NCVER

Case studies of training advantage for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island learners

Janet Skewes
TAFE SA

Melodie Bat and John Guenther
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

Bob Boughton and Frances Williamson
University of New England

Sandra Wooltorton, Mel Marshall, Anna Dwyer
University of Notre Dame Australia

Anne Stephens
James Cook University

Contents

Tables

Introduction

The case studies that follow are a compilation of learnings derived from the research project, *Enhancing training advantage for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.* The project, funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), was conducted by a consortium of researchers from five institutions: TAFE SA, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, University of New England, James Cook University and the University of Notre Dame Australia. The research was conducted during 2016 with participants from five locations: the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands of South Australia, the Northern Territory, western New South Wales, the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and the Cape York and Torres Strait Island regions of Queensland.

Based on training programs considered to be successful, the project was designed in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of retention and completion towards employability. Nationally, for very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees, completion rates for VET courses are on average 16.6%, with an even lower figure for certificate I courses.

Full details about the project and its cross-cutting findings, with a literature review and additional statistical information, are contained in the report, available from the NCVER Portal at <https://www.ncver.edu.au>. The case studies presented here mostly present qualitative findings.

Case study methodology

Research questions

Two main research questions drove the project. We refer to 'employability' in these questions rather than 'employment' partly because the issue of destinations beyond training is outside the scope of what was required and because it is difficult to track from the view of training providers. We recognise that outcomes other than employment may be important for participants (Miller 2005; Fredman 2014). At a national level though, the need for VET (Pocock et al. 2011), and even foundational literacy and numeracy skills (Shomos 2010), to increase productivity is paramount. While recognising the multiple reasons for engagement in training, our research questions explicitly make the connection between training and employability.

- How can retention and completion in post-school training be improved (to improve employability) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote communities?

  - Which models of adult training work well (or not) to achieve completion and employability outcomes in each site?

  - How do factors of funding, andragogy, individual agency, cultural attachments, geography, employment service delivery, English language literacy, digital literacies, and job availability effect improved engagement, retention and completion of training?

- What indicators of success other than completion would be important for training in remote communities (to improve employability)?

  - What do nationally available VET and employment data reveal about the link between completing a VET qualification and achieving employment outcomes for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners?

Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance for the project was obtained for all participating organisations in applications to institutional ethics committees. Additional clearances were obtained as required in particular locations (for example, with Land Councils, and in central Australia, with the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee). In addition, the project established an Indigenous Advisory Group to guide the research process and to ensure that all ethical considerations were given appropriate oversight.

Data sources

Each case study was based on an examination of documentary evidence (such as performance reports and evaluations) and a series of focus groups and interviews with VET trainees (past and present), employers, trainers, training administrators, job service providers, members of associated service providers, remote community representatives and relevant government agency representatives. Focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis in an NVivo (qualitative analysis software) database. Participant numbers for each case study are detailed below.

Table 1   Research respondents

	Aboriginal health worker training, NT	Ranger training, WA	Indigenous mental health (IMH), Qld	Yes, I can literacy campaign, NSW	Aged care and home community care training, SA
Trainees	10	11	3	6	6
Trainers/providers	3	3	5	3	1
Employers, job services, community organisations and cultural advisors	1	6	3	5	2
Total participants	**14**	**20**	**11**	**14**	**9**

Case study one

On-the-job training for Anangu workers engaged in aged, and home and community care on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands.

Background

Since 2006, TAFE SA has been involved in delivering training to those working in the community services and health sector on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. The case study for the research project focuses on the Anangu employees in aged, and home and community care with the Nganampa Health Council and the Department of Community and Social Inclusion (DCSI). Nganampa Health Council operates the nursing home, Tjilpiku Pampaku Ngura Aged Care Service, and it is also contracted to provide home and community care (HACC) services for those eligible at Ernabella and has been doing so since 2009. Since 2009 the Department of Community and Social Inclusion has provided home and community care services for those eligible at Amata, Fregon, Mimili, Indulkana, Kalka and Pipalyatjara.

Over the past 10 years the delivery of training has involved a team with one lecturer having been involved from the outset. Initially units from the Certificate II in Community Services and the Certificate III in Aged Care were delivered and over time additional qualifications have been added; in 2015 the qualifications with registrations and included in the research project were:

- CHC20112 Certificate II in Community Services
- CHC30312 Certificate III in Home and Community Care
- CHC30212 Certificate III in Aged Care
- CHC30408 Certificate III in Disability.

Funding since 2011 has predominantly been via various iterations of the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Development funds and the focus of this funding is the development of workers engaged in aged and community care. The funding covered the delivery of a training program, with the lecturer travelling to the APY Lands on four trips per year and spending up to three weeks visiting each of the six communities to deliver short intensive workshops and catch up with students and supervisors. Ongoing conversations between the lecturer and the workplaces were held to discuss coordination and the availability of students, training needs and student progress.

The case study has a focus on 2015 and interviews were conducted with a management representative and Anangu employees from the Nganampa Health Council, the Department of Community and Social Inclusion and the TAFE SA principal lecturer. Interviews with the Anangu employees involved two of the five from Nganampa Health Council's nursing home at Ernabella and the team of four employed by the Department of Community and Social Inclusion at Mimili. At both sites service delivery includes the provision of home and community care services in their respective community, and at Ernabella the additional service of residential care is provided in the 13-bed nursing home.

Quantitative data

In 2015 there were 50 Anangu registrations against the qualifications listed above, which led to 44 part-time students enrolling, and seven completions. Most students are women in their mid-30s registered in the Certificate II in Community Services.

Anangu employees

Recruitment of Anangu to positions is based on interest and ability to gain a police clearance; there is no requirement to hold a qualification or to have undertaken previous training and this practice is the norm for the Nganampa Health Council and the Department of Community and Social Inclusion. Once employed, and the employment status is as a casual, the employee is expected to register in a part-time study program, which is supported by the employer, with employees paid for the hours of training attended. Anangu employees are registered in units to either cover training as requested by the employer and/or units where the student demonstrates competency. At each workplace there are three to five Anangu employees and when training is taking place the employees have reduced work tasks to enable them to attend. An underlying intent of the training program is the completion of qualifications, and the continuity of the principal lecturer facilitates the immediate workforce development need, along with the ability over time to extend students and support their skill development and increased competency.

Most the six employees interviewed were regarded as long-term employees, of three or four years. Each employee is regarded as a successful worker and learner. They spoke positively about working and learning and both groups mentioned how they want to learn more, with comments such as: 'Makes us feel good to come to work every day to learn more'. A number had graduated with at least one qualification and had clear memories of the event held in their honour at the workplace and with family and other invited guests: 'getting the Certificate made us feel happy, excited and strong'.

Students spoke of how they enjoyed the training: 'We would always be happy when Sue [principal lecturer] comes'. At times the principal lecturer would bring another lecturer with her to deliver specialised training such as manual handling and the students spoke about this, as it was seen to be a positive contribution to their learning: 'The visitors, they could've felt a little bit shy but they kind of just joined in … They weren't scared, we weren't scared of them, all of us just worked as a good team'.

Course content was referred to by the students and they commented on the link between the training completed and day-to-day work tasks, for example: occupational health and safety — from the use of fire extinguishers and fire exits to cleanliness; how to complete incident reports; working with clients and emotional care; and code of conduct. At times the principal lecturer took the group to the TAFE SA Learning Centre to utilise the available online resources and this was mentioned with the example of learning about body parts.

The students commented on how they could attend most training sessions but acknowledged that they had missed a few, with funerals cited as the reason.

During the interviews references to the value of the training were made; for example, at times in the community when a family member is sick they may be approached for advice and how they 'talk to them about going to the clinic to get their blood pressure checked'. The other context given was in relation to work where they know they make a difference to service provision; for example, 'sometimes the patients tell us about the food and we interpret and let the nurses know what that

person needs like what sort of food the person likes'. Their confidence in their knowledge and skills and knowing they make a difference to their elders and families was a clear message.

There was an understanding of the need for the certificate III and its portability within the aged care industry on and off the APY Lands. A couple of the aged care workers, one with the certificate III and another close to finishing, commented on how in the future they may leave the APY Lands to work in another aged care facility.

The employers

In the interviews with the employer representatives the importance of the training and as it pertains to the requirements of working in aged and community care were discussed. Nganampa Health Council relies 'heavily on local Anangu staff who come to work without qualifications and for a permanent position the certificate III is required'. The Department of Community and Social Inclusion cited the importance of the training program in meeting workplace health and safety requirements — with both understanding the requirements and being able to put these into practice. Both employers regarded training as part of work.

Funding through Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Development funding has been via one contract after another and the employers were concerned about the future funding of the program and 'if the program does not continue not sure how we can continue to support Anangu employees'. The success of this program is viewed in terms of student achievement and the ability of the employers to develop the workforce for working in a regulated industry context.

Comments regarding the training program covered the ability of the lecturer to tailor the program and accommodate changing circumstances: 'Flexibility has enabled employees to continue with their study even if they have had to leave the workplace for periods of time or are unable to attend the training when the lecturer is in the community'. The continuity of the principal lecturer facilitating student outcomes was acknowledged; also mentioned was the value of the training model, whereby the 'combination of training and employment works as it makes the training meaningful'. The link between the training done on the job and having this recognised against accredited units was valued.

Appropriate trainers are essential as the 'trainer needs to understand how to work with Anangu, be practical, use relevant examples, and can style the program to suit people with different abilities'. In addition, the 'trainer needs to be able to deliver a program with a group of varying literacy and numeracy levels'. One employer gave the example of how they normally 'employ older people who don't have the computer skills and study skills for online learning, so need hands-on learning' and having a trainer who can support these learners over time enables their confidence as learners to increase. The integral link between training and employment is evident and, for example, 'they [the employees] need this training for completing the paperwork and Sue was very good on teaching them how to complete the paperwork. This is not something I could do. I relied on TAFE to do this'.

Employers recognised the time involved to gain a qualification: it 'takes a couple of years, and personal circumstances means that they are not always available — cultural and family pressures'. The work patterns of the employees are accepted and worked around, which enables workers to take time off work and then return, and this pattern of work is accommodated by the training program as well. The following comment was made in relation to a query concerning students who have left the program: 'those who have dropped out are not working or have moved on'. Data to understand why Anangu did not continue with employment and training have not been collected.

The interest in the training program was acknowledged, as 'it's easy for people not to turn up if they do not want to attend'. In addition, the training is perceived to have supported staff to remain at work, with the comment on how the 'retention of Anangu staff has improved in the past couple of years'. 'Employees on completion ask about other work that they can do' to further their qualifications, and at Nganampa Health several Anangu staff have the certificate III and are working towards the Certificate IV in Disability. There were several comments concerning student success and the completion of qualifications: how the 'employees are wanting the qualification and are very proud when they complete' and 'a couple of the staff who have been working here and have the training and very employable and could be employable anywhere out of the APY Lands'.

Lecturer and what makes the program work

The principal lecturer has spent her career living in remote locations and in Aboriginal communities, and her practice draws on this experience and knowledge. She took on the role in 2009 and over the years the program has evolved in conjunction with the employers and the students. In the interview she talked about delivery and the importance of relevance.

> I talk to the workplace about what their needs are so that I can address those needs while we're training … like when we are doing care plans … we can actually go through the plans in the workplace so that everything I focused on is linked to their workplace. Its accredited training and we can actually look at what the workplace is doing and put it into practice as we're doing it. Changes to workplace practice have resulted in the workplaces changing their ways of doing things because we actually have a discussion around it. The students can actually see why we're doing it. They get the theory behind the practical.

She works closely with industry and responds to their training needs and, in addition, she explains 'to industry what training you're actually doing and why, and asks them how they do it in the workplace'. Gaining the information from the workplace and incorporating this into the training program supports the students as learners and employees. For the lecturer, 'the measures of success are students accessing Moodle on their own as independent learners, students moving onto higher level qualifications, retention and staying in the industry area'.

Managing the coordination of the delivery of the training program is challenging, as there is 'lots of travel'. At times 'combining students from one community with another will work, but is dependent upon understanding which community teams will travel'. However, for most of the training, combining work teams is not possible as there is a need to consider the workplace, as the 'students still need to look after the aged'. There was the mention of being 'organised and keeping records as vital for being flexible and knowing exactly what a student covered in class and what they achieved'.

Summary of the success factors

Training provides the employer and employees with a strategy to meet industry requirements and, over time, qualifications are completed. The importance of workplace health and safety training, and this remembered by all, is a reflection on the emphasis given to industry standards. There appears to be a shared understanding of why the training is conducted.

The training program and methodology are connected to day-to-day operations and all acknowledge how the training is supporting the employees with workplace tasks: 'doing TAFE gives people confidence and a sense of achievement'. Increased confidence in the Anangu employees was

highlighted and in addition there were examples provided on how the 'Anangu employees make a difference to their community and the provision of services'.

Employers supported employees and paid for attendance at training. Other support provided by the workplace included celebrating the completion of a qualification, and the verbal compliments provided by management for work done. Retention of Anangu employees was referred to, with training viewed as a contributing factor.

Students and employers mentioned lecturers' flexibility and responsiveness to the workplace and individual learners. The ability of the lecturer cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

The importance of qualifications and accredited training for those engaged in aged and home and community care provide a barrier to employment for Anangu. On the other hand, to provide a culturally appropriate service there is a need to employ Anangu. The delivery of training over time supports both the employer in meeting requirements and the employee in being able to take on increased responsibilities with the knowledge and skills to perform tasks.

Success factors identified in this case study illustrate the different perspectives on the value of training and, although the certificate III is recognised and valued, there are more factors at play.

Case study two

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner training at Batchelor Institute

Introduction

The role played by the registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners is integral to the Australian health workforce and profession (Anderson 2011). As key health practitioners in both remote and urban contexts, these professionals provide both stability in a workforce that experiences constant turnover and a bridge between health care practices, as well as between languages and cultures and between community and non-local staff. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care (ATSIPHC) program is also a significant pipeline into the health profession and one that has been identified for further investment and recognition (Australian Productivity Commission 2005; Anderson 2011).

Batchelor Institute has been delivering training to health workers in the NT for 16 years and has trained many of the health workers currently registered in the NT. To complete the Certificate IV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care qualification, students must complete 21 separate units of competency, of which 14 are core and seven are electives. Further to this is the requirement from the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) around clinical placement hours. Students enrol full-time in the course, which is delivered through a mixed-mode approach with eight two-week residential blocks per year with work placements occurring between blocks.

This course is one of high importance and has high enrolment numbers; however, completion rates are below the national average. In contrast, this program is seen as successful within the institute and with students and key stakeholders. This seeming contradiction provides an interesting tension and facilitated an interrogation of the concept of 'success' in a training program that has a professional registration as an outcome.

Differing perspectives on the program

To elicit different perspectives on success in this program, data were sourced from both retention and completion rates, as well as through interviews with students, trainers and one key employing agency. These data are presented below, along with a discussion of what the data indicated.

Data on retention and completion

The data below, in Table 2, were gathered across years and remoteness indicators.

Table 2   Course completions by remoteness for the Batchelor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner Training program, 2009—15

Remoteness Indicator	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Interstate*			1		2	1	3	**7**
Remote 1		2	1	6	6	5	0	**20**
Remote 2	7	4	2	3	6	11	1	**34**
Urban	1	8	2	3	3	7	8	**32**
Total	**8**	**14**	**6**	**12**	**17**	**24**	**12**	**93**

Note: *Interstate includes all remoteness areas.

Taken at is simplest measure, by comparing each year's completions to enrolments, an indicative measure of completion was generated. This is not an accurate measure, given that most students take between two and two-and-a-half years to complete, but it suffices for the purposes of this case study. For the 2015 year, out of 40 enrolments, there were 12 course completions, which gives a completion rate of 30%, well below the national average. The peak year for completions was 2014, particularly for the very remote cohort.

The students' perspectives

The factors that contribute to successful completion, as well as some other measures of success, were elicited from interviews with students, trainers and employers.

A group of 10 students, who are studying full-time in the course, participated in a focus group interview for the project. This group was in their final months of their program and were on track to complete the program. Of the 10, nine were on some form on traineeship, with only one student a 'self-referred' student, who was a student returning to study to re-enter the workforce as they had let their registration lapse.

Throughout the interview, it was evident that the students who held traineeships found the course much easier because they had built-in support mechanisms in their workplaces and did not have to participate in finding clinical placements. Having said that, the students on traineeships spoke of differing levels of support in their workplaces.

Several the students came from families where at least one member was a health worker or had previously been a health worker. Where there wasn't a health connection, there was another in the family engaged in professions and management. All of them spoke about the role of family and community support in helping them to complete the course.

Many students acknowledged that they found it difficult being away from home for the 16 weeks per year for two years and that it put pressure on their families. On the benefit side, students also said that doing residential workshops gave them the opportunity to get their study done without any interruptions.

When asked why there were only about 15 students left from the original group of 40, the students said that a multitude of factors had contributed to students 'dropping out' and that these included financial issues and family issues in the most part. They also stated that they have created a strong network between themselves and some of those who left the program — and that this professional network will continue. They also all identified that there were other things that they had got out of the course, including an increase in their self-confidence and an awareness of their positioning as role models within their families and communities.

When asked what could be improved in the program, students identified that the key issue that could be changed was to strengthen the connection between the institute and the workplace, particularly in relation to the large number of observations that need to be done in the workplace and the repetition of some of these observations. Some also identified that they would like stronger communication with their workplace so that where there is a turnover in staff, the clinic staff are clear on their expectations.

The trainers' perspectives

It is not surprising that much of this was confirmed by the training staff and the manager of the program. Reducing the number of observations was identified as a need. Also, the communication with the workplace and the employer was identified by the three staff interviewed — two Aboriginal trainers who had both been Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care workers, and the program manager who is a non-Indigenous nurse educator. All three are very experienced trainers and health practitioners.

All three identified that the key reasons for students leaving the program were personal reasons, which included issues such as students becoming homesick from being away from home and Country for so long, and their partners becoming jealous for them. They also talked about English language, literacy and numeracy being an issue for many students.

One interesting factor raised during the interviews was the lack of self-responsibility when students did not turn up to workshops, even though all of their travel, which is fully funded, was booked. In 2016, fees have been introduced and the manager reported that this is having a positive impact, with students having to take stronger ownership of their studies.

Another issue confirmed by the training staff was the importance of the relationship between the RTO and the workplace and that if there isn't a good relationship, or there is high turnover of staff, then this impacts negatively on the students. The training staff identified also the specific role and importance of the workforce development coordinators, who are employed to support the trainees and the workplaces to help with programs.

The training staff also identified that students develop their professional identities through their training and their knowledge about workplace behaviours and expectations, particularly their legal responsibilities relating to their health practices.

When asked about the program itself, the trainers cited professionalism, communication, teamwork, respect and strong leadership as key factors to the program running well. They also spoke of the importance of the role that the graduates play in the health of their communities — that the graduates develop self-confidence to become strong advocates for health in their communities and that this is fostered throughout the course.

Some aspects that could be changed in the course were identified as: using technology more to support students when they are back at work; training the clinical staff in mentoring; and strengthening the relationship with the workforce development coordinators.

A major employer's perspective

In an interview with a senior member of the employing agency's workforce development team, the issue of strengthening the support structures was highlighted as a key area for improvement in the program. This was seen as pivotal to the success of the program, as was being able to provide

continuity of support even when there is the high turnover of clinic support staff, which is the reality for many communities.

The other key issue highlighted in the interview were the extremely high standards expected from the regulator and the training qualification, and that being unable to meet those standards had contributed to the high attrition rate. So, on the one hand, the program was a success because it was graduating job-ready health practitioners, but, on the other hand, recruitment to the course was difficult because of the low education levels in many remote communities. Strengthening the pathways into the course was one recommendation made during the interview.

Discussion

Through interviews with students, trainers and employers, it was shown that several elements contribute to the success of the program, with the key element being a culturally appropriate training approach (D'Aprano et al. 2015), which focuses on relationships and learning together. Also evident is that the program is affected when there is a lack of coordination between the registered training organisation (RTO), the health centre and the central employing agency.

For many students, the issues which prompt them to leave the program are personal factors rather than education and training approaches. To minimise the impact of these issues, the program has evolved to incorporate appropriate support mechanisms, which comprise a combination of factors designed to address retention and completion rates in this program.

Retention and completion are highest where several factors combine to support students:

- Workplace and pathways
  - being employed through a traineeship
  - the coordinated support with the workplace
  - strong pathways into the course.
- Workshops as on-campus intensives
  - the workshop-based program allowing a focused study opportunity.
- Personal support
  - the relationships between students and staff
  - family support and role models within the family.

Conclusion

This short case study has highlighted the need to interrogate the term 'success' in our policy-making approaches. This program is successful because it is contributing 15 new nationally registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care practitioners to the health sector each year, with those workers having a wider and positive impact across their communities. In contrast to this is the low completion rate in the program, which is a typical indicator of lack of success in the training sector.

This case study has described a well-organised, appropriate and rigorous program, one that meets the needs of the profession, but which can be improved, particularly through a strengthened coordination between the RTO, the health centre and the central employing agency. Work on the supported

pathway into and the mentoring through the program and after graduation and the strengthened communication will make a strong impact on the retention of some students in the program. For many students, however, the issues which prompt them to leave the program are not ones over which the program has any control, so must be seen as a reality of training at this level in this space.

Case study three

Yes, I Can adult literacy campaign

Introduction

Yes, I Can (or Yo Si Puedo) is an adult literacy campaign that aims to achieve population-level change (Boughton & Durnan 2014). It was first piloted in Australia in 2012 in Wilcannia, a community in the Murdi Paaki region of northwestern NSW (Boughton et al. 2013). The pilot followed a model originally developed in Cuba and deployed in the national literacy campaign in Timor-Leste (Boughton 2010).

Following a period of preparation, the campaign rolls out at a community level in three phases. Phase one, called 'Socialisation and mobilisation', engages the whole community in addressing the problem, by means of extensive community education. It includes training local leaders and staff in the model and visits to every household by local staff to discuss the issue of literacy and gauge the level of interest. Phase two involves '64 basic literacy lessons', taught to classes of 15—20 adults by specially trained local facilitators using Yes, I Can audiovisual resources. Phase three, called 'Post literacy', engages the partner organisations working with the campaign team to provide opportunities for the new graduates to consolidate their literacy in structured activities and work experience, with the aim of building pathways into further education, employment and socially useful community work. The campaign continues until everyone who has expressed a need has had the chance to participate or until the organisation leading the campaign has achieved the target reduction in 'illiteracy'.

The case study

After successful pilots of the campaign model in Wilcannia in 2012, the campaign was extended to Bourke and Enngonia, and is currently in Brewarrina. This case study centres on the Yes, I Can adult Aboriginal literacy campaigns in Bourke and Brewarrina between 2014 and 2015, utilising existing quantitative data and documentation held by the University of New England and the Literacy for Life Foundation, covering the period 2014—15. This data are supplemented by 11 in-depth interviews, conducted in April 2016 with a total of 15 participants representing a range of key stakeholders (trainees, trainers, community leaders, employment service providers and others).

Findings

Enrolments and completions

In the first instance, interest in a program is often measured by enrolments. The Yes, I Can literacy campaign has a target of approximately 40% of the adult population (aged 15 years and over) in each community, based on the proportion of adults estimated as having low literacy (Boughton 2009). In Bourke, this translates as 112 people and in Brewarrina, 194. Target populations are reached through an extensive door-to-door household survey administered as part of Phase one of the literacy campaign. This approach results in a much greater awareness of the campaign in the community at a 'grassroots' level and a relatively high number of expressions of interest. Since the campaign began in Bourke (four intakes to date), there have been a total of 98 expressions of interest. Of these, 69 people have gone on to enrol, representing an uptake of just over 70%. In Brewarrina 77 people expressed an interest in participating in Yes, I Can after being surveyed and, of those, there were 19 enrolments, representing a 24% uptake. This figure will rise with each subsequent intake of students.

Completions are a key measure of the success of a program. To successfully complete the Phase two lessons, students need to achieve several reading and comprehension tasks and independently compose a personal letter to a given standard. Table 3 shows the relatively high retention rate in Phase two of the campaign across both sites and over the three intakes between 2014 and 2015.

Table 3 Summary enrolment and completion data, Yes, I Can programs in Bourke and Brewarrina, 2014-15

Intakes 2014-15	Enrolled*	Completed	Retention
Bourke 3	19	17	89.5%
Bourke 4	13	8	61.5%
Brewarrina	19	15**	78.9%
Total 3 intakes	**51**	**40**	**78.4%**

Notes: * it is important to note that Yes, I Can limits enrolments to around 20 participants for each intake, as this is considered by the Cuban advisors and local staff to be the maximum number that the local facilitators can effectively manage.

    ** One of these completers has an intellectual disability, did not reach the required level, and has opted to re-enrol in the next intake. Consequently, the 'graduation' number is 14, which results in a different retention figure, 73.7% for Brewarrina Intake 1, and 76.5% over all three intakes that comprise the current case study.

It should be noted that completions in Bourke intake four were affected by a spate of violent deaths directly impacting on the students. However, the fact that eight people completed the Phase two lessons despite the extremely disrupting and distressing events shows how successful the campaign is in terms of retention. The achievement of Yes, I Can becomes even more apparent when compared with the total VET activity (TVA) figures for Aboriginal students in Bourke and Brewarrina. Table 4 reveals that the retention rates for Yes, I Can are more than four times the average for Aboriginal students in TAFE programs in the same region.

Table 4 TVA enrolment and completion figures for Aboriginal students in the Bourke-Brewarrina region, 2015.

	Cert. I	Cert. II	Cert. III	Cert. IV	Diploma or higher	Total
Enrolments	78	291	109	46	171	700
Completions	4	81	51	9	6	94
Apparent retention*	5.1%	27.8%	46.8%	19.6%	3.5%	13.4%

Source: NCVER (2016).

Note: *This figure is not the actual retention rate. It is based on enrolments and completions in a given year, and should be treated as indicative only. These data should be treated with caution as year-to-year fluctuations may lead to spurious results.

Expressed another way, the overall attrition rate for VET courses is 86.6% compared with 21.5% for Yes, I Can. These rates are the result of many aspects of the campaign, not the least of which is the flexible delivery of the Phase two lessons. The days and times the classes are held are determined by each community and in the intakes comprising the current case study classes ran for three days per week, with one day reserved for catch-up classes. The timetabling of catch-up time each week means that participants do not fall behind, despite missing some classes. It also represents an acknowledgment of the environment beyond the class, including the priority that family takes in Aboriginal culture. As one facilitator explained: 'we've had someone that couldn't come to class stuck home with the grandkids. I visited them and did a lesson'. This example of flexible delivery was not at all uncommon and indicates a key difference between the Yes, I Can model and conventional adult education programs.

Such flexibility in the campaign signifies more than contingency planning. It also indicates the level of care and investment the local facilitators and coordinators have in the campaign and the participants. Such care inspires commitment on the part of the students, as this anecdote shows:

> Two months we lost L while she supported her daughter in law through her pregnancy but when L came back, interestingly enough, she just begged us to let her finish the course so we did a special program for her.   (Non-Aboriginal trainer, national)

An ethics of care and concern, called solidarity by the campaign leadership, is one of the principles underpinning the Yes, I Can model. This care and concern produces a reciprocal commitment that contributes to the high retention and completion rates. While it is often not feasible for adult education providers to follow up non-attenders in the ways described above, the small, flexible and, most significantly, community-led nature of Yes, I Can means this level of support is possible. Moreover, in the communities in which Yes, I Can operates, a culture of mutual support or solidarity is a product of the historical experience of oppression and marginalisation. As one participant expressed, 'our philosophy is no one wants to be left behind, we don't want anybody to be left behind, we don't want people on the fringes left behind' (Aboriginal community representative and government employee).

Literacy outcomes

The literacy outcomes for participants need to be viewed in the context of the aims and methodology of the campaign. The Phase two Yes, I Can lessons comprise a basic literacy course for students who are typically below Level one on the Australian Core Skills Framework ACSF), in the three domains of reading, writing and learning. Initial steps are very small, beginning with motor skills, then vowels and consonants. After several weeks of instruction, students undertake a series of scaffolded tasks to demonstrate competence in reading comprehension and writing, culminating in the production of a simple letter to a friend, including description and opinion. As part of the Wilcannia pilot study, these tasks were mapped by a qualified ACFS consultant, at the equivalent of Level two ACSF (McLean 2012 cited in Boughton et al. 2013).

For many participants, their literacy achievement is of huge significance, as this extract from the personal letter written at the end of the lessons demonstrates:

> I did a lot of practice in the lessons and it taught me to do better in my reading and writing and it stopped me from being shame and learnt me how to spell and write sentences and paragraphs.
>   (Male participant, Bourke)

While the development of foundation literacy skills certainly contributes to the employability of graduates, the reality is that, for many participants, their literacy level upon exiting Yes, I Can is short of what is required by the labour market. According to the national trainer:

> So many of these people haven't had any general education so I don't think in six months any course can purport to overcome the fact that people basically haven't had any education post primary. Even for people who went to school, they didn't learn anything or they learnt so little. You can't make up in six months what the rest of us have done in thirteen years.

However, the literacy gains achieved as a result of attending Yes, I Can allow graduates to manage everyday text-based encounters better, as these comments illustrate:

> For lots of providers, in order to complete, you have to gain a qualification but Yes, I Can was more personalised and tailored. It was about developing the skills that people could use in their everyday life like reading to their grandkids, reading the bills, reading the medicine bottle.
>
>   (Non-Aboriginal employment services, Dubbo)

This finding echoes others that highlight the value of prevocational training in allowing participants to engage more meaningfully in textual activities for family, religious and community reasons (Kral & Falk 2004).

Work skills and further training

As outlined earlier, Phase three of the Yes, I Can campaign model, also known as 'post-literacy', aims to continue the gains of Phase two (the literacy classes) by giving participants the opportunity to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge. Consisting of a further 12 weeks of six to eight hours per week of structured activities, Phase three focuses on work skills but also includes activities and excursions of cultural, historical and creative interest. In Bourke, a total of 16 of 25 graduates participated in work experience at various local sites. This experience provides students with opportunities to envision different futures for themselves and their families.

The experience of Yes, I Can built participants' confidence to attempt more training. Table 5 indicates the numbers of graduates who went on to further training.

Table 5 Summary of further training outcomes, Yes, I Can, Bourke and Brewarrina 2014—15

	Number of participants /graduates	% in further training	Qualifications enrolled in
Bourke Intake 3	2/17	11.7%	Cert 3 in Children's Services
Bourke Intake 4	2/8	25.0%	n/a
Brewarrina	8/15	53.3%	Year 10 (at TAFE) (1) Cert. III (at Tranby) (7)

As an employment service provider commented: 'people were more receptive to new training and courses like the White Card and Barista course. They seemed more confident in approaching it and on the first day, weren't as shy with the trainer as they would have been'. Participation in Yes, I Can also provided knowledge and skills to understand the expectations and conventions of formal adult education, as one participant stated: 'if I hadn't gone to the Yes, I Can program, I wouldn't have understood most of the things in the TAFE course program'.

Community healing

Bourke and Brewarrina are communities that have experienced highly charged political environments, including several so-called 'race riots' (Cowlishaw 2004; Morris 2013). This, combined with a rapid decline in the rural economy and a major rise in structural unemployment and associated poverty, has produced increased racial tension in both locations, as well as conflict within the communities themselves. Therefore, the fact that Yes, I Can brought different factions and clans together was something many people chose to comment on. For example, a community leader in Brewarrina said that Yes, I Can was:

> Bringing communities together, for some people that maybe a few months before hadn't even congregated in the same room or spoke to each other. I saw that as part of a healing, bringing Aboriginal people together.   (Aboriginal community leader, Brewarrina)

A similar coming-together was experienced in Bourke, according to one of the participants:

> Most of these fellows around here that I did the course with, I went to high school in Bourke with most of them. But I hadn't spoken to them for years. We all grew up and went different ways. I met most of them there in the class. They all live around here but hardly speak to one another. That's where we all started laughing in that room. (Male participant, Bourke)

These outcomes are not serendipitous but rather a carefully considered aspect of Yes, I Can. Local staff receive training and mentoring in the management of conflict-sensitive environments. This training also feeds into locally made decisions about the campaign.

Beyond a reduction in community conflict, many informants commented on the sense of community created by Yes, I Can, which extended beyond the classroom and students. The physical space that housed the classes also became a point of convergence and, in effect, drew in even the most isolated and marginalised in the community:

> It's not only the program, it's the environment that's created. It's a place for people to come and have a yarn, a cup of tea, have a feed together. There are broken people in this community; very broken people, but through this Yes, I Can I've seen participants where even though they were broken, they've been pulled in. They've been embraced and pulled into the environment. They don't have to sit in the class all day but when they're in the space, it just has a positive effect. (Government employee and Aboriginal community leader, Bourke)

Capacity-building and engagement

A striking feature of Yes, I Can is the extent to which it builds capacity in communities. The delivery of the campaign is the responsibility of local Aboriginal people. Most of these local staff have had little or no experience with paid employment prior to joining Yes, I Can and so require significant ongoing training, support and encouragement from the campaign leadership, as well as from the community as a whole. In fact, the local staff were very much co-learners in Yes, I Can. Those individuals engaged as classroom facilitators (two per campaign) and coordinator (one per campaign) underwent a similar process of growth and empowerment, as one of the trainers from the Bourke and Enngonia campaigns articulated:

> It was challenging for me because I was always doubting myself that I could do the job. But it's made me see things differently, see the community differently, just opened my eyes up. It empowers you. I didn't even speak up much the way I do now. Not only does it open yourself up as a person and see things differently but it also opens you up to be able to speak to all these other organisations around. It's the confidence that it gives you. (Aboriginal trainer, Bourke and Enngonia)

Much of this growth in local capacity is due to the highly structured training and ongoing support provided by Yes, I Can, as well as the structured nature of the lessons themselves. This helps the local staff to quickly become competent in the delivery of the lessons. And while such a highly structured and even scripted learning environment might appear at first glance to be incongruent with effective adult learning principles or even principles of self-determination, this very structure creates a space where people are not only capable but comfortable and therefore willing to take on responsibility for the campaign in their community.

This balance between high support and high autonomy is one of the keys to Yes, I Can's ability to build capacity in each community. The national trainer expressed this well:

> I think the part that is important is that it's Aboriginal people teaching. It's in their space, they control it, even though they probably know that I'm the big boss behind the background, I'm not in their face. I don't deal with anything to do with the class. The class knows me and I help them in the first few weeks but we don't take the lead role. We don't have the rules; the local staff have the rules.   (Non-Aboriginal trainer, national)

Respect and trust are also a key component of the working relationship between the Yes, I Can leadership team and the local campaign staff. This relationship, as with the campaign, acknowledges the complexities and challenges faced by local staff and works with, rather than against, these:

> We're all working here to do something good. If you can't do it today then you go out, that's okay, and come back when you're ready. The first lesson of Yes, I Can is the gate is open. We just keep on harping on about the gate is open all the time, even for our staff. When our staff muck up, when I say muck up they might get on the piss or can't get their shit together and most workplaces would say 'out' whereas here the gate is open. You make the decision but our gate is open. It's your decision if you walk through.   (Non-Aboriginal trainer, national)

The approach allows local people to step forward and take control of their choices. In many instances, this manifested as greater participation and engagement in community and services. According to one of the project officers at Aboriginal Affairs NSW:

> Initially, some people would attend, they did have an issue with alcohol or others, but as they gradually developed their participation, it made a difference in their lives. You see a complete turnaround. On from that, you see people now getting their driver's licence. And filling out their own Centrelink forms, going to the bank, being able to talk to the tellers about their statements and things like that.   (Aboriginal community leader and government employee, Bourke)

Personal confidence and a sense of purpose

Growth in individuals' confidence emerged as one of the most striking impacts of Yes, I Can. Many people interviewed described the transformation of withdrawn people into more confident and engaged members of the community:

> Especially with some of the elders, people of very few words. Now they're not scared to walk out the front and read a piece of paper or express their feelings and ask questions and things like that but also like younger people that have been locked away feeling worthless, seeing them also come forward and speak and tell their stories and things like that.
>
>   (Aboriginal community leader, Brewarrina)

Integral to Yes, I Can's ability to build participants' confidence is the highly scaffolded pedagogy, already detailed, which moves in a steady, predictable pace from the elementary to the more complex, with frequent opportunities for practice and consolidation. The effect of the pedagogy on confidence was outlined by one of the local trainers:

> I think the way the lessons are set out, I think that gives them a little bit of confidence that it's not hard to do and knowing that the encouragement by the facilitators and each other. It's not too overwhelming for them or we explain it in that way.   (Aboriginal trainer, Bourke)

Attending Yes, I Can also provided many with a sense of purpose:

> What they [participants] always say is it's a sense of purpose. It gives their life some structure and purpose that they otherwise don't have. You get up and you shower and you get yourself nice because you're going out and you're going to something. I've had people in Wilcannia and Bourke, people would just start course in really unkempt and sort of, as time has gone on and very quickly, they then start grooming themselves and washing their shirts and not wearing torn clothes. Even one of our students in Bre, it was so obvious, one of the other students said have you got a girlfriend, mate? He was suddenly really sprucing himself up. So you know, that's a little thing but it's about dignity; it gives people a sense of dignity. I think that's the big thing. They have a purpose, they come together, they get an identity that gives them dignity. They're not the drunk or the most marginalised, they are the literacy people. I think there's a strong belief in the possibility of a better life and I think that is what the literacy campaign gives its students.
>
> (Non-Aboriginal trainer, national)

Conclusion

Yes, I Can is an example of a successful prevocational learning program. Forty of 51 adult participants completed the Phase two lessons in Bourke and Brewarrina in 2014—15, representing a retention rate of 78.4% compared with 13.4% for TAFE in the same region (certificate I to diploma or higher). The level of community buy-in (a direct result of the socialisation and mobilisation activities and local delivery of the campaign model) and a pedagogy of contingency, characterised by high degrees of support, flexibility, relevance and autonomy, are largely responsible for these figures. In terms of concrete outcomes, graduates typically raised their literacy from the equivalent of ACSF pre-level one to level one or two, and a small number went on to further training and work experience. While modest in terms of numbers, these results are set against a backdrop of communities with chronic and entrenched disadvantage and job scarcity.

The outcomes of Yes, I Can detailed in this case study present a strong argument for the measurement of success in adult education in remote Aboriginal communities beyond completion and employment rates. The many impacts of Yes, I Can in terms of the development of community capacity, engagement and cohesiveness suggest that a different perspective is warranted. This different perspective is best articulated by a community leader in Brewarrina:

> I think for the first time the people have clear visions for themselves in their own mind, away from just waking up every day and going on drinking. I've seen one young guy down there that I've known all my life and you know, he was an alcoholic. Just to see the difference in him now even participating in the meeting and speaking out about issues that affect them as Aboriginal people, probably for the first time ever and feeling valued about what input they can have into it, it's amazing and to see him write a story that you know, of his life and the way things have impacted on his life and things, they are empowered. Outside of that, who's going to listen to those people?

Case study four

Karajarri Ranger Training Program

Introduction

The Karajarri people are the traditional owners of the area that extends from the coast to the desert in the west Kimberley region. People from four other language groups, the Karajarri people's traditional neighbours, also live there, being the Nyangumarta, Mangala, Juwaliny and Yulparija. People from these connected language groups were welcomed to live as 'one' with Karajarri people on Karajarri country during the early days of colonial settlement of the Kimberley. The Karajarri people care for Country, carry traditional knowledge and monitor impacts on Country. As Traditional Owners, they are responsible for Country and the effective use of it to sustain life. The other tribes also have traditional Caring for Country knowledge, which is carried in their language, kinship systems and worldview. Therefore, ranger positions are open to all residents of Karajarri lands, including the traditional neighbours, who are now residents of Bidyadanga community.

The Karajarri rangers, with whom this study was undertaken, are based in Bidyadanga Community (formerly La Grange Mission), 200 km south of Broome. The Karajarri Ranger Program is highly regarded — inside Bidyadanga and all over the Kimberley — for the quality of ranger work and the 'best practice' demonstrated in training. Additionally, the program inspires many children across the Kimberley — they now want to become Caring for Country professionals — as rangers, on-Country scientists, linguists, and heritage practitioners or otherwise. The rangers are considered to be outstanding role models, and the intention of this evaluation was to determine why the program is so successful.

The case study

In this case study report we describe the overarching research questions and sub-questions, research design, and the arrangements for provision of training, followed by the findings. Finally, we draw these together in a discussion which answers the overarching research questions and conclude by summarising the education concepts that are very clearly part of the success of the Karajarri Ranger Program.

Two overarching questions are being addressed in this study. The first is: how can retention and completion in post-school training be improved (to improve employability) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote communities? The sub-questions are:

- Which models of adult training work well (or not) to achieve completion and employability outcomes in each site?

- How do factors of funding, andragogy, individual agency, cultural attachments, geography, employment service delivery, English language literacy, digital literacies, and job availability effect improved engagement, retention and completion of training?

The second overarching question is: what indicators of success other than completion would be important for training in remote communities (to improve employability)?

The research design used five focus groups and 12 individual interviews with the rangers. Data were supplemented by conversations with senior rangers and coordinators to augment the limited quantitative data available from the training providers. The focus groups were conducted with the group of rangers, divided into a men's group and a women's group; a group consisting of the ranger cultural advisors; a group of ranger coordinators and lecturers from the various training organisations; a council office member; and a group of Bidyadanga community members who are not directly connected to the ranger training program. The intention was to gather information from a range of perspectives, thereby ensuring comprehensive data to identify the various elements contributing to the successful overarching program.

Lecturers from North Regional TAFE (formerly Kimberley Training Institute or KTI) provide the training in Certificates II and III in Conservation and Land Management, as well as literacy and numeracy support. The method of delivery is flexible and involves lecturers predominantly coming to the rangers in the community, rather than the reverse. Much of the training is conducted 'on Country' with 'classrooms' on site in the bush rather than at a desk in a building. The on-the-job training that is provided to, and subsequently by, the rangers as part of the program is crucial to the program's success.

While lecturers are provided from North Regional TAFE for teaching and certifying the skill base of the rangers, they are not the only educators in the program, nor are they central to it. Rather, the cultural advisors and senior Karajarri Traditional Owners play this role. These elders are involved in nearly all levels of training for the rangers, guiding and teaching the lecturers and rangers themselves in the bush settings. Throughout this evaluation, all parties identified the cultural guidance and teachings as one of the key success factors of the program. Their involvement at this level in the ranger training program is one that is resourced through both the Working on Country (WOC) and Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) funding for the overarching Caring for Country program.

Additional partnerships provide specialised training opportunities, all of which also involve the senior cultural advisory group. This includes government agencies such as the WA Department of Parks and Wildlife, Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry Western Australia and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service; research institutes such as Murdoch University, the University of Western Australia, and our own Nulungu Research Institute at the University of Notre Dame Australia; links with non-government organisations such as World Wildlife Fund and Environs Kimberley; as well as shared training opportunities with the local community council and pastoral stations. In this way, additional courses are also made available to rangers and others in the community such as 4WD, first aid, coxswain/skippers tickets and the like.

Findings

The research findings are presented here, beginning with enrolments and completions and followed by the emergent sub-themes gathered into three general themes, which are clear in the qualitative information gathered.

Enrolments and completions

Records of enrolments and completions have previously been kept across the entire Kimberley Ranger Network; however, this information has been misplaced recently as systems shifted. While records are incomplete, some AVETMISS data were made available and participants have advised researchers of the names of rangers since the program commenced in 2005. A synthesis of that information was used to compile the statistics referred to here. Since the program commenced in 2005, 35 Bidyadanga

rangers have enrolled in certificate II, 12 have enrolled in certificate III and two have progressed to certificate IV. Sadly, four long-term rangers have passed away since the first program started. Twelve rangers are currently employed and all are enrolled in courses. Four are enrolled in certificate II and six are enrolled in certificate III. The remaining two have been invited to participate in advanced group study, which includes rangers from other programs and enrolment in certificate IV. One ranger has been continuously employed since 2006, and she is a Senior Cultural Ranger.

Of the current group three rangers are new this year, while one first enrolled in 2005, left in 2006 but returned in 2011. Seven of the current group first enrolled in 2011 or 2012 and have maintained continuous enrolment. Of the four people who commenced in 2011, one has now completed certificate III and the other three are making good progress towards completion.

From these statistics, we can see that rangers can take variable lengths of time to complete certificates, but there is ongoing learning towards further qualifications. Over a third of the Karajarri rangers who have ever participated in the program are still employed in it. Of the previous Karajarri rangers who are still alive, some are now full-time mothers with young ones and most others are employed in a range of different positions in Bidyadanga or other communities. At least one previous ranger is employed on a mine site. These statistics suggest that the training is satisfactory from the point of view of the employability of the rangers outside the ranger context.

Training model

In this section, we present and interpret information and perspectives about the training model from the focus group discussions and interviews, using the themes that are common to each contributing group or individual. Of note is the fact that the rangers are employed prior to enrolling in the certificate courses.

The model of training which is effective for the Karajarri rangers comprises a collaborative two-way[1] learning model, which is culturally aligned with Aboriginal traditional governance structures and involves substantial on-Country work. Learning involves non-Aboriginal (*kartiya*) science and administration, which includes English literacy and digital skills, alongside traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous technical knowledge (ITK). The latter two are culturally based and provide a foundation on which the *kartiya* areas of study are laid, contributing greatly to the success observed. The training model comprises elders as authoritative teachers, rangers as knowledge holders and interpreters, education providers as equal learners, peer learning, and rangers as both-ways learners.

Elders as authoritative teachers

The role of the elders as holders of ITK and TEK is one of the most significant elements of the Karajarri Ranger Training model. The elders, who are respected cultural bosses, are regarded as authoritative teachers by everyone — rangers and education providers alike — because of their deep knowledge and understanding of Country.[2] For example:

> That was learning two-ways, you know, when we took over, we tell them all the names of the Country we learnt as kids, you know? It comes down to your grandmother … Yeah, because they're saying here cultural advisors play a bigger role to guide rangers on Country. Their role is also

---

1 We refer to 'two-way' learning in the sense that the education providers and the rangers are both learning. That is, learning goes two ways and it is a reciprocal relationship. We also use the term 'both-ways', where we recognise that the rangers need to learn Aboriginal cultural knowledge and Western scientific knowledge.

2 Country is written with capital C when referring to an Aboriginal meaning of country, to convey depth of respect.

trainers, natural trainers, because of their knowledge, their cultural knowledge. They have to be the guidance, right through all this Country here. It's big. Some of the important places, we've got a lot of sacred sites around here. These old people worry about that. Some people, they're just going anywhere, creating roads and stuff. Why I know about this Country with sacred places, I've been with my grandmother and my husband with his grandmother. He tells me not to go there; don't take kids to that area. (Cultural advisor group)

To reinforce the significance of the elders' cultural knowledge to Karajarri Ranger Training, we elaborate on the term 'Country', which in the Kimberley is used in a different way from the standard English understanding of the word. In this report, Country (spelled *kandri* in Kriol[3] contexts) carries Aboriginal meanings about the relationship between people and place. By comparison, in English the word 'country' refers to the land itself, irrespective of human activities in the landscape. In Aboriginal languages, people are understood to be in inalienable, mutually supportive relationships of care and nurturing with the land; Country is seen to be alive with spirit and soul; wholesome and reciprocally responsive with human and more-than-human animals. As such, stories, songs and rituals can explain and be explained by landscapes, and need to be cared for by highly qualified elders who are cultural knowledge-keepers.

Hence, the immutable people—place relationships and the status of the elders that are so significant to this study. Bird-Rose uses the term 'nourishing terrain' to explain this understanding of Country (1996). Young people acquire this cultural knowledge about Country slowly — formally and informally — over a lifetime, and rangers are often known to have considerable cultural knowledge by the time they enrol in courses. Their knowledge is recognised by other rangers, elders and the training coordinators, as the following quote shows:

Because we know when they're out on Country, they also want to be the front person because they carry a lot of knowledge. They find out, they wait there patiently and find out a time where it's right for them to share. It's not just the coordinators teaching them, it's vice versa; you learn from that too. Some of them are like walking libraries but they don't know how to speak their mind. That's why the relationship between rangers and coordinators and training people and service delivery, they need to feel that and it takes time. Once they get to that time, you're probably amazed what they can deliver. (Cultural advisor group)

Rangers as knowledge holders: both-ways learning

Of significance in this study about training models is the fact that the rangers are recognised by the TAFE teachers and education providers as knowledge holders about Country. They can lead and teach, as well as follow and learn. In a Western society, which is replete with reference to the deficit model of Aboriginal people and the education system, this position is powerful in the learning outcomes that the rangers thus achieve. The following vignette illustrates this from a cultural advisor perspective:

A lot of our rangers have knowledge culturally. Getting the skills and understanding of how land management works both-ways is very important and getting them to understand when they're going out bush, they know what you can do and some of the stuff, they've got the skills to learn from traditionally and the skills that they can work in with some of the *kardiya* skills that come with that. (Cultural advisor group)

---

3 Kriol is a Kimberley creole language derived over generations by Aboriginal language speakers using English in Aboriginal contexts.

The education providers are regarded as knowledge holders about *kardiya* way, and it is acknowledged by everyone that the rangers need 'both-ways' knowledge to succeed as rangers.

Education providers as learners: two-way learning

For this reason, it is important that the education providers acknowledge that they also have much to learn from the rangers and elders, whether they are out on Country or in Bidyadanga community itself for training, and that the education providers go on Country to learn as well is appreciated by all, as reflected in this quote:

> [Education providers] also getting an understanding of what some of the stuff, the issues they've got here that we're dealing with, you know, on Country. It's good for them to come out and go on Country. I think it's very important to come out and go on Country. If there are things they want to do here, it's very important for the trainers to actually come out here and see what our trainers do for their Country. (Cultural advisor group)

The data have many references to two-way learning, in the sense that both the education providers and the rangers are simultaneously learners and teachers, learning from and with each other. However, learning two sets of knowledge — both-ways learning — is not always easy for the rangers, many of whom have taken some time to arrive at a position of open-minded learner, as is reflected here:

> He knew the land and he was, he had his own diploma; advanced diploma, naturally, by acknowledging Country. That was his training and that was his way. It was the Karajarri way. He didn't know about the TAFE and other training coming in from Broome town to actually train him to do [both-way] learning. He had to build up a relationship to try and share, to find new skills of different ways, the *kardiya* way and the blackfellow way. He was a little bit headstrong, you know? Sometimes he was very stubborn and not going through the *kardiya* way. It took him a long time to eventually understand this [both-way] learning. I think in his mind, he wanted his skills to be recognised. (Cultural advisor group)

This acknowledgment of two-way learning was not always valued in the early days of the program by the education providers, with some rangers and elders expressing their frustration to this. An example below illustrates this perspective:

> As a cultural land manager, it's part of our tradition, doing cultural land management before there was any ranger program. We were doing it naturally. He's been doing it naturally. For myself, when I was studying to be a ranger, I had to do Aboriginal land management, you know? I didn't really like to do it because it was talking about my skills, my cultural skills that I have to tick a box for. I didn't find it appropriate for me, you know? We needed to recognise his skills, not the *kardiya* skills. You know what I mean? We're always the subject first before the other way around. (Cultural advisor group)

This has changed substantially over the last decade and today cultural knowledge in the rangers is acknowledged and respected by the education providers.

Peer learning

The importance of peer learning was described in each dataset and, in the case of the Karajarri rangers, peer learning is where more experienced rangers mentor junior rangers. The quotation below illustrates peer learning from an education provider point of view:

> Oh yeah, it definitely does, just hearing the same information, I hope it's the same or very similar from different voices but very reassuring and just reinforces the safety aspects and also how to do

it properly. It also, when they start to become mentors, they're also learning to be leaders as well. The fact that a lot of the Karajarri guys … they do this certificate II, they do certificate III and they're up to about three and a half, four years worth of work. They've got the avenue or pathway to go into employment through KLC and just having that experience behind them allows the guys that are still doing their training as a pathway for them, moving forward.

(Education provider group)

In the Karajarri ranger case study, peer learning involves teaching by a more experienced mentor, which supports the learner, as well as learning by the mentor, who can review and revise information. A speaker in the men's ranger focus group explained the advantages of peer learning and learning on-Country (learning out of the classroom) this way:

When they're training you, you're not allowed in the classroom doing it. You're dozing off and you're missing out on words. When you're out there and they're showing you how to do it, you're learning from the boys who were doing it before, they're showing you how and why to use something. It's hard work.

(Men ranger group)

Thus, peer learning is a vital part of the Karajarri ranger training model.

The information presented above illustrates elements of the training model, including the essential role played by elders as authoritative teachers; the connected importance of the education providers recognising rangers as cultural knowledge holders and as 'both-ways' learners, whereby they are learning *kardiya* sciences, as well as further cultural knowledge; the significance of the education providers being learners themselves through a two-way learning process, in which they learn cultural perspectives on caring for Country; and the effectiveness of peer learning.

Adult learning principles: purpose and relationships of care

The following section distils key elements related to the concept of 'relationships of care' associated with the adult learning principles. To derive these, we have used material about the individual rangers' experiences of learning. Each of these elements is discussed below.

Rangers as individual learners in a collaborative, supportive setting

Individual agency plays a significant role in the learning relationship: because it is a holistic learning program that encompasses cultural and *kardiya* elements, a safe framework for individual success and achievement is provided. For example, the outstanding achievement of the following ranger was described by the cultural advisor group:

[Name], he got an award last year, trainee of the year award for safety ranger, the OH&S award. He got sent to Kununurra to receive that award and got a certificate … That was pretty good. He's a quiet achiever. He doesn't say much but he works hard and he's been here for a long time. He's one of the longest. Even [another name], going around places like Darwin and with [company name], as a young leader, you know? It's good to see young leaders like that coming up. They'll be up here one day. He'll never leave us.

(Cultural advisor group)

It makes them feel important, you know? It makes them feel they have a role to play. It makes them feel like they're somebody; that they have a job to do. That's where that leadership role comes in with their personality. They see them grow. They just grow to becoming a ranger. That will be a part of them for the rest of their life or even if they move along to other jobs, they still play a role at their station back home to work on Country no matter what they do.

(Cultural advisor group)

While the training model is collaborative in nature, individual success is enabled and encouraged by all participants — elders, peers, education providers and cultural advisors. Some previously quiet young people have delighted and surprised their elders and families when they have shown their skills in delivering oral presentations at local events, festivals and council meetings; the rangers are confident of their knowledge and know what to say. Families are proud of their relatives who have become rangers, and urge them to stay with the job as it brings pride and respect.

Culture, elders and cultural attachment to Country: Mapu Ngarlu or Pilyurr

Culture, elders and cultural attachment to Country are key success factors in this case study. There were numerous references from the rangers and cultural advisors relating to the importance of Caring for Country and the benefits to one's own *ngarlu* (spiritual inner feelings or in Karajarri, *pilyurr*, heart). One of the cultural advisors explained it like this:

> Karajarri people have cultural obligations from one of our very senior elders who passed away, to do this type of work because our heart (our *pilyurr*) is connected to this country as well.
>
> (Cultural advisor interview)

This was also explained by one ranger respondent during one of the individual interviews:

> I feel good when I am out on Country, I feel really comfortable learning different things from the old people that is why I am always around the old people from growing up from little time. When I am working with the old girls and working with [senior cultural woman ranger], because when I am stuck with anything they help me, I get my little information what I need to know about things on Country and what I need to do.　　　　　　(Woman ranger interview)

Country, cultural knowledge and old people are integral to the rangers — it is an assumed connection. The cultural knowledge is what they are learning, and the place to learn it is on Country. For instance, the quote below from a cultural advisor describes this information, and while doing so incorporates the Western science perspective into it, which shows a connection between the knowledge systems.

> This is their Country, they want to preserve and look after the environment and the culture, and look after their Country. It's their obligation … One of the things that I really like when you were talking about archaeology before is not necessarily the dating stuff but when you can connect the stories with what you find on Country and you know, when there are stories about people moving through the landscape and that they stopped in certain places and then we find the evidence of that. It just kind of reinforces exactly what everyone is already talking about.

> It's what old people did. They were living here. People are surprised to find paintings over there. That thing was just a little cave, a little hill and it goes down and they've got all the paintings there. They've never seen it before.　　　　　　(Cultural advisor group)

Digital literacies

Digital literacies represent an important workplace skill for the rangers, and is an essential part of ranger training. A range of databases are used, such as Cybertracker and Karajarri's own cultural database, both capturing information which needs to be transferred into other computer programs for archival purposes and analysis. For example, the clear purpose for learning digital literacies is described in this quote from the men's ranger group:

> We do database training. They only just started recently and what we do is get the data, subtract and put it into the computer like for future reference or for traditional owners to look at. Some of

us rangers, we go out, mainly the women rangers go out and take photos of plants and that that they also record on the database. They're working on a booklet. (Men ranger group)

As far as the rangers and participants involved in the research project are concerned, the reason the rangers are engaged in cultural natural resource management (CNRM) learning is to further assist them to care for Country in the ways that their ancestors and elders have done for millennia. The driving force of ranger work is highly significant — it is the protection of Country, stories, culture and place to link past, present and future. The importance of this purpose for ranger training cannot be overstated.

Thus, in relation to the adult learning principles that apply to the Karajarri ranger training program, six principles are adhered to. The first is relational learning, specifically, relationships of care in the sense of Caring for Country and peers, while being cared for by elders, cultural advisors and education providers. The second principle is a clear purpose for learning, which is Caring for Country through culture. In line with Aboriginal ways, this purpose is understood by everyone and this learning is ongoing and lifelong. The third principle is that individual learners are collaboratively supported, which provides a safe environment for individual success. The fourth is learning by doing, in a Caring for Country cultural knowledge context. The final and fifth principle is learning at the time of need: to undertake a task which needs doing. Digital literacies support on-Country activities by producing data suitable for conveying information to traditional owners.

Indicators for employability

Within the caring relationships theme embedded in the Karajarri Ranger Training model, the indicators that demonstrate the employability of rangers trained in the Karajarri program across several professions have been elaborated. These include self-confidence, knowledge of Country and Caring for Country skills; the relationship these elements have with indicators for employability is briefly presented below.

Increased self-confidence

Increased self-confidence, a key indicator for employability, is recognised throughout this study, for example:

You're sharing that knowledge too with each other. We don't have any shame, we don't feel shame. We just do it. There's confidence. Yeah, we're confident, we build our confidence every week, every day we come to work. (Men's ranger group)

Increased personal confidence was widely reported and discussed throughout the interview process. It undoubtedly contributes to an individual's employability, leading to skills such as public speaking through chairing meetings and delivering public presentations, in addition to an understanding of and participation in cultural governance structures. These workplace skills lead to employability across a range of occupations in remote communities.

Knowledge of Country, Caring for Country skills

Across the region, and northern Australia more generally, knowledge of Country and Caring for Country skills add significantly to a person's employability in such industries as tourism, environmental science and heritage protection, and in other positions requiring cultural natural resource management, such as mining companies, as well as in local employment opportunities, such as in schools, which value on-Country knowledge.

Cultural knowledge

Cultural knowledge is highly valued in remote communities and is a crucial central element in any successful program. With growing interest in sustainable and cultural conservation economies — in addition to this context — cultural knowledge is essential and transferable across employment pathways and increases employability in other traditional Western positions in these locations, such as in schools and councils, where employees need cultural governance knowledge and skills and community liaison experience.

This study shows that increased self-confidence, knowledge of Country, Caring for Country skills and cultural knowledge — together with the sharing of this knowledge and skills — are seen by the various participant groups to be key employability skills in this trainee group. These indicators are essential for ranger work, and are highly valued by community members and the other agencies who have employed program graduates.

Literacies and the funding challenge

Acknowledged throughout the process were the issues faced by all in relation to both English language literacy and the ever-present problem of funding. While literacy was identified as a challenge in the training programs, support is constantly garnered and the obstacle is addressed in various ways. However, funding shortfalls are less straightforward to deal with.

English literacy

For these Kriol and Aboriginal English speakers, English language literacy is acquired formally and informally as part of the learning program. TAFE lecturers visit Bidyadanga to deliver units of work formally, as well as provide a range of less formal opportunities to develop skills. The extra literacy needed can be problematic, as the following quote shows:

> They need to be enrolled in a unit in order for the literacy and numeracy lecturers to get out
> there. That's hard to attach. We've actually had to enrol people in kind of units, not necessarily,
> the done thing but in order for them to get their literacy and numeracy support.
>
> (Education provider group)

According to the education provider group, literacy levels can hold back a ranger from progressing past certificate III and onto certificate IV. One of the interviewees explained that visual learning of literacy worked effectively for them. In general, it seems that literacy learning is conducted on an as-needs basis. While this is a challenge, there are rangers in the overarching Kimberley Ranger Program who have now passed or are about to pass certificate IV, and some of these are now preparing to continue their studies at university in areas such as environmental science.

Literacy is a component of a successful learning context. Interestingly, during the interviews, there were discussions with both the cultural advisory group and the educators group indicating that, in addition to overcoming the literacy hurdle, some thought needs to be given to turning the learning model upside down, so that literacy and Western learning frameworks are on the periphery and Aboriginal knowledge and frameworks are central.

Funding

Funding appears to be an ongoing issue in both the ranger program itself and in some areas of the provision of training, a similar situation to other remote contexts. The following quote illustrates the creativity that has arisen because of funds scarcity:

> Funding can stop that happening out of the community. We need resources and funds to actually fund positions. I guess at the most basic level, funding and the equals is a barrier and more so for some groups. I think we're getting better at partnerships. That … mob over there with resources, there will always be some kind of … in Bidyadanga. It will change names but if that means there's always a potential source of rangers there, if we can strike up a partnership. You can strike up a partnership with the school. People want to do work experience to become a ranger for a couple of weeks, like that. It's just about us having the capacity to host people in a good way. We need to keep them interested.
> (Cultural advisor group)

Clearly, there would be many more rangers if funds for ranger training — and ranger positions — were more readily available.

Discussion

The close relationships observed between the education providers and rangers has not always been smooth; however, these connections now underpin the success of the project. Some of this 'corporate' knowledge about ranger training has been built up over the decade since the Karajarri program started and the decade prior as they endeavoured to secure a program. The accumulation of knowledge about ranger training in the community held by the rangers and the education providers is both a testimony to all those involved and an indicator of the time needed by programs to demonstrate success and impact. Learning to work together — two-ways at the organisational level using methods that align with cultural governance — takes time and considerable process. Put simply, it takes time to work out the 'right way'.

We now return to the key questions being addressed in this case study. The first is: how can retention and completion in post-school training be improved (to improve employability) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote communities?

The Karajarri Ranger Training model is holistic, culturally aligned and collaborative, so extracting single elements to improve employability is not valid; nonetheless, relationships of care seem to be a fundamental part of the success of the program. The real-life, practical purpose of Caring for Country, responsibility for which is enacted through a commitment to effective sharing and receiving both cultural and scientific knowledge, is also highly significant to the success of the project. This is because rangers themselves are collaboratively supported within a safe framework for their individual success and achievement, which is recognised and acknowledged by family and community members. An important component of the answer to this question of improving retention, completion and employability is that of the time it takes to properly refine a culturally aligned program. In other words, improving employability in remote communities needs culturally aligned community participation, which needs time, resources, cultural knowledge and funds to establish.

There were two sub-questions, as follows:

- Which models of adult training work well (or not) to achieve completion and employability outcomes in each site?

This study of the Karajarri Ranger Program shows that, in remote communities such as Bidyadanga, retention and completion can be improved with an effective on-the-job training model based upon collaborative, supportive two-way learning. The model is aligned with cultural governance in terms of cultural purpose, which is Caring for Country. An essential element is the recognition by the education providers of the cultural knowledge of the trainees. Within this model, elders are teachers of cultural knowledge. Rangers learn 'both-ways' knowledge: *kardiya* knowledge, such as science, and cultural

knowledge of Country as core content for learning. While we call it a training model, it is really a facilitation model of learning and the incorporation of knowledge that is valued by all.

- How do factors of funding, andragogy, individual agency, cultural attachments, geography, employment service delivery, English language literacy, digital literacies, and job availability effect improved engagement, retention and completion of training?

In summary, these factors each form part of a holistic, culturally aligned adult learning approach. Thus, individual learning within a collaborative support structure and which is culturally based on-Country is expected to bring about improved engagement, retention and completion.

The second overarching question asked: what indicators of success other than completion would be important for training in remote communities (to improve employability)? In this instance, the Karajarri Ranger Training study showed that, in the Bidyadanga remote community, success factors other than completion include increased personal confidence, knowledge of Country, cultural knowledge and Caring for Country skills, as well as the transmission and sharing of this cultural knowledge, language, skills and responsibilities.

Conclusion

A study of the data from five focus groups and the 12 individual recorded interviews for the purposes of evaluating the Karajarri Ranger Training Program highlights the operation of a strong culturally aligned on-the-job ranger training model, comprised peer learning, two-way learning by all parties, both-ways learning by rangers, elders as authoritative teachers and education providers being regarded as learners when on-Country.

Key elements of the adult learning methodology include: relationships of care that encapsulate Caring for Country through culture; a clear, shared purpose for learning; individual learners being supported collaboratively, thus providing an encouraging environment for individual success; learning by doing in a Caring for Country cultural knowledge context; and learning on an as-needed basis when the job needs doing.

Beyond the answers to the questions asked as part of this study, the program has benefits in and of itself to the community, to participants, to elders and to Country. By virtue of the training model and the learning principles that are implemented in such a way that enables Aboriginal knowledge from the past to inform the present and create future pathways, this program has a massive impact. It demonstrates what can happen within government program provisions when elders and communities are empowered to incorporate cultural governance principles, and when cultural knowledge is valued alongside Western science. Beyond narrow goals relating to retention and completion of training and employability, this strengths-based approach builds upon learning models that have been successful since time immemorial: this case-study demonstrates what success can look like when programs are implemented 'Aboriginal Way'.

Case study five

Training in Indigenous Mental Health (Suicide Prevention): the work of a Cairns-based Aboriginal College

Introduction

This is a case study of a Cairns-based Aboriginal training college's delivery in 2015 of the Certificate IV in Indigenous Mental Health (Suicide Prevention) (IMH). The college is located in far north Queensland. It is an Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander-founded and -controlled registered training organisation and has been providing adult education since 1983. The college was originally established to deliver theological courses but diversified in 1992 to community development studies. Today it proudly promotes courses that train people to work in front-line community service roles. Courses have included the Community Organising and Development Certificate III, Alcohol and Other Addictions, Certificate III; Alcohol and Other Addictions Counselling, Certificate IV, and presently, Addictions Management and Community Development, Certificate IV. The addition of the Indigenous Mental Health course complements the repertoire of skills and training opportunities offered at the college. The course is an ASQA-accredited program and is approved for ABSTUDY under the *Indigenous Tertiary Programs Team: Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*.

This case study reports upon the retention and the learning outcomes for employment of college graduates. The enrolment data of the 2015 cohort were audited and seven interviews with students conducted, as well as interviews with employers, trainers and one withdrawn student (in person and by telephone and via one focus group).

The case study found higher than national average course completion rates, with 65% of 2015 Indigenous Mental Health graduates completing the course. The study also found employers in the human service sector regard college graduates as both well trained and job-ready. The students who commenced the course reported having and maintaining high levels of motivation to undertake training and receiving relevant and engaging coursework materials from supportive and culturally sensitive trainers. The causes of early withdrawal most commonly pertained to family responsibilities and health concerns and, as such, were beyond the influence of the college trainers or support staff to remedy.

Retention and completion

Suicide accounts for a much higher proportion of all Indigenous deaths than in the Australian population, up to 2.5 times the rate for non-Indigenous people in some Australian regions. The rates for Indigenous females are higher than for females in the general population; Indigenous people commit suicide at much younger ages, with more cases involving children and youth reported. While rates vary over time and across Australia, some locations are known to have a marked cluster (Department of Health 2011) and these include communities located in far north Queensland. Against this background, the students and college staff were highly motivated to generate greater personal, community and professional awareness of mental health illness and disorder — identification and treatment options, as well as suicide prevention strategies.

The course completion rates of 65% well exceeded the national average. Twenty-six students commenced the course; of these 20 were women and six were men; 17 completed. The profile of the

cohort is typical for the college's intake. The college attracts on average mature-age students. The age average age of this cohort was 49 years. Ten people identified as employed in full- or part-time occupations at the time of their enrolment; half the cohort had a post-secondary qualification and one person had a bachelor degree.

The course attracted enrolees from across Australia, with the majority of students derived from the college's principal service areas, Cape York, the Torres Straits, Western and regional Queensland. Students travel to Cairns for four two-week residential blocks. They complete individual modules between blocks, representing a total of 500—550 hours of study over one year.

The students demonstrated high levels of motivation to complete the training. Several students reported needing certification to retain their positions in the service organisations in which they were currently employed. Others were wanting to upskill as part of their professional development. Nine students were unemployed and seeking full- or part-time work at the time of enrolment; there were also mature-age women who wished to improve their understanding of suicide and mental health to be better equipped to serve their community (as a volunteer, elder, or through their church).

Students reported wanting to develop their skills and knowledge to respond to mental health and suicide issues in a culturally appropriate manner and this includes having a greater understanding of their young, the causes of self-harm and contemplation of suicide, and where to refer people for professional help: 'I need to know more about suicidal prevention in our youth. As much knowledge as possible'.

Table 6 presents an overview of the course structure. Upon completion, students had an introduction to suicide cause and prevention, alcohol, tobacco and other drug misuse, community and domestic violence, industry skills development in counselling and relationship support, research skills and first-aid. Several local Aboriginal health services were visited to speak to staff about the management of community-controlled Indigenous health services and the primary care of community mental health (Stephens 2015).

Table 6   Course structure for the Indigenous Mental Health (Suicide Prevention) program

BLOCK 1	Introduce hope and healing: moving beyond trauma
	Support adult children of alcoholics
Local study	Project 1: Research adult children of alcoholics
	Project 2: Research addiction
	Apply first aid
BLOCK 2	Work effectively in mental health settings
	Apply understanding of mental health issues
Local Study	Research Mental Health Issues
	Research recovery processes
	Engage respectfully with young people B
BLOCK 3	Establish and maintain communication and relationships to support the recovery process
	Assess and respond to individuals at risk of suicide
Local Study	Establish and maintain communication and relationships
	Community Project 4: Research/Support DFV needs, or Project 5: AOD work experience 2
	Assess and respond to individuals at risk of suicide B (110)
BLOCK 4	Conduct assessment and planning as part of the recovery process
	Assess and respond to individuals at risk of suicide
	Provide crisis intervention and support to those experiencing domestic and family violence
	Work effectively in the alcohol and other drugs sector
Local Study	Conduct assessment and planning as part of the recovery process
	Assess and respond to individuals at risk of suicide
Elective units	Work effectively in the alcohol and other drugs sector
	Support community action
	Recognise and respond appropriately to domestic and family violence
	Work effectively with young people and their families
	Work with clients with complex alcohol and-or Other drugs issues

The modules were carefully selected by the college and modified to meet the needs of the Indigenous cohorts the college expected to enrol. As such, the course content met students' expectations and they in turn reported high levels of engagement and support. The regularity of residential blocks enabled students to seek additional learning support from college staff. The authenticity of learning activities, the relationships formed between students and their trainers and the serious and personal nature of the content they were examining encouraged higher levels of determination to complete the course. Many students reported changes in personal self-awareness, as the following students attest:

> I'm just blown away. I'm learning about myself. My past. My dysfunction. Addictions. Domestic violence. I already knew from experience but now I'm actually doing the work. My life changes after every time I go to Cairns … My life had to change as well so I can help others. So my whole life has changed. More limits but amazing freedom and a different world has opened to me. My mind has expanded.

> At first I thought this hasn't got much to do with MH … At the end I could see there's so much more about MH. After working in it for 12 years I knew I was good working with people. The information was new and things I hadn't heard — opened up a whole new thing to me. I was inspired. The knowledge of what the students all brought in, doing, I was inspired by everyone and the teachers. And I was motivated by my passion to see people with MH issues/illness get the right support and care they need. That's what motivates me to be trained and stay in this field.

The primary reasons for early withdrawal were due to family and cultural commitments, health issues, or course relevance and literacy demands. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are three times more likely to report diabetes than the general Australian population. Other chronic diseases, including end-stage kidney disease, heart disease and asthma, result in higher rates of hospitalisation and death than non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014). The families of people living with chronic disease, which at times is highly intrusive in their lives, carry this burden. The college reports frequent occasions where 'sorry business' disrupts students' progress and learning. Traditional funeral arrangements in some communities can last for weeks. The administrators report such events as delaying the start dates of other courses and causing postponement of residential blocks or the forced early withdrawal of students who were unable to attend. An interviewee for this case study reported attempting the Indigenous Mental Health course in 2014 but had withdrawn due to the double burden of providing in-home care for a loved one, as well as managing her own chronic disease. She reported her progress in 2015 as being better and was determined to complete the course, but her success remained contingent upon good health and managing family commitments.

> I attended all the session and work at home. It is self-paced so I do a little in the morning but mostly at night … I work at my own pace. It will take me a while as I'm a carer for my husband and I'm a diabetic and not been very well.

On principle, students are welcome, and encouraged, to return to study. As one employer interviewed commented:

> People drop out due to family conditions. They are told they have the opportunity to come back when things get better. An example of a family condition: Child-minding. People might try but have to defer training, and wait till their child is in school. (Employer)

Literacy and pastoral support are strong components of the college's course delivery mode. A literacy support teacher is available during all residential teaching blocks. Similarly, peer-to-peer learning is modelled and encouraged. When asked what additional support could be provided, students largely felt that the support provided was adequate in Cairns but they required additional support from peers or tutors when in their home communities.

> People felt they couldn't complete course they couldn't understand the written stuff. So I'd help them … The knowledge is all there but they just couldn't do the literacy skills. If they didn't have anyone back at home to support them they'd have problems finishing the workbooks. I don't know if they had tutors in the remote communities. (Employer)

> [The college] supports numeracy and literacy issues really well. In my experience of supporting students to do the training, it is normally unresolved issues of their own — addiction or mental illness that is not managed. Bamaga is 1000 km from Cairns. It's the big smoke and a 2-week block there is exciting. Some get carried away doing other things and are not ready to study so they might muck around for a couple of weeks. It's been their own personal troubles — drug, alcohol, jail. (Employer)

College staff understand their students and their needs and are particularly concerned to support students through difficult and challenging times. As college staff at a focus group interview for this study stated:

> The teachers, and the college is Indigenous controlled. We are flexible with students and they are comfortable to come here. We know the community people and the issues they face i.e. funerals. Our students have issues. If they get it in their head that they're going to take off, they just do. It

is really hard to talk them into staying — we often try and do that. We spend hours with them to help them get through it …
(Trainers' focus group)

Indicators of success

In my view the training at [the college] is very good … The trainers are very good. It works for 4 reasons. 1. The environment. 2. The lecturers accommodate learning styles. 3. They meet individual needs. 4. Most importantly, people don't get disconnected from their community. Sometimes people leave here to go to a residential block or the trainer comes here but either way the community connection is maintained.
(Employer)

With evidence of widespread support for the Indigenous Mental Health course from employers and students, and a completion rate of 65%, the delivery of the training at the college is regarded as successful. Table 7 presents a summary of the core skills developed during the training. Employers have confidence in the trainers and seek trained Indigenous people to fill community-based positions. They bring: knowledge of the communities in which they are working; community spirit and engagement with community; professionalism; and an understanding of the requirement to maintain patient confidentiality.

Students can fit right into a range of services that are now opening up for Indigenous people to tackle issues of mental health, suicide, community and domestic violence, and family dysfunction generally.

The students return to their communities with vision and passion. They stay connected to community. They don't disconnect. They can function well and offer the services they have learnt. They get answers to their communities' specific issues and they respond to them immediately on their return. Other training might give people big ideas but they are not relevant to this community. The college's training enables people to apply exactly what they have learnt.

Box 1   Summary of core skills gained through the Indigenous Mental Health Certificate IV

- An overview of mental health illness and disorders and common treatments
- Legislation and governance of service organisations
- Workplace health and safety, including the mental health of service sector workers
- An overview of counselling skills – group therapy, one-on-one interview techniques, active listening
- How to identify addictive personality types
- How to identify people at risk of suicide
- Knowledge of where to refer people for support
- How to talk to community leaders, council, Elders and government agencies
- Project planning, research and evaluation skills
- Public speaking, reading aloud and teaching
- In-class leadership and mentoring roles
- Conducting interviews
- Short answer writing
- Consultation – community and target group
- Conflict negotiation.

Returning to communities which have rates of unemployment beyond the national average, at 12.6% across Cape York (ABS 2016), graduates from the college were regarded by employers to have an 'edge'. However, as one interviewee for this case study explained, in a small Cape York community she had 17 college graduates apply for a single three-month contract position. The impact of the Indigenous Mental Health course is intended to go beyond employment measures alone. According to the course coordinator, the college is committed to providing a holistic approach to community-based

amelioration of the harm caused by mental ill health and to reducing the incidence of suicide by providing communities with well-trained and qualified people to work for their communities in paid and voluntary capacities.

> [The course has been] challenging for some but it has to be for some. We need the right people who are qualified. If it's too easy we'll be damaging our communities by sending out anyone to communities. We pushed each other and supported each other. Want people whose hearts are in it.
>
> (Stephens 2015, p.25)

Beyond these practical skill outcomes, students graduate with an enhanced sense of personal empowerment, control and mastery over their lives, environment and circumstances. This feature of the college's pedagogy is a core factor, which contributes to the success of student learning and course completion and is prevalent throughout the college's model of training delivery (Stephens, Baird & Tsey 2012).

Several key indicators of success can be observed. Firstly, the mature age of the cohort, at 49 years, translates into a learning community of concerned citizens, who are already in, or on the cusp of being, community leaders and mentors. In addition to this, a third of the students occupy professional or quasi-professional community service positions and bring their experience and knowledge of the course material into the classroom discussions. Several students were highly motivated to be more effective community elders, leaders and youth mentors and have multiple community roles, such as parents, grandparents, church leaders, or volunteers in the community organisations, including in the school and health centre and with the local justice groups. Motivated by an imperative to act, one Indigenous Mental Health graduate stated that:

> I've been working on a plan that'll take a couple of years. I'm working with my generation. We need to be role models and mentors. It's up to us. Some of our Elders aren't doing it … The elders are dying fast. We need to find the culture, dance, language, song. And we need to reach out to our youth. They realise they are not the babies but they are not the role models. It's a shock to many.
>
> (Student interview in Stephens 2015, p.26)

A second indicator of success is attributable to the focus on literacy as a core skill to be developed through training. Boughton (2000) makes the link between literacy and health outcomes. Durnan, Beetson and Boughton (2013) argue that literacy education is a socially transformative practice: how people learn to read, speak and write words gives people power.

Thirdly, the trainers establish a functional and genuine community of learners, which involves highly respectful student—trainer relationships and a 'two-way' approach to teaching, which is heuristic and student-focused. Such a culture fosters the peer-to-peer teaching and mentoring. This is a skill set required for work in the service sectors.

Fourthly, the student support provided during the residential blocks is a strong factor in helping struggling students resist the urge to withdraw. Beyond the classroom, the college maintains communication and relationships with students past and present. This includes alumni communities, the return of students to undertake other courses, and graduates as trainee-trainers. Additionally, the college staff will provide:

- graduate and student advocacy: the provision of references on request and character references for court appearances

- mentoring and support to pursue university pathways, with all trainers committed to lifelong learning (several staff have or are working towards higher research degrees)

- student assistance to access community funding, grants or other sources of project start-up capital.

Critical learnings

The college is an Indigenous-controlled RTO employing Indigenous trainers and staff. The trainers are well liked and trusted by the students and they present and deliver culturally relevant and appropriate training from an Australian Indigenous perspective. The college has established a strong reputation for providing supportive training relevant to the needs of Indigenous Australians. It has been operating for over 30 years.

Despite its experience in the sector, the college reports ongoing constraints to its capacity to fulfil its training potential for Indigenous students residing in the remote and very remote communities of northern Australia. Funding is sourced from across the Australian Government, although the physical constraints of course delivery imposed by seasons and the topography of places like Cape York, the Torres Strait Islands and other remote locations is often ignored by the government funding (Zoellner et al. 2016).

As noted, many students undertake the training to be better community role models, recognising from the outset that they will work in a voluntary capacity. Although the college welcomes returning students, the current policy may preclude individuals returning after previously failed efforts. An evaluation of the Indigenous Mental Health delivery (Stephens 2015) over a two-year period also identified concerns with funding to support long-term plans for course delivery: the college has reported difficulty in providing certainty of employment to its own staff or security of course delivery for the sector. The evaluation recommended that funding be allocated to ensure the provision of travel and accommodation for all enrolled students attending from remote areas. The evaluation also recommended that flexible funding arrangements be put in place to enable the college to travel to clusters of students in remote locations or regional hubs (for example, Thursday Island). In relation to literacy, a recommendation was also made for additional literacy support personnel for the periods of the residential modules (Stephens 2015). In the college's present arrangements, literacy support is often provided by volunteer retired teachers drawn from the Cairns community.

Student-fee support to induce students to pay more for VET certification (that is, VET FEE-HELP) will not be introduced at the college, with college staff expressing concerns about the social and financial impact of income-contingent loans for training at the college (Zoellner et al. 2016). The college staff will work with students, the community and college stakeholders to find other sources of funding to support the participation of students with particular barriers.

Clearly, the Indigenous Mental Health course is providing highly beneficial individualised learning. Students are likely to make an impact on their places of work and in their communities, reducing the stigma and shame of mental health illness and disorder in both Indigenous and the Australian populations. College staff are acutely aware that these issues are entangled with post-colonial trauma, social marginalisation and contemporary manifestations of racism. The following comments by students capture the extent of the problem facing graduates as they return with the intent to enacting change.

> [I've learnt] new stuff. About mental health. I was working with alcohol and other addictions training on … but I didn't know about mental [illness and disorders] and alcohol and other disorders and I need more knowledge about it [and its link to suicide]. Our kids are causing a ruckus. In hospitals [there is] often not a liaison officer and [they] rely on the family and Aunties

and need to follow up that this child's in danger. I had an incident with a nephew. But we had no knowledge with him. We need to get to the core issue. But [the course has] helped me. But I can't explain it to Aunties. It can be really damaging [talking about suicide and mental health]. They deal with it their way which means that they don't talk about stuff and are in denial and don't face their own core issues and we have to bring it out and work on that. The pain of going way back to colonisation and finding out where we come from, it hurts and we're fighting to keep our language and song. I learnt about my Grandmother fighting to stay on her land and trying to teach her language and song to children and couldn't. It got lost. We identify through our last names and who is married to who etc., but we don't know all of who we are. If affects us in public ways.

(Quoted in Stephens 2015, p.26)

Our men in our communities were big staunch warriors. In Western society they are nothing. I grew up in a white home. I grew up racist because I was not educated in aboriginal culture. Western culture is very individualistic and the communities are not. It's a completely different ball park. We have to live in both cultures and educate people to live in both. In our eyes we see them, who they are, when they have culture, song and dance. We see them for who they are. They don't have to have the shame. (Quoted in Stephens 2015, p.27)

Government Western law. Children wouldn't be doing this if they abide by the cultural lore. The Western law has taken our power away to handle our own youth. So the children are lost cause they know they can work it. But they really want those boundaries. Trying to live by spirit and the conflict in each of us is abiding by one Western law and the cultural lore is amazing and we could put a stop to this. (Quoted in Stephens 2015, p.27)

Despite the challenges of a complex milieu, the college courses are in high demand, and their graduates enjoy employer respect. The last word is a message to the college itself from an employer:

Don't stop doing what you are doing. They are doing a good job. Some of our students are hard. They have a lot of trauma and issues but the lecturers are doing a great job with them. Keep going don't give up.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2016, *Local government areas, statistical areas levels 2: Cape York (SA2) National Regional Profile (NRP)*, ABS, Canberra.

Anderson, I 2011, *Indigenous pathways into the professions,* University of Melbourne.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014, *Australia's health 2014*, AIHW, Canberra.

Bird Rose, D 1996, *Nourishing terrains: Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

Boughton, B 2000, *What is the connection between Aboriginal education and Aboriginal health?*, Occasional paper series, 2, CRC for Aboriginal and Tropical Health, Casuarina, NT.

——2009, 'Challenging donor agendas in adult & workplace education in Timor-Leste', in L Cooper & S Walters (eds), *Learning/work: critical perspectives on lifelong learning and work*, Human Science Research Council Press, Capetown, South Africa, pp.74—87.

——2010, 'Back to the future? Timor-Leste, Cuba and the return of the mass literacy campaign', *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol.18, no.2, pp.23—40.

Boughton, B & Durnan, D 2014, 'Cuba's "Yes, I Can" mass adult literacy campaign model in Timor-Leste and Aboriginal Australia: A comparative study', *International Review of Education*, vol.60, no.4, pp.559—80.

Boughton, B, Ah Chee, D, Beetson, J, Durnan, D & LeBlanch, J 2013, 'An Aboriginal adult literacy campaign pilot study in Australia using Yes I Can', *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol.21, no.1, viewed 1 April 2017, <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/lnj/article/view/3328>.

Cowlishaw, G 2004, *Blackfellas, whitefellas, and the hidden injuries of race*, Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Department of Health 2011, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention strategy: consultation paper*, DOH, Canberra.

D'Aprano, A, Silburn, S, Johnston, V, Oberklaid, F & Tayler, C 2015, 'Culturally appropriate training for remote Australian Aboriginal health workers: evaluation of an early child development training intervention', *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, vol.36, no.7, pp.503—11.

Durnan, D, Beetson, J & Boughton, B 2013, 'Using popular education in development work: some experiences from Aboriginal Australia', *Rhizome freirean*, 14.

Fredman, N 2014, 'Understanding motivation for study: Human capital or human capability?', *International Journal of Training Research*, vol.12, no.2, pp.93—105.

Kral, I & Falk, I 2004, *What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult literacy practices, training, community capacity and health*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Miller, C 2005, *Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australians' aspirations: a systematic review of research*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Morris, B 2013, *Protests, land rights and riots: postcolonial politics in Australia in the 1980s*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) 2016, *Total VET students and courses 2015*, NCVER, Adelaide, viewed October 2016 <https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/59584/Total-VET-students-and-courses-2015.pdf>.

Pocock, B, Skinner, N, McMahon C & Pritchard, S 2011, *Work, life and VET participation amongst lower-paid workers*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Productivity Commission 2005, *Australia's health workforce*, PC, Canberra.

Shomos, A 2010, *Links between literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

Stephens, A 2015, 'Training for life: supporting communities to reduce the risk of suicide: the delivery of Certificate IV in Indigenous Mental Health (Suicide Prevention)', Wontulp Bi-Buya College, Cairns.

Stephens, A, Baird, L & Tsey, K 2012, 'Australian Indigenous community development: making the link between community development training and community development practice', Community Development, vol.44, no.3, pp.277—91.

Zoellner, D, Stephens, A, Joseph, V & Monro, D 2016, 'Mission-driven adaptability in a changing national training system', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, pp.1—10.