



**THE ROLE OF SPORT
IN THE WELL-BEING AND MENTORING
OF INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Brisbane Broncos strongly believe that sport and sporting organisations have a significant and very positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander young people.

Rugby league has emerged as a key factor in some very positive statistics and research reports into Indigenous well being. Besides the obvious key health benefits gained through the promotion of sport and physical activity in general, it has been noted that there seems to be a sense of collective identity and pride exercised in the ways in which young people engage in rugby league competitions. (Nelson, 2009) It was also noted in Nelson's 2009 study of Sport, physical activity and urban Indigenous young people that there is an obvious and very significant investment in the cultural artefacts of rugby league, such as football jerseys of their favourite National Rugby League (NRL) Team. It is this ideal that really exemplifies the fact that Rugby League, for many families – particularly indigenous families – is more than just a sport they play, with televised rugby league games described as a site of family togetherness. As one participant of the study explained, 'we watch it [the Broncos match] every week. We have a little Sunday dinner for it.'

It is these values and beliefs that Indigenous communities hold about Rugby League that make it imperative that clubs such as the Brisbane Broncos run programs such as **Learn Earn Legend!** in order to improve the wellbeing of Indigenous youth. With such a good representation of Indigenous people in our playing group, it is simple to then identify how Indigenous Australians have a close affinity to both the players and the club in general.

The Indigenous players in particular have become very positive role models, not just for future football players, but for all students in our mentoring program, boys and girls, as the key message they take home with them from sessions spent with Indigenous players is one of pride in community, family and self and a desire to achieve greatness, even through adversity.





A COMMITMENT TO CLOSING THE GAP

2. CLOSING THE GAP

The Brisbane Broncos have a long and proud association with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than 15% of our organization is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage.

Given that Indigenous Australians comprise less than 3% of Australia's wider population, this is a fairly significant statistic. The success on and off the field of our Indigenous players through the club's history such as Wendell Sailor, Gordon Tallis, Steve Renouf and current captain Sam Thaiday, demonstrates the very proud relationship between the Brisbane Broncos and the Indigenous community.

The Brisbane Broncos Reconciliation Action Plan 2012– 2013 (RAP) formally recognizes the club's commitment and contribution to Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The RAP outlines the ways in which the club is demonstrating and promoting the key messages of reconciliation: relationships with, and respect for, the diversity of cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the opportunities provided by the club in game development and community engagement.

The Brisbane Broncos are dedicated to using their company as a vehicle to support, provide and improve outcomes and opportunities for indigenous young people.

The club recognises the deep relationship between family and community in the success and well-being of Indigenous young people, and the club's RAP states specifically that the club will consult with Indigenous groups and Elders on an ongoing basis to establish links and facilitate engagement with Indigenous people through new avenues. The program coordinator of our Learn Earn Legend! Mentoring Program attends community forum meetings at Brisbane North, Brisbane South and Ipswich throughout the year to foster these relationships and links, critical to the success of our mentoring of Indigenous young people.



2. CLOSING THE GAP

The Broncos recognise that the significant barriers to success for Indigenous young people extend not just to education, literacy and numeracy levels, but also to access to education and training opportunities and key information about healthy lifestyles. It has been reported that Non-Indigenous Australians are almost twice as likely to finish year 12 as their Indigenous counterparts.

It is through the Learn Earn Legend! Mentoring program that the Broncos seek to help in Closing the Gap- improving literacy and numeracy and providing real opportunities for success in a variety of areas.

We identify, as does the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, that *education is the key in Closing the Gap*, and our mentoring program is designed specifically to engage and support those students most at risk of disengaging in school.





3. RUGBY LEAGUE AS A VEHICLE FOR ENGAGEMENT & SUCCESS⁶

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- ▶ *The success of this program leverages very heavily on the Broncos brand as a vehicle to improve the outcomes of the Indigenous young people who are involved.*
- ▶ That this program has succeeded where others have not is a reflection of the power and drive associated with the Brisbane Broncos name and image. We have no difficulty engaging with students, even if they have no interest in football, simply because they recognise the organisation and the opportunities it can create.
- ▶ We currently have 82 girls in the program and 66 boys. We believe that females have engaged in the program equally as well as their male counterparts, and in many instances, are even more keen and eager to be involved. Female involvement and engagement can be attributed to the staffing arrangements (having 2 female case managers) and also to the information being delivered and the engaging delivery of that information to the students.
- ▶ *The Broncos brand has not only been successful in engaging students to participate, we have had significant success in utilising our corporate partners to provide jobs and training.*
- ▶ Our close contact with Brisbane universities has allowed us to negotiate some higher education scholarships for our students. Our close relationship with The Bremer Institute of TAFE has led to a number of students being offered scholarships to study diploma programs next year. One of our students from this year has been offered a scholarship to study at Bond University next year.





**4. BRONCOS
LEARN EARN LEGEND! PROGRAM**

4.1 OVERVIEW

- ▶ The Brisbane Broncos **Learn Earn Legend!** Mentoring Program is designed to support monitor, assist and encourage an Indigenous year 12 student as they make the transition between school and work. Students are intensively case-managed for a period of 12 months, from 6 months into year 12 until 6 months post-school.
- ▶ *To ensure a firm, positive and lasting connection and rapport is built between the case managers and the students, the students enter the program at the start of their year 12 schooling year on an unofficial basis, with case managers beginning their visits in February – well before the program officially begins.*
- ▶ Our program has been in operation now for three years, and began with only a handful of schools and less than 50 students. In 2010, 41 students commenced the program. In 2011 the program grew to encompass 133 students, and in 2012 148 students have commenced the program.
- ▶ Now in its third year, the program has over 150 students under its guidance across 15 schools in Brisbane and Ipswich. The schools involved are Aspley SHS, Bremer SHS, Bundamba Secondary College, Corinda SHS, Cavendish Road SHS, Ferny Grove SHS, Glenala SHS, Ipswich SHS, Mitchelton SHS, Redbank Plains SHS, Sandgate District SHS, St James College, St Peter Claver College, Wavell SHS and Woodcrest College.
- ▶ The program works with every Year 12 student in the 15 schools who wish to take part. It is the multi-faceted nature of the program that has and will continue to make it very successful. The program is made up of two main parts, a series of mentoring sessions run by successful ex- players and guest speakers, and an individual 'case manager' for each student to guide them through the transition between school and work.



4.2 MENTORING

- ▶ An integral part of the program is the Student mentoring, run by Paul Dyer, Michael Hancock and Michael De Vere. The sessions include information and discussion on the areas of goal setting, personal branding achieving your dreams, time management, Health and Nutrition (sessions run by The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health) and Life distractions (Drugs and Alcohol). The three mentors have previously worked in other mentoring capacities with Thiess and FOGS (Former Origin Greats). Their own personal stories of success at a high level bring credibility to their sessions
- ▶ *The focus of the sessions are to deliver good quality, interesting information to all of our students in the hope that they can then make informed choices and decisions about their pathways into the world post- school.*
- ▶ It is also through these sessions that the Broncos aim to give the students key messages to take back into to their communities and disseminate through the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community.
- ▶ Brisbane Broncos Players are used in these mentoring sessions to reinforce the messages being given. Jharal Yow Yeh and Justin Hodges have given up time to attend sessions and meet with the students. This aids the engagement of the students greatly and their efforts are always appreciated.



4.3 CASE MANAGEMENT

- ▶ Each **Learn Earn Legend!** student is case-managed to ensure support is provided to them to achieve their career goals. This service is provided by a 'case manager' who is an employee of the Brisbane Broncos organisation.
- ▶ The individual contact that each student has with their 'case manager' is vital to ensuring that each student is given the opportunity to reach their full potential. The case managers meet with the students at the start of the year to interview them and get a general idea of their career aspirations and create a plan to achieve this goal. The case manager then maintains a one-on-one relationship with the student throughout the school year and then into the first six months of life post-school.
- ▶ *The overall aim of the program is that each student will be involved in full time work and/or education and training.*
- ▶ Our students have vast career aspirations ranging in industries from students wanting to do apprenticeships and traineeships, and students wanting to go to TAFE or University. The case managers maintain strong connections with key members of the school community regarding the students' welfare, such as guidance counsellors, CEC's, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department.



4.4 STAFFING

- ▶ The Mentoring program is overseen by Scot Czislowski. Scot comes from a long history in Education and Player welfare. Scot is responsible for the day to day running of the program, meeting contractual requirements and invoice reconciliation. Scot has been in control of this program since its beginning and continues to enjoy the challenges and success stories.
- ▶ Scot (Brisbane North) and Amy Croll (Ipswich corridor) coordinate all school visits in their area for the mentors and Case Managers (Support Officers). We have three Support officers working in the fifteen schools, providing the continual support and guidance to the students as discussed previously. The success of this program hinges very heavily on the work of the staff involved.
- ▶ Merle Cashman and Dennis Conlon work as support officers in schools from Ipswich to Brisbane North, and both have successfully formed close partnerships with students, schools and community. Both officers are Aboriginal and therefore bring an essential cultural component of the program. They share a strong sense of community and are invested in helping Indigenous youth in their own communities and across the region.
- ▶ *Our goal is always to enhance and reinforce the students' heritage and culture while supporting them on their transition to work or further study.*
- ▶ Dennis is currently studying Medicine at University and is therefore a shining ambassador for higher education, and Merle is also a CEC at Mitchelton SHS which gives her an even better knowledge of the school system and ways in which to support Indigenous youth this year.



4.5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ The case managers' connection to parents and family has emerged as a key factor influencing the success of students. We have found the involvement of family members is crucial to reinforcing the messages we are delivering to the students. Maintaining close relationships with parents and care givers gives the case managers the opportunity to ensure information is dispensed thoroughly and students have support from all areas of their lives.
- ▶ This connection extends to community, as all staff involved in the program have been fortunate enough to attend community events and meetings where key stakeholders in Indigenous youth mentoring and well-being have been represented and community issues and ideas discussed.
- ▶ The role of our Facebook page has perhaps been the most successful tool in our challenge to keep community, family and the students themselves involved and informed. The Facebook page enables fast communication with students and an easy way to circulate information, job advertisements, training opportunities, deadlines and upcoming events.

4.6 FUNDING

- ▶ The program is funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the Australian Government and The Brisbane Broncos Football Club.





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5. DIFFICULT STORIES & DIFFERENT LIVES

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- ▶ The Mentoring program caters for individual differences – as many of the schools the program runs in have students who particularly need support and guidance and sometimes just someone else to talk to.
- ▶ Last year we had 2 students placed in detention, and 2 students fall pregnant during their final year. This year we had a student open up and admit a significant drug problem in the middle of a mentoring session, based on the power of the information he was hearing and absorbing.
- ▶ Another difficulty we have encountered with all of the cohorts to go through the program is the transient nature of some of our students– we had quite a few students move interstate or to regional Queensland and have lost contact with them. It is these areas that provide a challenge for the staff of the mentoring program, as they are invested in the achievement and success of each and every student.





6. REAL RESULTS & OUTCOMES

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- ▶ *The strength of any program and its success lies in the key facts and figures that have emerged.*
- ▶ In the first year of operation 39 out of 41 students entered into jobs, training or further education. The 2011/12 cohort excelled, with 103 of the 135 students finding further education opportunities, work or training. In this cohort, we had 29% go into University or TAFE courses.\
- ▶ We have recently secured an invaluable partnership with Arrow Energy, who has teamed up with All Trades Queensland to provide school based traineeships and apprenticeships for 15 students across Brisbane and Ipswich, across a two year partnership agreement. Those students have started their traineeships or apprenticeships as a school based arrangement, and when they finish year 12 at the end of this year, they will continue that training full time. The 15 currently in employment are involved in a variety of areas, ranging from cabinet making to business administration.
- ▶ 2012/13 promises to be just as successful as previous years – with increases in the number of students applying through QTAC for further study. Combined with a number of students who have had interviews with the defence force, and the large number of our students already seeking help to apply for jobs, TAFE interviews and other traineeships and apprenticeships – it is safe to say that the prospects for this year’s group of students are very successful.

