

Positive pathways for young people in remote communities: What works?



February, 2012

Prepared by
Dr Delwyn Goodrick

Based on research conducted by

Jenny Allen, Esmeralda de Trafford, Jenny Dobson, Teri Hart,
Tara McLachlan, Rosemaree Magro, and Christian Sayers

Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Report summary	6
The research involved two main phases:.....	6
• Phase 1:.....	6
• Phase 2:.....	6
Key messages	7
Phase 1: Service Providers at the YAT Remote Service Providers Forum (August, 2011) ...	7
Key messages	7
Phase 2: Data collection within four remote communities	7
1. Introduction	9
The report documents:	9
1.1 Structure of the report.....	9
1.1.1 A note about terminology.....	10
2 Background	10
2.1 What are the issues for young people in remote communities?	12
2.2 Working with young people in remote communities	13
3 What works in remote communities?	14
3.1 Why more research in remote communities?	14
3.2 Research purpose	15
3.3 Audience and stakeholders.....	15
4 Approach and methodology	15
4.1 Research phases.....	16
Phase 1: Initial Consultation—the Alice Springs Remote Providers’ Conference.....	16
Phase 2: Consultation with service providers and community members within remote communities	17
4.2 The research process	17
4.3 Representing others.....	18
4.4 Ethical considerations	18
4.4.1 Withdrawal from the research.....	19
4.5 Data analysis	21
4.6 Reporting findings from the five communities	22
4.6.1 A note about presentation.....	22

5	Findings: Phase 1—Planning and Youth Attainment and Transitions Conference	24
	Who participated?	24
5.1	What is a positive pathway?	24
5.2	Discussion statements	26
	Box 1: discussion statements	27
	Four discussion statements	27
5.2.1	The importance of addressing health and wellbeing needs	27
5.2.2	Relevance of COAG targets	27
5.2.3	Funders’ definitions of success	28
5.2.4	Staff turnover in remote communities	30
6	Phase 2: Research with four remote communities.....	31
6.1	Murchison and Gascoyne Region (WA)—Karalundi, Burringurrah and Meekatharra 32	
6.2	Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community (WA).....	32
6.3	Burringurrah, Western Australia.....	33
6.4	Meekatharra, Western Australia	34
6.5	Maningrida, Northern Territory.....	35
7	Findings from consultations in the four communities.....	37
7.1	What is a positive pathway?	37
7.1.1	Consultations with young people	40
7.2	Barriers to positive pathways	40
7.2.1	Lack of appropriate consultation and collaboration with communities in planning initiatives.....	42
7.2.2	Lack of Consistency - Programs and Staffing	43
7.3	How can young people be better supported to a positive pathway?	44
	The Importance of Relationships	44
7.3.1	Build relationships with young people.....	46
7.3.2	Build learning opportunities into social and community activities	47
7.3.3	Work with families, not just young people.....	48
7.3.4	Locate local mentors and role models.....	49
7.3.5	Strengthen partnerships	50
7.4	Interventions/Programs that make a difference	52
8	Summary- Touchpoints for Action	53
	Touchpointsfor Action	55

Explanatory notes	55
Example Quotes and Comments.....	55
9 Conclusion.....	59
Appendices—In Part 2 Report	60
References	60

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support of a number of people.

Ten service providers working within four remote communities generated the substantive data for the major component of this research¹. They undertook all the consultations, transcribed tapes and wrote notes and reflections about the research process. While not living within the communities, most of these individuals had existing links to participants within the communities and were knowledgeable about the contextual factors and characteristics of each community. I would like to thank the following researchers who contributed interview material for this report:

- **Meekatharra, Burringurrah and Karalundi, Western Australia**
Jenny Allen, Christian Sayers, Rosemaree Magro, Esmeralda de Trafford
- **Maningrida, Northern Territory**
Tara McLachlan, Teri Hart and Jenny Dobson

Thank you also to the program managers who provided support for the project.

Secondly, acknowledgements and thanks go to the members of the Youth Attainment and Transition National Network and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for their support of the project. There was enthusiasm and support for this research from the earliest discussions at National Network meetings, and this was reinforced in provision of support funding for the research.

Thirdly, we wish to acknowledge service providers and community members that participated in the research. The research timeframes were very tight, yet despite having to respond quickly, interviewees gave of their time to speak about their experiences and hopes for young people within their community. In part, this reinforces one of the central points made in this report, that the relationships formed through committed and caring community members is central to supporting young people in remote communities.

¹ With the exception of Maningrida, where the majority of interviews were conducted by Ms Tara McLachlan, an experienced researcher on placement with Mission Australia.

Report summary

This research project was undertaken to explore the meaning and characteristics of positive pathways for young people aged 12–19 years. The research focuses on the experiences of those who work in remote communities with young people.

The purpose of the research was to:

- enhance understandings of what works in supporting young people in four remote communities
- identify important components of effective service delivery, including, but not limited to the role of agency and community partnerships
- inform future Youth Attainment and Transition service delivery in remote communities.

The research was initiated and supported by the Youth Attainment and Transitions National Network and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

The research involved two main phases:

- **Phase 1:**
A group of service providers with experience working in remote communities were consulted to document their ideas and experiences of what works to support young people. Sixty two participants attending the Youth Attainment and Transitions (YAT) Remote Service Providers' Forum attended data collection sessions built into the conference program.
- **Phase 2:**
Service providers, who worked within the four communities conducted individual interviews and small group consultations with other agency and service providers within the communities, and community members. The four communities were Maningrida (NT), Burringurrah, Karalundi and Meekatharra (WA). The focus of these consultations was to identify what works for young people, drawing on participants' experiences living and working within these communities. Data was collected over a two month timeframe.

This report is based on a collation and synthesis of the material generated from the YAT Service Providers' Forum and data collected in the four remote communities.

Key messages

Phase 1: Service Providers at the YAT Remote Service Providers Forum (August, 2011)

- The phrase, a positive pathway, has a range of connotations. When considering the phrase, service providers felt that there were differences in interpretation between mainstream agencies and Indigenous people living within remote communities. Working with young people and the broader community to determine an appropriate, relevant and achievable pathway that is tailored for the young person was seen to be the most effective strategy: A one size fits all approach will not work.
- Eighty five percent (n=47/55) of participants in the service providers' forum felt that initiatives designed for young people in remote communities will only work if the basic health and welfare needs of young people are addressed first.
- Eighty eight percent of the group felt that the definitions of success of funders and funding groups for young people in remote communities were often unrealistic. While there was broad support for the intention of particular outcomes, measures and targets were often not feasible given the characteristics of these contexts. Measures to indicate progression need to be tailored to the community and owned by those living within the community.
- Over 80 per cent of the service providers that participated in the research forum indicated that staff turnover within their agencies affects their capacity to work effectively with young people. Staff turnover may weaken relationships the agency has established with young people and the community, but also may influence the strength and functioning of existing partnerships formed among agencies working with the community.

Key messages

Phase 2: Data collection within four remote communities

Fifty six service providers and community members participated in interviews and group consultations across the four remote communities. In addition in the Western Australia sites, 18 young people participated in individual or group discussions.

- Participants often framed a positive pathway as being one where the young person was able to set their own goals and progress to achieving these goals. Service providers noted the value of working with young people to extend their options and support them in planning for the future.

- Cultural, personal and professional barriers within the community influence the capacity of service providers to support young people. If young people are disengaged, abuse alcohol or solvents, are unsafe, lack routine and structure and are disconnected from their culture, it is challenging to provide support in a way that can be accepted.
- Service providers across the four communities referenced two specific structural barriers that compound the challenges service providers face in working effectively with young people in remote communities: 1) Lack of effective consultation and collaboration with communities, and 2) lack of consistency in staffing and programs.
- A range of suggestions were made about ways service providers could better support young people in remote communities.

Six themes were identified from research interviews:

- Spend time building relationships with young people
- Incorporate learning opportunities in social and community activities
- Work with families and not just young people
- Acknowledge existing strengths and interests in the community
- Find local mentors and role models within communities
- Strengthen partnerships between agencies.

A series of principles of effective practice are presented to reinforce and guide the practices of those who work with young people in remote communities. With further elaboration these principles may be useful in informing appropriate service delivery in remote communities.

1. Introduction

This document summarises the findings from research that focused on what works in supporting young people in remote communities. The research was conducted in 2011 under the auspices of National Network for Youth Attainment and Transitions (hereafter referred to as the National Network).²

The report documents:

- the experiences of those who work in remote communities with young people aged 12–19 years
- the views of those who live in remote communities about what is important for young people and what works—that is, what does a successful pathway look like for young people? How can we better support aspirations of young people in remote communities?
- the factors that help and hinder effectiveness of work with young people in remote communities.

While the research highlighted some barriers and issues that constrained the effectiveness of service providers' work within communities, it focused on the strengths and promising practices highlighted by participants.

This report is a synthesis of the two major phases of the research—data collected at the YAT Remote Service Providers' forum, and interviews and group consultations with service providers and community members in four remote communities. Ten service providers who were Youth Connections providers or Partnership Brokers were appointed as researchers, responsible for data collection in the four communities. All, but one of the researchers were known to members of the community, having worked in the community prior to the research.

Dr Delwyn Goodrick, a research psychologist provided support for the research project. She was responsible for preparing initial research materials for the service providers to use to shape the research process, and for collating and reporting the findings.

1.1 Structure of the report

Findings are presented from each phase, and structured around a series of focal questions.

Sections 2 and 3 provide the background and context of the research.

In section 4 the approach and methodology adopted in the research are discussed, and the phases described.

² Appendix 1

Section 5 presents the findings from the first phase, the material generated from group consultations with 55 service providers at the YAT Remote Service Providers' Forum in August, 2011.

Section 6 provides an analysis of interviews and group consultations with service providers and community members across the four remote communities. While the communities are diverse in history, geography, culture and context, there are several common themes that provide focus for this section.

In section 7 a description of promising practices and practice tips for working effectively with young people in remote communities is presented. The conclusion draws together key messages and suggests implications for further work or research.

1.1.1 A note about terminology

The report addresses what works to support young people in remote communities. Given the population characteristics of remote communities the focus is on Aboriginal young people, even if this descriptor is not used.

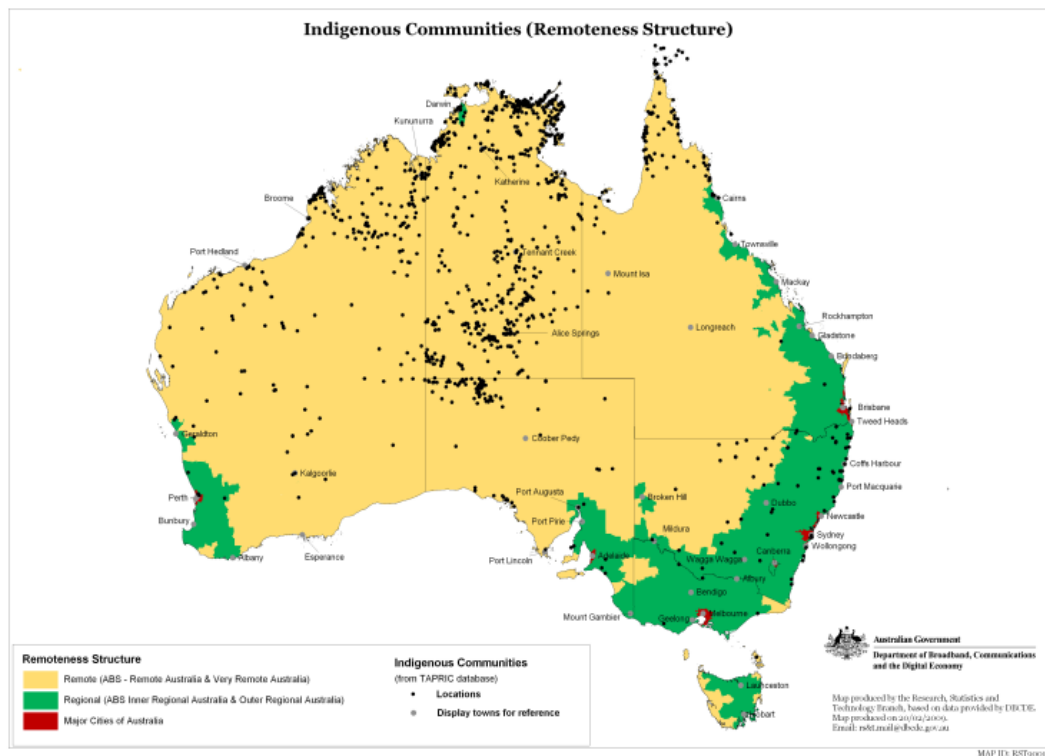
The terms Indigenous and Aboriginal are used interchangeably throughout this report to reflect the descriptors used by participants. There is a tendency to dichotomise Indigenous and Mainstream culture and in so doing present cultural attributes as absolute. This labelling camouflages the diversity within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. While the terms, Aboriginal, Indigenous and non-Indigenous are readily used throughout this report to focus attention, they are not meant to constrain understanding of the rich diversity within and between these groups.

2 Background

The classification of a community as remote is based on the ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) classification. Remote communities are characterised by small populations, with a larger proportion of Indigenous people than rural or urban settings. About one-third (32 per cent) of Indigenous Australians live in rural and remote areas—29 per cent in regional areas and 3 per cent in remote areas (AIHW, 2008a).

The classification of communities as remote is an organising system that indicates elements the communities are likely to share (such as, geographical distance to major centres, a narrower range of employment options); however, each community has distinct features that need to be acknowledged. The popular phrase, *'once you have seen one, you've seen them all'* does not apply to remote communities. This has led to a revised phrase, *'Once you have seen one remote community... you've seen one remote community.'*

The map below depicts Indigenous communities within the bands of metropolitan, rural, regional and remote. The black dots on the map indicate remote communities.



The untouched beauty of remote areas and the relative close ties between community members are key advantages of life in these parts of Australia. However, there are specific issues that affect the wellbeing of those living in remote communities that have gained attention and demanded a response (Scrimgeour, 2007).

Remote communities are likely to have fewer employment options than rural or urban sectors, and lower levels of access to a range of services. Young people within these communities may experience fewer options for work or further study post-schooling, resulting in the maintenance of patterns of poverty or dependence on welfare. Schooling and formal education may be regarded as irrelevant given this context. Those who leave the community to explore other options may feel dislocated from family and kinship ties and have difficulty adjusting to the pace of life in the major cities.

There is little doubt that the dispossession of Indigenous people along with a history that is characterised by assimilationist policy and programs has contributed to the poorer health and wellbeing of Indigenous people across Australia, not just those who live in remote communities. Australian governments have evolved approaches to better support Indigenous people and specific initiatives have been developed for those living in remote communities. These approaches emphasise the importance 'joined-up' services, community consultation, and place-based approaches. There is acknowledgement that 'packaged' programs will not work (Stewart, Lohar & Higgins, 2011).

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) national partnership for remote communities commits to a set of principles for work undertaken in remote communities. The National Partnership Agreement for delivery of services to Indigenous Australians living in remote Australia indicates that agencies are required to work closely with Indigenous

Australians so that services are appropriately tailored to community needs (Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services). A key rationale for the Agreement is that initiatives that are tailored to the differing social, political, cultural, and historical contexts of remote communities are likely to be more effective than implementation of generic packages of initiatives.

A better understanding of the aspirations, issues and concerns of young people in remote communities is therefore required if initiatives are to support them in ways that are culturally and socially relevant.

2.1 What are the issues for young people in remote communities?

This research project focused on young people aged between 12 and 19 years of age who live in remote communities. This section describes the issues that young people may experience and that may facilitate or inhibit their education, health and social wellbeing. A brief assessment of how young people are faring in these areas provides a useful context for the current research.

Most young people in remote communities do not attain the same levels of basic literacy and numeracy as young people who live in metropolitan or regional areas of Australia. An explanation for at least part of these performance differences are the lower levels of school attendance of young people in remote communities and lower levels of family engagement with schooling. While children are legally required to stay at school until they are seventeen years of age in NT and WA, many children in remote communities leave school much earlier with many children not making the transition from primary school to secondary school.

Children within remote communities may have limited role models and limited access to possibilities to focus them along a pathway of education and meaningful employment. Social issues within communities, such as alcohol and drug use, low levels of aspiration for employment, or further education and training, may further limit the likelihood that young people will complete schooling.

Young people who do not achieve minimal literacy and numeracy often face challenges in gaining and maintaining employment, and in pursuing further educational opportunities. Around 39 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15–24 years were neither studying nor working according to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (2008) compared to 29 per cent in non-remote areas. Research evidence indicates that young people who are not engaged in education or work are at a greater risk of long-term future disadvantage.

Schools in remote communities have adapted curriculum and sought flexible models of delivery to engage young people and their families, but these have resulted in minimal shifts in performance at school.

Speaking about secondary schools, Noel Pearson noted in 2004 that, with a few exceptions, there was an insufficient number of 'teachers and specialisations required to provide a proper secondary school education' to small student populations. It is difficult to attract and

retain teachers in remote communities, in part because of the work requirements, and in part because of the geographical isolation associated with these posts.

2.2 Working with young people in remote communities

The issues facing young people in remote communities pose both opportunities and challenges for service providers, not faced by those working in metropolitan or regional areas.

The geographical distance from major centres to remote communities alone can pose challenges in accessing and working with young people on a regular basis. For service providers that are not based locally, getting to and from the communities involves lengthy car travel or expensive chartered small plane trips. Upon arrival there may be limited accommodation available inhibiting service delivery as providers may need to travel to and from the community each day. This can pose problems for continuity of programming and may influence the level of engagement of young people and their families. Community events may also inhibit continuity. The providers may schedule visits, but upon arrival may discover that there has been a death within the community or other important family business, which necessarily prohibits service delivery or consultations on that visit.

Service providers working with remote communities recognise the importance of tailoring services to young people's aspirations rather than imposing mainstream expectations onto young people. However, therein lies a tension. An emphasis for many programs is successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent and transition to further education, training or employment. For many remote service providers the expected outcomes are stretch targets that they have little hope of achieving. Many children within remote communities do not regularly attend school, and may disengage from school as early as Year 10 or sooner. Even programs that assist children to attend school through home pick ups have limited success if the parents and caregivers do not support them, which may lie outside funding guidelines.

Remote communities may have smaller numbers of young people that do not attract the same levels of funding as larger communities, yet funding models may not fully take into account the features of working in remote contexts. Travel expenses and associated costs of service delivery may inhibit the development and implementation of more creative options or partnership approaches with other agencies working for similar outcomes, particularly if visits to the communities are not effectively coordinated.

The turnover of staff working with and in remote communities is relatively high compared to metropolitan or urban counterparts. One explanation for the turnover rates may be the heightened emotional and professional demands of the work. Muecke, Lenthall, & Lindeman (2011) have suggested that high rates of turnover may be in part a result of cultural shock experienced by workers undertaking work in remote Indigenous communities. While there are additional financial allowances for those who work within remote communities, staff who are more transient or mobile may be attracted to these roles, seeing it as temporary option to save additional money, rather than a more permanent employment option.

Regardless of the reasons behind the rates of turnover of staff within remote communities, the changeover of staff may reduce the sustainability of knowledge of the community's needs and interests, and may fracture the relationships formed with individuals and groups within communities. Further, the continuity of agency partnerships may also be threatened or compromised as new employees necessarily re-negotiate the partnership approach, costing both parties in time and effort.

3 What works in remote communities?

The issues facing young people in remote communities are complex and complicated and there currently exists no clarity about what constitutes best practice in this space. Perhaps better questions than 'What works?' are, 'What is the process of determining what will work in each community?', and, 'What works, with whom and in what contexts?'

It is acknowledged that approaches need to be tailored to the community needs, not imposed from outside. What works is dependent on a comprehensive understanding of each remote community, with interventions designed in collaboration and partnership with local community leaders. A 'one size fits all' solution is not possible given geographical, historical, cultural and social differences among the communities. Interventions must also be constantly refocused to align with emerging needs. There constantly needs to be an alignment of 'community desire to change' with 'interventions for change' if there is to be a chance for change to manifest.

3.1 Why more research in remote communities?

A range of strategies have been implemented to shift the pattern of educational and employment outcomes of young people and their families living within remote communities. A question arising from this assessment is, why do more research in remote communities?

For members of the working group in the National Network there was a very clear rationale for research focused on remote communities. While service providers share anecdotal stories with colleagues and funders, their experience working with young people in remote communities has not been well documented.

Second, formal research processes, such as interviews and consultations provide important information to service providers that may influence the way they provide services, and the type of approaches that may work best from the perspective of those living and working within communities. Research then, is not merely undertaken for the sake of knowledge generation, but to inform service delivery. Research in this context is both a process of information gathering and a process of intervention in defining understandings of what works best and contributing to an understanding of how best to work within these diverse contexts.

3.2 Research purpose

The purpose of the research was to:

- enhance understandings of what works in supporting young people in four remote communities
- identify important components of effective service delivery, including, but not limited to the role of partnerships in effective ways of working
- inform future Youth Attainment and Transition Service delivery in remote communities.

This research was exploratory and was aimed to contribute to an existing knowledge base within communities about effective ways of working with young people. Data was collected for the small scale research project over four months between August and November, 2011. It was then collated and synthesised in December.

The findings are intended to inform program delivery through potential transferability of findings to other remote service providers in 2012 and 2013.

3.3 Audience and stakeholders

The key audience for this research report are members of the National Network and DEEWR. It is intended that service providers and representatives from DEEWR will use the information documented in this report to better understand issues experienced in service provision in remote communities, and future program design.

4 Approach and methodology

The research adopted a predominantly qualitative methodology in the form of face to face interviews with individuals or with small groups. Service providers, already known in the community were selected as interviewers. Interviewers received a research package that included information on setting up interviews and group discussions, and templates to focus interviewing to support them in research and consultation tasks.

The research was based on consultations and interviews with service providers who work within remote communities and stakeholders within the remote communities, such as local police, school teachers, government staff, regional managers, and local community members. Eighteen young people participated in interviews within the WA sites.

Participants from the communities who were interviewed for the research project were not randomly selected, as a probability sample was not considered feasible in the current context given exigencies of time and limited access to communities. While interviewers sought a range of perspectives, interviewees were generally those people who were familiar with the service provider or agency. Service providers responsible for the interviews asked those individuals representing key stakeholder groups in the communities, such as school staff, other service providers in the community, Indigenous elders, and young people (where possible) to be involved. Although the research originally intended to also ascertain wider

remote community members' views, the majority of interviewees shared their perspectives from their position as service providers (for example, youth workers, community development workers, Police representative, School staff). Of course, some of the interviewees were both service providers and members of the community so this distinction is not clear cut.

4.1 Research phases

There were two research phases:

1. Initial consultation—the Alice Springs Remote Service Providers' Conference
2. Consultation with service providers and community members within the remote communities.

Phase 1: Initial Consultation—the Alice Springs Remote Providers' Conference

The small scale research project was commissioned in June, 2011. Following response to an initial brief the researcher attended the Youth Attainment and Transition (YAT) National Network forum in Sydney to meet the proposed research team and to focus the research project. The intended audience and purpose of the research was clarified at this meeting, and potential risks of the limited timeframe and process were discussed. This meeting resulted in a project plan (see Part 2—Appendices)³.

The next formal meeting occurred during the YAT Remote Service Provider conference (mid August, 2011). The purpose of this conference, held in Alice Springs, was to bring together service providers (Youth Connections and Partnership Brokers) that work to support young people aged 12–19 years in remote communities. One hundred and twelve people attended the conference.

Part of the two day conference was allocated to gather information from these service providers about their experiences working with young people (12–19 years) to inform the first component of the research project. Two group consultation sessions of approximately 90 minutes were also held to gather views from the broader range of service providers about what works in remote communities with young people in this age group. The group responded to a limited set of structured questions regarding their work in remote communities to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. Approximately 55 service providers (Youth Connections service providers and Partnership Brokers) and a small number of DEEWR representatives responded to the questions and discussions. The session was co-facilitated by the lead external researcher, Delwyn Goodrick and YAT Network member and Manager of the research team, Jenny Allen (Western Australia). Detailed notes of the session were prepared by Samantha Hill to support later analysis.

³ Note to readers and reviewers: As the report is lengthy there will be two separate documents- this report and a second part that includes all appendices (information provided to researchers, and support materials). This material may be useful to other service providers or community members who wish to undertake research in their communities.

An opportunity to discuss the research project and prepare the selected service providers representing the four communities who were responsible for conducting the research was also scheduled during the conference. This provided an opportunity for service providers to meet Delwyn, the principal lead researcher, and discuss any concerns and research requirements in person.

Phase 2: Consultation with service providers and community members within remote communities

Phase 2 formed the major component of the research. This component involved interviews and informal consultations with key community stakeholders (other service providers and community members) within three remote communities; Burringurrah, Karalundi (WA) and Maningrida (NT). An opportunity arose for data to be collected in a fourth site, Meekatharra and this information was included in the analysis stage. Material from a fifth community has been excluded for reasons explained in section 4.3.

4.2 The research process

The research was undertaken by service providers who work within each of the communities. All services share a focus on children and young people living in remote communities and are working within the communities either as Partnership Brokers or in direct service provision. Their programs emphasise strengths-based, holistic, and locally relevant approaches through active engagement with children, youth and families.

The research was undertaken by those with an existing relationship with and to the communities. In four of the five communities the research was undertaken by staff who had worked within the communities for some time. It was felt that those with existing relationships with the communities were better placed to conduct the research than an outside consultant. This was considered the only viable and respectful approach given the tight research timeframe and research budget.

In Maningrida the responsibility for the conduct of the research fell to a mature aged social work student on placement in Darwin. Tara McLachlan has considerable experience working within Indigenous communities and has experience in conducting research. However, she did not have established relationships within the community during the project timeframe, and worked alongside Jenny Dobson and Teri Hart to complete the research interviews.

Given the contracted timeframes for this research, a research yarning approach was adopted (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) as part of existing service provider activities. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) have emphasised the appropriateness of combining social and research yarning when conducting research with Indigenous communities. This approach builds on conversational interviewing practices and acknowledges the cultural meanings in everyday talk.

This involved structured research interviews, group discussions and more informal research yarns. Despite the informality of some of the processes, all participants were made aware

that their perspectives were being documented for a research project and only data from those that gave consent for this process is included in this report.

A total of 56 individuals participated in interviews/consultations across the four communities. Most interviews were taped and transcribed and summary notes also prepared. In addition, 18 young people participated in group discussions in the Western Australia communities. The researchers used projective artistic techniques to facilitate discussion.

Once all the interviews and consultations were completed the transcripts and/or notes and other materials generated through the research were sent to Delwyn, the external research consultant, for analysis and reporting. While independent analysis of qualitative data by an outsider is not the ideal approach, it was considered appropriate given time constraints and available resources.

4.3 Representing others

It is always challenging to adequately represent others, but interpretation is even more challenging when working across cultural frameworks of history and meaning.

All research is filtered through a lens, the lens of the person or people who collected the data, and in this case additionally through the lens of an external consultant writing up the data, who was not present during the interactive consultations to pick up elements of context that might be important for understanding, and not present to identify and clarify consistencies and inconsistencies in tone, expression and emotion. Writing up others' data is a heavy responsibility and it has implications beyond the formal account of the research—it has implications for the service providers' relationships with community. A central argument of this research is that relationships matter, and it is important that this research, though small does not do harm or distort these relationships in any way.

To ensure that the interpretations reflect the perspectives of those who conducted the research interviews, materials were collated and an initial draft was circulated to the research teams for review. A subsequent stage of review by those participating in the interviews was provided following feedback on the initial draft. Following this process, the report was finalised and submitted to DEEWR and to the National Network.

A short summary document was also produced for distribution to those involved and to interested groups within the communities.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues that necessarily emerge from any research process include issues of confidentiality, informed consent and reciprocity.

It is important to ensure that all participants are clear about the purpose of the research and that researchers consider how the research findings will be shared, interpreted and disseminated appropriately within the communities in such a way that individual comments are not identifiable.

The ethical elements of the research were important to the researchers, especially considering the nature of historical abuses of information gathered from remote communities (Tuiwai-Smith, 1999). For many Indigenous people, research is a dirty word (Tuiwai-Smith, 1999). It is a process that is associated with researchers taking local knowledge⁴ and redefining contributions from the positioning of the dominant cultural positioning, a mainstream white framework. At best these consultations identify salient differences in cultural understandings and meaning. At worst the process may lead to alienation of meaning from the perspective of those who are researched. Further, much research has been conducted with Indigenous groups under the auspices of collaboration, partnership and consultation, but many participants do not see the products of the research, nor do they feel part of its creation.

These issues weighed heavily on the research project team, and, given a tight timeframe early planning of the research reinforced the importance of this research being useful to members of the National Network, to Youth Connections providers and Partnership Brokers and to the participants in the communities.

Potential ethical issues were discussed in the initial planning meeting in Sydney (July, 2011), and in written documentation provided to support the researchers (see Part 2—Support Materials). The timeframe for the research was very constrained—data needed to be collected within a two month period and, given this timeframe ethics considerations became the responsibility of the researchers and the research consultant.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and asked whether they would like to participate. Permission was gained from individuals prior to interviews or group discussion. Participants were also informed that the material they shared would be treated as confidential in the final report. All participants were aware of the opportunity to withdraw from involvement in the research at any time. Jeremy Barren, Executive Officer for the YAT network, and Delwyn Goodrick also met with Dr Catherine Kroener (a researcher with considerable experience working with Indigenous communities) based in Darwin who reviewed the planned processes and indicated her support in principle for the proposed research process.

The short timeframe was acknowledged early on in project planning as a potential limitation of the research process. However, it was believed that the existing relationships of the community with service providers responsible for conducting the interviews would mitigate against this limitation.

4.4.1 Withdrawal from the research

In this brief sub-section a discussion of the practical and ethical issues emerging for the one of the teams are discussed. An agreement was made to exclude material from this community because of these issues and potential sensitivity of the research within the

⁴ The term knowledges is used in the plural to designate multiple knowledges of Indigenous peoples

community. The discussion of these issues is warranted here as they offer insight into research processes within remote communities.⁵

The research team experienced a number of issues and barriers to completing the research. They prepared a comprehensive report on these issues. In the main these barriers appear to have been related to concern from potential participants (both local indigenous people and service providers) about the purpose and use of the information and lack of formalised research ethics processes. These concerns are legitimate and offer another point of learning for future work of this nature.

The original conception of this small scale research process was to provide an opportunity for those within remote communities to share their views about what works for young people in terms of supporting them on positive pathways.

In this one community, a range of factors inhibited the research process. They include turnover of staff, lack of formal ethics process, and lack of consultation and approval from the Local Indigenous council.

These factors appear to be present in several accounts of research in remote settings and are noted briefly below.

- **Lack of consultation and approval by the Local Indigenous Council**
In many Indigenous communities, research cannot be conducted without consultation and approval by the Local Indigenous Council. This process of consultation and confirmation can take from 6–12 months. As this research was time limited to two months of data collection, there was insufficient time to initiate this critical consultation process. Without approval there was some anxiety from some people about participating in the research process.
- **Lack of formalised research ethics process**
Most research undertaken proceeds through a formal ethics review process. While this research was conceived of as an applied piece of research, the agreed timelines inhibited formal ethics approval. For many of the participants in this community, particularly those that worked within agencies working directly with children and young people, the lack of formal approval was sufficient justification for their decision not to be involved in the research, and also not to support the research process.
- **Turnover of key staff**
During the two to three months of the planning and conduct of the research there was considerable staff turnover, within both local and government agencies. While this is relatively common, it has real implications for research processes as the relationships between service providers and staff need to be formed and trust built

⁵ The research team were supportive of these issues being documented in this report

before meaningful work can proceed. The turnover meant that these relationships were not sufficiently robust to support the conduct of the research.

A decision was made to remove all references to this community in the research report, including the background and context written by service providers, and the interviews conducted with community members. A key learning for the research team, and a serious implication for DEEWR and for further research of this nature reinforces the importance of context. Remote communities are diverse and what seems workable in one community may fail in another. It is acknowledged that we did not allocate sufficient time to allow the appropriate consultation processes to occur, which may have deleteriously affected relationships among some stakeholders within this community.

4.5 Data analysis

Most interviews and consultations involved two service providers with one researcher taking the lead role in interviewing and the other service provider taking extensive notes to supplement the interview transcript. Most interviews were taped and transcribed. Where note taking was preferred over tape recording the involvement of a second interviewer was important. All transcripts and notes, and any accompanying materials such as art work, specific documentation of programs, and photos gathered during consultations and photographs, were sent to the external consultant.

Researchers also shared personal memos or reflective summaries of the interviews. These notes were particularly helpful to the external researcher who was responsible for the construction of the report, given she had not been present for the interviews.

In qualitative data analysis the analysis process is often concurrent with data collection. In this research, the formal analysis did not occur until all interviews were completed, but the analysis process drew on interpretive comments made by the researchers in synthesising the data.

Data from each of the communities was collated and analysed independently, then similarities and differences in perspectives between the communities were identified.

Two specific analysis processes were undertaken. First, a within case analysis was conducted. This was followed by cross case analysis. Within case analysis involved the compilation of all materials for each community and collating information according to the key research questions. A summary data matrix was developed to ensure comprehensiveness of all information and facilitate within-case comparative analysis. The purpose of this within case analysis was to portray the perspectives of those interviewed within each community and to consider the context within which the information was shared.

A cross case analysis was then undertaken. Patterns within and across cases were explored in order to synthesise key themes across the five communities. A series of propositions based on the evidence were developed from the synthesis to identify variation and salient patterns across the communities.

4.6 Reporting findings from the five communities

To protect the confidentiality of those who participated, a decision was made to aggregate data within each theme, rather than present them separately according to the community represented. While this decision means a loss of the context in which the comments were offered, salient points are referenced to the community where appropriate and specific examples of promising practices are clearly associated with the community to which they pertain.

The draft report was sent back to the researchers for review one month prior to the preparation of the final report. Each researcher was asked to review and provide comment on the complete report. Errors of fact were modified (for example, errors in chronology of events or partners involved in particular activities). Researchers were also asked to comment on the appropriateness of the description of the communities and to share other interpretations of the data.

In Maningrida all notes and transcripts were returned to participants to ensure that they approved of the content before being submitted to the lead researcher.

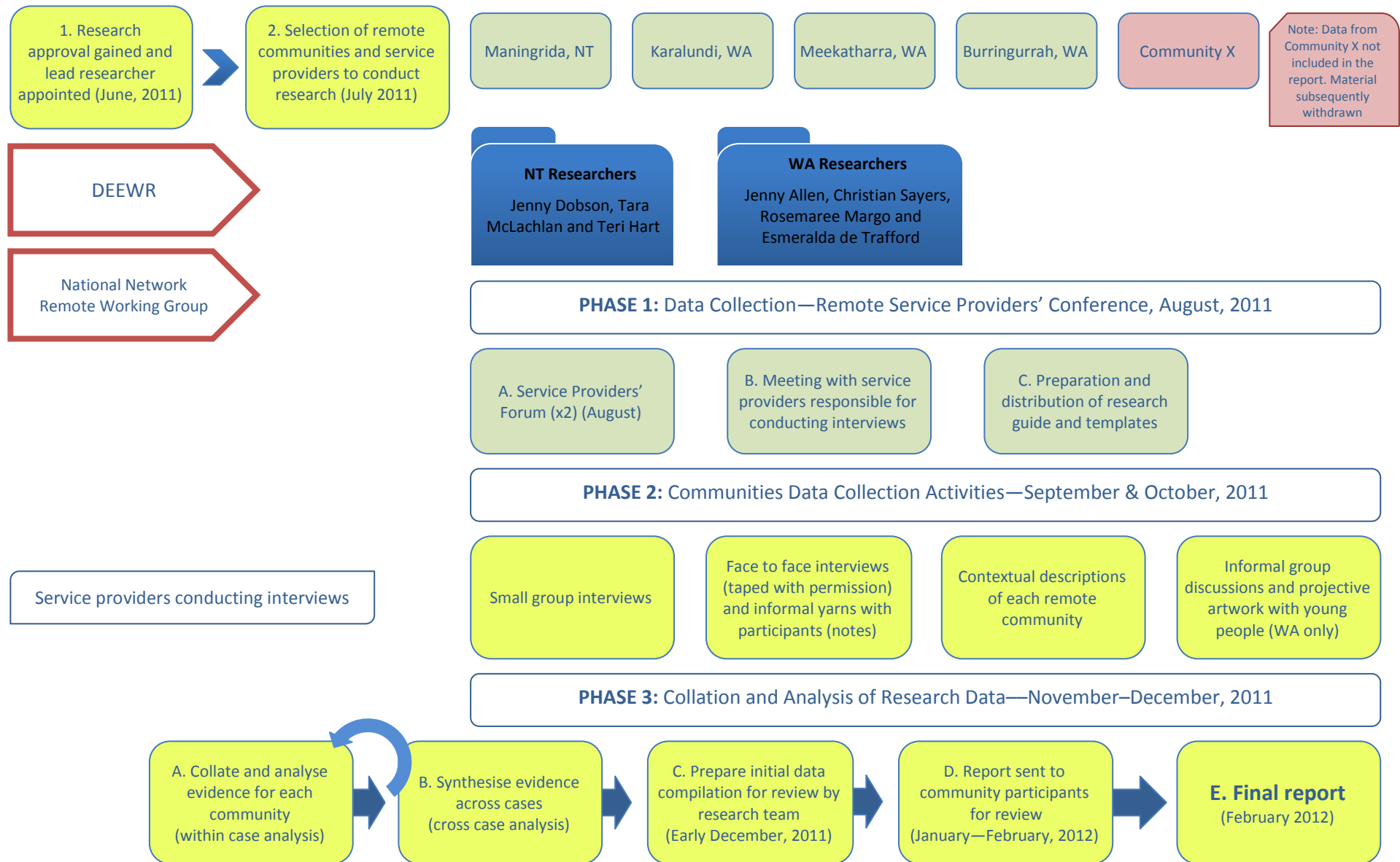
The research strategy is summarised in *Table 1* (see page 22).

4.6.1 A note about presentation

The reader will note that the findings section includes a heavy use of quotes from participants. There are a greater proportion of quotations from those who participated than would commonly be the case in most qualitative reports. This was a deliberate strategy to place emphasis on participant voices rather than the researcher's voice.

The views of participants expressed in these quotes are a much richer source of evidence than secondary interpretations by the external consultant responsible for constructing this report, as she was not present at the interviews, nor has she ever worked within a remote community. Of course, responsibility for interpretations of this material rested with the external researcher. Review processes undertaken in preparation of the report with service providers within the community and a variety of community members were implemented to ensure the quotes were not misrepresented in interpretations, and that the account adequately represents the intended meaning.

Table 1: Research flow chart and key dates



5 Findings: Phase 1—Planning and Youth Attainment and Transitions Conference

In August, 2011 a conference was held in Alice Springs to profile issues in working with remote communities and identify effective practices to support young people. The conference was attended by 112 people. As part of the conference two data collection sessions were held. Participants were invited to the sessions to share their experiences and perspectives on what works to support positive pathways for young people.

Who participated?

Sixty two people attended the two data collection sessions convened at the conference. Fifty six percent (n=35) of the participants indicated they always or often worked directly in remote communities, with the remaining participants either working to support those who work in remote communities or do other work to support these communities.

There was a good spread of participation by both Youth Connections workers and Partnership Brokers in the sessions. Most participants were female. Twenty six participants worked as Partnership Brokers, and twenty eight worked as Youth Connections workers. The remaining eight attendees represented DEEWR or other organisational affiliations.

After an initial introduction and explanation of the purpose of the research, participants were asked to form pairs and share a positive story about a young person they had worked with. They were asked to discuss the reasons they selected the story, and what was going on that facilitated a positive outcome for this young person. This sensitising activity was designed to focus attention towards what works when working with young people. Following this activity a series of statements were posed to the group for discussion. The presentation that follows summarises group responses.

5.1 What is a positive pathway?

Session participants shared their views about the meaning of a positive pathway for young people in remote communities. Most of those who provided commentary emphasised that a pathway entailed progress towards something, for example, improved cultural connectedness, participation in education and training and/or expansion of opportunities.

It was acknowledged that pathways for young people were often not linear, but rather involved periods of unsteadiness and change. Service providers needed to be flexible and accept the shifting characteristics of young people's lives. Regular review processes with young people assist staff in identifying the type of support required.

Review periods were seen to be important for two other reasons. First, they provide a point of reference for the young person in tracking their progress and encouraging them. Second, it helps services to document the often subtle shifts in engagement of the young person in progressing their goals, allowing the service to evaluate effective practices and to modify approaches if necessary.

There was a strong message about the importance of tailoring approaches to individual needs, rather than a one size fits all approach. A number of participants made comments about the importance of the young person 'owning' the pathway; imposing definitions of a positive pathway onto the young person was unlikely to contribute to success. Young people may need support in identifying different options available to them, but they make the choice about which pathway they will pursue.

“There needs to be acknowledgement that pathways are not going to be flat and smooth and even. There will be deviation from the path and (there is a) need to constantly review and update them so that they meet the needs of the young people as they evolve over time.”

“There needs to be change and support for embracing change; as well as an acknowledgement that what works for one person may not work for another”.

Tailoring initiatives and approaches to a young person's needs takes a great deal of skill. Service providers need to be able to form a relationship with the young person, obtain an understanding of their aspirations and needs, and clarify the relevant contextual factors that may facilitate or inhibit their progress. Engagement and consultation was critical in supporting progression on a pathway that is appropriate to the young person's aspirations and needs. In some cases the service provider needs to acknowledge a wider set of outcomes that are grounded in the young person's experience rather than referenced from one's own experience. The following three quotes illustrate the importance of extending definitions of what constitutes a positive pathway.

“It is important that decisions are made in consultation with the young people because they may have solutions to the problems we never considered, or may not want the solutions we come up with. Maybe our definition of what health and well-being (and concepts of homelessness) need to be considered and that maybe once again we are imposing our own judgements on these people. Find out what these concepts mean to individuals instead of deciding for them.”

“We need to acknowledge ‘other outcomes’ and that a positive pathway or outcome is also things like getting participants to contribute and be part of the community, accessing health care and working on their personal barriers to support them to engage in the community better. We need to look deeper than just the pathway from education to employment and that we need to look at social and community connectedness outcomes that support the development of the community overall.”

“(A positive pathway is) minimising and addressing personal barriers that improve their social and emotional well-being; and which improves their

quality of life (which is defined by them)."

It was felt that services need to work in ways that support the aspirations and pathways of young people in remote communities, rather than reinforce agency boundaries. Partnership was also a term used to refer to the relationship between services and between services and the community. Both types of partnership take time to develop and the partnership is a fluid not static process; partnerships need to be maintained, sustained and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are working effectively⁶.

A partnership with young people and the community means listening well to their needs and aspirations and supporting them as they navigate their way. This partnership and the relationship of trust that is at the heart of the partnership take time. It was also acknowledged that the aspirations of young people and the wider community may not necessarily fit with the expectations of funders in terms of their definition of successful outcomes and the time taken to achieve outcomes.

"Timing needs to be considered. Results are not necessarily going to happen within six months or one year. We need to consider that there may be absences from the 'pathway plan' for periods and that the pathway plan may take a long time to complete. It may take longer than a funding cycle."

"Mainstream outcomes such as educational and employment outcomes are 'expected' but not necessarily realistic in remote communities."

"It is about setting realistic and achievable goals and creating a pathway that is reflective of this. This includes really respecting what they want to do and how they want to live (and changing the parameters of what 'success' is). This is not necessarily consistent with the expectations of government."

5.2 Discussion statements

Following the initial discussion about positive pathways, participants in each session were asked to respond to four statements, indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Participants were asked to indicate their perspective by using individual keypads provided to them during the session. This interactive technology interfaced with Powerpoint™ so that once the participants had selected their response, a quantitative display of all group responses on the screen data was immediately generated. The statements were

⁶ This may be particularly important in remote communities given the relatively high rates of staff turnover within agencies, the impact of community events and local politics, and differing understandings and interpretations among groups

provocative and the aggregated totals for each response option stimulated further discussion.

Box 1: discussion statements

Four discussion statements

1. Any initiative that supports young people can only work if their basic health and wellbeing needs are met
2. COAG targets, in the main, reflect what remote communities really want
3. There is often a disconnect between funders' definition of success and what works in remote communities
4. Staff turnover within our organisation affects our capacity to work effectively with young people

Comments made by participants in the discussion sessions are briefly summarised below and the graphical presentation of data is also included.

5.2.1 The importance of addressing health and wellbeing needs

Of the 55 people that responded to the first statement, 47 indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that a young person's basic health and wellbeing need to be met before initiatives can be effective. This represents agreement by 85 per cent of all participants across both sessions. A participant in session 1 made the following comment:

"In [remote community] there is education available but they have no food and don't get an opportunity to sleep properly [lack of beds]. And you can't expect them to engage in education when they are tired and hungry. When people's basic needs [food, clothing, shelter, sleep, social and emotional needs] are not met you can offer all the options and opportunities you want, but engagement will be limited."

5.2.2 Relevance of COAG targets

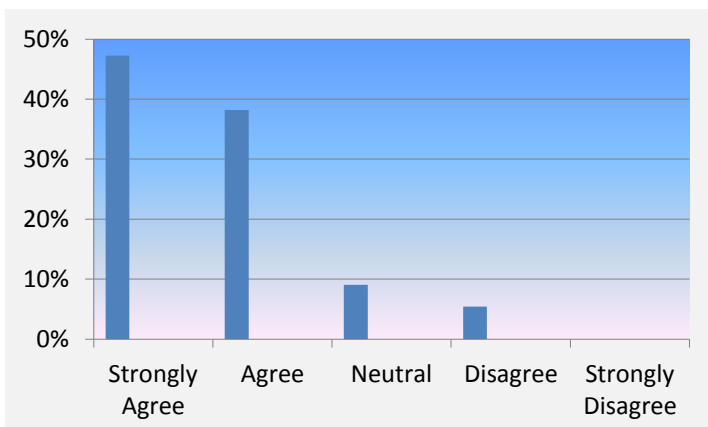


Fig 1: Any initiative that supports young people can only work if their basic health and wellbeing needs are met

The second prompt statement asked participants to indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statement, 'COAG targets in the main reflect what remote communities really want.' The COAG has agreed to a series of outcomes that they aim to progress through coordinated policies and programs. For more information about these targets see National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NP_youth_attainment_transitions_sig.pdf

Forty five percent of the participants indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Thirty three percent of participants indicated a neutral position on this statement, that is, they did not feel comfortable or sufficiently knowledgeable to nominate either agreement or disagreement with the statement. The central issue that emerged in ensuing discussion was that the context matters a great deal, and an either-or response to this question was inappropriate. It was felt that communities need to be consulted using strategies suited to the context. While there was a view that consultation with communities does occur, it was felt that some consultative processes were not inclusive or meaningful to community members.

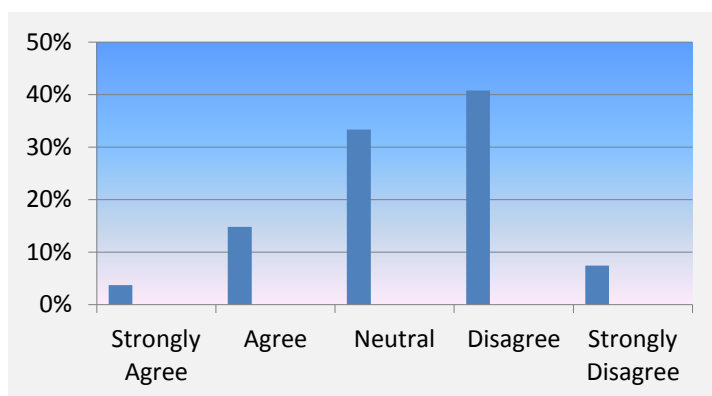


Fig 2. COAG targets, in the main, reflect what remote communities really want

An indicative comment emerging from this discussion is presented below.

“We need to define what each ‘community’ is or consists of; then decide what each community’s objectives and goals are; and then develop a ‘community plan’ with all services working together. If people and/or services don’t know what they are working for (or towards); and/or how what they do fits into the plan, it isn’t possible to be successful.”

5.2.3 Funders’ definitions of success

The third statement asked participants to reflect on their own work in remote communities and funders’ expectations. The statement provided to participants as a prompt was, "There is often a disconnect between funders' definition of success and what works in remote communities."

Of the 53 that responded to this question, 43 indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (representing a percentage agreement of 88 per cent of the group). Many people made a broad reference to funders as government, and in some statements it was not clear which tier of government was being referred to, local, state or Federal.

The key message from the ensuing discussion was the importance of understanding the exigencies and features of remote communities that may inhibit the attainment of particular outcomes. Existing community knowledge and structures need to be built on, not replaced with perspectives from outside the community.

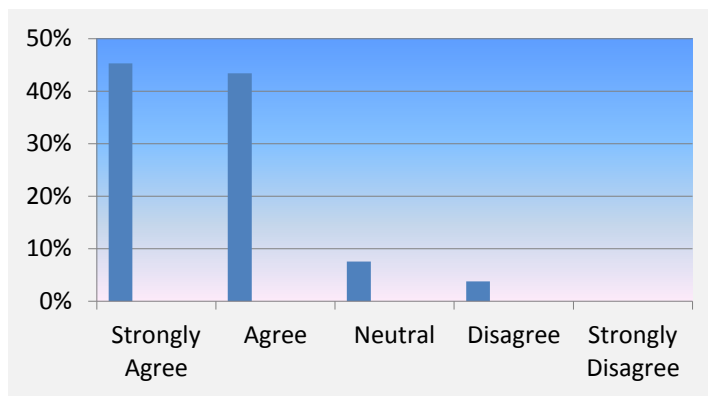


Fig 3: There is often a disconnect between funders' definition of success and what works in remote communities

Several participants noted that the measures of performance used by funders were unrealistic. While there was acknowledgement that collaborative processes were improving by some participants, there was a view that there was an inadequate exchange of information between communities and agencies responsible for funding. The following quotes exemplify the focus of the discussion.

“There is a difference between achieving outcomes in metro and regional areas and doing this in remote areas. Government have expectations around this achievement of outcomes in remote areas that are unrealistic and impossible given the issues.”

“The relationship between programs and government departments are getting better and are becoming more ‘collaborative’ [with contract managers having a greater understanding of the issues and needs of people in remote communities] which means that greater flexibility in individual programs is able to be negotiated. There is still a concern however that information about what is needed isn’t necessarily being provided to policy makers and funding providers [decision makers].”

“Much of what government is seeking is ‘outcomes’ and statistics rather than the qualitative data and stories that can demonstrate the change that is taking place in a community. We need to remember that it takes time to create change and to engage all of the major players and key stakeholders in a community. It can be wrought with political and social issues that

complicate the process of working together [including consulting with numerous family groups in a particular area or region].”

5.2.4 Staff turnover in remote communities

The final statement sought participants’ views about the impact of the relatively high turnover of staff working in remote communities. Working in remote communities is clearly rewarding for the majority of service providers; they spoke with passion and enthusiasm about their work, but there is little doubt that working with or within remote communities can also be challenging. Workers may have to travel long distances to conduct their work and distances from major centres may limit their access to social and commercial opportunities. Some of the areas in which they work may lack adequate communication facilities such as the Internet, which may increase personal and professional isolation.

Clearly, turnover may have implications for the continuity of service provision, levels of trust and collaboration, and capacity of the service to implement services according to defined timeframes.

Responses to this statement by workshop participants indicated that continuity of staffing is a major concern for many service providers and influences their capacity to work effectively with young people.

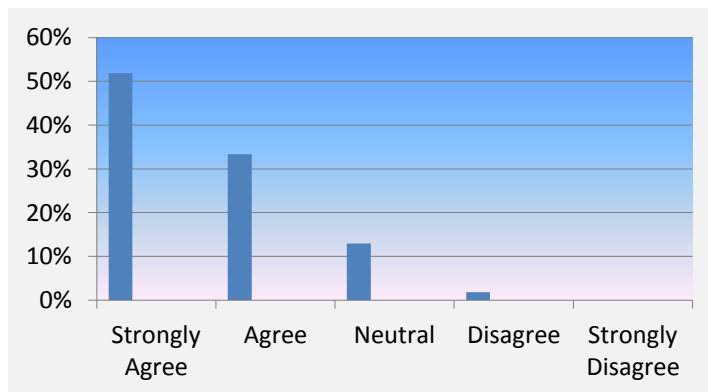


Fig 4 Staff turnover within our organisation affects our capacity to work effectively with young people

Over 80% of service providers participating in the session indicated that staff turnover detrimentally influences their agencies capacity to work effectively with young people.

Qualitative comments confirmed that a major impact of staff turnover was in the continuity of relationships between service providers and between the agency staff and the community. As relationships are critical to effective work within remote contexts, turnover poses a deleterious influence on achievement of intended outcomes. Additionally, delays in programming may result from the time lag from exit of a staff member to employment and induction of a new staff member. Staff turnover places additional stress on remaining staff,

who are required to work to maintain contract requirements. If handover processes are weak, these issues are exacerbated.

Many of the workshop participants pointed to the inadequacy of the salaries and remuneration their services could offer to staff, particularly when compared to other industries, such as mining, teaching and health care. They believed this reduced their capacity to attract and retain good staff.

Even if services are able to maintain some level of continuity in service delivery, the exit of a staff member may communicate another message to those individuals living in remote communities—the loss of relationship. As one participant stated, *"Communities don't care about the program, service or organisation that a worker comes from—they just know the person and when they leave, the community assumes that the work will cease also."* The exit of staff from an agency may influence continuity of the relationship with young people and the community, but it also may weaken existing relationships and partnerships between agency staff who are collaborating to support young people.

"Relationships are the key to success in working within these communities. Constant staff turnover causes issues in the breakdown with people in the community who disengage from programs altogether."

"You lose traction if you lose staff— you lose networks, you lose connections, you lose time and momentum. If it takes too long to get people into the position then it affects your ability to service that region. Communities see that there a large numbers of people coming and going and lose faith in the service. Having the right people in the right position is vital to the success of the program delivery."

In the final presentation at the YAT Remote Service Providers Forum, Mr. Sam Osborne discussed his work within remote communities. While this presentation was outside formal data collection, he indicated that it took him at least 9 months to gain a foothold in the community, where he currently lives and works. He highlighted the value of building relationships within the community by working with existing interests. His points speak to the importance of relationships and to qualities such as flexibility, openness and humour. High staff turnover clearly inhibits relationships and slows providers' progress in forming and maintaining relationships that support young people and their families.

6 Phase 2: Research with four remote communities

The views of service providers that participated at the Remote Service Providers' Forum provided a useful base for the major component of the research, primary data collection with service providers and community stakeholders within four remote communities.

In the initial research planning phase four communities were selected to be part of the research project. Information presented in this report is synthesised from data gathered from three of these four communities, Maningrida (NT), Karalundi, and Burringurrah (WA) plus an additional community, Meekatharra in WA. For reasons discussed in section 4.3, material from one community is not included in this report.

The communities were selected with one central criterion; the communities were those in which the service providers were already working and with which they had existing relationships. It was felt that given the research timeframe, it would not be feasible to gain access and build appropriate levels of rapport with people in communities that the service providers did not already have experience working within.

However, in Maningrida most of the interviews were undertaken by Tara McLachlan, a mature aged Social Work Student on placement with Mission Australia.

It was our intention to explore what works from a diverse range of perspectives across a range of communities⁷.

In order to better situate the context in which the research was conducted, a brief description of each community is included below.

6.1 Murchison and Gascoyne Region (WA)—Karalundi, Burringurrah and Meekatharra

The adjoining Murchison and Gascoyne regions are located in the mid west of Western Australia, encompassing a diverse landscape—from sea to desert—characterised by large open spaces and significant distances between communities. The Gascoyne region stretches from Exmouth in the north to Shark Bay in the south and includes the inland Shire of Upper Gascoyne. The region covers 135 277 square kilometres with a population of 9,865 people. Carnarvon is the largest shire with over 6000 people. Major industries are horticulture, fishing, pastoralism, mining and increasingly, tourism. The Murchison region includes seven shires with a land area of 423 302 square kilometres and 3451 people. Meekatharra is the major supply hub for the region. Land uses in the Murchison focus predominantly on mining and pastoral activity.

The Murchison and Gascoyne regions have a diverse population of Indigenous cultures and heritage. There are many key cultural and sacred sites throughout the region that provide significant insight into the rich heritage of Aboriginal history in the Murchison-Gascoyne. The generalised name used by Aboriginal people for the majority of people in the region is Yamatji. Yamatji is the collective name for Aboriginal people, country and region.

6.2 Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community (WA)

Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community (Inc) is a community that was established as a K-12 co-educational boarding school for Aboriginal students. It is situated as an 'oasis in the

⁷ This is analogous to maximum variation sampling, a type of purposive sample that seeks both an exploration of uniqueness of a case or site and an understanding of themes across diverse cases.

desert', (Karalundi School brochure, 2011) in the Murchison region, 60 kilometres north of Meekatharra, Western Australia. It is a mandated drug and alcohol free, Christian community, with strong ties to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It caters for up to 100 students from Years 1–10, with some older students accessing vocational pathways.

The majority of students are from rural and remote communities and frequently have a number of complex barriers which affect their active participation in school and learning activities.

Students board at the community during school terms and return to their communities for holiday periods. As a result students can often be transient due to not returning to school for periods of time after holidays or family events. Cultural events such as funerals and law time can mean that students return to their communities for extended periods, again making regular contact difficult during limited region visits. Further, weather conditions can affect travel plans and, as the community is remote, the majority of support services visit the school infrequently. There is limited technology available to students or the school and no mobile phone reception available.

6.3 Burringurrah, Western Australia



Burringurrah is a remote Aboriginal community in Western Australia, 790 kilometres from Geraldton. It is located in the Shire of Upper Gascoyne, approximately 420 kilometres east of Carnarvon and 330 kilometres north west of Meekatharra. The community is sited on a 45 000 hectare reserve excised from the Mt James pastoral lease, 45 kilometres south of the Mt Augustus monocline, a place of cultural significance.

Access to the community is by unsealed roads which are prone to lengthy closures during periods of rainfall or cyclonic flooding. This can affect student attendance, interrupt mail deliveries, food and fuel supplies. A chartered flight to the community is considered a standard route of access. During 2010–11 the community experienced a particularly wet year with the community having to be evacuated by air due to water contamination.

The population generally ranges from between 100 to 250 people but has had a significant drop over the past two years. After the evacuation in 2011 the population dropped to between 40 and 60 people, though numbers are gradually increasing. Burringurrah has a high percentage of youth and children living in the community.

The Burringurrah Community Aboriginal Corp (BCAC) became insolvent in 2009, which has contributed to some disruption in the community. Agencies have been working with the community to help it move forward, though this has been affected by flooding, funerals and other community issues. Employment for Aboriginal people in the community is very limited, with some opportunities available with the BCAC, at the school or through CDEP.

Community facilities include the school, which provides for up to 60 students ranging from 3 year olds to Year 12 level; a newly completed multi-functional police facility; a health clinic; administration offices; a 25m swimming pool and a sports oval.

The Telecentre/training facility, community store, women's centre and youth centre were closed during the period of the research. They have since re-opened. The community is serviced by a wide range of government departments and other agencies that provide health and other services to the community. Most are visiting services based in Geraldton or Carnarvon.

The numbers of students attending school can vary from week to week depending on cultural activities in the community or in the larger towns of Meekatharra and Carnarvon. Families tend to be transient and therefore students move between schools in the region. Primary school students are mostly well engaged, but secondary students have poor attendance and are largely disengaged. Only one student from the Burringurrah School has achieved secondary level graduation at Year 12 or equivalent. Strategies are being implemented for school aged children to remain in Burringurrah to benefit their education when their parents/caregivers are away.

6.4 Meekatharra, Western Australia

Meekatharra was added to the research project due to its proximity to Karalundi and because a number of agencies deliver services in Karalundi and Burringurrah and some have an office located in Meekatharra.

Meekatharra, though a relatively small town, is the largest centre in the Murchison. It is located 764 kilometres from Perth and 538 kilometres north east of Geraldton. The town can be accessed by sealed roads, though these can be closed during periods of flooding. It has a population of approximately 1 224. 51.6 per cent are Indigenous and 55 per cent are under 35. More than one quarter of the population are aged under 14 years.

The area has a long and continuing rich Indigenous history. The first permanent European settlement in Meekatharra was in 1894 with the discovery of gold, though the gold rush was short lived until renewed interest in the 1980s. Once again this boom was short-lived though mining remains the major industry in the region today.

Most employment in Meekatharra is in public services and administration, including local government, education, health care and social assistance. There is some employment in the pastoral industry. Aboriginal people experience high levels of unemployment with Aboriginal residents commonly employed through CDEP.

Meekatharra has a District High School, a District Hospital, a range of government and community services, a large Aboriginal Corporation, recreation centre, youth centre and swimming pool. The District High School offers classes from kindergarten to Year 12. In 2011, 161 students were enrolled with an attendance rate of 64 per cent for primary students and close to 50 per cent for secondary students. Approximately 90 per cent of

students come from Aboriginal families. In the 2006 census 119 people (less than 10 per cent of the total population) indicated they had completed Year 12 or equivalent.

6.5 Maningrida, Northern Territory

Maningrida is located in the central north of the Arnhem Land Region in the Northern Territory. Arnhem Land has an area of 97,000 square kilometres, which extends from Port Roper on the Gulf of Carpentaria around the coast to the East Alligator River, where it adjoins Kakadu National Park. It has wild coastlines, deserted islands, rivers and flood plains, rainforests, sandstone plateaus and escarpments, and savannah woodland. Maningrida has a tropical monsoon climate, which the local Indigenous people divide into six or eight distinct seasons. Arnhem Land is an Aboriginal Reserve with a predominantly Aboriginal population.



Maningrida is one of three major centres in Arnhem Land, the other two being Jabiru and Nhulunbuy. It is located 520 kilometres east of Darwin and 300 kilometres north east of Jabiru, classified by the ABS as very remote. It is on the North Central Arnhem Land coast of the Arafura Sea on the estuary of the Liverpool River. It has a population of approximately 2600 people, including people on 30 homeland outstations. Ninety-two per cent are Indigenous and of the total population 74 per cent are under 35 years of age. During the wet season the town population is considerably increased as access to homelands is reduced or cut off.

Maningrida was established in 1958 as a permanent welfare settlement partly to suppress the post-war migration of Aboriginal people into Darwin, and became a regional centre for many different language groups.

In per capita terms, it is said to be the most multilingual community in the world. There are eleven language groups represented in Maningrida, with 4 to 5 major local languages. Over fifty languages are spoken in the region. Most people speak at least three languages including some English. Consequently the people who live in and around Maningrida express a diversity of religious ceremonies and artistic forms in design, music and dance. A strong traditional life continues for many people and there are hundreds of different languages, customs and laws. The Kunibidgi people are the traditional landowners of this country.

Mining is the main industrial activity within the Arnhem Land region, most notably in Nhulunbuy at the Alcan Gove bauxite mine and alumina refinery. Most of Arnhem Land is closed for independent travel and a permit from the Northern Land Council is required to enter the region.

Maningrida can be accessed from by air year round but road access is limited to between June and November. There is a barge service that brings freight from Darwin and full telephone/internet services that are connected to the national grid. Maningrida has a relatively well-developed economy compared with other remote communities in the Northern Territory due to a population size that makes business more viable, relatively good education levels and two strong Aboriginal owned Corporations—the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and the Maningrida Aboriginal Enterprise Trust.

The Maningrida Community Government Council governs the township, while the Bawinanga Corporation governs the outstations and also contributes to the life of the town. There is an appointed Government Business Manager who plays a key role in liaising and consulting with local elders and local government staff, and provides feedback to the government.

There are employment opportunities although the local economy relies heavily on government funding and most Aboriginal residents are employed through CDEP. As one of 20 priority growth towns, Maningrida is a hub for community services, education, arts and health care.

Maningrida has a fully equipped community health centre with two doctors in residence and the Malabam Aboriginal Health Corporation that provides leadership and guidance on health issues, runs a clinic and provides various other community services, including for youth. There is a police station staffed by three Police Officers and two Aboriginal Community Police Officers and in 2011 a Community Engagement Officer was appointed, to work with families and run activities for Early School leavers and other local kids⁸. There is swimming pool and a custom-built youth centre although, dependent on staffing, its use can be spasmodic. Maningrida has a small tourist industry that includes the Art and Craft Centre, a motel and a fishing lodge, which is privately leased.

Maningrida School is located in town and offers classes from pre-school to Year 12 level. It also services twelve Homeland Learning Centres that are located at various outstations. Altogether about 650 students are enrolled at school but informal reports indicate that the attendance on any day is around 250. In the 2006 census 10.6 per cent of the population indicated they had completed year 12 of equivalent. Twenty-nine percent indicated attaining year 8 or below.

⁸ The Community Engagement Officer has subsequently left the community

7 Findings from consultations in the four communities

A total of seventy five people participated in the research consultations. Of this number, eighteen were young people between the ages of 12–19 years.⁹

This section of the report brings together the findings from the research conducted in the four communities. The material gathered across the communities is integrated to protect the identities of those individuals who participated. Therefore, reference to specific community issues or individuals in particular roles is also not included. However, promising practices and programs that are working well, or have the potential to work well are identified.

The idea of a positive pathway is a western concept. There can be differences in expectations between funders, service providers and community about what a positive pathway means and what is required to support young people. As noted in the previous section, there appears to be a tendency for mainstream agencies to identify the attributes of a positive pathway in relation to achievement of normative milestones, such as advancement in schooling, transitions from primary to secondary, and progression to employment.

According to this characterisation of a positive pathway, young people in all four communities are not faring well. Each community has relatively low rates of school participation and subsequently completion of Year 10 or above, when compared with regional or metropolitan areas. One of the communities, Karalundi, has better participation rates than most remote communities, as the young people board at the school, outside their home community.

Young people in remote communities are less likely than students in rural or urban areas to continue to the more senior levels of schooling. Retention of children beyond Year 10 is an issue for all four communities. NAPLAN results for each community indicate that most young people are not attaining Year 12 or equivalent and many struggle with more than basic levels of literacy and numeracy.

7.1 What is a positive pathway?

One of orienting purposes of the research project was to gain an understanding of the meaning of a positive pathway for young people from the perspective of those who live and/or work in remote communities. A single definition cannot capture the multiple meanings of the phrase. For the purposes of this report the meanings of those interviewed are highlighted.

As noted above, the notion of a positive pathway represents progression or movement that is consistent with expectations of appropriate age and stage of developmental milestones.

⁹ The researchers used projective art techniques with young people to generate discussion, but discussion was limited. Given the timeframe of the research and the focus of the research an elaboration of these interviews is not provided in this report.

A positive pathway was often defined by its absence, that is, interviewees noted examples they believed indicated that young people were not on a positive pathway. Interviewees expressed concern about young people who were not regularly attending school, who appeared disconnected from culture or who had evidence of a poor self concept. They noted that involvement in sniffing of solvents, and abuse of drugs and alcohol were indicators that a young person was 'off track'. Most participants made reference to a positive pathway with terms and phrases that indicated direction and movement towards a positive lifestyle. The health and wellbeing of young people was therefore a critical foundation of a positive pathway. Being able to function in the community and the family and keeping away from alcohol and drugs were discussed as components of a positive pathway.

Self-identity is formed through interactions with the environment (including culture and society, family, peers, and school and work environments) and interpretations of those interactions. A positive self-identity is promoted when young people can successfully integrate the various aspects of themselves with congruence, without having to deal with excessive contradictions in their behaviours and feelings.

Commonly, people saw positive pathways as one in which young Aboriginal people develop self confidence and self esteem; strong literacy and numeracy skills; and a connection to the bush, to culture, to their community and to elders. Service providers spoke of the importance of young people connecting with their culture and engaging in ceremony as a mechanism to build a strong self concept. One participant stated,

“Getting kids into ceremony long term and doing things like that which we don’t particularly value, they would see as valuable. They see us as irrelevant, they see us as just doing our own business...I don’t want you to get the kids reengaged with school, I want you to get them re-engaged with life.”

Service providers often framed a positive pathway as being one where the individual was able to set their own goals and progress to achieving these goals. A selection of direct quotes from interviews are presented below to illustrate these perspectives.

“For a young person it means being able to articulate where they want to go in the future...knowing their options...getting a fairly clear idea of where they are going even if it's something that they will never end up going at least they should be starting to think about it and community kids live for the moment...kids here want to get a good job but beyond that they don't really know much more about a positive pathway. It is focusing on the right kind of job, what you do to work towards it, what you need to do now in order to reach your goal.”

“A positive pathway is a pathway that a young person can visualise themselves taking- deciding to take that pathway...and then taking it

through a series of steps to reach their goal."

"The end result of anything I do is the welfare of the participant and I mean it is education, food and to see them on par with [another] person, being paid the same wage and to see them into full time employment."

"A positive pathway—is finishing school—then could be being a mum or head of the family, doing training and learning about children's nutrition and how to have a happy healthy child or a family man."

Supporting young people to set goals and work towards them was seen as a way of supporting young people on a positive pathway. However, several people indicated this was quite a foreign concept to many Indigenous people. Others emphasised that for many Aboriginal young people the here and now and the past is more salient than having a plan for where you are going. Although young Aboriginal people may be able to select some things they want to happen in their lives they cannot readily articulate the path to get there.

One Aboriginal woman, who has been working with young people for over thirty years, suggested that for this reason the emphasis of many mainstream agencies on goals and pathways was not productive. Those working with children and young people in remote communities held a fluid conception of the phrase, expanding its meaning beyond traditionally defined indicators of success or achievement. There are many different pathways. A path needs to be fluid—it can change—but it was seen to be important that a vision for the future needs to be there.

Service providers noted the value of working with young people to shift their thinking and planning for the future. Literacy and numeracy were seen as basic requirements by many participants across the communities. Not being able to read influences the individual's capacity to participate meaningfully in employment where the capacity to read and write will be required. These skills were seen to open up options for young people.

Those people interviewed who were in roles pertaining to education or employment services readily linked the concept of a positive pathway to progress toward or attainment of these outcomes, but they noted that these may not be shared by members of the wider Aboriginal community. A School Principal from one of the WA communities stated that *"Education and employment is a construct by non-Aboriginal people. To Aboriginal people there may be more pressing issues."*

“The positive pathway is less a sealed road and more stepping stones that are not clearly signposted. ”

7.1.1 Consultations with young people



In WA, interviews and small group consultations were also held with children and young people to gain an understanding of their views and vision of their future. Young people were asked to draw or develop a picture of themselves and what makes them strong using the metaphor of a tree, with a strong base, branches to reach out from the base.

While most young people engaged well in the activity, it became apparent that they found it difficult to articulate their plans for the future. Where they could identify where they wanted to be (big house, nice car, Football AFL player), they found it hard to establish the steps they would need to take to reach that goal.

Young people interviewed at Karalundi engaged well with the activities and appeared to be able to express where they wanted to be in the future. While they still struggled with identifying specific pathways to achieve their goals, they noted the importance of their education. Some of these young people appeared more confident of a future as they indicated there were supportive people around them.

“I have nurse dreams as growing up, doing a job... If you dream to be a nurse you have to follow that all the way.”

—Young person, Karalundi



7.2 Barriers to positive pathways

The focus of this report was to identify what is believed to work well in supporting young people in the 12–19 age group who live in remote communities.

While all service providers were able to refer to practices and principles that, in their experience had worked, many stakeholders appeared to find it easier to identify the barriers faced by young people that inhibit their progression and achievement of positive outcomes.

Structural, cultural, professional and personal barriers were noted by participants. Given the focus of this research and the scope of this report, it is not possible to explore these issues in any further detail; they are listed below to illustrate the range of issues emerging from the interviews:

- High levels of family and community dysfunction (for example, use of solvents for sniffing, alcohol abuse, violence within and between families, issues of safety)
- Poor attendance at school or educative settings contributes to low levels of literacy and numeracy limiting the number and scope of potential work roles and reducing the young person's options for further education and opportunities for upskilling.
- Community apathy about change and difficulties in conceptualising other ways to be that may be healthier.
- Cultural illiteracy or lack of cultural identity may inhibit young people in developing a positive self-identity. Some young people may lack a good sense of their own identity as Aboriginal¹⁰, and associated knowledge of the bush and ceremony and their country, which makes it difficult to make sense of the world around them. Others, who are knowledgeable about their heritage, but exposed to cultural expectations and standards from outside, may be caught between conflicting aspirations and realities.
- Lack of role models within communities for young people. It is clear that some young Aboriginal people do extremely well in navigating a positive pathway, and achieve successful outcomes as defined by themselves and also the community. However, some of these individuals may not want to be identified as a role model because of shyness, humility or because they fear being 'pulled down' by others.
- Intergenerational welfare dependency and intergenerational poverty, which may weaken a commitment or need for alternative pathways or may dull individuals' hopes for a different way of living.

“[We need to] change the acceptance of generational poverty... a whole family came into the office because their sixteen year old could go on Centrelink payments... celebrating like he was getting a university degree. This is not the future of our kids, this is the not the way to go.”

¹⁰ There is a tendency to dichotomise Indigenous and Mainstream white culture and in so doing present cultural attributes as absolute. This labelling camouflages the diversity within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of thinking. An Aboriginal identity, as all cultural identities fluid and evolving and should not be over-simplified.

- Limited access to training pathways that lead to meaningful work opportunities.
- Racism within communities, which may reduce the number of employment options offered to young Aboriginal people.

While there are cultural, personal and professional barriers within the community that influence the potential to support young people, there are system barriers that influence the capacity of service providers to work effectively with young people. In the following subsections, two such barriers are explored: 1) Lack of effective consultation with communities, and 2) lack of consistency in staffing and programs. These barriers were consistent themes across the four communities.

7.2.1 Lack of appropriate consultation and collaboration with communities in planning initiatives

Some participants identified structural interventions by Government as damaging traditional cultural ways of living. Interventions were seen as instances of assimilationist thinking – Aboriginal people who live in remote communities were being supported to be like ‘white folk.’ Two illustrative quotes are presented below:

“There is too much focus on getting stats and looking like they are doing their job than focusing on the kids. They need to be interested in the kids.”

“Government can’t step out from the fundamental belief that Aboriginal people’s survival really depends on them picking up our skills and becoming like us....what we have done, we’ve taken away their power to make decisions about their own life. And we’ve overwhelmed them with people who say, look this is how you should live, I know what the answer is.”

While many of the interventions in remote communities are based on a sound evidence base, good will, and undertaken by people who care about young people, participants believed there was often inadequate consultation and engagement with the community prior to implementation, and in some cases, interventions were not tailored well to the community with little or no planning for sustainability. Without sufficient consultation and engagement the initiatives are likely to fail.

The government imposed solutions or interagency meetings that do not include the people who will be affected create barriers. There was agreement at one stakeholder meeting that the government need to be made aware of the impact of their policies and procedures on individual communities. The community needs to develop action plans, not agencies. Short term seed funding that does not result in a long term commitment to a program may do more harm than good.

Local governance arrangements were seen to be critical in supporting the capacity and agency of local communities. Collective goal setting and negotiation within the community about the needs and opportunities available to young people, and the type of support that

is required is likely to facilitate a better contextual fit of initiatives to young people and their families. Service providers may play a key role in providing support to existing governance structures within communities, collaborating with these groups to determine the most appropriate and relevant initiatives. This is likely to maximise community engagement and support as initiatives are not imposed from outside.

“Elders should have control - we come in here with our agendas and leave them out of the discussion, then community talk negatively about [our] services.”

“When re-engaging with learning some kids need to start with a simpler course, than a Cert 2 level, and then be able to build on this. But the shorter course and their satisfactory completion are not given any recognition as an outcome for Government accountability. There is no vision or understanding from funding bodies of the benefits of shorter course that can be a strong foundation to be built on...But (these courses) are a part of a positive pathway.”

In a recent publication about what works in coordination of remote service delivery, Stewart, Lohar, & Higgins 2011) point to the importance of working with the community:

“Community involvement is particularly important in planning and setting priorities for initiatives to enhance service delivery coordination. Typically not all necessary initiatives can be implemented simultaneously and input from community members helps to ensure the right initiatives are implemented for the right people at the right time.” (p.7)

7.2.2 Lack of consistency—programs and staffing

A key issue emerging in phase 1 of the research was the impact of staff turnover on services' capacity to work effectively with young people in remote communities. This theme was echoed in consultations with the four communities. Several people referred to the high turnover of staff which inhibits the continuity of both programs and of relationships with young people and the wider community.

The following quote was shared by a service provider in one community. It illustrates that turnover is a pressing issue for communities, and this quote has particular resonance as this worker left the community during the course of the research:

“There is a big problem with changeover in staff all the time. We do what we can and try to keep the energy up. I keep being asked, ‘are you going to leave?’”

One of the challenging features of working within remote communities is the impact of travelling great distances and in conditions of some of the settings in which service providers work. For those service providers that are not based locally, it may take several

hours by plane or by car to get to the community. Travelling by car or small chartered plane is costly and adds another level of potential risk for workers. Travelling a full day to get to a remote community then returning, which takes another full day reduces the time available to spend with the young people, and, given the costs, weather, and distances to travel, means that programs may be inconsistent or irregular.

“I think because there hasn’t been consistency in programs because of all the external factors like budgets, staffing levels, accommodation issues, flight problems and the inability to secure a venue on a regular basis...I think that impacts on service delivery.”

Consistency of programming is also compromised by short term funded projects. While the idea behind the provision of such projects may be valuable, it takes a long time to build relationships and commitment of the community to a new program- they have seen others come and go.

Given some of these challenges it was suggested that community engagement should be built into program timeframes to acknowledge its importance. A Principal from one of the communities noted that programs that are delivered over short timeframes may not be effective in sustaining changes: "It's not coming in and going blab, it is being here for a period of time and doing it with them." Extended timeframes would strengthen opportunities to 'graft onto' what is already in place within the community.

“There should be adequate time spent as part of a program in community engagement—it may take 12 months for relationships to build, for adequate consultation and awareness of community needs and issues.”

7.3 How can young people be better supported to a positive pathway?

The importance of relationships

There are a range of programs and services available to assist young people in remote communities. It appears that the value of services and programs can only be realised if the relationships between service providers and the communities are strong. Service providers who contributed to this research emphasised the importance of building and maintaining effective relationships with young people and their families and other service providers within remote communities.

Relationships are tenuous and can easily be disrupted or lost. The real, but often invisible work of many service providers appears to be taking time to build a trusting relationship with members of the local community. Often people referred to building trust and rapport taking a long time. One interviewee spoke about “Sitting for a couple of days, then doing your work - let them decide you are safe ... wait for acceptance before giving the message” and to “slow down don't speed up”.

We say to people if you want to work with Aboriginal people you've got to develop a relationship. To develop a relationship you've actually got to be consistent and stable and out there and actually come into their lives as someone they value...Government departments just roll people through.

“You need to take time to get to know people. You hear so much that conflicts as people have their own agenda. Life in these places is very complicated.”

“Commitment to working in remote locations [is important] so that the families and people out in the community get to know you and they know you are a consistent part of the community so that you are able to show it does actually go somewhere. I think being transparent in what you're doing whether it works or not goes a long way.”

Once a relationship has been formed, service providers can ascertain the support requirements of young people in the community. Most service providers spoke about the importance of interpersonal relationships in supporting positive change and providing a level of structure while allowing flexibility to meet young people's needs.

Relationships are built on a foundation of trust, and strengthened by consistency and sustainability. There are three key challenges to the development and maintenance of relationships:

- 1) Funding expectations that highlight particular outputs (for example, participant numbers) rather than community outcomes**
Service providers are rewarded for achieving a target, rather than achieving outcomes the community value, outcomes which may be realised outside the funded timeframe of 1–3 years. This can influence the development of effective working relationships within the community in two ways. First, young people and their families may not believe that their needs are being addressed, and may see little reason to engage with service providers or with the program. Second, short term initiatives that are assessed on the basis of achievement of narrow targets may be prematurely withdrawn from a community if these targets are not met.
- 2) High turnover of staff**
Given past experience, young people in remote communities are aware that workers may not remain in the community, and this may influence the nature of the relationship that develops between agency providers and the community

3) **Family responsibilities and commitments of young people**

Service providers may regard absenteeism from programs or from schools as truancy or 'laziness,' when it may well be the result of competing family responsibilities. This may reflect a lack of cultural understanding, but may also influence the continuity of the relationship. For those providers who live outside the remote community, poor or irregular attendance lengthens the time it takes to develop relationships with young people.

7.3.1 Build relationships with young people

Some participants shared their informal ways of working with young people, characterising these approaches as more appropriate when working with young people in remote communities.

“You need to give kids the time to actually get used to you and to have the ability to share a piece of who you are so that they’re not frightened in giving a piece of themselves to you. Because they have had so many different organisations and so many different programs come through remote location that they often feel at times, why am I signing this paper and where is it going to, and do I waste my time telling you my story because in 3 months, 6 months a year another Joe blogs is going to take your place and basically I’ll be telling them the same story I told you.....”

“Go with the flow. Build on what relationships have already been built and try to graft yourself onto those and sit back and wait for the kids to accept you before you try and give them a message.”

“[We] play basketball with the kids and adults in the arvos and evenings, play cricket in the oval in summer, [have] disco and movie nights held by the police.”

Service providers from the three communities that participated in the research in WA emphasised the value of young people developing relationships with youth workers through other avenues outside of school, such as Youth Connections. These relationships can provide wrap around structures that support young people at school and outside school in the broader community.

The value of Aboriginal workers in supporting young people was noted across all communities. The cultural understanding and skill set they bring assists agencies in building credibility and fosters relationships of trust with young people and their families. However, the demands on Aboriginal workers in these roles within community means they may require additional support to navigate the challenging role of being a part of the community and being a worker within the community.

7.3.2 Build learning opportunities into social and community activities

Aboriginal people who live in remote communities have a long tradition of learning, learning through ceremony, learning through family and learning through environmental cues. Complementary models of education were seen to offer potential to attract more young people to school. Rather than formal classroom instruction and formalised curriculum, there was a preference for integration of curriculum content into work based activity settings. For example, a woodworking shop may be an ideal location to teach principles of measurement and numeracy. A sewing group can demonstrate the value of being able to count and measure through activities rather than through presentation of abstract principles.

“Support kids in practical ways of learning. From about 12 years of age they can be bored at school, but will work hard on the bush or on the farm and learn why it is important to be able to read a tape measure and know how long a certain piece of timber is and learn why they need maths and English—then they might be more engaged when they get back to education.”

“The way you do it is sitting down on verandas, going hunting with people and just tease things out. Basically yarning , not setting an agenda ...So I used to take them out into the bush, find a creek bed, set up a tripod, boil the billy and have a little bit of a BBQ and cook some sausages and they all got on just fine. You get them in a situation where they feel good...but I find when you get them out bush and do the same training . . . but you all lie around, have a cup of tea, talk about it, just impart your knowledge the way they normally do, don't get up to a blackboard with numbers and dot points. But you impart knowledge in just the way that they do things to impart knowledge.”

A key role for many agencies is to work with young people and their families to build basic skills. The importance of intervening early with young people was noted. Some of the interviewees indicated that intervention is too late even at year 10, before they were severely disengaged and still attending school – when there is more opportunity to make a difference.

Focus on years 8/9 - early intervention rather than late reaction to what is happening in the community or happening to the kids. Kids need vision of a longer term goal. They get caught up in things.

Got to get them before they disengage - share the idea of the value of a side track for kids who require something different, then maybe potentially can come back to education.

It was important for many service providers to support young people alongside their “cohort”. Many of the young Aboriginal people have “tight knit groups – they have grown up in the same direction – so working with them as a group is much more productive than working 1:1”. They felt it was important to put the right groupings together as different family groupings may not work productively together. A knowledge of these cultural and social elements of community communicates respect and potentially fosters trust between service providers and families.

Seeing the world is bigger than “this place” was a common theme with many individuals and groups. Young people need exposure to a wider range of opportunities than they can experience in their home communities. While taking young people out of their home communities to other places may broaden their perspective, these events must be supported and reinforced back in the home community if they are to be beneficial.

I think one of the bigger challenges is being able to provide the kids with a wide range of activities ... (not all kids will like what is offered). It's a matter of having a wide range of activities that you can rotate so that at any point you're actually giving those opportunities to those kids so that you are not actually just focusing on one activity.

7.3.3 Work with families, not just young people

Many of the service providers made a strong case for working not only with young people, but their parents and extended family members as well. As parents and family bear a strong influence on youth, it was seen to be important.

The importance of family and trying to connect with family; providing parenting support and advising the family about programs was identified as a challenge, but a necessary aspect of supporting young people.

Children and young people are disengaging from education earlier, not seeing its relevance to their experience or to their future. One of the conduits to raising participation rates in schooling is to engage the parents and extended family in an appreciation of the value of education.

Demonstrate value of schooling and education to parents. Grandparents already value it more.

Identify the right people in the community to, like peers like even to get parents interested, because you find that young people do want to do stuff and it's not supported by parents so we need to get them on board and get the kids excited and show them the opportunities.

Work alongside family, providing parenting support and advising the family about programs. Maintain family and community links even if children move away to boarding school.

While Boarding schools were spoken about positively by those within the WA sites, young people may miss their family and family issues back home can mean that young people miss chunks of the year, including important curriculum that will support their completion of school. One person who works within the school system indicated it would be valuable to explore strategies that would allow family to visit the school more readily so that young people did not feel so isolated.

7.3.4 Locate local mentors and role models

Mentoring and community volunteering were seen as other ways of supporting young people. In two communities the need to extend mentoring beyond formal programmatic boundaries was emphasised. Leaving young people without support following the termination of a funded program will not facilitate sustainable outcomes. One interviewee commented,

I have found that over the years that there is a lot of set up for failure in the sense of lack of complete planning, the introducing of people to new environments to new adventures and the releasing of hands too early instead of following up with mentoring and going back and checking...to see they are alright, and then you go back three times the next week and then you go back and you do not let go of their hands it is an ongoing process.

Pro-social role models extend young people's sense of the possibilities within and outside the community. Given geographical dispersion and mobility of young people, it was often difficult to identify positive role models and mentor within remote areas.

Some interviewees suggested that those who were doing well faced another challenge: They were often subject to criticism and “brought down” by the community. Such young

people may feel reticent about becoming more involved if they do well, for fear of possible rebuke.

One participant explained this type of lateral violence at length¹¹: *"There are some issues ...because there has been a number of people that have stood out as being a good role model but instead of being put up as a great example they are often brought down by the very community that they are supposed to be role models to and young adults that have got jobs or doing positive work. But then they will get called 'coconut' because they say that they are white on the inside but black on the outside and 'Who do you think you are? Do you think you are a white person?' And they get torn down and so the ability to maintain those positive steps that they are making is hard to rise above that to get that amount of frustration. I mean some of the people who have done the greatest amount of work have copped this huge amount of flack and the personal sacrifices they have made is horrific and I don't think many of us would stick around and put in the effort that they have put in."*

The availability of role models and peer support influences young people's expectations and hopes for the future. As a response to this one participant suggested that there needs to be more emphasis placed on building and strengthening capacity of local communities, and building up examples of what can be possible within the community: Young people need a vision and hope for their lives within community.

If you want children and young people to succeed then you look at avenues outside of this area which is a real shame so I think the consistent message is to look at how you build capacity within the community and give young people positive and tangible outcomes - You know you can't say to kids here now like the 15/16yr olds now that you are battling to keep going to school and keep engaging in the services -hang on because in a couple of years there will be a couple of mine sites that you will be able to go to and get a really good job. There aren't any tangible examples of what could actually happen for a child in this town. I think there's a very few examples that you can hold up to say there is hope, keep going with it.

7.3.5 Strengthen partnerships

It was evident that there were many different understandings of what a partnership is. Partnership means different things to different people. To some it means involvement in decisions, others it means consultation, and yet to others means joint planning and decision making. Participants in the research spoke about the importance of partnerships between agencies working within and for the community, and partnerships with community.

Providers stressed the need for providers to work together through avenues such as interagency meetings to coordinate and plan initiatives. Partnerships, when working well facilitate communication between agencies and contribute to responsiveness, maximise limited resources, and potentially reduce duplication of service delivery.

¹¹ Lateral violence has been identified in a number of studies. However, it is a sensitive issue and for this reason the community referred to in this quote is not included.

Collaboration with stakeholders in the community and other organisations that we can tap into is key - to get the right project and it is key that the right people are engaged at the right time and to the right amount. I think some people get put off because they (believe they) shouldn't have such a big role that others think they should have.

It was clear throughout the research that the capacity for sustainable, strong partnerships was a challenge in remote communities, due to transience, high staff turnover and differences of personalities in small communities that get in the way of people working together. While it was seen to be important for staff to build relationships outside of the silos of their agency, in small communities “if you don’t get along with a person you don’t get along with the agency”.

Poor communication and poor procedures was cited as a barrier, with high staff turnover contributing to information not being passed on to new people. Outside agencies need to work with locally based providers and ensure all stakeholders are informed and follow up. It was felt that it is important to have clearly articulated local plans that link into existing initiatives and clear communication. This may include sending out information repeatedly, every two to three months, due to high staff turnover. Agencies need to have well developed strategies and processes, clearly articulated and available so as not to be dependent on a person.

External providers need to use people when they are not there and share information between visits, tapping into what is already working within the community.

To address dissonance between program providers it was suggested by one participant that groups could perhaps explore ways to work together more closely to avoid duplication of service, determine joint ‘key performance indicators’ across programs and set performance measures that identify and include inter- service collaboration and communication as an area of work practice to be measured.

Outside providers need to spend blocks of time in a community, take time to build relationships, develop an ongoing presence and not be “seagulls” for a couple of days. They also need to not spread themselves too thinly. It is better to make fewer little commitments and make a few big ones.

Agencies/organisations need to be able to cross boundaries, working and supporting each other in other people’s territories rather than continuing to work in silos. An example of a structure that seems to be making a difference in Meekatharra is sharing a staff member across agencies. A youth worker is employed by local government and also works for Youth Justice Service and the school.

A teacher at Burringurrah highlighted the importance of providers working in partnership by providing school staff with the opportunity to build their skills, rather than just coming in and delivering services to young people in isolation.

I find all of these incursions very professional in upskilling myself, like yesterday I went to the drumming and I can take that away and use that. Previously I learnt about using digital media and I am now confident about using a range of different resources I hadn't previously touched. These kids find this excellent – the pads you showed me – the smart stuff - great, especially being out here isolated and not able to access PD.

7.4 Interventions/Programs that make a difference

A number of references to programs or approaches that have worked well in the community were identified by participants in each of the four communities. For the purpose of this report we have labelled these approaches promising practices. A promising practice is a program, approach or strategy that may hold potential as an effective way to work with young people in remote communities. While the approach may not have been systematically evaluated or validated by other studies, the practice is identified as having potential if noted independently by at least two of the interviewees from each community. Examining the characteristics or key features of these promising practices may reveal the contextual conditions that will influence the success of these or other interventions with young people.

The excerpt box provides three examples of programmatic interventions that were noted by participants. The principles underpinning these practices may be applicable to remote communities or impetus for further exploration.

Promising Practice 1: Selling the value of work: Karalundi - work line

Outside school hours teachers and workshop providers work with small groups of three to four kids in the classroom or dorm, to communicate the value and importance of work, the beauty of work, the necessity of work. Young people get pocket money they can then save or spend at the shop.

This approach teaches young people about responsible use of money. Advocates suggest it prepares young people for work (work readiness). Young people are provided with opportunities to engage in work experience from a young age.

Promising Practice2 – A Partnership Approach: The Country Arts “Out There in Burringurrah”

The Country Arts program is focused toward young people aged 12-26 years of age and is being implemented over a three year period. The project aims to increase the participation and engagement of young people in the arts. It is envisaged that their involvement will assist them in building a stronger sense of identity, strengthen community relationships, increase their confidence, and create opportunities and structures within communities to support young people and the arts. Experienced resident artists come to the community for extended visits to run the program. Other agencies and programs are linking into and supporting this initiative to develop an holistic, whole of community approach, rather than working in isolation in an attempt to achieve their own outcomes.

The community liaison officer indicated the program helps portray a positive image of the community to those outside the community, people feel proud, was teaching young people how to make a documentary and take videos etc to be posted on the internet. One of the elements that enabled the Country Arts project to be seen as successful was the extended periods of time in the community. Rather than a fly in, fly out approach, the Country Arts program comes into the community for blocks of time.

Promising Practice 3: Engaging Aboriginal Staff: The Mulpa – A helper for white staff working in communities

In one community reference was made to the Mulpa program at a women's centre in Central Australia. The program teams every white person coming into the community with a helper, a Mulpa. The Mulpa is a local person with experience and knowledge and contacts within the community. They are paid on the hours they do and don't have to go through a lot of bureaucracy and red tape 'administrivia' of formal employment contracting. The person needs to be collegial and have some training - pre-ceptorship before they go into the community.

Promising Practice 4: Partnership approach to engagement through art – “The Fridge Festival”

Through Youth Connections, artists from Darwin Community Arts worked with young people (12-19) at risk of dropping out of school to create artworks from polystyrene coolers. This event enjoyed a particularly high profile, with media, government, business and the public attending. The pride felt by the young artists from Maningrida was tangible, and has resulted in more communities looking forward to the Fridge Festival returning this year.

The Darwin Fridge festival is a deeply community-based festival that connects the most disparate of the Top End community in a way that is compassionate, quirky and celebratory. Through the simple act of bringing groups together to create something in partnership with the schools from their communities, young people further associated positive activities with their school environment.

8 Summary- Touchpoints for Action

Participants shared their views about what works to support young people, from their experience working within remote communities. While a report of this nature cannot do justice to the array of ideas and examples they provided, there do seem to be a series of key messages for those working within remote contexts.

The following Table presents a summary of these key messages presented as touchpoints. Touchpoints are markers or reference points generated from experiences shared in this research process. These are intended to inform further thinking and exploration and are not meant to be a complete or comprehensive list of strategies and actions that should be

adopted. Given the contextual diversity of remote communities, such prescriptions would be unworkable.

Table 2: Touchpoints for Service Provision - Working to support young people in remote communities

Touchpointsfor Action	Explanatory notes	Example Quotes and Comments
<p>1. "Come in without the full tin"</p>	<p>Learn from the community and don't assume you know what the community needs or have all the knowledge (the full tin)</p> <p>Service providers need to learn about the community, its history and context (including previous initiatives and interventions)</p>	<p><i>"Learn how they see their world. We look at them and think 'you're lazy' and they look at us and think 'you're crazy'"</i></p> <p>"(there is a) need for cultural awareness training as a white person and an understanding of how to work with people. Their job is not to build their own job but to build it with others"</p>
<p>2. Build relationships with young people and their families</p>	<p>Relationships take time</p> <p>Families can support or inhibit positive pathways. Working well with young people means working well with their families</p>	<p>"Some things take the long term commitment- like enhancing self esteem - start with a 15 year old boy and by the time he is 19 he will tell you real information."</p>
<p>3. Keep initiatives activity-based</p> <p>Cont...keep initiatives activity based</p>	<p>Social and community activities outside of school provide an opportunity to increase levels of engagement and offer an opportunity for learning in less formal settings</p> <p>Link learning to individual and community strengths and what young people love doing – sport, dance, the bush</p>	<p><i>... "when they have finished playing sport or doing dance when they are hot and sweaty and having a drink to then sit with them and discuss life and goals (Works best. It is) not easy to come in cold and do that...agencies need to sit for a couple of days then do your work. They (the young people) need to make the decision that you are safe."</i></p> <p>"If I had to deliver everything in the classroom I would not have had a class, but because I delivered it in the workshop where people had to draw their plans and measure they had to go and purchase and talk with</p>

Touchpointsfor Action	Explanatory notes	Example Quotes and Comments
		<p>staff at the hardware store and say what sort of finishes they wanted and what stains and joiners they wanted and why they wanted them. I think we ended up with very good results by understanding of the participants that they wouldn't have got if I had just had literacy and numeracy in the classroom."</p>
<p>4. Graft onto what is already there within the community</p>	<p>-Build on what exists instead of introducing a range of 'new' things. Understand the history of the community</p>	<p><i>"Duplication of services is confusing – for the services involved and for the community. Spend time getting to map what is offered."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't always expect that aboriginal people need to change- they have a different world view."</i></p> <p><i>"Flexibility is important- in programming, in personality and in pace."</i></p>

Touchpoints for Action	Explanatory notes	Example Quotes and Comments
<p>5. Work in blocks of time in communities where possible</p>	<p>-Block programs are often more effective than staggered programs offered over multiple visits</p>	<p><i>"It's not really going to work for people to come here for only one or two weeks because these kids get excited but it just someone passing through." Block periods are better "It's about getting them into a routine of attending something on a daily basis because if you are only here for two days it is easy for them to miss a day. Engage kids in something they are interested in."</i></p>
<p>6. Share resources with other agencies</p>	<p>-Resources will always be limited and the costs of remote service delivery require creative solutions. Services need to coordinate their efforts and explore ways to work more effectively together. This may reduce dependence on personalities and enhance sustainability</p>	<p>"Their (the service providers) job is not to build their own job but to build it with others."</p> <p>"Sharing staff across agencies. For example X is the youth worker, employed by local government and also works for Youth Justice Service and the school. This demonstrates 'creativity in practice'."</p>
<p>7. Invest time with those young people that are most ready</p>	<p>Identify groups of young people who would benefit most and who would make the most of the opportunity</p>	<p><i>"Don't go for the 17 year old who is in and out of custody."</i></p> <p>"If we can keep those kids in school engaged and motivated then when they leave school at least they will think that I am going to get a job now (or be) prepared to go to TAFE now or some cases these kids are bright enough to go onto university ... we need</p>

Touchpoints for Action	Explanatory notes	Example Quotes and Comments
		something to make closing the gap achievable."
8. Support and strengthen capacity for local governance	-Local governance arrangements build capacity and strengthen relevance and contextual fit of initiatives	<p><i>"Build local capacity, don't just bring it in (from outside)."</i></p> <p><i>"Action plans can undermine the community - putting the horse before the cart - there are leaders in the community."</i></p>
9. Employ local Indigenous staff and support them in their roles	- Indigenous workers may require additional support in managing dual roles of being a member of the community and being a service provider	<p><i>"Put simply, Indigenous workers make a difference."</i></p>
10. Plan for sustainability from the beginning	Issues of sustainability to be considered early in planning. This may mean questioning initiatives and in some cases refusing funding for initiatives that are offered to a community, with no plans for sustainability	<p><i>"Sustainable programs come from people who care (and who stay in the community). Quick fixes get you noticed but are not sustainable."</i></p> <p><i>"Being dependent on personalities is not sustainable. Having good processes helps but the care factor is important. It is important for staff to build relationships outside of their office."</i></p>

9 Conclusion

This report was initiated by a group of service providers working within Remote communities and members of the YAT National Network. They were interested in documenting the views of those living and working with young people within these communities. This research report has reflected these perspectives through inclusion of direct quotes and interpretations of key themes emerging from a small scale research project.

The communities are diverse as were the range of interviewees who participated in interviews and consultations which formed the basis of this report. Despite this diversity, a number of themes that relate to effective ways of working were identified. The participants shared their views about what works to support young people and their families. Service providers emphasised the importance of working in ways that build on the existing strengths and capacities of communities. Further, they emphasised the importance of community consultation, community governance and community control.

With the inherent complications of working in remote communities, it is clear that relationships are central. Trust, tailored programs and skilled staff enhance the quality of the relationship, but these relationships are fragile and can be quickly eroded by lack of consultation, lack of continuity in programs and staff, and by lack of cultural respect. Relationships formed between agencies in partnerships are equally important, but equally fragile.

Service providers will continue to adapt their practices to the needs of the communities with which they work. Thus, a prescriptive set of strategies that hold across time and place cannot be specified. Principles and guidelines for effective ways of working however, can be identified. These touchpoints provide guidance for new workers and for sustaining practices that lead to positive outcomes for young people; outcomes that the young people value, their parents and family support, and that enhance the personal, social and economic wellbeing of current and future generations.

Appendices—In Part 2 Report

Appendix 1: Youth Attainment and Transitions National Network

Appendix 2: Research proposal

Appendix 3: Research notes- for capacity building

Appendix 4: YAT forum - flyer

References

Bessarab, D., and Ng'andu, B. (2010) Yarning About Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research. International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies, Volume 3, Number 1

Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y & Smith, L. (2008). Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies (Eds) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Lenthall S, Wakerman J, Opie T, Dollard M, Dunn S, Knight S et al. What stresses remote area nurses? Current knowledge and future action. Australian Journal of Rural Health **2009;17(4)**: 208-213

Muecke A, Lenthall S, Lindeman M. Culture shock and healthcare workers in remote Indigenous communities of Australia: what do we know and how can we measure it? Rural and Remote Health **11: 1607**. (Online) 2011. Available: <http://www.rrh.org.au>

Scrimgeour (2007) Town or country: which is best for Australia's Indigenous peoples? Medical Journal of Australia, **186 (10)**: 532-533

Smith, Tuiwai. L (1999). Decolonising methodologies. Research and Indigenous people. London: Zed books and Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press

Stewart J., Lohar S., & Higgins D., (2011). Effective practices for service delivery coordination in Indigenous communities. Resource Sheet 8. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.