



AWABAKAL LTD &
NIB FOUNDATION

Youth Leadership Cultural Camp

2022



"For me, as an Aboriginal person, it reconnects me back to my ancestors and my culture, my family, my MOB, my land, everything. It just brings back my Aboriginal spirit and makes me feel more connected."

- 2022 Camp attendee

Program Significance

The Youth Leadership Cultural Camp is an initiative that promotes physical, emotional and cultural well-being for 14-18 years old during a critical developmental window.

As teenagers prepare for their future, they are faced with the daunting task of making decisions that will impact their life trajectory.

While it is largely understood that First Nations peoples on average, experience 8-years less in life expectancy and inequality across many areas that impact health and wellbeing[1], many initiatives focus on what are considered high risk or disadvantaged youth.

The Youth Leadership Culture Camp (YLCC) aims to impact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait community by targeting youth who may not be offered the same experiences as higher risk youth, with the aim of developing a strong network of young leaders who are connected to their culture and community.

Adolescence is where disparities in mortality widen between First Nations and other Australians, more than 80% of mortality among First Nations adolescents is avoidable within the current health system, providing an opportunity for significant impact[2].

Cultural identity, participation in cultural activities, and a connection to family, kinship and community, are recognised as protective factors and can positively influence overall health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders[3].

Connecting youth to culture and providing education through immersive experiences not only has significant impacts on an individual level for attendees, but long term benefits for the community.

In prioritising leadership skills, cultural connection and health and wellbeing education, the camp contributes to the development of confident, positive health advocates with the potential to have a significant impact the wider First Nations community.

80%

of mortality among First Nations adolescents is avoidable



"We're not the oldest living race in the world for nothing. We've survived in a harsh country and lived for thousands and thousands of years, and we don't ever want to lose that knowledge."

- 2022 Camp Facilitator

Goal: To increase the physical and cultural wellbeing of local Aboriginal 14–18 year old youth and contribute to the development of positive health ambassadors in the local community.

Inputs

Funding for camp operations, per cohort

In kind from Awabakal for camp operations

Awabakal Employee in kind to coordinate the camp

Volunteers to oversee the coordination of the camp

Partnerships with local schools, Elders and stakeholders

Facilities to hold the camp and recall

Activities

Administration to secure funding grant, coordinate communication, risk assessments and confirm itinerary

Partner with Schools to identify camp attendees

Confirm cultural workshops and facilitators

Confirm Glenrock Lagoon Scout Camp accommodation

Coordinate appropriate food and beverage for camp

Outputs

14 students attended camp

7 students attended recall sessions

7 schools involved in the Camp

37 health and culture workshops ran

Outcomes

Increased knowledge of Aboriginal culture and traditions

Increased connection to local Elders and Aboriginal peers

Increased future focused goal setting

Increased interest in personal health and wellbeing

Impacts

Increase of positive health ambassadors in the Aboriginal community

Strengthened community network for Aboriginal youth

Increased positive health outcomes for Aboriginal youth

The program has three key experiences for each cohort of young people attending

- 2.5 day Youth Leadership Cultural Camp
- Whatsapp group chat (optional) for ongoing connection with other attendees and facilitators
- 1.5 day YLCC Recall held six months after the initial camp



Cohort 1

- May 2022 – 2.5 day Youth Leadership Cultural Camp at Glenrock Lagoon
- 14 young people attended YLCC from 4 different high schools (4 males and 10 females)
- November 2022 – 1.5 day Recall – 7 young people in attendance (1 male, 6 female)



Cohort 2

- October 2022 – 2.5 day Youth Leadership Cultural Camp at Glenrock Lagoon
- 16 young people attended YLCC from 3 different high schools (6 male, 10 female)
- March 2023 – 1.5 day Recall planned – attendance TBA.





30

Local Aboriginal
young people
attended camps

7

Local High Schools
participated in the
project

37

Cultural experience
workshops held
throughout camp
and recall

"I find this group more valuable than school because I feel like in school, there's not really many people that I connect with and that are so connected with their culture as much. Whereas when I come here, I kind of feel like I belong. Like they listen to me, they, I don't know, they kind of make me feel happy when people at school kind of just brush me off."

– 2022 Camp attendee

KEY ELEMENTS

Throughout the evaluation process, a number of key elements were raised as pivotal to the program's success. These elements were intentional in nature and served the overall objectives of the camp, having a lasting impact on the program attendees.

- The Camp atmosphere – the combination of the location, the melas, the structured and unstructured time built into the itinerary and shared meal times contributed to the overall 'together-ness' feel to the camp.
- Cultural workshops – the wide range of cultural workshops had a lasting impact on attendees who described them as calming, soothing, connecting and therapeutic.
- Yarning Circle – attendees commented on being able to speak freely through the yarning circle, an experience they don't always get day to day.
- Community connections – participation of school staff had an impact on both students and staff. Increased connection to community occurred through formal processes like the student hosted dinner and informally through conversations during cultural workshops.
- Goal Setting – at the recall many students had achieved the goals they had set just 6 months earlier gaining employment, maintaining friendships from the camp and achieving sport and fitness goals.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The feedback from attendees and stakeholders following the camp was overwhelmingly positive, with many suggesting the camp be run again without the need for changes. The following recommendations were voiced as suggestions that could be explored when planning future camps.

- Streamline administration process to improve uptake from students
- Explore timing of the camp with regard to benefits of running the camp in the school term vs school holidays.
- Explore the opportunity to increase impact of the student hosted dinner by encouraging more adults from the community to attend.
- Explore the value in reducing the length of the Recall sessions and increasing the frequency to maintain ongoing connections.
- Introduce quantitative data collection for ongoing evaluation through a survey style questionnaire.





Case Study

Camp facilitator Simone Jordan spoke to the value of connecting face to face with mob, something that is less likely to happen day to day for young people.

Simone spoke of a young girl who was chatting casually to one of the workshop facilitators "she [the facilitator] was asking, so whose your dad then? That's something we do, find out who's who in the zoo, we tend to know each other and local families. It turned out she was one of the student's dad's cousins and they'd never met."

The student commented in her feedback that meeting her family through the camp for the first time was a highlight for her.

Acknowledgements

Awabakal wishes to thank the following people for their contributions to this evaluation report.

nib foundation for funding the project, without you this project would not have been possible.

Awabakal team members who brought the project to life, in particular Simone Jordan,. Your efforts made the camp the success it was.

School staff who attended the camp, giving their time to the project and this evaluation, Luke Sutherland, Aunty Selena Archbald and Belinda Wright.

And finally, to the young people who attended the camps and wholeheartedly threw themselves into every opportunity to explore their culture.

Awabakal Ltd
64 Hannell St
Wickham 2393

References

[1] NIB Foundation – Aboriginal Health Partnership Funding, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.nib.com.au/foundation/funding/aboriginal-health-partnerships-funding>

[2] Azzopardi PS, Sawyer SM, Carlin JB, et al. – Health and wellbeing of Indigenous adolescents in Australia: a systematic synthesis of population data. 2018

[3] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2017 report: South Australia, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/health-performance-framework-2017-sa/contents/table-of-contents>

[4] NIB Foundation – Our Purpose, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.nib.com.au/foundation/>

[5] NIB Foundation – Aboriginal Health Partnerships Funding, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.nib.com.au/foundation/funding/aboriginal-health-partnerships-funding>

[6] Awabakal – Our services, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.awabakal.org/services>

[7] Awabakal – What we stand for, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.awabakal.org/about/what-we-stand-for>

[8] University of Newcastle – Yarning Circles, accessed November 2022 at <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/campus-life/central-coast/ourimbah/spaces-and-places/yarning-circle>

