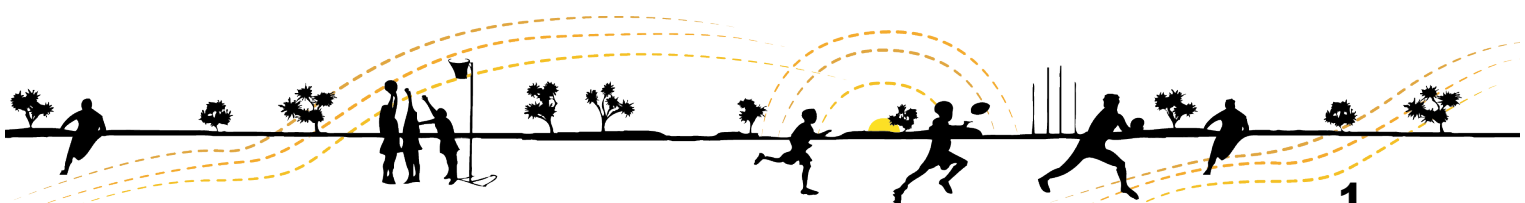
The National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) is a wholly **Aboriginal governed** organisation, founded in 1995 by former NRL player David Liddiard, an Aboriginal man from western Sydney. Through his own experiences David knew the positive impact that sport could have on the wellbeing of Aboriginal people and he wanted to provide those opportunities to other young Aboriginal people like himself.

The links between sport, positive education and health outcomes and child and youth development are well documented. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) first recognized sport as a tool for education and incorporated it into its program in 1952 and more recently sport is being used as a tool across all Millennium Development Goals (Right to Play, 2008).

The views in this submission are based on the seventeen years experience NASCA has in using sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and come from the perspective of an independent, non-government Aboriginal organisation. I have attached a document prepared by NASCA in February this year, titled 'Aboriginal Disadvantage, Sport and Engagement' (Clement, 2012) and would like to draw your attention to Chapter 5, which details how our programs are successfully working towards closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, building a strong sense of self efficacy and empowering our young people through the use of sport, sports based activities, role models and mentoring.

Some main points to highlight include:

- Increased school attendance rates
- Improved attitudes towards school
- Retention through to Year 12
- Improved numeracy & literacy
- Greater sense of culture and identity
- Working with over 1000 kids per year
- Strengthened levels of school engagement
- Higher levels of physical activity
- Improved confidence & self esteem
- Development of life skills such as leadership
- Increased knowledge & qualifications





Research by NASCA Gift Fund Committee member Colin Tatz shows that improvement in nearly all these areas correlate with a decrease in Aboriginal youth suicide. His 1994 report 'Aborigines, Sport Violence and Suicide' (Tatz, 1994) concluded that:

- 'sport has helped reduce the considerable internalised violence, homicide, suicide, attempted suicide, rape, self-mutilation, serious assault—prevalent in some disordered communities;
- sport provides a centrality, a sense of loyalty and cohesion that has replaced some of the 'lost' structures in communities that so recently operated as Christian missions and government settlements;
- sport has become a vital force in the very survival of several communities now in danger of social disintegration;
- sport is a cheap enough option in the way it assists in reducing the second-highest cause of Aboriginal deaths, namely, from external or non-natural causes;
- sport has been effective in keeping youth out of serious (and mischievous) trouble during football and basketball seasons; and
- sport is essential to counter the morale and moral despair of many Aborigines.'

'Sport is one of the most cross-cutting of all development and peace tools. It is increasingly being used to promote health and prevent disease, strengthen child and youth development and education, foster social inclusion, prevent conflict and build peace, foster gender equity, enhance inclusion of persons with disabilities, and promote employment and economic development' (Right to Play, 2008).

NASCA's seventeen years of community engagement and program delivery has created a trusted brand where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders feel safe and comfortable, allowing us to broaden our scope and **aspirations beyond sport**. This is attainable because communities have that comfort and knowledge of our history and success. Our Board Directors come from a wide variety of industries; sport, the arts, community services and government.

Using sport as the engagement point, NASCA has evolved to address the **social determinants of health** through:

- **Education** and skills development;
- Building **self efficacy and social wellbeing** in our students;
- **Creating, broadening and encouraging students aspirations from an employment pathways perspective beyond sport**, through our wide variety of partnerships in the private sector who assist in the delivery of activities and our role models who come from a range of industries; and
- Facilitating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development in a **safe, trusted and comfortable space**.





Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

Further to our attached report, I would also like to comment on the importance of providing services directly targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. Through our programs and conversations with school staff and community members, we have identified a need to provide additional support to females in a 'female only' environment. For example, in our ARMtour (Athletes as Role Models) program in the Northern Territory, we have created Kungka Klub (Girls Club) which combines popular education and arts based activities, with personal development sessions where the girls explore themes related to body image, self-esteem, identity, leadership, goal setting and careers.

Facilitated as an after-school workshop or a class session workshop Kungka Klub provides a safe space for girls to come together, have fun in a relaxed environment, chat, ask questions and develop a strong relationship with female role models/mentors from NASCA and from their community. We also run a Girls Club session in our Careers and Aspirations Camps.

Building strong self-esteem and positive body image in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls is essential to creating strong healthy communities. It also helps develop confidence in making decisions about becoming sexually active at early ages, living healthy lifestyles and staying in school.

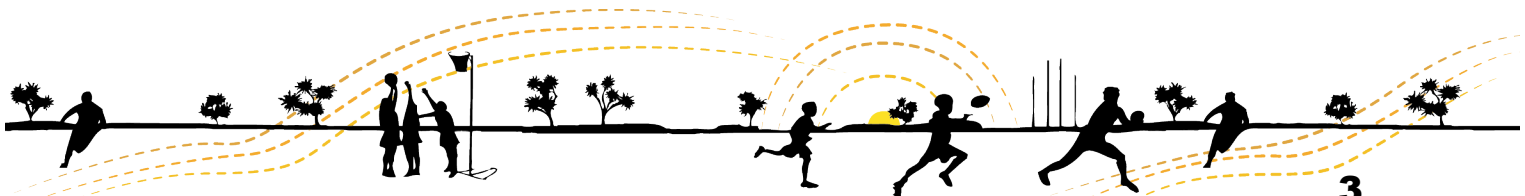
Further to this, it is critical for our students that we model positive healthy relationships between males and females. We always provide an equal male to female role model/mentor ratio on the ARMtour program, a balance of male and female staff members on our Careers and Aspirations Camps and ensure there are enough female teachers and support staff involved in the Academies. NASCA also has a strong female staff contingent, three female Board Directors and a female Chairperson who are modeling positive career pathways for our students.

NASCA strongly believes in the ability of sport and positive female role models to empower young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. We recently submitted applications to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to establish Girls Academies in the Illawarra and western Sydney regions, as part of the Sporting Chance Program.

The contribution of Indigenous sporting programs as supplied by the sporting codes

Seventeen years ago the aim of NASCA was to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in sport, provide young people with the opportunities to develop their sporting prowess and create career pathways. NASCA was filling a gap to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent in sport, because no one else was. This was done through clinics, camps, carnivals, scholarships and talent identification programs, across the country. One of our success stories, golfer Scott Gardiner who was a NASCA scholarship holder and trainee, has recently been selected to join the PGA Tour in America in 2013, becoming the very first Aboriginal person to do so.

For many years David Liddiard campaigned government and the major sporting codes to impress upon them the significant role that sport can play in improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. David was insistent that the sports codes needed to provide opportunities and support to





develop career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It took many years before he was heard. For example, David spoke with seven successive CEO's at the NRL and it wasn't until David Moffett and David Gallop listened and finally got the ball rolling, creating the Indigenous programs now in existence at the NRL. NASCA was critical in opening doors and leading the dialogue in creating change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing.

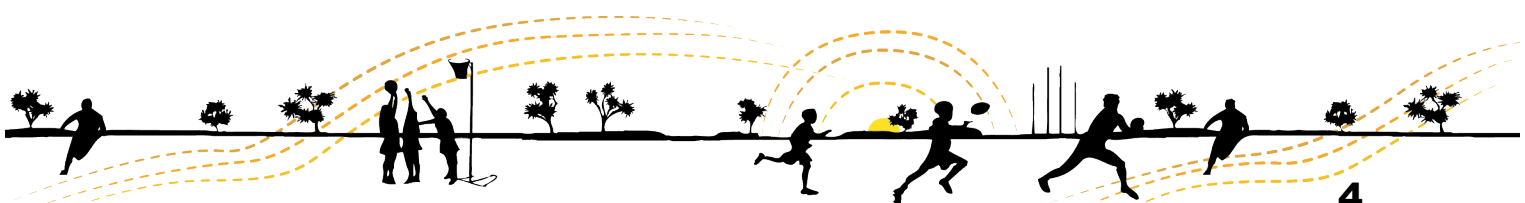
Eventually the major sporting codes developed their own programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which meant NASCA was able to focus more heavily on education, careers, health and personal development programs. Since then NASCA has worked in partnership with many of the major sporting codes, such as the NRL, the AFL, the Rugby Union Players Association, the Australian Institute of Sport, the state Institutes of Sport, Netball Australia, Softball Australia, Cricket Australia, Cricket NSW, Basketball Australia, Swimming Australia, Golf Australia, Baseball NSW, Volleyball NSW, Hockey NSW, Tennis NSW, Surfing NSW, Royal Life Saving and others. They have provided NASCA with role models/mentors and development officers for our ARMtour program, delivered skills sessions and accredited courses to students in our Academies and camps and donated sports equipment to NASCA and the schools and communities we work with. As you would be aware, non-government organisations are always in need of funding and support, a significant proportion of the support to NASCA from the major sporting bodies mentioned above has been free or at minimal cost. We would not have been able to provide many of the opportunities we have for our students without the support of the major sporting codes, yet we also believe there is always more that can be done.

For several years NASCA also received a cash donation from the NRL to support the NASCA Rugby League Challenge in Queensland. This program involved children and schools from around the Cape of Carpentaria coming to Townsville for a three day rugby league carnival with NASCA and the Queensland Cowboys. Based on attendance and behaviour, this camp was a reward and incentive for students. Whilst an extremely popular event in the region, unfortunately due to funding cuts we have been unable to run it since 2010. NASCA contributed towards transport costs for the schools to come to Townsville and the schools would pay the balance, however the schools' source of funding across the region was cut.

In recent years NASCA has also been fortunate to have support from NSW Government Sport and Recreation. This has been in the form of delivering accredited courses for free or minimal cost and providing financial assistance for camps and sports courses.

The contribution of Indigenous sporting programs as supplied by federal government assistance to Closing the Gap targets

NASCA is fortunate to receive a significant amount of funding from the federal government through the Sporting Chance Program, the aim of which is to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students through the use of sport and recreation. As discussed in the attached document, this model has proved highly successful for NASCA, our students, the schools and the communities. This program is achieving strong results and working towards closing the gap in education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing.





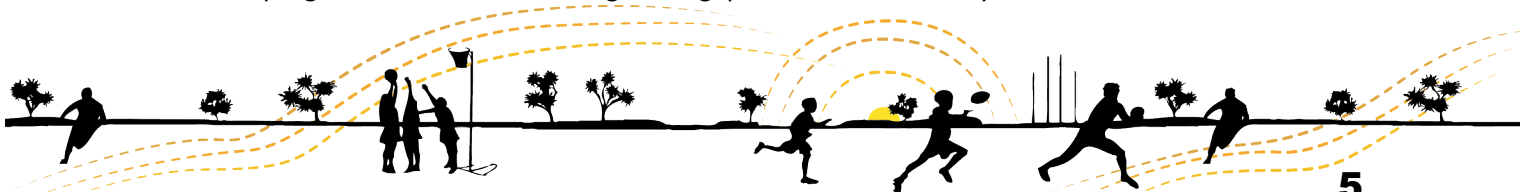
NASCA can see the validity in the Sporting Chance funding structure where the government provides one third of the budget in cash and the providers must secure the remaining two thirds in cash and in kind support, however at times this can be challenging given financial circumstances of the corporate sector. Yet we remain committed to the ideal as it creates momentum for full community partnership, involvement and ownership.

The success of the Sporting Chance model forms the basis for one of our recommendations at the end of this paper.

Non-government organisations utilising sport as a vehicle to improve opportunities

Based on our interaction and feedback from schools, community members and students, I would like to highlight what we perceive to be some of the major benefits of being a non-government organisation delivering school and community based sports programs:

- We are viewed as a neutral party, outside the school system, which assists in building trust with the students and parents, as well as encouraging better relationships between the students, parents, communities and the school.
- Our independence allows flexibility with our activities, ensuring we meet the needs of the students and maintain that 'fresh and exciting' nature that keeps students engaged, interested and attending school.
- We are able to draw on a wide range of role models/mentors and organisational partnerships (sports bodies, corporate organisations, universities, other non-government organisations) to support the personal development of the students.
- Our programs provide students with opportunities to participate in activities they may not otherwise experience such as specific camps, courses, and career and sports sessions with professional athletes, supporting and building on the school curriculum, whilst also encouraging the development of practical life skills used outside the sports arena. Exposure to new experiences encourages the students to 'think outside the box' regarding life after school, while also building the students' resilience, encouraging them to try new things in a supportive environment.
- Through the use of skilled role models/mentors we give students and communities access to skills development and expertise knowledge that they often do not have access to.
- Our role models/mentors go through an application process and all are volunteers, ensuring we only provide engaging, skilled, committed and relevant people. Our role models and staff are sources of 'aspiration, competencies and motivation. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by perseverant effort, raises observers' beliefs in their own abilities' (Bandura, 2011).
- A key advantage is that our programs are consistent. We return to the same communities and work with the same schools year after year, allowing us to build strong relationships with the students and community members and provide a wide range of activities that successively build on each other and work with the community and their needs. This is particularly significant in the Northern Territory (NT) where for example, school staff turnover can be extremely high. Despite changes in Principals, teaching staff, sport and recreation officers and youth workers our programs provide continuity. In some communities there may be no sport and recreation officers or youth workers, our programs work towards filling these gaps. Recent community feedback from our ARMtour





(Athletes as Role Models) program that has been working with NT schools and communities since 1997 has included comments such as:

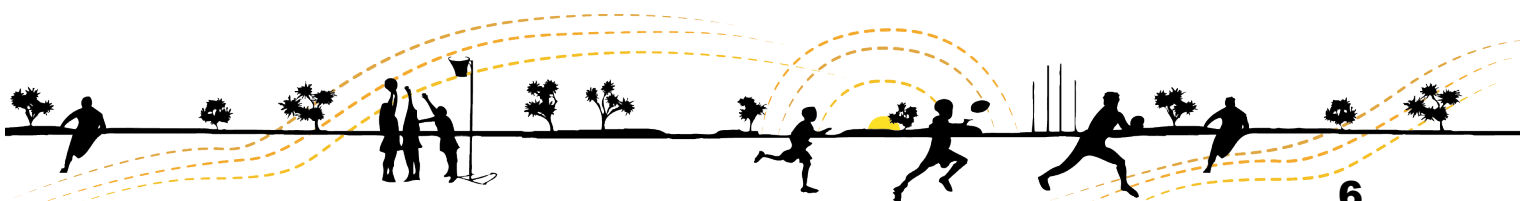
- 'We don't want the training centre, we don't want the government, we want ARMtour to come and teach our kids' (Head of School Council).
- 'We need ARMtour to come here for 6 months, even 3 months' (Elder).
- 'For the month after ARMtour visits the kids play the sport of the role models that came here, until they lose the ball or the Frisbee or whatever equipment you've provided' (School staff member).
- 'The kids get so excited when you come. Not only are you good role models but they can't believe that you've come all this way just to see them' (Community Doctor).
- 'It's the consistency. You keep coming back, the kids know you'll always be here and they really look forward to your visits' (Teacher).
- Attendance (48) at one ARMtour school doubled (98) the day the ARMtour team began their program in October, compared to the previous day.

This belief in NASCA comes from being an independent Aboriginal organisation, whose interests lie solely in the development and wellbeing of the students. We are consistent in delivery, despite what may be going on in the communities, changes in the schools and changes in government, and we provide skilled role models and quality staff and programs that work in partnership with the communities to meet their needs.

Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte and Jones identified the conditions for maximising positive social and psychological outcomes through sport participation:

- a) 'A *context* in which activities are challenging and intrinsically interesting, participants feel accepted by their peers, and there is emphasis on personal mastery and group cooperation;
- b) *External assets* characterised by close relationships with caring adult mentors, parental monitoring, positive peer relationships, and community involvement; and
- c) *Internal assets* consisting of learned skills transferable to domains outside of sport' (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte and Jones, 2005, as cited in Weiss, 2008, p. 440).

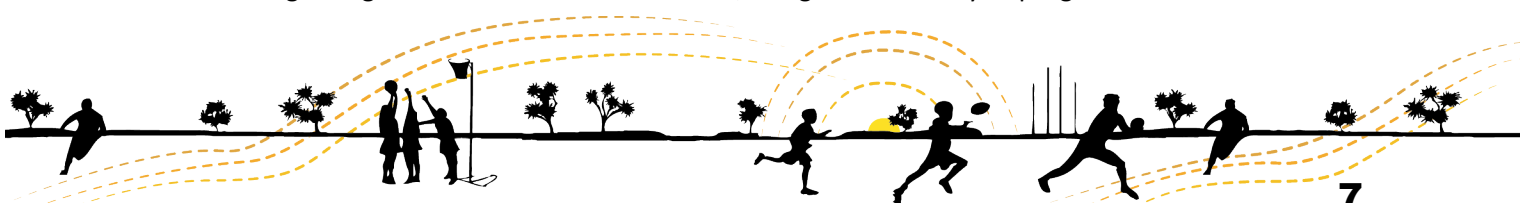
As you can see in the attached document, NASCA's programs provide all of the above. Our activities are challenging, interesting and fun, ensuring students remained engaged and feel comfortable participating and learning in a friendly, supportive environment. Guided by our staff and role models/mentors, the students build on their teamwork skills, supporting each other and their community. The skills learnt in the activities are transferable to all areas of life. They are designed to build on the students' sense of self and identity, encouraging them to take pride in their culture, to stay in school, to inspire positive lifestyle choices and to choose meaningful career paths. Sport is the vehicle to engage the students, but it is the combination of all the above that provide a holistic education and consistent support that fosters success and wellbeing.





Recommendations

- 1. We recommend a minimum of 3 year government funding contracts.** Whilst there are many benefits to being a non-government organisation, there are also challenges, particularly in relation to funding. NASCA is fortunate to have significant financial support from state and federal government, particularly the NSW and Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, including through the Sporting Chance Program. The nature of government contracts means that the grant cycle may be 12 months, which can create program uncertainty. It also makes planning for coming years difficult and in some circumstances can create unrealistic goals for change. This would also assist in the prevention of stop-start, fly-in fly-out activity that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have had so frequently in the past, creating distrust and minimal long term impact.
- 2. We recommend that the Sporting Chance Program funding continues and that the model expands further throughout the country.** We have had significant successes with our school-based sports Academies in South Sydney and central NSW and the ARMtour engagement strategy in the central desert (funded by the DEEWR Sporting Chance Program). The strength in these lies with the strong relationships between NASCA staff, the students and the communities, coupled with the wide range of interesting and engaging activities. Students attend school because they know if they don't they won't get to participate in NASCA activities. School attendance and behaviour in sessions are used as measures for whether they attend end of year camps and other activities. Past students have said this was the only reason they kept going to school. We have waiting lists of students wanting to be in our Academies. Not only are the Academies enjoyable, they provide a support structure for students that they are often not getting elsewhere. The success NASCA has experienced with these programs is the basis for our recommendation. We believe there is scope to examine the possibility of embedding it further into the school system and curriculum, while still being delivered by non-government organisations (with preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations) to ensure it retains that uniqueness which attracts students and keeps them interested and involved in the program.
- 3. We recommend investing in providers that are committed to a holistic approach to Aboriginal wellbeing.** From the make up of our Board, through to the range of our role models, program activities and our organisational partnerships, NASCA works with a wide variety of expertise across sectors. Sport may be the leverage to engage the students, but it is essential to build and connect to career pathways in all areas of life.
- 4. We recommend that the government gives strong preference to Aboriginal governed organisations.** As discussed earlier, one of NASCA's major strengths is that we're an all Aboriginal governed organisation working to empower Aboriginal young people. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of this. Crucially, it establishes in the eyes of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a legitimacy of the program deliverer and, by extension, the value of their product. This in turn provides a platform of trust, essential to the recipients being receptive to the message being delivered to them. As mentioned our evaluations consistently show a correlation between Aboriginal identification and improved outcomes. We therefore believe that the positive outcomes we are achieving could be further enhanced by government giving strong preference to Aboriginal governed and managed organisations in the identification, design and delivery of programs.



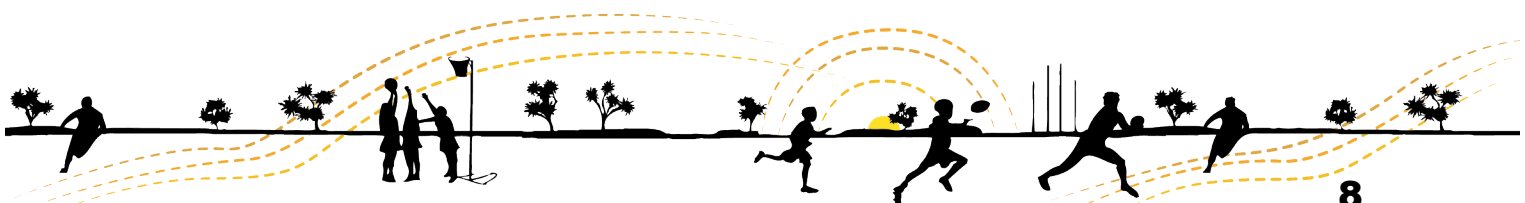


5. **We recommend the Committee provide an opportunity for NASCA founder and NRL legend David Liddiard to present to the Inquiry.** As an Aboriginal man who was given opportunities through sport and who subsequently established NASCA, David Liddiard has fought hard for many years to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using sport as the vehicle. His personal experience and knowledge about the contribution by the sporting codes, the private and NGO sectors and federal government policy, as well as the 17 years of success with NASCA, ensures that David is a highly valuable source of information for the Inquiry. As a leader in the field of using sport as the vehicle to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and as a wholly Aboriginal governed organisation, NASCA would welcome the opportunity to present to the Committee.

Charles Prouse
CEO

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February 2012



Aboriginal Disadvantage, Sport and Engagement

Report by: Susannah Clement, NASCA

National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy**Aboriginal Disadvantage, Sport and Engagement**

How do NASCA's programs and their focus on health, education, sport and cultural programs empower Aboriginal youth and their communities? How do they impact positively in the areas of Education, Health, Employment, Self-confidence, Suicide Prevention and the Justice System?

Michelle Engelsman

This report outlines the issues that face Aboriginal Australians, the cause of inequalities present in Australian society and because of their interconnected and socio-historical nature, why these are so difficult to overcome. Currently there are many policies and frameworks working to 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes. The not-for-profit Aboriginal organisation the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) provides successful programs that support this national goal. NASCA's programs use sport, culture and role models as a tool for youth and community engagement. These work to increase educational attainment and retention rates, and support positive choices and enhanced opportunities. NASCA aims to enable Aboriginal equality and cultural pride, and to therefore ensure that Aboriginal young people, like all Australians, are presented a range of opportunities and taught skills to support a successful life.

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Executive Summary

In the areas and indicators that the Australian Government uses to define ones socioeconomic status, Aboriginal Australian's are at the lower end of the spectrum. Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians are more likely to live in the most disadvantaged areas (ABS, 2010b), are less likely to complete school (FaHCSIA, 2011b), are more likely to have poor health, be unemployed, statistically have a lower life expectancy (ABS, 2010c), are more likely to be imprisoned (Tatz, 1999), and because of this have a high rate of mental health problems and are overrepresented in suicide statistics (CCYPCG, 2009). These figures are a snapshot into why Aboriginal youth are less likely to have the same opportunities as non-Aboriginal kids and they become disempowered and disengaged from society.

The Australian Governments 'Closing the Gap' strategy outlines timeframes for improvement across the areas mentioned above to make Australia a more equitable place. This includes a focus on improving access to early childhood, schooling and health services. It also aims to increase support for Indigenous Australians so they can maintain healthy homes, safe communities and increase their economic participation and governance of their communities. The effectiveness of Closing the Gap depends on its implementation and understanding of the social nature of the problems, as all these areas are interconnected and each issue can breed other problems. For Aboriginal Australians disadvantage can be hereditary, passed down from previous generations who have been denied access to services and opportunity and have been victims of racial discrimination and oppression. A feeling distrust of government policies is often bred in the communities and families most affected and hurt by past governments. Community consultation and participation in program delivery, as well as Aboriginal lead programs, are important parts in ensuring effective progress.

The geographic context of the problem is also vitally important in determining how one decides what is actually needed in finding an effective solution. Aboriginal Australians live across every geographic classification from urban, to regional, to remote Australia, and the nature and extent of issues which plague communities in each place is variable. At all times in policy and program delivery, the needs of the specific community must be taken account of in order for it to be effective and outcomes reached.

The National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) is a wholly Aboriginal governed organisation that collaborates with communities to work with Aboriginal young people to empower them through health, education, sport and cultural programs. NASCA's programs also use role models such as successful Aboriginal people or elite athletes as tool for engagement in schooling. The incorporation of interesting and fun activities at school that create career pathways, plus the repetition of the message that education is vitally important for achieving ones aspirations increases school attendance, educational attainment and employment opportunity. With the prospects of having an educated, healthy and economic secure life, students may have a renewed sense of self-worth and confidence and the ability to make informed decisions about their lives and are less likely to engage in risk taking behaviours, that may lead to the criminal justice system.

NASCA's programs are implemented across all geographies from urban Sydney, to regional New South Wales, to remote Northern Territory, and work not just with young people but with their communities to ensure that in between program delivery times the community can continue engaging and supporting their youth to greatness. NASCA's programs are successful in reaching their outcomes because of its hands on nature and versatility in providing a range of support. Being 100% Aboriginal governed, NASCA ensures that Aboriginal autonomy and the human right to self-determination is maintained.

1. Introduction

The National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) aims to be the peak body for Indigenous Sport, Health and Education in Australia and set the international standard for imaginative and effective personal development programs that empower Indigenous youth and their communities. NASCA's programs use the inclusive and participatory nature of sport, the allure and encouragement from elite athletes as role models, and partnerships with corporate business and sporting organisations to deliver positive education, health and employment outcomes for young Aboriginal people. These outcomes hope to influence one's educational attainment, health status, employment opportunity and self-confidence levels, and allow them to make informed and positive choices about their life. The propensity for anti-social behaviour and likelihood of mental health problems can be directly linked to low education levels, unemployment and health problems (ABS, 2009b). NASCA is a wholly Aboriginal governed organisation, and because of this its programs are culturally sensitive, positive and produce results due to the collaboration and a greater understanding of the issues at hand and how they affect communities.

This report will go through some of the issues that face Indigenous Australians, the cause of inequalities present in Australian society, why these are difficult to overcome and how governments and policies are trying to rectify this. It will then outline how NASCA's programs use sport as a tool for engagement in education, and how the organisation works towards supporting Indigenous youth and will in turn 'close the gap'.

1.1 Social Context of Aboriginal Australia

"The Aboriginal crisis is remarkable because it arises in a materially rich, stable, liberal democracy which has embraced, anti-discrimination, affirmative action and social justice policies, and which unceasingly perceives itself as 'the land of the fair go'." - Tatz, 1999, p. 11

Since British settlement in 1788, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had to contend with an invasion that threatened to destroy their people and culture that had been present for 60,000 years (Broome, 2010). As European settlement spread through the continent so did the communicable diseases that decimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations due to a lack of prior contact and immunity (Broome, 2010). Aboriginal people were pushed from their Country into missions and reserves so that the settlers could exert maximum control and begin their civilising mission. Full-blooded and also half-cast children were removed from their families, under the guise of 'protection', and put into white people's homes and families to live and work with the ultimate goal to assimilate them into the domineering western society (Broome, 2010). The State-led genocide of Aboriginal people came about through Western eugenic beliefs of Social Darwinism and an entrenched racism that was normalised by dehumanising groups of people based on cultural and visual differences (Tatz, 2011). The discourses that existed around Aboriginal people underpinned the colonial ideas and justified policies that severely damaged Country and kinship ties, and are the cause of much of the current family and community dysfunction and Aboriginal disadvantage today.

Indigenous Australians account for 2.5% of the total Australian population, yet the age profile of Australia's Indigenous population is very different to that of the non-Indigenous population (ABS, 2010c). The rate of the Indigenous population is growing at twice the rate of the total population growth. A reason partly for this is the higher fertility rates of Indigenous women (2.52 babies per woman, compared with 1.97 babies per woman for non-Indigenous Australians) (ABS, 2010c) meaning that Indigenous Australians on average are much younger than non-Indigenous Australians, with almost half of all Indigenous Australians aged 19 years and under (FaHCSIA, 2011b). In 2006, the median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 21 years compared to the median age of 37 years for non-Indigenous people (ABS, 2011a). So the need for detailed information, statistics, strategies and programs that

target the large youth demographic is paramount in being able to turn around Aboriginal disadvantage.

In the areas and indicators that the Australian Government uses to define ones socioeconomic status, Indigenous Australian's are at the lower end of the spectrum;

- *“In 2004–05 Indigenous Australians, aged 15 years and over, made up 1.5% of the Australian population and over three-fifths (62%) lived in areas in the bottom two quintiles of socioeconomic disadvantage. (ABS, 2010b)*
- Indigenous Australians are just over half as likely to finish Year 12 compared to non-Indigenous Australians. (FaHCSIA, 2011b)
- *“In 2008, 44% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over reported excellent/very good health and 22% reported fair/poor health. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to report fair/poor health. This gap has remained unchanged since 2002.” (ABS, 2010c)*
- *“At the national level for 2005–2007, the gap in life expectancy was 11.5 years for males and 9.7 years for females.” (ABS, 2010c)*
- 29-39% of the Aboriginal working age population is not in the labour force. (ABS, 2010c)
- Indigenous people account for 2.5% of the whole Australian population (ABS, 2010c), but 38% of young people in the juvenile justice system are Indigenous. (AIHW, 2007)

Areas such as education, employment and health which are seen as vital to personal development, well-being and having a good quality of life are still seemingly unattainable to many Indigenous people and there are historical and social factors that are a reason for this, which can only be seen in the Australian context.

State, Territory and Federal Governments are currently working towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations through implementing policy and programs which acknowledges the many social problems and disadvantage caused by prior government's policies. The 'Closing the Gap' initiatives are the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) approach to decreasing Indigenous disadvantage in all geographies (remote, regional and urban areas). State Governments also have other initiatives or strategy plans that aim for and similar things. Non-governmental organisations and Corporate Australia have taken significant steps towards closing the gap in both the business sector and beyond. Reconciliation Australia has developed a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to further reconciliation in workplaces by building relationships, respect and understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.¹ But more work remains to be done and this is where organisations like NASCA step in and find a way to help and complement the current policies.

a) Engagement

In this report 'engagement' refers to the level of participation and interest Indigenous youth and their communities have with involving themselves in the education system and pathways that lead towards the workforce. Engagement and empowerment is vitally important in closing the gaps in Indigenous disadvantage (FaHCSIA, 2011b). School needs to be an interesting place, where what is learnt is culturally relevant, as well as practical in the development and education of children and young people. In collaboration with communities, NASCA works with Aboriginal youth to empower them through health, education, sport and cultural programs.

“Evidence suggests that school connectedness and supportive social relationships have been associated with lower levels of absenteeism, delinquency, aggression, substance use and sexual risk behaviour, and higher levels of academic achievement

¹ Reconciliation Australian, Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report, <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans/rap-impact-measurement-report>

and self-esteem amongst children.” (Department of Education, WA, cited by the Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 131)

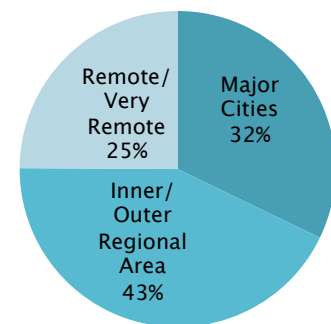
Governments, companies, organisations and Indigenous communities all have a vital role to play to make this happen.

b) Youth

Research suggests that children’s experiences in their early years of life greatly affect their development and can influence lifelong learning, behaviour and health (SDP IWG, 2008). The provision of services such as early childhood right through to higher education provides an opportunity for early intervention that addresses health, social and developmental problems.

(Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011)

According to the World Health Organisation ‘youth’ lies between the ages of 15-24. But in many respects, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth become older sooner than non-Aboriginal youth; there is earlier sexual development and experience, earlier exposure to danger, disease, and death, so the youth cohort may more appropriately be considered as ages 12 to 18. (Tatz, 1999)



“Aboriginal innocence ends at a young age. All children of early primary school age desire to become pilots, astronauts or rock stars. By 8 or 10, some of the starker realities prevail.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 86)

1.2 The importance of location

“Very few Aborigines live ‘non-Aboriginal’ lives, divorced from their social and personal histories, origins, geographies, families, lifestyles, cultures and sub-cultural mores. This is true of so-called ‘urban part-Aborigines’ as it is of traditional-oriented groups in rural and remote Australia.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 10)

The Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018 (FaHCSIA, 2011b) recognises the importance of location in economic development in terms of access to employment opportunities, markets, service provision, infrastructure and education. Three-quarters of Indigenous Australians live in urban and regional centres, leaving 25% who reside in remote or very remote areas [see Figure 1]. Because of this, the opportunities and challenges faced by Aboriginal people are not homogeneous and there is a need for flexible development opportunities which can be adaptable to place and local contexts.

“The concept of remoteness is an important dimension of policy development in Australia. The provision of many government services are influenced by the typically long distances that people are required to travel outside the major metropolitan areas. The purpose of the Remoteness Structure is to provide a classification for the release of statistics that inform policy development by classifying Australia into large regions that share common characteristics of remoteness. It is based on the calculated road distances to the nearest service centres in 5 categories of population size.” (ABS, 2011b)

The Remoteness Categories are classified as (ABS, 2011b):²

² See also: Department of Health and Ageing, 2011. *Doctor connect, Locator Map*. [Accessed Online 17 1 2012] <http://www.doctorconnect.gov.au/internet/otd/Publishing.nsf/Content/locator>

- Major Cities (Urban)
- Inner Regional
- Outer Regional
- Remote
- Very Remote

It is clear that whilst the Closing the Gap campaign adopted by COAG in 2008 has had some success in decreasing average and national levels of Indigenous disadvantage, there is an uneven spatial distribution in this progress.

Figure 1 [Indigenous persons 15 years and over by remoteness area](#). Source: ABS, 2009b, series 4714.0, Table 2

a) *Problems faced by remote Aboriginal communities*

“Social determinants of disadvantage are increased with remoteness. This includes income levels that fall from 70% of non-Indigenous levels in major cities to 40% in very remote areas (where costs of living are correspondingly higher), and levels of employment that fall from 57% in cities to 46% in very remote areas...” (Hunter, 2007)

Remote Aboriginal communities experience the worst levels of disadvantage due to their increased distance from and lack of access to service providers such as education, health services, and a full range of employment opportunities. And in many remote areas this disadvantage is more obvious as Indigenous people are a larger proportion of the population. Across the Closing the Gap socio-economic indicators, the Northern Territory’s Aboriginal population experiences the widest gaps between their lives and those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and for majority of these indicators the gap widens with increasing remoteness. On average NT’s Indigenous population have:

- low life expectancy (61.5 years for men)
- highest infant mortality rates
- low levels of literacy, numeracy, and attendance rates
- the largest gap (59% difference) for year 12 attainment
- the largest national gap in the proportion of Indigenous verses non-Indigenous employment; in 2008, 62% of Indigenous people in NT were in the labour force, compared to the 90% of non-Indigenous people.
- Alcohol related deaths are also a major problem with alcohol consumption apparently 1.5 times the national average. This increases the propensity for alcohol related harm, such as domestic and sexual violence. (FaHCSIA, 2011c, p. 19)

To increase opportunities in these areas the Government recognises it needs to focus its efforts on identifying new ways of encouraging economic activity that incorporates Indigenous labour into the current market and promotes growth (FaHCSIA, 2011b). Economic participation directly links with higher year 12 retention rates, and later in this report tools such as engagement in sports and the use of role models and mentors for demonstrating appropriate behaviour and encouraging youth to stay in school, will be discussed with increasing positive outcomes from Aboriginal youth.

b) *Problems faced by regional Aboriginal communities*

As mentioned above service provision and the likelihood of disadvantage increases with remoteness. Aboriginal people, like all people living in regional or rural areas have less access to a range of job or higher education opportunities in their immediate locations. This means that in remote communities

young people have to move away to study, increase their employment opportunities and have the careers they desire. The lack of commitment towards education is also present and many Indigenous students don't complete year 12 because of this [see Figure 2].

Educational Attainment of Indigenous persons by remoteness area

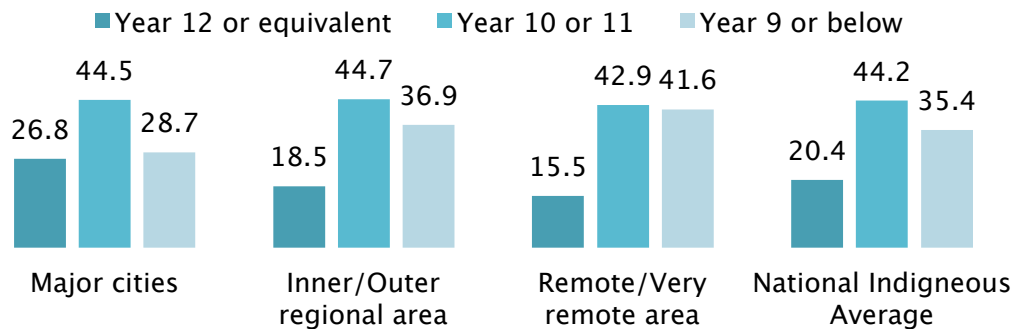


Figure 2 Educational Attainment of Indigenous persons by Remoteness Area, % of Indigenous people 15 years and over. Source: ABS, 2009b, series 4704.0, Table 2

In regional areas rather than having to create from scratch new industries for employment, the Governments focus is more on building up individual capabilities and ensuring welfare systems don't create a cycle of dependence. Building pathways to employment is also important, and this comes from increasing school retention. (FaHCSIA, 2011b)

"It's vital that every young Australian is enrolled in school and turning up to class. We can't afford to let any of our kids fall through the cracks..." - Peter Garrett MP

Minister for School Education
Minister for Early Childhood and Youth
2nd February 2012

c) Problems faced by urban Aboriginal communities

The problems faced by Aboriginal people living in urban areas are not as pronounced as those in regional or rural areas, but as 32% of Indigenous Australians live in major cities (according to 2006 data), and the majority live in urban areas (ABS, 2010c), there is a great need to address the issues that occur in urban areas. Whilst there is a wide range of services and opportunities (for example; education, employment and health care) that are geographically close to people in urban centres, their access to these services can be reduced by their socioeconomic status or the localised disadvantage of the area in which they live. Urban segregation of and within neighbourhoods is a major deterrent of people's access to resources. For example, looking at unemployment;

"Individuals who live in neighbourhoods or areas where few people are employed are believed to miss out on the employment networks that are often used to find jobs, particularly amongst those who are starting out in the labour market. In addition, if those who are employed are less likely to be employed in high-skilled jobs then access to relatively well-paid jobs may also be curtailed. Finally, there are the potential role model effects where an absence of people working in the area leads to social norms which place little value on working... Indigenous Australians who lived in areas with poor employment outcomes were more likely to have poor employment outcomes themselves..." (Biddle, 2009, p. 22)

This downward spiral of opportunity can also be used to make sense of the low school attendance rates of a location associated with a low socioeconomic demographic. The social costs and benefits of

any activity are important, so if there are few people in the area who have completed or are attending formal education, then the social benefits of doing so are reduced. There may even be social costs of attending school, like missing out on cultural and family events (Biddle, 2009). The de-valuing of education in these low socioeconomic urban areas is a major problem as there is a connection between educational attainment, unemployment and health and lifestyle habits such as smoking and alcoholism (ABS, 2009b).

“The likelihood of smoking decreases [sic] with higher levels of schooling, 34% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–34 years who had completed Year 12 were current daily smokers compared with 68% of those who had left school early.” (ABS, 2010c)

In 2001, “over 25 per cent of urban Indigenous Australians lived in the most disadvantaged 10 per cent of neighbourhoods” (Taylor, 2006 cited by Biddle, 2009, p. 29). The challenge in urban areas is to increase Aboriginal engagement and put in place systems and services which allow Aboriginal people to tap into the existing economy, whilst diversifying this to suit their cultural needs. This could include programs in schools that make education culturally relevant, and also getting the word out there to make people understand that education is vital to being able to broaden one’s career choices and increase life opportunities.

2. Closing the Gap

The following areas are where the gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the non-Indigenous Australian are most prevalent, and are areas which contribute greatly to socioeconomic disadvantage.

2.1 Where are the gaps?

a) Education

“I have always supported the education system at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and firmly believe that education for Indigenous people is imperative to our development and confidence. It allows us to participate with equity in an often inequitable society.”

- Bronwyn Bancroft, Indigenous Artist

Some statistics on Indigenous education (FaHCSIA, 2011b, p. 10):

- Indigenous Australians are just over half as likely to finish Year 12 compared to non-Indigenous Australians
- Indigenous Australians aged 15-19 years are 51.7% less likely to be enrolled in school at all compared to non-Indigenous Australians
- University attendance for Indigenous 20-24 year-olds is one-fifth that of the non-Indigenous rate of attendance

The value of education is invaluable as it can be attributed to numerous improvements in life chances and opportunity. High levels of educational attainment are associated with better health outcomes, employment and higher incomes, personal and community economic stability, individuals are less likely to be caught up in the justice system as they are able to make informed decisions, and many have an improved self-esteem, and a stronger sense of cultural pride. (ABS, 2010c)

“Children who have access to a good quality education and who are supported and directed by their parents to attend school are likely to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and social norms for a productive and rewarding adult life.” (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 17)

The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Report on Consultations October 2011* (FaHCSIA, 2011c) goes through the problems and concerns that many Aboriginal people have regarding the education of their children, families and community. The report lists numerous reasons for poor school attendance in remote communities (many can also be applied to urban and regional contexts), such as:

- parental alcohol, drug or gambling problems, loss of parental control of child’s behaviour
- children drinking and substance abuse
- lack of interest in education
- bullying
- parental lack of educational experience and valuing of education; unable to help with school work
- lack of housing
- no high school in the community or nearby; lack of transport
- teachers short length of stay
- worries of cultural loss; no culture taught in curriculum
- truancy rules and enforcement
- lack of rewards and sanctions for regular attendance

It's seen that parents are a key factor in getting their children to school and increasing attendance, but because of many of the aforementioned reasons, parents are unable to understand and pass on the value of education to their children.

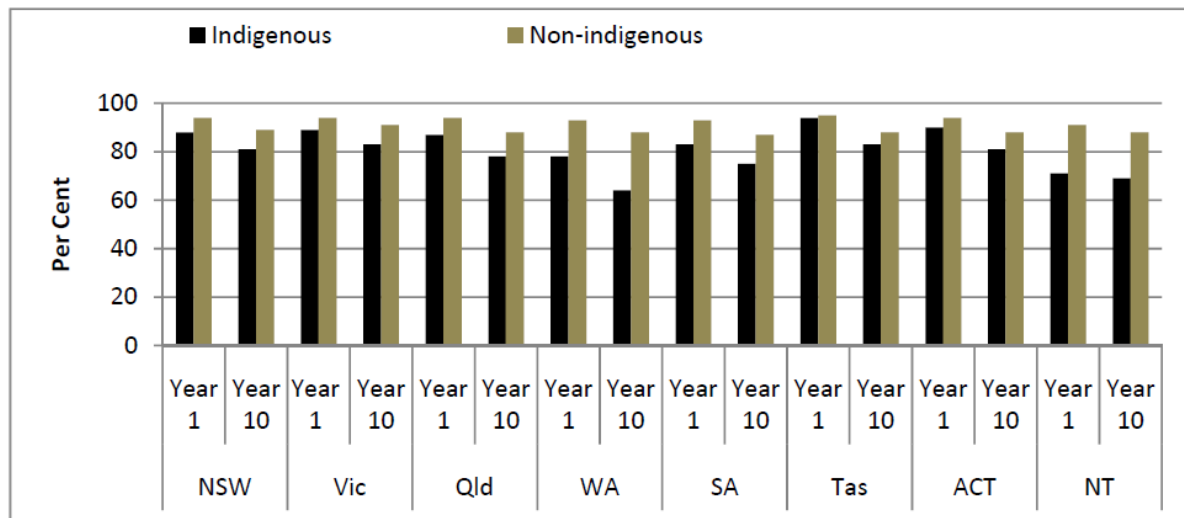


Figure 3 Students' attendance in government schools by state and Indigenous status, 2007. Source: Productivity Commission, 2009, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators*, cited by Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, *Doing Time - Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*, p. 127

“Successful learning cannot be built on irregular attendance. There is evidence to suggest that the more regularly students attend school the greater their success in learning.”
(MCEECDYA, 2011, p. 16)

Other ways to get children to school were discussed in the consultations and many of the responses centred on the need for cultural teachings to be part of the curriculum and that the best learning outcomes come from interest, encouragement and engagement. For example;

- *“Children do not like being locked up in the classroom all day. More language and culture needed in schooling. Bush tucker is needed in the schools. It is important we are learning both worlds.”*
- *“They need to learn something more (cultural learnings).”*
- *“Programs that are interesting for kids that make them want to come to school, like football programs”*
- *“Reward programs for individuals such as ‘no school, no pool’”*
- *“There should be encouragement and/or rewards for consistent attendance by students, e.g. trips away to football games or Darwin etc.”* (FaHCSIA, 2011c, pp. 22-23)³

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* was developed and released in 2011 by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) as part of the COAG's reform agenda to improve life outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The actions signed off on by all governments are linked to the following six priority domains:

- *Readiness for school*
- *Engagement and connections*
- *Attendance*
- *Literacy and numeracy*

³ For more initiatives to increase school attendance see: Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011. *Doing Time - Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*, Canberra: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, pp. 140-146

- *Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development*
- *Pathways to real post-school options*

The *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018* has similar and corresponding priorities as set by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011). Education Priority Objective 2.2 is to ‘Support successful transitions from school to work’. This states that the path to meaningful employment starts at school; “*For many young Indigenous Australians the transition from school to work will include obtaining vocational education and training qualifications.*” (p. 37) Objective 2.3 is to ‘Improve access to higher education’; to do this, one strategy is to “*encourage students to view higher education as a real option.*” (p. 38)

Statistics are beginning to show an improvement in educational outcomes; apparent school retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander full-time students from Year 7/8 to Year 12 increased from 36% in 2000 to 47% in 2010, and nationally the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over completing year 12 increased from 18% in 2002 to 22% in 2008 (ABS, 2010c).

“Non-school qualifications are attained through the successful completion of vocational education and training (some of which can be undertaken in conjunction with secondary school studies) and/or higher education at tertiary institutions.

In 2008, 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years had attained a non-school qualification, up from 32% in 2002. This increase was mainly due to higher proportions of Indigenous women and men attaining a Certificate III/IV—up by 7 and 3 percentage points, respectively, when compared with 2002.” (ABS, 2010c)

But whilst statistics show things are improving there is still a noticeable gap between the educational attainment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. For example by comparison, 7 out of 10 Indigenous people between 15- 24 years did not finish school, whilst 7 out of 10 non-Indigenous people between 15-24 years did finish school (ABS, 2010c). With education being such an important prerequisite for a good life and opportunity, it’s one of the most important issues that need to be addressed in overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage.

b) Health

“Indigenous Australians experience a significant and disproportionate burden of ill health compared to non-Indigenous Australians. The factors contributing to the poor health status of Indigenous Australians are extensive and complex and start from the earliest stages of life.”

- COAG Reform Council, 2011, p. 29

- Indigenous Australians are 1.2 times more likely to be overweight and 1.9 times more likely to be obese than non-Indigenous Australians. (Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009)
- Indigenous Australians are 4 times more likely to develop diabetes than non-Indigenous Australians. (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009)
- Cause of high obesity and diabetes rates is a combination of an energy dense, high fat and sugar contemporary diet and low physical activity levels. (Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009)
- These rates increase with remoteness.

All these statistics are a cause of the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as life expectancy is affected by many factors, including socio-economic status, quality and accessibility of the health system, risk factor behaviour (tobacco, alcohol, nutrition, exercise), social factors and environmental factors (e.g. over-crowded housing, poor drinking water and sanitation). The ABS in 2006 estimated life expectancy for Indigenous Australians to be approximately 17 years lower than the total population for the period of 1996-2001; for Indigenous males, 59 years compared with 77 years in the non-Indigenous population and, for Indigenous

females, 65 years compared with 82 years (FaHCSIA, 2009)[see Figure 4]. Since then this gap has decreased to 11.5 year for males and 9.7 years for females (ABS, 2010c).

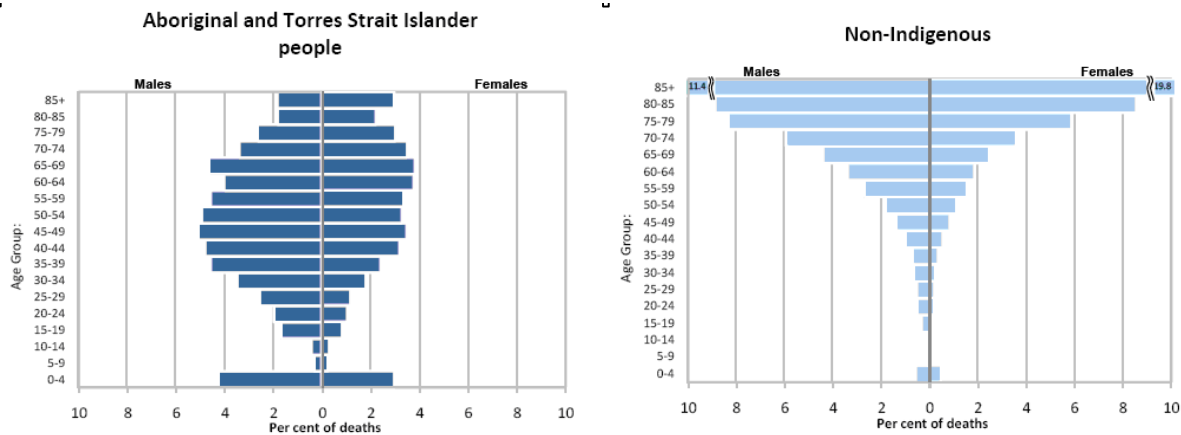


Figure 4 Comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous mortality rates by age group and sex, QLD, WA, SA and NT, 2002-2006. Source: Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council, 2008, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2008 Summary, cited by FaHCSIA, 2009

One’s level of health is socially determined by economic, physical and social conditions, and thus health is a big indicator of an individual or community’s socioeconomic status. “The social determinants of health include housing, education, social networks and connections, racism, employment, law enforcement and the legal and custodial system.” (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 87)

“In the 2004-05 ‘National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey’, Indigenous Australians living in the most disadvantaged areas were 1.4 times more likely to report their health as fair or poor compared with non-Indigenous Australians living in the most disadvantaged areas. Alternatively, of those living in the most disadvantaged areas Indigenous Australians were around half (0.6) as likely to assess their health as excellent compared with non-Indigenous Australians.” (ABS, 2010b)

Disadvantage as mentioned already, decreases the likelihood of educational attainment and knowledge of healthy lifestyle habits, such as the benefits of regular exercise and participation in sport, eating a well balanced diet, and good health practices, such as not smoking and not drinking during pregnancy. In 2001, 19.5% of males and 22.6% of females in the most disadvantaged areas were obese as they were also less likely to be physically active and less likely to eat healthy than those in non-disadvantaged areas (Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009). The ABS has also linked the educational attainment of children to an increased risk of poor health outcomes [see Figure 5].

Health Characteristics of Indigenous persons by highest year of school completion

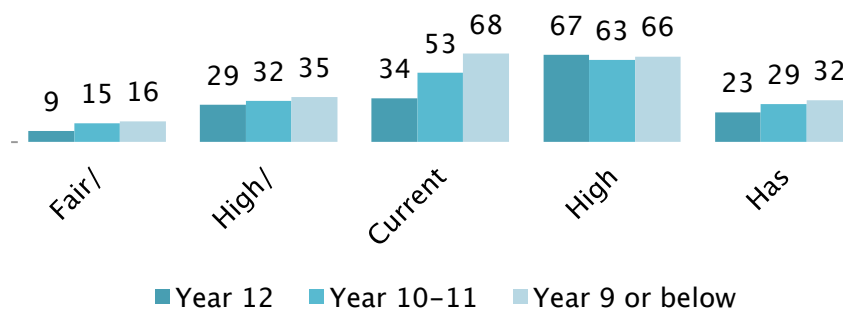


Figure 5 Health Characteristics of Indigenous persons aged 15-34 years, by highest year of school completion, % total Source: ABS, 2008, Series 4704.0, cited in *NASCA 2011 Strategy Offsite*, 2011, p. 9

Parents are extremely influential in the healthy development of a child through the type of lifestyle they live, and are also accountable for behaviours and practices that occur during gestation. For example, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term that describes a range of physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities that are a direct result of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. These problems can compromise school experience, increase the likelihood of mental health problems, be a cause of unemployment and homelessness, continue the cycle of alcohol and drug abuse, and increase the likelihood of partaking in risk taking behaviours which may lead to contact with the justice system. Alcohol abuse is a serious problem for many Indigenous people and communities, and it can have devastating effects on their lives, but also the lives of their children through secondary medical problems (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011).

More health education is needed for Indigenous parents and their children so that the next generation grows up with the knowledge needed to live a healthy long life and have a healthy family of their own. This starts with early childhood development. The report by the Australian Government, *Options for the Future of Indigenous Australia: Responding to the Australia 2020 Summit, 2008*, suggested a need for greater access to health care services for children and their families, e.g. health care nurses, support programs, childcare, ante-natal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services. One of the targets in the Government's 'Closing the Gap' strategy is to "halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade." (COAG Reform Council, 2011, p. xii) Indigenous children are twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday, and this target directly addresses this horrendous statistic (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011).

Already mentioned is the role of schooling in educating people about healthy lifestyle choices, but going to school to increase one's literacy and numeracy is just as important. Education and school retention increases a person's opportunity and ability to comprehend, participate and contribute in contemporary society.

"Our entire service and health industry is predicated on literacy. A person consults a doctor, is given a prescription, which is then dispensed by a pharmacist. He labels the package by computer, with the required dosage administration at appropriate times, together with warning labels about contra-indications and avoidances, such as alcohol or driving a car, or taking medication without food. All professionals involved in the cycle assume comprehension and compliance." (Tatz, 1999, p. 92)

As the health of an individual or community is socially determined the answer to combating poor health is to use a tool that focuses on and addresses social nature of the problem; such as sport. Sport

generates health benefits in two ways; through direct participation and through the use of participatory and spectator sport as a platform for communication, education and social mobilisation (SDP IWG, 2008).⁴

c) Employment

“Nearly a fifth of very long-term unemployed job seekers are Indigenous. It is important that these Australians get the additional training and assistance they need to enter the workforce... The Australian Government believes that more attention needs to be paid to vulnerable job seekers who have become disengaged from employment services.” (FaHCSIA, 2011b, p. 45)

Unemployment is a major issue that reinstates the cycles of Aboriginal disadvantage. Many people work in low-skilled, low-paying and low-security jobs, because of their or their family’s low educational attainment.

“There are some locations in Australia where particularly acute levels of unemployment and disadvantage mean that many people live on income support for extended periods. In some households, unemployment is a way of life. Circumstances like these can give rise to complex and inter-related barriers to education, training and employment, as well as participation in other crucial aspects of life and society.” (FaHCSIA, 2011b, p. 45)

The Australian labour force participation rates for Indigenous people decline with remoteness, with a 57% participation rate in major cities compared with 46% in very remote areas (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011), and this can be seen when looking at the Northern Territory (where many remote Indigenous communities exist). Unemployment rates are exceptionally high with close to 40% of Indigenous people not in the labour force (FaHCSIA, 2011c).

Reasons for unemployment can be attributed to a low educational attainment, as leaving school early doesn’t prepare young people well enough for the world of employment.

“Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years, 58% of those who had completed Year 12 were in full-time employment in 2008, compared with 24% of those who had left school at Year 9 or below.

Similarly, 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–64 years who had completed a non-school qualification of Certificate III or above were in full-time employment compared with 29% of those without a non-school qualification.” (ABS, 2010c)

The basic skills and knowledge learnt at school such as literacy and numeracy are vitally important within any workplace and a lack of these skills can hamper employment opportunities.

d) Self-confidence

“...unemployment and unemployment benefits are the norm in Aboriginal life...They see themselves as unwanted in mainstream Australian society.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 98)

Lowered self-esteem and self-worth are problems faced by many Aboriginal people who feel that they are stuck in a never ending cycle of disadvantage. This can cause a rise of mental health issues within individuals, families and communities, such as depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies (Youth Beyondblue, n.d.). Low education levels, unemployment, poor health, low income, are all factors ones

⁴ For more on the health benefits of sport see Section 3

self-confidence and happiness, along with the mental climate of the people around them. Youth are socialised to behave and think in certain ways as “...identity is constituted and shaped by interactions of youth among themselves, but also with others within their world.” (Fietz, 2005, p. 1) But because of the many problems and issues that still plague a large proportion of Indigenous society, historically and currently “Aboriginal children are socialised from birth to an endemic and all-pervasive racism. They are perceived differently because of physical and cultural characteristics such as colour and lifestyle.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 97) Feelings of disempowerment can be, unfortunately, a norm of life; “Aboriginal youth rarely experience autonomy, self-fulfilment, or personal sovereignty over their physical, material or internal lives.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 78)

The ‘Engagement and Connections’ section of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* looks at the need for this positive conditioning of young people;

“Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed. A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages by schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school. There are strong links between wellbeing and learning outcomes.” (MCEECDYA, 2011, p. 12)

Physical exercise is known to produce beneficial effects on mental health, enhance self-esteem and help manage stress, anxiety and depression. It may also improve cognitive function such as memory and learning capacities; this trend is more profound in children whose brains are still developing (SDP IWG, 2008).

“Sporting success is an attainable goal. There are increasing numbers of models, hero figures who have achieved a new place, status, and above all, social acceptance and respect within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 85)

A number of Aboriginal sportsmen and women see sport as an area in which they can compete on equal terms with the rest of the Australian population (Tatz, 1999). Then, once a level of sporting success is gained many continue to believe that they can be successful in other avenues, such as education or through careers. Indigenous sportsmen and women can be role models for young people to look up to and aspire to be like.

e) *Suicide*

“Suicide is not the sole indicator of societal ills, but it is generally acceptable as a strong signal that something is seriously awry.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 31)

Indigenous Australians are over-represented in the statistics surrounding suicide (CCYPCG, 2009). Suicide and Land Transport Accidents were the two leading external causes of death for Indigenous people in 2009; intentional self-harm accounted for 4.0% (97 deaths) of all Indigenous deaths; 72 were male and 25 were females (ABS, 2009a). A good deal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide occurs in clusters, so the social context of the cluster and not just the individual must be examined to determine why these events are happening, and what type of social problems exist.

“The majority of Aboriginal youth showing suicidal behaviour cannot read or write, or cannot read sufficiently well to absorb other than the most elementary popular materials... Illiteracy creates its own frustrations and anger. Incomprehension alienates as does being inarticulate.” (Tatz, 1999, p. 74)

Because of these high illiteracy rates, suicide notes are rare among Aboriginal people who have suicided, so it’s hard to find out why these people are taking their lives. The issue of illiteracy is one that can be addressed through strategies like Closing the Gap. The most startling thing is the incredibly young age of people who are suiciding. *The Reducing Youth Suicide in Queensland (RYSQ) Discussion Paper* (CCYPCG, 2009) mentions the young age of children taking their lives; 12

Indigenous young people in the 10-14years age bracket suicided between 2004 and 2007, along with 6 people 15-17years. *“The average yearly rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth being 16.3 suicides per 100,000 compared to 2.8 suicides per 100,000 other Queensland youth.”* (p. 17)

“To date, prevention efforts targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have mostly been adapted from those aimed at the wider population, which do not take into consideration cultural and traditional understandings of suicide and mental health. Consequently, risk factor identification and examination is required to ensure that prevention efforts are appropriately targeted at the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.” (CCYPCG, 2009, p. 18)

Low educational attainment has been linked to an increased risk of physiological distress that can be attributed to suicide [see Figure 5 p. 12]. So the provision programs within schools that are culturally engaging and places where students can develop aspirations will help to ensure school retention may be a step to decreasing youth suicide.

f) Justice System

“Proportionately, Aborigines are the most arrested, the most imprisoned and the most convicted group in our society.” – Tatz, 1999, p. 13

Indigenous people are more than ever more likely to be detained or imprisoned for an offence; 38% of young people in the juvenile justice system are Indigenous (AIHW, 2007, p. 29); this is startling statistic as Indigenous people are only 2.5% of the total Australian population. This high level of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system is a major challenge confronting the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG’s) commitment to Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

“Contact with the criminal justice system represents a symptom of the broader social economic disadvantage faced by many Indigenous people in Australia. We have reached the point of intergenerational family dysfunction in many Indigenous communities, with problems of domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, inadequate housing, poor health and school attendance, and a lack of job skills and employment opportunities impacting on the next generation of Indigenous Australians. Additionally there has been a loss of cultural knowledge in many Indigenous communities, which has disrupted traditional values and norms of appropriate social behaviour from being transferred from one generation to the next.” (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 7)

Prominent amongst the reasons for high proportion of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system is the broader social and economic disadvantage faced by many Indigenous people. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*⁵ (ABS, 2002 cited by Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011) found that respondents were far more likely to have been charged with, or imprisoned for, an offence if they left school early or performed poorly at school, were unemployed, or abused drugs or alcohol [see

Figure 6, Figure 7 p. 19 & ABS, 2009b]. Young people in contact with the justice system also often experience multiple health problems including mental illness and health incidents relating to drug and alcohol. (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011)

Children who have access to good quality education and are supported by their parents are likely to develop with the necessary knowledge, skills and social norms for a productive and rewarding adult life. But the difference between educational access and participation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, including early childhood education, is a powerful determinant of the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the justice system.

Sport has been a tool used in reducing Aboriginal juvenile delinquency; where there is active competition, and access to it, delinquency declines (Tatz, 1999; SDP IWG, 2008). Positive role

⁵ ABS, 2002, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002, series 4714.0, ABS
See also: ABS, 2009b, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008, series 4714.0, ABS

modelling and social norms of behaviour can be encouraged through the engagement of Indigenous youth in sport and afterschool recreation activities can promote positive social and health wellbeing and can help to minimise the potential for offending and anti-social behaviour. (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011)

□

Educational Attainment and contact with the legal and justice systems

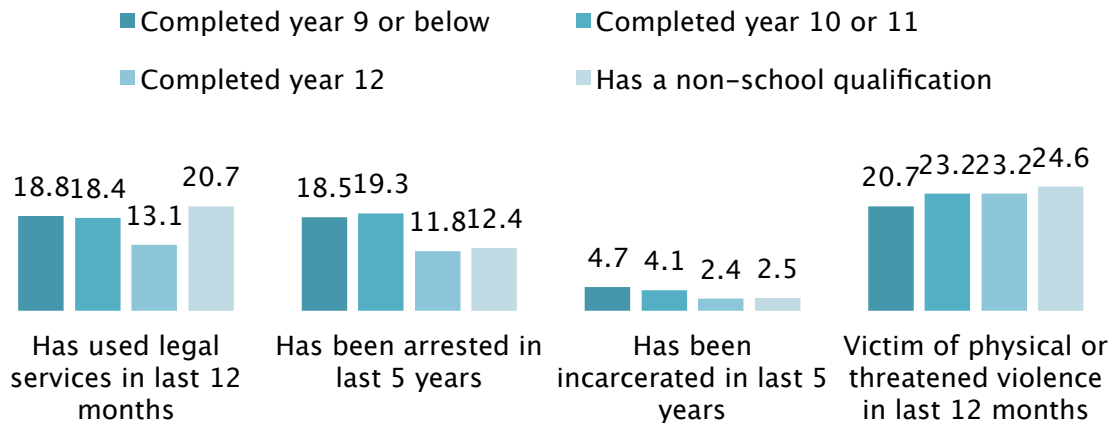


Figure 6 Educational attainment and contact with the legal and criminal justice systems, % of Indigenous persons. Source: ABS, 2009b, 4714.0, Law and Justice, Table 5a

□

Labour Force status and contact with the legal and justice systems



Figure 7 Labour force status and contact with the legal and justice system, % of Indigenous persons in labour force. Source: ABS, 2009b, 4714.0, Law and Justice, Table 6a

“An important aspect of sports participation is the need to conform to regulations. Understanding the rules of various sports and the penalties associated with infringements in sports can assist the understanding of the penalties imposed by crime and offending behaviour.” (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 65)

However there is often a lack of these activities for Indigenous youth at risk.

It’s noted in the report, *Doing Time- Time for Doing: Indigenous Youth and the Criminal Justice System* (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011), that the Closing the Gap strategy does not incorporate any criminal justice targets into its 6 goals [see section 2.2], which focus primarily on health, education and employment. The *National Indigenous Law and Justice*

*Framework*⁶, is probably a better document to look at as it provides a more coherent framework for pursuing Indigenous justice outcomes. Unfortunately this is just a framework, and does not stipulate that actions must be adopted by governments.

2.2 Government Response

“Under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, COAG committed to work together with Indigenous Australians, and the broader community, to achieve the ambitious target of Closing the Gap across six key areas—life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, numeracy and literacy, educational attainment and economic participation.”

- COAG Reform Council, 2011, p.

xi

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) goals Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to (COAG Reform Council, 2011, p. xii);

- *Close the life expectancy gap within a generation; base line gap- using data from 2005-2007- is 11.5 years for males and 9.7 years for females*
- *Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;*
- *Ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years*
- *Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing, numeracy within a decade*
- *Halve the gap for Indigenous 20 to 24 year olds in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020*
- *Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade*

Since the NIRA began in 2008 some progress in many parameters has occurred (COAG Reform Council, 2011). But in many areas the statistics are too volatile to be considered a sufficient improvement, or the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes are widening.

- Life Expectancy- PROGRESS: historically has been decreasing between 1991-2009
- Mortality Rates- PROGRESS: There was also a significant decrease in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous child mortality rates—from 132 per 100 000 in 2007 to 115 per 100 000 in 2009—and this is consistent with the trajectory for this target. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous infant (under 1 year) mortality rates also significantly decreased over this period—from around 5 deaths per 1000 live births to around 3 deaths per 1000.
- Early Childhood- There is currently no national comparable data available on Indigenous participation in early childhood education, thus one could assume that there is limited resources for ensuring the service is available.
- Reading, Writing and Numeracy- Partial SUCCESS: Nationally, the gap decreased in Years 3, 5 and 7 Reading and Writing and in Years 5 and 9 Numeracy. Nationally, the gap increased in Year 9 Reading, in Years 3 and 7 Numeracy, and in Year 9 Writing. The largest increases were in Year 3 Numeracy (from 17.4 to 21.2 percentage points) and Year 9 Reading (23.5 to 26.5 percentage points).

⁶ Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG), 2009, National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework, http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Consultationsreformsandreviews_DraftNationalIndigenousLawandJusticeFramework

- Year 12 Attainment- No Change: There was no new data available for this report and there was no improvement in Indigenous students' attendance rates in Year 10 in government schools from 2007 to 2009, as indicated in the last report.
- Employment- No new data was available for this area at the time of publish

A team from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Altman, et al., 2008) put together a discussion paper analysing the trends in the socioeconomic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians from 1971 to 2006 using ABS statistics. They found that “*Policies designed to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are intrinsically difficult to operationalise since many of the underlying causes are inter-generational in nature.*” (p. 16) For example, one's life expectancy depends on what happens in early childhood, and many of these crucial decisions are made by parents or previous generations. The discussion paper also found that the targets and time frames for the Governments 'Close the Gap' strategy are too ambitious if you look at long running Indigenous socioeconomic trends and their convergence/divergence from non-Indigenous socioeconomic status [see Figure 8]. Outcomes are dependent on social, cultural and community contexts, so policies that address these gaps must have a long-term focus and tackle problems at several levels, and with continuity between changes of governments.

Table 2. Number of years till convergence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes

	Convergence based on long run trends since 1971	Convergence based on post-1996 trends
Unemployment rate (% labour force)	28	**
Employment to population ratio (% adults)	**	**
Private-sector employment (% adults)	**	23
Labour force participation rate (% adults)	100+	**
Median weekly personal income \$A (2006)	100+	**
Household size	100+	100+
Median weekly household income \$A (2006)	94	100+
Home owner or purchasing (% population)	100+	100+
Never attended school (% adults)	2	14
Post-school qualification (% adults)	44	25
Degree or higher (% adults)	NA	100+
Attending educational institution (% 15-24 year olds)	NA	63
Male life expectancy at birth (years)	100+	**
Female life expectancy at birth (years)	47	**
Population aged over 55 years (%)	**	100+

Note: If Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes are diverging then the entry is a double asterisk. The trends are based on the maximum period for which comparable data was available. For example, the long run convergence for income calculated from 1981 as there were no available estimates for 1971. If the number of years to convergence is greater than 100 years, then the table entry is shown as 100+.

Figure 8 Number of years till convergence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes. Source: Altman et al., 2008, *How realistic are the prospects for 'Closing the Gap' in Socioeconomic Outcomes for Indigenous Australians*, p. 13

“*The Government recognises that achieving these targets [of the Closing the Gap strategy] will require sustained action across all levels of government and all sectors...*” (Australian Government, 2008, p. 176)

3. Sport driving engagement

The report, *Harnessing the power of sport for development and peace: Recommendations to governments* (SDP IWG, 2008), goes through the many reasons why sport is such a great tool for increasing social development and equality. Sport is a social connector as its nature of inclusion brings together players, teams, coaches, volunteers and spectators. Sporting programs that reflect the best values of sport, such as fair play, teamwork, cooperation, respect for opponents, and inclusion, reinforce this process by helping participants to acquire values and life skills consistent with positive social relationships, collaborative action and mutual support. The report goes on to say that sport is also a great motivator and tool for empowerment, as it's about "*drawing on, developing and showcasing people's strengths and capacities...*" (p. 6) rather than focusing on what people cannot do or do not have.

Sport has many benefits, such as (Olds, et al., 2004);⁷

- Reduction in the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, some forms of cancer, osteoporosis, and some mental disturbances.
- Improvement in quality of life is associated with reduced antisocial behaviour among young people.
- A range of economic analyses shows that promotion of physical activity is 2–25 times more cost effective as either primary health care approaches to certain behaviours (e.g. smoking), or secondary care approaches.
- Each extra hour of sport a day reduces 'screen time' by 20–24 minutes, reducing sedentary lifestyles that cause obesity
- Acute and chronic exposure to physical activity improves cognitive function in both able-bodied and disabled children, and there are positive correlations between levels of physical activity and academic performance
- "*In rural areas in particular, attitudes towards sport are very positive and sport is seen as a kind of 'community cement'.*" (Olds, et al., 2004, n.p)
- Sport can be seen as a therapy or as a physical or mental focus for youth, as a substitute for group cohesion, an answer to boredom, through leisure it is a possible alternative to the pub or delinquency. "*Of all 'group therapies' available, sport is the most logical in our armoury, and the one most likely to succeed.*" (Tatz, 1999, p. 136)

Participation in sport for children and adolescents is seen as such an important issue that it has been made mandatory in all public schools in NSW from kindergarten to year 11, as stated in Department of Education and Communities *Sport and Physical Activity Safety Policy for Schools* (1999, section 3.1);

"Schools are required to include two hours per week for planned physical activity, including in Years 3-6, a minimum of one hour for sport. In each of Years 7-10, 80-120 minutes per week is allocated. 80-120 minutes per week is also required for Year 11 students, and for students in Year 12, if Year 12 students wish to participate."

The SDP IWG (2008) again reiterates the usefulness of sport in increasing school enrolment, retention, and access to education; "*there is some evidence to suggest that building physical education, sport and play into school curriculum can be an effective means to increase the number of children enrolled in school and boost retention rates.*" (p. 105)

⁷ For more on the benefits of sport see:
Australian Sports Commission- <http://www.ausport.gov.au/information>
Sport England, The Value of Sport Monitor- http://www.sportengland.org/research/value_of_sport_monitor.aspx

The Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs produced a report on Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system (2011) where among a range of things it looked at the role of sport and recreation in encouraging youth engagement. The Committee made list of recommendations to the Commonwealth Government regarding this topic:

- [The Commonwealth Government should] *work with state and territory governments to support more sporting, music and other recreational activities for Indigenous children and youth outside of school hours, particularly in remote and regional areas*
- *encourage sporting bodies and sporting celebrities to become more involved in organising sporting engagement for Indigenous children and youth*
- *ensure continued funding for sports partnership programs and the provision of infrastructure and services to ensure sports participation by Indigenous youth, and*
- *investigate and address impediments to sports participation for Indigenous young men and women.*

“Leisure activities like sport may provide spaces where Indigenous people escape from being 'the other' in dominant culture by enabling opportunities for their own cultural reproduction and community connection. Participation within a sporting team can be a source of pride and esteem and can be important in the socialisation of young people through playing games with family members.” (Nelson, 2009)

But Nelson (2009) warns that to be solely dependent on sport as a tool for Indigenous success can cause issues if people revert to discourses about ‘sport as a saviour’, as it simplifies the extremely complex issues and causes of disadvantage. The Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG) (2008) also mentions sport’s limitations, in that it is just a tool for development and must be applied holistically and in an integrated manner for results and desired outcomes to be achieved.

Sport is a powerful tool for education as it possesses the ability to reach a broad spectrum of the community, including marginalised groups. High-profile athletes also wield an enormous amount of influence over people, especially youth who admire and wish to emulate them (SDP IWG, 2008). An athlete serving as a spokesperson for education, health or other youth development issues can be a significant tool for the communication of information especially to young people who are large consumers of popular culture and are extremely peer orientated. (SDP IWG, 2008)

4. *The role of role models and mentors*

The endemic racism, disruption to traditional ways of life and community structure in many Aboriginal communities has meant that Aboriginal youth are likely to be inadequately socialised (Fietz, 2005) and lacking in self-confidence. Mentoring has real value in these cases, in all aspects of the adolescent's life;

“Mentors and role models can assist youth at risk to develop self-esteem, self-worth, future aspirations and a commitment to community responsibility. They can contribute to rehabilitation and mentor on healthy lifestyles, sport, and education and employment goals.” (Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 61)

In the *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018* (FaHCSIA, 2011b) Objective 1.5 of Strengthening Foundations priorities is to ‘Support strong leadership’.

“Role models that Indigenous Australians can identify with, together with a supportive community and family environment, help to set high aspirations for economic independence and the skills necessary to achieve it.” (p. 28)

Fietz's (2005) work touched on the point that in many Aboriginal communities today problems such as drug and alcohol abuse have caused a fragmentation of the traditional social structures that provided the needed framework for development for children and youth. Now there is a lack of strong elders and public figures for Aboriginal youth to look up to and learn appropriate behaviour from. Tatz also mentioned this in his work on youth suicide; *“There are far too few publically recognised [Indigenous] role models who show that education, study, training or an apprenticeship is ‘the way to go’.”* (1999, p. 86) He also says that ideally there should be someone within the community group who becomes the first port of call for the youth at risk, such as a mentor.

When kids have strong positive role models they are more likely to stay on the right track and are less likely to partake in anti-social behaviour. A study by Hurd, et al. (2009) found that gender-matched role models were associated with more positive school outcomes than non-matched role models for female adolescents. A possible reason for this trend is due to the current limited female representation in a variety of careers, so for adolescent girls, having a female role model may be inspiring and accordingly, linked to greater academic achievement. (Hurd, et al., 2009)

A study by Brooker (2011) also found similar results;

“... students with a mentor had higher educational expectations, expectations for success, a stronger sense of school belonging, and fewer absences from school than those without. Having more than one mentor was associated with fewer total absences, a greater sense of belonging and higher educational expectations.” (p. 12)

Parents are critical in providing support and guidance to young people; however, if these strong parental role models do not exist, other family members, teachers, coaches or sporting athletes can be just as influential (SDP IWG, 2008).

5. NASCA's Programs

NASCA is a wholly Aboriginal governed organisation, its programs aim to empower Aboriginal young people through health education, sport and cultural programs with the collaboration of their communities, in order to help them develop the skills needed for negotiating and making the most out of life. The major message that each NASCA program conveys is to 'stay in school and get an education'. As previously mentioned, education is vitally important to be able to gain basic numeracy and literacy skills and the necessary knowledge needed for future employment. Many of NASCA's activities create pathways between school and the workforce, such as providing opportunities for gaining non-school qualifications, or equally important at a more basic level, allowing them to voice their aspirations and goals so that they can start achieving them.

NASCA does this by engaging youth through the use of sport, cultural programs, role models and mentors. The multifaceted cross-cutting nature of sport tackles a range of interrelated social issues that are seen as key problems faced by many Indigenous Australians as it teaches appropriate social behavioural, skills of collaboration and teamwork, increases self-belief and self-discipline. Many of NASCA's programs focus on bringing interesting and engaging events into schools to encourage kids to attend school each day.

NASCA's staff and role model volunteers undergo cultural training days to support them to have cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural competence and cultural proficiency, these skills are essential for working with the diverse range of cultures that make up Aboriginal Australia. (MCEECDYA, 2011)

NASCA's programs operate across a range of geographies and in a range of different ways in order to target a scope of issues, and deliver support to a larger volume of students. This way each program can be specifically designed to help the participating students.

5.1 Careers and Aspirations Program (CAP)

a) Overview

The Careers and Aspirations Program is a 5 day camp held at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) in Redfern, Sydney, and is attended by 13-17 year old Aboriginal students from schools across the country. They are designed to expose students to the range of employment possibilities after school and incorporate activities that aim to support self-empowerment, cultural pride, self-confidence, teamwork and personal growth for the participating students. Students visit potential future employers and workplace, increasing their awareness of post-school options. Students also attend workshops and seminars that are run by NASCA staff, role models and partners, who speak about their personal experiences, challenges and careers pathways. The CAP camps are specifically designed around ensuring culturally appropriate and interesting career paths are presented, and that the young people have the opportunity to design their own career plan that suits their needs, aspirations, and cultural identity.

b) How CAP is closing the gap

CAP reinforces the importance of education and having aspirations in order to achieve career and life goals. The program directly addresses issues of education, employment and self-confidence, as well as all the addressing other issues indirectly through these. Throughout the camp the main message of the importance of education and staying in school is reinforced by NASCA staff; as education is most important thing a young person can have as it increases life chances through being the starting point for the basic literacy and numeracy knowledge needed for any career [see section 2.1a) p. 11]. Activities such as a trip to Sydney University and Eora TAFE visit show students that higher education can be a viable option as there are support networks out there to make post-school education more accessible for Aboriginal youth. Employment opportunities and career pathways are

shown to students through visits to careers expos and business's to places such as Koori Radio, QANTAS, Accor Hotels, News limited.

A vital part of the program is the various aspiration and confidence building workshops that take place. These activities all work towards creating proud, empowered and high achieving individuals. Sessions include:

- iModel beauty and deportment course; increasing self-esteem of female students as well as their skills in personal presentation, which come in handy for job interviews
- NIDA Drama workshop; increasing confidence, teamwork and communication skills
- Goal setting workshops; valuing and defining personal aspirations
- "I am deadly" session; self-empowerment and cultural pride

CAP also encourages cultural and personal pride and has a 'no shame' policy to further support positive ways of thinking, cultural expression and participation. These sessions aim to increase self-confidence of students, who may be at risk of being shy or have a low self-esteem. [see section 2.1d p. 16]



Image 1 Griffith High School Students playing Rugby on CAP camp at NCIE, June 2011

As well as serious discussions about career and personal aspirations, the camp is a fun and engaging experience for students and many sport and recreation activities sessions are done too, such as trivia night, basketball, laser skirmish, ALF, soccer surfing lessons, shopping, movies. This brings fun and fitness together to reinforce NASCA's focus on sport and physical lifestyles and encourages the students to participate. [see section 3 p. 22]

In June to December, 2011 students from schools such as Griffith High School (Central NSW), Vincentia High School (south Coast NSW), Mount Isa High School (North West QLD), Yirara College (Alice Springs NT) and Barkly College (Tennant Creek NT).

5.2 ARMtour (Athletes as Role Models)

a) Overview

ARMtour uses athletes as role models to deliver sport and recreation activities that encourage educational engagement to Aboriginal students living in remote Northern Territory communities. 'Role models' (Indigenous or non-Indigenous athletes and volunteers) work with the schools and communities to;

- Provide inspiration, encouragement and support for students at school
- Enhance students' self-esteem and self-confidence as Indigenous young people
- Help students develop life skills, e.g. in communication, leadership and goal-setting
- Encourage participation in sport and recreation activities for healthy and positive lifestyles
- Strengthen school and community partnerships

ARMtour teams visits 4 Northern Territory schools and communities for a week each, three times a year. In 2011 these were:

- Ntaria School⁸, Hermannsburg; 'very remote', pop. 999, 130km West of Alice Springs

⁸ In a bid to improve these statistics and problems the community of Ntaria has been targeted in COAG's *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (RSD)*. Federal, Northern Territory, local government and shire councils have agreed to work together with the Ntaria community through the Local Reference Group, known as the Wurla Nyinta Reference Group, to reduce Indigenous disadvantage through the *Local Implantation Plan (ILP)* (Australian Government, 2010). This provides a framework where priorities, strategies and actions can be discussed and a time frame for achieving these is decided upon. In Ntaria, but also in all of the communities visited, the ARMtour program is complements the ILP objectives and the needs of the local people.

- Warrumpi Kuula, Papunya; ‘very remote’, pop. 350, 250km west of Alice Springs
- Ltyentye Apurte, Santa Teresa; ‘remote’, pop. 550, 80km south-east of Alice Springs
- Mt Allen School, Yuelamu; ‘very remote’, pop. 300, 280km northwest of Alice Springs

The communities visited face many of the social problems other Aboriginal Australians face, but also their problems are unique due to their remote geography [see section 2.1 a) p. 8]. For example, Ntaria has a large youth population, with nearly two thirds of people under 25 years (in 2006) (Australian Government, 2010), because of this, resources must be invested into the education of these young people to increase outcomes. Alcohol and substance abuse is a major problem in many communities, like in Papunya, where many adolescents and adults have chronic addictions to petrol sniffing (Northern Territory Government,



Image 2 Yuelamu children playing AFL, 2011

n.d.). School attendance is also extremely low; Mt Allen School only has an average attendance rate of 68%, whilst Warrumpi Kuula School in Papunya has only 66% attendance (ACARA, 2010). With the lack of resources available, schooling usually only goes up to years 9 and 10, as most students drop out, or leave to go to boarding school, usually in Alice Springs.



Image 3 Bush walk with children and role models, Santa Teresa, 2011

b) *How ARMtour is closing the gap*

NASCA’s use of athletes as role models in its ARMtour program provides support and empowerment for young Indigenous people and the remote communities they visit. Indigenous and non-Indigenous sportsmen and women can be role models for young people to look up to and aspire to be like [see section 0 p. 24]. Role models, for the majority of the time, are based in the classroom as teacher aides, working one-on-one with students who are at varying levels of educational development, and helping teachers who have overstretched resources. This one-on-one mentoring has been seen to be very effective in engaging the students in educational activities. Whilst the role models are in the classrooms and communities they can form mentor like relationships with the students they are interacting with.

ARMtour Online (and its predecessor, Mydreaming) is a networking site set up to continue the connection and mentor like relationship between students and ARMtour athletes. NASCA is working towards increasing the use of this site in order to develop relationships between role model and student, so that students can continue to have support post-ARMtour.

For the rest of the time, ARMtour role models deliver and participate in outdoor sports sessions, craft workshops, community engagement and personal development activities. These all work towards addressing the projects objectives and outcomes; i.e. leadership, teamwork, goal setting, positive lifestyle choices, nutrition, sport skills and self esteem. Sporting activities that have been done include soccer, hockey, softball, netball, basketball, AFL, Frisbee, swimming, Traditional Indigenous Games, athletics and daily ‘huff and puff’ physical activity and skills sessions.

The ‘Huff n Puff’ sports exercises are done in the mornings before class. Participating in sport before going into the classroom improves student concentration, attitude and behaviour in class [see section 3 p. 22]. Students also clear their noses and wash hands before entering classrooms combating other health issues such as spreading of the common cold or other communicable diseases. Other activities that promote healthy lifestyles are the Nutrition/Healthy Living Community afternoons. Students, parents, local women, a sport and recreation officer, a clinic nurse, a nutritionist, and mentors participate in making healthy meals. This creates a space for community engagement in the local

children's education, along with educating parents about healthy living and nutrition that is applicable to everyday life.

Other activities are aimed at personal development and community engagement in supporting schools, such as; community BBQs, cooking classes and breakfast club, community and role model bush trips to cultural sites, and an after school Girls/Boys club.

Having strong and proud women as roles models in the remote communities is extremely important, as due to alcohol and substance abuse and damaged cultural norms there is a lot of domestic and sexual violence against women. ARMtour's *Girls Club* or *Kunga Klub*, afterschool sessions are specifically target towards the student's personal development and addresses social norms and behavioural problems that have arisen from a breakdown of women's roles and standing in the community. In Papunya this activity has helped the young women and girls realise their actions after a spate of bullying in school. This session also allows for more bonding between student and role model, and these afternoon activities are highly anticipated by students in all communities.

ARMtour aims to engage students *and* the community so that in between visits progress can continue and students and families see the benefits of school and living a healthy life. Below is a list of some of the activities which have occurred at the various communities on ARMtour;

- Breakfast club
- Athletics Carnival; Mt Allen and Papunya, this saw a big increase in attendance at school
- After school Girls/Boys Club
- Daily sports sessions: e.g. Huff and Puff activities, softball, AFL, basketball, soccer, netball
- Papunya Community BBQ in celebration of International Children's Day
- Goanna hunt with elders, community members, and role models; Papunya
- 'Walking School Bus' event participation encourages kids to come to school; Papunya
- Nutrition/Healthy Living Community afternoon with students, local women, Sport and Rec officer, clinic nurse, a nutritionist, parents and mentors
- Joint Swimming Carnival between Ntaria and Ltyentye Apurte Schools in Alice Springs
- Car Wash fundraiser for RSPCA; Ntaria
- Photography workshop with Indigenous photographer; Ntaria
- Ntaria community event to celebrate an Indigenous play opening in Melbourne; Role models got involved with whole community
- Ntaria, Papunya and Ltyentye Apurte visited NASCA later in the year for a Careers and Aspirations Program (CAP) camp; as reward for school attendance, participation and good behaviour

ARMtour addresses many of the issues brought up communities consulted by FaHSCIA (2011) regarding education in their remote communities. [see section 2.1a) p. 11]

- Children do not like being locked up in the classroom all day, so ARMtour's outdoor sports sessions allow students to be outside and active during school time.
- 'Cultural learnings' as well as academic knowledge is encouraged and ARMtour role models participate in cultural events with the communities, and aim to promote cultural pride
- ARMtour's presence in the communities increases attendance

Image 4 Ltyentye Apurte and Ntaria joint swimming carnival, Alice Springs 2011



- Groups of students from 3 of the 4 schools were rewarded for their consistent attendance by going on a CAP Camp at the end of 2011.

The main goals of ARMtour are to increase community participation by youth and school attendance. During the weeks of ARMtour's visits, school attendance rates dramatically increase. This anticipation and excitement by not just children but all community members is a testament to the great work the program does in these communities.



Image 5 Gala Day Walan Barramal Sporting Chance students, South Sydney 2011



5.3 Sporting Chance Academies

a) Overview

NASCA's Sporting Chance Academies use sport and sports based activities to support and encourage Aboriginal youth to stay in school, increase self efficacy and create better post-school opportunities. Part of this includes empowerment, increasing self-confidence and belief, building cultural pride, learning life skills and developing leadership qualities. This is done through having a variety of activities for students to take part in such as going on excursions and camps, training courses, learning new skills, and having one-on-one mentoring available for students in class the form of a Project Officer who regularly visits schools. NASCA runs two academies;

- *Walan Barramal* Sporting Chance Academy; South Sydney, 'urban', consisted of 94 students (in 2011) from Tempe High School, Alexandria Park Community School and Marrickville High School
- *Gambirrang* Sporting Chance Academy; Dubbo region, Central NSW, 'regional', consisted of 117 students (in 2011) from Dubbo College Senior Campus, Dubbo College Delroy Campus, Wellington High School, Narromine High School

All Aboriginal students from years 7 to 12 from these various schools are offered to be a part of the Sporting Chance Academies, and get the chance to take part in camps, excursions, sports days, and other special activities in return for their good behaviour in class and maintaining satisfactory school attendance.

The program aims to achieve the following goals:

- Increasing school attendance and retention rates
- Strengthening student engagement with school and improving attitudes to schooling
- Improving general skills such as teamwork, leadership and communication
- Improving opportunities for post school-pathways
- Improving the health and well-being of students, including physical activity levels, self-esteem and confidence
- Promote and support positive learning experiences that foster success

b) *How NASCA students are closing the gap*

"Young people's transition from school to continued study or full-time employment can have long-term implications. For example, those who are not fully engaged in either education

and/or work (i.e. not in full-time work, full-time education or in a combination of part-time employment and part-time study) may be at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, underemployed or marginally attached to the labour force.” (ABS, 2010, 4704.0)

The Sporting Chance Academies aim to increase the capacity for Aboriginal youth to navigate contemporary Australian society through increasing educational attainment by engaging with students in school settings. This in turn aims to increase Aboriginal educational attainment, employability, health status, self-confidence, and decreases the risks of entering the justice system. Education is vital in ensuring youth have to most options available to them when choosing career paths [see section 2.1 p. 11]. In the urban and regional areas where the Academies operate there are many post-school opportunities present but by not staying in school Aboriginal students will find it harder to tap into the existing workforce and economy [see section 1.2c) p. 9]. The Sporting Chance program makes school a more culturally relevant and engaging place for Aboriginal youth; practical learning is done through participating in the many different opportunities available to students which can be sporting, educational, cultural, or career preparing in nature.



Image 6 'reflections craft afternoon' with Sporting Chance students on Year 12 Graduation Camp, NCIE 2011

For example, this is a list of some of the activities that have occurred at the Walan Barramal South Sydney Academy:

- 8 week AFL NSW/ACT training course
- Soccer clinic
- AIS camp; 3 days of living like a elite athletes
- Year 12 Graduation and Careers camp at NCIE; recognition of completing Year 12
- Careers Expo with Alexandria Park Community
- Year 8-9 Curriculum influenced by partnership with 'High Resolves Leadership' program students learning about Totems
- Year 9-10 3 week CV writing program
- Senior First Aid Certificate and Bronze Medallion accreditations
- Commonwealth Bank Start Smart Program to introduce financial literacy
- Attended Vibe Alive youth Festival; participation in cultural performances, learn about career and University pathways, health and lifestyle information
- Cultural art classes
- PE classes
- Sports Gala Days; inter-school gathering with all Walan Barramal Academy students

Gambirrang students have been involved in a wide range of activities also, such as:

- Austswim course
- Work Experience Programs
- Advanced Sports Taping Course
- University and work-site organisation visits
- iModel; grooming and beauty department workshops for girls
- Indigenous Careers Expo

- Travelled to attend Year 12 Graduation and Careers camp at NCIE; visited organisations, attended Deadly Awards
- Traditional Indigenous Games and NAIDOC celebrations with visiting primary schools and community groups
- Attended Vibe Alive youth festival Moree; participation in cultural performances, learn about career and University pathways, health and lifestyle information
- End of year rewards activity/excursions for >85% attendance; 5 day beach camp with surfing lessons, rainforest walks.
- Sports and Community Gala Day; hosted by NASCA in Dubbo

Many of these activities engage students with their education through the use of sport, but part of this also includes empowerment, building confidence and self belief, understanding and being proud of culture, learning life skills, developing leadership qualities and increasing post-school opportunities. A draft evaluation of the Walan Barramal Sporting Chance program done by the University of Sydney (Peralta, et al., 2011) provides evidence that the programs strategies are effective in these above areas and are also meeting the overall objectives of the program; which is to empower Aboriginal youth so that they have the opportunity to lead healthy, educated and happy lives. Engagement in schooling and community life allows this to occur; as evidence shows that school connectedness and supportive social relationships create positive outcomes for youth [see section 1.1a) p. 6]. Increasing self-confidence and leadership qualities also directly addresses the issues of low self-esteem and self-worth felt by many Aboriginal people who feel they can't achieve in life due to their social position [see section 2.1d) p. 16].

Activities such as attending career expos, work experience programs, CV writing workshops, leadership programs and completing courses such as Senior First Aid Certificate and Bronze Medallion accreditations, Austswim, and Advanced Sports Taping are helping build up a student's self-confidence in their ability and increase their capacity for future employment. Because of these activities students are given the opportunities and support needed to encourage them through high school, and then onto work or further education and training [see section 2.1a) p. 11; 2.1c) p. 16].

Sports and community Gala Days, cultural art classes, events like the Vibe Alive youth festival involve Traditional Indigenous Games and other cultural activities such as dance, music, art, are enriching experiences for students where they can learn, maintain and teach other young Aboriginal people about their cultures. Activities like sports, camps, excursions and culture and painting class were named as being effective in engaging students [see section 3 p. 22]. 'Choice and variation' was also noted as an important part of keeping things fresh and interesting for the students (Peralta, et al., 2011, p. 13). The 'keep it fresh' approach is one adopted by both Academies to ensure students stay engaged in the activities and continue coming to school.

Participation in events and special excursions rely on their good behaviour in class and their regular attendance at school. Events such as end of year camps are rewards for 85% or greater attendance throughout the year. These camps are well anticipated and are used as rewards but also ways to ensure good behaviour and attendance from students. Based on attendance records from 3 of the 4 Gambirrang Academy schools (Wellington, Narromine and Dubbo Senior High Schools) the average attendance rate for the NASCA students was 87% for 2011, compared to a national average of 80% attendance for Indigenous students. More evidence that NASCA's Sporting Chance Academy program is effective is the improvement in academic outcomes for its students; 69% of Academy students (yrs 8 – 10) had an increase in literacy skills and 64% of the same cohort had an increase in numeracy skills; 76% of all Senior Academy students (years 11 & 12) showed an overall improvement (academic and/or behavioural). NASCA's program directly addresses the difference in school attendance and retention between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as they are almost half as likely to complete high school (47.4% compared to 83.3% (FaSHCIA, 2011b))[see section 21.a) p. 11]. NASCA shows that getting students to attend school is the first step in helping them reach their full potential, goals and helping students

close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage by increasing academic retention, which is vitally important as a starting point for a good life [see section 2.1 p. 11].

5.4 Stay on Track

a) Overview

The ‘Stay on Track’ program is a 4 day (3 night) camp funded by the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) and is run during school holidays at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE). It’s aimed at 20 Indigenous youth aged 11-14 years from the local area that are seen to be at risk of partaking in delinquent or anti-social behavior, committing a crime and entering the justice system. The aim of Stay on Track is ‘prevention rather than intervention’; this is done by providing workshops to increase participants self confidence and life skills, health awareness and awareness of the impact of crime on victims and perpetrators.

b) How Stay on Track is closing the gap

The overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the juvenile justice system (38%) and the increased likelihood of imprisonment mean that Aboriginal youth are at high risk of partaking in criminal behaviour (AIHW, 2007, p. 29). Stay on Track targets Aboriginal kids from the Redfern local area by sourcing through local youth services (DOCS, Barnardos), schools, and sporting organisations (football clubs). These organisations and institutions nominate kids who they believe could benefit from coming on the fully funded camp. The camp runs 2 to 3 times a year and has so far just been for groups of young males, but a female targeted camp is running in 2012. This gender division means the program can be tailored to target specific issues that are different between males and females, such as targeting the causes of domestic violence against women in male actions and behaviours.

Stay on Track, like all NASCA’s programs also reiterates the message of staying in school in order to increase life opportunities. Education is a powerful determinant of staying on track; the ABS found that Indigenous people are far more likely to have been charged with, or imprisoned for, an offence if they left school early or performed poorly at school, were unemployed, or abused drugs or alcohol. (ABS, 2002 cited by Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011) [see Figure 6 p. 19]

Activities and workshops include:

- Healthy lifestyles: Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) talk on healthy lifestyles, nutrition, the effects of drug, tobacco and alcohol use, the effects and causes of domestic violence. Kids also ate healthy foods whilst on camp.
- Realities of crime talk: Police and Aboriginal Liaison Officer and speak on the impact of crime and criminal behaviour and what it can do to you.
- Mentoring: Tribal Warrior mentors and CEO spoke about how crime affected their lives, and how they turned their lives around.
- Sport and Recreation activities: soccer, learn to surf lessons, Laser Skirmish, trips to the movies.

All these sessions are aimed at opening the kid’s eyes to the life that crime really brings and shows them that there other ways to live. Research has shown that engagement in sport and recreation activities outside school is an effective way of deterring anti-social behaviour that can lead to crime (Tatz, 1999; SDP IWG, 2008). However there is often a lack of access these activities for Aboriginal youth at risk. NASCA tries to provide this service and create better access for sporting activities for its students, through the Stay on Track program but also through programs like the Sporting Chance Academies, which are specifically designed to target and provide positive resilience building activities for young Aboriginal people.

6. Conclusion

NASCA as an organisation that looks at the challenges Indigenous youth encounter belonging to culturally different worlds, and supports them to navigate through this, live happy healthy lives and achieve their goals. NASCA's programs, rather than finding flashy new solutions, look at the issues that are a cause of the problem, and work with communities to rectify this through methods that increase youth participation, engagement and empowerment. Statistically there is a large gap in the socioeconomic conditions between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian population that is explained when looking at the past policies and the socio-historical context of Aboriginal Australia. Current policies, such as the Governments 'Close the Gap' strategy, now aim to decrease this disadvantage. NASCA recognises that a major cause of the problem is that Aboriginal children are getting left behind in school and the support systems that other Australian children have (such as parental support, encouragement, positive role models and an understanding of the value of education) may not exist for them. NASCA's main goal is to turn this around and increase the educational attainment and retention rates for Aboriginal youth. Most of NASCA's programs are run through schools and this enables the programs to provide support and engaging activities for youth in school settings which encourages and rewards attendance. The programs also encourage community involvement in schooling, which in turn strengthens the parental and community support systems for the young participants.

A realisation of the interconnectedness across all the aforementioned areas of Education, Health, Employment, Self-confidence, Suicide Prevention and the Justice System, in policy making and program delivery is vital to closing the gap. NASCA's programs target these areas by using sport as a tool for engagement and health education. The incorporation of interesting and fun activities at school that create career pathways, plus the repetition of the message that education is vitally important for achieving ones aspirations, increases school attendance, educational attainment and employment opportunity. With the prospects of having an educated, healthy and economic secure life, students have a renewed sense of self-worth and confidence and the ability to make informed decisions about their lives and are less likely to engage in risk taking behaviours, that may lead to the criminal justice system.

NASCA's programs are designed to target Aboriginal youth in context specific ways that are culturally appropriate and engaging. NASCA's programs will hopefully ensure that through their engagement strategies, mentoring and support of Indigenous youth through the avenues of sport and formal education, 'the gap' for their students will be diminished and they will have helped break an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

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