

**Engaging 'disengaged' Aboriginal youth: policy, practice and success  
in youth development programs**

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Unless otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents the original research of the author

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## Abstract

This thesis contributes to the limited research available within the field of Aboriginal education and policy specific to work with Indigenous youth. The statistical 'gaps' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in regards to engagement in education and the attainment of qualifications, as well as in involvement in part-time or full-time employment, have been well documented. It is these statistical gaps that inform current policy thinking on the nature of the 'Aboriginal education problem', and what needs to be fixed. However, this policy approach is dominated by aggregate statistics and generalised discourse and tends to view the 'Aboriginal education problem' as representative of all Indigenous youth. Youth development programs have been a popular model for addressing the 'Aboriginal education problem' and have enjoyed years of positive and uncritical reflection on their approach. This research explores the compatibility of this current policy approach with the actuality of the social, local and historical contexts that many of the Indigenous youth come from, and argues that it is poorly related to the reality of the lives of many youths who attend these programs.

From a policy perspective understanding the value of the current policy approach is important because program success or failure, and consequently refunding, may be based on flawed indicators of success, particularly today when these indicators are driven by neoliberal processes and objectives. In practice the kinds of indicators chosen affect the delivery of youth work by confining the youth workers to unrealistic models of delivery and notions of success that easily lead to both young people and youth workers being defined as failing.

This thesis draws on data collected over 18 months of anthropological fieldwork with NGOs, corporate organisations, schools, Aboriginal organisations and young Aboriginal people, by following one national government-funded youth and career development program. The evidence challenges the assumption that Indigenous youth necessarily have limited aspirations when it comes to education and employment or even a limited acceptance of the reasoning behind schooling, even in the case of youth from remote regions. I outline how the need of policy makers to demonstrate value, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability, imposes an increasingly hierarchical system in the delivery of youth work, creating a divide between managers and their staff. Consequently organisations are becoming less responsive to the voices of those who work in the organisation, as well as to the young people they aim to serve.

I explore the consequences of this reshaping of the youth work environment on the youth workers themselves and on their professional and personal identity as Aboriginal. I demonstrate how the discourse of the 'disengaged young person' and the popular operation of youth work within a functional model reshapes a youth work environment traditionally established to critique conventional approaches. I end with an assessment of whether *the youth program at the heart of this study was a success*.

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## List of Acronyms

ABSEG	Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme (formerly the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme)
ACG	Aboriginal Consultative Group
AIME	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience
ANZSCO	Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations
BECA	Building Education and Career Aspirations
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTG	Closing the Gap
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
HSC	Higher School Certificate
IYF	Inspiring Youth Foundation
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OID	Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage
QLD	Queensland
SIP	Schools in Partnership
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan

## **Appendices**

**Appendix A** - List of Inquiries, Parliamentary Reviews and Reports into Aboriginal Education 1975-1988

**Appendix B** - List of Goal Maps

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **The problem of 'Aboriginal education'**

The statistical 'gaps' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in regard to engagement in education and the attainment of qualifications as well as involvement in part-time or full-time employment have been well documented. Low engagement with schools among Indigenous students, families and communities; low levels of enrolment, attendance and retention rates; low attainment level outcomes in the areas of literacy and numeracy as documented through the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN); and low levels of employment are all indicators where Indigenous Australians record lower levels than the non-Indigenous population in Australia, whether in remote or settled Australia. It is these statistical gaps which inform current policy on what the Aboriginal education problems are and what needs to be fixed.

In 2008, under the Federal Labor government, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to six targets which were set to address disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, child mortality, education and employment. Originally three of its Closing the Gap (CTG) agenda targets related to education – preschool access (target 3), literacy and numeracy (target 4) and Year 12 completion (target 5) – with a fourth target, school attendance (target 7), added by the current Coalition government when it came into power in 2013.

The broad targets set out as part of the CTG policy are based on aggregate statistics and a generalised discourse. Whilst the gaps in education, attendance and attainment are at lower levels in all regions across Australia, from cities to regional and remote areas (Biddle 2010), the disparity increases with an increase in remoteness. The 2011 Census estimated 670,000 people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, roughly 3 per cent of the Australian population. In the same census 35 per cent were identified as living in major cities, 22 per cent in inner regional areas and 22 per cent in outer regional areas with 8 per cent and 14 per cent living in remote and very remote areas respectively. Yet the 'Aboriginal education problem' and the policies developed

to address this problem continue to be viewed and presented as common to the whole Indigenous population.

The government states that the completion of Year 12 or equivalent is important, as students who complete secondary education are more likely to go on to further education and training, have better employment options and have improved economic and social wellbeing. Indigenous teenagers and young adults in comparison to non-Indigenous students are less likely to complete secondary or further education (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2009). Drawing on 2006 census data, by age 20–24 only 36.0 per cent of Indigenous Australians who were not still at school had completed Year 12 compared with 74.5 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians (Biddle & Cameron 2012). However the number of Indigenous students completing secondary school is increasing, with recent reports stating that 45 per cent of 20–24 year olds completed Year 12 or equivalent in 2008, increasing to 59 per cent in 2012–13. Interestingly the most recent Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (OID) (SCRGSP 2014), published in November 2014, indicates a national youth program, *The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)*, is one of the ‘things that works’ and which may have influenced this increase.

School attendance also forms an important part of the current debate, having gained even more attention with the current Coalition government adding it as an additional target to the Closing the Gap framework, the idea being that students need to attend school regularly if they are to do well at school or to improve on current levels of attainment. Data on attendance and participation indicate that attendance is lower for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students in all states and territories from Years 1 to 10. Also, whilst attendance rates decline in all jurisdictions from Year 5 to Year 10, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, the rate of decline tends to be stronger for Indigenous students (SCRGSP 2014). Participation, which refers to the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1 to 10 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended over the period, also indicates that Indigenous students are performing poorly, although the statistics are difficult to analyse. Related to attendance and participation is school engagement, which is made up of three main elements: attendance, interest and motivation/effort, acknowledging to an extent that attendance alone is not enough to ensure improved educational outcomes. However, to date there is no nationally agreed definition of school engagement and therefore no developed measures or data sources. Indeed, relying on attendance records alone overlooks the many reasons or contexts for non-attendance and the underlying associated factors (Gray & Beresford 2002). Even so, the OID report (SCRGSP 2014) includes another



youth program, *The Sporting Chance Program*, which receives federal funding and is delivered by local, regional and national organisations, as a potentially effective approach to addressing any gaps in this area through engaging and motivating students to attend and participate in school.

NAPLAN, established in 2008, saw the introduction of yearly testing of students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in the areas of reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy. Consequently NAPLAN testing and reporting influences and informs the Australian education policy space. As with the previous indicators mentioned, Indigenous students overall score less than non-Indigenous students across these four areas, with the gap increasing with increasing remoteness. The latest OID report (SCRGSP 2014) shows that there has been no change in the proportion of students achieving national minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy between 2008 and 2013, apart from Year 3 students' achievements for national minimum standards for reading, which have slightly increased.

School to work transition is another major focus for the government, which states in its reporting that young people who do not successfully make the transition from education to work are at risk of long-term disadvantage. In terms of school to work transitions the portion of Indigenous Australians aged 20 to 64 years either with or working towards post-school qualifications increased from 26 per cent to 43 per cent in 2012–13. However, it needs to be recognised that data available on employment has been difficult to interpret mainly due to the difficulty in determining the influence of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program on the overall data (SCRGSP 2014). The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged 17–24 years participating in post-school education, training or employment also increased from 32 per cent in 2002 to 40 per cent in 2012–13. And, the proportion of those aged 18–64 years in full time employment increased from 54 per cent in 2002 to 65 per cent in 2012–13, five percentage points lower than for non-Indigenous Australians. Finally the proportion of people aged 15–64 years in professional or managerial positions increased from 16 per cent in 2001 to 20 per cent in 2011, with the non-Indigenous proportion increasing from 33 to 35 per cent.

These statistical gaps form the underlying basis for the monitoring of the 'Aboriginal education problem'. However, the statistical representation of these issues presents a simplified picture of what is a complex area and one that needs consideration of the historical context of 'Aboriginal education' and the experiences within it, as well as the political and philosophical debates in Indigenous affairs, education and school to work transitions. It has been argued that the deficit discourse is most frequently based on understandings of the advantage provided by education which

then leads to the sense of the 'Aboriginal problem' (Gorringe 2011). Indeed, further stereotyping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as one homogenous group (Rowse 2012) leads to false binaries formed along racial lines, which may then be perpetuated through data and statistical reporting (Guenther 2014).

There are many caveats to consider when interpreting the data used to support these statistical reports. For example, inclusion of data from remote locations can conceal urban and regional improvements. Issues with availability and usability of national data also need to be considered when interpreting statistical reporting (Hunter & Yap 2014; Malin & Maidment 2003; Mellor & Corrigan 2004). In addition there is the limitation of the use of standardised testing data which is undertaken by schools and has been shown to be more an indication of the socioeconomic status of families than of academic potential (Klenowski 2009; Robinson 2009). There is also questioning of the relevance of such indicators as attendance, participation and attainment because they provide only narrow measures of education and ignore the broader aims of the field (Guenther 2014) and the standard or quality to which it is delivered (te Riele 2012).

Finally there is the problematic nature of western education for Indigenous people (Partington 1998). The issues are complex and vary considerably by region, encompassing economic and social factors, the history of policies and the low incentive to do well at school. Further, a failure of western education to support and reaffirm elements of traditional culture has led to the perception by many Aboriginal people that the education system is irrelevant and hostile to their culture. This is all the more significant where the relevance of educational attainment takes place in the absence of a labour market and a lack of employment opportunities for youth.

The reasons for this educational disparity have been presented in statistically derived reports and literature as being potentially due to geographical and financial access, particularly for Indigenous youth living in remote locations (Biddle 2010), or to fewer material resources due to the financial strain of growing up in large families, which, the authors argue, make it more difficult to access expensive private schooling (Biddle & Yap 2010). Although, as Biddle and Yap note, this only provides a limited explanation, as most of the population would have access to some sort of schooling close by. Another argument is that benefits of engaging with the educational opportunities available do not outweigh the associated costs (Biddle 2007), therefore a choice is being made to not participate in formal education, however there is limited to no longitudinal data

available to be able to determine both the reasons for and the effects of these choices (Biddle & Cameron 2012).

Such a narrow view does not take into account issues (Partington & Beresford 2012) such as the intergenerational transfer of disadvantage (Rutter & Madge 1976); resistance (Folds 1987); racism (Dunn et al. 2004) and alienation (Beresford & Omaji 1996; Bourke et al. 2000). It also does not address Indigenous perspectives that may challenge mainstream ideas and values of education through presenting alternative ways of being, thinking, believing and of valuing education and learning (Arbon 2008; Ford 2010; Martin 2008; Nakata 2008; Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt 2012; Yunkaporta & McGinty 2009) which are particularly significant in remote community contexts where people retain epistemologies, ontologies and cosmologies that differ from the western norms that underpin mainstream education.

If education is to move beyond its obsession with the externally derived data and data-based deficit discourse that seems to be choking the space for imagination, creativity, long-term adaptive approaches and risk-taking that is required to respond to the complex nature of the field, then it stands to reason that educators and education systems will need to better understand the power of this tool called 'education' when applied outside the limited constructs of a homogenised, westernised and urban-centric construct of what a 'real' education is. If remote educators and the systems they work in do not challenge themselves to take account of the remote contexts they work in and the values that inform them, they are in danger of perpetually applying and reapplying the simplistic (and failing) logic of schooling and education.

(Osbourne & Guenther 2013, p. 95)

Whilst all these points may contribute to the statistical differences reported, government policy focusing on Aboriginal education mainly draws its ideas from the more simplistic explanations arising from the statistical gap.

## **An overview of Aboriginal education policy**

Education policies for Aboriginal people began to take shape between the 1880s and 1930s with approaches in this period based on the idea that Aboriginal children should be offered minimal schooling, this being consistent with views at the time relating to their limitations in terms of ability and expectations. To take NSW as one example, during this time early experiences of education for Aboriginal children included missionary schools, segregated and mixed public schools and from 1880

onwards training institutions focused on manual labour (Cadzow 2007). Aboriginal education policy was the responsibility of state governments until the 1967 Referendum.

The 'discovery of educational disadvantage' (Gray & Beresford 2008, p. 207) began from the late 1960s. With the 1971 national census, the first census to include Indigenous Australians, came confirmation of the extent of the problem in terms of access and attainment. At this time the problem was not considered to be with school organisation or policies and their failure to meet the needs of their Aboriginal students. Rather the problem was seen as being with the Aboriginal students' backgrounds and living environments, and understanding the problem was in terms of 'cultural deprivation' and a 'deficit model', masking complex and deeper problems (Beresford 2012).

The election of the Whitlam Labor government in 1972, after 23 years of a conservative government, saw a shift in Australian Aboriginal policy with a move away from assimilation to self-determination. With this shift in policy approach came the development of specific administrations and councils, and the 'emergence of an Indigenous organisational sector' (Sanders 2002) tasked with addressing specific concerns of Aboriginal people as well as the development of a Department of Aboriginal Affairs which would work alongside other mainstream agencies across all levels of government.

This commitment to Indigenous Affairs extended to education and saw the establishment of advisory groups<sup>1</sup> and the extension of financial support<sup>2</sup>. The commissioning of a report<sup>3</sup> on the state of education for Aborigines highlighted a need to improve teacher training, to train more Aboriginal teachers and school liaison officers, to provide more culturally relevant programs (including bilingual programs and English as a second language programs), to ensure adequate Aboriginal representation at all levels through the appointment of Aboriginal people in various administrative roles and to raise the awareness among teachers and the broader community about Aboriginal issues. However a later report highlighted that whilst some gains had been made throughout the previous decade there was still an insufficient commitment by state departments, teacher training institutions and schools to undertake the necessary reforms. This was particularly in regard to the recognition and valuing of cultural difference, which, even if accepted, saw 'little

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<sup>1</sup> The Aboriginal Consultative Group (ACG) was established in 1974 to advise the Commonwealth Schools Commission on Aboriginal education. In 1977 the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) superseded the ACG as an official body tasked with advising the Commonwealth Government on the education needs of Indigenous Australians (Wilks & Wilson 2014). The Commonwealth Schools Commission was tasked with examining the needs and position of government and non-government secondary schools to make recommendations for grants and programs (Schwab 1995).

<sup>2</sup> The Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) and the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ABSTUDY), which provided financial assistance to students, were extended to include all Aboriginal students and to provide further education services in remote settings (Wilks & Wilson 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission (Aboriginal Advisory Group Report 1975)

attempt to translate into specific objectives at the various stages of education' (Watts 1981, p. 1275). Indeed, the gains made towards ensuring the representation of an 'Aboriginal voice in educational decision making [was considered] small but inadequate' (Watts 1981, p. 1265).

Nevertheless, the perception of the Aboriginal education problem began to change in the 1970s, with linguistic and language research beginning to confirm the varying degrees of language problems that may be faced by some Aboriginal students in the classroom (Brumby & Vaszdyi 1977). Also researchers during this time began linking issues of health and housing to poor performance by students in school (Beresford 2012). Here the deficit model was being challenged with the emergence of the view that it was the 'child's performance not competence, which was deficient'(Beresford 2012, p. 104).

Another change was the 'proliferation' of special assistance programs in the 1980s, with the 'underlying rationale for separate Aboriginal assistance programs [being] the extreme disadvantage and special needs of the Aboriginal clientele' (Altman & Sanders 1991, p. 8). Over time this led to 'fragmentation, duplication, overlap and inefficiency in program delivery' (Altman & Sanders 1991, p. i). Some were critical of having a separate Indigenous organisational sector but without it the special needs of Indigenous Australians 'would lack public policy recognition and they would be invisible making it difficult for them to make demands, as Indigenous Australians' (Rowse 2001b, p. 39 in Sanders 2002, p. 5).

Aboriginal education continued to be revisited by a number of taskforces, inquiries and parliamentary reviews throughout the 1980s, all of which noted the failure to address the underlying social and economic factors influencing educational opportunities for Aboriginal people<sup>4</sup>. In 1988 the states and Commonwealth established the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, drawing on a report provided as an outcome of a three-month inquiry undertaken by the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce (DEET 1989, p. 1). Aligning with this policy was an increase in funding from both state and Commonwealth governments. This policy included five objectives:

- to achieve equity in the provision of education to all Aboriginal children, young people and adults by the year 2000
- to assist Aboriginal parents and communities to be fully involved in the planning and provision of education for themselves and their children

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<sup>4</sup> For a list of inquiries and parliamentary reviews and reports, see Appendix A.

- to achieve parity in participation rates by Aboriginal people with those of other Australians in all stages of education
- to achieve positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in school and tertiary education
- to improve the provision of education services across the national and the local level.

However by the mid 1990s the unlikelihood of meeting its stated timelines became obvious, the reasons given for this being the lack of negotiation and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal people on the educational needs of their children.

More recently in Aboriginal education policies there has been a shift to a focus on socioeconomic outcomes (Guenther 2014). For example the Howard years, beginning in 1996, saw a change from a 'symbolic' reconciliation approach to a 'practical' reconciliation one, with the view that Aboriginal people should be accommodated into the mainstream (Partington & Beresford 2012). Ideas emerged which also drew on some of Noel Pearson's (2003) writings underpinned by 'the right to take responsibility' and getting Aboriginal people off passive welfare (Partington & Beresford 2012).

As Partington and Beresford (2012) outline, the idea of mutual obligation also began to emerge. For example, policies were developed where young people on welfare began to be required to look for work, or schemes were introduced such as 'no school, no pool', which blocked access to recreation facilities if school attendance was not maintained. This notion of mutual obligation was more formally implemented through Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) in which school attendance formed part of the behavioural changes sought (Sullivan 2005). Also during this time part of the Northern Territory Intervention instigated by the Howard Government in 2007 saw the enforcement of school attendance through the management of welfare payments. The most influential policy on Aboriginal education over the past six years has been the Closing the Gap policy. The Closing the Gap policy, and its associated indicators, is what currently drives Aboriginal educational policy approaches, delivery models and funding allocation.

Rather than viewing the three principles of assimilation, self-determination and self-management governing Indigenous policy historically as a progression, Sanders (2009) suggests all principles reflect the 'ongoing debate between the principles of choice and socioeconomic equality' (p. 10). The 'debates which ensued ... equivocated profoundly between ideas of Indigenous socioeconomic difference reflecting informed cultural choice on the one hand and ongoing unjust exclusion and

disadvantage of Aboriginal people within the structures and opportunities of settler industrial society on the other' (Sanders 2009, p. 10). Sanders (2009) also refers to the recent rise to prominence of the evidence-based approach, currently preferred by both sides of politics in Australia, as being driven by the need to develop and pursue policy and associated implementation based on evidence of it 'working'. In this case the evidence 'lauded as the basis of good policy making' (Sanders 2009, p. 1) has generally been based on aggregate statistics and broad generalisations.

## **Policy delivery models**

Beresford and Gray (2012) identify seven discreet but not mutually exclusive program delivery models in Aboriginal education in Australia, focusing on approaches since the late 1990s. However before outlining these models it is important to also acknowledge that Aboriginal education policy is not only influenced by the statistical data and reporting that outline the difference in outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians or the current approach to Indigenous affairs overall adopted by the government at the time. It is also influenced by philosophies of education and the interpretation of what constitutes 'good education' and its purpose (Biesta 2009). In the case of Aboriginal education, Guenther (2014) suggests that an analysis of government reports on education demonstrates a narrow interpretation of 'good' education, assessed within even narrower sets of measures.

Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1970) saw education as an emancipatory tool. The development rationale for education suggests that better education leads to increased levels of development (Hanushek & Wößmann 2010) and benefits in social equity (Field et al. 2007). Then there is the employment and economic development perspective (Hanushek & Wößmann 2010) based on an economic rationale for education with the argument being that 'schools should encourage competition between individual students, and prepare students to live independent lives in society, respecting their uniqueness and distinct capabilities' (Portelli & Menashy 2010, p. 421). Economic theories also reflect individualism (Becker 1964) and are based on theories of human capital, on return on investment of education and on the distribution of income on the basis of educational attainment. Indeed, the Productivity Commission uses the same language to define expenditure on schooling, outlining that schooling expenditure is related to the 'development of human capital, including school education, tertiary education' (SCRGSP 2012, p. 48). Finally there is the associated knowledge and skills rationale of education where knowledge is viewed as an end in

itself, which underpins the ability for students 'to make appropriate moral choices and therefore become good citizens' (Guenther 2014, p. 206).

Pring (2010) argues that the discourse of education and individualism, which tends to dominate the 'good education' debate in policy terms, and the associated language describes an 'educated person' in terms of intellectual development, practical capability, community participation, moral seriousness, pursuit of excellence, self-awareness and social justice with the purpose of education being to enable an individual to live independently (Guenther, Bat & Osbourne 2013). However, the same authors highlight the contradiction that 'while education happens in the social setting of school, academic success is attributed to individuals' (p. 114). The influences of each of these philosophies of education can be seen in the models below.

#### *The social justice model*

The social justice model is the first of Beresford and Gray's (2012) seven program delivery models in Aboriginal education. The model refers to the addressing of structural disadvantages which impede a student's progression at school. It draws on theories of alienation, resistance and the relationship between education and social differentiation. Whilst the Aboriginal education policy discourse acknowledges the importance of this approach, such an approach is complex and difficult to administer. A longstanding example of such an approach on a larger scale would be the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) a means-tested income support scheme for Aboriginal youth who are over 16 years and attending school or tertiary study. Examples of such approaches at a school level might be school breakfast and lunch programs, bus pickups for students, or school and community health workers. Other aspects that would fall under such a model and need to be taken into account are the effects of dispossession and racial policies which relate to transgenerational disadvantage and trauma (Beresford & Gray 2012) and these are yet to be fully acknowledged within the Aboriginal educational discourse. Another factor that also needs consideration within this model is the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the criminal justice system.

#### *The community development model*

The two components that form this approach are the need for partnerships between schools and Aboriginal communities, as well as between schools and the broader community, for the purpose of developing solutions specifically tailored to local circumstances. All states to some extent fund programs to link schools with Aboriginal communities. An example of such an approach would be



the place-based learning programs, which are run between schools and land and sea rangers in remote communities (Fogarty & Schwab 2012). In such programs the community is seen as a site for learning, therefore aspects of the curriculum are delivered through hands-on project-based activities that are undertaken within the community setting and therefore in the real world. However there are also issues that need to be taken into account in this approach. For example the capacity within each community to become involved varies, as does the inclination of communities to do so.

#### *The enhanced coordination model*

The enhanced coordination model refers to the improved coordination between government and non-government services and schools for the purpose of 'overcoming deficiencies in the delivery of cohesive services to Aboriginal communities' (Beresford & Gray 2012, p. 133). An example of where this type of approach has been a focus can be found in the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) (DEST 2004a), the major Aboriginal education initiative of the Howard Government, which includes up to 265 separate initiatives implemented by schools and training providers addressing the strategy's six key elements<sup>5</sup>. However the achievement of such an approach is complex and difficulties persist (Gray & Beresford 2002), but its importance is nevertheless recognised (Zubric et al. 2006).

#### *The cultural recognition model*

Such an approach is based on the notion that Aboriginal students have a need to have access to their own language, learning styles and cultural identity if educational outcomes are going to improve. However Beresford and Gray (2012) suggest that whilst discourse on this issue is strong, progress is less so (Collins 1999; Education Queensland 2000), with the ongoing phasing out of the bilingual education program by the Northern Territory Government being a case in point.

#### *The school responsiveness model*

The school responsiveness model focuses on the importance of building positive relationships between Aboriginal students and schools through supportive school structures, learning environments and policies. An example of this might be how some schools utilise their Schools in Partnership funding from the NSW Department of Education to fund staff and resources to specifically promote these objectives within the school and by providing spaces and representation for Aboriginal students within the school that address their needs or issues. However such an approach needs to acknowledge the challenges schools face, Beresford and Gray (2012) suggesting

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<sup>5</sup> NIELNS' six key elements are: improving attendance; improving participation in preschool; addressing hearing and health issues; getting good teachers; using best teaching methods; and improving accountability (DEST 2004a).

that a 'model of school responsiveness needs to take into account: the socioeconomic context of Aboriginal students, the importance of recognising culture, adapting curricula to Aboriginal needs, dealing with racism and meeting the opportunities and the requirements of community participation' (p. 140).

#### *The elitist model*

The elitist model focuses on those students who are reaching literacy and numeracy benchmarks and have aspirations to go to university, by offering additional support and resources to the students and their families. This type of model forms the approach of the Western Australian Government's single largest Aboriginal education program. However, such programs raise concerns of elitism and privilege as well as not acknowledging that some individuals or groups would do better within a different setting. They also go against ideas within broader educational policy and practice of striving for equality.

#### *The compensatory skills model*

The compensatory skills model utilises, as the name suggests, compensatory programs to provide additional support to students. These programs, whilst providing some support to address issues within Aboriginal education, also have unintended consequences. Firstly, they have the potential to further marginalise the participants and program leaders within the system they are operating in, by highlighting that a student is failing to meet stated benchmarks and secondly, they become a focus of debates and perceptions among other students about unfair access to additional resources. Such a model can be seen, for example, in the area of literacy, particularly since the introduction of NAPLAN. An example of one such program would be the 'Direct Instruction' literacy model funded in northern Queensland through the advocacy of Noel Pearson (2009).

Beresford and Gray's (2012) work provides a framework of models encompassing current approaches to Indigenous education policy, however they argue that a secondary contribution of their framework is that it highlights that 'official [Indigenous education] discourse has a limited understanding of these models, and especially their theoretical underpinnings' (Beresford & Gray 2006, p. 277). Whilst there are examples of all these models being delivered, the underlying driver of government funding still lies in the Closing the Gap objectives and targets. Success in an educational context for Indigenous students is often defined in terms of attendance, retention and academic performance and outcomes. Here the emphasis is on achievement demonstrated through standardised testing scores (Jenson et al. 2013) with the uncritical acceptance of the benefit of more

schooling (Lea 2011). This, along with dominant ideas of what 'good education' looks like and the emphasis on an evidence-based approach to policy development and associated funding, remain the critical influences in policy making and delivery.

## Defining youth work

Over the years, one specific approach has gained prominence within the Aboriginal education policy space as an 'alternative' approach to addressing policy objectives. This is youth work and youth programs. Davies (2012) defines youth work as being 'a way of working with young people that has been thought up and practiced by human beings in all their diversity, therefore it cannot mean the same thing to every individual involved in the field' (p.1), nevertheless key features remain at its core (Davies 2012). Coburn and Wallace (2011) posit that the ideas of informal learning and motivation found in youth work contexts are connected to the importance of the learners' identity and consequently emphasise the 'social' aspects of learning. There is also an emphasis on the centrality of dialogue, which 'raises the possibility of a more critical pedagogy, as an approach to working with young people that helps them challenge beliefs and move towards critical consciousness' (p. 10). To explain this process they draw on Freire's (1970) work and apply this to a youth work setting, outlining four components of undertaking youth work:

- **Dialogue:** between youth worker and the young person. The youth workers encourage questions as a way to open up dialogue and uncover taken-for-granted assumptions about the world.
- **Praxis:** there is informed committed action in which qualities such as respect for other people is inculcated.
- **Conscientisation and cultural action:** the youth worker and young person develop a consciousness that can transform ideas and actions.
- **Experience and meaning:** learning takes place by drawing on the young person's own experiences and using their own language.

Viewed in this way 'youth work becomes part of a much broader canvas of civil society and, indeed, the political sphere ... youth workers do not work in isolation but together with young people as part of wider social and political movements that shape the position and status of young people and the services afforded to them' (Coburn & Wallace 2011, p. 10). Youth work therefore can be viewed as an experience of identity formation, for both the young people and the youth worker (Coburn & Wallace 2011).

The field of youth work is 'a world of loosely coupled systems' (Weick 1998) in which the youth worker engages with young people individually and in groups, to create a practice that is coherent and connected but rarely uniform and predictable' (Coburn & Wallace 2011, p. 12). Underlying these loosely coupled systems is a core ethos and value base that:

take similar direction, but because each situation and the people involved in them are different they are coupled together loosely, to allow for the variation required to accommodate a range of purposes and perspectives. Youth worker and young person actively engage in making practice together and this practice is authentic to their situation and value base (p. 12)

and therefore cannot be found or replicated in other settings.

### **Youth work and youth programs – filling the gap**

Heath and Roach (1999) state that 'traditional institutions of school, family and church, [which have been] assumed to take responsibility for the positive development of young people, can no longer meet the full needs of today's children and youth between the ages of 8 and 18.' They suggest that an "institutional gap" exists, and it affects our youth' (p. 20) and this they argue, as do others, is where youth-based organisations have the potential to fill this gap (Kugler 2001). Additionally learning not only occurs in schools, it also occurs in libraries, museums, at home, within the community and within youth programs; indeed it can occur anywhere. With these two points in mind, out-of-school education and youth programs and activities can form part of the overall ecology of education provision (Sefton-Green 2006). From an Australian Indigenous perspective, it has been argued that there is a need to provide these kinds of practical and meaningful educational activities for Indigenous adolescents, particularly in remote areas where school attendance among teenagers is poor (Bourke, Rigby & Burden 2000; Kral 2010).

Whilst alternate or free-choice modes of learning commonly struggle to remain sustainable entities and continue to be regarded as a new alternative approach, the use of youth programs to engage and develop both personal and practical skills in young people has steadily been gaining acceptance by policy makers as a potentially new way to engage with young people outside the formal education system. Recent years have seen an increase in youth development programs as well as

the youth development program literature encompassing all forms of out of school hours learning<sup>6</sup> (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011). With this increased focus on the field has come a steady praise for the success of youth development programs as an approach for both learning and personal development (Broadbent & Papadopoulos 2010; Dobosz & Beaty 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin 2005; Heath 2000; Heath & Roach 1999; Hughes & Wilson 2004; Kugler 2001; Newman et al. 2001; Papacharisis et al. 2005; Reeves 2002; Ruiz 2004; Scheve, Perkins & Mincemoyer 2006). However in the past decade there has been critique of the overstated benefits of such programs (Spaij 2009) and of the positivist approach adopted and favoured in the evaluation of programs (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011), although these critiques themselves have been questioned (Levermore 2011).

Heath and McLaughlin (1991) suggest that 'successful [youth] organisations adopt an approach that is both firm and flexible ... they are clear about their goals and their rules of membership' (p. 625). The authors describe how these organisations take a personalised approach to youth and set rules which are monitored by both program deliverers and attendees. Successful organisations see young people as resources not problems, with young people being empowered to attain skills in a supportive and knowledgeable atmosphere. The programs are characterised as being safe places<sup>7</sup> with expectations of success. And whilst program activities may have direct or indirect links to education, they offer developmental opportunities as well as opportunities to broaden participants' horizons.

That youth programs have some positive impact is widely accepted but there is a call for stringent and systematic evaluation methods and monitoring tools to assess the impact objectively and rigorously (Fashola 1998; Newman et al. 2001; Ruiz 2004; Scott-Little et al. 2002; Vadeboncoeur 2006). Common critiques of much of the existing literature have been that evaluation methods have failed to take into account factors such as attendance, participation or participants' characteristics (Roth Malone & Brooks-Gunn 2010; Ruiz 2004; Scott-Little, Hamann & Jurs 2002).

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<sup>6</sup> The literature referring to programs concerned with learning outside of the school classroom setting includes many different approaches and modes of delivery and therefore terminology differs as well. There are out-of-school-hours learning, extracurricular activities, youth programs and youth development programs.

<sup>7</sup> However whilst they are safe spaces, there still may be found a prominence of 'risk', which makes these sites powerful developmental sites. Heath and Soep (1998) are referring here to both the risk involved in the activities found in various youth programs or organisations, be it going on stage for the first time or preparing for a sports tournament, as well as the increased variety of risks involved with being involved in arts programs as opposed to sport or other more general development initiatives, when pursuits in such activities may be devalued by the community at large.

Some commentators argue that there is a necessity for advocates of youth work to base their analysis in learning theories which explain what constitutes a productive learning environment (Honig & McDonald 2005). Whilst some do, Heath and McLaughlin (1991) being one example, a theoretical basis generally tends to be missing from much of the literature promoting the positive impact of the youth program approach. There have also been calls to define development in ways that go beyond simply identifying changes in personal attributes alone (Coakley 2011). Rather than applying these narrow interpretations of program outcomes it has been suggested that a broadening of interpretations of program success be applied by critiquing programs within a critical social theory (Coakley 2011) and empowerment construct (Jennings et al. 2006). This call for a more holistic approach to the exploration and analysis of youth programs would, it is felt, support the ability to conduct comparative analyses between programs (Vadeboncoeur 2006). Indeed, this study, which focuses on one particular program through the development and implementation phase, with data collection being based on an anthropological perspective rather than an evaluative one, addresses some of the limitations and gaps currently found not only in the Australian Indigenous literature relating to youth work approaches but also the international youth work literature.

### **The influence of current context on youth work and programs**

Like any other form of 'education', youth work has always been shaped by the wider social, political and economic contexts (Bunyan & Ord 2012). Davies (2012) provides a historical overview of how youth work was conceived and practised in the UK, tracking the sector from its roots, when youth work was implicitly focused on the young people and their needs, and accountability was intuitive and unarticulated, to the current era of management and external accountability, driven by the need for increased reporting of government expenditure. He argues that the changes have come with a move away from voluntary<sup>8</sup> towards state-determined aims of direction for the youth work sector, leading to a larger role for the private 'for-profit' sector and large NGOs<sup>9</sup>, and a tighter control of the voluntary sector; a move towards targeted programs specifically for those identified as being 'at risk', as opposed to earlier models of open access youth work; and a move away from youth work being defined and developed in broad, educational terms, towards a focus on rescue and

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<sup>8</sup> Originally many of these not-for-profit organisations were highly dependent on volunteer workers and voluntary financial contributions, therefore labelled voluntary.

<sup>9</sup> Davies (2012) suggests that whilst many local community-based organisations continued to function as before, others who were in the position to professionalise and corporatise their organisation did so, along with newer organisations that did the same. It was these organisations that began to receive substantial grants and contracts to deliver services or run facilities.

rehabilitation. These emphases, Davies (2012) argues, reflect the changes that have occurred between how youth work was 'done' in the past and what youth work is being asked to 'do' in the present. Whilst it is not possible or feasible to go into a detailed history of the youth work sector in Australia and how it has been delivered in the past, the trend away from state sponsored and delivered services outlined by Davies (2012) in the UK has many similarities in Australia (see Bessant 2012).

Davies' (2012) first example refers to the differing expectations and requirements that occur between what he terms 'voluntary vs. state sponsorship' programs. Voluntary in this case refers to the 'independent' charity or non-government organisations that deliver youth work and in many cases have done so for many years. The changes have gone even further towards a situation where large portions of national voluntary youth organisations' funding comes from competitive commissions to deliver government-funded programs, where smaller youth programs might still rely on funding coming either directly from government agency grants or their own revenue raising, arguably allowing for greater flexibility and in many cases supporting an already existing initiative, program or idea. This has seen the contracting and funding of larger scale programs that in the name of effectiveness and efficiency have gone out for tender, which many of the larger national not-for-profit organisations can then bid to deliver.

Davies (2012) argues that as these organisations then effectively become clients of the state, a contradictory pressure grows. He cautions that based on the principle of 'who pays the piper is most likely to call the tune, the state and in particular central government continue to decide the policies' aims and even sometimes how they were to be implemented' (p. 12), raising the following questions that independent non-government organisations need to address:

What price their independence as they take on the government policy aims? [Can] they be sure that these fit with their 'mission' – historic or current – as they define it? And what if their managers and workers disagreed with government policies; would acting as critic, even as 'critical friend', threaten their financial survival?

(Davies 2012, p. 12)

The second issue that Davies (2012) raises is that of 'open access' programs versus 'targeted' provision, arguing that increasingly youth work and programs are moving away from being based on an open access model where all young people can have access to facilities and clubs in their local neighbourhood to ones where specific groups of youth are targeted to attend and participate in youth programs and initiatives. This model has moved from the targeting of young people from

poor or lower socioeconomic areas, and therefore providing services in their local communities, towards a model of targeting socially excluded or disadvantaged individuals and groups.

Within both the Indigenous youth and broader youth policy space these programs are increasingly starting to prioritise the targeting of young people 'at risk' of antisocial behaviour or dropping out of school. An additional restriction on access to these programs that has been adopted within Indigenous youth work policy is using them as a reward for the demonstration of the behaviour that is expected, for example regular school attendance. Therefore the assumed rationale of this approach is that the outcomes that the youth policies and associated youth programs are trying to achieve will occur independently through an increase in the motivation of the young people themselves<sup>10</sup>.

This idea firmly rests in the logic that the reason that young people are not attending school or engaging in school activities when at school, is solely due to their own motivation and a consequence of the zero-sum logic they have placed in the schooling process. Therefore if a reason to attend school and participate can be presented to them, be it relevant to the objectives of schooling or not, the motivation to attend and participate in school will increase. Whether this behavioural change is a consequence of an altered interpretation of the value of school or just to fulfil a requirement to access the preferred activity that the program offers, is seldom reflected on. The problem with this approach is that the drive to identify the targeted population and to meet set targets, most commonly numerical ones, leads to the identification of young people based on assumptions of need rather than the actuality of it.

The final issue outlined by Davies (2012) describes the balance between the policies and the programs aimed at developing a young person's own potential [*i.e. education*] versus ones developed with the stated purpose of 'rescuing them from personal and family "lacks", deficiencies and failures [*i.e. risk*]' (p. 14). Indeed, an exploration of the narrative within the policy literature demonstrates that the underlying message within the government youth development or career development policy is based on a view of Indigenous youth as being a problem that needs to be addressed and solved. Davies' (2012) framework provides a useful tool from which to explore the

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<sup>10</sup> For example, if the objective is to have young people become more engaged in school and demonstrate that engagement through school attendance and appropriate classroom behaviour, then this can be achieved through the promise of being able to attend and participate in the said youth program, be that playing in the local AFL team and partaking in all the competition, training and development opportunities that form part of that program, as is the case with the Clontarff Foundation initiatives (Clontarff Foundation 2014), or, in the case of this research project, taking part in a week-long youth program.



policy contradictions that exist and that influence how youth work is delivered in this case study, and the consequences and conflicts that arise from these contradictions, which I will explore further in the following chapters.

In addition to the social and political context influencing youth work, there are also the current theoretical models influencing ideas of effective youth work and youth development programs, in this instance the increased popularity and use of the theory of positive youth development as the basis for program development, implementation and evaluation. Positive youth development identifies core competencies and characteristics that youth need to have (Jenson et al. 2013). These characteristics and skills tend to focus on themes of increasing self-esteem and self-concept, increasing motivation and engagement and increasing teamwork and co-operation. At other times the focus is on developing practical skills relevant to managing learning and school requirements within the formal education system, or developing skills relevant to job seeking, for example, résumé writing and interviewing skills. Once the young person has developed these characteristics and competencies they are assumed to be on the pathway towards a healthy and ‘thriving’ adulthood. Whilst conditions need to be created specifically within a program or any other youth work setting for this development to occur, it is assumed all young people participating in the program have the capability of achieving positive development. There is encouragement in the field and in particular through government and organisational funded evaluations of such initiatives to also work within a positivist research paradigm.

Sukarieh and Tannock (2011), in their review of the literature from the growing field of positive youth development, which is now moving beyond academic journals and into the realm of policy and practice, express caution in relation to the limitations associated with this approach. They critique positive youth development as an intellectual, cultural and social movement. Positive youth development, they argue:

represents, in part, a shift in how youth is conceptualised that has been driven by neoliberal ideology and human capital theory; it has involved a strategic extension of the social category of youth in terms of the age range, social groups and arenas of practice that youth is commonly understood to cover; and it also has sought to inject a strong spiritual and religious dimension into mainstream youth work, research and theory.

(Sukarieh & Tannock 2011, p. 676)

Positive youth development uses human capital language such as ‘assets’ and ‘resources’, to refer to the youth who attend the programs (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011). Competence, character, caring, prepared and productive adulthood are also concepts that make up the positive youth development

construct, however Sukarieh and Tannock (2011) argue that these terms are presented as if they are self-evident, unproblematic and easily measurable, whereas in actuality they are difficult to identify and measure, and more importantly, to relate to causality. Focusing on promoting the youth development model means that other analytical frameworks focusing on issues such as class, race, gender or political, social and economic constructs are pushed to the background (Sukarieh & Tannock 2011).

The uptake of youth development programs as one model for addressing the 'Aboriginal education problem' seems obvious. The current philosophies that underpin the dominant interpretation of need and of an 'evidence-based' approach are both based in and driven by neoliberal ideologies and human capital theories. Such programs are therefore able to be delivered with objectives, outcomes and indicators of success that specifically align to current policy ideas of what's needed and what constitutes both best practice and success. However, as previously argued, such simplistic approaches to complex problems can end up having consequences not only for those who are the targets of the policy, but for the youth workers too.

## **Career development and the Aboriginal education policy space**

Career development and guidance or counselling have been gaining increased support, backing and importance from most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as well as the Australian Government. As an OECD member, Australia has made efforts towards developing a more co-ordinated and strategic approach towards career development and guidance practices and delivery, based on various career theories, the most relevant of these being the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (MCEECDYA 2010)<sup>11</sup> and the Core Skills for Work Development Framework and associated tools and resources (DIICCSRTE and DEEWR 2013). In addition, there have been measures to support the career development profession, such as funding the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) to develop *Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners* and *Guiding Principles for Career Development Services and Information Products*. However these approaches are again formulated within the positivist paradigm found within most career development and guidance theories. Such theories place the

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<sup>11</sup> The Australian Blueprint for Career Development, officially rolled out in 2010, is 'a framework that can be used to design, implement and evaluate career development programs for young people and adults [by identifying] the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to make sound choices and to effectively manage their careers' (MCEEDYA 2010, p. 9).

individual at the centre of the career development process, and whilst some theories acknowledge the role of context and process, the degree to which each theory does so varies, and the individual remains at the core as the processor and mediator of such influences.

A working definition of career development and guidance is provided by the OECD:

Services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programs (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programs (to sample options before choosing them), work search programs, and transition services.

(OECD 2004, p. 10)

The way career counselling and development are defined and applied in an Australian policy and practice context, follows similar lines. Career development in Australia is generally used to describe an encompassing process that includes the provision of information, counselling, curriculum and intervention programs such as career education, structured work experiences and events such as career markets (Patton 2005a). It is also defined as a way to support an individual's lifelong skills relevant to education and employment (Patton 2005a).

The career development field and services in Australia have been described as having a disjointed structure, painting a picture of an industry that involves many stakeholders who work with minimal coordination or guidance (Patton 2005a). Others agree and have outlined the consequences:

Unfortunately career programs in this country have largely been characterised by a band aid approach (Prideaux et al. 2000). Often formulated to address immediate needs, they are hastily put together, unsystematic (McMahon, 1997) and generally atheoretical (Hansen 1999). This type of career education programming tends to bring disorder to the field.

(Prideaux, Patton & Creed 2002, p. 117)

The Federal Government, in its National Career Development Strategy Green Paper, released in August 2012, acknowledged some of these limitations and sought submissions to inform the development of a National Career Development Strategy. The Strategy, released in June 2013, was written as 'a high level document which provides an overarching vision for career development in

Australia [encouraging] stakeholders to collaborate across sectors whenever possible' (DEEWR 2013, p. 1). It also moved away from the traditional view of employment and career to one which views the process as a 'whole-of-life' approach. The document draws attention to a number of initiatives developed and implemented more recently specifically to address the issues highlighted by Prideaux, Patton and Creed<sup>12</sup> and outlines how they will be improved to align with the stated objectives of the new strategy document. Although these initiatives have been implemented in the last decade they are still in their infancy.

There are a number of other issues associated with current career development approaches. Firstly, there is the assumption of linearity found in current youth and education policy in Australia in general (te Riele 2004). Bradley and Devadson (2008) highlight the differentiated pathways undertaken by young people today that also include shifts between employment status due to education, travel, parenthood and unemployment. Secondly, along with this idea of a linear trajectory between education and employment comes a notion of adulthood that is also full of assumptions, with Wyn and White (1997) suggesting that 'the term "transition to adulthood" draws on the idea that young people make one transition to adulthood, and that adulthood is a clearly defined status – a destination at which one arrives' (p. 96). However many of the life course markers of leaving school, leaving home, getting a job are reversible (te Riele 2004) with decision making regarding school and work being multi-faceted (O'Connor 2012; Gordon et al. 2008). Indeed, te Riele's (2004) research suggests that non-linear transitions may be beneficial in the successful attainment of adulthood. As a consequence of this change Bradley and Devadason (2008) suggest that there is an 'important shift in mentality occurring with this generation', which has 'internalised the rhetoric of adaptability and life-long learning' (p. 133) through what the authors term 'internalised flexibility' helping to maintain optimism within a changing and challenging economic environment and as a way of 'handling the transition'. The dominance of the linear model of transition as well as the statistically presented 'lagging' situation of Aboriginal youth in this transition process, still dominate policy thinking.

Whilst youth transitions predominantly focus on the transitional points between compulsory to post-compulsory education, school to work, and dependent (family home) to independent living, the study of transition has been dominated by the study of school to work, and in particular the use of the psychosocial paradigm from which to explore it (Wyn & Woodman 2006). Whilst there are many

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<sup>12</sup> Some of the initiatives include Career Development Assistance programs in the labour market [Experience+ , Career Advice for Parents information service and the Indigenous Youth Career Pathways] and National Career Information [My Future web portal] (DEEWR 2013).

researchers who do not operate within the psychosocial paradigm of transition research (Roberts 2007), it is the strand of transition research which tends to influence policy discourse and development, consequently raising a few concerns for social researchers.

Furthermore, Wyn and Woodman (2006) suggest that within this framework 'description of youth draws in many respects on psychosocial assumptions' (p. 497) where transition becomes closely aligned to development, whilst it tracks a linear trajectory. This psychosocial based approach then leads to a number of assumptions being made: '(a) there exists a normative transitional process, from which young people deviate; (b) youth is a linear process or position on a life-course; and (c) culture, economy and politics simply add "flavour" or context to the development process' (Wyn & Woodman 2006, p. 498).

### **Career development in policy and practice**

The Federal Government's National Career Development Strategy Green Paper<sup>13</sup> suggests the most successful early interventions for young Indigenous students involve mentoring, support and career advice, which will help them re-engage with learning and therefore complete secondary education (DEEWR 2012). One of the biggest Indigenous-specific career development initiatives funded by the Federal Government is the Indigenous Youth Careers Pathways Program, which provides school-based traineeships and associated support activities for Years 11 and 12, specifically supporting 6,400 school-based traineeships and is delivered through the use of a personal mentoring and case management approach that helps young people 'deal with the issues making the move from school to work difficult' (Helping Indigenous Australians achieve their potential 2012, p. 1)

The National Partnership also provides additional funding for national career development initiatives administered by the Federal Government as well as specific funding for states and territories to maximise engagement, attainment and successful transition through career development, multiple learning pathways and mentoring. An example of one such program is the Learn Earn Legend! initiative which is described by the government as its:

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<sup>13</sup> In acknowledgement of and response to this need the previously named Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the Commonwealth agency responsible for education, youth and employment, released a Green Paper outlining options for the National Career Development Strategy under the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Transitions. The Green Paper was released in June 2012.

message to young Indigenous Australians and their role models ... a message which ... encourages and supports young Indigenous Australians to stay at school, get that job and be a legend for themselves, their family and their community ... delivered by community leaders, sport stars and everyday 'local legends' who young Indigenous Australians respect and aspire to be like, the *Learn Earn Legend!* message advocates the importance of education, training and employment.

(DEEWR 2012)

Under the Learn Earn Legend banner are additional programs such as the Sporting Chance Program, the objective of which is 'to encourage improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (boys and girls) using sport and recreation' (DEEWR 2012). Specifically these projects use sport and recreation as a vehicle to 'increase the level of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to improve their educational outcomes' (DEEWR 2012). This program is delivered through an approach that utilises sports-based academies which provide 'intensive, innovative and high quality sports-focused learning and development opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students' (p. 1). These sports-based academies are established by a range of organisations: schools, non-government organisations, youth programs, sporting clubs etc., which develop their program and apply for funding through the Sporting Chance grant program. However the main focus of the Sporting Chance Program is that it hopes to provide an alternative education engagement strategy for primary and secondary school students.

### **The theoretical underpinnings**

It is helpful to look at the dominant schools of thought in the field of vocational psychology, career development and guidance and to understand how the field has developed since its inception in 1909. My objective here is not to critique or provide a detailed review of the field of career development and guidance but to demonstrate the dominance of certain ideas in the development of career-based policy, initiatives and programs that provide further understanding as to how they eventuated<sup>14</sup>.

The field of career development and guidance has developed since the early 1900s to incorporate methodological approaches embedded in psychology, human development and sociology, and in some instances more than one discipline. The publication of Frank Parson's *Choosing a Vocation* (1909) initiated the field of career counselling and was based in a model focusing on individual

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<sup>14</sup> It is also acknowledged that each theoretical approach has had varying degrees of influence on career education and career counselling, both aspects of career guidance (Patton 2005b).

differences. The emphasis was placed on matching an individual's personal traits to occupations. Indeed, ideas associated with the approach would not seem out of place in discussions in the field today (McIlveen & Patton 2006).

Psychological approaches popular in the 1980s saw the emergence of personality or behavior being matched to career choices. This approach, in particular Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities in Work Environments model and subsequent reviews, conceptualises occupational choice as an expression of personality and suggests that particular personalities match certain occupations and their characteristics (Holland 1959, 1997). Holland's theory focuses on an individual's interaction with their environment and explores how both individual and environmental characteristics result in vocational choices and adjustments. By adolescence most individuals come to resemble a combination of six vocational personalities.

Addressing the limitations associated with the more static trait and factor approach gave rise to the more recent shift to the developmentally focused person-environment fit approach. Whilst the person-fit approach was based on assumptions found in the trait-factor approach such as that people make rational decisions, that people and work environments differ in consistent ways and that greater congruence between characteristics and job requirements leads to greater success, it did acknowledge the influences of both individual and environment on each other, and viewed the process as one of continual change (Super 1953, 1969, 1990).

At the same time an emphasis emerged that included life/career stages, and career patterns and trajectories. These developmental perspectives were most interested in how individuals navigate through developmental milestones, with cognitive growth and development being instrumental to the development of occupational conceptions of self (Gottfredson 1981). Social-cognitive perspectives also began to gain prominence with their emphasis on personal agency and learning, and a focus on the role that self-efficacy has in the career decision-making process (Lent, Brown & Hackett 1994).

More recently, literature and theories based on a constructivist approach emphasising life themes, relationship, story and meaning making, and adopting a narrative approach have been advocated (Colin & Young 2000; McIlveen & Schultheiss 2012; McMahon & Patton 2000; Savickas 2002). Such an approach takes a critical stance, acknowledging the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge and the social processes which construct it (Schultheiss & Wallace 2012). Nevertheless

career development theory has remained heavily influenced by a positivist view for most of its history, with the constructivist view only gaining influence in recent years (Patton & McMahon 2014). Although there has been a continual development of career development theories since its inception as a field, there are core elements which are found across most theories. The first element is the individual, whilst other elements are the importance of individual traits such as values, personality and interests.

While current policy draws on some of these theories<sup>15</sup> there is a major limitation which whilst being acknowledged in the literature, has not filtered through to current policy. This is the recognition that there has been ‘too little attention paid in both the theoretical and practical literature to groups outside the white western able bodied middle class male’ (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 113) and failure to cite the recent and growing body of literature that acknowledges the influence of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. To address these limitations specific theories have been developed to explain career development issues within these groups, providing a sociological perspective to career development.

This sociological perspective on career development suggests that the socialisation process that an individual is exposed to outweighs their individual characteristics and therefore that to be able to understand people’s aspirations and career development we need to look at the social constructs influencing the individual. Rather than focusing on motivations or aspirations, the issue is the mismatch between young people’s preparedness and their skills, suggesting that the key factor in career success is not about willingness to work but rather readiness to work. This suggests that the focus should be on matching an individual’s desire to work with appropriate employment opportunities (Sinclair, McKendrick & Scott 2010).

Irving (2010) suggests that career education is moving towards the presentation of notions ‘in which individuals, not organisations or society, are responsible for the self-management and negotiation of employment opportunities’ (Irving 2010, p. 55). He argues that career education fails to connect with the social studies curriculum (Irving 2010) and that:

career education discourse *has* continued to present young people with the simple illusions that if they ‘work hard’, pursue their passions, take personal responsibility for their own

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<sup>15</sup> The National Career Development Strategy in particular outlines the necessity to move away from a static trait and factor approach to career development towards a whole-of-life approach which incorporates a career journey. By viewing career development through this lens the strategy outlines how initiatives will be adjusted to provide information and support services to a broader age group.



futures, and develop the 'right' attitudes and competencies, success will follow. Thus, failure to succeed is constructed as due to lack of individual tenacity and or personal attributes.

(Irving 2010, p. 57)

Consequently 'career education practices only rarely aim at enhancing equality of opportunity, of lessening *social inequity* or enhancing collective development actions ... career education is focused on the individual (and) tends to ignore society or community' (p. 56). Discussions about the influence of social class, 'race', culture, gender and sexuality, and why discrimination occurs are missing in career education (Irving 2010). Irving (2010) goes on to argue that if career education is to effectively assist students to shape their individual and collective lives, and to find their way in an increasingly fragmented world, an inclusive framework that is developed from the precepts of critical social justice will be required (Irving 2010).

Chaves et al. (2004), arguing along similar lines in an international context, go further, raising the issue that generally school to work transition initiatives are developed without any awareness of how the individuals that the programs target conceive and construct ideas of employment, work and vocation. This point is particularly relevant to the Indigenous policy space where policies and programs are based on the non-Indigenous or Australian mainstream concept of work (see Gibson 2010; McRae Williams & Gerristen 2010).

Gibson's (2010) research with Indigenous people throws some light on this in her explanation of the intersection between work and employment in western NSW: 'for most Aboriginal people in Wilcannia, you are who you are, not by virtue of what you have "become" in any economic, professional or educational sense. *Who you are* is not a *becoming*, it is established at birth' (Gibson 2010, p. 143). She observes that 'life in Wilcannia is not a carefully planned process which encompasses stages or periods of development as these pertain to employment' (Gibson 2010, p. 155). Gibson goes on to highlight the attempts by government agencies to get Aboriginal people into employment and the balance being skewed towards public sector jobs. Good jobs are seen as the domain of white people and the jobs that are available to Aboriginal people are felt to be spurious and are generally knocked back. Those that move away to 'better' themselves can be judged harshly by others in the Indigenous community as forfeiting culturally perceived values for regular work attendance and what it affords (Gibson 2010).

Issues of cultural identity and autonomy of the individual are also seen as aspects of Indigenous concepts and contexts of employment that are not found or acknowledged within a mainstream understanding of work. Helme (2010) also talks about the importance of cultural identity and community services when people make decisions about future careers based on the training choices made by the participants in her research. McRae-Williams and Gerritsen (2010), focusing on a remote community, suggest that 'culture, as daily-ways-of-being in the world, is an important, almost sufficient, barrier to Indigenous integration to some non-Indigenous mores and social requirements, such as working for a living' (p. 2). There is also the issue of autonomy of the individual, for example taking into account what tasks and roles the individual wants or would like to do whilst at work and the reluctance to take too much direction (McRae-Williams & Gerritsen 2010). In the context of a community where people are all related workers, individuals see themselves as 'working for' somebody and not simply 'working', which demands that the responsibilities that come with authority be acknowledged (Austin-Broos 2006). Finally, it could be argued that specific discourse over the need to motivate young Aboriginal people into work overlooks the long history and culture of work characteristic of the past (Keen 2010).

Irving (2010) suggests that career education programs should be developed to make sure they are located within a socially just framework. In that case the utilisation of youth work seems appropriate and a good match with its roots based within a social justice model. The flexibility of youth work programs means a space is provided to address the social and political context in which the 'Aboriginal education problem' is occurring that might not be available within a more structured and administered space such as a school. It also seems to provide an opportunity to incorporate the community development model, providing additional capacity for communities to work with schools through models of enhanced coordination. However like schooling, youth work is also influenced by many of the same discourses and philosophies that underpin the development and delivery of the policies that make up the 'Aboriginal education' space.

I draw on relevant literature that focuses on Indigenous youth, Indigenous youth policy, youth work and career development to provide context to the youth program and the organisations, staff and young people involved with the program. I use this literature to provide an introduction to the assumptions that underpin policy approaches and current models of youth work and provide a basis from which to discuss the robustness and relevance of such policies and approaches when viewed in the historical, social and political contexts in which they find themselves. I now move my attention to describing the youth program on which this thesis is based.

## The Building Education and Career Aspirations (BECA) Program

The *Building Education and Career Aspirations* program<sup>16</sup>, which from now on will be referred to as the *BECA* program, is a federal government funded education and career-based initiative delivered in a youth development program format. By the time I began my fieldwork, the program was in the second half of its first year. The program itself was run in a camp style format, based on the idea that the young people from communities across three states would come to a major city and complete a residential camp (two from New South Wales (NSW), one from Queensland (QLD) and one from the Northern Territory (NT)). To ensure anonymity the four communities will be referred to from this point on as Farming Town, Ocean Town, Mining Town and Dusty Town<sup>17</sup>. These camps would run for between four and six days depending on the scheduling requirements of the school and availability of facilities at the residential site. The camps began early with breakfast each morning, and ran throughout the day till dinner, with a final recreation activity at the end of the day. The program relied on 'partner organisations' to deliver the content of most of the program. These partner organisations were a mixture of national sport and arts organisations, other Indigenous youth, arts, culture or service based organisation and corporate businesses.

Coburn and Wallace's (2011) classification of youth work provides a useful basis from which to introduce and describe the youth program at the centre of this research. The authors define three types of youth work: functional youth work, liberal youth work and critical youth work. Using this typology the *BECA* program would mainly rest in the functional youth work category. This is not necessarily because that is where the youth workers aspired for it to be, or because the needs of the young people who accessed the program required or requested this type of approach. Rather it is due to the responses required of such programs that are situated in the Indigenous youth sector policy space, driven by the neoliberal agenda found in youth work in general. For now I will define the *BECA* program as drawing on the perspectives and purposes outlined in Coburn and Wallace's (2011) functional youth work typology, with at times a sprinkling of liberal and critical youth work.

Functional youth work is defined 'by its explicit socialising of young people to meet preconceived norms' (p. 13). In this context the focus is on individual development and diversion from 'risk' behaviours such as risk-taking with drugs, or antisocial behaviour and specifically targets those

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<sup>16</sup> The names of the youth program, youth organisation and youth workers have all been changed to ensure anonymity.

<sup>17</sup> A fifth group participated in the program; however this group of young people attended an independent boarding school and therefore came from a number of communities. They also do not feature in the thesis until chapter five. The reasons for this are explained throughout the thesis.

young people identified as being at risk or disadvantaged. The specific risk behaviour that provided the focus for the development of the *BECA* program was academic disengagement. Whilst the young people who attended the *BECA* program were not necessarily considered at risk of antisocial behaviour, the idea that one leads to the other seemed to be assumed. However, the focus here was to motivate young Aboriginal people to stay in school, finish school and get a job.

In a functional youth work model, programs or initiatives are developed which provide the young people with a skills set or given knowledge that align with the program's aims and objectives to address these problems, a format which means that the participants have limited choice in the program as it is developed and delivered. Indeed there was limited choice and influence by program participants in the development and delivery of much of the program. There was, however, an attempt to address the needs of the young people through a survey sent out to each school that would be participating, however this survey was filled in by the teaching staff identifying what the young people might be interested in, from an academic and employment perspective as well as the social activities and excursions they might enjoy.

The week-long camp was organised, generally before the young people were met, and the content of each camp saw a mix of activities with the hope that a broad range of activities would appeal to all in the group. There were arts and sports activities included in the week. For example, there was always a drama session included early on in each camp, with the purpose of 'breaking the ice' between the young people and youth workers as well as pushing the young people out of their comfort zone, with the assumption that this would then lead to an increase in confidence. There were sports sessions used for the same reason, which included activities such as acrobatics and trapeze, or gymnastics. Another aspect of the youth program sessions included motivational talks. These were normally led by prominent Indigenous sports people, as well as some in the arts and media. The format for these was usually a presentation of the presenter's own life pathway towards the achievement of the goals they are most recognised for, followed by questions and answers, and at times a goal-based activity.

Finally, the young people were exposed to a variety of employment and educational settings. These included visiting often large multinational companies or smaller local Indigenous organisations and having a presentation or talk given to them about the industry as well as a tour of the premises. The presentations featured one or both of the following approaches: a human resources representative providing detail on the specific opportunities identified specifically for Indigenous people wanting to

gain entry to the industry, and employment in that organisation; or a talk from existing Indigenous staff members explaining their journey and experiences of gaining employment with their current employer.

As is the case with functional youth work, the camps were often delivered utilising predetermined activities delivered over fixed time frames afforded to the program. Finally, audits or assessment processes regularly are attached to programs and therefore such work relies on the regular maintenance of records and collection of relevant data, in this case the number of youth attending. Age and social characteristics also formed the terms of requirement for those targeted for participating in the program.

In this instance the young people all identified as being Aboriginal. They all came from communities and towns, which were identified using a very informal process as potentially having young people with the need for such a program. For example Mining Town School, one of the five schools that attended, was approached as one of the program staff had been told via program staff in another organisation that the town had seen an increase in the number of young people from the community who had taken their lives in the previous years. A second school, Dusty Town School, was offered the opportunity to attend after a remote community school originally attending pulled out of the program. The reason for this was that the principal of the school felt that the students' behaviour in recent months had not been to a standard to warrant a trip to the city and the opportunity to participate in such a program. Consequently the offer was then extended to Dusty Town School, which took up the opportunity at the last minute. Farming Town School's process of involvement was slightly different, as it originally made contact with the *BECA* program as a way to expand the opportunities it was able to provide to its young Aboriginal students.

The ad hoc nature in which program participants were identified was acknowledged as being a frustrating point for the youth workers and the organisation. State jurisdictions were set by the funding provider of the program, the federal government, with limited explanation, consultation, advice or support provided to the youth organisation on which schools to target, assuming that the youth organisation already had these networks established or at least the ability to identify young people who would benefit from this program. The funding provider also set the criterion that the program be used as a reward for young people who had already demonstrated a commitment and certain level of engagement with their schooling. Again this caused confusion and frustration

amongst the youth workers as they were left to navigate the contradictions of the policy requirements for program attendance and the outcomes it was hoping to achieve.

It must be noted here that whilst the organisation that ran the *BECA* program had been in existence for a number of years, the *BECA* program itself and the youth workers hired to develop and deliver the initiative were a consequence of winning a government tender to deliver the program. Therefore development and implementation of the program was constantly restricted by the need to align to contradictory government policy objectives.

Functional youth programs are often delivered in a predetermined and restrictive way, meaning that relationships between the youth workers and the participants are largely formal. However the *BECA* program youth workers regularly tried to navigate away from the formal structure of the program, seeking to establish a more liberal-based youth work approach within the more restrictive functional model imposed on them as part of the funding requirements. Liberal youth work is based on a humanist view that emphasises association and socialising, with an emphasis on group work, personal development or achievement of individual goals. In this context leisure-based activities are also utilised, such as arts, sports, ICT and media, with the purpose being that these practices move beyond the development of work-related and functional skills. In this case the sports and arts activities were included within the program with these objectives in mind.

However other characteristics of liberal youth work were not included. Recruitment was not open to all youth. Rather recruitment to the program needed to be earned, although the 'reward' criterion was not always adhered to by the schools. The curriculum was prescribed, with limited opportunity provided to allow flexibility or involve the young people in any decision making. Whereas liberal youth work demonstrates a program structure that is made up of a mixture of pre-defined programs delivered over a key period of time as well as more participatory programs that still have their learning objectives but are delivered in a more 'informal' setting, the *BECA* program did not reflect this approach.

Relationships in a liberal youth work setting are said to develop organically over a period of time through engagement in a project, program or centre. In this instance relationships developed between some of the program participants and the youth workers and generally during the sports and arts-based activities that were informal in nature and had group work and developmental objectives in mind. The type of youth work represented in the *BECA* program is not surprising as

Coburn and Wallace (2011) suggest it is usually functional and liberal youth work that tends to be the predominant practice. However whilst the program structure reflected both functional and liberal models of youth work, there were also some brief glimpses of a critical youth work model. In critical youth work, young people are viewed as being 'capable social actors and citizens' (Coburn & Wallace 2011, p. 15). Learning occurs through the questioning of hegemonic views of the world, which then facilitates an understanding of issues of justice, power and oppression with the intended goal of promoting social transformation linked to political participation and connected to democratic citizenship. Participation, whilst being open, may also in some instances be targeted, focusing on specific emancipator purposes. Young people are encouraged to discuss issues or share experiences through group work as well as through utilising different media such as arts, drama, music or video. In this context participation is active and based on social engagement with informal education underpinning all aspects of the ongoing program. As with liberal youth work the curriculum is negotiated with social justice and equality at the core.

Whilst the majority of these characteristics of the critical youth work model were not included in the *BECA* program there was the occurrence of the regular questioning of hegemonic views of the world, which led to brief discussions about issues of justice, power and oppression. The young people were regularly told by the youth workers and some of the Indigenous presenters that they were 'young and deadly'; to not listen to anyone that would tell them otherwise; and that they could achieve anything they put their mind to. The youth workers and some external presenters talked about the struggles they had overcome to get to where they were, overcoming discrimination and racism being common themes. Therefore to an extent there was an element of critical youth work identified in the *BECA* program.

The *BECA* program could also be defined as a career development learning program. Although delivered in a youth development program model by a youth organisation, the delivery of education and career information was one of the program's main objectives, therefore the program can also be described as being a career development learning program as well as providing career information. Career development programs are important because 'they are able to relate the contextual influences that are part of the particular environment in which the individual is learning [as well as providing] the opportunity to work with a group [which] offers the advantages of shared experiences as well as cost benefits' (Patton & McMahon 2001, p.10) if compared to one on one counselling.

Although how career development learning is delivered is also of importance; career development learning 'works best when integrated into the curriculum rather than as a marginalised extra' (Patton & McMahon 2001, p.10). In the case of young people still at school this would be the linking of career information into the school curriculum and classroom practices.

Patton and McMahon (2001) suggest that career development learning needs to include both content learning and process learning. Content learning includes:

the world of work and it's changing nature; the knowledge and skills people need at work and the expectations of employers; awareness and understanding of career options and pathways available; knowledge about primary education, training and employment-related information sources and services; knowledge and understanding of decision making processes that can be applied when making career choices; changing labour market opportunities; awareness and understanding of aspects of the self (interests, abilities, values, motivations) and how these change throughout life; knowledge of processes to implement decisions, and relationships between career decisions and life goals.

(Patton & McMahon 2001, p. 12)

Process learning includes 'skills that are transferable through such things as self-reliance and self-promotion, exploring and creating opportunities, action planning, networking, decision making, negotiation, coping with uncertainty and transfer skills' (Collin & Watt 1996 in Patton & McMahon 2001, p. 12).

Awareness and understanding of career options and pathways available, as well as awareness and understanding of training and employment pathways, formed part of the *BECA* program. The young people on the *BECA* program were provided career information either through site visits to different employers or from presentations delivered at the camp facilities. There was also on two occasions a careers fair, which a number of employers attended, each with a desk and space provided to display career information relevant to their organisation and in some cases more generally the field of employment they represented. In addition there was a small handful of organisations whose core business was to provide individuals with career advice as well as take on additional human resources roles. Whilst this was a focus of the *BECA* program all other aspects of a career development program, either content or process learning, were not included.

Indeed, the ability of a youth program and youth organisation to deliver or even at the least co-ordinate a career development program should be questioned, particularly within the constraints of



the funding. Patton and McMahon (2001), drawing on career development program literature, outline a number of principles identified in career development programs which might be considered best practice. The first principle relates to identifying the needs and existing knowledge of the client as a base from which to further develop as well as monitor. Related to this is the principle that clients should be actively involved and that new knowledge cannot be created 'unless information is related to something they already know' (Patton & McMahon 2001, p. 15). Firstly, delivering a national program within a predominantly functional model makes it difficult to establish context and therefore have an understanding of what the client already knows. As the youth workers could not travel to the communities prior to the program due to a lack of funding they were relying on information on the young people's needs to be provided by the school staff, which in most cases was provided in general terms, such as possible employment interests of the group and this information generally replicated the dominant employment found in each community. Furthermore, it was assumed that the young people did not have much education or career knowledge and that having more education and career knowledge would lead to the outcomes desired; further engagement at school which would then lead to academic and employment outcomes. Nevertheless while the career talks and visits provided career information the *BECA* program relied solely on this facet of delivery within career development programs, overlooking another principle of best practice in career development programs, which is that they should be multi-faceted by providing a variety of learning experiences.

Another set of principles associated with best practice in career development programs relates to the relationship between the program and the broader community (Patton & McMahon 2001). With career development now recognised as a life-long process, the associated career guidance needs to also occur throughout this process at various stages. Therefore programs need to involve relevant stakeholders as well as representatives of the wider community. When career development programs are conducted in schools or organisations, involving relevant stakeholders and the wider community becomes possible. For example in schools this would include employers, service providers, mentors, parents and former students. In the context of a short national program, the ability to establish a relationship between the program and the broader community becomes difficult, even more so if funding models solely focus on the logistics associated with delivering a program for one week.

Finally, a set of principles relates to professional issues regarding the personnel involved in coordinating and delivering the programs. These principles suggest that personnel need to be

adequately trained and have access to relevant and accessible information. Patton and McMahon (2001) suggest that 'careers work has traditionally been portrayed as deceptively simple' (Patton & McMahon 2001, p. 16). The youth organisation, viewing itself as having the ability to engage and deliver youth programs that were relevant to young Indigenous people, extended their scope to include career-based programs as well, also initially viewing the role of both youth work and careers work as being simple. However without the understanding or expertise of the careers work field, important elements associated with career development programs were left out of the *BECA* program. Indeed, in many instances even if they had wanted to include these elements neither the funding nor the imposed program model would have allowed for it. This highlights a lack of understanding on the part of the funding agency.

### **The youth workers and youth organisation**

The program itself employed three full-time staff, Sarah, Tanya and Chris, all of whom were new to the youth sector space. Sarah and Tanya, the two older staff members, were highly experienced in the Indigenous affairs and Indigenous health fields. They had gone to university and were active members in the local community where these programs were based. It was felt that their past experience in these two areas, along with their Indigenous identity, would be enough to undertake the roles of youth program manager and officer respectively. Chris, the third staff member, was a junior staff member at the beginning of his working life.

All three youth workers were Indigenous people and at the beginning their passion and enthusiasm as well as commitment to young Indigenous people and the potential impact of the program was obvious. One of the youth workers grew up in the local community, the other had spent the last 10 years living in the local community, the third member had just moved there but had many family members in the local community. A walk up to the local shops and services on the main street running through the suburb demonstrated the wide networks that Sarah, Tanya and Chris had throughout the community. We would regularly be stopping as they would catch up with family and friends. They knew the staff within the local Indigenous organisations, indeed they had worked with some of them in the past and it was these networks that they would be drawing on for the year and initially be looking to for support. Whilst the program had already run for six months when I arrived, these three staff had just begun in their roles and I spent the first six months of my fieldwork observing and participating in the process of developing the program model and planning for the delivery of the first year of camps.

Many of the camp sessions were based at a residential site located in a major city. The site itself included dormitory-style accommodation as well as two dining halls and two conference rooms. At one end of the site were the office buildings of a handful of Indigenous organisations that focus on delivering services to young Indigenous people. On the other side of the site were sport facilities, which made up the rest of the complex.

The centre employed mainly Indigenous staff in the sport and recreation facilities. The branding of the centre reflected its objective of targeting and inspiring young Indigenous people. The colour palate of the facilities very much reflected the yellow and ochre colours found on the Aboriginal flag as well as associated with Aboriginal art or the landscape of the remote central desert regions. The basketball court line markings are yellow and red on a black surface, representative of the colours of the Aboriginal flag which flew at the entrance of the facilities along with the Torres Strait Islands flag. Inspirational quotes as well as expectations of those using the facilities are found on the walls throughout the sport, recreation and dining facilities.

The facilities are utilised by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the local and surrounding communities, as well as by other local and national youth development programs. The residential and conference services provided at the centre are booked by a range of non-government and corporate organisations as well as sports and arts organisations. At the time of the year that the youth programs were running, the centre was in its second year and operating at full capacity most weeks.

The *BECA* program is run by the Inspiring Youth Foundation (IYF). The IYF has been in existence since 1995. For the majority of the organisation's existence it has been a small organisation focusing on national youth programs but predominantly in one region of Australia. From 2010 their funding, and therefore staff numbers and reach, increased and the *BECA* program formed a large part of this new funding stream. The organisation accesses funding through government grants, government tenders or commissions and fundraising. To give an idea of the size of the organisation their annual budget for 2011 was \$1,737,516. The IYF organisation is led by a CEO. Under the CEO the organisational structure is relatively flat with the three teams representative of the three programs IYF delivers. The *BECA* program is the only program of the three where the youth come to the organisation; for the other two programs the organisation works in the local community. Each of the three teams is led by a program manager. In the case of the *BECA* program this was Sarah. The rest of the team is

made up of between two and three program officers or administrators. These positions are held by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In addition to these teams are two additional administrative roles, an office manager and receptionist, and in recent times the organisation also employed a partnerships and funding manager with the aim of increasing the organisation's funding and expanding its reach. The IYF is overseen by an all-Indigenous board made up of individuals who have experiences over a diverse range of areas including sport, arts and Indigenous affairs. It was my understanding that while members of the board had been involved with youth organisations and youth programs this was in voluntary roles or on small-scale programs and therefore youth work, or education more broadly, was not specific to any board member's experience. This would be the structure of the *BECA* program and IYF over the duration of the fieldwork.

## **Thesis outline**

In the following chapter I outline the rationale for focusing on one particular youth program from development through to implementation and adopting an anthropological perspective. I explain the research design and list access, ethical and logistical issues which influenced the design of the research as well as a justification for the methods chosen. I also situate myself within this research and highlight the various aspects of my own positionedness which would, could and did potentially influence my research. In chapter three I turn my attention to the policy space in which the *BECA* program found itself. I follow the discourse from policy to practice by examining the texts found in the relevant overarching policy documents, the implementation framework documents which interpret policies into actions and the initiatives and project plans which underline the practice. This provides the context for the field in which the *BECA* program is situated. I ask how did the word 'disengaged' come to prominence as a term to describe young Aboriginal people and I explore how this 'problem' is framed and contested within the social space and set of relations involving the 'disengaged' youth, the youth development organisation and policy makers.

In chapter four I shift my attention from policies and programs to the young people themselves, to explore the social and local context within which this program is situated. I begin by introducing the four communities where the young people who attended the *BECA* program live and attend school, with the aim of demonstrating the diversity of lived experiences across a group of young people that in policy discourse is regularly presented as either homogenous, or even artificially distinct based on demographics such as age and the region in which they reside. I also reflect on the young people's response to questions about their future and aspirations. I identify, describe and explain similarities

and differences in how the young people in this study present their imagined futures and aspirations in relation to the current literature and policy discourse and explore whether these presented identities displace stereotypes customarily ascribed to young Aboriginal people. Drawing on interviews, Goal Maps and observations I argue that the policy assumptions, interests and priorities that become naturalised as problems by policy makers and youth work organisations and the subsequent solutions put forward by both are not best suited for the young people they are trying to affect. The evidence challenges the assumption that Indigenous youth have limited aspirations when it comes to education and employment. This not only brings into question the issue of policy rhetoric about Indigenous youth as one homogenous group across the country, but also the lack of homogeneity within a group even from the one location.

In chapter five I begin to focus on the youth program, youth organisation and youth workers and in particular how they became part of a 'system of relationships'. I explore how the youth workers had to contend with increasing pressure from organisational demands from above and from those attending the program, which I suggest made their role as youth workers even more challenging. My aim is to demonstrate that the youth program, whilst seemingly driven by official policy and the needs of policy makers alone, was also greatly influenced by the exigencies of their organisation and the need to maintain and manage the patron/client relationship for the purpose of future funding. I demonstrate how the need for policy makers to demonstrate value, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability imposes an increasingly hierarchical system in the delivery of youth work, creating a divide between managers and their staff. Consequently the organisation becoming less responsive to the voices of those who work in it, as well as the young people they aim to serve.

In chapter six I explore the consequences of this reshaping of the youth work environment on the youth workers themselves, their professional identity and their personal identity as Aboriginal. I demonstrate how the discourse of the 'disengaged young person' and the popular operating of youth work within a functional model reshapes a youth work environment traditionally established to critique hegemonic discourse. I turn to the 'activities' which made up the day-to-day running of the program to explore this in more detail and demonstrate how through these activities the youth workers began to develop their identity as youth workers, but at the same time had these identities challenged as they came to view the program within its political and social context. I explore how policies in this context were productive and performative but were too powerful to be contested by the youth workers.

In chapter seven I draw on the work outlined so far in chapters four, five and six and ask whether *the BECA program was a success?* I return to the young people for whom this program was developed and ask what the program meant to those who attended it: the 'resisters', the 'engaged' and the 'aspirational'. I reflect on the youth workers, who originally viewed themselves as responsible for the development and implementation of a project based on the dominant discourse surrounding Aboriginal youth problems and solutions but came to understand that the policy arena and political space in which they were operating had different definitions and interpretations of success from their own. I conclude that those that operate best within the neoliberal framework, whether individuals or organisations, are viewed as succeeding by both external and internal stakeholders, even though this imposes considerable limitations on the ability of the program to deliver the best outcomes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research design and methods**

#### **Rationale for an anthropological perspective**

The 'Aboriginal education problem' is regularly described in the context of statistical differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth and supported by reports and academic articles highlighting those differences. These draw their findings from the number of large databases that record indicators such as school attendance and attainment levels in literacy, numeracy and qualifications. Whilst these reports and scholarly articles provide some insight they are only able to suggest why differences in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth continue to be recorded. Indeed, relying on a quantitative representation of these issues alone leads to a simplified explanation of what is a complex area and overlooks the historical context of 'Aboriginal education', as well as the political and philosophical debates in Indigenous affairs, education, and school to work transitions that together make up this space. Consequently this leads to the sense of an 'Aboriginal problem' framed within a deficit discourse that is most frequently based on understandings of advantage (Gorringe 2011). Moreover, stereotyping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as one homogenous group (Rowse 2012) leads to false binaries formed along racial lines, which are then perpetuated through data and statistical reporting (Guenther, Bat & Osborne 2013). There is a tendency in both policies and programs to do this.

This thesis focuses on one particular youth program from development through to implementation, adopting an anthropological perspective rather than an evaluative one. It provides an opportunity to explore the 'success or failure' of a program from a critical perspective and the context in which the program was developed and delivered, rather than from one based on evaluation in the light of predetermined criteria. Rather than assessing for the stated and assumed benefits and outcomes of the youth program, this research will look at how policy is formulated and consequently infuses program design and influences how program decisions are made. Furthermore it explores the context in which this program is delivered by including the perspectives of the staff involved in developing and delivering the program and the young people who attend the program and the communities in which they live. By doing so, the focus of the research moves away from the positivist approach adopted and favoured in the evaluation of such youth programs (Spaaij 2009; Sukarieh & Tannock 2011).

Whilst I draw on the available anthropological literature in the area of education, youth development and policy, as well as research specific to Indigenous Australians, I also include the literature within these same fields that draws on other disciplines such as economics, human development and quantitative social science. Indeed, I argue that it tends to be the literature in disciplines other than anthropology that is favoured by both policy makers and youth workers and that has become the dominant source of information and ideas underpinning 'best practice' and success in the field, without acknowledgement of any limitations, weaknesses or oversights.

Whilst youth development programs have gained prominence and broad acceptance, particularly among those who fund, develop and deliver them, there have been calls for further stringent and systematic evaluation methods and monitoring tools to truly assess the impact of such programs (Fashola 1998; Newman, Curtis & Stephens 2001; Ruiz 2004; Scott-Little, Hamann & Jurs 2002; Vadeboncoeur 2006). Many studies evaluating youth programs have relied on subjective reflections from participants, program staff and primary carers to determine program effects. Frequently evaluation of such programs is conducted towards the end or just after program completion, or for longer programs at a single point in time, which inevitably presents a biased and limited view. In addition characteristics of program participants beyond basic demographic indicators are also generally lacking, as are detailed descriptions of the program itself and how participants engage with that program. To overcome such limitations, there is a need for studies that obtain comprehensive longitudinal data sets to objectively monitor progress over time. Factors such as attendance (how often or for how long people attend or not), participation (the extent to which they engage whilst there) and breadth (of activities undertaken within and outside of the program) as well as participants' characteristics have also been raised as being of importance (Roth, Malone & Brooks-Gunn 2010; Ruiz 2004; Scott-Little, Hamann & Jurs 2002).

There have also been calls to define development in ways that go beyond personal attributes (Coakley 2011) and connections to the programs that go beyond intrinsic motivation, to provide a critiquing of programs within a critical social theory (Coakley 2011) and empowerment framework (Jennings et al. 2006). This call for a more holistic approach to the exploration and analysis of youth programs, it is felt, would support the ability to conduct comparative analysis between programs (Vadeboncoeur 2006). Also, studies that base their analysis in learning theories which explain what constitutes a productive learning environment generally tend to be missing from much of the literature promoting the positive impact of the youth program approach (Honig & McDonald 2005), although some examples exist (e.g. see Heath & McLaughlin 1991).



As well as the methodological limitations of dominant theories and approaches is the suitability of such models when applied to all groups and individuals. One of the many underlying assumptions in many career theories found in the field of career development and underpinned by a human development framework is that ideas, values and motivations towards work, employment and careers are viewed in the same way by everyone. Subsequently these same theories and assumptions find their way into career development policy in general and specifically Australian Indigenous youth policy. The idea of work forming part of an individual's identity has been argued to be a predominantly Western construct (Patton & McMahon 2006). Generally school to work transition initiatives are developed without any awareness of how the individuals targeted by the programs conceive and construct their views on employment, work and vocation (Chaves et al. 2004), and rarely is the intersection between work, employment and identity explored (Gibson 2010).

Moreover some career development theories situated in the human development discipline discuss phases of development associated with age and attach to each phase milestones based on assumptions of a singular and normative transition process (Wyn & Woodman 2006). They generally follow a longitudinal development trajectory of an individual's life course with limited acknowledgement that life course markers such as employment and education are or can be multifaceted, reversible and influenced by culture, politics or economics (Gordon et al. 2008; te Riele 2004; Wyn & Woodman 2006). This formulaic way of looking at an individual's development through life stages ignores the fact that human development is also a cultural endeavour (Rogoff 2003) and overlooks the value of utilising an ethnographic approach to explore these cultural processes and patterns (Damon 1996; Weisner 1996). Indeed, Down and Smyth (2012) suggest the benefit of using ethnographic techniques to provide insight into how individuals talk about 'getting a job'.

Finally, policy studies tend to see policy as a process, viewing policies as 'objective entities ... that are the result of decisions made by some rational authority (e.g. a government, committee, management board or chief executive) and which recognise bureaucratic action to solve particular ' "problems" and produce "known" (or desired) outcomes' (Shore & Wright 2011, p. 4). The 'policy process' is viewed in a cyclical or linear way (Colebatch 2000) following a path that begins by analysing the problem, identifying responses, selecting and implementing an approach and evaluating the occurrence or not of the expected outcome. This 'Practitioner perspective' which

takes a non-critical stance, Shore and Wright (2011, p. 4) argue also dominates academic ways of conceptualising policy, with much of the research conducted in this field situated within a positivist paradigm.

There are 'few populations that are not in some way or another touched by the classificatory logics and regulatory powers of policy' (Shore & Wright 2011, p. 2). For Indigenous Australians this point is pertinent. The previous chapter outlines the political and policy nature of the 'Aboriginal education problem' and how it has been developed and progressed throughout the decades. Many of the policies and associated programs and models chosen for implementing change tend to be prescribed, delivered and evaluated within a narrowly defined scope of needs and success.

The anthropology of policy aims to 'reveal larger processes of governance, power and social change that are shaping the world today' (Shore & Wright 2011, p. 1). Shore and Wright (2011) go on to explain that 'policies have complex "social lives" as people interact with them and as they in turn enter into relations with institutions and other artefacts' (p. 3). Social anthropologists, they argue, are in the position to track the 'flows of policies and their impact on people's lives and behaviour' as well as 'examining the cultural logics that structure "policy worlds"' (p. 8) by focusing on making sense of policies, how they engage with policy and what they make of it.

The anthropology of education explores the enculturation and socialisation processes of all forms of 'education'; how people learn as well as teach others to organise behaviour. Anthropologists of education seek to understand how teaching and learning are organised socially and culturally, as well as the social processes that teaching and learning are embedded in. The anthropology of education has deep roots in the critiquing of schools and schooling as well as 'education' in its broadest sense, including youth work. Specific to schools and schooling, anthropologists of education are interested in exploring the power relationships taught and challenged in schools, and how schools and schooling can serve as a tool for reproducing hierarchies or homogenising the population (Blasco & Vargas 2011). The field has been effective in questioning the structural inequalities found in educational practice and policy and it is this 'sociohistorical context for the transfer of the anthropological construct of culture to educational practice [that has been] a space where anthropology and education have engaged in the struggle to influence educational policy' (Gonzalez 2010, p. S249). I suggest the same or similar can be done for youth development programs.

Finally, although there is a rich body of anthropological literature on Indigenous Australians, work in the field of education, and youth work in particular, is limited, with only a small group of anthropologists focusing on Indigenous education and even fewer on youth work. Nevertheless the literature that is available provides a detailed insight into the diversity of the population as well as the complexity of many of the 'problems', both of which tend to be overlooked by policy makers. Over the past decade there has been increasing awareness within anthropology in general about the need for a more engaged role in academia and the public arena, as well as calls for greater relevance with regard to addressing social problems and the structures that produce and maintain them. There has been a growing call for public and more relevant anthropology Borofsky (2000) as well as the need for it to utilise strategies to engage the public (Sanjeck 2004). More anthropologists, particularly in the field of the anthropology of education, are now situating their work within an applied framework, as does this research. However whilst this thesis is applied in nature, it adds to the theoretical debate in which it is situated, avoiding the academic versus applied anthropology binary (Gross & Plattner 2002; Hastrup & Ellass 1990; Rylko-Bauer, Singer & Weilligen 2006).

### **Access, ethics and logistical influences on research design**

Issues of access, reciprocity and ethics have influenced the overall design of this research. I made the initial contact with a partner organisation and it was through this partner organisation that I met the staff of the youth program I would be focusing on. The process of gaining access to the field site was straightforward and both myself as a researcher and the opportunity to have research conducted on the youth program were welcomed. The youth workers and their management running the program were interested in critiquing and reflecting on their program and therefore saw the potential of the research to support its future development. However, whilst I was provided with access and the proposed research was accepted, there was a continuing process of negotiating around it which lasted throughout the research.

The basis of access to most social research sites is one of reciprocity between the researcher and the people they are working with. As there was a need to establish reciprocity at the beginning of the project, the negotiation process centred on the ability of the research project to provide ongoing feedback to the youth workers. The research also needed to be a learning tool for the youth workers to further develop their research skills and therefore build capacity to conduct applied or action research in their organisation. Through discussion when accessing the field site I shared my experience and professional skills in the field of education and youth work more specifically, the

benefits and limitations of which I discuss later in this chapter. These two factors were the basis of my negotiation about and acceptance into the field site and the youth program.

The way the youth program was structured and delivered influenced the research design. I followed the development and delivery of the youth program for 15 months. During this time five camps were delivered. One school, and therefore locality, was represented at each of the camps. During the six months after the delivery of the camps I made a follow-up visit to four of the five schools that attended the camps to meet with the students and staff who had attended. Therefore the participants and the schools and locations where they were based were consequently decided for me. Also, as the camps were only up to a week in length, I felt that the research project needed to be developed in a way that did not disrupt the participants' day-to-day activities.

The program camps run in 2011 were developed from December 2010 through to the beginning of the first camp in June 2011. The five camps were delivered between June 2011 and December 2011. Prior to each of the camps I would visit the organisation and meet with the youth workers who were going to develop and deliver the program. In some instances I would spend the whole day working with them towards the development of some of the program activities as well as a monitoring and evaluation framework that would support their reporting requirements as outlined in their funding agreement. Sometimes these visits were informal and involved discussions about the program or attending meetings.

During the camps I had access to all the students and school staff who attended and all the sessions. I attended all sessions and meals, travelling with the group and youth workers the whole time. During the camps the youth workers stayed at the same residential facilities as the students and I was invited to stay with them, which I did. No youth worker or school staff member ever refused to speak to me or to be part of the research and only three young people from the total 124 had returned ethics forms signed by parents stating that they did not want their child to be involved in the research project. Indeed, whilst consent was sought from each of the students' parents or primary carer, I also sought verbal consent from each of the young people on the camp.

A follow-up visit to each school site was included in the research design. Whilst a few days were spent in the community, school visits lasted no more than one day at the most as the access granted by individual state education departments is dependent on ensuring limited impact on classroom teaching time. As I was researching a youth program and not a school program it would have been

difficult to request more time at each school. During each of the four school visits I had access to the young people who were available or still at the school on the day of the visit. This was 62 young people in total, however due to time constraints I was only able to conduct interviews with 56 students. Some of these interviews were conducted individually, others in small groups of two or three and for one school visit interviews were replaced by two focus group discussions as requested by the young people. I also individually interviewed 12 of the 17 school staff members who attended the camps and were at the school on the day of the visit. In addition I had the opportunity to speak to two staff who did not attend the camp, but who worked closely with the young people who did, and in both cases specifically in the area of career education. Not all students who attended the camp were at the follow-up school visits. This was due to a variety of reasons: some had moved away and therefore left the school; others were away from school that day or away due to other commitments; and a few who were at school decided not to participate. Whilst this was only a small number, four students from the one school, I include these details in subsequent chapters. In three out of the four school visits the youth workers from the program attended the school with me.

The identification of participants and sites were elements of the research project that were out of my control. The five specific localities and schools that form part of this research project were the five locations and schools that were identified by the youth program and invited to attend the camp. The students who participated in the camp were the ones chosen by various members of the school staff, with each school applying different criteria for the selection of students invited to attend.

The benefits of this approach are that I had access to a diverse range of young people from a variety of localities and communities who participated in the research. One of the overall objectives of the research project was to explore the extent of diversity among young Aboriginal students in regards to their future aspirations, and specifically work and education aspirations, to understand how these relate to current policy and youth work discourse. Most of the schools applied several criteria in selecting attendees, drawing together a group of young people who came from very diverse backgrounds in terms of their school and academic experience, socioeconomic background and age. This diversity is evident within each of the groups as well as across the five groups. This not only further supports the objective of exploring the diversity of aspirations amongst Aboriginal youth, but also provides an opportunity to explore the different experiences gained from one nationally delivered program, and therefore one model.

Additionally it is recognised that individuals experience the same event or program differently. This research provides an opportunity to see if there are certain themes that could be drawn from various aspects of the individuals' backgrounds and therefore influence experiences in a certain way. This in turn can provide valuable policy considerations and guidance on youth program development and implementation. Finally, because this was originally promoted as a reward program, although this criterion was not strictly adhered to by each of the schools, it provided an opportunity to also include the perspectives and experiences of those students who would be categorised as being the 'engaged' students within a school. This provides a perspective too often lacking in the literature focusing on Indigenous youth policy and the 'Aboriginal education problem' which tends to rarely focus on those young people who are demonstrating the characteristics and choices preferred and promoted by policy makers. A limitation of the research as a consequence of the structure of the program was the difficulty in conducting participant observation over extended periods of time with the young people, however long-term participant observation was able to be conducted with the youth workers and their program.

### **Influences and justification of method choices**

In considering how best to undertake the research, I had to take into account a range of factors, both theoretical and practical. The views of young people, particularly from backgrounds identified as 'vulnerable' or 'hard to reach', have been regularly overlooked in the past by both researchers and policy makers (Baker & Plows 2015). Instead young people have been represented and spoken for by the adults and institutions who administer their lives. Also the power relationship between the adult researcher and young person being researched was another influencing factor. With these two points in mind I explored the available literature centred on conducting research *with* young people, rather than *on* young people, with the aim of embedding research methods within the project that were child or young person centred as well as making the most of the limited time available with each group of young people.

### **Conducting research with young people**

There has been an increased focus on and critique of traditional research methods carrying out research *on* children rather than *with* children. This research, drawing on the children's rights movement, focuses on the importance of developing inclusive and participatory methodologies which are child-centred and, within that, the utilisation of a mixed methods approach. Barker &

Weller (2003) argue that utilising child-centred research methods can offer partial glimpses that reflect in one form the complexity and diversity of children's lives. Also when specifically working with young people it has been argued that a 'multi method approach helps to reflect the diversity of children's experiences and competencies, by engaging as many children as possible of different ages, backgrounds and abilities' (Barker & Weller 2003, p. 50). Punch (2002) raises additional reasons for the use of mixed techniques, particularly to support the interviewing process, arguing that most young people have limited experience with direct communication with an unfamiliar adult. Therefore carrying out group discussions first and providing activities for students to focus on, combined with direct questioning, can facilitate the creation of a relaxed atmosphere that can increase confidence in taking part in the interview process. Furthermore, young people tend not to be as likely as adults to give long answers to open-ended questions (Harden et al. 2000) so the use of stimulus material and prompts can enable them to expand their responses.

In particular, visual methods have been shown to also facilitate communication between the researcher and the child as well as support the interview process (Bagnoli 2009; White et al. 2010). Indeed, utilising both text-based and image-based methods can balance out the strengths and limitations of each approach (Pridmore & Landsdown 1997) as well as improve accuracy in understanding and interpreting images (Kearney & Hyle 2004). However, whilst visual methods have been shown to be of value when conducting research with some children and young people, there may also be reluctance for others to participate in activities that require them to draw because of a perceived lack of artistic skills, therefore possibly deterring them from participating (Kearney & Hyle 2004). Methods that utilise either photography and/or drawing are processes whereby children are in control and do not require the presence of the researcher, allowing the child to express themselves more freely (Barker & Weller 2003). Such methods can also be particularly useful when used by children with low literacy levels (Young & Barrett 2001). Whilst the use of multiple qualitative methods provides greater insight (Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller 2005) the challenge is to 'strike a balance between not patronising young people and recognising their competencies but maintaining their interest and keeping the research familiar and relevant to them' (Punch 2002, p. 54).

To provide a greater understanding of children's perspectives and to support the prioritisation of a children's agenda in both policy and practice it has been suggested that research approaches with young people should go beyond the data collection process and that children should also be involved in the data analysis process (Coad & Evans 2008). When analysing drawings, for example, there is a

need for the drawings to be clearly interpreted, therefore it is necessary for the researcher to discuss the drawings with the young person to ensure the meaning and interpretation of the drawing is that of the child or youth and not that of the researcher (Barker & Weller 2003). Indeed, although connections between academic research and policy development are useful, we must be aware of these limitations when promoting the voices of children and communicating their concerns when working with policy makers (Barker & Weller 2003; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton 2001).

### **Overcoming time constraints**

A practical consideration which influenced the development of some of the research methods chosen was that of time available to conduct the research, particularly during the camps. Whilst I was able to follow the youth workers for 18 months, my time with the young people attending the camps was limited to four to six days. I was also conscious to not ask the young people to take time away from their program activities for me to be able to interview them. Finally, with group numbers of around 30 young people at each camp, I needed to consider what would be more beneficial to explore at the implementation stage of the program – breadth or depth of responses.

I made the decision for breadth over depth for the following reasons. Firstly, I did not think it would be fair to draw out the young people from participating in activities for the period of time that it would require to get their responses to the set research questions. Furthermore it was unlikely that I would be able to draw out detailed responses by conducting interviews with young people who had just met me. The ability to gain trust and some level of acceptance into the group had to be established first. It was for these reasons that I decided on the following two approaches in regard to the young people's participation in the research during the camp: participant observation and research activities delivered as sessions. I felt that this would provide breadth of information across the group and would allow me to then focus on exploring the underlying issues of some of the responses in the follow-up phase of the research, which would be conducted once the camp had ended and the young people were back in their local communities.

I decided to develop a range of research sessions that delivered objectives that the program staff wished to cover, but also provided me, the researcher, with relevant information specific to my research objectives. These sessions were developed as activity plans and were facilitated by myself and the youth workers. For example, finding out how young people thought of their futures and the role of education and employment within this was of interest to both my research and the staff



involved in the program. Underlying this interest was also the need to get a clearer understanding of the young people's lives. Therefore research sessions were developed that fitted the objectives of the program staff and would provide data, feedback, or a general activity relating to the needs of the camp. Initially five different sessions were developed, however for various reasons outside of my control relating to camp scheduling<sup>18</sup>, only two were used in the end, *Goal Maps* and *Community Mapping*, both of which I outline in the methods section.

### **Training youth workers to be researchers**

The AIATSIS *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS 2010) highlights the need for involvement and participation by Indigenous people in the research as one condition of access to a field site and the demonstration of ethical research. It was recognised by the organisation and staff that the development of research skills, particularly in relation to monitoring and evaluation, would be of benefit to the program and organisation as a whole. Therefore an objective of the research project was to involve the youth workers as researchers as well as research participants. Whilst this fulfilled the ethical and access-driven obligations to my field site it also provided an opportunity to ensure different interpretations and insights were collected and assessed, along with those of the young people and school staff through the triangulation of findings.

Two of the four types of triangulation outlined by Denzin (1978) are applied in this study: investigator triangulation (the use of several different researchers) and theory triangulation (the use of multiple theories and perspectives to interpret the results of the study (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007)). However whilst this is an approach promoted in development work and action research approaches, the delivery of such an approach is not always straightforward. Whilst monitoring and evaluation and therefore some form of research are a requirement of most funded programs, this is not seen as a priority particularly at the development and implementation stage of a program. Therefore gaining involvement and commitment to the research at each stage proved difficult, as the youth workers were not always able to dedicate time to research activities. For example, the youth workers would record their observation of the camp and the young people attending, however instead of completing this task at the end of each day, it would generally be left to complete at the end of the camp, therefore relying on recollections of the past week. This was

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<sup>18</sup> During the planning phase the youth workers hoped to be delivering the majority of the sessions on site. However as the program began to be implemented it became clear that most of the schedule would be filled by external activities and site visits with minimal time spent on site and available for research or program-developed activities, consequently leaving limited opportunity for the developed sessions.

due to the youth workers working long and exhausting hours during the day and then having to use any remaining time to plan for the following day or to rest. Nevertheless the youth workers were able to draw on their own head notes, which through discussion at the end of each camp could be developed into field notes.

## **Methods**

The research design was chosen based on using a variety of complementary methods to provide a more comprehensive perspective, over multiple points of time, within the constraints set out above. Initially participant observation and unstructured interviews with the program staff were used to gain an understanding of the development phase. During the implementation phase, and therefore specifically the camps, I used a variety of methods. Participant observation was used to gain an understanding of the youth workers, school staff and young people's experiences. In addition to participant observation, practical, youth-centred research activities delivered as sessions were used for further insight with the young people. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used during the camps with youth workers and school staff. In the follow-up phase post-camp, semi-structured interviews were used.

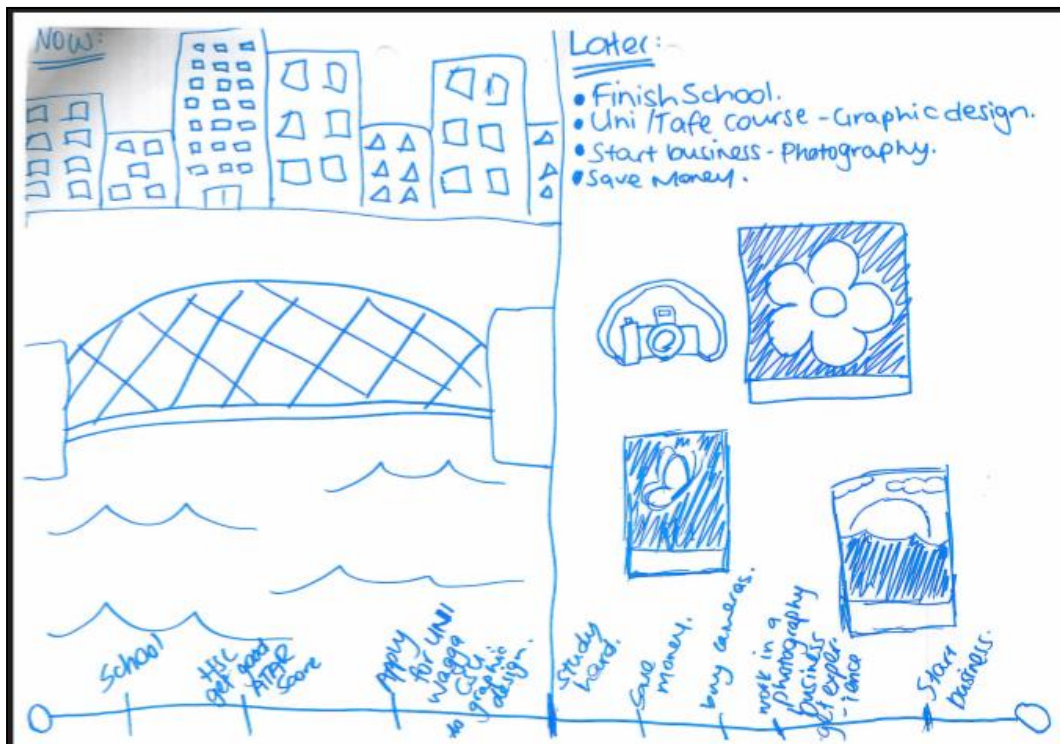
### **Research activities delivered as sessions**

#### **Goal Maps**

The Goal Map activity utilised a projective technique and was based on a method used by Sirin (2003). The objective of this activity was to gain an understanding of how young people thought about their near future and more specifically the role of employment and education. In particular I was interested in the school to work transition time frame which for most of the students would occur during the next five years.

Each young person was given a blank A3 piece of paper with a line drawn down the middle of the page. They were each asked to draw or write who they are now on the left side of the page. They were asked to provide as much detail as they wanted and could incorporate anything they felt represented who they are at present, what they do in their day-to-day lives, what's important to them and so on. Each young person was then asked to think about themselves in five years time and using the right hand side of the page to explain how they imagined themselves and their lives in five

years time, what they would be doing and had done in that time. In the case that images alone were used, a verbal explanation of the meaning of the image was also sought. In addition, any discussions had during the activity by the group were recorded by taking written notes. The activity was completed in groups and was led by myself and the program staff, with one staff member allocated on each occasion to take notes of any associated discussions. This was completed by myself and the youth workers. Figure 1 provides an example of a Goal Map completed by a female student from Farming Town.



**Figure 2.1** A Goal Map completed by a female student from Farming Town

Youth workers and school staff were available to support the young people, as some individuals needed a more scaffolded approach to the activity to understand and complete it. This could be viewed as either a strength or limitation of the research. Whilst it is acknowledged that there was an opportunity for those assisting to influence responses once additional instructions had been given, the benefits of this approach were seen to outweigh this limitation, as each young person was given the opportunity to participate at their own pace and have any potential support needs addressed. The A3 sheets of paper were then collected and analysed thematically.

### *Limiting Bias*

Procedures were put in place to limit any bias. The Goal Map session was delivered within the first day of the camp and usually followed up by a role model presentation by an athlete who talked about their own viewed future at that age, their own goals and the path they followed. I was concerned that the young people would feel the need to complete the Goal Maps and respond with what they thought would be the most appropriate or expected response, such as attending school or getting a job. In addition I was aware that they were attending an education and careers program and therefore would be receiving as part of the program presentations and information which specifically promoted the importance of staying on in school and getting a job or establishing a career. In most cases the young people attending the camp had limited information about the camp due to unclear communication between the youth workers and school staff. The first session normally held during the camp was a drama session, which was utilised as an icebreaker as well as an assumed way to build confidence in the young people attending. I delivered the Goal Maps session directly after this first session. I also ensured I did not use any terms referencing education, employment or careers to avoid as much as possible influencing their responses.

In total, 94 Goal Maps were completed by both male and female students from Farming Town, Ocean Town, Mining Town and Dusty Town. The Goal Map activity was not conducted with the second group from the Northern Territory<sup>19</sup>. Table 2.1 gives an outline of the respondents by location, gender and age.

**Table 2.1** Goal Maps Respondents

<b>Locations</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>&lt;15</b>	<b>15-16</b>	<b>&gt;16</b>
Farming Town	26%(11)	31%(16)	52%(11)	18%(11)	50%(4) <sup>+</sup>
Ocean Town	17%(7)	17%(9)	0%(0)	25%(15)	13%(1)
Mining Town	29%(12)	35%(18)	33%(7)	30%(18)	38%(3) <sup>+</sup>
Dusty Town	29%(12)	17%(9)	14%(3)	28%(17)	0%(0) <sup>+</sup>
Total	100% (42)	100%(52)	100%(21)	100%(61)	100%(8)

<sup>+</sup>Age for respondents missing (1 – Farming Town; 1 – Dusty Town; 2 – Mining Town)

<sup>19</sup> Due to a last minute change in program dates the Goal Map activity was delivered by the youth workers without me being present to explain that the Goal Maps would be used as part of a research project and therefore adhere to ethical guidelines. Therefore it was not possible or realistic to run the same session again.

Categories were developed to try and group responses from the Goal Maps activity. Content analysis was completed by transferring all responses from each of the Goal Maps into a category. For example education goals included in a Goal Map could be communicated through a quote, word or image reflecting the completion of a Higher School Certificate, or attendance at university or the undertaking of a course. In some instances it included a number of these examples. Therefore all this detail would be interpreted as that individual having educational aspirations. Table 2.2 outlines the themes that were developed as well as an example of the types of quotes or themes which make up each theme. The category headings used have been drawn from and therefore are similar to those found in Chang et al. (2006). In addition to the Goal Maps being analysed by content analysis, descriptive analysis was also completed on the Goal Maps drawing on observation and interview data as well to provide further interpretation of the Goal Maps.

**Table 2.2** Coding Scheme for Self-Articulated Goals

Category	Examples
1. Educational Goals	"Finish YR 12" "Finish School" "Get a good education" "Stay at school and finish YR 12" "Get an apprenticeship" "going to uni" "Medicine at QCU" "I want to finish school"
2. Occupational Goals	"get a job" "Have a good job" "full-time work" "Diesel fitter" "Playing NRL" "good paying Job" "I wanna be a beautician"
3. Family-related Goals	"married or in a relationship" "have my own family" "girlfriend"
4. Material/Financial Goals	"earning good money", "buy my own new car" "be rich" "nice car" "buy a house" "Buy stuff for the house"
5. Self-Actualisation Goals	"wanna be healthy and fit" "having fun" "better" "good life ahead of me"
6. Travel and Leisure Goals	"move to a bigger city" "travel around the world" "travelling around Australia"

## 7. Other Goals

“help kids around the world” “hang out with friends”

### **Community Mapping**

The second research activity used, Community Mapping, was developed to form part of the introduction process as well as provide information on how students viewed the communities in which they lived. The term community was applied broadly, incorporating the local neighbourhood or town in which the young people lived as well as their school community. This activity was adapted from Participatory Rural Appraisal tools regularly used in the international development field and have now also been adopted in youth research due to the tools’ ability to engage and include youth perspectives in the research (Amsden & Van Wynsberghe 2005). The Community Mapping activity was completed in small groups which the young people established. It was assumed doing so would lead to groups forming along friendship lines and therefore support the open flow of discussion as well as provide a particular perspective based on interests, age and gender.

The young people were given a large area and a large roll of butcher’s paper and coloured markers. They were then asked to draw a map of their community. Each group either had the researcher or a youth worker working with their group. The Community Maps were then collected and the discussions had within each of the groups recorded, through a debrief between the youth workers and the researcher. The main benefit of the Community Mapping activity was that it provided a way of getting to know the participants, however no real social/anthropological insight was gained. Because of this, and to avoid the identification of the research locality, I have not included all community maps in the appendix.



**Figure 2.2** Example of completed Community Map by students

### **Semi-structured interviews and focus groups**

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used during the development, implementation and follow-up phases of the camp. During the development phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three youth workers. During the implementation phase, focus groups were conducted with the three youth workers as well as 17 school staff (10 teachers, seven support staff) who accompanied the young people to the camps. No focus groups were conducted during the fourth camp, however there were informal discussions with the four school staff members who attended (three teaching staff and one support staff). During the follow-up phase semi-structured interviews were conducted with 56 students, either individually, in groups of two or three and, for one school, as two larger focus groups. In addition across the four schools 14 school staff (seven teaching staff, seven support staff) were interviewed. For two of the school visits a fellow PhD student attended with me to assist with conducting interviews.

Focus groups were predominantly used when time was limited. During the implementation phase of the program, the youth workers were involved in a focus group discussion at least once during each camp and for three of the camps twice. The initial idea was to record observations and reflections from the youth workers at the end of each evening, however it had to be acknowledged that this was not the youth workers' main priority, and planning and rest had to be prioritised. Most of the interviews and focus groups were audio recorded, depending on permission given by the interviewees.

Focus groups were also used to gather information from the school staff during the camp. Again this was due to time available as school staff also had to fulfil their primary care responsibilities whilst on the camp. Informal conversations and semi-structured interviews occurred one-on-one with both the youth workers and the school staff throughout the duration of the camp and these were recorded daily as field notes. To support analysis, NVivo Software (2012) was utilised to store and manage all audio, written and visual (Goal Maps and Community Maps) responses. The interview and focus group responses were drawn on throughout the thesis for the purpose of description, interpretation and analysis.

### **Participant observation**

Scratch notes and memos were recorded daily with space and time allocated to reflect and further expand in the evening on notes collected during each day. Notes were transcribed at the end of each camp. In addition an overall reflection on the camp as a phase in the implementation process was also completed. I was also interested in collecting the youth workers' observations of the students and school staff as well as each other. Whilst I would have liked this to be recorded by the youth workers, time and priority prevented this. Therefore the youth workers' observations were recorded in a focus group setting towards the end of each camp. A limitation of this approach was that it was reliant on memory and recollection of the previous days. These observations were also transcribed. Information collected through participant observation was drawn on throughout the thesis for the purpose of description, interpretation and analysis.

### **Document analysis**

Finally, there was not the opportunity to interview the policy makers who were responsible for the funding of this program. Indeed, the documentation and guidance provided by the staff within the government department was described by the youth workers as being limited and fairly flexible. To



overcome this limitation a document analysis was conducted which describes and outlines the broader policy space in which this specific program operates and forms part of the following chapter.

## **Ethics and informed consent**

Ethics approval for this research project was obtained through the Australian National University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Additional ethics clearance was gained from each of the three separate state education departments: the NSW Department of Education and Training; the Department of Education QLD and the Department of Education and Training NT, to be able to request and conduct a follow-up visit at each of the schools that attended the camp. All participants in the research were given an information sheet along with an informed consent form. For the young people attending the camp an information sheet and informed consent form was sent to parents and carers. In addition to the informed consent forms returned with parent/carer signatures, the research was explained to the young people when they arrived at the camp and verbal informed consent was gained from each of the young people involved.

## **Situating the researcher**

To conclude I wish to situate myself within this research and highlight the various aspects of my own positionedness which would, could and did potentially influence my research. This influence is demonstrated from the choice of the field of study to focus on, through to my choice of research questions to explore, and methods to apply. It is also demonstrated in how I navigated my 18 months in the field and the writing up of my findings.

What I have found to be of the greatest influence, and therefore needing regular reflection on throughout this research, has been my own professional work experience. I have worked in the area of youth development and education since 2000 in Australia, Finland and England, from a grassroots level to a national and international level and in roles responsible for project implementation as well as strategic development and management. However it is not the number of years of work experience I have in the field that I found to be the greatest influence on my research, but where I gained this experience and the organisations and people I worked for and with. The organisation where I spent the majority of my time in the United Kingdom was regarded as an example of 'best

practice' internationally by the industry. When I worked there, the organisation was in its eighth year of operation; it had already navigated the steep learning curve associated with establishing a new organisation. It was a large organisation, with a good training, mentoring and support structure, working within an already well-established network that it had itself established and expanded.

My background in this field led me to focus on this area and in particular explore youth development work from a practitioner and management perspective. I was becoming frustrated with the overly positive interpretation of youth development and project outcomes that were increasingly driven by an agenda situated within neoliberal principles of efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes. At first sight it looked like this agenda is being enforced from the top down, that is through the funding providers, be they government or otherwise, however what I found in my work experience was that ideas of efficiency, effectiveness and indicators of successful outcomes were starting to become commonplace with those that developed, delivered and managed youth work initiatives and programs, consequently hindering the critical and reflective process so important in any type of development work.

I also needed to be conscious to not overestimate or underplay the youth workers' levels and feelings of autonomy or self-efficacy to complete their jobs, as well as the extent they were able to appropriate the policy discourse in which they found themselves and the program in which they were situated. Being part of a large organisation that was seen to be doing well also meant less scrutiny and more freedom from funding providers. The organisation specifically worked at the level between policy makers and practitioners on the ground (i.e. smaller youth organisations, schools etc.). Therefore the organisation acted like a buffer between the two levels as well as a communicator between the two. Consisting of staff either from a development or education background, it was able to understand and interpret the needs of the practitioners on the ground and the policy makers in government. Since returning to Australia I have not seen a system or model that replicates this one. The organisation which forms the focus of this research, whilst national, would be considered a small, grassroots youth organisation; therefore I had to always be conscious not to draw an unrealistic comparison between how the two organisations operated and in particular how the staff within each organisation were able to conduct their work.

Additionally, from a youth program implementation perspective, my previous work history has also influenced my involvement in the field and in particular my observations. Previous to my work in

the youth development sector, I was employed in the tourism and events sector. This work experience provided me with logistical and public speaking skills necessary in this field. Similar to my experience above, I was employed with international and national organisations that were well known in the field and therefore had the benefit of an in-depth training and mentoring program and well-defined guidelines and approaches. I found myself early on being frustrated observing what I felt was the disorganisation of the youth program and youth workers, which I initially felt was due to a lack of training and support. When I mentioned this disorganisation to a colleague they replied *'maybe this is just the Koori way'*. I think both points of view are limited in their reflection on what could have been occurring, although this issue demonstrates to me the potential influences of my work history, particularly early on in the field, in influencing my initial perceptions and interpretations. Finally my background and experience in education, particularly the development of resources for teachers and youth workers, influenced the research methods I chose to use and in particular allowed me to develop the methods delivered as sessions within the program.

From a personal perspective I also felt that certain experiences potentially influenced me throughout the research process and required me to be constantly reflective of the way they influenced my observations and interpretations. I am a first generation Australian born to Greek parents who migrated to Australia as adults. I grew up and went to school in Sydney in the late '70s and '80s where I struggled to accept my Greek identity as I felt it came with many attached stereotypes and essentialising which did not resonate as truthful in my own personal experiences. At the same time I was struggling to be accepted as an 'Australian', an identity that I felt was a better reflection of me personally at the time. The idea of difference between 'mainstream Australia' and Indigenous Australia seemed to me from the beginning of my research, and still at this stage, to be overly highlighted, particularly as there are many experiences growing up and even in adulthood that would exclude my inclusion in the 'mainstream' category. I have always felt and still feel that the difference is not that large. In some cases I experienced at least the same degree of difference between my cultural background and 'mainstream Australia' as I did with my cultural background and 'Indigenous Australia'. In other cases I felt even less of a cultural difference with 'Indigenous Australia'. I feel that this impedes me from trying to identify differences, and whilst I do see differences, I come to them from the initial point of expecting and seeing similarities first. Because of this I feel in some cases I need more convincing before accepting a cultural difference argument, despite it being prominent in the academic literature. It also potentially influences my focus on those young people within the research who do not necessarily 'fit' the more commonly held view of a young Aboriginal person.



## Chapter Three

### Indigenous youth policy and youth work discourse

Policies can reflect the prevalent ‘rationality and assumptions’ of the times in which they are created (Shore & Wright 2011, p. 3). In this chapter I critically examine the discourses found throughout Aboriginal youth policy and youth work by looking at the meanings in documents and of keywords found within them, which establish what I argue to be a simplistic view of young Aboriginal people as disengaged and unmotivated when it comes to educational and economic opportunities. I follow the discourse from policy to practice by examining the relevant overarching policy documents, the implementation framework documents which interpret policies into actions, and the initiatives and project plans which underline the practice. This provides the context for the field in which the *BECA* program is situated. In subsequent chapters I describe the influences on program design and the practice of youth work as a whole.

I ask how did the word ‘disengaged’ come to prominence as a term to describe young Aboriginal people and explore how this ‘problem’ is framed and contested within the social space and set of relations involving the ‘disengaged’ youth, the youth development organisation and policy makers. I rely on document analysis here, as the opportunity to conduct interviews with the policy makers involved in this program was not available<sup>20</sup>. My aim is to demonstrate the dominance of certain assumptions and rationalities beyond my field site for the purpose of exploring the influence of these on the *BECA* youth workers and youth development program and this can be done from documents alone. I argue that the documents highlight the dominant rationalities and assumptions currently held and adopted by many in the field of Indigenous education and youth work and underline the limited space for a social justice framework to emerge in policy and practice.

To begin, I outline two documents: the overarching policy framework relating to ‘Indigenous education’, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (DEET 1989); and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* (MCEECDYA 2010). Both documents inform Indigenous youth development initiatives in the area of education and school to work transitions. Whilst there are other policy documents and reports that influence the space in

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<sup>20</sup> The reason for this is firstly with the limited communication between the funding provider and the youth organisation I felt it would not be of value. Indeed, at the beginning of my fieldwork I was more interested in the young people and the program alone as a site for learning and not necessarily the policy influences. The change in focus later on meant it was difficult to schedule interviews with the original policy makers.

which the program operates, I chose these two documents as they are the two main overarching documents that are specifically focused on Indigenous youth and education and differ in their approach to delivering education to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth. I then explore how these overarching documents are converted into government programs and initiatives. I identify one particular initiative, the *Sporting Chance Program*, and one comparable youth organisation and program, the *Clontarff Foundation*, to demonstrate how the discourse of disengagement is appropriated to support a particular approach to youth work as well as to highlight the need for the services each organisation provides. In the second section of the chapter I turn my attention to the *BECA* program, in particular the project planning stage, and outline the project narrative as established through the development phase of the program. I describe the process of project design to reveal the 'social life of a policy text' (Mosse 2005, p. 21); how knowledge and identities of young people, youth and youth organisations were produced and constructed; and how problems were analysed and the solutions that resulted.

### **Framing the Indigenous education problem within a 'cultural agenda'**

The 'Aboriginal education problem' was revisited through a number of taskforces, inquiries and parliamentary reviews throughout the 1980s, all of which noted the failures to address the underlying social and economic factors influencing educational opportunities for Aboriginal people. In 1988 the Australian Government established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy Taskforce with a view to developing a comprehensive long-term approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy. Following the report of the Taskforce, the then Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training announced that a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy would be jointly developed and endorsed by the states, territories and the Commonwealth. Aligning with this policy was an increase in funding from both state and Commonwealth governments. That policy, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (DEET 1989), has been an influential and foundational document in Indigenous education policy and Indigenous affairs policies ever since (Gunstone 2013).

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* included five objectives:

- to achieve equity in the provision of education to all Aboriginal children, young people and adults by the year 2000,
- to assist Aboriginal parents and communities to be fully involved in the planning and provision of education for themselves and their children,

- to achieve parity in participation rates by Aboriginal people with those of other Australians in all stages of education,
- to achieve positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in school and tertiary education, and
- to improve the provision of education services across the national and local level.

The policy statement is based on a list of *goals* which ‘*form the basis for co-operation and collaboration between educational institutions, States and Territories and the Commonwealth, in association with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*’ (DEET 1989, p. 1). The goals are described as long term, with a purpose to ‘*guide the development of agreed educational strategies for meeting the different education needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the States and Territories*’. The four goals and associated objectives are summarised below.

Firstly, ***Involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making***, through:

- ‘establishing effective arrangements for the participation of parents and communities’ in educational decisions at all levels.
- ‘increas[ing] the number of Aboriginal people employed’ in leadership, administrative and delivery roles throughout the education sector;
- Increasing the involvement of communities in the delivery of subjects in Aboriginal history, language, culture and society; and,
- ‘develop[ing] arrangements for the provision of independent advice from Aboriginal communities’.

Secondly, ***Equality of access to educational services*** which is to be achieved through ‘ensure[ing] access’ or ‘ensure[ing] equitable access’ to all levels of schooling including pre-school services.

Thirdly, ***Equity of educational participation*** which aims to ‘achieve the participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling’; as well as the ‘participation of Aboriginal children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for all Australian children’ and to achieve ‘rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors’ in higher and further education.

And finally ***Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes*** by:

‘provid[ing] adequate preparation of Aboriginal children through pre-school education’; to ‘enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years ... and ... to attain the successful completion of

Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students' as well as the same graduation rates from award courses in further and higher education.

Under this final goal are listed additional resources considered necessary to support the achievement of the set objectives. They are:

to develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal languages; to provide community education services which enable Aboriginal people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities; to enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal adults with limited or no educational experience; to enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity; and to provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.

The policy itself, along with a small selection of programs reviewed in 1995 (DEET 1995), showed both had limited success in terms of educational outcomes. Although there were some gains over the first four years of the policy with improvements recorded in student retention rates through to the final year of schooling; a doubling of Indigenous students enrolling at universities; an increase in 'Aboriginal studies' programs in universities and schools; and the establishment of up to 2,500 Indigenous Australian parents' committees across the country, these improvements were inconsistent across regions of Australia with urban regions accounting for the majority of improvements recorded.

Nakata (1995) and McConaghy (1998) have provided critiques of the limitations of the policy document and review process itself. Whilst acknowledging the achievement of the policy as highlighted above, McConaghy (1998) argues that overall the policy has 'fundamental inadequacies at the level of both pedagogy and policy development' (p. 342) arguing the policy is based on a form of 'culturalism', and the belief that 'before issues of pedagogy, timetabling, curriculum and so on can be considered, it is first necessary to deal with "Indigenous cultures" specifically' (McConaghy 1998, p. 345).

Nakata's (1995) work goes further to describe how educational policy is framed by a mainstream 'cultural agenda' and outlines the negative consequences that arise. Nakata (1995), analysing the use of the term *culture* and its use as a 'predominant source for educational representation and



educational reform' (p. 44), undertakes a description of the policy as a single site for the investigation of representational discourse, suggesting the term culture is both a disciplinary and disciplining concept. He suggests the policy is limited by two representations its 'liberal humanist disposition and its preoccupation with a liberal version of culture' (Nakata 1995, p. 54)

'Culture' in policy, Nakata (1995) suggests, is foremost a 'reference to inter-group relations and with little emphasis on intra-group diversity' (p. 49) that has overall served as an 'apparatus for exclusion'. A common issue not only in 'Indigenous education' policy but Indigenous policy overall is the overlooking of diversity and difference. Indeed, research in education overall across disciplines also has a preoccupation with universal categories (Nakata 1995). Whilst anthropological research has been conducted focusing on Indigenous students' experiences in remote, regional and urban settings, policy tends to continually generalise these diverse experiences, bringing them into an overall representation of the 'issue' (singular) and consequently overlooking gains or brushing over or downplaying issues (plural), therefore failing to respond to contextually specific needs of students (Altman & Fogarty 2010). Nakata (1995), arguing from the standpoint of a Torres Strait Islander, suggests that:

the constitution of the Islander in the cultural mode has meant that the Islander's domestic and public 'culture' have become central areas for reform rather than the institutions and apparatuses that contributed to the 'low performances' in schooling. Culturally relevant programs then at best become 'add-ons' to unchanged mainstream 'practices' in the education system.

(Nakata 1995, p. 48)

This final point leads to the core of one issue, that schools and schooling are effectively sites for educating for work in the mainstream.

Underpinning the analysis here is the debate and scrutiny regarding the use and meaning of the term 'Indigenous education' in policy, practice and research (Nakata 1995; Vass 2012) suggesting that the 'widespread and largely uncritical use of this expression is contributing to sustaining deficit assumptions regarding the engagement and outcomes of Indigenous students within Australian schools' (Vass 2012, p. 85). There is also confusion created through the merging of two separate ideas: the education *of* Indigenous students and *education about* Indigenous history, heritage and people (Ah Sam & Ackland 2005).

Whilst the policy document went through a review process in 1995, with the review committee accepting the limited improvements gained across various educational outcomes, the review process

reproduced rather than challenged significant flaws, reaffirming the principles and assumptions of the original policy document (McConaghy 1998). Whether through self-identifying or being categorised ('Othered'), young Indigenous people are centrally caught up as 'both objects and participants in the mire of "Indigenous education" ' (Vass 2012, p. 86), a category that young people have been placed in by others. In the case of this thesis, others include the policy makers and practitioners, both school staff and youth workers and the organisations and institutions they work for.

Summarising the consequences of policy constructed within a framework of culture from a Torres Strait Islander perspective Nakata (1995) concludes that

the culture theme in policy has been based primarily on inter-group priorities where individual members, their age, their gender, their religion, their schooling needs, their interests, their economic needs, their politics, their individual persuasions and their own experiences remain undifferentiated and suffice under the more prioritised common group norm

(Nakata 1995, p. 49)

Nakata suggests that culture in policy also sets out the

positive thesis' ... for example, on-going government projects and on-going low performances in schooling have led the general public to form an opinion of the education of Islander people as an intractable problem. Yet the national policy, as a public democratically processed document which sees the educational agenda for the schools (i.e., schools which failed Islander people), receives little attention

(Nakata 1995, p. 53)

Consequently the

idealist philosophy where 'cultural differences' represents all relations between the Islander and the dominant...is why policy is in an inevitable position where blame begins and ends with the victims of the education system, and where the dominant/sub ordinate relations escape direct attention

(Nakata 1995, p. 55)

At the overarching policy level we begin to see attention being focused on the young people themselves as being identified with the 'problem' rather than the system itself.

## **‘The disengaged youth’**

Over time, state, territory and Federal government education ministers have developed a number of frameworks for implementing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, including the *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002*, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008*, and most recently, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*.

The latter, being the latest framework developed to support the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, is a progression on the policy itself and the Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians<sup>21</sup>.

The plan ‘identifies national, systemic and local level action in six priority domains that evidence shows, will contribute to improved outcomes in Aboriginal [and] Torres Strait Islander education’ (MCEETYA 2010, p. 5). These six priority domains are ‘pathways to real post-school options; readiness for school; engagement and connections; attendance; literacy and numeracy; leadership, quality teaching and workforce development’. The framework considers these domains to contribute to the following improved outcomes: ‘*Children and Young people: Ready for School, Attending, Engaged, Learning, and Achieving*’, described as a linear pathway with one leading to the achievement of the next.

The Action Plan goes on to outline how it will approach each domain and it is from this section of the report that I draw out the following examples. In the excerpts chosen as examples we begin to see early on in the document how broad policy goals have been interpreted into actions and objectives and the creeping in of additional theoretical and representational ideologies and discourses. Here the construct of the disengaged youth with low expectations and aspirations once again emerges. We also begin to see assumptions of linear pathways from school to work and the meritocratic viewing of schooling become more dominant. From this point on specific solutions to the problem also emerge, citing attendance and engagement in schools and the raising of expectations as the best approaches to addressing the problem.

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<sup>21</sup> The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians is a national declaration that was released by all state and territory education ministers in December 2008. It outlines two national goals and Commitments to Action to support the achievement of each goal. The Declaration’s stated goals are: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence and All young Australians becoming successful learners; confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.

Within the Action Plan we begin to see the education problem being constructed as the youth people themselves more literally and in particular their aspirations, expectations and engagement with the schooling system. The plan states that:

Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These partnerships can establish a collective commitment to hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and foster learning environments that are culturally safe and supportive. Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed ... the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of educational decision-making and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers, education workers or community members in schools and classrooms provides strong role models and builds connections, contributing to a positive impact on educational outcomes.

(MCEETYA 2010, p. 12)

Here the language moves away from partnership with families for the purpose of developing '*agreed educational strategies for meeting the different education needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*' to partnership with families and communities '*to support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*'. The paragraph continues to suggest that such partnerships '*can establish a collective commitment to hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*'. It is implied here that high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are currently not held by educators, families and communities and the young people themselves. Here we see the discourse move even further away from a critique of the system itself towards a greater focus on the Indigenous youth themselves. This shift brings with it further assumptions and rationalities, primarily the assumption of the disengaged youth as lacking aspirations and the rationality of information and knowledge (i.e. further 'education') to address the issue. I draw on the available literature to demonstrate the potential problems with the dominant rationalities utilised to present both the 'problem' and the 'solution'.

Partnerships between families, communities and schools are presented as a key to supporting the '*education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*'. Indeed, the engagement of the family and wider community is seen as an important factor by parents as well as service providers and practitioners in relation to supporting the development and achievement of young Indigenous people's aspirations and educational outcomes (Dwyer 2002; Lester 2000; Lette et al. 2009; Walker, Scrine & Shephard 2008). For example the development of culturally inclusive resources and the valuing of existing knowledge has been stated as an outcome of the engagement of parents and

community within school programs, leading to an increase in Indigenous student enrolment and Indigenous teaching staff members, who acted as role models for students (Dwyer 2002). In another example, a holistic approach engaging Indigenous parents in the development and running of a community-based literacy and numeracy program not only built confidence and self-esteem in the students but began the development of a learning community (Broadbent & Boyle 2004). Yet another study looking at Indigenous youth and adults who have returned to the education system in the Northern Territory found family support the most important influence in motivation to stay at school (Howard 2002). Community mentoring through the use of role models has also been a successful approach, although there is a need for further longitudinal data and rigorous evaluation for each of these cases (Dawes & Dawes 2005).

Specifically the role of parental and peer influence on the setting and achievement of aspirations, particularly in relation to education and employment, has been widely emphasised in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian literature (Alloway et al. 2004; Arthurs, Hughes & Wasaga 2004; Berzin 2010; Buchmann & Dalton 2002; Craven et al. 2005; Gutman & Akerman 2008; Lester 2000; Walker, Scrine & Shephard 2008). The importance of assistance from 'family and friends', including immediate family as well as uncles and aunts, has been highlighted as the main reason for Indigenous youth setting and achieving their aspirations within a study based on employment aspirations in the Torres Strait Islands (Arthur, Hughes & Wasaga 2004), a finding supported elsewhere (Craven et al. 2005; Walker, Scrine & Shepard 2008).

The ability to provide advice and support relies however on various other determinants such as the adviser's own education, employment and socioeconomic background. This raises additional issues around support structures for Indigenous youth in relation to educational and employment aspirations, as Indigenous families may not be able to access education or employment options and therefore advice and support may be limited based on experience, a consideration also raised by parents and carers (Lette 2009). A study by Arthur, Hughes and Wasaga (2004) found that in some cases the relatives who were able to give advice already had jobs and careers in the areas in which they were giving advice. This then links to the importance of, firstly, engagement of the family and wider community in relation to supporting the development and achievement of young Indigenous people's aspirations (Lester 2000; Walker, Scrine & Shephard 2008), and secondly, the role of teachers and schools in filling the gaps in knowledge and career information. This provides some backing for the idea that youth programs may also fill knowledge and career information gaps (Bessant, Sercombe & Watts 1998). However the availability and scope of such information and

knowledge and indeed who imparts such information and knowledge need to be considered in more detail, points overlooked in the Action Plan itself.

Research suggests that available information and advice, parent and peer influence, location, opportunities and socioeconomic background are all to some degree determinants of aspirations of young Indigenous people (Arthur & David-Petro 2000; Arthur, Hughes and Wasaga 2004; Biddle 2006; Char-Hansen et al. 2008; Craven 2008; Craven et al. 2005; Gelade & Stehlik 2004; Hossain et al. 2008; Lester 2000; Walker, Scrine & Shephard 2008). However whilst the reported influence of these determinants on educational and occupational aspirations and expectations can be found in both the national and international literature the level of influence of each is challenged across studies. Whilst the Action Plan calls for the establishment of partnerships between families, communities and schools to raise student expectations and provide role models, the determinants of aspirations and consequently outcomes, as stated above, are overlooked or played down in the documents.

Whilst literature is available supporting the solutions offered in the Action Plan document, the Action Plan, as with the Policy document itself, continues to overlook the Indigenous historical, social and political contexts. Within the school to work transition literature the importance of 'individual freedom of action ("agency") and the constraints imposed by one's position in society ("structure")' has been continually debated (White 2007, p. xiii). Rudd and Evans expand on the question in terms of specific school to work transitions as 'the relative contribution of agency (input from young people themselves on an individual basis) and structure (inputs from organisations at a national and local level, the effects of labour markets, and influences of broad social characteristics such as gender, social class and ethnicity) on the education-to-employment transition process' (Rudd & Evans 1998, p. 39). Whilst the structure/agency debate is supported by a large body of literature, within the policy context of the Indigenous education problem, the debate is presented in its most simplistic form.

The promotion of the benefits of formal schooling itself is also embedded in assumptions. An example of this is the concept of achievement ideology, which follows the belief that going to school regularly, working hard, studying and participating, leads to achieving in school and further educational and employment options. However MacLeod (1987) suggests that the achievement ideology line of reasoning rests on two assumptions – the efficacy of schooling (the notion that academic performance is the crucial link to economic success) and the existence of equality of

opportunity (MacLeod 1987). Therefore the consequence of promoting an achievement ideology is, if one accepts the equality of opportunity line of reasoning, that those who are not 'making it' have only themselves to blame.

The Action Plan also states that it is the responsibility of the education system itself to influence young people's expectations of themselves, through the school's raising of its own expectations of the students. Indeed, teacher expectations often 'serve as a mechanism through which young people's initial impressions of their future place within the labour market are confirmed' (Furlong 1992, p. 110). However Malik and Aguado (2005) contend that schools more often than not contribute to inequalities in education and therefore future academic and career options through many of their practices, in particular the classification or grouping of students into lower ability or special programs, which are mostly a consequence of biased assessment and evaluation.

Finally, one of the issues regularly raised with policy documents in regards to school to work transitions is that these imagined pathways are presented as being ordered, logical and linear. However this does not accurately reflect today's experiences of school to work transitions (MacDonald & Marsh 2005). School to work transitions have changed over the last few decades. The introduction of work experience and training schemes, increased unemployment and the continuation into further tertiary or higher education are some examples of how the transition has changed. Also work in itself has changed; the movement of Australian employment into a 'knowledge economy', for example, has meant that the types of jobs available are specific to industries which have seen expansion in recent decades, such as those in the information technology sector. The changing labour market landscape as a consequence favours those with higher qualifications, such as university degrees. However the dominant acceptance of the concept of the 'knowledge economy' within Australian education policy and its underpinning assumptions, as highlighted above, has been critiqued (te Riele & Crump 2003). To address this demand school curriculums focus their content delivery on the skills required by their students to follow this pathway, therefore literacy and numeracy become the dominant focus. The increase in standardised testing, such as National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the potential increase in funding or recognition attached to successful testing scores, narrows the focus of administrators to these aspects of the curriculum over other subject areas.

Irving and Malik (2005) argue that the increase in the language of responsibility and push towards economic participation as a basis from which to draw social worth, consequently contributes to the

marginalisation of those whose work does not fit into the mainstream interpretation of what constitutes work. Indeed, 'beneath the glowing picture of choice, opportunity and economic rewards lies a neoliberal individualist conception, which belies the notion of social belonging or collective rights' (Irving & Malik 2005, p. 2). Individuals are viewed as being responsible for their failures, achievements or successes, within a meritocratic ideology. Indeed, the use of terminology such as 'at risk' to describe a group te Riele (2006) argues is based on a false dichotomy between 'a problematic minority and a "normal" majority' (p. 141), focusing 'attention to what is wrong with youth rather than what is wrong with schooling' (p. 129). In an Indigenous context te Riele's argument can be taken one step further; in this case the small number of youth are interpreted in policy documents as being the whole Indigenous youth population.

Here we begin to see the production of the view of the disengaged youth who can only be turned around with support and high expectations. Young people and the problem begin to be defined by low expectations and potential disengagement with the system and what it can offer, therefore highlighting the need for re-engagement through the setting of high expectations as an offered solution, or indeed, the only solution. This opens up a space for youth workers and youth organisations to promote themselves as the neutral, youth-focused agents that have the potential to re-engage the young person, as these youth will not listen to those who in the past may have held low expectations of them, such as school teachers or family and community members. Whilst educators, families and communities have been enlisted as 'interested' parties, the voices of the young people themselves are missing. Instead youth are spoken for and about by more 'knowledgeable' people within both documents, a common occurrence in education policy (Smyth 2010).

### **From policy to implementation**

Under the banner of Indigenous schooling the government develops and funds initiatives that it believes will achieve its stated policy objectives. I now turn my attention to these initiatives and the youth work field with the purpose of demonstrating that it is the youth work field as well, and not policy makers alone, that maintains the emphasis on both the problem and solution resting with the young person. I draw on one government initiative and one of the programs it funds and examine texts relevant to both. I argue that as we track the pathway from policy to practice we see the assumptions and rationalities already presented in this chapter become further embedded in practice and accepted without critique. Furthermore I demonstrate how the discourse of



disengagement is appropriated to support a particular approach to youth work as well as to highlight the need for the services each organisation provides to access or retain funding to do so.

Whilst the two examples I draw on below are not necessarily supported by the same funding stream as the *BECA* program I choose them to provide context to the space in which the *BECA* program operates. This section includes one government initiative – the Sporting Chance Program – and one youth program delivered by a youth organisation – *the Clontarff Foundation* – an organisation focused on delivering programs to Indigenous youth. I choose this example for the following reasons. It is a national program delivered by a national organisation, although the *Clontarff Foundation* has academies which are locally based across the country. Like the *BECA* program, the *Clontarff Foundation* utilises sport as a vehicle for engagement and delivery, although the *BECA* program does not solely rely on sport whereas the *Clontarff Foundation* does. Both the *Clontarff Foundation* and the *BECA* program operate on the principle of reward for adherence to rules (e.g. attendance and behaviour at school) and both programs are driven by the underlying goal of developing aspirations and pathways to further education and employment.

### **The Sporting Chance Initiative**

The Sporting Chance Initiative is ‘an Australian Government initiative that uses sport and recreation as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schooling to encourage positive educational outcomes’ (DEEWR 2012). A review of the Sporting Chance Program states that

outcomes may include an increase in school attendance, strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling, improved achievement in learning, increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and greater parental and community involvement with the school and students’ schooling.

(Lonsdale et al. 2011, p. 4)

It is these outcomes that direct the initiative’s selection and funding of programs as well as the evaluation and determination of success, therefore organisations applying for funding must prove their ability to achieve one or more of these outcomes.

The above excerpt highlights the change in recent decades in how public services are managed. Merton (2010) describes the current approach to managing public services, and more specifically youth work, as being driven by the adoption of a neoliberal agenda and the consequences of the move to adopt a business culture model. This, Merton argues, is the current policy climate that

requires youth workers and youth work organisations to ‘analyse the interests of stakeholders, develop partnerships with other service suppliers and create networks so that the expectations of all stakeholders for efficient and effective provision can be met’ (Merton 2010, p. 93). As a consequence, Bunyan and Ord (2012) suggest two major changes have occurred in the youth work field: the introduction of private sector management practices to the public sector and the introduction of competition, which leads to the ‘marketisation’ of services. This has led to an overall shift towards a model embedded in the ‘three E’s’ of economy, efficiency and effectiveness’ (Farnham & Horton 1996 in Bunyan & Ord 2012, p. 21), a model which allows for assessment through performance indicators, measureable predominantly by quantitative indicators.

Youth work is increasingly made measurable by the state, with standards developed and aligned to outcomes, behaviours, knowledge and understanding, and which are in conflict with what is primarily an improvised practice. For organisations to market their services and compete with each other, they need to utilise the language of the policy maker to meet the criteria for funding and to increase their chances of being funded. This makes it difficult for youth workers to take a critical stance whilst constantly aware of the surveillance applied to themselves and the young people they work with (de St Croix 2010). Making the situation even more frustrating is that the focus on measurable targets has been argued to have little relationship to the events taking place on the ground (Fraser 2008).

According to the Sporting Chance Program Fact Sheet (DEET 2011), many Academies (i.e. the organisations that have successfully received funding refer to themselves as Academies) offer

innovative and high quality sports-focused learning and development opportunities to develop leadership skills, enhance education and career opportunities, improve health and well being of learners including self-esteem and confidence, and promote and support positive learning experiences that foster success.

(DEET 2011, p. 1)

Here these programs don’t just offer an activity, they offer an opportunity. Indeed, these opportunities are most of the time delivered within structured program settings. Whilst overarching policy documents such as the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* refer to the ‘development of agreed educational strategies for meeting the different education needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ here the agreed educational strategies have now become ‘innovative’ and ‘high-quality development opportunities’. This is the language of service

provision and choice creeping in. Young Aboriginal students are now not provided support to ensure their education needs are met, instead they are offered additional opportunities and services.

Ord (2012) critiques the assumed linear and rational relationship that exists between inputs and outputs found in youth program planning, arguing that this assumption implies that the more conversations a youth worker has, the more interventions made, the greater the number of positive outcomes that will be achieved; likewise the more activities undertaken the better. Consequently what occurs is that youth work is then driven by the policy preoccupation with an overly simplistic view and assumption that it's about young people participating in 'positive activities', without any acknowledgement that it's not the activity itself that will lead to developmental outcomes, but rather the facilitation that accompanies those activities that is key (Davies 2012). The assumptions outlined in the previous sections are carried through to the implementation of a policy, making their way into youth program rhetoric, situating the problem with the individual young person whilst ignoring the relevance and impact of associated historical and social factors at play and placing both the problem and solution solely with the individual. I continue to explore this point by now focusing on one youth organisation, *the Clontarff Foundation*.

### **Influencing program practice**

Mosse (2005) suggests that project documentations are 'statements of policy' which involve a 'special kind of writing that, while preserving the appearance of technical planning, accomplish the social tasks of legitimation, persuasion and enrolment, become richly encoded with institutional and individual interests and ambitions and optimisms' (p. 21). They are one moment in the policy processes that 'reveal the social life of a policy text' (p. 21). Indeed project design, Mosse (2005) argues, is:

the art, first, of making a convincing argument and developing a causal model (relating inputs, outputs and impacts) oriented upwards to justify the allocation of resources by validating incompatible interests, for example those of national governments, implementing agencies, collaborating NGOs, research institutions or donor adviser and different hues .

(Mosse 2005, p. 15)

To achieve this, projects need to demonstrate enrolment, therefore seemingly accommodating the needs of all involved. Projects need to be persuasive by claiming big effects. They also need to be innovating and replicable as well as purely technical so they can be seen as without political or institutional interests. Finally, projects have to be 'predictive models [in] which the elements are systematically and causally related' (Mosse 2005, p. 37). In the previous section I outline how policy

assumptions, interests and priorities become naturalised as problems. Now I will draw on the program narrative of one program to describe and provide context and reveal what Mosse (2005) refers to as 'the social life of a policy text'.

### **The Clontarff Foundation**

The *Clontarff Foundation* is one program that has continually received funding through the Sporting Chance Initiative and is frequently presented as a successful program within the overall initiative. The *Clontarff Foundation* website states that the not-for-profit organisation 'exists to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men and by doing so equips them to participate meaningfully in society' (Clontarff Foundation 2014).

Opened in 2000 and starting with 25 boys in its program, it has now grown to 'cater' for about 3,000 boys in 59 schools across the country. The Foundation delivers its programs through a network of football academies which have been established in partnership with local schools.

The Foundation believes that failure to experience achievement when young, coupled with a position of under-privilege can lead to alienation, anger and more serious consequences. As a prelude to tackling these and other issues, participants are first provided with an opportunity to succeed and in turn raise their self-esteem ... Our Academies provide an important school-engagement mechanism for many at-risk students who would otherwise not attend or have low school attendance ... Academy activities are planned within the focus area of education, leadership, employment, healthy lifestyles, life skills and football. In order to remain in the programme, participants must continue to work at school and embrace the objectives of the Foundation ... With these mechanisms in place year-to-year retention is not less than 90% and school attendance rates are greater than 80%. In areas where Clontarff exists there has been evidence of reduced crime rates in the community.

(Clontarff Foundation 2014)

Here we begin to see the labelling of 'at risk students', which in this case are constructed in terms of poor attendance at school and its consequences. The 'evidence' provided in relation to school attendance within the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan* is taken up without critique, even though the same Action Plan admitted that, to date, evidence has been lacking due to the difficulty of collecting relevant data. Regardless, the organisation makes a connection between low school attendance and the assumed causes and outcomes of the decision to not attend school. This moves beyond the stating of the problem and preferred solution to the promotion of the organisation's understanding and expertise to solve the problem. In this program the 'input' is

attendance in the program, the output is experience of achievement in sport and the expected outcomes are an increase in self-esteem for the individual and improved social outcomes for the community. This in turn provides an 'important school-engagement mechanism', on the basis of the assumption that a positive experience in the youth program will lead to an increase in self-esteem, which in turn will influence engagement with the school.

Applying Mosse's (2005) criteria for successful project design in a development context, we can see that the *Clontarff Foundation* meets them all. The program demonstrates 'enrolment' by presenting itself as serving the needs of all involved. For the young people, this is to experience achievement and consequently increase their self-esteem; for the schools it is the need to get young people to attend; for the policy makers it is the need to meet the indicator of school attendance which has been set as a policy and program objective and identified as an indicator of success. The project design is persuasive through claiming big effects, in this case, claiming its program to be an 'important school-engagement mechanism', when in fact it is a youth program that requires school attendance as a basis for access. Utilising sport and sport leadership frameworks allows the program to present itself as being innovative, technical and replicable. However it could be argued with government's focus on indicators of success, this model of attending a youth program based on meeting minimum school attendance criteria offers predictable outcomes which are systematically and causally related.

Speaking within an international development context Mosse (2005) suggests that:

the development policy models through which resources and political support are so successfully mobilised are rarely those best suited to understanding the social and historical context of development action. Indeed standard intervention models and project cycles are designed to take out the history, to exclude wider economic and political analysis, and to isolate project action from 'the continuous flow of social life'.

(Long 2001, p. 32 in Mosse 2005, p. 47)

The same point can be made for youth development policy models situated within the Indigenous education space, an argument I outline in subsequent chapters.

### **Developing the *BECA* program narrative**

In turning my attention to the project planning stage of the *BECA* program I outline the project narrative as established through the development phase. I describe the process of project design to reveal the 'social life of a policy text'; how knowledge was constructed, how problems were analysed

and the solutions that resulted. My objective is to provide a basis from which to highlight the contradictory nature of such policies and approaches which are incompatible with the social, local and historical context in which the program is situated.

When the three youth workers first began their roles in late 2011, specifically working on the *BECA* program, they were thrown in at the deep end. Two groups had been scheduled to arrive within the first month of them starting in their new role. There had been little if any logistical hand over from the previous youth workers working on the program, and little saved in documentation to give the new youth workers an indication of how the previous two camps had progressed. I was not in attendance at these two camps, indeed at the time I was worried as to whether my fieldwork would continue: my phone calls and emails to the youth workers were not being returned and knowing they were in the middle of a busy period of work I did not want to be any extra burden on what I already knew would be a busy and stressful time for them.

The summer holidays passed before I received any returned communication. When that contact occurred they showed the same enthusiasm for the research as they did when we had spoken before the two camps in the previous year. I did not press them to find out why there was no returned communication over the past couple months, content to be back on track and with the support to conduct fieldwork throughout the year. Since the last camp in November the youth workers had negotiated a six-month gap between the last camp for 2011 and the first camp for 2012<sup>22</sup>. This time was negotiated with both their manager and the funding providers of the program, as it was felt this time was needed to develop and plan for the program, something that they felt had not been done previously. For the next five months whilst the planning process took place I made regular visits to the city and spent time with Sarah, Tanya and Chris whilst they went through this process.

Interestingly the youth workers, all Indigenous but without any background or experience in youth work, unintentionally began to develop a youth program based on the principles of what Coburn and Wallace (2011) term functional youth work. Coburn and Wallace's typology of youth work posits that functional youth work is defined 'by its explicit socialising of young people to meet preconceived norms' (p. 13). Indeed, the government agency funding the *BECA* program was

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<sup>22</sup> The guidelines provided by the program funders were limited, with only a target number of young people to attend the program stated. How this would be achieved in terms of specific format and content of each camp, as well which schools or young people should be approached to be involved was left up to the Inspiring Youth Foundation, as the funders felt the organisation was best-placed to make these decisions. The only other stipulation was that the program be offered as a reward.

specifically doing so to 'engage' young Aboriginal people to stay in school and start thinking about post-secondary study and jobs or careers beyond. From the funder's perspective the norm here is that young people, at the age targeted by this program, should be attending school regularly. They also should have begun to think about and plan towards their future, in particular employment and further education, as this is what the career development literature states should be occurring at this stage if the desired outcomes of employment and career pathways are to be realised. Indeed, the funders had asked that the program support the young people attending to develop career plans, and that these career plans be collected and tracked by the youth workers.

During this time the youth workers had regular meetings and discussions to identify the exact purpose, aim and objectives of the *BECA* program. With limited direction from either management or funding providers beyond the above mentioned guidance, the creation and establishment of program goals and objectives was left up to the youth program team. With limited guidance and no funding allocated for the youth workers to meet the young people they would be delivering their program to, the three were left to develop their own objectives based on commonly held assumptions. Whilst the youth workers were aware throughout the planning process that they were developing a program based on assumptions, they felt they had no other option left to them, particularly if they were going to be ready to deliver a one-week youth camp by June.

The decision made by the youth workers in the end was that the program would focus on six objectives:

- Students would be inspired to identify, strive for and achieve their own goals through attendance at the camps.
- Students would increase their knowledge of career opportunities and pathways.
- Students would increase their understanding of their personal aspirations.
- Students would increase their awareness and understanding of healthy lifestyle choices.
- Students would increase their understanding of how to be an active member of a team.
- Students' confidence and self-esteem would increase overall as a result of attending the program.

It could be argued that the objectives the youth workers had identified demonstrated their own norms, which had been established through their own experiences and the experiences of those they had witnessed in their communities. They were also influenced by broader societal norms which are rarely questioned and are situated firmly within the autonomy and agency of the

individual rather than viewed in the context of the socio-cultural and political contexts that drive them.

### **Adopting a functional model**

A key characteristic of youth work that is consistent with a functional model is the focus on individual development and diversion from 'risk' behaviours, such as risk-taking with drugs, or antisocial behaviour. Also, functional models of youth work specifically target those young people identified as being at risk or disadvantaged. In this case study the 'risk' behaviour was the dropping out of school, the non-continuation of further study beyond secondary school and the possibility of unemployment. In this context youth work organisations and the youth workers within them develop programs and initiatives that are aimed at providing the young people who attend them a skills set or given knowledge. These skills or knowledge then align with the program's aims and objectives to address these 'problems'.

The consequence of such an approach is that a youth program based on a functional model is generally developed and delivered by program facilitators such as youth workers, coaches or tutors. Its content is therefore transmitted to the young people attending the program with limited choice or influence on its development and delivery. With the objectives established, even if with trepidation by the youth workers, they went about building a one-week program that they felt would provide the best opportunities for the programs objectives to be achieved.

To achieve their stated program objectives the youth workers adopted workshop approaches that are regularly found in equivalent youth initiatives. Elite athletes and prominent Indigenous Australians in the arts or media sectors were brought in to talk to the young people attending the camp about their personal journey and how they got to where they are now. This was used as a way to also influence the young people to think about their current and future goals and aspirations and how to plan for them. Career-based visits were organised to large corporate organisations who would give the young people guided tours of their offices and facilities and make a presentation to the group about the employment programs they offer specifically to young Indigenous people. Along with this, visits were also made to smaller community-based organisations with the same reasoning, but also the additional purpose of promoting cultural knowledge and meeting more Indigenous people whilst in their workplace.



Functional youth work is often delivered utilising predetermined programs over a fixed time frame. This then leads to a preoccupation with an overly simplistic view and assumption that it's about young people participating in 'positive activities', without any acknowledgement that it's not the activity itself that will lead to developmental outcomes, but rather the nature of interpersonal relations that accompanies those activities that should become the key issue (Davies 2012). In the case of the *BECA* program the assumption was that the more presentations one has with an inspiring individual the more inspired they will be to identify and strive towards aspirations of their own. Or the more information someone has about different jobs and careers the more able they will be to identify goals and interests for themselves in areas of study and employment and have the ability to access those opportunities. What is missing in this approach is an appreciation of the 'quality' of the conversations or activities. Indeed the appropriateness and 'timeliness' of the interventions also cannot be accounted for when adopting such a mechanistic model. The camps were scheduled to fit in with available slots where the accommodation facilities were free for use. Additionally, schools had to schedule the availability of students to attend camps based around other school, staff and student commitments.

As the time neared for the first camp a timetable of activities began to be constructed. The youth workers, with little experience in developing and delivering youth programs or education programs to young people, or indeed much experience in standing up in front of a group and leading an activity, overcame what they saw as a weakness by developing partnerships with organisations that had the required expertise. For example a connection was established with a national drama company to deliver drama sessions at the camp. This session was usually scheduled as the first activity of the camp with the dual purpose of providing a fun icebreaker activity to begin the camp and to push individuals out of their comfort zone. The youth workers felt that this activity would provide a casual environment for the group and the youth workers to get to know each other as well as influence self-confidence through completing the activity. Sport-based sessions were also included throughout the week to provide an environment that develops teamwork. One camp even included a trapeze class as a way to demonstrate to the young people their ability to overcome fears and achieve the unexpected.

The first camp also saw the scheduling of visits to local Indigenous-run organisations such as the local radio station as well as a tour of the city area. Some of the camps also attended a session called the Young Mob Leaders course which specifically worked on developing general communication skills as well as cultural knowledge. The young people had a chance to demonstrate

their public speaking skills by completing an acknowledgement to country in front of the rest of the group<sup>23</sup>.

There was a cooking session delivered by a local café owner using the barbecues on the residential campus. The purpose of the cooking sessions was twofold: to promote the importance of healthy eating amongst young Aboriginal people and to show young people how to prepare a few meals. The session would begin with a personal introduction from the facilitator running the session, who spoke about his heritage and background as well as how he got involved in the hospitality business and subsequently ended up developing this cooking program for young Indigenous kids. He would speak about his motivation to establish the program and the importance of it, in light of the poor health outcomes experienced by many Aboriginal people and in particular in comparison to non-Indigenous people. He then brought in various types of food produce that would be common to the diets of some Aboriginal people or communities, such as kangaroo meat, and locally produced preserves and sauces as a base for the recipes he was making.

Other informal sessions, such as art sessions, also had a cultural element woven through them. One session developed by the youth workers was named *I am Deadly*. During the *I am Deadly* session students were asked to paint an image which explains why they are deadly. The finished artworks of many of the young people included images of the Aboriginal flag, or the red, black and yellow colours presented in the flag. Others included hand prints in these colours, the hand prints representing a common symbol found in Aboriginal paintings or design.

Cultural knowledge transmission occurred in both formal and informal ways throughout the camps. The young people were regularly referred to as being young and deadly. The Indigenous youth workers and other Indigenous facilitators regularly told the young people *'You're black and deadly'* *'You can do whatever you want to do'* *'Don't let anything stand in your way'*. The notion of shame was brought up at the beginning of the camp, with one of the camp rules being 'no shame'. Shame, a prominent cultural theme, incorporates notions of embarrassment, shyness and respect. Indeed, it has been argued that 'notions of shame and shyness have a powerful impact on children's willingness to attend school, but it also affects their degree of participation and engagement' (Schwab 2001, p. 253). Students were told at the beginning of the camp that there would be no

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<sup>23</sup> An acknowledgement to country is a short statement that is made at the beginning of a public meeting or function as a way to show respect for Aboriginal culture and heritage as well as the ongoing relationship with the traditional custodians of the land on which the event is taking place.

shame, therefore no opportunity for them to opt out of participating in an activity out of shyness or embarrassment.

As these young people were from regional or remote communities, time was allocated to take them to see some of the tourist sites with the idea being that they become aware 'of what's out there' beyond their own communities. Finally, to achieve the objective of providing educational and employment advice and support, the program also included visits to some education colleges where the young people could sit and receive presentations about courses and pathways available to them if they chose a career in a specific trade such as a beautician or a carpenter or electrician. Also the group was scheduled to visit some large multinational corporations in the hospitality, tourism and banking sectors where they would receive a tour of the facilities as well a talk about Indigenous employment pathways within each organisation. How and why specific corporations were chosen to visit will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The *BECA* program at the development phase was strongly influenced by the assumptions found across policy and program discourse relating to young Indigenous people: the young person at risk of dropping out of the mainstream schooling system; the young person who needs to participate in some positive activities where there is a chance to experience achievement; the young person in need of motivation to raise their aspirations and expectations; the young person in need of role models to look up to; and the young person in need of information, support and guidance to achieve their future education and employment potential.

In the next chapter I shift my attention to the young people themselves, to describe the social and local context within which they and consequently this program are situated. Drawing on interviews, Goal Maps and observations I argue that the policy assumptions, interests and priorities that become naturalised as problems, as well as the resulting solutions that become a basis for program initiatives and designs, bear little resemblance to the diverse background and lived experiences of the young people that attended this program.



## Chapter Four

### The 'disengaged' youth

In the previous chapter I critically examined the discourses found throughout Aboriginal youth policy and youth work and argued that there is a simplistic view of young Aboriginal people as disengaged and unmotivated when it comes to educational and economic opportunities. I followed the discourse from policy to practice by examining the texts found in the relevant policy and program documents to provide context to the field that the *BECA* program is situated in and to describe the influences on program design and the practice of youth work as a whole.

In this chapter I shift my attention from policies and programs to the young people themselves, to explore the social and local context within which this program is situated. Mosse (2005), through his research into international development and aid projects, concluded that:

standard intervention models and project cycles are designed to take out history, to exclude wider economic and political analysis, and to isolate project action from 'the continuous flow of social life' (Long 2001, p. 32). They erect (conceptual) boundaries around projects and communities and demand the continuous production of dichotomies, for example, between insiders (the locals) and outsiders (the project), as well as a discontinuity between the past and the present and future.

(Mosse 2005, p. 47)

Drawing on interviews, Goal Maps and observations I argue that the policy assumptions, interests and priorities that become naturalised as problems by policy makers and youth work organisations and the subsequent solutions put forward by both are not those best suited for the young people they are trying to affect.

I begin by introducing the four communities where the young people who attended the *BECA* program live and attend school: Farming Town, Ocean Town, Mining Town and Dusty Town. I provide context by drawing on my own observations whilst visiting these communities and the schools as well as on discussions with the young people and staff of each school. Due to the nature of the fieldwork, both in geographical scope as well as it being situated predominantly with the youth organisation, access, time and resources meant that interviews with the young people's parents or carers were not conducted. The purpose of this section is for descriptive scene-setting, a written account of each community which focuses on particular settings relevant to this study that

provides a brief overview of the social structures of each community as interpreted by myself from my brief visits as well as accounts by individuals who live there and are research participants.

In the second section of this chapter I reflect on the young people's response to questions about their future and aspirations. I identify, describe and explain similarities and differences in how the young people in this study present their imagined futures and aspirations in relation to the current literature and policy discourse. I explore whether these presented identities displace stereotypes customarily ascribed to young Aboriginal people.

## **The communities**

It was not until the year following my initial fieldwork with the youth program that I had the opportunity to visit the young people in each of their home communities, usually between six to seven months after each group attended their set camp week. The following overviews of each community are drawn from my impressions of each town as well as from the young people's responses in interviews during these visits. I also draw on additional interviews with the teaching staff both at the camps and during the follow-up visits, including with staff that did not attend the camps but work closely with the groups. The purpose of this section beyond descriptive scene setting is to provide a brief overview of the social structure of each town as well as context to the interpretation of the Goal Maps.

### **Farming Town**

The main street of Farming Town is typical of most mid-size towns in New South Wales. Upon my arrival at Farming Town, I stopped at the local Tourist Office – situated in an old brick house, a style common to the area, which is set among beautiful gardens situated on the outskirts of town – to locate a street map. I made my way down Farming Town's Main Road; this wide road was lined with shops, cafés, supermarkets, hotels and restaurants, some of which are recognisable multinational companies whilst others are local family-owned businesses. The main street by late afternoon was still full of activity with people moving in and out between the shops, offices and cafés that line the street. Each side as well as the centre of the wide main street is allocated to parking spots that quickly fill during the morning and afternoon peak hours.

The café I stepped into had a steady flow of people sitting inside as well as out, dining at the tables set up on the footpath. Before I made my way to my accommodation, I headed to the local

Woolworths supermarket for some supplies and waited in the queues common with the late afternoon rush hour. Having settled in my room, that evening I walked across the road to an Italian restaurant, one of a number on the main street. I was told that the food is good and the atmosphere lively and sociable. Indeed, when I got there the restaurant was lively for a mid-week evening with most tables full.

A general observation I made that first day as I went about my errands is that the town's population of around 25,000 people is culturally diverse. Statistical census data highlights that Farming Town has an Indigenous population almost double the statistical percentage of NSW and Australia. Indeed, it is well known for its diverse population as it has seen a steady flow of migrant populations many of which arrived, established and worked in the surrounding orchards and vineyards. Farming Town began to see a small immigrant population emerge when construction workers moved to the area, many of them with the aim of securing irrigation farms. The end of the First World War also saw many ex-soldiers move to the area and settle on irrigation farms as part of a government-sponsored program. Today the city is presented as cosmopolitan and multicultural, known for its food, wine and fresh produce.

The next morning I headed to Farming Town School to meet with the young people and teachers who attended the camp. The school was a four-minute drive from the main street or a 20-minute walk. I drove over to the school and tried to find a park. Some students arrived at school on foot, although many were dropped off by car. Within 15 minutes the morning rush was over and all students made their way inside the school building. The school building I entered was relatively new and the school grounds were green with lots of space for students to sit, play games or just hang out. During breaks most of the students hang in groups around the cement quadrangle that connects all the separate buildings, rather than on the grass areas that surround the outer sides of the buildings. Inside, the classrooms seem fairly spacious and modern, some having recently installed updated technology.

I was met at the school reception by Steve, one of the teachers who attended the camp. As we were walking around the school he told me their enrolment numbers have gone down by close to 80 students over the past three years, so space is no longer an issue, indeed there are plenty of rooms that are empty which in the past would have been filled. Whilst walking through the school, Steve explained the reason for the decrease in student numbers:

*Steve: Our school's probably in the last five or six years suffered a major decline. We have two state schools in town, we're seen to be the school not to go to, whereas the other schools seem to be the richer schools.*

The third school in Farming Town is an independent Catholic school. Indeed, two of the young girls who attended the camp the previous year I was told are no longer at Farming Town School, one having switched to the 'better school' to do her final Higher School Certificate (HSC) year and the other having taken up an Indigenous-targeted scholarship at a boarding school in the city. Some teachers told me of the effect they think this has, as it tends to be the students doing well at school who leave, so the remaining students lose achieving peers and role models.

Farming Town School is a rural school with roughly 480 students, 14 per cent of whom identify as Indigenous. It is also what the NSW Department of Education system calls a priority school, meaning the school is both in a lower socioeconomic area, as well as having many students enrolled who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However the group of young people who attended the camp come from diverse backgrounds as Steve explained.

*Steve: In terms of their background, there's a mixture, some of them come from split homes and live with another relation, a few are from the mission, some of their families where both people have got jobs, what I would describe as middle class people, quite a few from a split background, that don't have a mum and dad at home. As far as the range of abilities, I'd say the majority of them are in the lower half. Some have got learning difficulties, so some of them reading, writing expressing yourself aren't something that would come easy to them, some don't have them, but there are quite a few in the group who would struggle big time. So any activity that would involve writing a line, even some of the older ones, is pretty tough for them.*

Indeed, after completing the first Goal Map activity with the group, the teachers told me that just the act of including papers and markers in the activity, whether requiring them to write text or not, would be enough to have some of the young people disengage with the activity itself. This became obvious from a few of the Goal Maps as well as comments made throughout the activity by some of the young people, in particular some of the boys who either returned close to blank Goal Maps or mentioned the activity's similarity to school work.



I organised for the youth workers to also attend this follow-up visit with me. The school allocated a room for us to all meet in and most of the young people that attended the program came to visit myself and the youth workers that day. There were four boys that did not show up: they were the four Year 11 boys that did not participate in any of the activities during the camp itself, choosing to sit on the sidelines and watch for most of it, in their small group. Nevertheless the majority of the junior high school students were there, as were many of the young people from Years 9 and 10. The older Year 12 students had now left and were in employment in the local community, one at a bank, the other as an apprentice. Another had left for Sydney to play professional Rugby League. But of those that had shown up most seem excited to be seeing Sarah, Tanya and Chris again.

That afternoon, once I had spoken with the students, two of the teachers showed me around the school campus. We walked past the murals painted by the Aboriginal students as part of a school project which I am told depicts cultural themes. We also got to see the Indigenous Student Support Room which is where the Aboriginal Student Support Officer works and from where programs and projects specifically targeting Aboriginal students are run. The two teachers who work closely with the Aboriginal students in the school showed me around the room. They talked about the various programs, with an obvious enthusiasm and passion, wondering which if any of these programs would be the one to engage the young student that is otherwise struggling.

The school has access to SIPS (Schools in Partnership) funding, and is therefore also referred to as a SIPS school. It is through this funding that Farming Town School was able to develop a position they call the Head of Indigenous Programs that oversees and develops the targeted programs run by the school. However, as with most government funding, it is short term and therefore discussion around approaches to spending the funding occur along the lines of what is the best way to get the funding to stretch for as long as possible and what programs would be the most effective considering the ever-changing funding environment and limited resources available.

Apart from this funding stream, the staff of Farming Town School are left to their own devices to source funding, resources and opportunities for their Indigenous students or for their own continuing professional development. As Steve explained to me, he had been requesting for the past five years to attend the annual Indigenous education conference, however he had never been able to get there till that year due to lack of funding. He spoke of his frustration hearing private school principals and staff talk about the difficulties they encounter with supporting their Indigenous students, sometimes only a small handful of students within the school numbering three or four, yet

Steve works at a school with an Indigenous student population of over 60 students. He has been struggling to get funding for a number of years to attend this same conference.

He explained how he went about accessing the BECA program opportunity for the Indigenous students at his school and his motivations behind having the young people attend.

*Steve: I just thought one day, instead of just doing what we always do, I knew there was heaps of things out there, just got to go and track them, so I organised some appointments with the BECA program and the mentoring ... but lucky enough they had places in the camp which is quite good and that's how we got onto part of this program, so I suppose in terms of where I'm looking at going overall is motivation for some of the kids. I mean some of them don't see much past Farming Town, I mean some have got wider goals but some of them just seem to be lacking any direction. I mean we just wanted to get some motivation, I mean there are things out there for you to do, you don't have to stay in Farming Town doing what you've always done, so that's what I was hoping to achieve out of this week.*

## **Ocean Town**

Ocean Town has the feel of a seaside holiday destination surrounded by beaches and national parks. The local population is just under 4,000 people with the Indigenous population of the town slightly higher than the NSW and national percentage. The small 'Main Street', no more than two blocks in length and where the shops and food outlets are located, is the road across from the beach. Ocean Town and the surrounding area see peaks and troughs in visitors throughout the year who come to experience the region's natural attractions. Indeed, many of the young people that attended the camp from Ocean Town, I was told by one teacher, were 'outdoorsy, nature-type kids' who spend their time surfing or climbing in the local national parks. For some, their sun-bleached hair and surf-branded attire gave this away. When I visited, it was an overcast day in the middle of the week, and there were only a few local people going about their business. It seemed that apart from this spot next to the beach, the main services for the town, the supermarkets, medical clinics and the like, were scattered around the local area rather than collectively situated solely in one large main road precinct.

Ocean Town High School is in another section of the town nestled amongst greenery. The school grounds are a mixture of permanent buildings and smaller, older portable buildings. The room

where I spent most of the time and that acts as the Indigenous Student Resource Room is also housed in a small portable building with a handful of computers set up around the edges of the room. Ocean Town High School has around 1,200 students, with the Indigenous students making up 13 to 15 per cent of this student population, roughly 150 students. The Indigenous students come from the smaller communities around the Ocean Town area including the local Aboriginal mission.

As with Farming Town School, Ocean Town School is also considered a disadvantaged school and therefore also receives SIP funding, in particular funding to run programs focused on Aboriginal students. In the middle of the Indigenous Student Resource Room couches and tables are set up, as well as facilities to make tea and coffee. Four staff work in the room full-time with their roles being to provide support to Indigenous students to complete their school work as well as provide support and advocacy on behalf of the students if any concerns or problems arise within the school environment, but not necessarily related to their school work. Finally, they also provide a link between students' parents and carers and the school. However, for a range of reasons, not all Indigenous students at the school access this service; some students may not need the support the room offers while others who may benefit from its services choose not to access them. The students who attended the camp were those that accessed and therefore had some sort of relationship with the room and its staff. I was told roughly half of the students that identify as Aboriginal access the room and its resources.

The students chosen to attend the camp were selected on a reward basis: attendance at the camp was based on who the resource room staff thought deserved to go. Although some of the students had been suspended in recent times the staff felt that they had worked hard enough to be given the opportunity of attending. Stacey, the staff leader on the camp, explained: *'We thought that the benefits outweighed their (laugh) sometimes poor record'*.

My initial observations of the group during the camp led me to believe that the young people in this group as opposed to those from Farming Town seemed to be more 'engaged'. They participated in all activities from the onset and seemed happy and enthusiastic to be doing so. Also the concept of shame, a prominent cultural theme that incorporates notions of embarrassment, shyness and respect, seemed not as prevalent as with the previous group. For example the word was not used between students when asked to do something which might cause embarrassment such as speaking in front of a group, whereas I commonly heard the word throughout the week between the young people from Farming Town. These students also seemed more open to communicating with adults

they didn't know. They seemed more confident and independent, although in some ways they also seemed more naive to the bustle of city life than the previous group. A comment from Stacey supported this observation; she explained that these kids are used to running around in the bush and scuba diving and for some of them going out of the residential campus into the city during the camp would be a bit much. Indeed, for one student their attendance at the camp saw them catching a train for the first time.

Initially I observed during the camp that these students seemed to not have as many issues with literacy and numeracy as the previous group, still I would later find out that a few of these students needed support with reading and writing. In their day-to-day school life the Indigenous Student Resource Room and its staff was where they got their support. Yet what was observably different between the students with literacy needs in this group compared to those with support needs within the Farming Town group was that the Ocean Town students seemed willing and happy to get support from teachers to complete work. Nevertheless, Tony, one of the Indigenous Student Resource Room staff members, said that whilst students are happy to receive help from the room staff they do not ask for similar support from other teachers in the school. This is in contrast to the previous group who I was told and witnessed would not accept help in the form of literacy and numeracy programs being offered to them and who would choose to not attempt a piece of work rather than ask for support.

Informal conversations with the teachers and students throughout the camp suggested that there was some conflict between the Indigenous Student Resource Room staff and the rest of the school in terms of how they viewed the Aboriginal students in the school and how they thought best to support them. Both staff and students explained that some classroom teachers would complain that students were allowed to do what they wanted when they went to the Indigenous Student Resource Room. There were also comments from the students that on occasion some classroom teachers send Indigenous students down to the room for no other reason than they do not want to deal with them in their classroom when an issue arises. Indeed, it was acknowledged by the room teachers that this sometimes is the case, for example, if they know the student has had some trouble at home or had a tough day, they might tell them to sit down on the couches and make themselves a sandwich. Amanda, an Indigenous Students Resource Room staff member, provided a context for this common scenario:

*Amanda: A lot of their parents had bad experiences at school, so therefore, this is going years and years back, they have trouble coming up to school for meetings, because they're worried, they don't like the environment, they don't feel comfortable. I don't know, I found that at another school, but the same sort of thing they'd rather meet outside somewhere where it's comfortable for them and I think that's also with the kids too. I think that will trickle down generationally and I think they also have a fear of, just an institution I suppose, of being told what to do or where to go. And I think school doesn't usually reflect in their lives at home because they have a different lifestyle which is not that ... in the staffroom with us we very rarely have trouble, like they're much the same when we sat down the other night and did the answers with them and they asked us for help or whatever, because there's not that getting them to sit down, be quiet.*

The students attending from Ocean Town also seemed to be more aware of their local culture or at least more willing to talk about it, yet another difference from the Farming Town group where staff regularly mentioned either the lack of knowledge or willingness of students to talk about the local culture. For example during camp workshops the young people were asked what their language group was and totem, which they all knew. When leaving the centre to say goodbye, one student pointed out to another the kangaroo paw plant and said they had loads of them back home. When asked about it he said they used it to make spears for fishing. A few of them were referring to facilitators throughout the week as auntie and uncle as they do when back in the local community, which is an appropriate and recognised way of addressing an adult in many communities.

The young people from Ocean Town, as with Farming Town, came from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, families and homes. A small number of the young people lived on the mission close by; some lived with siblings and parents in the local surrounding communities; others were from more affluent backgrounds; and some other young people were in care but this was generally with family relations; others lived in single parent families with either the mother or father.

Unlike Farming Town School, Ocean Town School was identified by the *BECA* program and invited to participate. The reasons for the school accepting the offer to attend and participate were many, as Stacey and Tony, a young support staff worker and Indigenous ex-student of the school explained:

*Stacey: I suppose my main aim for this was for the kids to come away and experience something totally different to what they normally experience on a daily basis ... um I was hoping that there would be some session on self-esteem and confidence because I think that's one of our kids' main*

*downfalls. They're alright amongst themselves but you put them out into the bigger picture they're quite shy even though they might not come across like that ... um ... and really probably to have fun, because some of the kids just don't have this sort of thing ever, they don't go on holidays, so I think um ... for me it was to just come and have a bit of fun as a reward, four days away from school and ...*

*Tony: For them to learn a bit too as we go around see what's around here as well, it's good for the culture and that, history of [the city] and some of the stuff we've done ... Yeah that's good for them too, but it's more for them to know, there's better things out there than just down Ocean Town.*

*Stacey: Even a train ride for these kids was an experience, because one boy had never been on a train. And I would say that a lot of them have rarely been on a train before, they might have been on a train before but rarely.*

*Tony: Most Aboriginal people I've come across don't have the self-esteem that some of the kids have. There is probably two or three in that group that want to get involved and do this do that, but some of them just hide in the corner, like they don't want to put themselves out there I suppose you could say. Have a voice yeah, and it's good for these camps that they get to do some self-esteem stuff, like even talking they have trouble they get nervous, anxious and that's just talking out in front of say 10 people up there. Once you're around them and that they grow to you I suppose and you can more have a conversation with them and they start to build that bit of confidence ... you know ... that's good.*

## **Mining Town**

As the plane made its approach to land at Mining Town airport it was hard to miss the main industry currently driving the local economy. A large open cut mine sits at one end of the town. The scale and proximity of the mine to the town is striking, with the mine situated literally across the way from the Junior High School. My flight was the first to land of the three flights remaining for the Sunday afternoon. Tanya, one of the youth workers had arrived earlier in the day, having been working for the week at another program interstate. Sarah, who I also invited to the Mining Town visit, was arriving on the next flight in half an hour so I waited at the airport for her flight to land. Her flight landed and we waited at the baggage carousel along with others that she knew and who had been on the same flight. We formed a group of eight and took two taxis to our accommodation in town and planned to meet for dinner in an hour.

I found out during dinner that the group of five are part of a different youth education and career-focused program targeting Indigenous young people across the state. This program is funded by a different federal government agency to the one funding the *BECA* program. This program also utilises sport as a vehicle for engagement and athletes as role models for young people. The group was passing through Mining Town on their way to two remote communities the next day. Interestingly the objectives and approach of this group's program and those of the *BECA* program are very similar, yet neither was completely aware of the other's program. In addition to the youth workers there was a government official who accompanied the youth workers to the two remote communities, which I was told is now a common procedure to ensure the youth programs undertake their work within approved government procedures and processes.

Mining Town had a very different feel to Dusty Town, the other remote town in this research. Even on a Sunday night people, although only a small number, were out at the local club or tavern for a meal. There were people walking back and forth between home and the several accommodation options lining the main street. The town itself is large, with many of the recognisable stores and eateries found in cities and towns across Australia also found here. After eating our meal, myself, Sarah and Tanya walked back to our accommodation: there was still traffic on the street and we felt safe to do so.

There are many accommodation options in Mining Town that all fill up regularly due to the fly-in fly-out nature of employment offered by the mine. In the morning I headed down to the hotel reception to sort out some paperwork. The lady at reception checking in was also making a booking for her next visit to Mining Town in a few weeks time. She and the front desk attendant discussed availability and how it changes throughout the year. It was obvious from this discussion that this woman is a regular visitor and that her job entails both conducting work visits to Mining Town as well as using Mining Town as a base to access remote communities close by. That morning and the previous evening made me realise that mining is not the only fly-in fly-out industry visible in Mining Town; the other is the bureaucracy.

I made the short walk from my accommodation to the senior campus of Mining Town School. The main street running through the middle of the town and its footpaths are wide and open. On my way I passed a number of individuals in the recognisable dress code of the mines. Large trucks also made their way throughout the day and evening down the busy main road from the coast towards

the mine or on their way out again. Whilst the junior campus sits at one end of town, across from the mine, the senior campus is situated at the other end and predominantly in the suburb with a high Indigenous population. The campus is small, tidy looking and fairly quiet, the students seeming to go about their day with minimal fuss.

I met Sarah and Tanya at the front of the school and before we even got the chance to sign in at the school reception, the seniors that attended the camp the previous year spotted us and came up to us one by one to give us a hug and say hello. The school had organised for us to meet with the senior students in the morning and the junior students in the afternoon. The school campus was small and welcoming, it seemed to be well-resourced and the staff enjoyed working there. All the students who attended the camp last year were there and we spent some time chatting with them, catching up and having morning tea. Instead of conducting individual or small group interviews the students requested to talk as a group, as did the junior high students.

One of the staff members who attended the camp, an Indigenous community advisor, offered to drive us across to the junior campus. The drive across town took about 10 minutes, on foot it would take roughly 45 minutes to an hour. There is no transport between the two campuses. Consequently one of the main issues for the school and local community is that for many Indigenous students who live at the top of town near the senior campus, the long walk and limited public transport access to the junior campus are two of the factors influencing regular attendance.

As we turned the corner and made our way up the road to the school entrance, the school community advisor driving us looked in her rear view mirror, swore and pulled over. I was not sure why we had stopped but soon realised that we had been pulled over by the police as I saw a female police officer coming up to the driver's window. Sarah, the youth worker, turned to me and said 'here you go Helen, something you can include in your thesis, now you can see what it's really like'. The police officer asked our host where she was heading; she explained that she was on her way to work with guests, and pointed to the school, 20 metres up the road. The police officer mentioned something about registration needing to be displayed, however from what I can tell there was no reason for the car to have been pulled over.

We met with students in the large, bright and modern-looking junior campus library. Again we worked through the same research activities as a group, however whilst the majority of the students from the camp were there, a couple were missing today, either out of town, as well as one or two



that had left the school. As with the young people from the senior campus the students were welcoming, friendly and chatty.

Throughout the week-long camp there was never a time when I saw any of the young people from Mining Town not participating in an activity. Indeed, for the majority of the time their participation could be described as being with the intent to enjoy the activity and program. At other times when the activity may not have been interesting to them, they still maintained an attentive demeanour, which seemed out of acknowledgement and politeness towards the facilitator and their efforts.

The planning of the camp, the youth workers mentioned, was much easier for Mining Town than any of the other groups. The teachers accompanying the students had a parent and carer information evening and all associated logistics and communication between the school and the youth workers was efficiently undertaken, which meant that the youth workers were not overly preoccupied prior to the camp with such detail. The youth workers felt that the clearer communication between the youth workers and the school staff meant that the young people attending the program had been prepared for and understood the focus of the camp, and this was the reason for the higher levels of engagement reflected across all the sessions.

Mining Town School has been in existence in its current form since 2003 following an amalgamation of two state schools. It comprises three campuses: a junior campus, which caters for Year 7 to 10; a senior campus for Year 11 to 12 students; and a residential campus for students of both campuses who attend Mining Town School and come from the remote communities surrounding the area. The two schools that amalgamated were perceived in differing ways by the local community. One was viewed as the Indigenous school and the other as the non-Indigenous school, the academic school. The amalgamation was seen as a way to combine numbers as well as available resources.

The school, including both campuses, has close to 1,000 students, two-thirds of whom are at the junior campus. The junior campus has roughly 270 Indigenous students and the senior campus around 35 and 30 in Year 11 and 12 respectively; while these numbers tend to fluctuate, generally Indigenous students make up about a third of the student population. One of the biggest struggles for the school is to get the Indigenous students to make the transition between the junior and the senior campus. Adam and Sonya, a teacher and an Indigenous student support worker who attended the camp, explained:

*Adam: A lot of them make that transition and stumble for lack of a better word, I think they don't cope with the pressures of senior schooling, they don't cope with the pressures and the environment we have at our senior school. I'm not sure if that's because of a lack of support or ... um ... that we don't prepare them well enough in our junior school ... that's a discussion for another time ... but that's probably our biggest struggle, retainment of our students from junior to senior and then our second one is, which we've sort of been pretty successful at this year is, getting our students in Year 11 and 12 and getting them their senior certificate and getting them to either a job and further training or a job beyond Year 11 and 12. I think we've been pretty successful at that as far as I'm aware.*

*Sonya: Yeah, sort of yeah as soon as the Year 11 come over to us you just get a handful that just struggle to stay there and like Adam said, they're not coping with the work and because you know we're senior schooling, you're there to get an education and get through. A lot of them you know they like to wag classes and it sort of takes us a term to get them in their place, you know you can tell them you can't keep skipping classes because the more you skip classes or the more you stay away you just find it hard to cope with the work then because you're missing out on a lot.*

As with Farming Town and Ocean Town schools, the additional support programs at Mining Town School are dependent on extra funding, therefore many programs are generally short-lived. For example the school has what they call an assessment centre, which included a number of tutors who would attend the various classes with students to support their needs. Currently the assessment centre has three staff, however two years ago the centre totalled up to nine staff. Not all the staff are tutors; some of the staff take on community liaison roles, with their main objective being to support the students beyond their academic needs. For example, if the student is not attending school, the staff member may make a visit to the home to determine if there is a way the centre can support the student to get back into school and the classroom.

The staff at Mining Town School responsible for the selection of students to attend the *BECA* program stayed close to the suggested program funding requirements, based on engagement and attendance, as Fiona, a classroom teacher, explained.

*Fiona: We found out about the camp a couple of days before their reports came out so, once their report cards were finalised we had a look to see who had the best behaviour and their effort grades, rather than ... not so much academic achievement because from our understanding from these guys*

*down here that wasn't as important as making sure they had the right attitude ... that they were behaving themselves in class, they were putting the effort in and they had few unexplained absences. So the people who are here got in based on their behaviour, their effort and their attendance at school.*

However the staff also acknowledged that they also would have liked to see some of the students from the school that would be categorised as being disengaged attending.

*Adam: Especially our younger kids, especially our 8s, 9s and 10s, cause that's where we lose them. By the time they reach 11 and 12 it's pretty much already too late. Really our grade 8s and 9s that's where we really should be targeting with a program like this because it's at that age that they're either at that stage where if they don't start changing their attitudes it's almost too late to catch up, whereas if they come on a camp like this, say it's a grade 8 camp we're bringing away 30 Year 8 Indigenous students, they then can have a look and go well I want to do this I want to do that, well then I've got to get an education if I want to do that ... um ... maybe I'll change my attitude back at school.*

*Sonya: Like this year has been a challenge in that part of it ... and like I can just think of three boys just on the top of my head now that I reckon would have benefited from it, because they're the three that ... well actually there's probably.*

*Adam: There's probably five or six.*

*Sonya: But, they're just wagging classes, like they're at school but they're wagging classes and a couple of them are very shy and I reckon something like this to bring them here to participate in all of this probably would have provided, yeah it might of just, gave them that spark again ... Yeah, but in saying that too these kids that we've brought away with us are different from the kids that are getting disengaged.*

*Adam: Yeah*

*Sonya: If we brought those groups of kids, it probably would have been a difference. It would have taken a while for them to get motivation and that ... you know these kids are already motivated and like most of them they know the direction in life of where they want to go.*

The two mines close to Mining Town feature heavily not only on the local landscape but also in the fabric of the day-to-day lives of most of the people of the Mining Town community.

*Fiona: A lot of kids where we are look to the mine as a source of income because they do earn pretty big money working in the mines and they know a lot of people who work there and you know, most of Mining Town is sponsored by the mine, everywhere you go it's there.*

*Adam: Even within the school I think we have a very blinkered perception of the way, of where our kids can end up. There's pretty much two pathways at the moment it's either you go to uni you do higher education or you get a job at the mines, there's nothing really outside of that and that's what this has been really good about, it's exposing these kids to a large range of opportunity which they've probably never really ever considered before.*

However the mines do not form part of every community member's life. Making my way over to the junior campus in the afternoon we drove over the bridge where a small group of Aboriginal people had set up camp and sleep and live regularly. Indeed, whilst the mines link in closely with most of the community this does not occur in all areas and employment sectors.

*Renee: They also see it like probably the way I would have seen it living in Mining Town ... is that working in the bank, it's all like non-Indigenous you know, they don't have that, you know thinking that I could be in there ... and then when they come down and they see that it's like oh there's people like us working in there you know and there's hardly any [Indigenous] people working in the banks and motels and that.*

## **Dusty Town**

The last community I visited for my fieldwork was Dusty Town. The drive to Dusty Town took the best part of a day. Entering the town just past sunset, I relied on the Community Map the young people of Dusty Town had drawn for me during their time at the camp. Before making my way to my accommodation I drove the length of the town's main street to get my bearings. It took me all of 30 seconds before I was back out onto the open highway in absolute darkness heading towards the next town located 115 kilometres away.

I turned back and zigzagged my way through the four parallel streets that make up the town precinct on either side. The majority of the buildings on the main street were office buildings although it was hard to tell which buildings were in use and which ones were empty, as there was only signage for some. There is one large supermarket, a handful of petrol stations and a small number of motels situated on the main street. There is also the Cultural Centre and a Chinese restaurant. I explored the three parallel streets on either side of the main street and drove past the institutions usually found in many small towns across Australia: the local hospital, a bowls club, the swimming pool and the local primary school. There is also a sport and recreation facility which is one of the only places for the young people in the community to hang out, as there are no cinemas, cafés or other forms of entertainment or places to socialise in the town.

It was an early Thursday evening and the town was quiet. There were no people walking along the streets on their way between places, however there were groups of adults and others of younger people who were 'hanging out' on the footpath, heading nowhere and doing nothing in particular. From some groups there were loud conversations occurring which at times looked like they might turn into disagreements or arguments as the night progressed.

The next day it was raining; the weather was a mild 34 degrees considering it was the start of summer. As I drove across the town, making my way to the high school, I noticed that like the evening before the town this morning was again very quiet. I made my way to the school administrative building and checked in for the day. I got taken to the principal and assistant principal's office right across from the reception desk and this is where I waited in between talking to students and staff throughout the day.

Sally and Jenny, the two principals, spent the day finding students and staff who were part of the program to speak to me. We went through the list of students who attended the camps last year. I found out that three students have since left Dusty Town, some have moved to other regional towns, others have moved back to remote communities. One of the teaching staff had also moved away and another was on a training course for the week. It was also raining and this, they said, would impact attendance numbers at school that day. They listed between them the names of students that they had seen that day or knew were regular attendees at school and began to find these students for me to talk to.

In the office, each student of each year has their own folder with all their details; these folders sit on the shelving above the desks. The two staff explained that many of the students enrolled in Year 7 are likely not to still be at the school in four years time, such is the nature of movement of students, for various reasons, between communities. Therefore statistical reports based on student progression lack meaning as rarely are the students enrolled in Year 7 the same students once the cohort gets to Year 10.

However, the majority of the 12 students I spoke to have spent most of their lives living in Dusty Town and are also regular attendees at school. All of them remembered the camp and myself from the previous year. I spoke to them individually or in pairs and small groups. They asked me how my travel to Dusty Town went, when I got here, how long I was staying and what did I think of the town. When I told them I got there the night before some of the more outspoken students asked if I could hear the arguing from the people hanging out in the street. I said I did not. A group of young girls in particular talked about Dusty Town and how it's not safe anymore to walk through the streets of an evening by yourself, instead relying on lifts to get to and from work in the evening. However their view of Dusty Town was not all negative.

In Dusty Town, Indigenous people represent just over half (52%) of the population of 3,000 people which is over double that of the region generally (26.8%) and much higher than the national representation. Indeed, on the bus trip between arriving at the airport in the city and making their way to the residential campus, some students commented on the apparent smaller Indigenous population with one male student saying 'there are no black people walking around; oh hang on there's one, I saw one'.

One of the teachers mentioned she had found out about the program six weeks out from attending. The school had been offered an opportunity to participate in the program since another school had pulled out, due to its students not 'deserving' a reward because of lack of attendance and disruptive behaviour during the previous school term. She went on to explain that the age group that attended the camp, the Year 9 and 10 students, were targeted for many other programs, such as training programs and other career-related initiatives and they spend a lot of time out of regular school classes to attend these programs. As an example, during the previous term many of the female students had completed a Certificate I course in building and construction. However whilst many programs are offered, the scope and range of activities with an education and training focus tend to

be limited, reflecting the limited opportunities available in the local area. Therefore trade and social services such as health and education tend to make up the majority of available options.

Out of the group I discovered that the girls are regular school attendees with many interests which is why they made up the majority of the group attending the camp from Dusty Town. The school also brought along students who, in their words, needed to be re-engaged, however this made up a small number of the group. To further demonstrate the many programs offered in the local area I was told that there was also another camp on the same week, and therefore many of the students who could have come along to *BECA* program were away at another camp.

Tourism and specific Indigenous affairs and service organisations also form part of the structure of Dusty Town. Whilst employment options are limited, one positive is that closer links can be made with local businesses which the teachers say are generally very supportive and interested in providing young people with the opportunity to gain some work experience. Indeed, beyond this work experience, many of the students, the female students in particular, hold casual or part-time work which they undertake after school and on weekends.

## Goal Maps

The Goal Map activity utilised a projective technique and was adopted from a method used by Sirin (2003). The objective of this activity was to gain an understanding of how young people thought about their near future and more specifically the role of employment and education. In particular I was interested in the school to work transition period which for most of the students would occur during the next five years. In total, 94 Goal Maps were completed by both male and female students from Farming Town, Ocean Town, Mining Town and Dusty Town. The Goal Map activity was not conducted with the second group from the Northern Territory. When interpreting Goal Map responses, it is important to note that for those individuals who did not express any aspirations in a particular area, those responses must be interpreted as 'unknown' aspirations rather than 'no' aspirations. In other words, no aspirations expressed (nil response) does not equate to having no aspirations (negative response). It is possible, even likely, that a number of individuals have aspirations in a particular area, but for whatever reason did not express them in their Goal Map. Table 4.1 gives an outline of the respondents by location, gender and age.

**Table 4.1** Goal Maps Respondents

<b>Locations</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>&lt;15</b>	<b>15-16</b>	<b>&gt;16</b>
Farming Town	26%(11)	31%(16)	52%(11)	18%(11)	50%(4) <sup>+</sup>
Ocean Town	17%(7)	17%(9)	0%(0)	25%(15)	13%(1)
Mining Town	29%(12)	35%(18)	33%(7)	30%(18)	38%(3) <sup>+</sup>
Dusty Town	29%(12)	17%(9)	14%(3)	28%(17)	0%(0) <sup>+</sup>
Total	100% (42)	100%(52)	100%(21)	100%(61)	100%(8)

<sup>+</sup>Age for respondents missing (1 – Farming Town; 1 – Dusty Town; 2 – Mining Town)

Categories were developed to try and group responses from the Goal Maps activity. Content analysis was completed by transferring all responses from each of the Goal Maps into a category. For example education goals included in a Goal Map could be communicated through a quote, word or image reflecting the completion of a Higher School Certificate, or attendance at university or the undertaking of a course. In some instances a map included a number of these examples. Therefore all this detail would be interpreted as that individual having educational aspirations. Table 4.2 outlines the themes that were developed as well as an example of the types of quotes or images which make up each theme. The category headings used have been drawn from, and therefore are similar to, those found in Chang et al. (2006).



**Table 4.2** Coding Scheme for Self-Articulated Goals

Category	Examples
1. Educational Goals	“Finish YR 12” “Finish School” “Get a good education” “Stay at school and finish YR 12” “Get an apprenticeship” “going to uni” “Medicine at QCU” “I want to finish school”
2. Employment Goals	“get a job” “Have a good job” “full-time work” “Diesel fitter” “Playing NRL” “good paying Job” “I wanna be a beautician”
3. Family-related Goals	“married or in a relationship” “have my own family” “girlfriend”
4. Material/Financial Goals	“earning good money”, “buy my own new car” “be rich” “nice car” “buy a house” “Buy stuff for the house”
5. Self-Actualisation Goals	“wanna be healthy and fit” “having fun” “better” “good life ahead of me”
6. Travel and Leisure Goals	“move to a bigger city” “travel around the world” “travelling around Australia”
7. Other Goals	“help kids around the world” hang out with friends”

### Aspirations

A brief content analysis of the Goal Maps below provides an overview of the themes across the four groups and differences between location, genders and age groups. To begin with, Table 4.3 shows self-expressed aspirations by gender and age. For all categories, a higher proportion of females expressed aspirations than males. This was most pronounced for family-related goals, where more than twice the proportion of females expressed family-related aspirations than males. Another major difference in the proportion of self-expressed aspirations by gender was for travel and leisure related goals, with females approximately 50 per cent more likely than males to express aspirations

in this category. The difference was least pronounced for employment goals, with a very high proportion of both males and females expressing aspirations in this category.

There was little difference in self-expressed aspirations by gender or age for either education or occupation goals, with all groups having a high proportion of individuals expressing goals in these categories. Although 100 per cent of respondents over 16 years of age expressed occupation-related aspirations, the sample size in this category is too low to reliably draw conclusions. There was a striking difference between the younger students (<15 years) and students aged 15 to 16 years for family, material/wealth and travel/leisure related goals, with a much lower proportion of the younger individuals expressing goals in these categories. The reverse trend is apparent for educational goals, with a noticeably higher proportion of younger students expressing educational goals.

**Table 4.3** Self-Articulated Goals by Gender and Age<sup>+</sup>

<b>Themes</b>	<b>F (42)</b>	<b>M (52)</b>	<b>&lt;15 (21)</b>	<b>15-16 (61)</b>	<b>&gt;16 (8)</b>
Educational Goals	83%(35)	73%(38)	86%(18)	74%(45)	75%(6)
Employment Goals	90%(37)	88%(46)	90%(19)	87%(53)	100%(8)
Family-related Goals	32%(14)	15%(8)	0%(0)	33%(20)	13%(1)
Material /Financial Goals	37%(14)	27%(14)	14%(3)	39%(24)	25%(2)
Self-Actualisation Goals	29% (12)	2% (1)	0% (0)	21% (13)	0% (0)
Travel and Leisure Goals	61%(25)	38%(20)	24%(5)	61%(37)	50%(4)

<sup>+</sup>Age for respondents missing (1 – Farming Town; 1 – Dusty Town; 2 – Mining Town)

Table 4.4 shows self-expressed goals by location. Ocean Town showed the lowest proportion of educational related aspirations. All locations had a relatively high proportion of students expressing employment related aspirations, although there were still relatively large differences between locations. While Mining Town had the highest proportion of individuals expressing education and occupation related goals (100% for each), as well as Travel/ Leisure related goals, it had the lowest proportion of individuals expressing family or wealth/material related goals for any location. Additionally, Farming Town had a strikingly lower proportion of individuals express Travel/ Leisure related aspirations than any other location.

**Table 4.4** Self-Articulated Goals by Location

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Farming Town (27)</b>	<b>Ocean Town (16)</b>	<b>Mining Town (30)</b>	<b>Dusty Town (21)</b>
Educational Goals	70% (19)	50% (8)	100% (30)	73% (16)
Employment Goals	70% (19)	81% (13)	100% (30)	95% (21)
Family-related Goals	11% (3)	31% (5)	10% (3)	50% (11)
Material /Financial Goals	26% (7)	31% (5)	20% (6)	45% (10)
Self-Actualisation Goals	0% (0)	0% (0)	20% (6)	32% (7)
Travel and Leisure Goals	15% (4)	44% (7)	70% (21)	64% (14)

When conducting a content analysis of the Goal Maps based on tallying the types of responses included on individual Goal Maps there are two themes that emerge that are contradictory to the dominant rhetoric found in policy. Firstly, the idea that education and employment related goals are not a focus of young Aboriginal people's views of the future and secondly, that young people from remote locations are more likely as a group to not have education and employment aspirations when thinking about their future.

Literature highlights that young people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have aspirations about the future, and these aspirations include employment and education, with acceptance of the importance of education. Both of these aspirations are also represented in this study. However the contradiction here is that this common finding is represented most interestingly in the responses from the young people from the remote and very remote towns, Mining Town and Dusty Town respectively, both of which, although situated remotely, are unique from other remote towns across the country. The concerns outlined in policy and programs which continually argue for a need to promote to young people the importance of staying at school or thinking about future employment are not founded within most of this group of young people. Therefore if Aboriginal youth want to stay in school, gain further qualifications and find a job or enter into a career, yet statistically tend to not achieve these goals particularly when based in regional and remote communities, what is the cause behind this and are current policy settings accurately identifying and addressing this issue?

The four Goal Maps included in Figure 4.1 incorporate many of the themes found across all the Goal Maps. In these Goal Maps the young people mention employment and education goals. They express their ambition to have a job, and a good job at that, one that will support them with raising

children or helping family. They talk about moving away from home, yet still maintaining links to their family, or even having a family of their own and providing for that family. However it must be acknowledged that the Goal Maps in Figure 4.1, whilst they include an example of the range of responses from the groups as a whole, are not a reflection of a typical Goal Map. Not all young people responded in such a broad and holistic manner about their viewed future, rather many tended to just focus on education and employment, or family alone. Indeed the Goal Maps in Figure 4.1 come from young people from Dusty Town, a remote community. Yet it is these same young people who are represented in reports and policy documents as failing, lagging behind, disengaged and 'at risk'. These Goal Maps demonstrate that a statistical approach based on large survey methods alone can lead to over-generalisation and an essentialised view of young Aboriginal people, dismissing the experiences and social contexts in which young people's lives are lived.

- 15.
- Im indgenous.
- nearly 15
- family
- good education.
- friend.
- Work for my money
- thinking about my future.

- 5 years
- Have a Job
  - Family of your own.
  - Have car and house
  - Show right for from wrong to own family / kids
  - respect elders.
  - MOVE
  - I wanna a ~~man~~ man that Rich me
  - Love for How i Im
- 76

Now

aurj Kid brain

Facebook Married!!

Smart Vibrant

Friendly young! forever.

Finish school - get scholarship in acting.

Get grades finish yr 12

Find job qualifying for best job

61

5 years time

Be Close With my friends

Limosine

be famous

My own house

Have my own car.

be my married

get our house

77

Finish Year 12  
Play Basket ball

Strong cultural respect

Family is important

5 years time

Want to be mechanic

Keep culture strong by teaching young ones.

Travel around a bit.



Now

16 years old in December 3rd

I am Aboriginal I like to play sport, listen to music and play video games I come from Tribe called Kalkadon in QLD NT is a

5 years Time

to have a Job a family have my own house I would like to be a Ranger or a Rugby Player. To be Alive in 5 years time and be able to support my family leave



Figure 4.1 Examples of Goal Maps from Dusty Town

## Education aspirations

Taking a broad overview of the Goal Map responses the theme of education had a very strong presence in forming part of these young people's viewed future. The majority of young people expressed education goals when asked to describe what the next five years would look like for them, with the exception of the young people from Ocean Town. However whilst education-based goals were a common response they were not as frequently mentioned as employment goals. Finishing school, getting a 'good education', or obtaining qualifications were strong features of future plans across gender, age and location groups. And whilst most students, during observations at the camp, would speak about their boredom with and/or dislike of school the majority of the young people saw education as a feature of their future. In terms of the type of educational qualification aimed for, the completion of Year 12 as well as TAFE qualifications were more regularly mentioned as an educational goal than attendance at university, a finding which supports existing literature<sup>24</sup>.

This overview of educational goals only takes us so far in understanding how these young people view education and the role it has in their lives. By looking at the construction of each Goal Map we can gain some insight into how each young person views each aspect of their future they have included in it. The Goal Maps, I argue, give us a particular insight into how well thought out each goal is and the level of belief or confidence the young person has in achieving the stated aspirations that make up their viewed future.

For instance looking at Ross's Goal Map in Figure 4.2, Ross explains his life in Mining Town as being centred around school alone, to the right his future involves attending lectures at a specific university and in a particular course, medicine. Now, as in the future, education and studying in particular will take up most of Ross's time. To get into the degree he wishes to he will need to get high grades, and once he's in that course he will need to keep up a similar study load for many years. Alternatively, when exploring Tim's Goal Map, finishing school is the only goal and progression towards that goal has been split into smaller tasks such as studying hard, maintaining attendance and demonstrating good behaviour. Angela's Goal Map also outlines a pathway that includes

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<sup>24</sup> Whilst it has been shown that Indigenous students make a positive association between staying on at school and career and employment options and prospects (Arthur & David-Petro 2000; Arthur, Hughes & Wasaga 2004; Biddle 2006; Craven et al. 2005; Walker, Scrine & Shephard 2008), Indigenous students tend to aim their schooling and post-schooling aspirations at lower educational levels than non-Indigenous students. For example more Indigenous students aspired to go to TAFE over university and more felt that TAFE was a better option than did non-Indigenous students (Craven et al. 2005; James 2002).

educational milestones; however these all link in quite a strategic manner towards what is an obvious interest and skill in visual arts and design.

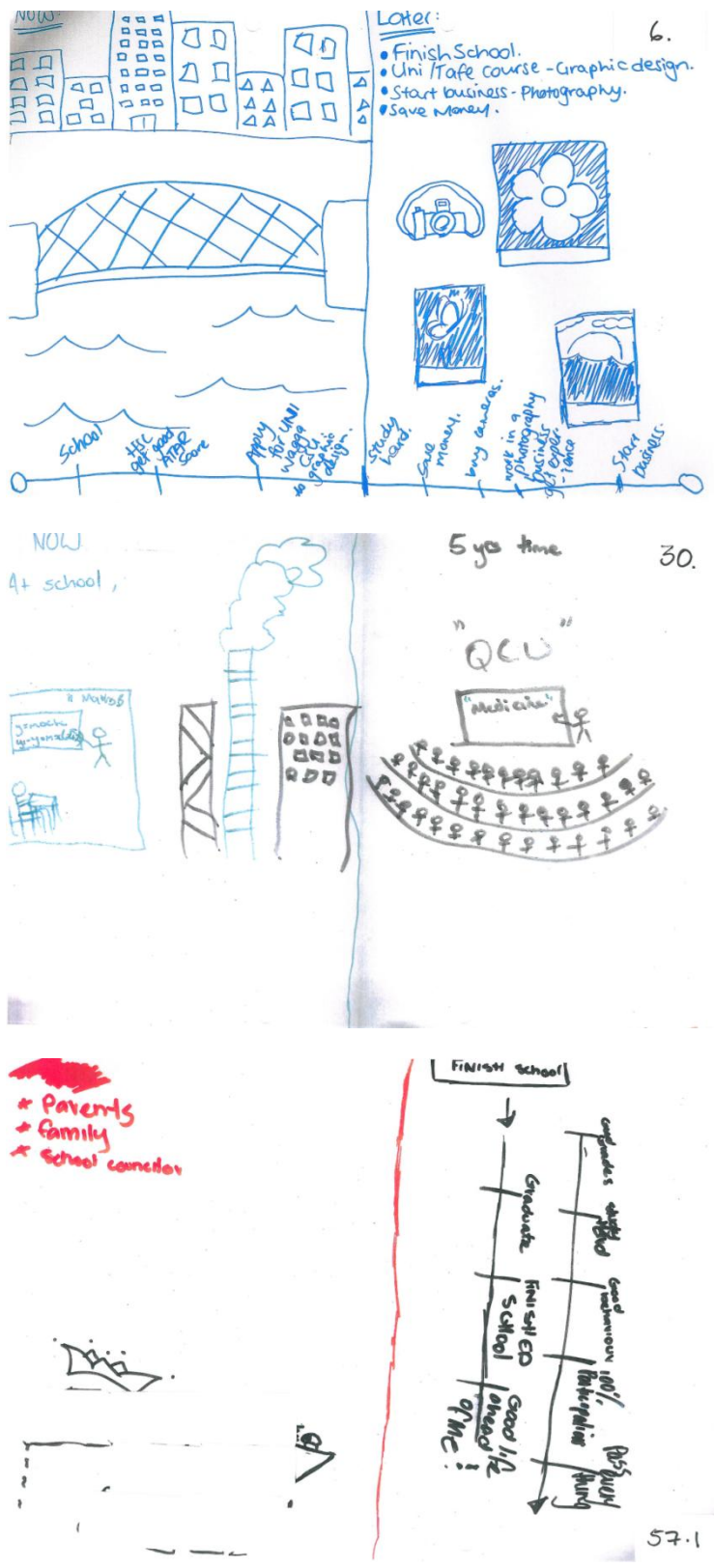


Figure 4.2 Angela’s, Ross’s and Tim’s Goal Maps (in order from top to bottom)

Unlike Ross and Angela there is no specific attachment of an educational goal to a particular interest or career in Tim's Goal Map, rather it's about making it to the end of school and a belief that the completion of high school will lead to a 'good life ahead of me'. This type of thinking reflects that found in current policy and the types of initiatives it mainly funds<sup>25</sup>, which view employment as an end in itself, never exploring the underlying motivation to work. Indeed the same limitation has been highlighted when promoting the completion of secondary schooling, focusing on economic outcomes alone and overlooking a number of other individual and social benefits associated with completion (te Riele 2011). Furthermore the importance of obtaining qualifications is acknowledged by many young people, their teachers and parents, however not necessarily for their relevance in the workplace but rather as a screening device used by employers to sort, rank and select potential employees (te Riele & Crump 2003). Whilst all three include education as part of their viewed future, how they each view education and what it can offer are quite different. Tim seems to believe in the notion of schooling and buys into the associated notion of meritocracy that accompanies it, however not including any further detail beyond a qualification providing a good life may suggest that this view of education has not been translated into concrete outcomes in the context of his own life.

For Ross and Angela, educational goals are not about education and qualifications leading to a better life as such but leading to what interests them and what they want to do in the future. Therefore it could be argued here that whilst many young people see education as part of their near future and in particular part of the school to work transition phases, the clarity with which they see this aspect of their lives differs. It also suggest that whilst their interests might change in the future, they still have the ability to think clearly and specifically about their future in regards to education and employment. Indeed, by the time I visited Mining Town six months later, Ross had changed his mind about applying for a medicine degree, applying to a law degree instead.

It has to be noted, however, that the picture painted above is not the case for all the young people, indeed there were some, although not many, young people who did not express any education aspirations or goals, and it was these young people who also had a higher likelihood of not expressing employment goals. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that there were many instances where clear employment goals were included with no mention of educational goals.

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<sup>25</sup> One of the most heavily funded programs by the current Coalition government is GenerationOne which will receive \$45 million, just under half of the \$94 million dollars allocated to Indigenous affairs policy overall. This program, as the election policy document outlines, will see 'up to 5,000 Indigenous Australians receive practical training through the GenerationOne model with a guaranteed job at the end' (The Coalition Policy for Indigenous Affairs 2013, p. 5). This model is dependent on large corporates pledging a number of specifically Indigenous-targeted jobs.



Examining education more closely and through a specific gender or locality view point, additional themes emerge. Overall there were twice as many females as males who highlighted education goals involving university. If we look at responses by location those students that came from Mining Town all mentioned education and employment aspirations. In Farming Town young females were more likely to include both education and employment goals than their male counterparts.

The responses from the young people in this study follow similar lines to the literature presented in the previous chapter. The idea of education forming part of these young people's viewed future is very strong. Finishing school, getting a 'good education', obtaining qualifications is a strong theme across gender, age and location groups. However, when we look at responses from the young people in Mining Town and Dusty Town, the two remote towns, the congruence ceases.

Interestingly in this study it is the students in the remote and very remote locations who also hold in most cases strong educational goals, particularly the young people of Mining Town. This contradicts past studies which explain the difficulty young people have of imagining a future, and particularly the limited role education plays in that future. Biddle (2006), identifying the motivators available for young people to continue with and complete secondary education, found that the biggest motivating factor was finding a non-CDEP job<sup>26</sup>, arguing that if there are limited options for employment other than CDEP there is limited motivation for Indigenous students to complete high school.

The distinction here is that Biddle's research focused on very remote communities. One of the main differentiating factors between Mining Town and Dusty Town and the remote communities that feature in Senior's (2010) or Walker, Scrine, and Shepherd's, (2008) work, which also draw out similar themes of limited or no motivation to continue with school or further education, is the very different opportunity structure that exists in Dusty Town and Mining Town. One is an administrative hub for the region and the other is in the middle of a mining boom.

I argue that large scale surveys exploring young people's aspirations and expectations for the future lead to simplistic assumptions. Broad indicators of difference are developed based on gender and location with limited ability to delve deeper into the specific context of each location as well as the institutions within and the family and community units that form the field of these young people's lives. I suggest that it is at this point that we begin to gain a clearer understanding of the influences

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<sup>26</sup> The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program was introduced in 1977 and is a community managed work program developed around job creation, income support and community development goals (Jordan 2012).

of young people's views of the future, aspirations and expectations and gain potential further insight into Ross's, Tim's and Angela's Goal Maps which I explore further in chapter seven.

### **Work aspirations**

Overall, employment goals were the most mentioned category of expressed goals as a whole when completing the Goal Maps activity. Whilst most young people mentioned the desire to 'get a job', 'have a good job', roughly half of the young people expressed a specific occupation or career. Generally both males and females identified specific occupations that would be recognised as technical or semi-skilled work, however within each group there were a small number of students who stated careers which would be classified as professional using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) (ABS 2009). The only location that went against this trend was Mining Town, with a third of the male respondents highlighting professional jobs.

Not surprisingly, and aligning with the literature, two common themes stood out amongst the employment goals of all groups. Firstly, roughly a third of males recorded becoming a professional athlete as a career goal, with the main sport identified being Rugby League, although soccer, basketball and track were also mentioned, as outlined in Figure 4.3. For many of the young people including sport based aspirations, however, there was limited information and acknowledgement of the process involved to get to the professional level they were planning to reach. Indeed, the opportunities and likelihood of any young person making their way to a level of sport that would provide them with a living are limited, as is the period of time available to compete in the sport at that level. Yet young people mentioning a goal centred on professional sport tended to fall into two groups. One group included a second field of work in their Goal Maps which they would regularly refer to 'as a backup' if the sports career did not pan out. The other group included only the one sports career goal. Not surprisingly it was the young people who were struggling in school who tended to mention a sport-based goal alone. This could be interpreted as either the young people being aware of the limited likelihood of achieving this goal (i.e. the first group) or feeling they have no other options; therefore sport becomes their only option because it is what they are good at. Mining Town had the fewest number of males aspiring to professional sporting careers but the highest number of males of any of the four groups aspiring to professional jobs.

and I go to school I would like  
 to do better. I like it at home &  
 Will like to get a job at  
 I will like to get far in soccer &  
 my playing netball.

Playing in big league soccer or be  
 a hair dresser finish school with  
 a trad behind my back.

40



Figure 4.3 Professional sport as an employment aspiration

The second theme to emerge was also based on the frequency of particular types of professions mentioned. Trade-based occupations were regularly mentioned by males in particular. When we look at employment goals overall as we did with educational goals the themes are not surprising. The popularity of sport as a preferred career for young males is commonly reported in the literature focusing on Indigenous youth (Helme et al. 2003) as well as in the Australian and international literature (Furlong & Biggart 1999; Sirin et al. 2004). The dominance of trade jobs is also a common theme found in other studies looking at Indigenous youth and aspirations. However when we look

closer at specific Goal Maps in Figure 4.4 we see the same diversity in the representation of work as we did with educational goals. For some, like Sal and Ella, work in a casual format is part of life now, indeed many of the remote and very remote town youth in this study hold casual jobs which they undertake after school and on the weekend. This highlights another contradiction or often a missing part of the picture in current policy. For some, such as Joshua, the projected pathway includes the expected markers of completing educational qualifications which it is assumed will then lead to a good job. For others future occupations are based on a specific interest or aspiration to enter a certain profession or career. In Nicole's case, outlined in Figure 4.5, it is a career as a social worker in the juvenile justice system, which she is already progressing towards by undertaking work experience with the youth courts. However many young people like Joshua, aspire to a 'good job', which in the case of Tessa incorporates at least 'good pay' but what type of job this might be has not been considered.

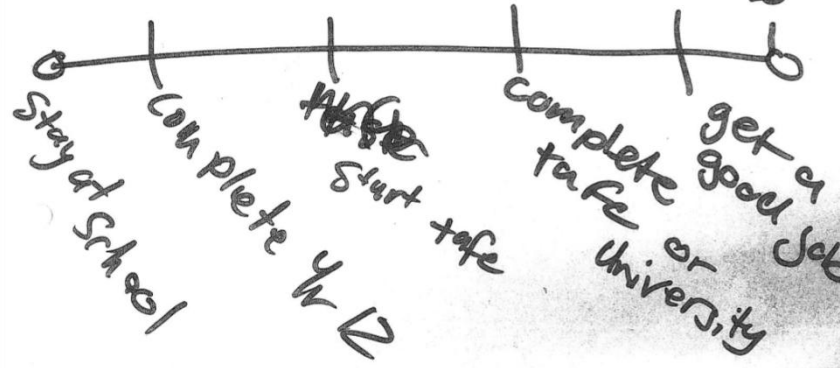
# Good Job

13.

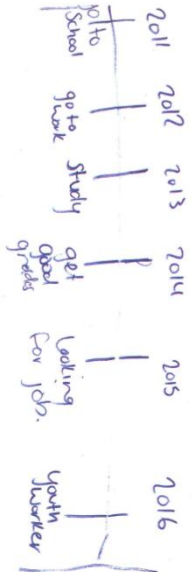
keep working

- \* I would like to have a diploma in education.
- \* Possibly be a primary school teacher or a personal banker.
- \* Study teaching at JCU?
- \* Pro skater ☺

- \* I work at ANZ bank as a school based trainee.
- \* Drama is my favourite subject in school.
- \* I consider the skate park my second home.
- \* I love working with kids.
- \* Friends mean alot to me.
- \* I LOVE Food. (especially Ules :)
- \* I Like to do well in school



37



Time Line

5 years time

I wanna be a Youth Worker  
I wanna move away from when I am older.

Now

am 15 years old I was 2 in!  
I still live there I work at food bank play AFL its heaps fun on the weekends some times go to the town pool if I can't work.

7

Year 12  
Aboriginal studies I Love  
Business studies  
Photography  
English  
TAFE

P's so I drive around watch movies + TV Party or swim when its hot Face book, Listen to music Travel to Shellharbour every now + then

Life in 5 years  
22 yrs old

Good paying job  
Living away, Queensland hopefully Or somewhere away from here  
Apartment or house

86

Figure 4.4 Joshua's, Sal's, Tessa's and Ella's Goal Maps (from top left running clockwise)

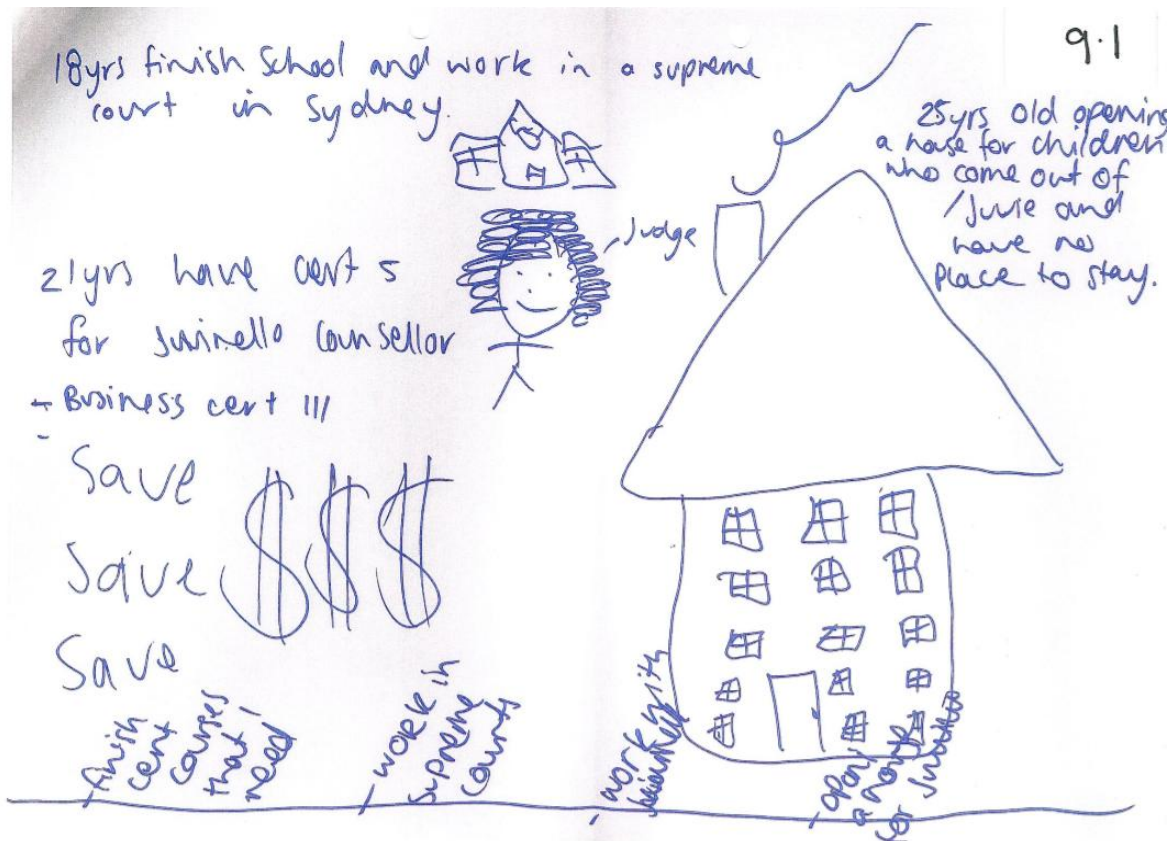


Figure 4. 5 Nicole's Goal Map

As we did with education goals, when we look at how young people view work, employment and career goals in their near futures using the Goal Maps we get a much deeper understanding of what this means than if we were to ask a young person to list an employment aspiration and expectation alone. The motivations for employment vary across the responses and provide further insight into young people's views of work, which in many instances contradicts the findings of other studies. For example through the interviews conducted with some of the young girls from Dusty Town, they state their motivations for working as there being not much else to do in the town after school, the jobs being available and being able to raise money to attend the various camps that are offered to them through the school or other youth programs, which they say are well-funded for the boys but not well-funded for girls and therefore the onus falls on them to raise the money. Alternatively the young people from Mining Town see every day the jobs that are available and the pay that comes with working in the currently booming local mining industry. For Ocean Town youth, the local picture is quite different. The laid-back holiday town has neither the administrative jobs, nor the specific industries that Mining Town and Dusty Town have, and therefore the casual jobs that are found in the supporting services industry are also limited. Once again it is the local context here that provides insight into young people's responses.

However it is more than the local opportunity structure found in each town that influences responses. For example why is it that every young person from Mining Town mentioned employment? The fact that, as one student, Adam, put it *'if you think there's no work then you're not looking'* suggests that there is a belief the jobs are there to be had. This does not explain, however, why others are focused on leaving the community to pursue education and employment goals when there is employment available locally or why others who were not part of the youth program yet from the same town do not hold any employment goals.

The young people of Mining Town who participated in this study as a group were viewed as the 'engaged' students within Mining Town School. Engagement in this context meaning the students attend school regularly, participate regularly in class as well as in out of class time school programs, and for some of the students, also doing well academically. The Mining Town students, of all four groups, displayed the most diverse aspirations in regard to study and employment. Those that listed a trade were generally the students who were currently applying for an internship program run by the local mine. However in Mining Town we see that many of the young people tend to focus on education and employment pathways that interest them rather than those they feel are available to them and therefore achievable. In other words, they focused more on their aspirations than their expectations, although aspirations and expectations have been shown to converge as the young person progresses through adolescence (Creed, Conlon & Zimmer-Gembeck 2007; Furlong & Biggart 1999; Sinclair, McKendrick & Scott 2010)

Whilst this study cannot confirm whether these young people view work as part of their identity, what is reflected in the young people's responses is that education and work form part of their adult life plan and the thinking about and planning for these decisions has already begun. Therefore in light of available literature on concepts and the role of work amongst Indigenous people it could be argued that many of these young people have already been socialised by schools, youth programs and families to accept the importance of work and education from a mainstream viewpoint. This is a point I explore further in chapter seven when I return to case studies of some of the young people mentioned here.

### **Aspirations beyond education and employment**

Many of the young people in this study who did not express any education aspirations had a higher tendency to express aspirations in other areas such as travel, family and wealth. Asking the young

people in this study to complete the Goal Map activity provided the opportunity for the young people to discuss all aspects of their future that they saw as being important to them. Whilst this study cannot go further to explore the extent to which young people view work as part of their identity, it supports the idea that work forms part of some young Aboriginal people's viewed futures. However for many of these young people the near future also incorporate aspirations which are rarely addressed or given equal support and consideration by policy makers

To provide context, the age of these participants needs to be taken into account when exploring the Goal Map responses. The young people in this study being between the ages of 13 and 17, with most aged between 14 and 16, meant that this task required them to explain their life when aged 18–22 years. Therefore it could be argued that views of family or travel may not regularly feature due to the young person's age and associated stage of life. However, acknowledging this point, the role of family in young people's viewed futures differs from location to location and features more strongly in some locations than others, therefore potentially demonstrating the diversity of viewed futures and pathways amongst the group overall. This is an important point demonstrated by this study and continually overlooked in policy and research, beyond differentiating indicators of locality and gender.

### **Family aspirations**

Family-related goals, including goals referring to getting married and having children, were included in this category, as were any additional points included by young people referring to family-based responsibilities to immediate and extended family, such as responsibilities around 'teaching young ones' and the transfer of cultural knowledge and practices. Family-related goals such as 'married or in a relationship' or 'have my own family' were predominantly mentioned by female respondents, as Lana does in her Goal Map (Figure 4.6). However the mentioning of family-related goals was quite different between the four locations. Those in Farming Town did not mention family-related goals at all and only two females from Mining Town referred to family-related goals, 'settling down' and 'becoming a mum', as we can see from Fiona's Goal Map in Figure 4.6. However in Dusty Town under half the young people (seven females and four males) mentioned family-related goals whether these related to having their own children, being married or referring to their family in general. Also a number of female students from Ocean Town mentioned family-related goals.



Family-related goals specifically mentioning extended family responsibilities were mentioned in Dusty Town only. Some students saw part of their future as including keeping culture strong and the teaching of young people in the family. Interestingly this aspect of family-related goals did not feature in the Goal Maps of the young people from the other locations. Also themes relating to family goals were only raised in the Goal Maps exercise and not during any of the interviews.

It is the Goal Maps produced by the young people of Dusty Town which include the greatest diversity of aspirations in their viewed futures, when compared to the other locations. In the Dusty Town Goal Maps, work and education form only one part of the young people's vision of themselves, as does family. What we see here in the Goal Maps of many of the young people from Dusty Town is an ability to incorporate both individual education, employment and wealth aspirations, with family and community-based aspirations.

When we look at the two Goal Maps in Figure 4.6 we see that aspirations are balanced with responsibilities. Indeed, aspirations are spread across a variety of areas of young people's lives, both personal and professional, and there is no sense through looking at these Goal Maps alone that one comes at the cost of another. However, the limitation of the Goal Maps needs to be considered here. Whilst young people may have both professional and personal aspirations, negotiating their realisation is another matter.

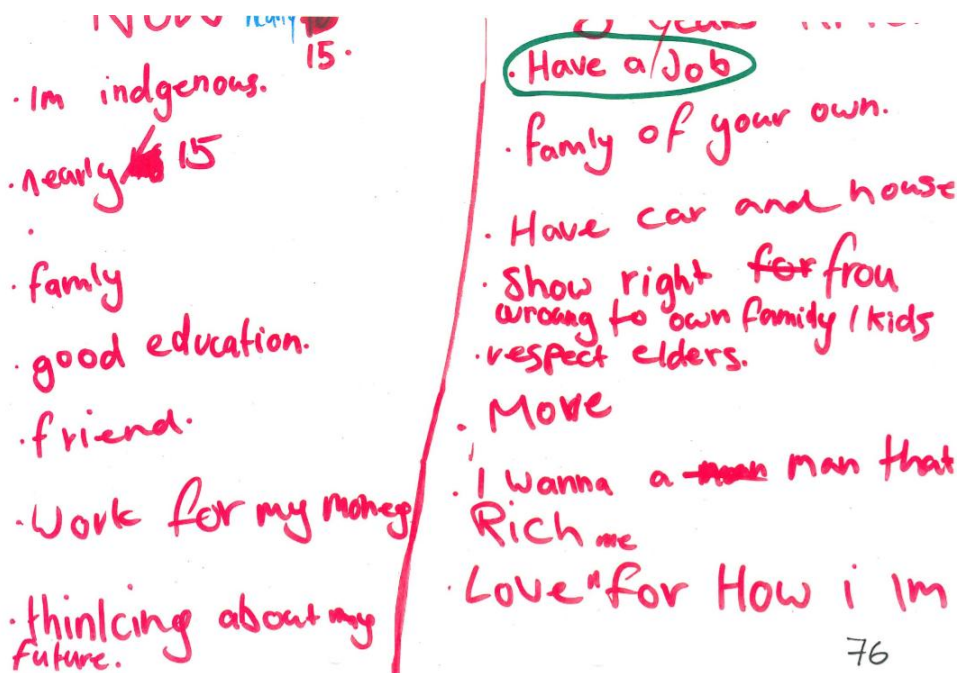
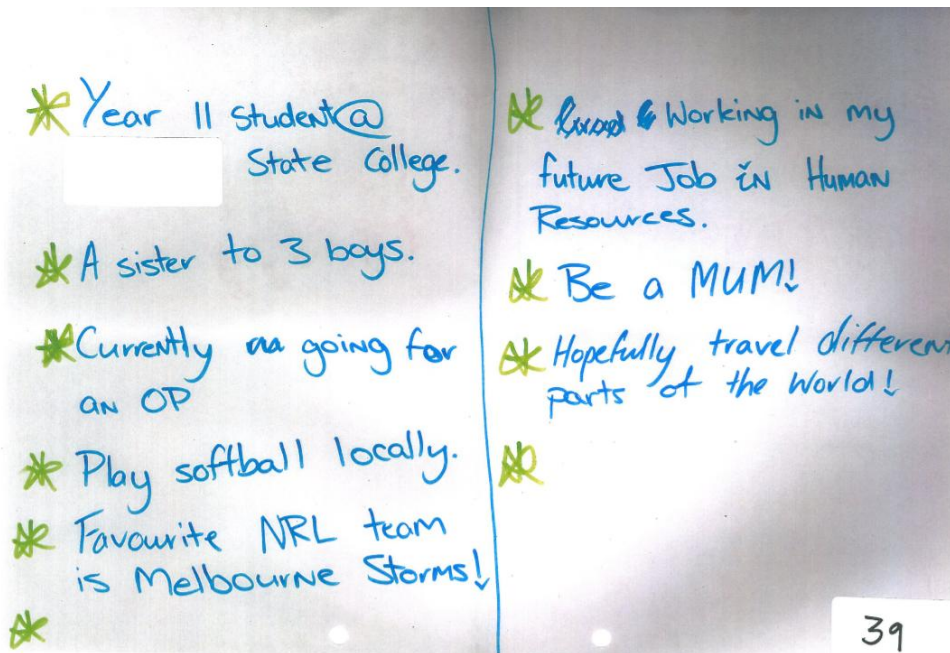


Figure 4. 6 Fiona's and Lana's Goal Maps (from top to bottom)

### Travel aspirations

When looking at the Goal Map responses alone there are two distinct patterns which emerge in relation to the broad theme of travel. Firstly, it is the young people from remote and very remote areas who mostly speak of travel and moving away from home. Secondly, those that are aged 15

and younger across all four groups refer to travel goals and goals of moving away from home the least. These two themes in themselves, when we consider the rest of the goals mentioned throughout the Goal Maps activities, are not surprising. With education and employment forming part of many young people's future plans, regardless of age or location, the need to move away from Mining Town and Dusty Town is in many cases a necessity to following these pathways. Secondly, it would make sense that the time to move away for either further study or employment would be in the plan of those older than 15 years as the five-year horizon of the Goal Map would see them completing secondary school and moving beyond this stage. Another point that is important to acknowledge here is that for Farming Town the theme of travel is not as strong when considering the Goal Map responses alone. A confounding factor could be the age cohort of the group, which included a larger number of young people below the age of 15 years than in other groups. However, even when exploring the interview responses, the theme of travel and moving away, whilst it was mentioned in the context of getting away, was not as strong a theme as in the other locations.

The interviews conducted provide additional context to this theme. They suggest that the motivations for travel vary slightly between each group. For Mining Town and Dusty Town, travel goals were driven very much by study and employment opportunities, as Adam from Mining Town stated *'there two ways you can go, you can either go that way (pointing east) to the uni or that way (pointing west) to the mine'*. Moving and travel for work and study formed part of many young people's reasons for leaving Ocean Town as well. However, for Dusty Town and Farming Town, the motivations were more diverse: moving away to get ahead, to get away or to experience a different sense of self all emerged as themes from the young people from these locations.

### **Moving away to get ahead, moving away to get away**

The theme of moving away to get ahead was a common theme found predominantly in Mining Town and Dusty Town. Whilst young people from each of the areas spoke about possibly moving to a city, there was a strongly held view by the young people of Dusty Town that moving to the city, or out of the town, was necessary to expand opportunities, broaden horizons and to learn to make it in the 'real world'. This type of discourse is commonly found in many national youth programs, which frame moving away from community in a context of opportunities.

Interestingly it is the young people from Dusty Town who out of the four groups had done the most travel, travelling interstate for sport and youth programs. Indeed, some of the young people from

Dusty Town school who would have been chosen to be part of this camp could not attend due to it clashing with another program opportunity which also involved travel. The notion of travel and the experience of doing so was very strong for many of the young people from Dusty Town. Whilst sitting at the dining table with a group of female students from Dusty Town, Tonya asked where I lived. When I told her I lived in Canberra, she told me that she liked Canberra. She had travelled there last year for a national football competition, and pointed to another student who also made the trip for the same competition. The following year this same student would be travelling to Melbourne to attend a UN Youth Conference, after her school was targeted by the program to identify young people who would be interested in attending the conference. Indeed, Dusty Town School also offered a volunteer tourism opportunity for its senior students to travel to Cambodia and work on a volunteer project. This was a trip which some of the young people mentioned their interest in and planned to attend, hence working at a casual job. Whilst both of these female students, as well as the others sitting at their table, had many experiences of travelling, the girls of Dusty Town still complained that they did not have as many funded opportunities to do so as the boys of Dusty Town.

The travel and program opportunities offered to and accessed by the young people of Dusty Town are in stark contrast to the situation at Ocean Town and Farming Town. For some of the young people at Ocean Town the opportunity to go to the *BECA* camp and the city was a first trip. In Farming Town the school staff member responsible for sourcing this camp opportunity spoke about having to go out and find youth programs for their students, a wholly different situation to Dusty Town where the youth programs come to them.

This raises an important issue: that is, the additional opportunities that are provided for young Indigenous people based on locality, which in this context sees the young people from particular remote communities targeted by national programs and policy initiatives more so than young people from regional locations. This also raises the question of whether the young people who form part of this study and who are receiving these opportunities are indeed the right match between the project policy objectives, their own aspirations and currently lived contexts. This is an issue I will return to in chapter seven.

Students also spoke about the need to move away, worried that if they stayed in their home community they would not 'get anywhere'. At Farming Town a common topic discussed by the female students at that school was moving away to a boarding school to complete their secondary

schooling. One young female student who was at the camp had since left the school to take up a scholarship offered to Indigenous students by a private school in the city, another was in the process of doing so. Yet another student has changed to the other 'better' secondary school in Farming Town to complete her Higher School Certificate and used this change as a new start. Other students also mentioned travelling away from their local community just to get away; some mentioned that one of the benefits of the camp was that it gave them a break from the day-to-day. For others, the getting away is a chance to explore somewhere different.

### **A change of environment and presentation of a different self**

Travel, as well as moving away, if only for a short period of time, was a very common theme in Dusty Town. However the reasons behind moving away were varied. For some young people travel or living in another city provided a change from the everyday, a chance to explore and experience something 'different'. For others it was seen as an opportunity to explore a side of themselves that their local community does not provide them the opportunity to explore, or to present an image of themselves that would not be accepted or which would be out of place in their local town. The following conversation with Janice and Sarah explains this further:

*Researcher: Travel seems to be a big thing for young people in Dusty Town?*

*Janice: Because we're in Dusty Town.*

*Sarah: And like you guys in the city you're all like let's go to the country.*

*Janice: You're like let's go see the trees*

*Sarah: But when we go to your, like, [city] and stuff we're like wow*

*Janice: It's the bomb being in the city, not only when you get there you're a different person, you wear different clothes, you know you can dress up ... like you wouldn't dress up here*

*Sarah: because you get judged*

*Janice: And not only like there's no point walking down the street in like cool shoes and dresses.*

*Sarah: (laughs)*

*Janice: and stuff, you're walking in the desert*

*Sarah: It would get dirty like that*

*Janice: It would get dirty straight away ... like here, you know everybody here. There's no point if they're going to see you with scruffy hair, you know them. Like in [the city] it's heaps good you like catch up with your friends, go to [the shopping centre] and stuff and here you're like what are you going to do on the weekend ... and it's like I'm going to play Xbox.*

## **Moving away to explore the ‘real world’**

Statistical reporting would lead us to believe that as distance from major cities increases, the local job opportunities decrease. The issue of high youth unemployment in remote areas is one that is well presented in the literature as is young people’s readiness to work. Consequently the lack of work in remote communities and towns presents a notion that work is easier to find out of town in major centres and cities. However, rather than viewing a move to the city as a way to access further avenues of employment and expanded opportunities, young people spoke about viewing their own communities as easy to navigate and get work in, and larger cities as a new territory with greater uncertainty:

*Well Dusty Town, it’s not really the real world, it’s a little town it’s easy to live in. Like you go to like Darwin, it would be hard to get a job you’ve got to like have some sort of qualification to your name, you need some knowledge of something to be able to get a good job. Here you just go to the place, Sport and Rec they pay a lot of money, you’ve just got to go there and be able to work with kids well and that’s it, you’ll get paid a whole lot of money, and the like life-guarding course I just did you get payed almost the same wages that you’d be getting in the mines ... so it’s like your living in a fantasy really, but it’s a boring fantasy*

(Janice – Dusty Town)

## **Travel for leisure**

For others the theme was travel for travel’s sake; indeed, a common theme found amongst young people in Australia is the ‘gap year’ taken between the completion of high school and the take up of further education or employment. There is limited research that has been conducted on what has been commonly referred to as ‘the gap year’, which further highlights the non-linear school to work transition that is common among many Australian youth. Curtis, Mlotkowski and Lumsden (2012) estimate that around 20 per cent of Australian students who complete high school will take a gap year. They also found that students who took a gap year tended to be weaker academically, with lower than average entrance marks and also a lower completion rate of university. When looking specifically at young Indigenous students there are currently no studies on this topic, therefore the young people of this study mentioning their intention to take a gap year presents a new perception of young Indigenous people and their viewed futures around the school to work transition period, which mirror aspirations found across the broader population.

The topics discussed by the young people in this study under the theme of travel tend to be fairly unique within the Indigenous youth literature. The idea of being able to represent a different view of self when travelling outside of local community (Senior 2010) and the change in attitudes towards moving off country to complete study or work (Tonkinson 2011) have been reported. The themes revolving around travel and or moving away from home community for study or work presented by the young people from Mining Town and Dusty Town seem to add to understandings of the way travel, and moving away from community, particularly in the context of education and work, within this body of literature. The reasons for these findings are varied: as an example many young people from Mining Town and Dusty Town who attended the *BECA* camp had mostly in the past travelled interstate and out of their local communities, whether as part of another program, a school activity or with family.

This was quite a contrast to the young people of Farming Town or Ocean Town who did not appear to have undertaken many trips beyond their community, or had as many opportunities to do so. This could therefore suggest a familiarity with travelling away from home and therefore such an idea is not seen as being out of place. Secondly, it could be argued that it is a consequence of the exposure to various discourses of what futures can or should hold, and in particular the type of discourse found in national youth programs. Indeed, when speaking with one of the teachers from Farming Town School, she told me that once the students had travelled to the city and realised that they now had the basis of some type of network, in this case the youth program staff and centre, it made the taking up of a scholarship to a private high school that much easier. Although the question still remains of whether people can sustain being away for long periods of time. The following quote from Janice might provide some insight.

*Researcher: Would you come back to Dusty Town?*

*Janice: Of course everybody comes back, it's like the Bermuda triangle.*

### **Material and financial aspirations**

Overall the young people who expressed aspirations in trade or apprenticeships were the only ones to express wealth aspirations. Those considering university or specifically listing education goals were proportionally less likely to express aspirations in areas of wealth. This is not to say that those who held specific higher education or professional goals did not have material or wealth aspirations,

just that they did not express them as a prime motivating factor or viewed future. In many cases young people spoke about wealth in relation to getting a good-paying job, saving money and buying resources such as a car or a house, Carla's Goal Map at Figure 4.7 being an example of this. This type of response was the most commonly found response across each community.

Overall wealth and resource goals were more likely to be mentioned by females, however there was not much difference by gender. If we look at wealth alone, without including resources, then this representation skews more towards male respondents. What is interesting is that those male students who did mention wealth in the majority of cases did not work or have access to their own money. For example, Ray's Goal Map (Figure 4.8) from Farming Town states he wants to be a billionaire, however Ray does not have a job, and he is also quite disengaged at school in terms of attendance and academic participation. Ray was part of a group of four boys that whilst at the camp rarely participated in any of the activities, choosing instead to sit on the sideline and watch. When we made the follow-up visit to Farming Town School, these boys chose not to come along to the gathering. Consequently the information I have on Ray and his friends is limited to observation and anecdotes from the school staff. What is interesting in the case of Ray is that whilst he has aspirations of one day being wealthy this is in striking contradiction to the actuality of this occurring. Ray does not participate in school from an academic perspective, he and his friends do not have any employment, and indeed some of these boys come from families that have generations of unemployment.



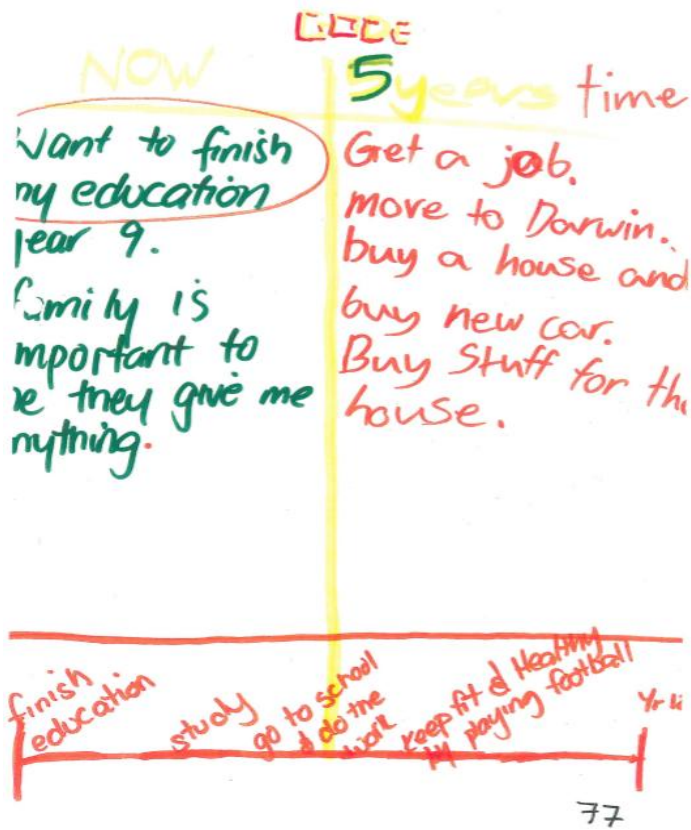


Figure 4.7 Carla's Goal Map

Big House, Nice Car, Money, Mechanic

23.1

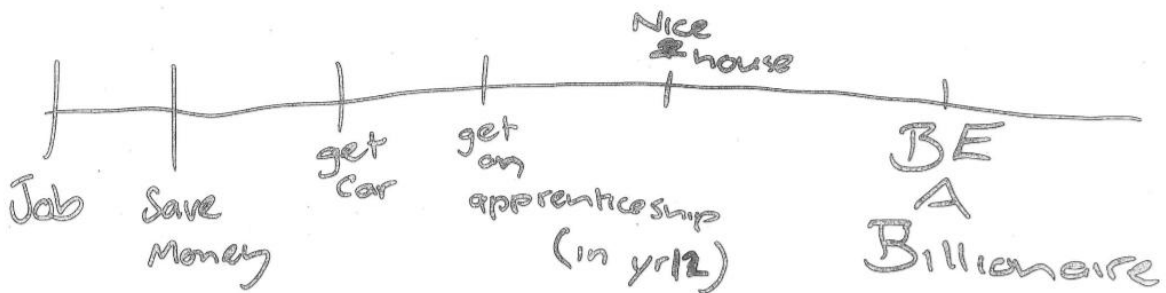


Figure 4.8 Ray's Goal Map

For others, monetary and material resources seem more likely. For example many of the female respondents who mentioned wealth had casual jobs and had had them for a while. For example, Janice had been working a regular casual job for the past few years. She was also in the process of setting up a school-based apprenticeship with a mine close to Dusty Town. Jake had also been working for many years and saving up to buy items such as a motor bike. Jake had grown up on a property in another state where he had learnt to muster livestock. Having now moved with his family to Mining Town he utilises this skill in the school holidays, travelling to properties close by to do short stints of mustering throughout the year.

When looking at responses based on location, the percentage of respondents across all locations was fairly consistent, however Dusty Town had a slightly higher occurrence of wealth and resource goals mentioned than elsewhere. Again this contradicts the literature, which suggests that there is limited financial and material motivation for young Indigenous people to remain at school or gain employment with good salaries.

### **Self-actualisation aspirations**

The development of self-actualisation goals and the rhetoric associated with this seem to be an important part of national youth programs in general, and the *BECA* program was no different. Much of what is written on the organisation website and marketing material talks about strong futures for young people beyond the goals of employment and education alone. They speak about developing confident young people with a high self-esteem who are engaged in life, healthy living and have a bright future ahead of them. However, how many young people actually articulate such goals in this way?

Self-actualisation Goals such as 'wanna be healthy and fit', 'having fun', 'better', 'good life ahead of me', were not regularly mentioned overall. Of those that did mention such goals they were far more likely to be the female students. Figure 4.9 shows the Goal Map of Gabby who mentioned many self-actualisation goals. Another common theme was that self-actualisation goals were mentioned only by the young people from Mining Town and Dusty Town, with none of the young people from Farming Town and Ocean Town including such goals in their Goal Maps. It is hard to extrapolate from a location perspective why this would be the case overall for any particular area. Nevertheless there remains a striking difference between the two regional towns and the two remote towns.

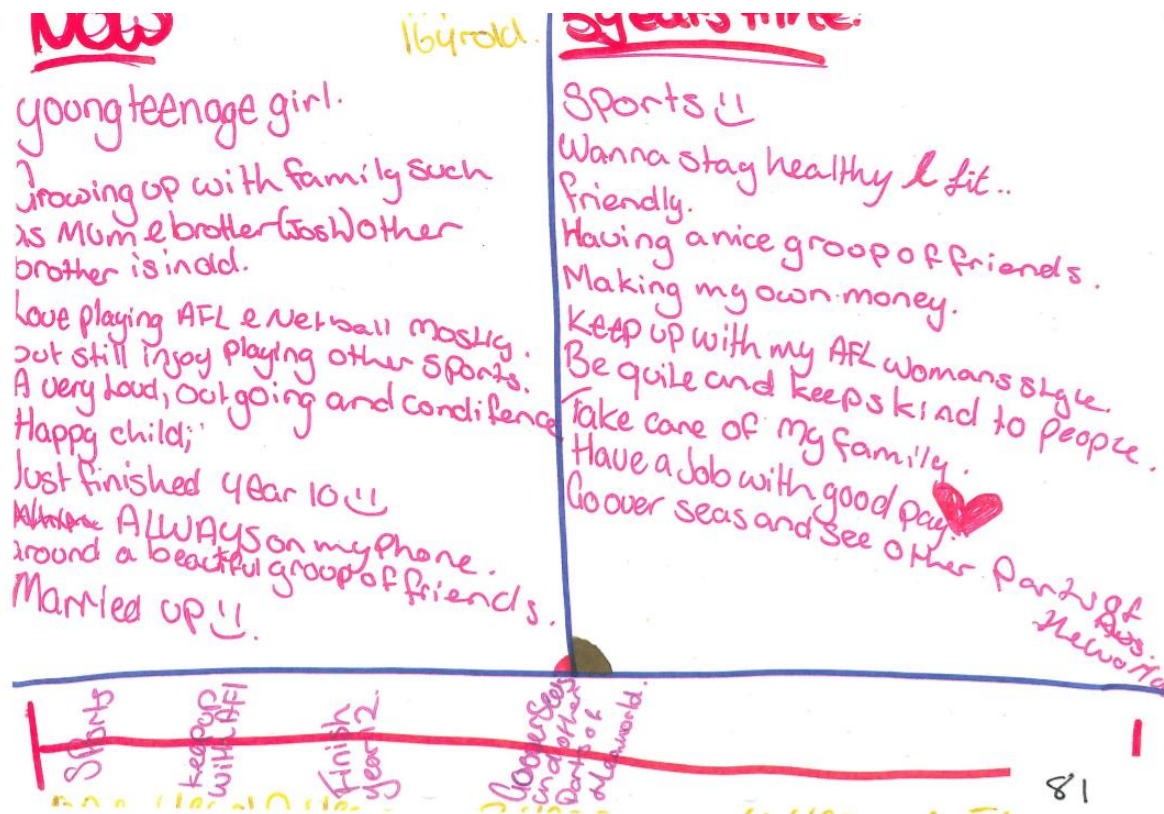


Figure 4.9 Gabby's Goal Map

### Policy and program expectations

Both policy and youth program objectives in this specific case are underpinned by an assumed lack of ability, desire or tendency for young Aboriginal people to think about and plan their future. The themes included in the Goal Maps, as well as the supporting interviews, provide alternate representations of young Aboriginal people that further highlight the assumptions made by policies and programs as outlined in the previous chapter. The assumption that Indigenous youth have limited aspirations when it comes to education and employment or even a limited acceptance of the reasoning behind schooling has been challenged by the responses in this chapter. This not only brings into question the issue of policy rhetoric about Aboriginal youth as one homogenous group across the country, but also the lack of homogeneity within a group even within the one location.

Indeed, the representation of Aboriginal youth has been simplistic and one-dimensional, with Aboriginal youth being represented as one homogenous group. Bessant, Sercombe and Watts (1998) suggest that 'too often groups of young people are identified in terms of one or two aspects of their identity – like their age, socioeconomic position, gender or ethnicity, which is then treated in

an essentialist way' (p. 42). They argue that looking at individuals in such a way overlooks both the collective and individual features of identity and that identity is both subjective and objective, an outsider's perspective. Furthermore, typically with young people's views and experiences being ignored, Bessant, Sercomer and Watts (1998) argue that 'identity is often conferred on young people in ways that are reflective of the older outsiders perception of them' (p. 43). Indeed, in this context these perceptions are only re-affirmed through policy and program rhetoric.

Palmer (1999) takes issue with the uncritical application of youth subculture analysis, which in the context of young Aboriginal youth has seen them represented as homogenous, culturally impoverished, bored and suffering from a loss of identity. He argues, '[i]t seems to me that there is little value in debating whether we essentialise young people's lives or whether our knowledges about young people are myths or not – of course we do and of course they are' (Palmer 1999, p. 11). Chester et al. (2009) go further to state they believe that the failure discourse which constructs young Indigenous secondary students as likely to leave school shapes the school and tertiary transition experiences for the majority of Indigenous students, regardless of their capabilities and aspirations. Indeed, for individuals from historically oppressed groups, outcome expectations and perceptions of the future may play a more important role when it comes to career choice than self-efficacy (Flores et al. 2010).

The matters covered in this chapter also have further implications. Policy and program assumptions frequently utilise basic demographic and descriptive statistical information to identify issues or highlight need areas. This approach has the potential to lead to three consequences; one is the targeting of resources, funding and support to those that may not be as much in need of it, leading to others missing out, for example focusing funding and resources on young people in remote communities over those in regional communities. Another is the poor targeting within a group, for example potentially focusing on the more 'engaged' cohort in a generally 'disengaged' group. And finally there is the consequence of the mismatch that eventuates when policies and consequently programs driven by assumptions targeted at addressing perceived or assumed problems rather than actual problems.

In the next chapter I shift my focus to the implementation phase of the *BECA* program. I explain the process of how the wider development program agenda was set, how structural and ideological program choices were made and how power was asserted in the program. I demonstrate how,

during the process, conceptions of young people's needs and identities were shaped by perceptions and misconceptions which influenced ideas of what the project should deliver.



## Chapter Five

### Implementation

In the previous chapter I focused on the young people themselves and explored the social and local context within which this program is situated. The evidence challenges the assumption that Indigenous youth have limited aspirations when it comes to education and employment. I argued that the policy assumptions, interests and priorities that become naturalised as problems by policy makers and youth work organisations and the subsequent solutions put forward by both are not best suited for the young people they are trying to affect, which leads to further consequences.

In this chapter I look at the youth program, youth organisation and youth workers and in particular how they became part of a 'system of relationships'. I explore how the youth workers had to contend with increasing pressure from organisational relationships from above and from those attending the program, which I suggest made their role as youth workers even more challenging. My aim is to demonstrate that the youth program, whilst seemingly driven by official policy and the needs of policy makers alone, was also greatly influenced by the exigencies of their organisations and the need to maintain and manage the patron/client relationship for the purpose of future funding and the promotion of efficiency and effectiveness, which I suggest is reflective of the current Indigenous youth work space more broadly.

Shore and Wright (1997) refer to policies as having 'complex social lives' with agency, which shift actions and then develop as they enter into relations with institutions through peoples' interaction with them. By taking a 'horizontal slice' out of the 'complex social life' of a policy and the social world in which it operates, and by looking at the variety of actors tasked with the delivery and implementation of projects that stem from it, I explain the process of how the wider development agenda was set and how structural and ideological program choices were made.

I demonstrate how during the implementation process, conceptions of young people's needs and identities continued to be shaped by perceptions and misconceptions, which influenced ideas of what the project should deliver. I aim to demonstrate, as Mosse (2005) has done for international aid, that projects are a site for other institutions and agendas contending for influence within the wider policy and youth work arenas. I suggest that early as well as later stage activities for the young people had less to do with planning and delivering program objectives and more to do with

meeting other stakeholders' needs, be it the funding agency or partner agencies and organisations. I also outline how models of efficiency and effectiveness established through a neoliberal policy framework favour individuals and organisations that operate best within a framework providing minimal opportunity for critical reflection. The same individuals and organisations are viewed as successful, both by external stakeholders in the system and those working within it.

Mosse (2005) suggests that 'the work of organisations is more immediately shaped by their own "system goals" – those of organisation maintenance and survival – than the formal policy goals of the minister' (p. 103). I demonstrate how divergent interpretations of youth development and youth work efficiency and effectiveness influenced how success was approached and classified. In particular I explore the assumption of a linear progression from process to outcome. I demonstrate the consequences of administrative procedures, individual and organisational accountabilities and program reporting which saw social issues reduced into matters of implementation, with the needs of the young people mattering less and less. The system rewards compliance over reflection and critique, the latter being a key principle underpinning traditional youth work. I suggest that these changes altered significantly the way the Aboriginal youth workers experienced their roles and relationships with the 'client' and the 'partner organisations', which led to professional and personal identities becoming more separate. I argue that to manage these relationships requires skilful mediators fluent in the discourse of youth work, the bureaucracy of government and the culture of corporate philanthropy, who are able to function between the different rationalities and expectations.

### **Program organisation and influences**

Towards the end of chapter three I outlined how the youth workers went about developing their youth program. Policy ideas based on youth 'at risk' of not attending school or completing school qualifications and in need of guidance and motivation through their school to work transitions became accepted by the youth workers and youth organisation early on as the main purpose of the program. Youth workers therefore went about sourcing and structuring activities that would provide information to young people about study and employment opportunities and help them develop the interpersonal skills these young people were perceived as lacking, such as motivation, confidence and self-efficacy.

The questioning around the youth program structure and content, in those early days of planning, was not so much about the broad objectives that underlined the purpose of the camp, rather it was



about what particular information was required about the youth, for example, what jobs were they interested in, as well as what were the best activities through which to develop the personal skills being targeted. At this early stage, policy and organisation staff all seemed to be on the same page in terms of the goals and the structure of the program. The youth workers seemed motivated in their new role and set about developing the best program they could.

Funding and administrative requirements would structure their work to a point in those early days. The program would run for a week. It would need to reach at least 120 young people in that first year, meaning roughly 20–30 young people attending per camp; so that five camps would have to be run over the year. Camps had to be scheduled around school and accommodation availability. The youth workers would then try to schedule some planning and down time prior to and after each camp allowing for effective planning and adequate debriefing and reflection. The funding and administrative requirements began organising work routines even early on, and down the track administration needs based on efficiency and effective use of project dollars would further organise work routines.

The youth workers went about developing a structured youth program, based on a functional model for a group of young people they were yet to meet, but who they believed would benefit from the program they were designing. However the youth workers were aware of the potential that the activities chosen may not be the right match for the young people attending the , given the limited detail they had on the young people. Nevertheless, the youth workers believed a camp model had the ability to impact on the lives of these young people through expanding their horizons, developing personal skills and opening them up to new opportunities and experiences. Realising the limitation of not having met the young people before they attended, the youth workers briefly lobbied management to allow them to do so before each camp; however this request was denied, due to both time and, more importantly, the cost. To overcome this limitation a survey was developed which was sent to the schools prior to the students' arrival seeking information on the type of employment industries that interested the young people. The survey was not always completed and in some instances advice was sought from the school staff on the students' needs and interests.

The youth workers were without any previous experience in developing or delivering youth programs. Whilst they were aware of their own limitations in terms of skills to develop and deliver specific sessions and activities, they were able to navigate this area by drawing on activities from

other providers which they would schedule throughout the week. However, this was not always going to be the case and early on they realised the continual logistical hurdles relying on external providers would create. The youth workers also wanted to develop their own skills and capacity so they themselves would be able to deliver the sessions within the camp and therefore rely less on other organisations and individuals to do so.

## **Diverging interpretations**

### **The youth worker, young person relationship**

Sarah, Tanya and Chris had spent the last night of the first camp sitting up and speaking to me about their observation on the past four days. They spoke about their perceptions of the young people, the effectiveness of the activities they ran and the issues with the program, as it was planned and delivered. It would not be incorrect to say that the camp was delivered in a logistically haphazard way. In the last minute rush to complete the program schedule and associated logistical tasks around accommodation, meals and travel, the youth workers did not formally introduce themselves or the program when the young people from Farming Town arrived. Regularly timings of activities were thrown out with sessions running half an hour or more late; a frustration for the teachers who were used to highly scheduled days. The youth workers were nervous in their presentation of activities, even if they were only responsible for a brief introduction. Logistical information on many occasions was not clearly communicated to the school staff, or those brought in to run sessions, leading to confusion, delays and a lot of waiting around. On other occasions activities were cancelled or did not eventuate for one reason or another. And some visits to partner organisations barely moved beyond a site visit making it clear that the purpose and content of the visit had not been adequately discussed between the youth workers and the partner organisation.

The youth workers also spoke about their own preparedness to deliver the camps and the sessions within them. They were aware of their nervousness, lack of preparation and logistical weaknesses; the very things they recognised from the beginning that they needed training for. The mood that evening was reflective, the youth workers were tired, they had learnt from the process and had formed a basis from which to improve. However, there was also a sense that they might have failed and a feeling of being out of their depth.

The next morning with bags packed, breakfast over and a formal thank you from the group of young people from Farming Town completed, the youth workers headed to the bus parked in the site

parking lot to see everyone off. As the group and the youth workers walked across the residential campus to the parking lot, smaller groups formed around the youth workers where conversations continued, making the most of the last few minutes available. At the bus each youth worker and student weaved around the cluster they had formed trying to find who they had not spoken to or thanked yet. There were hugs all round and for some of the female students tears as well.

I walked back to the office with the youth workers and listened as they relayed and compared farewell stories with each other. Whilst last night the youth workers seemed exhausted and unsure of themselves, this morning their mood could be described as surprised and elated. I asked them if they wouldn't mind answering some questions before they finished up their work and headed off for lunch. They obliged, however unlike the evening before where I had prompted discussion through questioning, in the morning I just turned on my recorder and listened to what the youth workers had to say, the conversation flowing from one story to the next.

*Sarah: As I was coming out and as they were walking in he put out his hand and said thanks for this week. This student had said nothing previously. It was him off his own bat, even when I've asked him a question but not got much of a response from him and it was him coming, I hadn't prompted I hadn't actually said anything, it was just ... yeah and that was ... yeah.*

*Tanya: Stacey was saying 'if I didn't have a dog I wouldn't want to go home, but I do miss my dog'. Elisa didn't want to go home. I think the emotions at the end. I got a hug off every single one of them boys, even Tom.*

*Researcher: You did chase some of them down though didn't you?*

*Tanya: Yeah I did, they weren't getting away from me. But Harry was just standing there and he went like (imitates lacklustre hug), but even so I didn't think I'd get that. I thought some of those boys would be a bit more [standoffish]. All of those boys that were a bit more quieter, a bit more reserved, I got a hug off all of them.*

Whilst the youth workers had discussed the importance of being Indigenous people running the camps and the chance to be role models as well as facilitators, this was the first time that they had acknowledged the potential of the camp to be utilised as a tool to build relationships with the young people. Even though the camp had logistically not been the best delivered, it was the connection

that the youth workers had made with the young people, a connection that was not fully acknowledged until everyone was saying their goodbyes in front of the bus in the parking lot, that the youth workers realised this potential. This then gave the youth workers a sense that they did have the ability to undertake the role of a youth worker, as Tanya explains:

*I think it hit a nerve. I think some of those girls have got some self-esteem issues, some stuff happening, like I noticed with Elsie when at the end we gave her that hug and I was saying to her, just remember how special you are, how deadly and amazing you are and don't let anyone make you feel any different. She got really, really emotional. She was sobbing. It wasn't just tears, she was sobbing and I thought, oooh, she's letting something out here.*

Divergent interpretations between the youth workers and their colleagues, the managers and funding providers, started to become more apparent from this point on. These divergent interpretations were based around ideas of effectiveness, the practice of youth work, the needs of the young people and the expected responses. It was as if the youth workers began to question the functional model of youth work and realised that the key to effective youth work was not necessarily in the planning and efficient delivery of targeted activities. Rather it was they themselves that were the key to an effective program. As Coburn and Wallace (2011) explain, being a youth worker is a process of becoming and these processes are not simply an 'accumulation of skills and information, they are a process of becoming a certain person, or conversely avoiding becoming a certain person ... It is this exploration of identity that youth work offers the space to do, where complex historical, cultural and biographical constructs are experienced, critiqued and developed' (Coburn & Wallace 2011, p. 11).

The youth workers had realised that youth work is a 'developmental process' which 'involves building relationships with young people to better understand the experience of their lives and therefore intervene appropriately' (Ord 2012, p. 77). Whilst the youth workers came to this realisation, what was also not far from their minds was the knowledge that there was limited funding to continue to build on the relationship that they had begun to establish with the young people from Farming Town. In fact funding stipulated that students would attend just one camp as it was assumed this would be enough to effect change as well as provide more young people with the camp experience. The buzz that the youth workers received from the camp was enough to sustain them over the three week period until the young people from Ocean Town arrived. However the diverging interpretations of the camp's objectives and processes between the youth workers,

their managers and the policy officers funding the program, started to lead to what Mosse (2005) refers to as ‘an arena of competing ideas and groups’.

The youth workers wanted the chance to get to know the young people better and develop relationships with them, which would allow for the understanding of what type of activities and sessions would best meet their needs. They wanted to further develop their skills as facilitators, educators and project managers. They wanted to achieve this not only through formal training but also through the freedom of trial and error and the time to stop, reflect, contemplate and therefore learn.

On the other hand the youth work managers and policy officers wanted to schedule programs filled with positive, engaging, inspirational and informative sessions. They wanted partnerships with organisations whose names were recognisable, therefore providing their organisation as well as their programs with a certain status and acknowledgement. They wanted to be able to provide their programs to as many young people as possible, drawing on camp attendance numbers as an indicator of the success of their programs as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of their organisation.

However, the continued push for these outcomes raised many unanswered questions for the youth workers. How much time were they going to have to truly prepare each camp for a diverse range of young people? This point became even more evident towards the end of the year when the youth workers realised the different needs of each camp based on regional and remote locality alone. How would they be supported to get to know the young people before the camp as well as maintain contact with them after the camp; where would the time and funding resources come from to do this if they were to be scheduled into a year of delivering back-to-back camps to constantly changing groups? Who would support them to develop all the partnerships necessary to provide a range of opportunities to such a broad group of young people with varying needs, interests and lived experiences? How and when would they develop their own skills through formal training and mentoring or through their own reflections from each camp? And when would they have the time to have a break and recharge their batteries ready for the next camp, if the administration, planning and delivery of one camp rolled into the next? These tensions only highlighted contradictions already built into the program design.

## **The 'bureaucracy of planning'**

The move towards a business culture model of delivering public services and the preoccupation with certain concepts of efficiency and effectiveness has led to an over dependence on the assumed benefit of planning. This is particularly so if youth programs are based on a functional model of delivery where objectives are predetermined and outcomes are closely scrutinised against predetermined indicators of efficiency, effectiveness and impact. Ord argues that this 'cultural shift has created a "bureaucracy of planning" where workers spend more time predicting what it is that needs to be done, creating ways of delivering work which would (in theory at least) produce particular outputs and outcomes (than actually delivering face-to-face work)' (Ord 2012, p. 75). Ord highlights the incidental nature between the process of youth work and outcomes, demonstrating that in some cases, such as when trying to affect confidence and self-esteem, it is better not to focus on outcomes in order to achieve them. For example, consistently focusing on someone's lack of confidence becomes more liable to undermine that person's confidence rather than increase it. I argue that this 'bureaucracy of planning' not only contradicted the objectives that the program was trying to achieve in the first place, but also led to negative consequences for the staff and the program they were trying to develop and deliver.

In many instances the youth workers had only limited phone and email communication before the camp with the school staff accompanying the young people to the program. Whilst the youth workers developed a questionnaire to hand out to young people prior to the camp for the purpose of gaining further insight into the young people and what their interests and needs might be, they soon realised the questionnaire provided only very simplistic information without the additional social or historical contexts needed. The funding required that the young people attending the camp be recruited from only three states. When I asked why, no-one could give me a reason for these three states being chosen. The schools were invited to attend by the youth workers' line manager and the young people were generally chosen by the school staff.

Originally the program was developed and targeted on a reward basis. The schools were told that the students who were to be invited were those who had already demonstrated some 'engagement' at school, this could be interpreted as attendance, interest, co-operative behaviour or academic achievement. This approach in itself highlights the contradictory nature of the popular approach utilised by many government-funded Indigenous programs. In this case, the reward for these young people is not tangible, they have not previously attended the program, nor do they know what the program entails and what opportunities it will provide them, therefore to assume a proposed trip to

a major city to attend a one-off camp for a week would address the many and varied reasons behind why a young person may be 'disengaged' with the school system, demonstrates a simplistic and narrow way of viewing the issues.

Indeed, many school staff also felt the same way. There were many instances where school staff appropriated this policy in their own way. They invited students who did not necessarily meet the 'engaged' criteria, but who they felt would benefit from a week away from the everyday home and school environment and the opportunity to be exposed to various individuals and organisations that were part of the program. However the type of young person the school staff invited was also someone they felt would not cause too much trouble at such a residential camp. Many of the school staff during the camp told me that now that they were familiar with the premises and camp structure, if offered a camp again in the future they would bring those young people who would require more supervision and setting of disciplinary boundaries. They felt that it would be these young people who would benefit most from such an opportunity, referring to the chance to participate in something different or new rather than any specific camp activity.

I raise this point not to explore and critique the reasoning behind the reward model so favoured by many policy makers and youth organisations working in the Indigenous space, but rather to highlight how such an approach is a simplistic way for policy makers and organisations to account for the money being spent on youth programs. Although for both youth workers and youth organisations, as well as policy makers, this approach does have its benefits. Through adopting a reward-based model for youth engagement and development the funding may be seen to be more justified, as it is only spent once the program objective has been met. Critically it also increases the likelihood of program success due to the specific young people being engaged either already meeting the program's objectives or being more likely to do so, therefore reducing the risk of failure for all program staff, organisations and funding bodies.

As the year progressed, the buzz that the youth workers felt at the end of the first few camps once the young people had left soon dissipated as they became preoccupied with planning the next camp. The same issues would come to the fore again: who were these young people; what were their interests; what were their needs; who was going to deliver on the camp, etc. As well as a preoccupation within the planning details in regards to activities there were also planning considerations focusing purely on logistics such as transport and accommodation. In a conversation with Sarah, she spoke about how she begins to feel the pressure a few days before a camp starts and

that too much of her energy is spent worrying about the logistics, leaving no time to focus on the more important aspects of youth work the sessions and the young people attending the camps.

However Sarah, Tanya and Chris seemed to be getting better at managing this aspect of the youth program and by the third camp they felt that they were learning how to best plan the logistics associated with running such a youth program, which included the general movement of a group of people through a highly scheduled program. Whereas during the previous two camps I would arrive on site to find the youth workers still frantically confirming bookings, organising meals or preparing welcome packs, on the day of the third camp all these tasks had been completed and all the youth workers were able to make their way over to the airport to greet the Mining Town group on their arrival, relaxed and assured that they were ready for the week's activities.

The youth workers were also getting better at developing and implementing sessions themselves. The trivia night that they had developed and wanted to run as a way to get to know the young people early on was delivered at the beginning of camp three as planned and had a good response from the young people attending. At the end of the third camp the youth workers had felt that they had progressed well, having had a chance to deliver some of their own activities, such as the trivia night and some sport and arts based sessions and they had also delivered a logistically smoother week-long camp than the previous two. With the third camp they had both the buzz of getting to know the young people as well as the confidence in their ability to be able to learn through trial.

Camp three was considered a high point of the year for the youth workers. However, there were certain characteristics which supported the likelihood of camp three being a success. All the young people from Mining Town School selected to attend the camp were those that had demonstrated 'engagement' in the school system. All were regular school attendees, most did well at school, all had aspirations which involved either further study or employment (as outlined in the previous chapter) and all were happy to follow the rules and guidelines set by staff and teachers for the camps. They all participated in the sessions and enjoyed the opportunity to make the trip to the city and attend such a program. The school staff also played an important role in influencing the planning and smooth running of this camp. They provided all the requested details to youth workers within the time frames required, they prepared the young people for the camp by outlining the camp's purpose and expectations of them and they were flexible, providing the freedom to the youth workers to develop and deliver the program as they saw fit, a characteristic of all school staff except for those attending camp four. It would turn out that camp three would be the only camp



where the bureaucracy of planning played a minor role in the youth workers' working day. The following two camps would see the full effects of the bureaucracy of planning on the youth workers, both on their professional identities as well as their identities as Aboriginal, a theme I will pick up on again in chapter six.

### **Efficiency, effectiveness and surveillance**

Davies (2010) suggests that how much room youth work practitioners have to manoeuvre can depend on whether the economy is doing well or badly, whether people in general or influential groups feel secure or threatened and whether young people are more respected than feared. When applying Davies' idea to an Australian Indigenous youth policy context it perhaps is not surprising that the room left to manoeuvre for the program staff in this area might be quite limited. For example in recent years the Australian economy has been doing well whilst many other developed countries headed into recession as a consequence of the global financial crisis. This coincided with a formal acknowledgement that economic prosperity was not experienced by all Australians and particularly not by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who were consistently identified through census data to be less financially well off as a group than non-Indigenous Australians.

At the same time there was the development of the CTG policy and indicators, along with an increase in funding streams directed towards the attainment of six specific indicators with set time lines for achieving them. Indeed, an interesting trend that can be observed by viewing government reports since the year the CTG policy targets were introduced is the change in tone and discourse presented in each of the annual reports (Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2013). Early reports view the current social indicators as quite bleak, and therefore strive to highlight the need for specific and targeted measures to address this inequality. Move forward to the year 2013 and the reports focus on achievements and outcomes as a consequence of the funding to date, and highlight the ongoing and on time progression towards those targets. It is not surprising then that a federal government funded program such as this one would have strict outcomes expected of its financial inputs. The fear here is that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth will not meet their full potential as defined in an economic sense by mainstream Australia and therefore reflect negatively on the work of the policy makers and the government at large.

Bunyan and Ord (2012) suggest two major changes have occurred as a consequence of 'key neoliberal political rationalities and "managerial technologies": they are the introduction of private

sector management practices to the public sector and the introduction of competition, leading to the “marketisation” of services and an overall shift towards a model embedded in the “three E’s” of economy, efficiency and effectiveness’ (Farnham & Horton 1996 in Bunyan & Ord 2012, p. 21).

Neoliberalism is a:

theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. Therefore the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such activities.

(Harvey 2005, p. 2)

It is this institutional framework which remains in place regardless of which political party is currently in power (Bunyan & Ord 2012), working with the setting of targets and the identification and allocation of performance indicators predominately measured quantitatively.

This emphasis on measurement is a problem for youth workers who traditionally have seen their work as being primarily an improvised practice. Consequently it makes it difficult for them to take a critical stance towards their practice when constantly aware of the surveillance applied to themselves and the young people they work with (de St Croix 2010). Making the situation even more frustrating is that focus on measurable targets has been argued to reflect little on the events taking place on the ground (Fraser 2008). To address these issues, Fuller and Ord (2012) recommend that practitioners and managers alike should reflect on ‘the persuasive and pervasive discourse of efficiency and effectiveness which is being promoted, and ask how far contemporary accounts of leading and managing support the values and principles which underpin youth work’ (p. 45).

Lastly, with increased funding becoming available to youth work and youth programs and the move towards a business culture model of management, youth organisations and program staff are left needing to develop project management skills to be able to meet the requirements set out by funders (Hoggarth 2010; Millar 2010). In many instances in youth work, the skills associated with managing, delivering and reporting on a project are assumed within the funding model, with no acknowledgement or support resources, such as training or funding, to meet government’s ever increasing reliance and need for project management tracking tools and reporting. Similarly to the findings in Mosse’s (2005) work on development workers, this emphasis on measurement and the need to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness as well as the skills associated with delivering

youth work services in the current policy setting lead to two types of youth workers, both of which were visible in the *BECA* program setting.

On the one hand there were those that were fluent in the skills and language required to both deliver and promote youth work programs. They were confident public speakers; they had some background in an education setting and could, therefore, develop sessions by turning their ideas into practice, or had the ability to replicate what they had seen elsewhere in their own settings. They were familiar with target-orientated program delivery and had the logistical skills to plan and organise a program within set time frames and to a set schedule. They were fluent in the vernacular of reporting and had experience in working with funders, effectively utilising the language of efficiency, effectiveness and therefore success. And they were skilled in the selective promotion of the impacts of their work and programs. In the eyes of both funders and their managers this is how successful youth work and youth workers should be.

The three youth workers on the *BECA* program however did not adopt this style of youth work even though it was the style they originally set out to emulate. They did not have the skills, the support or the time to develop these competencies. They had no background in education, which saw them struggling to turn ideas into planned activities. They had limited to no experience in public speaking, which saw them become nervous when delivering sessions. And they had never logistically planned anything like a residential camp. Consequently tasks which may have been undertaken more efficiently by more experienced youth workers took longer to complete. Sessions were not well thought out leading to unpolished presentations and in some cases the withdrawal of an activity due to a lack of confidence on the youth worker's part. In their eyes as well as that of their managers, at times they were in a sense 'failing'. This made it difficult to utilise the language of efficiency, effectiveness and success necessary in program reporting and led to a more critical reflection by the youth workers of the purpose and need for their work. In a way, the smooth presentations and finely tuned schedules of other youth workers and youth programs meant a glossing over of critical questions as they were seen, by themselves and others, as doing well. With these areas of the program failing for this group of youth workers, it left them exposed to contemplate the more pressing questions associated with their field of work and in particular the current context it operates in.

Mosse (2005), outlining the same process changes, but in a different context – aid policy – describes a similar change in the program he followed. He reflects that 'implementation changed project

relations and brought new accountabilities. An organisational emphasis on activities, targets and spending resulted in a clarification of hierarchy. This was inevitable' (Mosse 2005, p. 109). Indeed, the same dissident shift was being witnessed in the *BECA* program and the youth workers were becoming more aware with each camp of the effect this was having on their autonomy and identity as youth workers. Also they were seeing what they felt to be the most important concern of the program, the needs of the young people, fading into the background and mattering less and less. Indeed, the youth workers began to see that all camps were beginning to look the same, not only to each other but to other youth programs as well. Consequently this affected their learning, a consequence observed in Mosse's work where 'fixed guidelines displaced people's design and reduced learning' (2005, p. 116).

### **Negotiating partnerships**

Merton (2010) explains that under the guise of efficiency and greater choice, as well as the drive to demonstrate results and public value, policy makers have opened up a number of public services to the marketplace, which are then delivered by organisations appointed through commissioning or compulsory competitive tendering. The establishment of partnerships was viewed by the organisation as a way to demonstrate how the *BECA* program and the organisation it was situated in had a better 'product' or 'program' to deliver, therefore supporting its potential to be more competitive when applying for funding. The staff also believed they were providing a better service to the young people attending their programs as it provided more options, more information and more networks.

However the identification and role of partner organisations would become an area of divergence between the youth workers and those around them. Whilst the youth workers began to acknowledge the importance of building relationships between themselves and the young people, those around them in the organisation, specifically managers and those tasked with maintaining and accessing funding, became more focused on the importance of promoting the success of their programs and expanding the programs' and organisations' networks through the establishment of further partners, particularly those in the corporate sector. Additionally it was felt that by establishing partnerships with organisations, and particularly organisations within the corporate sector, other avenues of funding would open up, outside of support currently gained from government and philanthropy.

Sarah, Tanya and Chris realised early on the need to draw on additional technical support to deliver the BECA program and the need to identify additional partners. The easiest way for them to do this was to organise other facilitators to come in and deliver sessions of the program and from whom they could learn the art of developing and delivering workshops. Identifying and establishing links with new partners was not an easy task for the youth workers. Firstly, it was hard to identify which partners to approach and work with because of the limited knowledge about young people attending the program and their needs. Secondly the main partners identified by Sarah, Tanya and Chris were other youth organisations or individual facilitators who were called on by youth programs to deliver specific sessions and activities. These were usually small organisations or individual contractors. Many times the youth workers were left to rely on their own networks to identify individuals. However facilitators were often busy delivering their own programs and in many instances were not able to commit to the restricted and highly scheduled time frame by which a one-week program ran. As a consequence, if there was not enough space in the week to run the activity or workshop then that activity or workshop would be missed for that camp. Finally, with the youth workers in the process of establishing the goals and approach of their own program, they were rarely able to be strategic when identifying potential partners, were unable to establish partnerships based on their own needs or to clearly identify and articulate what they offered to the partners. This limited their ability to sell their program to partner agencies. They essentially had no currency to negotiate with as they were unable to deliver workshops in return or to offer additional opportunities and resources in exchange. The issue of partners became one of the consuming issues for the youth workers as Sarah and Tanya explain:

*Sarah: Well I don't know that from our end anyway that there has been enough engagement with potential partners around what the program is and how we'd like them to be on board. There needs to be, you know I think that stuff, you need to work on that. We need to have that spelt out clearly you know, what the program is, how do we expect them to be involved, are we going to pay for it, how much, because currently we don't have any real partners on board and it just means that we don't have people that we can really call on for their expertise.*

*Tanya: Yep. We need partnerships. We need people that understand what this program is and what we're trying to do. So far we've been trying to call on people through our contacts, through our own networks. But they've all got their own jobs, their own commitments and their own priorities. So we're almost feeling like we're asking people for stuff that hasn't really, they haven't really been brought on board properly yet, to feel comfortable to call them in to do this.*

Whilst Sarah and Tanya both recognised the need to bring partners on board and to be clear about expectations, they never reflected on what they could offer in return for these services, particularly as money was limited. For some of the facilitators there was payment. For example the drama sessions delivered in each camp were payed for apart from the first session, the reasoning for which I explain further below. Others were essentially favours from people they knew, such as dropping into the local Indigenous-run radio station to sit in on the airing of a program and have a staff member from the station talk to the young people about employment opportunities in broadcasting.

This problem underlines the limitation in current funding models which either do not adequately calculate the cost and resource needs to run programs, or effectively estimate the cost of the staff to develop and deliver such programs. In this case, the Inspiring Youth Foundation was identified and presented itself as capable of delivering a full program. The youth workers, all new to the field, were hired with limited attention to the costs of either supporting them to develop the necessary skills to undertake the role effectively, or purchasing the expertise to fill that gap. Ultimately the youth workers were left feeling that they were yet again failing in another area of their role as well as becoming increasingly frustrated when partners dropped out of delivering a session or were unable to commit.

Another interesting occurrence around identifying and accessing partner organisations was what I refer to as the 'ownership' of partner organisations. Along with the *BECA* program, several other Indigenous organisations were housed together on the same site. The aim of basing these organisations on the same site was to provide a network of Indigenous organisations that could work together and benefit from each other, in a space that was specifically Indigenous in identity. However what occurred in relation to partnerships was reflective of the current competitive environment youth work operates in.

The *BECA* program regularly utilised drama sessions in each of its camps as a fun icebreaker at the beginning of each camp as well as a potential tool for confidence building, by getting the young people to participate and do something that was slightly out of their comfort zone. The way the drama company was contacted had to be carefully negotiated as the company was already a partner of a neighbouring organisation on site. The process that occurred each time the *BECA* program wanted to book a two-hour drama session was that they would have to get in contact with the youth worker responsible, who had the contact with the drama company, and get that worker to ask the drama company to come and deliver a session during a camp. The first time this occurred is

understandable as the drama company was delivering the two-hour session for free as part of the neighbour organisation's partnership agreement. However after this point all sessions were payed for by the *BECA* program. Therefore going through their neighbour organisation to make the booking was not necessary, although doing so meant that the *BECA* program was not stepping on the toes and territory of the youth workers of their neighbour organisation. Partnership identification and ownership was in itself valuable for each organisation, as the organisation that first established the partnership gained 'ownership' and therefore control of access to the partner organisation. The reasoning for claiming ownership was not always based on what would be the most beneficial for the young people attending the various youth programs.

The main reasoning for the partnering between the drama company and the neighbour organisation was to provide a potential pathway for identifying young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had interest in or potential for a career in the dramatic arts. However it was identified early on that this neighbouring organisation did not have the capacity or ability to develop and deliver youth programs, therefore it relied on its Indigenous and non-Indigenous partner organisations to deliver those programs utilising their site, resources or name. The *BECA* program needed the drama company to deliver drama sessions. The neighbouring organisation needed to demonstrate its specific relevance and role within this network, in this case as the main access point for other Indigenous organisations and young Indigenous people. Handing over the drama company's details to the *BECA* program would remove the need for the neighbouring organisation. Consequently the youth worker from the neighbouring organisation ensured contact with the drama company was made through her.

The consequences of this meant that the youth workers of the *BECA* program were unable to develop a more meaningful or more strategic partnership between themselves and the drama company. They were unaware of the objectives of the drama company. Nor were they able to have access to the company to explain and negotiate what they could offer, or vice versa. This was because the workshops were delivered by senior acting students so there was never an opportunity to meet and discuss options with the management of the drama company as they always had to go through intermediaries. Going directly to the company, the youth workers felt would be going against the request of the neighbouring organisation who asked that access to the drama company occur through them. Therefore, instead of establishing and building networks across many organisations, what occurred was the narrowing or obstruction of such networks and partnerships to maintain relevance and need.

## From the partners to ‘the corporates’

Whilst the *BECA* program and its youth workers were able to offer little in return to their partner organisations, there was one asset they had to offer that became the basis from which to negotiate with another set of partners, ‘the corporates’. That asset was support for corporate organisations to achieve their equity targets, which each organisation had set through the development of its own Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)<sup>27</sup>, established within the broader setting of corporate social responsibility. It became very evident as the year’s camps progressed that the engagement with partners was taking a different course to that described so far in this chapter. Early on, Sarah, Tanya and Chris were trying to identify partners that could support them to deliver sessions during the camps, such as the drama sessions, or the cooking and cultural sessions explained in this and other chapters. As the year advanced, they got more support from other staff in the organisation’s main office who were responsible for the identification of partner organisations and the promotion of the organisation. The difficulty was that the office staff members’ vision and motivations for identifying partners were quite different to those of the youth workers, and in conflict with the objectives of a logical and critical model of youth work.

Half way through the year the youth workers began to make comments about a push coming from management to include the corporate sector as partners in the camps. Indeed, corporate visits were included into the final timetable of the third camp, which had not occurred in earlier camps. The youth workers began to express frustration with this new direction. Comments were made to me along the lines of, ‘is the program about the young people or the corporates and how many numbers we get through’?

The reasons for identifying corporate organisations to partner the camps were threefold. First, the camp had a career education focus and therefore it was felt that the young people needed to be exposed to various industries and types of employment, although this did not necessarily mean that the exposure to various types of employment needed to come directly and only from the corporate sector. The second reason for engaging the corporate sector was the notion that it could provide an alternative route to funding outside of the public and philanthropic sector. Thirdly, the corporate

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<sup>27</sup>The RAP initiative was introduced in 2006 by Reconciliation Australia, a national organisation that promotes ‘reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community’ (RAP 2012). The RAPs ‘are about changing the culture of an organisation so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel valued and respected’ (RAP 2012, p. 11). A RAP (2012) is ‘a business plan that turns good intentions into actions’ (p. 11).



organisations targeted were well known, and in many cases large multinational companies, which if brought on board would provide a certain image and status to the Inspiring Youth Foundation.

Whilst the youth workers had started to move away from their original functional model approach to youth work to a more logical and critical model in the first two camps, the influence of the office staff half way through the year saw the camps return back to a more functional model. During the third camp, apart from a few site visits to some of the large corporations, the youth workers also organised a careers expo. Most of the site visits involved a presentation by a representative from the human resources department talking to the young people about the various jobs on offer within the organisation as well as specific advice on any Indigenous-specific employment programs on offer. Sometimes they brought in an Indigenous staff member to talk about their experiences of working for the organisation and their career pathway to date. For some site visits the young people would get a tour of facilities and morning or afternoon tea. The types of organisations visited and targeted represented the hospitality sector, tourism and travel sector, banking and finance sector and media sector.

This new push towards working with the 'corporates' did not sit well with the youth workers, who began to question the reasoning for the corporate engagement and what exactly the young people were gaining from this new aspect introduced to the program.

*Sarah: For me again with the site visits and things, again we've flagged it before we need to know what they intend to do with them, because you know they promise a lot of things that they don't end up delivering, but is it really for the kids benefit or is it really them promoting their own industry and for the business. Which there needs to be an element of exposure to different sectors, but I think we can look at how we do that. For me the expo was great, I think that could be how more of the careers stuff gets incorporated because then the onus is on the kids to interact and they're not just sort of being talked at.*

Sarah continued now referring to the office staff.

*I just think that we've all got different agendas and maybe some of that is how it is and how it should be, just because we've got different roles and different priorities and maybe just look at things from a completely different perspective, but I just, I think there's too much of that ... and I think that for me ..*

*I don't know that, maybe I'm looking at it incorrectly but I just am not comfortable with all this focus on the corporate engagement, I don't like it, I think it's so far from what we should be doing.*

Indeed, after one of the careers expo staff made the comment: 'the two "corporates" didn't show up, at least that now gives us a chance to go to [management] and say see, stop asking us to go with them'. This was after a number of other organisations that they did invite, many from the community or public sector, did show up and fulfilled their commitment to the careers expo that had been organised. Throughout that year some other 'corporates' came to the camp itself and delivered some sessions. One media organisation in particular had come to the camp twice. After their presentation on careers in broadcasting, journalism and photo-journalism, the organisation members took the group outside to have a go at using the camera equipment. I stood with one of the visiting staff members, who I found out was a journalist and later editor himself. His paper had closed down so he had taken on the equity manager role within the organisation, which included the development and delivery of the organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan. He told me how he and the photographer enjoyed attending the sessions at the BECA program and they thought the young people enjoyed the sessions, however that they had been offered to be involved in another Indigenous-focused youth program, which they thought they might switch to because it would be a better option for them to meet their objectives. Indeed, this organisation never delivered a session at the last camp for the year.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) concept, defined as the 'commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life' (WBCSD 2002, p. 2), has been gaining increasing awareness and acceptance over the past few decades, be it from the corporate sector, development sector or the general public. However the core principles that drive the corporate sector are surely different to those that motivate the development sector with each industry itself having differing priorities and viewing social responsibility through a different lens (Dahlsrud 2006; Vidal & Kozek 2008). One might suggest the context in which CSR occurs for organisations that are involved in an Indigenous career development/education youth program, would be one specifically related to achieving the objectives or actions and measurable targets set within the a business's Reconciliation Action Plan.

One theory that is dominant in the business literature in regards to CSR is the business case. In this instance 'companies that embrace Corporate Social Responsibility recognise that their social and environmental impacts have to be managed in just the same way as their economic or commercial performance' (Little 2003, p. 2). This leads to six commonly recognised benefits of a business case study approach: reputation management, risk management, employee satisfaction, innovation and learning, access to capital and financial performance (Little 2003). Financial performance, also referred to as a cost-benefit analysis, is a strong influence in particular (McWilliams & Siegel 2001; Waddock & Graves 1997). Whilst there is literature to support the business and financially related costs and benefits of CSR to a corporation, the social and environmental aspects, which make up the rest of the triple bottom line, have scarcely been assessed.

The business case approach to CSR demonstrates that CSR could mean little more to corporations than an effective advertising and public relations tool that maintains competitive advantage and fulfils the requirements to maintain the image of being an equitable business. The language alone, it could be argued, suggests this focus or motivation. Carroll (1999) refers to economic and non-economic components of CSR; economic components of CSR being what the business does for itself, and non-economic components as what the business does for others. Indeed, Blowfield (2007) suggests that we know more about the impact of CSR itself on business than we do of the societal and environmental impact, particularly in the context of developing countries. The incompatibility of the business case approach (i.e. corporate objectives versus development objectives) has been outlined in terms of a failure to involve the beneficiaries of CSR and a failure to 'integrate initiatives into a larger development plan' (Frynas 2005, p. 588)<sup>28</sup>.

The recent development and promotion of Reconciliation Action Plans, it could be argued, may be a specific motivation to businesses and organisations to be involved in career development/education youth programs for young Indigenous people. Reconciliation Action Plans have been promoted and developed as a way for a business to address and deliver on its commitment to being an equitable and inclusive organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. They are both an advocacy and strategic tool, and have gained momentum with various types of organisations across the country. However, I argue that in youth development programs focusing on education and employment the objectives and indicators set out in RAPs become the drivers for involvement in certain initiatives. On the one hand, the push to meet stated objectives and key performance

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<sup>28</sup> Looking at corporate citizenship in Australia, in a study involving 98 companies from the top 500 companies in Australia, Birch (2002) found that corporate citizenship was mainly seen as a short-term community involvement, and not seen as being central to core business or the way the company is organised or run.

indicators, which has been a way to lobby organisations as well as hold them to a level of accountability, has forced organisations to think about their practices, stated or unstated, and make a commitment to address inequality in the areas of access, involvement and opportunities. On the other hand, the same targets and indicators have meant a possibly restrictive view of the underpinning philosophy and purpose of RAPs and reduced them to the delivery of measurable outputs and outcomes. In the context of youth work delivered within an Australian Indigenous policy space specifically relating to career and education development, policies and objectives need to address the additional complex nature of Corporate Social Responsibility and Reconciliation Action Plans when exploring the stakeholder and partnership web in which they operate.

### **Contending for influence, avoiding judgement**

I asked Sarah if any specific requirements had been set down from the funding agency in terms of what needs to be included in each program, or the format the program should take. Sarah responded:

*Nup, which I think that's a good thing in a way because then we can build the program, otherwise just if they dictate it's going to be based on the same model somewhere else.*

Even though the youth workers thought they were not being dictated to by the policy makers, throughout the year there were many examples where it became obvious that whilst there may not have been a visible dictation of program content, there was an invisible, although very real, top-down determination of how the program should be rolled out. Whilst it was not the staffers within the funding agency specifically handing down instructions on what the program should look like, the initial format they requested, the participation numbers set as key performance indicators early on, and the yearly need to re-apply for funding, ensured that the youth program would be joining a space where it would be contending for influence within the wider policy and youth work arena. This is an arena dominated by administrative procedures, individual and organisational accountabilities, and program reporting that rewards compliance over critique. As the policies entered the youth work arena they entered into relations with institutions through the interactions with the people within them, moving back and forth between those involved in the process. This led to a divergence of interpretations and ultimately a conflict of ideologies which in turn led to an internal struggle for power over the program within the organisation.

The current approach to managing public services and the consequences of the move to adopt a business culture model, means that the current policy climate requires youth workers and youth work organisations to 'analyse the interests of stakeholders, develop partnerships with other service suppliers and create networks so that the expectations of all stakeholders for efficient and effective provision can be met' (Merton 2010, p. 93)<sup>29</sup>. Ma Rhea (2012) referring to partnerships between families and communities and policy makers in an Indigenous education setting, suggests that:

unlike previous engagements with missions and governments that had their own 'logics of exchange'...the neoliberal approach has bought a business-like, contractual element to relationships between Indigenous peoples and education service providers that has direct impact on how government policy of 'partnership' is being mobilised(p. 48).

Partnerships can have both advantages and disadvantages; an advantage may be a wider choice of services, activities and opportunities for the young people. Consequently an increase in services and options leads to an increase in partner organisations involved in the process. This makes decisions around resources, methods and information-sharing more difficult and more time consuming, creating conflict over issues such as claiming credit and taking responsibility for results (Merton 2010). In such situations the need to maintain and manage the patron/client relationship and demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness as well as contend for influence in the policy and youth work arena is in danger of becoming the underpinning purpose of partnership development, with the result that the disadvantages of partnership involvement outweigh the advantages.

Mosse (2005) states that:

viewed from an individual's perspective project implementation is not only, or primarily about executing policy, or even putting schemes in place, but a matter of sustaining a set of relationships that secure a person's identity and status, and which are a pre-condition for action at every level. Effective relationships are necessary to win support, sanction the flow of resources, build reputations, trust and reliability; to fend off the arbitrary judgement ... Stability in the world of action does not come from coherent policy but from effective relationships (p. 130).

In the case of the youth workers, their skills and willingness to form and maintain effective relationships was at times at odds with their sense of their own identities as youth workers, leading to an ongoing struggle to maintain power and influence over the direction of their program, and

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<sup>29</sup> Merton (2010) describes a stakeholder as being 'any individual, group or organisation that has a material, legal or political interest in your organisation and may be affected by its activities and performance' (p. 105), for example a regional government office, a state department of education and in this case and most importantly the young people themselves. On the other hand a partner is defined as 'any service provider or agency whose activities and responsibilities affect young people directly' (p. 105), for example other youth organisations.

whilst not necessarily breaking down relations, leaving them at the bottom of the power hierarchy. In the following chapter I explore the consequences of the reshaping of the youth work environment on the youth workers themselves within the framework of identity; their professional identity as youth workers as well as their personal identity as Aboriginal.

## Chapter Six

### The youth workers

The previous chapter has shown how the need by policy makers to demonstrate value, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability imposes an increasingly hierarchical system on the delivery of youth work, creating a divide between managers and their staff. Consequently organisations are becoming less responsive to the voices of those who work in the organisation, as well as the young people they aim to serve. Central to this issue is the weakening of trust which is at the heart of a viable youth work culture and undermines people's sense of 'professionalism' (Fuller & Ord 2012). To provide an analogy, Fuller and Ord (2012) draw on a poignant quote from a BBC Radio 4 lecture given by O'Neil in 2002 who suggests that:

the culture of accountability that we are relentlessly building for ourselves actually damages trust rather than supports it. Plants don't flourish when we pull them up too often to check how their roots are growing: political, institutional and professional life too may not go well if we constantly uproot them to demonstrate that everything is transparent and trustworthy.

(Fuller & Ord, 2012, p47)

There is a loss of autonomy for youth workers as youth work becomes more centralised and aligned to government priorities.

In this chapter I explore the consequences of this reshaping of the youth work environment on the youth workers themselves, their professional identity and their personal identity as Aboriginal. Shore, Wright and Pero (2011) suggest that the rise and spread of the audit culture and associated auditing technologies exemplifies how policies can have a 'runaway effect, actively reshaping the environments into which they have been introduced' (p. 3). Research conducted specifically in the youth work space demonstrates and presents this runaway effect as a move away from the traditional intuitive approach to youth work to the more recent functional youth work approach which views youth in terms of problems to be managed. I demonstrate how the discourse of the 'disengaged young person' and the popular operating of youth work within a functional model reshapes a youth work environment traditionally established to critique hegemonic discourse.

I ask how did these youth workers interpret the program model and policy space they found themselves situated in and how within this space did they establish their own status and personal

and professional identity? I turn to the 'activities' which made up the day-to-day running of the program to explore this in more detail and demonstrate how, through these activities, the youth workers began to develop their identity as youth workers, but at the same time had these identities challenged as they came to view the program within its political and social context. Shore and Wright (2011, p. 1) argue that policies are 'productive, performative and continually contested'; in this chapter I explore how policies in this context were productive and performative but were too powerful to be contested, due to the hegemonic nature of the policy itself within the social worlds of the actors and agents who operate in it, including the general public, stakeholders and other youth organisations that operate in this space.

### **The competent youth worker**

Sarah, Tanya and Chris had been trying to get Todd and Derek, two youth workers from another youth organisation, to come and deliver one of their sessions at the *BECA* program. Todd and Derek and the organisation they were employed by were seen as being successful in the Indigenous youth work space. Their organisation had continued to grow over the last few years through a mixture of government, corporate and fundraising money, leading to an expansion in its employee numbers and reach across the country. The organisation's public image was also managed very well with a unique and youthful style reflecting its proclaimed new and youthful approach to mentoring and developing young Indigenous people. The *BECA* program youth workers looked up to Todd, Derek and the organisation they represented as being an example of what they should be aiming for with their own program as well as their own professional development as youth workers.

The youth workers spoke enviously about Todd's and Derek's ability to deliver engaging sessions and connect with young people. Todd and Derek were confident public speakers who believed in the need and relevance of the programs they delivered. They viewed themselves as role models for young Indigenous people and felt that their personal stories were examples of the possibilities that could occur when one was motivated and worked hard and, more importantly, engaged with the school system. They also had runs on the board, the type favoured in project evaluation discourse of outcomes and impacts and they would regularly make claims for their program's achievements even if those claims would be difficult to verify. For example Todd claimed that his organisation had mentored a young Indigenous student who would go on to become the first Aboriginal school captain in Australia. This claim was immediately refuted by the teachers and students of Ocean Town School who said that they had an Indigenous student as school captain several years earlier.



This is just one example of the ease with which some youth programs and staff advocate and publicise the success of the services they provide.

The young people from Ocean Town had come towards the end of their camp; they would be leaving that afternoon, but before they could go they had one last session to attend. After lunch they headed to the main room where the majority of sessions were held, and where Todd and Derek would be presenting their session. Todd led the session with Derek assisting. The focus of the session was not clear from the outset, and whilst they had been booked to present at a previous camp, this would be the first time they had attended and presented.

Todd started the session by asking the group of students to form a large circle and began by trying to motivate and engage the students through some simple movement and spatial activities. He asked the group to begin laughing as loudly as they could then they were asked to yell out words to each other as loudly as they could. Such an approach, referred to as an energising activity, is typically found in workshops or training days and Todd in particular was very confident in his ability to stand up in front of a group and lead it through such activities. The young people seemed energised and happy after this start to the session. They then all sat on the floor and listened to Todd speak for the next 20 minutes about himself, his upbringing, what was important to him and how he identified as a young Indigenous adult. He had an energetic and engaging presentation style and the young people responded by listening attentively.

Todd drew on a Rugby League analogy to present his advice on how young Indigenous people should approach their future and in particular the transition between school and further education/employment, as this is one of the key focuses of the organisation Todd represents. Todd pretended to be a famous Rugby League player, who was thinking about his future, and by doing so tapping into the interests of the group, in particular the boys. He pretended to be making a phone call to Derek asking for advice about what he should do with his future. Todd hung up the pretend phone and then went on to reflect on his thoughts from that phone call.

He asked the young people in the group to tell him what type of job they thought they could get if they left school in Year 10. He then answered this question fairly quickly, as there was limited response from the group. A 'trolley pusher' was his response, suggesting that if you left school in Year 10, your employment opportunities will be limited to that of someone who collects trolleys in local supermarket parking lots or an equivalent low-level job.

He then asked the young people what type of job they thought they could get if they completed high school and obtained their Higher School Certificate. This time the young people responded; a plumber, an electrician, a job in the defence force were all responses shouted out. It seemed like many students had thought about this route and therefore had done some research and planning around these possible employment pathways. Indeed, many of these students had family who held such employment and had spoken about their families supporting them to get into such fields of work and trades. Todd accepted that, yes, you could get a trade, but that it probably wouldn't be that great a job and you would be stuck working for the council. From this he made the jump to maybe ending up getting a job as a 'garbo', someone who empties household rubbish bins.

Finally he asked the young people what jobs they thought they could get if they went to university. A teacher, an engineer, a lawyer were the jobs mentioned by the young people. Todd agreed. To summarise and make his point, Todd went back to his interpretation of a famous Rugby League player contemplating his future. Derek pretended to be on the other end of the phone again providing advice, telling him to think about his future and plan, strive and work hard towards his goals, like he had his football career.

Todd put the phone down, he had made his decision. Demonstrating the attacking and side-stepping tactics commonly found in the game of Rugby League, Todd as his Rugby player alias, was going to head towards the try line and score a goal, a euphemism for success. He was going to side-step Year 10 and the job opportunity it provided of being a trolley pusher, he was going to side-step the HSC and becoming a garbo, he was 'going to go all the way to the try line, to uni, to become a lawyer or a doctor'. And this is how Todd's main presentation ended, apart from a few final closing comments about the organisation he worked for.

The young people in the group seemed energised by this talk, even though the Goal Maps they completed suggested that university was only a goal for a handful of young people from Ocean Town. One boy asked how they would go about getting a job with Todd's organisation. Todd responded that to get a job at this organisation you would have to either be enrolled at university or have completed a degree. The boy seemed deflated, the enthusiasm etched across his face about potentially finding an organisation or field that appealed to his interests was quickly replaced with a sigh and a disheartened look. Interestingly there are no formal qualifications required to work in the field that Todd's organisation functions within, the youth sector, it was just a requirement that Todd's organisation had put in place.

I choose Todd's presentation as a way to highlight a few points. Firstly, it is easy to refute some of the claims made by Todd. Based on many different qualifiers of success, for example, income, job security, flexibility and job status, going to university does not always translate to achieving successful and meaningful employment. However I have to acknowledge that Todd was trying to be motivational and therefore would have probably admitted to some creative licence here. But whilst Todd's presentation could be argued by most, including him, to not be factually correct, it demonstrates the assumptions that are held by youth programs and the type of values and knowledge many of them aim to transmit to the young people who attend their programs.

In addition to the primary socialisation process that these young people have been exposed to in their families and local communities, as well as the socialisation process that their school may provide, these youth programs offer an additional socialisation process. Indeed, look through most national Indigenous youth organisations, youth programs and the associated marketing materials of the programs they deliver and you will find that a lot of the discourse focuses on influencing young Indigenous people's aspirations, or supporting them to achieve stated outcomes of success; a job, self-confidence, or to expand their horizons. The youth programs develop these messages based on the idea that there is a need for exactly what they are offering, however in many cases, and particularly in larger national programs, there has been limited or no consultation with each individual which would allow these organisations to identify the scope and range of needs for each of the young people and to tailor their program appropriately.

Todd's presentation, I would argue, falls directly within the functional model of youth work. In this instance there is a lack of acknowledgement of young people's lived experiences, as the details of their lived experiences have not been sought, rather what has occurred instead is the transfer of knowledge as a way to achieve motivation and a reinterpretation of the value of school and schooling. Whilst the program provides some room for critical reflection it does not comprise all of the characteristics of a critical youth work program that would allow this reflection to occur in the fullest sense. In critical youth work young people are viewed as being capable social actors and citizens. Learning occurs through the questioning of hegemonic views of the world, which facilitate an understanding of issues of justice, power and oppression with the intended goal of promoting social transformation. Rather than young people being encouraged to discuss issues or share experiences in a context where participation is active and based on social engagement, what occurs is that the curriculum of critical and liberal youth work with social justice and equality at its core is overridden by a model set on knowledge transmission. This approach is based on the transmission

of pre-identified strategies for addressing issues of social justice and inequality. These strategies have been predetermined by the youth workers with little reference to or acknowledgement of the young people's individual lived experiences, but are instead based on the youth workers' own individual lived experience, or the organisation's or the government's policy rhetoric and the objectives these represent.

Todd and Derek were revered as highly competent and capable youth workers; they knew what to do, they knew what to say and had the skills to develop and deliver such a session. This is what the youth workers thought they needed to skill themselves up to achieve. If they could develop and deliver a session like this, they too would be effective and competent youth workers and they would no longer need to rely on 'partner' organisations to populate their camps with activities and sessions. Whilst the youth workers had realised only a few weeks before the importance of establishing a connection and developing the youth worker – young person relationship, their inexperience in delivering activities and sessions continued to highlight to them their lack of competence to undertake their role.

### **Becoming a competent youth worker**

The youth workers had now delivered their first two camps. They would have a two-month gap between camps two and three to prepare for the arrival of the young people from Mining Town who would participate in their third camp. They had had a chance to see what it was like to deliver a residential camp, the logistics and planning that was associated with such a task, what could go wrong and potential strategies that could avert logistical disasters. They had had a chance to work with some of the partner organisations and had begun to realise the potential consequences that diverging agendas may have. They had had the opportunity to see other youth workers delivering their sessions, giving them a basis from which to develop their own ideas into deliverable sessions. And finally, they had also come to realise the impact of the push from management to incorporate 'the corporates' into the youth program. Most importantly, however, they had the time to reflect on these experiences and set about putting some of the lessons learnt into practice for the next camp. The youth workers saw their own improvement in the skills necessary to undertake the tasks associated with planning such a program and observed increasing efficacy in their work through their ability to develop relationships and engage with the young people. They felt that camp three would be an opportunity to put their new found skills and efficacy on display.

The morning of camp three felt very different to the mornings of the previous two camps. The youth workers arrived to work later in the day, calm and prepared, as all the logistics for the camp had been confirmed and completed and all paperwork had been signed off. The teachers from Mining Town had completed all their administrative requirements allowing the youth workers to focus on their own administrative processes without having to chase teachers and young people for further documentation associated with such programs. The youth workers had also developed some of their own sessions. Realising the need to establish a connection with the young people and the short amount of time allocated in each camp to do so, they decided to hold a trivia night on the first day of the camp, a fun activity which would also provide a space for the young people and the youth workers to meet without any mention of program goals relating to education or employment. The day was relaxed and in contrast to the other camps, the youth workers seemed prepared, confident and satisfied with their planned program for the week. When the time came the youth workers and I headed out to pick up the young people from Mining Town.

The trivia and games night went well with the young people enjoying the evening's activities and the youth workers coming away feeling that they had done a good job of hosting it. Also by now some of the logistical 'issues' that had caused stress and/or embarrassment for the youth workers at previous camps had started to be ironed out. Transport issues were organised, enough time was allocated for sessions as well as time in between sessions. Back-up sessions were planned in case any partner organisation pulled out at the last minute, and there was an acceptance that some free time or down time during the camp was acceptable as long as it was planned and not a consequence of activities falling through. The teachers had arrived prepared, they were organised and appreciative of the youth workers' efforts and impressed by their energy and planning. The young people participated in all the activities with enthusiasm and regularly provided positive feedback to the youth workers about the camps activities. When they were taken to activities that did not particularly interest them they still listened attentively out of politeness, knowing that later in the day there would be activities they found more interesting. During this third camp I would rarely get the chance to sit and speak with the youth workers, they were continuously talking with young people or teaching staff or confirming and planning the next day's activities, leaving me to rely on observations and anecdotal conversations with the youth workers throughout the day.

I travelled with the youth workers to the airport on the last day to see off the young people from Mining Town. It had been a successful camp, and the youth workers felt they had built up a rapport with the young people from Mining Town. Logistically, whilst there were a few hiccups, overall the

week had run to schedule with few cancellations or changes. The feeling of surprise and enthusiasm mixed with the critical reflection on areas for improvement that had dominated at the end of the previous camp discussions was now replaced with a more confident and matter-of-fact response. Where in the first two camps the youth workers appreciated the time to sit as a group and download their perspectives and experiences, they were now doing me a favour answering my questions on their thoughts on camp three. The excerpts below from camp two and then camp three demonstrate the changes in the youth workers.

*Sarah (at the end of camp two): Well the first one was also very stressful and the lead up, there was a lot of things that weren't finalised, there's still a lot of pre-camp processes that need to be streamlined and set up properly, we really and I was really conscious at the fact we don't have proper partnership in place for getting people to come in and to do sessions and stuff and it's only reinforced it this camp, and I was well aware that there wouldn't be time between the completion of the last one and this one to do much about that. We know that it's an issue but we need to get through this camp and start investigating more of the activities that are off site and how we do the onsite and who do we engage in the onsite sessions so I'm well aware of that and this week's definitely just reinforced that.*

*Chris (at the end of camp two): This camp has been a big learning curve for me. I think I've grown a lot since the last camp. Probably the same as Tanya, I think I've taken on more responsibility, the facilitating and all the talking, actually running some sessions. Things do happen, it doesn't run smooth all the time, but that's another learning curve for me. We've got to try and work our way, to work around things. Hopefully evaluate what we're doing. Hopefully get a structure on our program. So we do need a lot of work before the next camp. But I think we've learnt a lot though.*

Whereas the focus of the youth workers after camp two was on aspects of their work that needed improving, the discussions at the end of camp three focused more on what they did well and the progress they had made.

*Tanya (at the end of camp three): I feel more confident in myself at facilitating the activities, workshops and that. Like with that 'I am Deadly' [session]. And especially separating the girls from the boys, we're even better. I opened up with the girls, told them my story and they all listened and sort of some could relate because they grew up with single mums and that, and it was even the boys as well as, I felt more confident in myself with delivering.*

*Chris (at the end of camp three): So I think, more hands-on, and the more we actually got in and had a go with delivering and participating with the activities, I think, we did get confident with delivering. I know I did, actually just having a go. This camp's actually built up my confidence. I wouldn't have done this a couple of months ago. Speaking up, having a yarn to kids, and talking in front of crowds and that, so like just actually having a go. All that 'no shame' that we're trying to build with the kids, you know, you know that's what we preach.*

*Sarah (at the end of camp three): And I think the more we deliver that trivia and games and stuff I think the more we go back and look for more activities and more games and do some training on it and stuff, we'll get ever better at that stuff, I was really happy with the first night I think you could just tell that it was a much different atmosphere, they were even saying on the second day, they were like debating what day it was cause they couldn't believe they'd been here for one day ... I said yeah I felt the same, but felt like on Tuesday morning, it felt like where we were at with the other kids by the Wednesday evening, so I think we intended to do that and make that a priority and we definitely did that.*

And when camp logistics fell through or sessions didn't run as planned, the youth workers felt they:

*Chris: Took care of it.*

*Sarah: We took care of it, no doubt we can get better and I think we will, for me I just feel like, I'm really happy with the camp. Because it was work we have the control of, the things that we're disappointed in, or I'm a bit disappointed in are things that we particularly didn't want involved in the first place.*

*Chris: Yeah, there has been a lot of last minute decisions, but you know we did pull together as a group.*

*Sarah: Yeah, and I think that just happens and I think we're getting used to how to manage things, like, you know, from the start, from the day we got here, the taxis weren't here, but compared if that had happened to us two camps [ago] or the camp before, I think we were just like, all right we'll sort it, it didn't frazzle any of us, we were just like thinking, oh shit, this isn't a great way to start the week but.*

*Chris: We're more proactive I think with the camp, like us, like heaps better, we kind of knew what we had to do and we just did it. And that's that same thing being on the same page we all know what we have to achieve so.*

*Sarah: I think and having that sense of ownership. Yes, I know there's quite a few things that are still being forced onto the program. But, mostly I feel as though, we've got a sense of, we own this program, we've developed this or developing it, and it's you know.*

By the end of camp three the youth workers were seeing improvements in their ability to undertake their roles as youth workers. The third camp was seen as the peak of the year for the youth workers; it had been well-organised and the youth workers through trial and error had got to the stage where they felt they could deal with any logistical issues which could arise in such a format. They were also confident in their ability to connect with young people, something they felt was important prior to the program starting and had been confirmed across the past three camps.

### **The consequences of 'messaging up'**

The previous chapter outlined how the move towards a business culture model of management has left youth organisations and their program staff needing to develop project management skills to meet the requirements of funders (Hoggarth 2010; Millar 2010). However project management skills and abilities have little influence or effect on the undertaking of youth work as it is not the planning of activities themselves which is of importance in youth work. Rather, going beyond solely delivering the program activities to connecting with the young people who attend not only increases participation in the programs by the young people, but also strengthens commitment to continue with the program (Davidson, Evans & Sicafuse 2011). For a bond to be established between the adult and the youth it is necessary for a joint commitment and emotional involvement to be demonstrated by both parties, leading to the deepening of the relationship to the point where the youth worker is viewed as a significant adult in the young person's life (Spencer 2006).

In Anderson-Nathe's (2008c) work on youth workers he describes how youth workers 'operate within a professional climate in which competence is perceived to be linked to a worker's ability to respond quickly and effectively to whatever situations clients may present' (p. 85), even though this might not always be possible. Indeed:



youth workers experience moments in their professional lives where they simply do not know how to respond. Often, these moments pass by without incident; they present merely a feature of the work and result in no long-standing crisis for the worker. Nevertheless, at other times the same events may be lived quite differently, bringing about panic and vocational questioning.

(Anderson-Nathe 2008c, p. 12)

During these times the youth worker is 'stuck' and not able to determine what it is they need to do. This inability to respond to the issue at hand is what Anderson-Nathe (2008c) refers to as moments of 'stuckness' and 'not-knowing'. It is in these times that the youth worker begins to reflect on this experience as one that highlights their failings and lack of professional skills, subsequently leading to professional anxiety and shame associated with a perception that they are unfit for their chosen career (Anderson-Nathe 2008c). Along with this anxiety and shame are feelings of being exposed to colleagues, who they perceive are more competent and therefore capable than themselves to deal with such issues and therefore further exposing themselves as 'frauds'. The following quote summarises how the youth workers in Anderson-Nathe's study described these moments.

Their reaction to the experience of not-knowing is different from merely feeling embarrassed. While embarrassment carries connotation of something accidental and forgivable, humiliation indicates a personal failing, something of which one should be ashamed. There is something inside the terms that indicates duration as well. Embarrassment is accompanied by a red-faced chuckle and a mumbled apology. Very shortly, the incident which gave rise to it may become the punch line of a shared joke. Humiliation, on the other hand, is far less fleeting. Linked to personal failing, it is the companion of depression, of a lingering sense of shame, often the result of something that could have been prevented but was not.

(Anderson-Nathe, 2008a, p. 92)

### **Competence and job self-efficacy – a fragile foundation**

Sarah, Tanya and Chris were not only tasked with managing the *BECA* program for the year, they were also involved in the development and delivery of a second week-long residential-based youth program, from this point on referred to as the *Right on Track* program. The *Right on Track* program was quite different to the *BECA* program and targeted young Indigenous people who had demonstrated at-risk behaviour towards or had been implicated in incidents with the corrective services. I did not follow the youth workers through the development of this program; however I did speak to them after the first such camp for the year. The main objective of this second program was to get the young people attending to move away from the risk behaviour they were involved in. In

this vein the residential camps were developed around the inclusion of role models and mentors, as well as public talks delivered by counsellors or those in similar support service roles.

The main response the youth workers provided me with when I asked them about the first camp of the *Right on Track* program was that it was tough. During this camp a couple of the young people attending had to be sent home due to not following the camps policies around safety and respect. The group of young people attending the camp were not as responsive to the youth workers, relationships between the youth workers and the young people on this camp were harder to form, and a week did not seem enough time to achieve an understanding of the young people and vice versa. The youth workers did not get the gratification from the young people for the activities and programs they had developed and delivered in the form of either appreciation or engagement as they had received on the previous *BECA* camps. As a consequence, the delivery of the *Right on Track* program left them feeling flat and out of their depth. The youth workers seemed to try and put this experience past them to concentrate on the planning of the final two *BECA* camps left for the year. In the meantime Sarah and Tanya were also asked to travel away for a week and be mentors on one of their organisation's other programs, so they were conscious they had one less week to get all the planning completed for camp four, but wanted to be ready for the camp on their return, the weekend before the young people from camp four arrived. This did not eventuate as planned.

An airline dispute which lasted for four days across the country meant that Sarah and Tanya as well as the young people attending camp four were not able to fly out or back to the city to attend the camp. As the airline dispute continued into its second and third day it became clear that the whole camp would need to be rescheduled, and this is what occurred. All the planning the youth workers and school staff had done had to be re-organised for the following week; understandably the youth workers did not feel as prepared as they had been before this change occurred. The self-assurance which they spoke with at the end of the third camp was now being replaced with doubt and disappointment.

*Sarah: Because of the delay with flights and weeks having to be changed it felt like, for me, that all of that hard work went out the window, for me that delay had a really big impact.*

*Tanya: I felt really flat, with all that mucking around, we were all prepared, everything set.*

This was not where the feelings of frustration would end. I have not mentioned the young people who attended camp four in the previous chapters and this is for a number of reasons, the main one being that I did not have a chance to spend the time with them that I did with the other groups, as I was also impacted by the airline dispute. However the main reason that the young people who attended camp four do not feature in the previous chapters is that the youth program they attended was quite different to that of the other four groups that year.

To provide some context, the young people who participated in camp four attend an independent, fully government-funded boarding school specifically targeting young Aboriginal people from remote communities and towns. At the beginning of each term vehicles are sent to all communities across the state to drive the young people to the school for the beginning of term. For others who live outside the state, flights are organised. The group was made up predominantly of young people who came from roughly 12 different remote communities from across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, from the central desert area all the way to the top-end. The school seemed fairly well funded and there seemed to be a big drive towards developing employment pathways for the young people beyond school, indeed there was a specific staff member at the school responsible for providing information and guidance to students in the areas of work experience, training and employment. The school had promoted the *BECA* program as a reward program for its students. One of the main difficulties the school has is getting their students to return to the school at the beginning of each term. Therefore students were told that this opportunity would be available to them if they attended the school that term and consequently the school staff viewed the program as a reward program.

The *BECA* camp began as it usually did with the drama session and followed on with a few sessions from 'the corporates'. However after the first day the school staff began to ask if their students were going to be doing any sightseeing. Their reasoning was that there were already many career-based support opportunities that are provided to these young people through the school, and the activities delivered as part of the camp so far, particularly the career and development activities, were not necessarily the best or most relevant for their students. They were also frustrated with the lack of logistical planning and keeping to schedule throughout the first day. Whilst the teachers from the other schools also mentioned some frustration with the lack of structure and keeping to time, this issue was balanced out by an acknowledgement of what the program did provide as well as the acknowledgement that being educators in the formal schooling system meant that they were very used to strict timetabling and therefore it was necessary for them to remain flexible as well.

The camp four teachers asked for a meeting with the youth workers where they requested that the camp program be reviewed. This led to the cancellation or rescheduling of many of the pre-planned sessions to allow more time for sightseeing opportunities, which the school staff felt would also be a benefit to the young people and a learning opportunity in itself. The remainder of the week was spent on undertaking a range of sightseeing activities. There would still be some 'corporate' visits as the youth workers were told that management would require them to include these visits. These 'corporate' visits consisted mainly of visiting sites within the hospitality and travel industry.

The following excerpt from my field notes begins to highlight the consequences of these events and how they played out through the fourth camp.

*The staff seem to give up on this camp. This was from the first evening when Sarah and Tanya did not attend the first activity [trivia night]. No one was formally introduced. The preparation was not there. Students were given a work book, which as far as I could see was never referred to. There were issues with Chris not pulling his weight. It would be interesting to see how the next camp goes, for a while there was improvement, but this camp was a step backwards in progress to do this job as well as in staff dynamics. Last night Sarah said to me whilst walking back to the train station that she felt they were going backwards rather than forwards. I have to say at this time I agree with the statement. I don't know whether the disorganisation is because the staff members just don't have the skills such as time management, planning etc. Or, if they do not have the confidence and therefore shut down and don't do the work needed because they feel overwhelmed and don't know where to start.*

Interaction and communication with the young people attending camp four was limited. The youth workers seemed deflated and to be questioning what the purpose was: trying to deliver a logistically sound camp or interacting and getting to know the young people on the camp. At this stage it was just about getting through the week. Sarah provided insight into her thoughts when I interviewed her after the camp.

*Sarah: Comparison to the other group, we've done quite a few different activities compared to the other group and the flow of the week has been very different and also has had an impact. I think it's harder on us this week, because one it's so close to the other camp and we are trying to juggle wrapping up that last camp preparing for this one and doing our day-to-day stuff, the last three*

*weeks have been really, really tough so leading up to this camp has been quite stressful and then delivery of this camp Tanya has been unwell, I've been unwell and now Chris has been unwell and I think we don't have enough support in place for us as staff to really cope with that and that's impacting on us, I know that coming into the Monday and feeling already really mentally and physically exhausted is not a good way to start off this process, because we need to be able to give them all our energy.*

On the bus trip between another 'corporates' visit and the camp site, I sat next to Sarah and had the following conversation. The following is a paraphrasing of some of the things she said to me as recorded in my field notes.

*Listen are you able to get that information that you've been collecting to [management], I've been away for a couple of weeks and [they're] starting to lock in camps. I've had some frank talks with [them] about reviewing the camp and then piloting different things, however [they've] now gone back to making contact with new schools and booking in camps, they want us to do eight camps next year one each month starting in March. Are you able to get some information from the research to [them] like we've discussed before [they] plan any further. I feel embarrassed about this camp, we need training, we need support.*

Whilst the youth workers seemed to pick themselves up a little between the fourth and final camp for the year, the flat feeling left over from the previous camp could still be felt. When I arrived at the offices on the morning of the final camp the timetable was still being finalised. Myself and all of the youth workers drove out to the airport to meet the young people and school staff from Dusty Town, however only one youth worker travelled back on the bus with them, the others decided to drive back in their own car. There was no mention of program goals, no formal introduction of the staff, just a basic name only introduction at the airport. The students were given a site introduction by a staff member of the residential facilities. At dinner none of the youth workers were present, I was the only one there. Whilst the youth workers tried to make an effort to get to know the young people from Dusty Town this was limited and felt forced due to what looked like exhaustion and disconcertion.

On the last evening of the final camp for the year I sat down in a corner of the activities room with Sarah and Tanya and asked them for the regular end-of-camp interview I had been conducting all

year long. I asked them how they felt. Their response was excited to have finished the last camp for the year, but even more so exhausted.

*Sarah: For me it didn't feel like it's achieved what I'd like it to, which I'm a bit disappointed in. Feel like I've let the kids down a bit and have not given the program I'd like to. To feel like this since June is quite frustrating, not being able to draw any of the learning that has occurred over the past camps into place, is frustrating...Getting to the point where I'm thinking how much have we improved this program in these five camps, don't think I've gotten it to where I would have liked it to be.*

I asked what had got in the way and slowed the process of 'getting there'. Not enough time between the camps, having to work on another two separate youth programs, one of those developing and delivering from scratch the other travelling away from the office a week at a time meant that over the space of six months Sarah, Tanya and Chris were responsible for the development and delivery of seven residential camps and were support members on an eighth camp. This had taken its toll on the youth workers.

*Sarah: Just to be able to resolve an issue at a time, there's a thousand things going on in my head". At the same time within the office space there are new things coming up constantly, dealing with staff issues and office issues ... I feel quite exhausted, worn out.*

The staff issues and office issues Sarah was referring to are those outlined in chapter five around diverging interpretations of program content and outcomes, and the push for involvement of certain partner organisations. The other staff issue was in regard to the management of her own team of youth workers and in particular the divide between Chris and herself and Tanya. Whilst all youth workers seemed to be exhausted and to be struggling at the beginning of camp four, how they each dealt with this was different. Sarah and Tanya still managed to involve themselves at some basic level with the camp and made a few attempts to speak with the young people and get to know them. Chris on the other hand would go missing for hours at a time, and at other times not follow any of the directives given by Sarah, his line manager. On the final two camps he made no effort to get to know the young people at all, a point picked up on by the teaching staff of both camps who mentioned their disappointment at his lack of engagement with the group, some questioning why he was even there.

The youth workers felt unsupported in developing the BECA program. A training budget had been requested to address the staffing needs. 'Time, support, understanding and resources' was what was requested; however apart from a two-day workshop no other training or mentoring had been provided. When I asked how this could be changed I got the following response.

*Sarah: You know I don't have the solution to it, I really don't because I'm struggling with it. I don't know the answer to it, I really don't and I need to find one to it ... I know that I don't have a background in delivering stuff, and I'd like to practise, I'd like to be more prepared (this was a response to the need for and lack of training). There seems to be too much emphasis time-wise placed on getting logistics done.*

Indeed this emphasis on logistics being imposed on youth workers is not necessarily a feature of quality youth work, rather it is a consequence of operating within a space that is overly concerned with measurable outputs and outcomes, demonstrated through quantifiable measures: more activities, more young people, more partnerships and the continual promotion of the message that the youth program is both innovative and necessary.

Sarah spoke again about the lack of understanding from the management about what is involved, what support the staff need to run the program and how frustrating it was that past discussions about this with management had seemingly not been heard or addressed.

*Sarah: I'm hoping this is stuff I can continue to work on, but I don't want to continue to do it like we have been and if I'm going to be still working on this I'd like to see it improve. I'm not saying that there hasn't been some great things happen and some wonderful experiences, I'd just really like to feel like that we're building on what we're doing and learning and growing and that's something that you can stand up there whether we're doing it, you know, whoever we're having to present in front of or whatever it is we know what the purpose is, we're confident in it and, yeah, not sort of just ... you know ... it's a shame but in some ways I know that I'm feeling ... just wanting to get through this week, we're so exhausted, but that's not fair on them [the young people].*

### **The work environment and the ability to 'do' youth work**

The value and importance of a youth worker's ability to develop meaningful and supportive staff–youth relationships and connections is widely recognised as a key influence on the likelihood of

positive development outcomes from a program (Anderson- Butcher & Conroy 2002; Anderson-Butcher et al. 2004; Dubois & Karcher 2005; Halpern, Barker & Mollard 2000; McLaughlin, Irby & Langman 1994; Rhodes 2004; Zand et al. 2009). However others suggest that the benefits of specific mentoring programs have been overstated (Du Bois et al. 2002) and the proponents of these programs uncritical (Sukriah & Tannock 2011). Nevertheless, Anderson-Butcher et al. (2004) exploring how supportive staff–youth relationships develop and, in turn, affect the prevalence of both pro-social and antisocial school attitudes and behaviours, suggest that such mentoring relationships can lead to heightened pro-social attitudes and behaviours at school and consequently to academic achievement.

Mentoring within youth organisations is wide-ranging and has a greater role than has been recognised in the past, with, in some cases, strong relationships linked to self-esteem more so than kin-based relationships (Hirsch 2005). Indeed, this mentoring relationship can include many responsibilities which have far-reaching outcomes. As Anderson-Butcher et al. (2004) explain the many responsibilities can include:

fortifying developmental competencies; strengthening relational capacities; providing opportunities for intellectual stimulation and growth; expanding social, recreational, and resource horizons; and instilling the hope and promise of goals and aspirations. All of these important mentoring tasks work in sync to enhance self-esteem, self-worth, and self-recognition, thereby promoting the well being of youths (p. 93).

However for these staff–youth relationships to form, the work environment needs to be one that is conducive to and provides a space for this to occur. The effect of the work environment on the ability to form strong relationships, to complete tasks relevant to the role and clarity of work roles have been identified as a significant predictor of youth workers' ability and competency to form a positive relationship with youth attending the program (Davidson, Evans & Sicafuse 2011).

Apart from the Goal Maps activity discussed in chapters two and four, another four 'research/activity' sessions had been developed. For each of these activities I had drafted a one page outline of the activity including the kind of information that would be found in a lesson plan which included activity progression, resource needs and activity adaptations. I did this for two reasons: so the research activities during the camp doubled up as camp activities and aligned with the theme of the camp; and so the staff could deliver these sessions for research or non-research purposes whether a researcher was present or not. This drew on my own background in this field



and also fulfilled one of the criteria of being granted access to the program, which was that I share wherever possible some of my skills and knowledge in the field with the youth workers.

One afternoon during the final camp for the year a booked workshop had fallen through at the last minute. As this was not an uncommon occurrence, what would usually happen was that a sports activity such as a basketball game or an arts and craft activity would be set up to fill that time slot. I saw this as an opportunity to ask if another of the research/activity sessions I developed could possibly be delivered during this time slot, thinking that this would provide me with extra time to speak with the young people and gain further insight into their lives in Dusty Town. It would also provide opportunity for Sarah, Tanya and Chris to practise delivering sessions, as they always mentioned how they would like more opportunities to do so. Sarah agreed and went to the resources cupboard under the stairwell to prepare for the session, I went along to help. As the youth workers went to get the resources for the session, they seemed annoyed. At the time I thought this was with me. As we walked back to the activities room I tried to work out what it was I had said or done that could have caused this response. I felt I had stepped on the youth workers' turf by suggesting they deliver one of the pre-planned workshops developed at the beginning of the year. I said nothing and followed the youth workers back to the main activity room and began to help set up the activity.

Whilst we were setting up the activity Sarah turned to me and said 'I feel sick in my stomach'. She was nervous about the session, even though learning new skills was something she wanted to develop and realised was one part of delivering such programs. Indeed, the ability to develop and deliver activities would support the case for the youth workers having further autonomy and control of their program. The negative feedback she had received from the other youth workers when sessions did not go to plan, or when a pre-planned session did not live up to expectations meant that Sarah was left feeling unsupported and nervous about delivering a session. The potential for failure dominated her thoughts and to an extent prevented her from learning the skills of her trade and developing as a youth worker.

Once she said this to me I asked her if she wanted me to go through how I would prepare to deliver a session or workshop and the strategies I use: she said this would help. I explained the activity progression to her as well as some additional strategies and made sure she had all the resources she would need to deliver the session at hand. She asked me if I could start the session and then hand it

over to her to continue running it, which I did. Later that day we delivered another of the sessions in the same way; she delivered it and I helped her plan and prepare for it.

A few days later during our regular final day camp interview I asked Sarah if she remembered the incident and how she was feeling at the time. I wanted to see if my interpretation was correct. She responded

*Sarah: for me feeling prepared and feeling like I know what we are doing this particular session and at the end of it I felt like great we did something that we should be doing and are here to be doing, so I felt really good about that, but just leading into that I just felt really like a hundred things juggling and just going I don't want to do this wrong, and I don't want to stuff it up, and I don't feel prepared to go into this sort of thing and literally I think it is being prepared and practising. And if I have to I can get up and talk, it's just like when I get anxious standing up there for something I'm not ready for.*

This is an important comment. Particularly in regard to the planning and efficiency of youth work, there is little support to help deliver a smoothly planned camp with well-organised sessions, a skill for which no training was provided. Even so what seems to have been more important is the building of relationships between the youth workers and the young people. As the camp continued to become overridden by an agenda of efficiency and target setting, what suffered was the 'doing' of youth work, predominantly the establishment of relationships between the youth workers and the young people. There was the additional consequence that came from what Ord (2012) refers to as the 'bureaucracy of planning' and that is the impact on innovation. No longer were there any trivia nights or *I am Deadly* sessions planned or delivered.

The youth workers, with their limited experience of youth work and youth programs, began to lose confidence in their ability to do their jobs. They now found themselves becoming overwhelmed and rather than trying new ideas and extending themselves, they were retreating in an attempt to avoid failure. They were trying to just get by and innovation was sacrificed. The push of the 'corporates' onto the program meant that opportunities to work with the young people and build relationships were disappearing and being replaced by career-related workshops and visits. For the policy makers these corporate visits, engagement with partners and career-based sessions could be quantified. Each stakeholder could report to the other how many young people had attended the program, how many presentations were delivered, how many partnerships they had formed links with and present

this as proof of their efficiency and effectiveness. Meanwhile the youth workers had realised that all of this mattered very little. Talking with Sarah about the external focus by those above and around them on the number of young people they get through a program she responded by saying, *'It's not about the number of kids, it's all about the quality of the program, let's try and have a real impact'*.

## **Establishing a professional identity**

Anderson-Nathe (2008c) suggests that to gain an understanding of the consequences of 'not-knowing' which occur in both the work settings and the youth worker – client relationship, and which influence a youth worker's self-efficacy in undertaking their tasks and job, it is essential to situate the discussion within the context of professional identity and sense of professionalism. The youth workers had experienced occasions of 'not-knowing' in both a work setting, and the youth worker – young person relationship. I have already outlined examples of 'not-knowing' in a youth work setting. In the final section of this chapter I will reflect on instances where this occurred in the youth worker – young person relationship and examine the consequences of these events.

Anderson-Nathe (2008c) drawing on Schöns' (1983) concept of professional identity suggests that 'it rests in many ways upon the perceived ability of the professional to systematically and effectively respond to situations within his professional realm. In fact, the knowledge and ability with which the professional responds define the profession itself' (Anderson-Nathe 2008c, pp. 19–20).

Exploring the concept further by drawing on Schein's work (1973) there are three characteristics that are found in professions, which are not found in fields classified as non-professional. They are a unifying and underlying theory base, a scientific application of that theory, and the skills and attitudes required to implement the application. However, whilst similar professions such as teaching and social work have come to meet these criteria and establish themselves as professions, youth work, drawing on elements of both fields, has struggled to view itself or be viewed as a profession, therefore struggling with the development of a professional identity.

With the increase in the uptake of youth programs by policy makers as a possible vehicle for change in addressing social issues, as well as the development of the field within academia, there has been a push towards developing the professionalism of the industry. Academics have argued for the need to develop training standards to be met by those entering and working in the field arguing that this will lead to the further professionalisation of the field (Curry et al. 2012). Indeed, the theoretical base on which such training would rest has been expanding in the past decade or more as

increasingly youth workers and youth programs form part of an area of research within the disciplines of education and social work. Others however suggest that the development of stringent criteria and standards for training and undertaking youth work completely overlooks and is at odds with what distinguishes youth work from its sister disciplines of social work and education. Youth work has no theoretical foundations but the advantage is that it creates a flexibility and openness to navigate work with clients free of constraints.

Left to its founding principles, youth workers are not only free to explore the possible solutions to problems they come upon in their work, they are also expected to generate all the possible solutions to such problems, and in many instances be able to do so on the spot and in difficult situations. However, how youth workers go about doing this in their day-to-day work can be dependent on their level of practical experience in the field. Ross, Buglione and Safford-Farquharson (2011) explain the difference between expert and novice youth workers.

Expert youth workers are able to generate many possible solutions to problems. Able to anticipate the outcomes of these various solutions, they can be strategic in choosing the course of action with the most potential for a positive resolution. The experts also engage the young person in solving the problem, thereby turning the situation into a learning opportunity. Novice youth workers, on the other hand, tend to frame problems more concretely and their responses generally center on discipline and maintaining order (p. 202).

Here the quote is referring to generating possible solutions to problems they encounter within the youth worker – young person relationship rather than in the work setting *per se*.

Overall there was limited opportunity for ‘things to go wrong’ during the *BECA* camps in terms of the youth worker – young person relationship. On each camp the students were chaperoned by at least three and sometimes up to six school staff. Therefore it was these staff who were responsible for addressing any problems that might arise. If any incident did occur it would be left to the school staff to address the issue and determine the consequences or outcomes. The school staff were also responsible for maintaining the ‘rules’ for the camp and ensuring that expectations of behaviour and responsibilities were met. Finally these school staff also had, at a minimum, some knowledge of the students’ history, including family, school and community life. Other school staff knew students quite well, having been involved in the local community for many years. Therefore they were able to anticipate any potential problems and identify potential solutions based on past experiences. This left the youth workers free to go about the planning and delivery of their program without the need to worry about the problems that often arise in the youth worker – young person relationship.

However this was not the case for the *Right on Track* program. The young people that made up the small group came from a variety of schools across the city. Here they were not accompanied by teachers or school support staff, so for the first time it was left to the youth workers to fulfil this role. Indeed, due to the nature of the program and the young people it targeted there was an increased likelihood that social or behavioural problems would arise. The youth workers, with no experience of how to manage such problems, were left to their own devices to deal with any incidents. It was hard to get the youth workers to talk about this program and what occurred, however their feelings of being out of their depth came across clearly in discussions. Consequently a few young people were sent home, aligning with Ross, Buglione and Safford-Farquharson's (2011) description of novice youth workers' tendency to focus on disciplining and maintaining order.

Anderson-Nathe (2008c) suggests the:

professional's ability to unite theory and specialised practice across unique circumstances is central to appreciating youth workers' experiences of not-knowing. Framing professionalism in terms of the worker's ability to encounter a scenario, assess its content, select the appropriate theoretical foundation for interpreting it, and then build a grounded response introduces tensions in the context of not-knowing (p. 21).

The consequences of 'not-knowing' underline the importance of youth worker training, program quality and, as research has stated, program outcomes (Akiva 2005; Hartje et al. 2008). Participation in agency-supported professional development and training opportunities provides youth workers with valuable knowledge and skills (Evans et al. 2010; Hartje et al. 2008). Staff development supports youth workers to interact positively and effectively with youth as well as plan and develop enriching activities and connect and communicate with young people's families and broader community stakeholders (Bouffard & Little 2004). Professional development can also lead to increased confidence in one's role, leading to an increase in job satisfaction (Evans et al. 2010), subsequently leading to increased staff retention and lower staff turnover rates (Astroth, Garza & Taylor 2004; Bouffard & Little 2004). Additionally, the ability for staff to provide meaningful input into decision making and the encouraging of creative, innovative and collaborative work with colleagues has been shown to support not only a healthy work environment but also support job satisfaction (Bednar 2003), leading to an increased intent to continue working with youth (Hartje et al. 2008).

As already indicated, the youth workers had specifically made several requests throughout the year for access to various forms of professional development. They had asked if it was possible to attend

training workshops, they explored the potential of linking with partner organisations that would also benefit their own professional development by providing them with opportunities for observing others work. They also requested that there be some form of support within the management structure of their organisation, either at line manager level or at the board level, for recruitment of an individual that they could turn to for advice and guidance.

The youth workers were able to attend two training sessions throughout the year, totalling four days of training. On completion, the youth workers felt that one of the training courses was too theoretical and overly concerned with providing general historical knowledge on the progression of youth work rather than the development of skills and broadening of knowledge relevant to the day-to-day work of the youth worker. The second lot of training was specific to delivering a pre-developed youth program and whilst the youth workers found this training informative and interesting its applicability and utility was limited in the contexts of their work. Indeed, the youth workers mentioned the difficulty in finding relevant and interesting training in the area of youth work.

The specific training needs and interests of youth workers as well as the effectiveness of professional development and training has only recently begun to receive some attention (Evans et al. 2010). Indeed, formal recognition and reward for youth workers' years of experience from the agencies they work for also influence feelings of competency (Evans et al. 2010). However not only is training limited for youth workers much of it also ignores the training needs of mid-level managers and administrators (Vance 2010). In the case of the *BECA* program the youth workers not only found it difficult to locate relevant training workshops but also found it difficult to identify more experienced individuals within the organisation who could fulfil a mentoring role. Further, in the current environment in which youth work is driven by indicators of efficiency, effectiveness and impact there is more competition than collaboration among staff and organisations.

There is a lack of consensus on what is the most necessary or effective type of training, as well as difficulties in developing and delivering such training in a context that utilises knowledge and resources from a variety of disciplines (Borden & Perkins 2006). Others suggest that it is not specific sets of knowledge that are necessary for youth workers to have, rather of more importance is how the knowledge they have is applied in day-to-day events as they are encountered (Walker & Walker 2012). Understanding youth problems cannot be separated from the ecological contexts that the young person finds themselves in, such as family, school and peer groups and neighbourhood

(Larson et al. 2009). However being a national program the ecological perspective is missing completely for these youth workers, subsequently they are left with their own interpretations of the young person's ecological context, based on limited knowledge and influenced by policy and program rhetoric dominant in the field. This is even more concerning considering the diversity of the background of the youth in the six residential camps throughout the year which included young people from urban, regional and remote communities. Whilst the importance of critical reflection by youth workers on their own development process is an important part of a youth worker's learning process (Collins, Hill & Miranda 2008) there was little time available as the time and space to do so was filled with the tasks necessary to prepare for the delivery of the next camp or program and reporting against the delivery of the previous one.

### **Merging the professional with the personal**

Bednar (2003) highlights the importance of staff in child or youth welfare roles expressing 'a strong sense of personal or professional mission in connection to their work ... they should be carefully matched to positions for which they have been adequately prepared through education and training' (p. 11). This suggests that education and training alone is not enough when undertaking work in welfare or helping roles, such as youth work. Indeed many youth workers are led to seek work in the sector due to their own experiences and history and the belief that they can draw on these experiences to make a difference in the lives of the young people they work with. Conversely this personal connection to their work can have negative consequences when the youth worker finds themselves in positions of 'not-knowing' or 'messaging up':

Given this relationship, youth workers' experiences of not-knowing reflect not only conflicts of professional identity but also profound crises of vocation or calling. Being called to the profession often contributes to youth workers differentiating themselves from other service providers. There is a certain task, to be performed in a certain way, because the world has called them to respond thusly. Folta (1995) has suggested that vocation or calling is defined by this sense of separation from the crowd for a specific purpose. When that purpose appears unattainable, as in moments of not-knowing, what happens to the call, to the justification for uniqueness? This may be the core of vocational crisis for youth workers in moments of not-knowing—it is a crisis of both profession and vocation.

(Anderson-Nathe 2008c, pp. 22–23)

The concept of vocational calling originally linked with youth work undertaken in religious communities and settings has begun to make its way into the helping professions and has formed the basis for many people entering into the field of youth work (Anderson-Nathe 2008b). Even

though this can be viewed as a positive, Anderson-Nathe (2008b) warns that whilst the sense of moral commitment provides direction and meaning to enter the field it also ‘holds the potential to introduce significant emotional pain, existential struggle, and vocational doubt’ (Anderson-Nathe 2008b, p. 101).

Whilst the idea that the personal and the professional should remain distinct from each other in the helping professions, for some youth workers it is the personal that provides the basis for the involvement in the field and their initial self-efficacy in their belief to undertake the role successfully. However this can have consequences as Anderson-Nathe (2008b) explains: ‘constantly walking the line between their personal and professional selves, demands much conscious energy. Preserving authentic connection while also remaining professionally detached can be exhausting for youth workers’ (p. 102). Anderson-Nathe’s (2008b) work explores the consequences of this binary when it conflicts with agencies’ policies and guidelines, for example when a youth worker may feel that what is necessary is a reassuring word or a demonstration of solidarity with the young person’s feelings, while guidelines might state a focus on detachment and process. In this way Anderson-Nathe (2008b) explains:

not-knowing was not merely a failure to meet the demands of their personal interests. More significantly, it created a conflict in terms of their sense of themselves as effective youth workers ... Feeling forced to choose between attending to personal or professional interests, they found themselves required to affirm one and deny the other—a position that ran counter to the ideal conception of youth work as the effective integration of professionalism and human engagement (p. 104).

I draw on Anderson-Nathe’s (2008b) thoughts on calling and purpose to explore the role of personal identity from a slightly different angle in the context of the *BECA* program and its youth workers. The most important feature of the whole program, as explained by one of the youth workers, Chris, was that ‘*we’re black fellas ourselves running the camp for black fellas*’. In the early planning days whilst policy ideas, program content and administrative processes dominated the youth workers’ time and discussions, this was the one point that they all agreed was important. This included the school staff that would attend, with one non-Indigenous teacher explaining why:

*You can see some of the kids are suffering from real motivation, those Koori role models in front of them, to be speaking to them and to grab them out of it, ‘c’mon, I’ve done this, I’ve done that’ ... Even when we talk about culture [in school], we got to sell that to them too. So instead of selling that to them at school, it should be Koori people selling that to them, [this is] what I would like to see (Alistair – Teacher – Farming Town School).*



The fact that the program was developed and run by Aboriginal staff was seen as a necessity for a camp that was aimed at engaging and inspiring a group of young people and underpinning the program's success. As Tom, an Aboriginal staff member from Ocean Town School explains:

*I don't think it would work without Indigenous people running it actually to be honest, because I think there's that barrier with the kids, with the trust anyway. And I think it's inspiring for them too (Tom – Support Worker – Ocean Town School).*

The youth workers and the youth organisation strongly believed in their ability to connect with other young Indigenous people and develop and deliver what were regularly referred to as culturally appropriate activities in their program. Indeed, this feeling was supported by the school staff that attended the first three camps, as many of them commented in interviews about the importance of Indigenous role models for their students and the capacity of these youth workers to fulfil that role. However the same sentiment was not expressed in the interviews conducted with the school staff in camps four and five.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the youth workers struggled to develop a youth worker – young person relationship with the young people from Dusty Town as well as the young people who attended from the independent boarding school. I have already mentioned the teaching staff members' concerns with the program activities and the relevance of these activities to the needs and interests of their students. The school staff had requested a meeting with the youth workers on the second day of the fourth camp. During this meeting they outlined their concern that the activities and career talks delivered to date to the group were either overlapping with what the school already provided or would be of no interest to their students. Visits to banks or to media organisations to discuss pathways in each industry the staff felt were either not reflective of their students' interests or realistic as potential pathways, considering the geographical and social contexts of these young people's lives back in their home communities. Consequently the youth workers were asked to remove most career-based activities and replace them with sight-seeing activities instead. Here, the non-Indigenous school staff challenged the youth workers on their understanding of the needs and interests of the young people, the one thing the youth workers felt confident in their ability to do based on their own Indigenous identity.

However this was not the only conflict the youth workers encountered based on their perceived notion of the needs of the young people. As with previous camps all meals were had in the dining hall area. Four large rows of trestle tables occupied the space and usually groups would form across

the dining hall with a mixture of male and female students. However on the first and subsequent days of the fourth camp the young people from the boarding school sat separately across two long trestle tables, one table occupied by the male students the other by the female students. This did not seem to be explicitly directed by the school staff rather the young people situated themselves at opposing tables. The youth workers walking past the dining hall on their way to have their meal by themselves made comments about the split of the group by gender. They felt the school staff had imposed this gender split on the group and could not understand why they had done this or indeed any reasoning for this. They also mentioned that they had seen a small number of female students praying just before the meal was served; again the youth workers reflected on this as being enforced by the non-Indigenous school staff and referred to both examples being just another reflection of the continued imposition of non-Indigenous beliefs and ideas on Indigenous young people.

The following mealtime I again went to sit in the dining hall to have my meal with the staff and students. I asked the staff why the young people sat separately from each other. The school staff told me that the school has an advisory committee which includes one representative from each community represented on the school student enrolment list. This representative is usually a community elder and it is this advisory committee that requests that there is no mixing of male and female students from across communities, which the school staff then interpreted as separate seating during meal times. The school staff also told me that prayer is not a requirement of the school as the school is an independent non-denominational boarding school, rather it is students, in this case four girls from a central Australian remote community, who choose to pray before meals.

The youth workers felt that their own Indigenous identity was central not only to them but to the program itself and therefore integral to its success. The organisation they work for also sees this as an integral part of its service in that the management and board are all Indigenous, therefore promoting the organisation's ability to identify, and therefore cater to, the needs of Indigenous youth through their own understanding and experiences of being Indigenous. Here the Indigenous youth workers were not only having their professional identity challenged throughout the camps, but now their personal identity was also coming into question.

## **Conclusion**

In the introductory chapter I drew on Shore, Wright and Pero's (2011) suggestion that the rise and spread of the audit culture and associated auditing technologies exemplifies how policies can have a 'runaway effect, actively reshaping the environments into which they have been introduced' (p. 3).

These youth workers interpreted the program model and policy space they found themselves situated in uncritically to begin with. Ideals of what makes a competent youth worker were drawn from dominant youth work and policy rhetoric well versed in functioning in an audit culture, with limited time or need for critical reflection. The youth workers, in getting a glimpse of the contradictions such an audit culture imposes on the youth work environment, had limited opportunity to negotiate this conflicting environment. Consequently their ability to establish their own status as well as their own personal and professional identities within their work was also compromised, leading to feelings of shame, embarrassment and letting the young people down. The political and social context in which this youth program operated provided too strong a challenge for the three staff to develop their identities as youth workers.

‘It is one thing for a youth worker to obtain knowledge, skills, and strategies. It is another thing entirely for that youth worker to believe that he or she has the ability to act on that knowledge and implement new strategies’ (Ross, Buglione & Safford-Farquharson 2011, p. 203). The youth workers, left without any belief in their ability to undertake and succeed in a task or youth worker role, saw their initial eagerness to undertake the task of developing and delivering such a program diminish over the year. With their professional and personal identities challenged throughout the year, the youth workers began to demonstrate and speak of fatigue and exhaustion. The youth workers began the year eagerly planning and envisioning their youth program, a program that they hoped would be engaging as well as make an impact on young people’s lives. They had bought into the current youth work and youth policy rhetoric and saw themselves as being part of this space which so confidently talks about its positive impacts on young people’s lives. Whilst they were aware of their limitations in terms of experience and training, they were also naïve about the work environment they would be entering. They were surprised to find that in the process of developing and delivering programs, maintaining funding, reporting against outcomes and maintaining organisational need, the young people’s needs (i.e. their clients and the sole purpose for the existence of the organisation) were becoming less and less of a priority.

In the following chapter I draw on the work outlined so far and ask whether *the BECA program was a success?* I return to the young people for whom this program was developed and ask what the program meant to those who attended it. I explore the various definitions and interpretations of success held by all involved: the policy makers; the youth organisation; the youth workers, school staff and young people and conclude that the good intentions of both the youth workers and youth

organisation in the end were not enough to satisfy either their own or others' interpretations of success.

## Chapter Seven

### Program success?

In the previous chapter I described the influence and effect of the current policy context and its competing and contradictory demands on the youth workers' personal and professional identities. By following their experiences through the first year of the program I described the youth workers' progress in the Indigenous policy space, from the beginning as uncritical participants ready to demonstrate their abilities to do good and influence young people's lives to a more sceptical attitude towards the end which saw them acknowledge that doing good was difficult to achieve.

In this chapter I draw on the work outlined so far in chapters four, five and six and ask whether *the BECA program was a success?* Mosse (2005) reasons that 'success' and 'failure' are 'policy-orientated judgements that preoccupy the narratives of project and donor, but obscure the underlying operations and relations of development' (p. 205). I return to the young people for whom this program was developed and ask what the program meant to those who attended it: the 'resisters', the 'engaged' and the 'aspirational'. I reflect on the youth workers, who originally viewed themselves as responsible for the development and implementation of a project based on the dominant discourse surrounding Indigenous youth problems and solutions but came to understand the policy arena and political space in which they were operating had different definitions and interpretations of success from their own. I conclude that those that operate best within the neoliberal framework, whether individuals or organisations, are viewed as succeeding, by both external and internal stakeholders even though this imposes considerable limitations on the ability of the program to deliver the best outcomes.

The most obvious question to ask is, how realistic is it to expect that a one-week intervention in these young people's lives can make a real difference? And is it even meaningful or fair to evaluate the success, effectiveness or impact of a one-week program such as the *BECA* program? Even though some suggest that the length of a program does not necessarily significantly relate to the building of the staff–youth relationship (Anderson-Butcher et al. 2004), nevertheless, considering the well-documented literature in the youth work field focusing on the importance of establishing meaningful relationships based on trust and understanding as well as environments that are both safe and challenging, it would stand to reason that time is needed to achieve such objectives.

The *BECA* program had 123 young people attend its week-long camps during the study period. Many of the young people talked about how the week was fun; others mentioned it as a welcomed break from their day-to-day lives, in particular the day-to-day struggles they encounter, be they school, family or community related. For some it was a chance to visit a big city and to have a week filled with first experiences such as taking a train or seeing the ocean; but for others, only a very small number, the week did surprisingly appear to have had more of an influence.

To explore the nature and interpretation of the idea of program success I draw on two case studies to demonstrate different experiences and outcomes of the camp for two similar young people. The case studies of the two young people were chosen because they are very similar students in terms of their engagement at school and social circumstances, yet their experience of the program led to two very different outcomes. I then turn my attention to the various definitions and interpretations of success held by all involved: the policy makers; the youth organisation; the youth workers, school staff and young people. I conclude by demonstrating that the good intentions of both the youth workers and youth organisation in the end were not enough to satisfy either their own or others' interpretations of success.

## **A successful outcome?**

### **Ryan from Farming Town**

Ryan was a Year 8 student from Farming Town when he attended the *BECA* camp. On the first day of the camp the group from Farming Town was taking part in a drama session. There were a group of boys from Farming Town that did not involve themselves much in the camp at all, always sitting on the edge of most activities, talking amongst themselves or watching the others participating. However there was a second group of boys, who, although a few years younger, involved themselves in every activity and made the most of every opportunity. I sat and watched the participating Farming Town students during the drama session from the side and spoke with one of their teachers. She pointed out Ryan and told me how surprised and impressed she had been with his behaviour that morning.

At school Ryan had a reputation for mucking up in class and not being able to concentrate on a task for more than 15 minutes, regularly disrupting it or talking back to teachers. In the past year he had several run-ins with some teachers which resulted in his temper escalating and him getting angry, consequently leading to a suspension from school. He also struggled academically at the school and

chose to never access any specific literacy and numeracy support programs the school ran for Indigenous students that could support him in this area. Indeed, Ryan was one of the young people the school brought to the camp to try and 're-engage' and as far as the teacher could see it was working. He attended the youth camp along with his older brother, who was 17 years old and tended to regularly pick on him throughout the week. Both boys lived with their mother in Farming Town but would also visit their father throughout the year, who lived a few hours away. Ryan's brother also needed specific support in the areas of literacy and numeracy, but like Ryan would rarely access any support programs.

Ryan participated in every activity throughout the week. At the end he was chosen by the teachers to make a formal thank you speech to the youth workers as well as to receive an award from the school staff acknowledging his enthusiasm and behaviour throughout the week. When I next met Ryan it was six months later at Farming Town School. He had heard that Sarah, Tanya and Chris would be visiting and he was one of the first of the group that came into the room to meet them. I spoke to Ryan while we waited for the youth workers to arrive and he told me what he'd been up to. He was participating in his school's junior football team and had been away for a couple of tournaments already that year. In recent times he had also taken on a leadership role in the team. He told me how he had been putting in effort at school and behaving how the teachers expect him to, because he'd like to go on another *BECA* camp, however he'd been told that the only way that will occur is if he maintains his good behaviour and effort at school. He told me he did not know what he wanted to do in the future, although being involved in sport would be good. Indeed his older brother, who also attended the camp, recently left Farming Town to take up a football scholarship in the city with one of the major Rugby League clubs. He also told me that he hoped to complete his high school qualification, but he was not sure he had the ability to do so. The teachers told me they were happy to see the old Ryan back since their return from the camp.

When I conducted the Goal Maps activity during the camp, Ryan's response was close to a blank sheet of paper. Indeed, the teachers had told me that on receiving the markers and A3 paper to complete the activity his response had been that the activity was too much like schoolwork. The limited detail on his Goal Map could be related to his protest against all things school-like, which in the context of literacy could also be attributed to the difficulties he experienced in that area, rather than just a lack of aspirations. Asking him about his future aspirations again on my return to Farming Town School he mentioned that he might like to work in the sport sector and specifically as a football manager. This could have been influenced by his brother's recent playing offer.

The *BECA* program did seem to have had some level of influence or impact on Ryan; it had been an enjoyable week for him. He had participated in all activities, something he had rarely done in recent times at school. He spoke to me about the youth workers and all they had done for him, speaking of how they took him and paid for him to do the range of activities throughout the week. Ryan's case study is exactly what each of the stakeholders involved in the funding, management and delivery of the program hoped for. However cases such as Ryan's were rare. It is difficult to determine exactly what it was about the camp that led to a distinct change in Ryan's behaviour and attitude, or indeed to what extent the camp influenced those changes amongst other aspects of Ryan's life.

Nevertheless, both Ryan and his teachers saw and referred to change that they attribute to the *BECA* program.

Ryan's case study gives some insight into his view of his world today as well as his perception of it in the near future and the aspirations he has for that future. Indeed the reason for asking the young people about their aspirations was that aspirations 'reflect an individual's view of his or her own chances of getting ahead and are an internalisation of objective possibilities ... however ... aspirations are not the product of rational analysis, rather they are acquired in the habitus of the individual' (McLeod 1987, p. ). In turn habitus offers a theoretical framework from which to understand the link between social structures found in each of these young people's worlds and their individual perception of them.

Dumais (2002) briefly summarises the many aspects of habitus as:

one's disposition, which influences the actions that one takes; [which may] even be manifested in one's physical demeanor, such as the way one carries oneself or walks. It is generated by one's place in the social structure; by internalizing the social structure and one's place in it, one comes to determine what is possible and what is not possible for one's life and develops aspirations and practices accordingly. This internalization takes place during early childhood and is a primarily unconscious process (p. 46).

This forms the basis of how individuals develop ideas about their potential, which is highly influenced by the social class into which they were born and raised. Habitus has connections to and operates within a field, 'a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 97), of which there are many. It is within a field that individuals deploy various forms of capital and where practice takes place. Indeed the school system or the workplace can be described and recognised as a field. Therefore 'one's practices or actions are the result of one's habitus and capital within a given field' (Dumais 2002, p. 46), such as how an



individual responds to the school system based on their familiarity and comfort with the system itself through their exposure to the types of capital it values through their family life. Indeed, it is these 'holdings of capital [that] determine an individual's position within a field, which in turn determines the conditions under which they live and shapes their habitus' (James 2009, p. 318).

Ryan was given the opportunity to attend the program as a trial and a way for the teachers to test if, through program attendance, they would be able to re-engage him in the school environment and steer his behaviour away from the path it was heading down. In Ryan's case the opportunity to participate in the program was framed in the context of a trial, with the rules he needed to follow stated beforehand and monitored closely. In this case Ryan depended on himself alone to accumulate, acknowledge and understand the capital that is valued within the institutional field as his familial field does not either value this type of capital nor is in the position to provide a space for its development. Ryan was able to make that connection on his own. He was provided an environment where he could feel both challenged and safe and given the opportunity to demonstrate his strengths and autonomy the whole way through receiving acknowledgement, support and motivation from the youth workers. Ryan's attendance at the camp provided an ideal picture of the program's potential and ability to succeed. However stories like Ryan's are few and far between. There was no other young person's story that demonstrated the positive influence of the camp and the youth workers to the extent that Ryan's did. Indeed, it is fair to ask if Ryan would have had the same experience, and the same response, had he attended one of the camps later in the year. I now turn to Sean's case study to provide a differing example and outcome to that of Ryan's, in fact a more common outcome.

### **Sean from Ocean Town**

Sean is a Year 10 student from Ocean Town School. During the camp both he and his teachers mentioned that he, along with many of the other boys in the group, was into outdoor activities such as surfing and climbing. Indeed, the area they live in is well known for its beaches and national parks. Sean lives on the mission along with his parents where, as one teacher explained, they spend a lot of their time hanging around as they are not in employment.

One difference between the young people of Farming Town and those from Ocean Town was that there seemed to be more of an uptake of Indigenous programs by the Indigenous students in the school at Ocean Town. Whilst both schools received funding specifically for developing programs

targeting and supporting Indigenous students, and adopted similar models allocating a specific room and staff to help deliver those programs, the Ocean Town model seemed to be more successful in drawing in Indigenous students. I was told by a school staff member that many of the Indigenous students come to the room for a variety of reasons: to get help for assignments, support for more personal issues, or just to say hello. Indeed, this was very much the case on the day I was at Ocean Town School, with its staff in particular seeming like advocates for Indigenous students within the wider school structure supporting them with their pathway through the education system.

Sean was one of the students who would spend a lot of time in what the students and staff referred to as the Indigenous Student Resource Room. He seemed to get along well with the support staff and was known to drop by regularly. Academically, Sean struggled at school however he gets support from the Indigenous Student Resource Room staff to complete his assignments. Whilst Sean struggles with his studies at school in contrast he is very knowledgeable about the local area and culture. One of the teachers made this point when she told me how surprised she was that Sean was not interested in the local Aboriginal history of the area the camp was held in, stating that back in Ocean Town he is both quite knowledgeable about local history as well as advocacy about Indigenous rights, regularly wearing hats or t-shirts with slogans such as 'black power'. At the camp he was attentive and polite, participating in all activities and referring to all adults as auntie or uncle. Back at school however he rebels against participating in many of the activities, preferring to spend his time in the Indigenous Student Resource Room. When I ask Sean about what type of employment he'd be interested in, he tells me he would be interested in becoming a ranger. However this was not Sean's immediate response, his initial response was *I don't know, nothing*, until one of the Resource Room staff questioned and guided him towards his reply of a ranger.

Habitus is not a static state, rather it is continually restructured, it is linked to individual history, and therefore is made up of layers of socialisation from childhood onwards, which then influence how circumstances or events are acted on. For example the habitus acquired in the family forms the basis of the school experiences, which itself adds another layer of socialisation and so on. This process can be referred to as a continual restructuring of the original habitus, that has developed as an outcome of family socialisation, by experiences from the outside world (Reay 2004). In Sean's case study above we see how Sean lives on the mission along with his parents who are unemployed. Sean's parents did not finish school, they also have negative feelings and experiences associated with the schooling system. The feelings associated with their own experiences of school influence both their own and Sean's engagement within the school structure. Indeed, 'the habitus, produced

by social conditioning, tends to encourage us to behave in ways that reproduce the existing practices and hence the existing structure of society' (Elder Vass 2007, p. 327). For Sean the place where he gains his support to operate in the school system is in the Indigenous Student Resource Room, however he uses this resource to support him to get through the day-to-day struggles he has at school in terms of assessments and negotiating any run-ins with school teaching staff and not necessarily to develop the skills and knowledge to behave and act in the way that is valued by the system.

Because one's habitus is open to transformation, when habitus encounters a field that it is familiar with the habitus takes the social world around it for granted. When habitus however encounters a field that differs, this is where change or transformation can occur (McNay 2000). Reay (2004) suggests viewing this occurrence on a continuum can be useful.

At one end, habitus can be replicated through encountering a field that reproduces its dispositions. At the other end of the continuum, habitus can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations. Implicit in the concept is the possibility of a social trajectory that enables conditions of living that are very different from initial ones  
(Reay 2004, pp. 434–435).

Indeed Collet (2009) suggests that 'the greater the change in social environment, the more salient the benefits of using habitus as a tool to analyse an agent's behaviour ... what we internalize ends up having within us a capacity to generate new things' (Collet 2009, p. 419). There are two examples of where this transformation could be occurring in the above case studies. Youth programs, and in particular youth programs, based in a functional framework tend to operate on the idea that a young person can begin a program in one state, and through attendance and involvement in that program come out the other end with altered values and an altered disposition. It is this idea that then drives the funding of such programs, as policy makers view this as a way to 'fix' the problem of disengagement. Indeed, many of the teachers felt that attendance at this youth camp might do exactly that for some of the young people they brought along. Whilst this is one of the main reasons for conducting programs such as the *BECA* program, this type of 'transformation' was only visible in one case, Ryan's. As the case study outlines, his attitude and demeanour changed during the program and carried on at school. He was able to successfully operate within the rules of the youth program. The youth program, with its focus on practical skills and limited inclusion of academic skills such as reading and writing, meant that Ryan in most instances was able to operate effectively and at times excel in each of the activities. For his involvement he received praise from both the youth workers and the school staff, which also led to further opportunities in the form of more turns at a

particular activity, or being the first to try something. He talked about wanting to attend another camp therefore behaving and trying to work hard at school so he will be given the opportunity. However he always questions his ability to do so, acknowledging in a way that he lacks the capital to do so effectively. The following sections in this chapter outline and explore why cases such as Ryan's were not as prominent or numerous as hoped.

## **Defining and interpreting success**

Definitions of success and effectiveness, as outlined in the literature presented so far in previous chapters, is specific to both the context and ambitions of each individual program and organisation. I now turn my attention to the various stakeholders involved in the *BECA* program: the policy officers, youth organisation and youth workers, and school staff and describe what a successful program meant to each. I outline the problems that arose from such diverse and conflicting definitions and interpretations of success and the consequences of contradictions between expectations, approaches and outcomes.

### **The policy officers**

The policy officers working on the *BECA* program were operating in a political space not only dominated by models of efficiency and effectiveness of youth work, as outlined in the previous two chapters, but also in a space influenced by assumptions of the needs of young Indigenous people, driven predominately by quantitative reporting on individual indicators around school attendance, attainment and achievement. For the policy officers, a youth program had the potential to address the issues of school attendance and engagement in education and employment, now and in the future, utilising a model that moved away from the formal schooling system and structure to one based on what is presented as a new and innovative approach to engaging youth. Of additional importance was the fact that such a model could be developed and delivered by an Indigenous organisation and Indigenous youth workers therefore addressing calls for the need for programs to be developed and delivered in ways that are both relevant and meaningful to Indigenous youth and which draw on Indigenous people to act as role models for the young people who attend.

An approach adopted in Indigenous youth work policy and programs, and in particular those supported by government funding, is one of allowing access to youth programs and the activities

they provide as a reward for the demonstration of the behaviour that is set as a program outcome. In the case of the *BECA* program, an opportunity to attend the camps was based on the demonstration of school attendance and engagement. The assumed rationale of the reward approach is that the stated objectives and outcomes that the youth policies and associated youth programs are trying to achieve will occur naturally through an increase in motivation by the young people themselves. This idea firmly rests in the logic that the reason that young people are not attending school or engaging in school activities when at school is solely due to their own motivation and a consequence of the zero-sum logic they have placed in the schooling process. Therefore if reasons to attend school and participate in it can be presented to them, be it relevant to the objectives of schooling or not, the motivation to attend and participate in school will naturally increase. Whether this behavioural change is a consequence of an altered interpretation of the value of school or just to fulfil a requirement to access the programs offered, is seldom reflected on.

Providing access to the *BECA* program on a reward basis based on behaviour that was consistent with policy objectives further supported the likelihood that the program could be interpreted as successful. For the policy officers, success could be defined in the short term as the number of youth who accessed the programs and the number and range of activities they were offered; and in the long term by school attendance ultimately leading to improved educational attainment levels and employment outcomes. The program from the perspective of the policy officers was meant to provide both employment and training knowledge as well as develop the personal and employment-related skills of each young person. In considering the basis of assessing success for the program, the policy officers did not take into account any of the pre-existing skills, attributes, or attitudes of the cohort of Aboriginal youth accessing the program therefore not providing a baseline from which to assess the extent of change, if any, in these areas. They were assumed to be universally non-existent. Therefore anything provided through the program that was consistent with policy objectives could be considered as adding value, or contributing to the success of the program, regardless of whether or not it actually did.

The policy officers' ideas about and expectations for the program demonstrate either a lack of understanding and confusion about both the needs of young people and the field of youth work, how it operates and what it has the potential to do; or a rushed and ill-thought-out strategy for engaging young people. Indeed, the policy officers are not aiming to engage or influence those young people which are hardest to reach. Instead their proposed approach firmly plants the majority of the responsibility and work with the schools, again another contradiction found within a

model which suggests the need for an alternative approach to schooling such as youth work. Once the necessary behavioural changes have been achieved, the youth workers can then take these young people who have demonstrated the target indicators of school engagement and attendance and further develop them into success stories based on innovative, Indigenous-led approaches, leaving the policy officers to report the successes of the project overall and consequently the strength of the policies that underpin the funding of such programs.

For the policy officers, the *BECA* program was a reward program, to be promoted to young Indigenous people who had demonstrated some level of engagement in school and to provide them with an opportunity to further develop their skills and knowledge as well as build on their desire to stay engaged in school. Indeed, originally they wanted each young person attending the camp to complete a career plan and for this career plan to be recorded. However without funding to continue any meaningful communication and work with the young people, how this was going to occur, and indeed how the youth organisation was going to claim its influence over the outcomes, was not thought out. From the perspective of the policy officers this project aligned to current policy rhetoric and presented a model of minimal risk in terms of evidencing success. It also engaged Indigenous organisations to undertake the work.

### **Limitations of the reward approach**

A reward-based approach raises the issue of who is appropriately the target of these programs. There was no guidance from the policy officers in identifying schools to be targeted to participate in the program. Also when asked why the NT, NSW and QLD had been chosen as the three states or territories from which schools and young people could be recruited, the youth workers told me that there was no explanation for that decision. As outlined in chapter four, there was already a stark contrast between the opportunities provided to the young people at Mining Town and Dusty Town School in comparison to those provided at Farming Town and Ocean Town School. Whilst Dusty Town School staff spoke about regularly receiving calls from youth organisations offering opportunities to their students, Farming Town School staff spoke of a lack of resources and opportunities. Indeed Dusty Town School was contacted and asked to be part of the *BECA* program, whereas Farming Town School's involvement was led by its staff members researching opportunities and negotiating for participation.

I draw on the case studies of eight youth across the four communities to further highlight the contradictions of a reward model that offers development opportunities and support to young people, who I argue in this case are already on track to achieve the objectives of the *BECA* program whether attending such programs or not. This in turn raises the problem that occurs when resources and funding are allocated on assumptions of need and based on simple demographic and geographical information, an occurrence which is more likely to be the case for national youth work models.

### **The girls of Dusty Town**

Janice, Sarah and Natasha are all in Year 10 at Dusty Town School. Sarah and Natasha have grown up in Dusty Town, whereas Janice has spent time living in a major city and has only been living in Dusty Town for the past few years. We sat in one of the offices in Dusty Town School and they told me about their day, the subjects they had scheduled on that day and about the exam they had on that afternoon. All three girls come to school regularly. In fact two of the teachers had made a comment to me earlier in the day that 'it would be much easier if they [the students] were more like the Robertsons' (Sarah and Natasha's surname), referring to the fact that these students came to school regularly. Indeed the Robertsons did not seem to have much choice as to whether they went to school or not as their grandmother made sure that they did so every day.

Being in Year 10 the girls were all in the process of undertaking the school's work experience program, which involved the completion of two short work experience periods at two separate organisations within the Dusty Town area. Some did their work experience within the Indigenous affairs agencies which have an administrative base in Dusty Town, for example Sarah did her placement with the tourist board. Apart from their work experience program the girls also completed a Certificate I in building and construction. Indeed, there are a lot of short programs such as the building and construction course that are offered in Dusty Town School, either by the school or external organisations.

Apart from employment programs there are also youth-based programs which utilise sport and recreation activities such as the Clontarff football program and the Sister Speak program, which the girls are a part of, acting as mentors to the younger girls. Whilst there are programs for both male and female students, the three girls made a point of saying there were more programs aimed at the boys and that they were also better funded. Because their programs were not as well funded they

need to be able to raise the money to be able to go on some of the excursions. The opportunities and programs provided to the students of Dusty Town School also extend to international travel and projects. Dusty Town School sends a group of senior students each year to Cambodia as part of a community volunteer project where the students might spend a couple of weeks helping with the building of a school or other similar community-based projects.

To be able to take part in these activities the girls said that they needed to work and so they do. Janice worked at the local sport and recreation centre, a job she said paid well and was in high demand amongst young people in Dusty Town. Sarah had just got a job at the local pharmacy, and Natasha worked at the local supermarket, which was Indigenous-run. They also said they worked because there was not much else to do in Dusty Town, therefore they take on about three to four shifts a week after school or on weekends and use this money to partake in various programs throughout the year as well as for shopping when they went to the major cities for those programs.

All three girls listed a variety of aspirations for their future; they told me about their work aspirations as well as their aspirations to travel. Janice was in the process of setting up a school-based traineeship at a mine not too far away, Sarah talked about the aspiration of getting a job in the fashion industry, Natasha was not too sure exactly what she wants to do but she thought it would involve travel and moving away from Dusty Town for education and work. Indeed, all of the girls talked about spending time away from Dusty Town, but potentially also returning.

All three would be the first to acknowledge that they are not representative of all students at Dusty Town School and that they view the social world they live in a little differently.

*Janice: For starters being Indigenous you get all the support you can get, half of us just take it for granted, but you get so much opportunities being Indigenous and half of them just don't do anything with it.*

*Sarah: like you get scholarships and everything*

*Janice: you get scholarships, and apprenticeships and everything, kind of gets given to ya.*

*Sarah: Yeah like handed on a plate.*

*Researcher: And what do you mean when you say some students just don't care?*

*Janice: Like some of them don't come to school they don't care they just run amuck they're just troublemakers really, they don't realise how easy they can get it, get a good job, especially in the mines and all that there's so many opportunities but, no-one's making the move really.*



The case study of the three girls from Dusty Town raises the question that if these young people are already demonstrating a level of engagement in their schooling then are they the young people that should be accessing the *BECA* program? It also highlights the assumptions held by the policy officers and the rhetoric that they subscribe to. The three students themselves acknowledge the variety of opportunities made available to them whether employment-related programs or programs developed along the lines of personal development. Indeed, what was clear from the case studies was that each young person who had been offered the opportunity to participate in the program on a reward basis, more often than not could describe a network of support which surrounded and supported them, raising the question of whether these young people need even more support or whether there would be others who would get greater benefit from accessing this program and the opportunities it provided. The following three case studies further elaborate this point.

### **Dean from Mining Town**

After spending the day at Mining Town School, Sarah and Tanya, the two youth workers from the *BECA* program, and I decide to meet at a local café in the main shopping centre to grab a bite to eat. A few of the seniors from Mining Town School who were part of the program and who we visited that morning saw us and came over to our table to talk. They told us that across the road was a short walk to a tourist spot at the top of a hill where you can look out and see all of Mining Town. They offered to be our tour guides and took us there. On our way up to the lookout they talked about living in Mining Town, the increase in property prices and rent due to the mining boom, and how the local economy is dominated by fly-in fly-out workers.

Once up there you can clearly see the smoke stacks of the local mine, indeed there does not seem to be any location in Mining Town where it is not possible to see the mine. We told the students how surprised we were to see the close proximity of the mine to the town. Dean, one of the group, started to tell us how the colour of the smoke changes during different times of the mining process, and how you knew something was not right when it turned a certain colour. He pointed out the suburb that he lived in, as well as the ones his older siblings lived in. He went on to tell me that his sister worked in the mine along with his father. His mother worked at the other mine a few kilometres away. He explained their shift work, the hours they did, the pay level available for each of their roles, the rostering options they had and so on. Dean talked about aspirations of working in the mines, in particular entering the corporation through an Indigenous traineeship as a fitter and turner which the mine was currently recruiting for through Mining Town School.

Dean is not originally from Mining Town, he grew up in a mid-sized rural town in another state, living and working on a property. His family moved up to Mining Town a few years ago for the purpose of working in the mining industry. Whilst they no longer lived on and ran a property, Dean still utilised his farming skills by doing short work stints mustering cattle over the school holidays. At school and during the camp Dean was both courteous and polite. He participated in all activities as he does at school. He was helpful and conversational with his fellow students as well as with the teaching staff, the youth workers and myself. He was in Year 11 when he attended the camp and in his final year of high school when we made the visit the following year. He did well at school and was on track to finish his high school qualifications. The teachers spoke highly of Dean as they did of all the students from Mining Town, as these young people were the 'engaged' students.

With both of Dean's parents working in the mine one would assume that from an economic perspective the family was living comfortably in Mining Town, even with its high cost of living. It was obvious that Dean had spoken at length with his siblings and parents about their jobs in the mine as he was able to provide great detail on what working for the mine was like, in a trade-based role as well as an administrative role. Indeed, for a 16-year-old, Dean seemed to have a good understanding of work life. Considering he had been working for the past few years this was unsurprising.

The traineeship that Dean was applying for in the mines was run through Mining Town School. The mine worked closely with Mining Town School, having funded some programs as well as facilities, viewing the link between the school and the mine as an important one for local recruitment and employment. However, that recruitment tends to be focused on trade-based occupations and not on professional roles, such as engineering. The teachers told me that many of the students of Mining Town tended to view the mine as an opportunity for work. As one teacher told me, many of them tend to have the opinion that if school doesn't work out they can just go over to the mine and get a job, like their parents or other family members did. However the teachers tell me this is not necessarily still the case and they struggle to change this firmly held attitude to getting a job in the mines. Nowadays there was more competition for mining jobs and completing high school was almost an essential criterion for gaining employment in the mines, even if applying for a trade position.

There are, however, a couple of differences between Dean and many of the other students who think about working in the mines one day. Dean goes to school regularly and when he is there he

completes all his work as well as partakes in the extracurricular activities the school offers. He has a positive and supportive relationship with the school staff as well as with the other students. His peer group seemed to have a similar approach to school, as well as similar employment aspirations either in the mines or in other industries. For Dean the *BECA* program was viewed as a reward for his efforts in school. Indeed, Dean's engagement and involvement in school seems to be nothing different from the approach he has always taken to school and employment. Therefore how Dean was identified as being in need of such a program was based on two criteria underpinning access: rewards and locality.

### **Tonya from Dusty Town**

Tonya was the first person I spoke to the day I visited Dusty Town School. She sat and spoke to me about the camp and what she had been doing since in a bright and bubbly manner. She asked me about Canberra and told me again that she had been there for a sports program a couple of years before. She reflected on the camp and relayed some of the stories, stating she had had a fun time. In the past year she had also been to Melbourne, for a UN youth conference. When I asked her how she got involved in that opportunity she told me that 'this guy came to the school and he was looking for Aboriginal people who would be interested in attending'. Tonya, being her conversational and vocal self, put her hand up as it was something she would be interested in doing and therefore got offered the chance to go. She spoke about the conference, getting to listen to inspiring speeches and partaking in a range of personal development workshops.

I asked Tonya about her life in Dusty Town. She had been working at the local supermarket for over a year, doing four to five shifts a week. She complained about the backpackers who came through the town and stopped off in the supermarket and their sometimes not so friendly manner. She told me she was looking to leave the supermarket because she had started getting back pains from the type of lifting and packing work it involved. She was exploring the possibilities of getting a job in one of the town's fast food outlets instead.

Tonya was also involved in other extracurricular activities at school. She was the lead in the school musical and described how she got positive feedback from friends, family and the school staff for her performance. She told me how much she enjoyed working on the musical because she loves acting. In fact she takes drama classes at school, however she recently asked to change subjects because there were too many students mucking up in the class, which annoyed her. She is also a mentor on an Indigenous women's and girls' program, but complained about the younger girls not listening or

being as respectful as they should be.

I asked her about her future aspirations in terms of further education and employment. Sport, science and drama are all things Tonya enjoys, however she found it hard to decide on just one to pursue. She thinks in the end it will be drama that she focuses on. She has a friend who is a couple of years older who applied for and won a scholarship to go to a drama school in one of the capital cities. Tonya is hoping to do the same, regularly having discussions with her friend about this.

Like the other girls from Dusty Town, Tonya works for a variety of reasons: firstly because there is not much else to do in Dusty Town after school; secondly for the pay which supports her attending the programs she's involved in or provides her with spending money to travel; and finally because she is able to pass on some of her wages to her father, who is the sole provider for a large family which includes siblings as well as grandparents. She told me about her father. He works two jobs in Dusty Town both with Indigenous organisations. He is one of her biggest supporters and advocates telling her she can do anything and making sure she continues with school and her goals beyond.

She said that it is important for her to stick with her study and her goals and not go down the same track as her older siblings; something her father tells her too. However whilst her father's words regularly give her a lift and support her, her older sisters' comments tend to put her down or tell her she's not capable of achieving her goals. Tonya deals with this negativity by fighting back as well as by not letting her siblings' comments get to her. Nevertheless her outlook on the future was positive, *'I actually see myself making my way to the top, like to university and I just see myself in a drama school'*.

### **Ross, Adam and Taylor**

Even though Ross, Adam and Taylor are from two different communities I've merged them into one case study as their stories have many similarities. Ross and Adam are seniors at Mining Town School and have grown up in Mining Town. Both take on leadership roles within the school as well, indeed when I was speaking to the seniors from Mining Town school as a group, both Ross and Adam were regular contributors; even though they tried to let others contribute, they were always able to add their point of view to the discussion without taking over. Ross and Adam, like their fellow student Dean, seemed like mature and friendly students who had positive and respectful relationships with their teachers and fellow students. Indeed, Ross was voted school captain in his final year.

All the young people from Mining Town mention occupational and educational goals to some extent, however Ross's and Adam's goals were fairly specific. Adam had an interest in joining the defence forces. He had mentioned this at the camp and this had not changed in the time since. He seemed to know the various pathways that were available to him in the defence forces and the qualifications and criteria associated with each. He also seemed to have a keen interest in history, in regard to the armed forces as well as the local history of his identified group. In the past year he had attended a specific Indigenous youth program run by the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra, and he spoke at length and with great enthusiasm about his time on the program, visiting the defence force facilities as well as the War Memorial, finding the latter quite moving.

When I asked the group about the camp, Adam said it was a fun week and one of the best programs he had ever attended. The school is part of another Indigenous program which utilises sport, and in particular athletes, as mentors or motivators to distribute employment information. He also mentioned that the week on the camp was also a good opportunity to get away from the community for a while and have a break. Whilst Adam tried to avoid altercations, he suggested that this is hard to do as there are individuals in the community who like to start them. In particular he mentioned a common attack he receives in relation to his lighter skin colour. Even with this aspect of life in Mining Town that both Ross and Adam found quite negative, both still regarded Mining Town as a place where people in general were friendly and welcoming.

Ross also had very specific aspirations when it came to education and employment. During the camp he was one of two students who mentioned an interest in getting into a medicine degree, indeed both students spoke about the extra study load they were currently taking on to try and maintain their grades to be able to get into the course. Ross had his mind set on a particular university that he wanted to attend. He also had family in the faculty, with one of his aunties being a lecturer on the course. He mentioned this was useful in terms of advice and support with understanding the available pathway options.

Whilst both Ross and Adam were doing well at school and seemed to be mature and responsible young people, who were respected by both school staff and peers, they also spoke about concerns they had about their futures. Whereas the girls from Dusty Town spoke about the advantages of being Indigenous in terms of educational and employment opportunities, Ross and Adam viewed the same point with trepidation and raised concerns about the assumptions that would meet them in the workforce based on their identity as young Aboriginal people.

Ross: *I think people will look down on my résumé because I'm black and they'll just think that I won't do anything*

Adam: *I get that feeling too. Kmart did the same thing to me. They 'lost' my résumé three times.*

Interestingly Taylor had similar thoughts, however she had gone into more detail explaining her thoughts on the potential influences of race when it came to employment.

*I think a lot of the times someone's culture does affect the career that they choose, like a lot, as bad as it sounds a lot of companies and stuff they do sort of degrade people because of their race, like I know it sounds weird but, like you notice in the paper and stuff there's always articles about Muslims not being able to get jobs because of their burqa and they don't want to wear them and it offends people, so I reckon yeah your religion or culture does affect the job that you want. Like some people might be scared to be what they actually want to be because their culture doesn't approve of that or because the people in the area that they are, that they want to go to don't necessarily have a lot of those people in there so, and it's extra hard for Kooris because not a lot of Kooris you know go out and actually be something (Taylor – Farming Town).*

Taylor attended the BECA camp when she was in Year 8. When she completed her Goal Map she stated that she was interested in dance, hairdressing and law. One of the presenters on the camp that she attended was a professional dancer, who had talked about her training pathway in the performing arts. This speaker asked the group if anyone could dance and if so did they want to show the group their dance moves. Everyone pointed to Taylor, who politely refused to get up and dance, nevertheless she was known amongst her peers as having abilities in dance. During my visit I spoke to Taylor and she told me that she was part of another Indigenous youth program, which also had an employment and education focus. As part of this program she had gone and visited a variety of organisations and businesses in the local area. One of the places that Taylor visited was a solicitor's office. A couple of weeks after her visit the solicitor's office rang up her parents and offered her a scholarship. She was excited about the opportunity, however would have to wait to take up the scholarship, as she was only 14 years old and not 17 years old as the solicitors office originally thought. What Taylor has done in the meantime has been to organise work experience and a summer job at the same office.

She went on to explain what she felt she needed to do the next few years to achieve her goal. She

explained to me how completing a degree in law is a five year process, containing three years of general law and then two years of a specialism which for Taylor is an interest in criminal and family law. She had also found out that the hardest aspect of the next few years of her plan would be getting into a law degree at university due to the high marks required for entry into the program. However she mentioned that being in the Sister Speak Program, a program focusing on supporting young Indigenous women, had led her to information about the different ways that she could get into the law degree. Therefore even if she does not get a score over 99 in her Higher School Certificate, there are other avenues she could pursue to qualify for entry, which whilst they may take longer are available to her.

The four case studies presented demonstrate how each of the eight young people interprets and responds differently to the institutional field, in this case the school system and its associated out-of-school-hours programs. They all mention individuals in their family who support how they operate within this field and guide the development and attainment of ways of being which can then be deployed within this field. For example the Robertson girls, who are made to get up every morning and come to school on time, pay attention in school and do their work, are supported here by their grandmother to develop and deploy a way of being within the system that has value, this being consistency, timeliness and attentiveness. Tonya's father also provides Tonya with a form of capital the school values. He instils this both through his work and conversations with her about the importance and value of school for getting ahead. Also the value and potential of economic capital gained through employment is demonstrated in real terms through Tonya's ability to then support her father to provide for the family.

Taylor from Farming Town also has an understanding of the ways of operating within the institutional field. Her parents travel with her, taking her to opportunities that the youth program she is a part of offers, as do Ross's and Adam's families, who provide support both through guidance and in monetary terms to take up the opportunities offered to them. The girls from Dusty Town as well as Taylor, Ross and Adam demonstrate a familiarity with the education system; here too they rely on their social capital to operate within the institutional field. Ross has direct social connections, having a relative employed as a lecturer at the university he wishes to go to and in the specific course he wants to attend. The others mentioned parents' involvement in their day-to-day school lives: they have family that communicate with the school and the staff within, and who attend the school and speak to the teachers, an approach that the institutional system again values, preferring to conduct communication on its campuses rather than out in the community. These

young people's parents therefore also know how to operate in the institutional field both as primary carers and as students, knowledge that they pass on to their children.

These young people's ability to operate in the institutional field successfully means they tend to be offered more opportunities within that field, which have greater value beyond the basic school system and are seen as a reward for their efforts to date, such as school trips to Cambodia or leadership camps, a range of work experience opportunities, or the chance to act in the lead role of the schools play and so on. These provide each with the opportunity to demonstrate the capital they already possess as well as to accumulate additional capital.

Conversely, Sean and Ryan were given the opportunity to attend the same program as a trial. In their case the opportunity is framed in the context of a trial, with the rules they need to follow stated beforehand and monitored closely. In this case Sean and Ryan depend on themselves alone to accumulate, acknowledge and understand the capital that is valued within the institutional field, as their familial field does not either value this type of capital or is not in the position to provide a space for the attainment and development of it.

One thing that was very obvious through the course of this fieldwork and the subsequent community visits was the unequal distribution of opportunities between the two regional communities and the two remote communities. The young people of Dusty Town School were offered a number of local, national and international opportunities, indeed they were in the position to be able to turn away some opportunities that didn't suit. Alternatively the young people and school staff from Farming Town and Ocean Town had to research and chase opportunities for students. What was very evident here was Indigenous policy in general, as well as Indigenous youth policies in particular, have a preoccupation with remote communities, which I suggest here is driven by the quantitative statistical reporting which paints a picture of most need, and therefore greater urgency, in addressing issues of inequality in remote locations. However not all remote locations or every young person living in these locations is in need of such support.

The current push towards statistical equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth has been the underlying principle of the Closing the Gap policy. To deliver on this policy, government has funded a range of programs targeting youth with a particular focus on educational and employment objectives and outcomes. Considering that the girls from Dusty Town are between 15 and 16 years old, they would have been between the ages of 9 and 10 years when the CTG policy and



associated programs funded and developed under its banner began. It is clear through the quotes included from the girls from Dusty Town that they are well aware of the opportunities available and the reasoning behind these opportunities. They speak of having worked out the system of Indigenous policy and programs, potentially another field itself, and understand how to deploy the capital they need to vie for position within that field. I argue that this type of habitus in relation to this field may be a phenomenon that is unique to this age group, as this cohort is currently going through a system that has been set up to offer opportunities on a basis of statistical equality influenced by geographical boundaries rather than individual need.

The girls from Dusty Town internalise this rhetoric, as do their families, but as I have pointed out in previous chapters the allocation of these resources and programs is not necessarily directed to those who most need them. For example, youth program outcomes tend to be driven by simplistic indicators applied to the Indigenous population overall with limited to no acknowledgement of diversity within the group, even down to the level of regionality. Many programs are offered on a reward basis, therefore the young people who are already navigating their way successfully within the education system or institutional field, are the ones provided with additional opportunities. I also suggest that towns like Dusty Town, which are easily accessible and have a basic level of services within the community, make for easier program delivery, therefore meeting simplistic qualifiers of targets, such as locality (i.e. remoteness). This then raises additional questions: if the *BECA* program in this context is surplus to requirements and poorly targeted then the same points could possibly be made for other programs delivered in the same area. Therefore who decides, and on what basis, which programs to either continue or cease funding?

Indeed, the argument of need for and access to resources and the 'fairness' around who receives these resources is one that the young people themselves faced amongst their peers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Many of the young people who attended the *BECA* program spoke about comments they had received from other students both Indigenous and non-Indigenous about the opportunities they had been provided with and the feelings of the lack of fairness in how these opportunities and resources were allocated. Many times the comments were made along the lines of having opportunities provided based on Indigenous identity alone. For example both the staff and the students of Ocean Town School spoke about the different treatment, as well as the perceived different treatment, of Indigenous students at school. Many non-Indigenous staff and students at the school viewed the Indigenous Student Resource Room as a space where Indigenous students not only received more support, but also where more relaxed expectations of work and

effort were accepted. The young people from Mining Town School also mentioned that they had received comments before leaving for the *BECA* program about the unfair distribution of resources and opportunities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at the school, leaving them to explain the reasoning behind this to their fellow students. Indeed, the consequences of these types of comments in Farming Town School led to the poor uptake of Indigenous-specific support programs. For example a breakfast program aimed at Indigenous students at the school saw low numbers involved until the program was opened up to and promoted to all students, which saw an increase in uptake by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.

### **The youth organisation**

I now turn my attention to the interpretation and expectations of effectiveness and success as defined by the youth organisation and in particular the board and the management. The youth organisation, with its focus on expansion over the past few years, saw its programs as an opportunity to demonstrate its skills and abilities as an organisation. The *BECA* program therefore had the potential to be yet another successful program through which the organisation could promote itself. The increase in funding allowed the organisation to expand both in staff numbers, as well as locality and reach. They also saw it as an opportunity to display their ability to develop and deliver innovative and engaging youth programs. All of this could be presented through good news stories, media interviews and annual reporting, potentially leading to not only increased recognition and funding but also the gaining of authorisation from both the youth work sector and associated policy areas for the organisation's work. However I argue the chances of some of these outcomes occurring was limited.

Taking risks and accepting uncertainty, challenging the status quo and accepting controversy, lateral thinking and openness to sharing knowledge are all factors that contribute to innovation, and the exchange of values and skills between staff and partners through continued trust building is also an important factor (Merton 2010). Yet in the *BECA* program these were all things the youth workers and youth organisation felt almost needed to be avoided. Conversely it was obstructions to innovation such as an emphasis on short-term results, excess control and regulations and containment within the status quo that became prominent features of the program. Most importantly the one difference between contributing to and obstructing innovation, the preparedness to work from the young people's viewpoints and concerns rather than from the starting point of an agenda set by adults, was also missing throughout the program year.

Consequently the setting of rigid objectives aligning to a reporting structure founded in project management and monitoring and evaluation principles led to a restriction of innovation and an inability to undertake youth work in its traditional sense.

Whilst the importance of planning cannot go unacknowledged, the possibility of what is essentially a 'future focused' activity leads to the development of inappropriate and unreliable plans, within the informal setting in which youth work traditionally occurs (Ord 2012). How one plans and the extent of the planning that is undertaken is challenged, with some authors allowing for various levels of planning within an essentially less prescriptive framework (Smith 1994), whereas others give planning a central role in youth work (Ingram & Harris 2001), both outlined in Ord (2012). Even so the links between grants and funding and achievement of specific outcomes and indicators, generally within short time frames, cannot be ignored. Youth work is increasingly made measurable by the state, with standards developed and aligned to outcomes which are in conflict with what is primarily an improvised practice. Here we begin to see the need for organisations to market their services and compete with each other, utilising the language of the policy maker to meet criteria for funding. Making the situation even more frustrating is that the focus on measurable targets may, it has been argued, reflect little on the events taking place on the ground (Fraser 2008).

### **Promoting Success**

In the previous chapter I outlined the experience of camp four. The young people attending this camp were all students from an independent government-funded boarding school. The school had a full-time staff member employed in the role of careers advisor. The staff member responsible for career counselling services at this school attended the *BECA* program as a support staff member. She spoke to me about how she undertook her career counselling role. To begin with she would rely on career development questionnaires to gauge the personal skills and interests of each student and then from this point map out a pathway and opportunities from which to provide the young person with experience in their area of interest.

We were attending another of the 'corporate' talks on the third day of the camp, this time with a major airline. The presenter was explaining the company's Indigenous-targeted employment program. The career counsellor, who I happened to be sitting next to during the presentation, told me that Casey, one of the students in the group, was currently going through the application process with this airline. The career counsellor had spent the past couple of months supporting the student,

originally from Darwin, to develop an application and prepare for the interview process. She was set to find out the following week if she would be successful or not.

Two weeks later the youth organisation's regular bi-monthly newsletter became available on line. An article was written up on the progress and success of the *BECA* program. In this article was a short section referring to Casey's success. However the story was interpreted differently from the one I have outlined above. Casey's success was interpreted as a consequence of her attendance at the information session organised by the *BECA* program.

The youth workers, although not allocated any funding or support to maintain meaningful contact with each school following a camp, continued to communicate with them on an ad hoc basis after each camp either on the phone or through email. They had found out on a follow-up phone call a week or so after the camp that Casey had been successful in her application with the airline. Knowingly or not, Casey's success had been interpreted as a consequence of attending this information session at the airline scheduled as part of the program.

The drive to promote the relevance, need and, most importantly, success of each program can be seen throughout the many youth organisation reports of its programs and work, including the *BECA* program. This success story, like Todd's from the previous chapter, would be difficult to prove or indeed accept as being the case. For Todd to convincingly link the attendance of a young person at his organisation's programs to that young person becoming the first Indigenous school captain in Australia, he would first need to prove how the student's involvement in the program for a handful of hours over a number of months led to her obtaining her captaincy. And secondly, he would need to establish that she indeed was the first Indigenous person to become a school captain in an Australian school.

In Casey's story, the difficulty would be proving that a major airline would draw on a youth organisation's recommendation based on one week of contact to fast-track a young person through what is a competitive and lengthy employment process and secondly that the process would be completed over such a short period of time. Nevertheless the youth workers, in both cases, genuinely believed in and held up both cases as examples of the success of their work, driven by the need to continually demonstrate their relevance and their abilities to turn activities and inputs into outputs and outcomes.

## **The youth workers and the school staff**

The previous two chapters outline in detail the experiences of the first year of the youth program and its effects on the youth workers who developed and delivered the program, so their interpretations of the purpose, and consequently success, of the program will only be addressed briefly here. For the youth workers, as with the school staff, the program provided a space for the young person to be 're-engaged'. The youth workers quickly realised as did the school staff that the key to this was the development of the youth worker – young person relationship. In fact the potential for establishing themselves as role models or mentors was where the youth workers and school staff felt the *BECA* program differed from other areas of young people's lives such as school and home and therefore identified this as the unique catalyst it offered to their 'disengaged' students. Indeed the school staff did mention that the messages about building aspirations and striving for goals would not have the same influence or effect coming from them as it would coming from the youth workers and the various other individuals presenting on the *BECA* program.

The establishment of a reward-based attendance criterion for accessing the program was also critiqued and consequently appropriated by the majority of the schools that attended the program that year. Three out of the four schools saw the program as an opportunity to 're-engage' those students who they felt had truly moved beyond the school staff's ability to re-engage. They felt having a mix of both 'engaged;' and 'dis-engaged' students would provide an opportunity for mentoring and support to not only occur between youth worker and young person, but between the young people themselves; a scenario which if achieved through the program could continue on into the school grounds and local community and therefore be sustained beyond the one-week program.

The school staff realised that the achievement of this objective was going to be neither easy nor guaranteed. Indeed, all teachers and particularly those attending the first three camps spoke of the necessity of maintaining momentum and contact with the youth organisation beyond the one-week camp. Although without a confirmed plan for how this was going to occur, and without knowledge of the funding or resources to support this, their concern as to whether this would happen was obvious. The school staff had also made their own sacrifices for this week to go ahead. Missing a week of school meant additional planning prior to leaving to have their lessons delivered by other teachers as well as a need to catch up on work on their return, adding to their workload.

The school staff had seen programs come and go, and whilst the school staff attending the first three camps spoke highly of the program, in particular the effort demonstrated by the youth workers, they showed concern about the likelihood of such opportunities and connections continuing; hoping they would, but realistic about the prospect that this program, like others, would stop when the funding did. However it would not be the funding per se that would lead to their involvement with the program ceasing, rather it would be the principles underpinning the model itself, those established by the funding body and maintained by the management. Those principles being firstly that a functional model of youth work based around a one-week camp was the most effective and efficient method of achieving the objectives of the program and secondly that the more young people the program could reach the more successful the program would be.

The school staff's concerns would be realised. Apart from web-based communication being maintained through a Facebook-like website and the follow-up visits I conducted, which were attended by some of the youth workers, there was no other formal program-based contact between the youth workers and either the schools or the young people. From the perspective of the youth workers, the contradiction between the policy officers' and management's interpretations of success and the youth workers' preferred model of delivery based on relationship building was a source of conflated feelings. The organisation ended up marketing itself as a supplier of services. Meaningful indicators of success from the perspective of the youth workers and school staff in this case simply did not have a place.

### **Ownership of the program versus the requisite skills**

Whilst the program's objectives and outcomes as well as preferred delivery models and interpretations of success varied between those involved with the program, from policy to practice, the one common belief held by all at each level was the necessity and benefit of having the program developed and delivered by an Indigenous organisation and Indigenous people. At all levels, from policy to practice, there was the perpetuation of the belief of the necessity for the program to be developed and delivered based on an Indigenous ideology. However in the context of the *BECA* program this raised a few questions and potential issues; in particular it raised the question of whether an Indigenous ideology alone is enough and what the consequences were when this one criterion overrides others.

## Developing an Indigenous youth program

Early on in the fieldwork phase and during the development of the *BECA* program I was asked if, based on my previous work experience, I could support the youth workers in any way in the development of their program. I sat in on brainstorming sessions with the youth workers, shared some resources as well as experiences from my previous work history. The youth workers also drew on their own networks within the local area, discussing their program ideas with other Indigenous youth workers who they felt had more experience than they did and could support them to further develop their ideas. One day I came to the office and met up with Sarah to specifically discuss program activities for the up and coming camps. After bouncing around some ideas Sarah decided she wanted to walk around the campus where the programs would be based and explore the possibilities of all the available sport and recreation facilities and how they could be utilised. On the way down to the recreational area we bumped into Angela.

Angela worked in the recreation section of the facility and was responsible for developing and delivering health and lifestyles programs for the local community. Sarah mentioned it would be good to speak to Angela and draw on her experience in developing community programs. Sarah explained the program objectives and structure to Angela to give her context. She also explained that I would be conducting my research with the program throughout the year and at times offering any support to the youth workers with the development of the program. Following the quick explanation of the program by Sarah, Angela offered a couple of ideas on what activities could be included, concluding with the point, *'but you have to make sure it's culturally appropriate ...'*

What Angela was suggesting here is that whilst I might have experience in the field of youth work that was not enough, as I myself am not an Indigenous person, therefore the experiences and skills I have either would not be enough, or would not be relevant to developing a program for young Indigenous people. It was not clear where training and experience fitted in. The youth workers did not have either a history of work in this area or the support and resources from which to develop the skills needed, as both the management and the policy officers felt that being Indigenous was enough. So it is important to ask, *what occurs when it is felt that an Indigenous ideology trumps training, experience and support? Is an assumed Indigenous ideology enough, particularly when programs operate in a neoliberal space?'*

Significantly, the youth workers themselves had quite quickly come to the realisation once the programs had begun that training and support were necessary for them to develop and deliver their

vision of the youth program. They believed in their ability to connect with the young people both as youth workers and as Indigenous people but they realised early on that it would be their lack of training and support that would plague their first year.

The Inspiring Youth Foundation hired both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. The non-Indigenous staff hired had worked in the youth work sector for longer, one undertaking further studies in the area as well. The organisation would hold bi-monthly board meetings and the way Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff prepared for and utilised the board meetings was demonstrative of the Indigenous ownership versus experience and support divide. The board meetings would regularly require the staff from the various programs to give an update on their progress. The meetings would also provide an opportunity to raise any issues encountered within the various programs or the organisation more broadly. Whilst Sarah, being the *BECA* program manager, would collate data on the program to report on its progress as and when requested, her main objective around each of these board meetings was to lobby for the approval of funding and resources to be allocated to further supporting herself, Tanya and Chris to undertake their work. Alternatively, the non-Indigenous youth workers who had experience in youth work utilised the board meetings as a way to present their work to date and to gain approval and authorisation for it from the Indigenous board members. Indeed, the board meetings provided an arena in which to lobby and gain the missing element that each youth worker felt they had. For the non-Indigenous youth workers, it was the authorisation from the all-Indigenous board. This they seemed to get on a regular basis. For Sarah, Tanya and Chris it was the support and funding to access training and mentoring to put their ideas into practice as well as to deal with the day-to-day issues of undertaking youth work. Whilst they did succeed in getting access to some training, overall it was not enough. The fact that the program funding also did not allocate funds to support the training and development of the staff who would undertake this work, an occurrence common in the majority of state-funded youth work, made the support of this request even more difficult for the organisation's management to provide and approve.

### **Good intentions not enough**

The imagery that the young people attending the *BECA* program presented about their future was comparatively free from the negative stereotyping and concern which is usually ascribed to young Aboriginal people's future. Whilst individuals viewed their futures in different ways, most young people's future incorporated major milestones such as finishing school, getting a job, buying a house or moving away. In fact dominant narratives of a school to work transition period that incorporates



conventional goals based around work and study, family and friends, home ownership and wealth and at times travel were common among male and female young people from all four communities. Yet it must be acknowledged that the young people who attended the youth program that year were predominately a representation of those already 'engaged' in the schooling system. Nevertheless it raises two important points. Firstly, why is the imagery and narrative reflective of this group of young people missing from policy rhetoric and to an extent youth work discourse as well? Secondly, if many of these young people are already demonstrating the beliefs and behaviours underpinning the policy funding objectives, then why are they receiving access to such programs? In fact the *BECA* program continued for another year, with many of the issues outlined in the previous chapters reoccurring. Mosse's (2005) assertion that projects are successful because they sustain a coherent policy idea provides a basis from which to understand this decision.

Whilst there is no doubt that the youth workers and the youth organisation have the best of intentions in mind when undertaking their work, most had spent the majority of their working life employed within the area of Indigenous affairs as well as volunteering their time in various community-based organisations and projects. What became obvious to the youth workers throughout the year was that, within the current socio-political context, good intentions were not enough. The youth workers and youth organisation were aware that they themselves along with other organisations were vying for relevancy in the current youth work space and it is the promotion of success that underpins this relevancy. Mosse (2005) suggests that in development, success is made and managed. Here 'success is not merely a question of measures of performance; it is also about how particular interpretations are made and sustained socially. It is not just about what a project does, but also how and to whom it speaks, who can be made to believe it' (p. 158). Success, Mosse (2005) argues, depends on three factors: 'establishing a compelling interpretation of events; sustaining this as a key representation; and enrolling a wider network of supporters and their agendas' (p. 158). And it was these criteria that the youth workers were not able or willing to maintain.

The youth workers believed they were able to engage and motivate students and become role models for the young people that would attend their camps. But a program delivered along an Indigenous ideology was not enough. Quantifiable measures such as efficiency, timeliness and high quality programming were also necessary elements in the presentation of a successful program (Mosse 2005). But the youth workers' lack of training and experience as well as the influence of competing ideologies over what the program should include meant that such criteria were rarely

achieved. Nevertheless the organisation was, to a point, successful in selling its programs. The organisation's basis for relevancy in the youth work space aligned neatly to the views held by those funding the program. Whilst the program did not go as planned, and experienced many issues along the way, the sustaining of a policy based on disengaged youth and the effectiveness of new models to engage young people based on concepts of positive youth development and delivered in functional youth work models was enough for success to be promoted and funding to be re-issued.

While success was represented externally, internally from the perspective of the youth workers this representation of success did not ring true. Sukerieh and Tannock (2011) critique the overall positivist view of current youth work, currently dominated by the theoretical and ideological construct of positive youth development, in what they term as being 'youth development for a neoliberal society' (Sukerieh & Tannock 2011, p. 679). They argue that the rise of neoliberalism has seen the intensified selling of corporations to youth and vice versa, in which youth work is undertaken within a positive youth development framework. Certainly with the career planning focus requested by the policy officers and the push to engage corporations by management, the conflicting views of youth work from policy to practice became obvious as the youth workers, and school staff, more persuaded by the potential of youth work in its traditional sense, saw the program overtaken by the ideologies of those above them.

Sukerieh and Tannock (2011) suggest that the appeal of focusing on the positive aspects of youth is that social problems become easier to ignore. They conclude that

in the more positive view of youth, the agency, contributions and capabilities of the young in society are to be recognized, celebrated and supported. The limitations of this analytic frame become apparent when both mainstream and critical approaches to youth are marked by an overt and deliberate positivity, which manifests itself in the endless generation of programs dedicated to empowering, engaging, including and celebrating youth

(Sukerieh & Tannock 2011, p. 687).

Consequently a model which ignores social problems as well as limits the environmental contexts it operates in will only be able to achieve so much. Sukerieh and Tannock (2011) suggest that whilst the new youth development movement claims to operate in an ecological model addressing environmental contexts, these contexts rarely include broader social, economic or political issues, rather they concentrate on the 'micro-contexts' of school, family and local community. In fact the *BECA* program funding model directed specifically to camps alone to be delivered by one national organisation, not only ignored the broader social, political and economic issues but also completely

underestimated the role of school, family and local community. In this way the young person is viewed out of both the broader societal contexts as well as the 'micro-contexts' which make up their daily lives. The youth workers became aware early on in the implementation phase of the limitations that a functional framework placed on their program; they also became aware of the control that both the funding providers and the management of the youth organisation had over the program. Gaining a clearer picture and more experienced understanding of what Sukerieh and Tannock (2011) refer to as youth development for a neoliberal society and with limited resources, experience or support to challenge the status quo, the youth workers came to the conclusion that good intentions in the end were not enough, all three deciding to leave the program and their jobs at various stages throughout the second year.



## Chapter Eight

### Conclusion

In this thesis I have shown how the discourse of the 'disengaged' young person and the popular operation of youth work within a functional model reshapes a youth work environment traditionally established to critique hegemonic discourse. My aim has been to explore how the 'Aboriginal education problem' has been interpreted by policy makers, and by workers in the youth work field. I have shown how the youth program, whilst seemingly driven by official policy and the needs of policy makers, is, in fact, greatly influenced by the exigencies of organisations and the need to maintain and manage the patron/client relationship for the purpose of future funding and the promotion of efficiency and effectiveness, which I suggest is reflective of the current Indigenous youth work space more broadly.

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that policy maker thinking on young Aboriginal people's lived experiences and identities continues to be shaped by misconceptions about need. Policy and program assumptions frequently utilise basic demographic and statistical information to identify issues or highlight need areas. Whereas most research on Indigenous youth aspirations draws its findings from a small number of interviews, this research explores aspirations in a qualitative and visually representative way. The use of Goal Maps provides a particular insight into how well individuals have thought out their futures and the level of belief or confidence the young people have in achieving their stated aspirations. The Goal Maps allow for a broader look at young people's aspirations beyond employment. They also focus on the youth to adult, school to work transition phase and demonstrate that the assumption that Indigenous youth have limited aspirations when it comes to education and employment or even a limited acceptance of the reasoning behind schooling is not always the case. This research also provides a chance to look at the 'engaged' youth, providing some insight into why some succeed in the current system where others don't. This research raises two important points. Firstly, why is the imagery and narrative reflective of this group of engaged young people missing from policy and to a lesser extent from youth work discourse more generally? Secondly, if many of these young people are already demonstrating the aspirations and behaviours underpinning the policy funding objectives, then why are they receiving access to such programs?

I suggest that youth programs based on the disengaged youth discourse and the effectiveness of the new models and theories, such as youth development programs and positive youth development, are promoted because they will lead to funding being renewed. Whereas much of the youth work literature on Indigenous development programs focuses on the outcomes expected of such programs, this research focuses on the relevance of the model adopted. This has allowed for the opportunity to explore the consequence of the mismatch that eventuates when policies, and consequently programs, are driven by assumptions targeted at addressing assumed problems rather than actual problems. By providing a more critical and holistic view of the success of a youth development program I have added to the growing body of literature that critiques the incompatibility of functional youth work models based on positive youth development principles and particularly to their lack of suitability in the Indigenous youth work area.

Indeed, the need for policy makers to demonstrate value, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in their programs imposes an increasingly hierarchical delivery approach that creates a divide between the managers and their staff. These changes alter significantly the way the Aboriginal youth workers experience their roles and relationships with the 'client' and the 'partner organisations', which leads to professional and personal identities becoming more separate. Furthermore the consequences of administrative procedures, individual and organisational accountabilities and program reporting, sees social issues reduced to matters of implementation with the actual needs of the young people mattering less and less. Consequently organisations are becoming less responsive to the voices of those who work in the organisation, as well as to those of the young people they aim to assist.

I have demonstrated how models of efficiency and effectiveness established through a neoliberal policy framework favour individuals and organisations that best operate within the framework providing minimal opportunity for critical reflection. The same individuals and organisations are viewed as successful, both by external stakeholders and those working within them. The current policy and funding approaches means organisations are vying for relevancy in the current youth work space and this leads to a competitive environment rather than a collaborative and strategic ethos dominating the youth worker field, moving the focus away from clients' needs towards organisational reproduction.

I have also raised the dominance of Indigenous ideology and demonstrate how an Indigenous ideology alone in such a setting as the *BECA* program is not enough, particularly when this one

criterion overrides others such as youth work experience and training. There is a need for training in the youth work sector, both formal and informal, through mentoring, and the establishment of support structures, if youth workers are to be effective in their work

### **Implications of findings**

The *BECA* program found itself in a policy environment that is based on assumptions and misconceptions about the youth it was aiming to influence, supporting both Bunyan & Ord (2012) and Davies (2012) assertions of the influence of wider social political and economic contexts on youth work. The stereotyping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as one homogenous group (Rowse 2012), leading to false binaries formed along racial lines, which Guenther (2014) suggests may then be perpetuated through data and statistical reporting, formed the basis of broader policy objectives of the program and the approach adopted and determined through program outcomes and attached funding. Consequently this led to many contradictions within the program in terms of program aims and program funding, which I suggest lead to practical implications which can be applied more broadly. The *BECA* program aimed to broaden the horizons of Indigenous youth, motivate and inspire them to set and achieve goals and to support them to do so with information, advice and a network. Yet by focusing on the specific need to change the minds and views of the youth themselves, the program overlooked the young people's social and local contexts, which meant that in many cases the Indigenous youth already held these values and views. The *BECA* program therefore provided a perfect case from which to further explore the consequences of what Davies (2012) describes as the balance between the policies and programs aimed at developing a young person's own potential [*i.e., education*] vs. one's developed with the stated purpose of 'rescuing them from personal and family 'lacks', deficiencies and failures [*i.e., risks*]' (p.14). Indeed the ability for a national model such as the *BECA* program to, as Heath and Roach (1999) suggest, 'fill the gap', by providing the support, advice and mentoring to young people about whom the program has limited information and understanding, needs to be questioned. Even if the *BECA* program had tried to base itself on a critical model, without the understanding of the local contexts and of the individuals themselves, it is questionable how effective it could be. Further, the program did not allow adequate time for the youth workers to develop meaningful relationships with the youth This leads to a further practical implication that relates to who gets access to such support services and youth work programs and the limitations of the current models based on demographic indicators alone, demonstrating the consequences of a move away from 'open access' program of the past towards 'targeted' provision towards socially excluded and disadvantaged individuals and groups as

outlined by Davies (2012). Indeed, it could be argued that the likelihood of a mismatch between the services and the support provided and the client's needs increases when uniform national models of delivery are adopted which draw on simplified representations of young Indigenous people (Guenther 2014, Rowse 2012).

Traditionally youth work with aims similar to the *BECA* program would be undertaken at a local level and over longer periods of time. Yet the drive to demonstrate efficiency, simply in terms of the numbers of young people accessing the program, and effectiveness, through the demonstration of quantifiable outcomes, leads to the promotion of national youth programs which offer a way to 'impact' more youth in less time. With such limited time, and consequently limited understanding of the youth and their lived experiences, it is very difficult for programs to make a real difference. This raises the question of how the current pathway following functional youth work principles can be shifted. How can smaller, local youth work programs operate in the current neoliberal environment and how can larger national programs acknowledge and address the limitations of their models while maintaining relevance.

This problem also underlines the limitation of current funding models, which either do not adequately calculate the cost and resources needs to run programs, or correctly estimate the real costs of the staff to develop and deliver such programs. In this case, the Inspiring Youth Foundation was identified and presented itself as capable of delivering a full program. Yet ultimately the ability to fulfil the criteria of the program was based principally on the Indigenous identity of the organisation. Although some in the organisation had youth work experience, those involved with the *BECA* program did not. Furthermore there was no funding allocated to either establish contact with the young people prior to the program or to maintain contact afterwards in any meaningful way. Current funding models need to take into consideration costs beyond program delivery alone, such as training and support for both the youth workers and mid-level management staff involved in the programs. There is also a need to allocate both time and resources for youth workers to establish and maintain relationships with each other, with the youth program and with the young people. Simply funding providers on the sole basis that they are Indigenous-run organisations is not enough to ensure effective program development and delivery.

Another practical implication relates to training and support, specifically the form this takes and the content that is included. Youth work operates across two fields: social work and education, both of which have formal structures for training and development as well as guidelines for conduct within



the field. The Inspiring Youth Foundation is unable to provide the formal training or the guidelines for conduct to support its practitioners to undertake their roles. Consequently it cannot provide professional training and experience for the youth workers. Indeed the organisation appears to assume that anyone can undertake the role of a youth worker or manage youth work services regardless of whether they have experience and training or not. In the current youth work environment, particularly in a national setting, youth workers need to be able to establish, manage and maintain a number of relationships. Whereas in the past these relationships might have extended to the young people's families, schools or other local institutions, in the current setting this relationship network has expanded. To manage these relationships requires youth workers to be skilful mediators, fluent in not only the discourse of youth work, but also knowledgeable about government bureaucracy and the culture of corporate philanthropy, and who are able to function between the different rationalities and expectations encountered. Indeed, the need for training does not only apply to the youth workers but also to the training and support needs of management.

Finally, this research has both practical and methodological implications which could potentially be applied more broadly in similar settings. A large volume of research undertaken on youth programs focuses on post-program outcomes. Whilst there is existing literature focusing on the development and implementation of youth programs, in comparison this is limited. This research adds to the body of literature that provides a more holistic representation of the youth program process leading to a more critical reflection when exploring outcomes and impact. However conducting research during a program has its own practical challenges, in particular the time taken to conduct such research. The Goal Maps and Community Mapping activities, developed to include both research and program objectives and to be delivered in a program setting, have the potential to overcome some of these challenges. Such an approach has the potential to provide a child or youth centred research activity, whilst also developing the research skills of the youth workers and drawing on their reflections and interpretations, adding to the research itself. This approach also addresses the issue of time in terms of impact on the program schedule and it allows for data to continue to be collected without the presence of a researcher.

### **Limitations of the research**

It needs to be acknowledged that this is only an in-depth study of a specific and small aspect of Indigenous youth work and therefore its limitations in scope and methodology need to be considered. The youth that formed part of this research were predominantly the 'engaged' youth and the time available to speak to the youth was limited. Thus the study cannot claim to provide a

balanced representation of all the young people found in the communities and schools represented in the research. Whilst the program explored the viewed futures and aspirations of the students it cannot predict outcomes. The Goal Maps activity allowed the young people to present their viewed futures but no clear distinction was made between aspirations and whether these accurately mirror their true expectations or only those they know are expected of them.

This research did not include interviews with the policy makers and whilst conducting a document analysis provides insight into the current youth work space the *BECA* program was operating in, its specificity to the policy officers' views can only be assumed. In hindsight it would have been valuable to also attend the second youth program the *BECA* youth workers delivered. Not doing so meant relying on limited interviews based on the youth workers' reflections on the program alone.

### **Recommendations for future research**

This research has explored the aspirations of Indigenous youth and their views of the future. It suggests that there are a number of young Indigenous people who have both educational and employment aspirations. However, statistically many Indigenous youth tend not to achieve these goals, particularly when based in regional and remote communities. Understanding the causes behind this, and how current policy settings need adjusting, is a crucial issue. Indeed, it would be beneficial to identify the same young people who were part of this research and track their life, educational and career paths in the years after the program to gain insight into the actual influence the program had on their lives and where youth programs fitted into these, if at all. The scope of the current research could also be expanded to include more of a focus on the young people themselves, incorporating not only the young people's views and thoughts but also those of their families as well as others in their lives.

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## **Appendix A - List of Inquiries, Parliamentary Reviews and Reports into Aboriginal Education 1975-1988**

- 1975      *Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission (ACG 1975)*
- 1976      *Access to Education: An Evaluation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (Watts 1976)*
- 1979      *The Education and Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Report (Hughes & Willmot 1982)*
- 1981      *Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines (Watts 1981)*
- 1985      *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs (Miller 1985)*
- 1985      *Support Systems for Aboriginal Students in Higher Education Institutions Report (Jordan & Howard 1985)*
- 1985      *Report of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education*
- 1988      *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (Hughes 1988)*
- 1988      *Higher Education: a Policy Statement Australian Commonwealth Government (Wilks & Wilson 2014)*



## Appendix B - List of Goal Maps

Goal Map No.	Gender	Age	Location <sup>+</sup>
1	F	15	Regional
2 & 2.1	M	13	Regional
3	F	16	Regional
4	M	16	Regional
5	F	15	Regional
6	F	17	Regional
7	F	15	Regional
8 & 8.1	F	13	Regional
9 & 9.1	F	16	Regional
10	F	14	Regional
11	M	13	Regional
12	M	16	Regional
13	M	15	Regional
14	M	15	Regional
15	M	13	Regional
16	M	17	Regional
17	M	17	Regional
18 & 18.1	F	17	Regional
19	F	14	Regional
20	M	13	Regional
21	M	14	Regional
22	M	16	Regional
23 & 23.1	M	16	Regional
24	F	14	Regional
25	M	N/I	Regional
26	M	14	Regional
27	M	14	Regional

Goal Map No.	Gender	Age	Location <sup>+</sup>
28	M	14	Remote
29	M	16	Remote
30	M	17	Remote
31	F	17	Remote
32	M	16	Remote
33	F	16	Remote
34	M	16	Remote
35	M	16	Remote
36	M	16	Remote
37	F	16	Remote
38	F	16	Remote
39	F	17	Remote
40	F	16	Remote
41	M	13	Remote
42	M	16	Remote
43	M	16	Remote
44	M	15	Remote
45	F	16	Remote
46	F	16	Remote
47	F	16	Remote
48	M	14	Remote
49	F	16	Remote
50	F	15	Remote
51	F	14	Remote
52	M	14	Remote
53	M	15	Remote
54	M	N/I	Remote <sup>++</sup>
56	M	14	Remote
57	M	N/I	Remote
58	M	14	Remote

Goal Map No.	Gender	Age	Location <sup>+</sup>
59	F	15	Remote
60	F	15	Remote
61	F	15	Remote
62	F	16	Remote
63	M	14	Remote
64	F	N/I	Remote <sup>+++</sup>
66	M	15	Remote <sup>+++</sup>
68	F	16	Remote
69	M	16	Remote
70	F	14	Remote
71	F	15	Remote
72	F	16	Remote
73	M	16	Remote
74	M	16	Remote
75	M	16	Remote
76	F	15	Remote
77	F	14	Remote
78	M	16	Remote
79	M	15	Remote
80	M	15	Remote
81	F	16	Remote

Goal Map No.	Gender	Age	Location <sup>+</sup>
82	M	15	Regional
83	M	15	Regional
84	F	15	Regional
85	F	17	Regional
86	M	16	Regional
87	F	16	Regional
88	F	16	Regional
89	F	15	Regional
90	M	15	Regional
91	F	15	Regional
92	F	15	Regional
93	M	15	Regional
94	M	16	Regional
95	M	15	Regional
96	M	15	Regional
97	M	15	Regional

+ To maintain anonymity the location of each town has been replaced by broader geographical descriptors.

++ There is no Goal Map No. 55 due to a sequencing error when numbering Goal Maps.

+++ Goal Maps No. 65 and 67 are not included as they were completed by individuals who were non-Indigenous.

N/I Age of participants was not recorded.