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Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt Inc

Evaluation of the Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) Program

July 2021



An Australian Government Initiative

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Ballardong

Moorditj Yaakiny
(Standing Strong)



Yued

Ngala Wele Karla
(Our Dream on Fire)

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Introduction

RDA Wheatbelt Chairman

The NEDS program has been a terrific experience for RDA Wheatbelt. The project has produced some outstanding outcomes and more importantly, has laid the base for further expansion and opportunities for the future.

The program has proved to be a learning journey for all involved. However, the lessons, experiences and adaptations made along the way have given greater flexibility on how the program will roll out in the future. The real success has been the development of the people involved and the very real opportunities for the Wheatbelt Region's Aboriginal people to be involved in business.

I would like to particularly congratulate our small but dedicated staff, led by our Director Regional Development Mrs. Mandy Walker, Research Evaluation Project Support Officer Mr. Chris Evans and Admin/Finance Officer Mrs. Pippa Harris. I commend them for their great commitment, drive and leadership to ensure the success of this previously untried program.

Great credit must also go to Mr. Robert Miles, for the outstanding role he has played as the Project Officer. Rob has been brilliant and is a real success story of the program itself. I hope Rob will continue the work as his own business and continue his personal and professional association with RDA Wheatbelt. The business manual he has developed is quite outstanding and will serve many future clients well going forward.

My thanks also go to Ms. Stephanie Mippy, who did some outstanding work in Yued that laid the foundations for work that is now being further developed and undertaken. On behalf of myself and RDA Wheatbelt, I wish Stephanie well for the future and hope that she is able to use some of the knowledge and experiences that she gained from the program in her future pursuits.

I also extend my thanks to the Department of Social Services for their ongoing support and belief in the program and the way RDA Wheatbelt has managed it. Finally, I thank my RDA Wheatbelt Committee who stood by the program through its challenges. I know we are all extremely proud of the achievements and the fact that the work continues for the benefit of Aboriginal people in our region and the Wheatbelt Region as a whole.

RDA Wheatbelt Director Regional Development

Delivery of the NEDS program was RDA Wheatbelts's first formal effort to tackle economic and social disadvantage experience by the Ballardong and Yued people within the Wheatbelt. We drew on our experience working with businesses across the region to build the confidence and capacity of our Project Officers to deliver NEDS activities.

Along the way we changed some of our approaches and learned from what was, and what wasn't working. It was a pleasure to work alongside our Project Officers who delivered a complex project with resilience and determination.

This evaluation report sets out those lessons and the achievements of our NEDS Project Officers and participants. They are the ones who put themselves out there with the courage to try something new and build themselves a business. Congratulations on your achievements, these have been recognised by our funders, the Department of Social Services through a twelve-month extension to keep the NEDS program running in the Wheatbelt.

Executive summary

The Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) project was designed to provide support to the Ballardong and Yued Noongar peoples to develop businesses by utilising existing cultural assets (infrastructure & community), providing resources that will inspire, facilitating and activating the community to develop self-employment options and social enterprises that provide skills, employment pathways, income & most important a sense of purpose and hope.

Focused especially on school leavers and providing culturally meaningful social enterprises that provide a sense of connection to and pride in community, opportunities for voluntary work and gainful employment. The aim was to increase individual self-reliance and contribution to the local community and meaningful participation in the real economy. The social enterprises were expected to act as incubation hubs, stimulating and assisting with the development of micro enterprise as the community and individuals therein gain confidence, experience and commercial knowledge.

The Aboriginal population in the Wheatbelt over the last 4 census to 2011 has grown steadily in every sub region with the population growing by almost 25% over the 15 year period. This is a higher growth rate than for the State as a whole and it could thus be expected that the Aboriginal Population will become comparatively more significant within the Wheatbelt as time passes. The Wheatbelt community has been experiencing significant structural change over many years brought about by improvements in technology within the agricultural sector. The absence of traditional employment pathways, coupled with low education outcomes and a continuing desire amongst the Noongar community to stay on country has resulted in very high levels of unemployment (over 50% youth unemployment) and an increasing sense of hopelessness being reported within what is an expanding Noongar community.

Within the Wheatbelt the 'closing the gap' targets have been widening rather than closing and a circuit breaker is required. The NEDS project set out to provide resources that would inspire, facilitate and activate the Noongar community to develop self-employment options as well as social enterprises that provide skills, employment pathways, income and most important a sense of purpose and hope. It was intended that over time this would feed back into educational pathways and provide a link for young people to both develop their own skills with confidence that these could be employed on country.

The economic profile of the Indigenous population in the Wheatbelt is characterized by low employment, low labour force participation, very little business development, low personal incomes and high levels of income support. An evaluation of employment/business support services in the Wheatbelt identified a key gap in services with only two out of twenty-eight services extending a physical presence to the region. In comparison, the Great Southern Region with 38% fewer Indigenous people than Wheatbelt has 4 services and an office location. The gap in the services to the Wheatbelt is further highlighted by the geographical comparison of the two regions with the Gt Southern covering almost a third (39,000 square kms) of the area of the Wheatbelt's 154,000 kms.

As far as possible, the RDA Wheatbelt solution was designed to be closely aligned to the success factors identified by the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Steering Committee which were cooperative approaches; community involvement; good governance; and ongoing government support. Tim Mazzarol has completed a study into the WA Noongar nation and presents a carefully focused case study on ways to stimulate entrepreneurship. The most important barriers are lack of support and information, risks, the realities of the business world, lack of finance and lack of marketing skills. Among Aboriginal respondents the fear of failure is higher, the problems of gaining support from others is greater and the role models are fewer. RDA Wheatbelt's NEDS program was capable of

providing supportive mentoring services designed to overcome such barriers as fear of failure. A key component of the NEDS project was the proactive identification of opportunity, the engagement with individual families and the development of forward pathways involving education, mentorship, connection with markets and existing advisor programs that can support the success and longevity of Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

The NEDS Project Officers were tasked with undertaking a scoping exercise with the families to identify current indigenous assets/opportunities/interests from which an enterprise might develop; showcasing to the families' enterprises undertaken elsewhere; working with the families to develop business plans and pilot enterprises; connecting with other relevant support mechanisms within the region and in Perth; connect social enterprises with mentors; and develop employment pathways for indigenous work force to staff these businesses including work experience.

The outcomes intended to be achieved over the 3-year program were improved wellbeing of young people through the addition of 'hope'; improved retention in year 11 and 12 school programs with the provision of employment pathways and work experience; opportunities for the provision of voluntary work to the unemployed Ballardong and Yued community members through engagement using work for the dole as a mechanism for initial engagement in social enterprises prior to commercialization; a minimum of 30 Ballardong and 30 Yued Noongar people in employment with an additional 30 work experience places in each social enterprise by end year 3 (from a zero start); a minimum of 2 social enterprises at the end of year 2 (from a zero start) in both Ballardong and Yued regions; and improvement in community self-worth through improvements in expectations for the future.

Comparing our actual outcomes as of June 2021, with the intended outcomes described in the 2017 funding application, it is clear we didn't hit the targets in respect to actual numbers of people in business and within an employment or volunteering pipeline. The same is said for the impact we intended to have on the wellbeing of young people. We didn't quite hit the mark in terms of being able to measure actual retention in years 11 and 12.

What we have achieved through the Project Officers and our contracted delivery partners is an ecosystem of existing micro businesses and people on the cusp of establishing their own enterprises who are prepared with a business plan, are motivated and confident to take the next steps in their business with the knowledge of where to get support locally. The fears that Tim Mazzarol found in his research continue to resonate in terms of fear of failure and access to finance, however what NEDS has been able to achieve is a connected network of business support with the resources and information readily and freely available to anyone who wants to be part of the NEDS journey.

In view of the number of engagements with potential pre-start-up or start-up clients over the past three years, it would be reasonable to propose that the NEDS program has initiated a growing interest in starting a business or community enterprise among Aboriginal people living in Ballardong and Yued Country. The 92 individuals that have engaged in the program represented 10% of the 18-64 years population across the two Countries. Added in the people who attended community enterprise engagements and that percentage increases markedly to 30% of the 18 to 64 years population in Ballardong and Yued.

This achievement is a credit to Robert Miles, Stephanie Mippy, Ann Maree O'Callaghan, Carol Redford and Donna Vanzetti. The foundation is now set for a program like NEDS to continue to be delivered in the region through the business established by Robert Miles. This ongoing service will be vital to ensuring local, supportive, and trusted business start up information is shared not only across the Wheatbelt but potentially the State or Nationally.

1. Background

The Wheatbelt Region

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Wheatbelt is part of a national network of 52 RDA Committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the economic development of their regions. RDA Wheatbelt has an active and facilitative role in the WA Wheatbelt's communities, with a clear focus on growing strong and confident regional economies that harness their competitive advantages, seize economic opportunities and attract investment.

The Wheatbelt Region covers 155,256 square kilometres and comprises 42 Local Governments (LGs), and over 200 communities with an aggregated population of 74,000 people and is divided into five sub-regions being, Avon, Central Coast, Central East, Central Midlands and Wheatbelt South. The region broadly stretches approximately 500 km from the West Coast (Lancelin in the Shire of Gingin) to the Eastern Shire of Yilgarn (Southern Cross) and almost 400 km on roughly a north south axis between the Shires of Dalwallinu in the north and Wagin in the south.

Traditional Boodja, Culture and Heritage

There are four traditional Boodja (Country) of the Noongar Nation in the Wheatbelt:

- Wilman Boodja - which broadly speaking runs from the Shires Narrogin, West Arthur, Williams and Wickepin north through the Shires of Cuballing, Pingelly and Brookton being the northern boundary.
- Ballardong Boodja - extends north of Brookton through the Shires of Beverley, York, Northam and half of Toodyay and east out through the Shires of Corrigin, Cunderdin, Quairading, Tammin and Kellerberrin and possibly includes some of the southern eastern parts of the Shire of Wongan Hills Ballidu.
- Yued Boodja - includes the northern side of the Toodyay Shire and encompasses the Shires of Chittering, Gingin, Dandaragan, Moora, Victoria Plains, along with southern portion of the Shires of Dalwallinu and south western parts of Wongan-Ballidu.
- Nadji Nadji Boodja - runs east of Kellerberrin and Quairading with its furthest point on the eastern end of the Shire of Yilgarn.

Several of these Noongar Boodjas also adjoin other First Nations boundaries. The northern part of the Shire of Dalwallinu is Badami Yamatji Country while Nadji-Nadji Boodja borders Kelamaia Wongai Country in the eastern end of the Shire of Yilgarn. In addition, the Shire of Toodyay is the three-way boundary between Ballardong, Yued and Wadjuk Boodja.

While these are the traditional Boodja of the Wheatbelt Noongar people, the removal of Aboriginal children from across WA has resulted in descendants of these children remaining in the areas their forebears were interned in.

Such is the case of children interned on Mogumber Mission and at New Norcia whose descendants have remained in Moora (Yued Country). As a result, there are tensions and challenges in the town between the traditional Yued Noongar community and the stolen generation descendants.

In addition to these tensions intergenerational trauma derived from the policy of removing First Nations children from their families, communities, country and cultures continues to resonate and

adversely impact on the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal children and adolescents' education and future life outcomes.

The challenge for socio-economic development within the Aboriginal community in the Wheatbelt is that each community is confronted by tensions and conflict on the social interface within their own community and with the broader non-Aboriginal community; along with the institutions and the accompanying expectations of compliance and assimilation in the non-Aboriginal world.

In effect, Aboriginal people in the Wheatbelt must exist within the social environment of a foreign civilization that appropriated their countries, took their children, suppressed their languages and dismissed or denigrated their cultural heritage.

This overview illustrates not only the diversity of Aboriginal culture and heritage in the Wheatbelt region, but also the diversity and complexity of challenges that act as constraints in advancing socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal people. Additionally, it shows that a reductionist approach to attaining better outcomes through the development and implementation of 'top down' generic programs in such a complex space may be challenging the delivery of successful outcomes.

1.1. Background to the Project

The Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) project had its origins in February 2015 when the then Executive Officer of RDA Wheatbelt, Ms. Juliet Grist convened a meeting with Mr. Michael Ward, founder of the Maali Family Elder Group out of Northam. This was to explore what approaches could be taken to increase Aboriginal economic participation in the Wheatbelt's mainstream economy. Ms. Grist's reason for engaging in the region's Aboriginal economic sector was motivated by three key interdependent factors. These were:

- The socio-economic disadvantage faced by a large proportion of the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal population
- The issue that while the region's Aboriginal population represented 5% of the region's total population, it had to a great extent 'fallen through the cracks' in terms of projects and funding to activate employment and economic participation
- COAG's Closing the Gap initiatives were not delivering improved outcomes across education and employment for the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal population and if anything, the 'gap' was widening for them.

The core of Ms. Grist's motivation was encapsulated in Emeritus Professor D'Arcy Holman observations drawn from a presentation of his report on WA Indigenous Health Programs. In the presentation he noted that the very significant disadvantage being experienced by Indigenous West Australian's is unlikely to be remedied without *"huge improvements in education, employment and wealth"*.

At this point of concept development, ABS data from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing illustrated the seriously low levels of Wheatbelt Aboriginal people's engagement in economic participation and the disparities between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. For instance, in the Wheatbelt sub regions of Avon, Central Midlands and Wheatbelt South which broadly included Ballardong and Yued Country, only 1.1% of Indigenous people between 15 and 64 years were self-employed compared to 7.1% of non-Indigenous people. Added to this was the high Aboriginal unemployment rate of 26.5% compared to the low rate of 3.7% for non-Aboriginals in the combined sub regions.

Correspondingly concerning were the poor labour force participation rates for Aboriginal people of 44% in the 15-64 year age category compared to non-Indigenous participation rates of 83.4%. These figures were further compounded by the low Aboriginal male labour force participation rate of 51% compared to the non-Aboriginal male's rate of 91%.

The 2016 ABS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census data showed little change from the 2011 census data. Region wide figures indicated that unemployment amongst Aboriginal 15-24 year olds was still high at 39% and labour force participation remained low at 39%. Alternately, the 25-64 years data showed that unemployment was running at 24% which was similar to 2011 figures as was labour force participation which was at 49%. The only positive change was a slight increase in the percentage of those who identified themselves as self-employed.

In effect, as Ms. Grist observed through a series of briefings and a project proposal to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the initiatives implemented through COAG to close the gap of economic disadvantage were not delivering and if anything, the gap was widening for the Wheatbelt Region's Aboriginal population.

RDA Wheatbelt initially proposed a long-term project of between five to 10 years that would apply a different approach to the delivery of economic development support to Aboriginal people in the Wheatbelt.

It was envisaged that the project and approach would entail the establishment of an Aboriginal organisation, staffed with Aboriginal people who had a cultural connection with Wheatbelt communities. These staff would facilitate the delivery of economic development support and undertake mentoring and fostering of business development and employment. It was anticipated that from these economic beginnings, education programs and employment pathways would be added which in turn would develop synergies with the developing enterprises.

This approach was intended to generate a holistic approach to family economic independence which would in turn influence improvements in health outcomes, reduce risks in early childhood development and positively impact a range of economic, social and health outcomes.

Unfortunately, applications to fund the program in this format through a variety of entities was unsuccessful. However, RDA Wheatbelt's then Executive Officer, Ms. Grist continued to advocate for the program and its necessity to various agencies and philanthropic organisations. At the very end of Ms. Grist's tenure as Executive Officer of RDA Wheatbelt, the Department of Social Services offered funding for a revised project over three years.

This became the Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) project. The project entailed funding two locally based Noongar Project Officers with connections to their communities to deliver a business development program in the traditional Country regions of the Ballardong and Yued Noongar.

2. Literature Review

In developing and refining what would become the NEDS project, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken. The purpose of the review was to accrue information that would support delivery of the project and to identify important components that needed to be addressed or taken into consideration during the delivery process.

A key element that needed to be qualified and was addressed early in the literature review was to examine the socio-cultural constructs of the Aboriginal Business Model and if there were differences between it and the Mainstream Business Model. However, the first step was to establish the socio-economic demographics of the Wheatbelt's and targeted traditional Countries of Ballardong and Yued Aboriginal populations based on 2016 Census data.

Wheatbelt Aboriginal population age profile

The Wheatbelt's Aboriginal population in 2016 was approximately 4,000¹ and constituted 5.5% of the region's total population (ABS, 2016a) which was a higher proportion than the 3% representation in the State's population (ABS, 2016b). It was a predominately youthful population with over 50% of the population being aged between 0 and 24 years old and just 7% being 65 and older (Table 1). In comparison, the non-Aboriginal population of the region was heavily skewed towards the older age demographic.

Table 1 Wheatbelt age profiles

Years	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal % change 2011-16	Non-Aboriginal % change 2011-16
0-14	36%	17%	-3%	-3.6%
15-24	16%	9%	+6.9%	+10.5%
25-64	41%	53%	0%	+7%
65 +	7%	21%	+3%	+36.8%

With the high bias towards youth comes the importance of education outcomes. Unfortunately, based on attendance data and attainment levels it would appear that education outcomes for the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal young people are very much less than satisfactory.

Education Profile

Aboriginal education outcomes in the Wheatbelt Region has and continues to be characterised by low levels of regular attendance, year 12 attainment and post school education that contribute to ongoing numeracy and literacy issues in adulthood. It could be proposed that these poor education outcomes have translated into low rates of labour force participation and employment and high rates of unemployment.

An environmental scan of Wheatbelt schools undertaken through the My School website (2021)² shows that in 2019 there were 466 Aboriginal students attending 32 Wheatbelt Primary Schools, 459 attending 21 Wheatbelt District High Schools and 327 attending the region's four Senior High Schools. The proportion of Aboriginal students of the school population in these schools varied greatly. For instance, there were 10 Primary Schools with Aboriginal students comprising between 24% and 57% of the school population.

¹ This figure is approximated as the ABS noted that there was potentially a 17% margin of error in the count due to issues with delivery of the 2016 census.

² My School website, accessed 2021. School Profiles and attendance 2015 to 2019.
<https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

In terms of attendance of Aboriginal students for 90% or more of the time in first and third term there was a five-year (between 2015 and 2019) downward trend in the region's Primary Schools of 11% in first term and 9% in third term. Correspondingly Aboriginal students' attendance for 90% or more of the time in the region's District High Schools did not exhibit the same level of decline in first term over the five years as had the Primary Schools, but there was a 5% decrease in third term attendance in 2019 compared to third term 2015. However Aboriginal students' attendance at the region's four Senior High Schools for 90% or more of the time in first and third term was by any standards very low in 2015 at 30% and 25% respectively and with the exception of slight rises in some years, was 25% for first term in 2019 and 20% for third term.

These low attendance rates can be seen to impact future post school education and training rates for Aboriginal young people and their participation in the labour force as illustrated by 2016 census data.

Employment profile

An analysis of the Wheatbelt's employment and labour force data showed that over a quarter (28%) of Aboriginal 15 to 24 year olds were not engaged in education or the labour force compared to just 5% of non-Aboriginal 15 to 24 year olds. Alternately, 46% of Aboriginal 15 to 24 year olds were unemployed compared to 10.5% of non-Aboriginal people and just 25% were employed compared to 59% of 15 to 24 year olds non-Aboriginals.

These patterns continued in the 25 to 64 years population where a quarter of the Aboriginal segment of the population was unemployed compared to only 5% of the non-Aboriginal population and just half of the Aboriginal population was participating in the labour force compared to 85% of the non-Aboriginal 25 to 64 years population.

In preparation for the delivery of the NEDS program across the Ballardong and Yued Countries, further analysis of population and socio-economic profiles were undertaken of Aboriginal communities within the Shires that comprised both traditional Countries. This process held challenges particularly in regard to determining the extent of Ballardong Country due to maps as well Elders and community leaders contesting where boundaries were.

2.1. Ballardong and Yued Country

Before breaking down the socio-economic profiles of Aboriginal people living on Ballardong Country in the Wheatbelt, it was necessary to establish a negotiated understanding of which shires fell within Ballardong Country boundaries and where those boundaries were. This was due to differences in boundaries between the Ballardong People Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) map of the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) (2014) with the Tindale Tribal Boundaries TTB map (2019) and opinions of Noongar leaders and Elders (pers com 2016 and 2017).

The Ballardong ILUA map concurs with the TTB map and on ground Noongar knowledge on the Northern most boundary of Ballardong Country which falls just short of the township of Dalwallinu. However, the differences between the two maps and local traditional knowledge lay with the eastern, south eastern, southern and parts of the western boundaries. On the eastern boundary, the Ballardong ILUA map extends to the western edge of the Shire of Westonia which includes the Shires of Nungarin, Merredin, Bruce Rock, Narembeen, Kondinin, Kulin, Lake Grace and Dumbleyung. Conversely, the TTB draws the eastern edge of Ballardong Country on the western side of the Shire of Kellerberrin and places the Shires of Merredin, Bruce Rock, Narembeen, Kondinin, Kulin, Lake Grace and Dumbleyung along with the eastern side of the Shire of Kellerberrin in Nadji-Nadji (Njakinjaki) Noongar Country.

Alternately, the TTB places the Shire of Dumbleyung in Wilman Country along with the Shire of Wagin which the ILUA map includes in Ballardong Country. On the southern boundary, the TTB map draws the Ballardong boundary through the township of Pingelly essentially ceding the northern side of the Shire of Pingelly to Ballardong and the southern side to Wilman. On the other hand, the Ballardong

ILUA map draws the southern boundary on the southern side of the Shire of Beverley and extends the boundary almost in a direct easterly direction to the Shire of Corrigin, which the TTB placed in Nadji-Nadji Country.

In regard to the western boundary, both the Ballardong ILUA map and the TTB aligned with each other, with the boundary cutting through the western sides of the Shires of Northam and Toodyay. However, Ballardong Noongar leaders and Elders in part dispute this with the assertion that the western boundary of Ballardong Country is where the Derbil Yerrigan (Swan River) flows through Guildford and Bassendean areas and incorporates all localities east of that line to Northam and the south western side of the Toodyay side.

Ballardong Elders and leaders also disputed the other boundaries with a strong consensus that the Shires of Brookton, Corrigin and Kondinin also fall within Ballardong Country.

Ultimately, for the purposes of the program it was decided to classify Shires in Ballardong Country using Elder’s knowledge to negotiate boundaries drawn from both map sources. This resulted in Ballardong Country being designated across the 17 Wheatbelt Shires listed in Table 2. There were other shires that some Elders were in conflict about them being Ballardong or other language groups. Given the high number of shires or part shire on the Ballardong ledger and the inconclusiveness associated with the disputed shires, it was decided to keep the scope of NEDS project in Ballardong to the designated 17 shires.

Table 2 Ballardong Shires

Ballardong Country Shires	
Complete Shire	Part of Shire
Beverley	Brookton
York	Wickepin
Northam	Wongan-Ballidu
Goomalling	Kellerberrin
Cunderdin	Corrigin
Quairading	Kondinin
Tammin	Toodyay
Dowerin	Bruce Rock
Wyalkatchem	

Conversely, the task of qualifying the Shires that fell within Yued Country was less difficult with just four shires confirmed by Elders and map sources as completely or mostly in Yued Country and Yued Country incorporating some of the area of a further three shires (Table 3).

Table 3 Yued Shires

Yued Country Shires	
Complete Shire	Part of Shire
Gingin	Dandaragan
Chittering	Dalwallinu
Moora	Toodyay
Victoria Plains	

As the Table 2 and Table 3 show, Toodyay is included in both Ballardong and Yued Country. In fact, according to local Elders and the TTB map, Toodyay is the three-way border between Ballardong in the southern and eastern sides of the shire, Yued in on the northern side and Wadjuk on the western side. However, it was decided for the purposes of the program that Toodyay would be included in Ballardong.

Ballardong and Yued population profile

A review of the Aboriginal population in the 17 Shires that comprise Ballardong Country and the seven in Yued Country showed that there were 1,604 people in Ballardong and 654 in Yued (ABS, 2017a). There were marginal differences in age demographics between the two Countries with Ballardong having 3% more children in the 0 to 14 age group while Yued had 3% more young people in the 15 to 24 years age group (Table 4). The breakdown of the age demographics in both Countries were closely aligned to the overall Aboriginal population in the Wheatbelt Region.

Table 4 Aboriginal population profiles

Country	0-14 years	15-24 years	25-64 years	65 years +	Total population
Ballardong	39%	13%	40%	8%	1,604
Yued	36%	19%	38%	7%	654
Wheatbelt	36%	16%	41%	7%	4,000

Ballardong and Yued Education profile

On the face of it, the 2016 Census data indicated that the gap had somewhat closed between Indigenous and non-indigenous young people attending secondary school in Ballardong and Yued Country (Table 5).

Table 5 Secondary school attendance

Country	Indigenous attending secondary school	Non-Indigenous attending secondary school
Ballardong	64.5%	76.1%
Yued	75.2%	77.4%

However, the latest attendance data drawn from the My School website showed that there remained a considerable gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students attending for 90% or more of the time (Table 6).

Table 6: Comparisons of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous attendance for 90% or more of the time

	Primary School Indigenous attendance 90%+	Primary School Non-Indigenous attendance 90%+	District High School Indigenous attendance 90%+	District High School Non-Indigenous attendance 90%+	Senior High School Indigenous attendance 90%+	Senior High School Non-Indigenous attendance 90%+
Ballardong	35%	68%	48%	71%	16%	54%
Yued	48%	72%	27%	68%	48%	71%

Overall, marginally more than a third of all Indigenous students in Ballardong and Yued were attending school for 90% or more of the time with non-Indigenous attendance levels being double or almost double that of Indigenous levels (Table 7).

Table 7 Comparisons of total Indigenous and Non-Indigenous attendance for 90% or more of the time

Total students	Indigenous attendance 90%+	Non- Indigenous attendance 90%+
Ballardong	36%	67%
Yued	35%	70%

Coupled with the consistently low Indigenous attendance rates were the low year 12 Indigenous attainment rates for 19 years plus in Ballardong and Yued (Table 8) which in context placed the mature Indigenous population in a position of disadvantage in regard to employment, salary levels (Langton, 2013; Birch, 2014) or capacity to start a business (Loomis 2000; Dodson & Smith 2003).

Table 8 Year 12 attainment comparisons

Year 12 attainment - 2016	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Ballardong	20.9%	41.7%
Yued	30.6%	43.2%

These low attendance and year 12 attainment outcomes continued through to low post school attainments with just 2.4% of Ballardong and 0% of Yued people gaining a tertiary qualification (Table 9 **Error! Reference source not found.**). Not only did the 2016 Census data (ABS 2016a) show a vast gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal post school attainment in Ballardong and Yued Country but also a considerable post school attainment gap between Ballardong and Yued people and Aboriginal people in the Greater Perth region (ABS 2016c). In fact, Greater Perth Aboriginal Postgraduate Degree level and Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate Level attainments were almost on par with Ballardong and Yued non-Aboriginal attainments in those degree levels.

Table 9 Comparisons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal post school attainment

Post school attainment	Ballardong Aboriginal	Ballardong non-Aboriginal	Yued Aboriginal	Yued non-Aboriginal	Greater Perth Aboriginal
Postgraduate Degree Level	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.9%
Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate Level	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	1.0%	0.9%
Bachelor Degree Level	2.4%	7.7%	0.0%	7.9%	5.0%
Advanced Diploma and Diploma Level	3.2%	7.6%	2.1%	7.8%	5.1%
Certificate II	1.6%	1.4%	0.9%	1.3%	2.7%

Post school attainment	Ballardong Aboriginal	Ballardong non-Aboriginal	Yued Aboriginal	Yued non-Aboriginal	Greater Perth Aboriginal
Certificate III and over	11.9%	19.4%	14.1%	22.0%	15.9%
Tertiary	2.4%	10.2%	0.0%	9.9%	6.8%
Tech & further ed & training	16.7%	28.4%	17.0%	31.0%	23.7%
Total post school	19.1%	38.6%	17.0%	40.9%	30.5%

The outcome of the high levels of unemployment, low labour force participation and very limited post school education attainments were manifested in the measure of the high proportion of Aboriginal people and households on or below poverty line income. In an analysis of this metric, RDA Wheatbelt used as a guide personal and household poverty line weekly income as described in an ACOSS and University of New South Wales (UNSW) report (Davidson, et al, 2020).

Ballardong and Yued employment and economic profile

The economic profile of Aboriginal people in Ballardong and Yued was one of disadvantage emanating from high rates of unemployment and low levels of labour force participation.

The Aboriginal employment profile in Ballardong and Yued Country as demonstrated by Census data (ABS, 2016a) could best be described as dire, with unemployment rates for 15 to 24 year olds recorded at 56% and 40% in Ballardong and Yued respectively (Table 10). In comparison, the unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds non-Aboriginals was 10% on both Countries. As much as unemployment rates for the Aboriginal 25 to 64 year age group were considerably less than the 15 to 24 year olds, they were still significantly higher than the unemployment rates of the non-Aboriginal 25 to 64 years population.

Table 10 Comparisons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment rates in Ballardong and Yued

Unemployment rates	% of Aboriginal 15-24 years	% of non-Aboriginal 15-24 years	% of Aboriginal 25-64 years	% of non-Aboriginal 25-64 years
Ballardong	56%	10%	24%	6%
Yued	40%	10%	11%	5%

Respectively, Aboriginal labour force participation rates were markedly lower than non-Aboriginal rates with an 18% to 21% difference in the 15-24 years populations and 14% to 20% difference in the 25-64 years populations (Table 14).

Table 11 Comparisons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal labour force participation rates in Ballardong and Yued

Labour force participation rates	% of Aboriginal 15-24 years	% of non-Aboriginal 15-24 years	% of Aboriginal 25-64 years	% of non-Aboriginal 25-64 years
Ballardong	37%	55%	49%	69%
Yued	37%	58%	58%	72%

In addition, there were substantial differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who described themselves as self-employed in the 2016 census. Just 0.6% of Aboriginal people 15 years and over in Ballardong Country indicated that they were self-employed compared to 5.1% of non-Aboriginal people while no Aboriginal people in Yued Country described themselves as self-employed (Table 12). The 0.6% of self-employed Aboriginal people in Ballardong Country equates to only six individuals.

Table 12 Comparisons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal self-employment rates

	Aboriginal self employed	Non-Aboriginal self employed
Ballardong	0.6%	5.1%
Yued	0.0%	5.8%
Total	0.4%	5.3%

2.2. Added socio-cultural disadvantage contributing to economic disadvantage

The economic disadvantage was further compounded by the higher numbers of persons living in Aboriginal households, which it could be assumed, constituted a greater proportion of young people who had no or limited access to income streams. It could be anticipated that this was an additional draw on weekly household income that placed a large portion of Aboriginal households on or below the poverty line income levels as described in the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and University of New South Wales (UNSW) report (Davidson, et al, 2020) (Table 13)

Table 13 Poverty Lines by family type 2017

Family Type	50% of median income, before housing costs (BHC) \$ per week after tax	50% of median income, after housing costs (AHC) \$ per week after tax
Lone person	\$457	\$370
Couple only	\$686	\$555
Sole parent, 2 children	\$731	\$592
Couple, 2 children	\$960	\$776

As these figures and family descriptions did not directly align with the ABS Census descriptions and dollar levels, the analysis set the weekly personal poverty line income at \$399 as a midway point between before and after housing costs. The poverty line benchmark for households was set at \$999. This was done to align with the ABS household weekly income table as well as allowing that around a quarter of Aboriginal households in Ballardong and Yued had five or more persons living in them (ABS, 2016) and that due to the youthfulness of the population, these were children, and many households would have a higher proportion of children than was set in the ACOSS and UNSW table.

Applying these adjusted poverty line income measurements, the analysis showed that half of the Aboriginal people in Ballardong and Yued had a personal weekly income of \$399 or less. In turn 41% of households in Ballardong and 31% in Yued had a weekly personal income of \$999.

The ABS 2016 Census data collectively showed that a high proportion of Aboriginal people spread across the two Traditional Countries of Ballardong and Yued were in a position of considerable

economic disadvantage and through disengagement from the labour force and or education appeared to not have the necessary capacities to redress their position.

The question was, given the resources that had been invested in closing the economic and employment gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, what other factors were limiting economic participation among many Ballardong and Yued people.

2.3. Challenges facing Aboriginal people engaging in the economy

A review of the literature shows that there were a number of issues that constrain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in the mainstream economy. These range from discrimination and racial vilification in the workplace (Biddle et al, 2013) and or in business (through to poor health (Biddle and Webster, 2007) and education outcomes (Birch, 2014).

A Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey found that 12% of Indigenous job applicants believed that they had been unsuccessful in their job application and 8% who had worked for an employer in the previous two years felt the employer had discriminated against them (Biddle et al, 2013). Biddle et al (2013) in their study proposed that the main impact of discrimination on Indigenous people impedes their readiness to apply for jobs or participate in the labour market.

Equally in Collins, et al. (2017) Aboriginal businesses owners cited instances of discrimination ranging from non-Aboriginal customers not patronising the business to their suppliers doubting they would pay their bills or clients expecting sub-standard services or products.

While health outcomes have an obvious effect on an Aboriginal person's ability to participate in the workforce or business, education outcomes have a direct impact on their earning capabilities (Langton, 2013). As Birch (2014), reported, Indigenous males working full time with year eight or lower education were earning 60% less than Indigenous males with degrees or higher levels of post school attainments while the rate for females with a year eight education or lower was 90% less than their counterparts with higher post school attainments.

Added to these challenges, particularly in the case of Aboriginal business start-ups is the difficulty they face in accessing finance. Limited savings, lack of intergenerational wealth and low home ownership rates constrains Aboriginal entrepreneurs' access to commercial finance to either start or grow their business (Supply Nation and First Australian Capital, 2018).

Other challenges cited by the Supply Nation and First Australian Capital Report (2018) included:

- Lack of business skills
- Lack of strong support business and mentoring networks
- Challenges for Aboriginal businesses in rural and remote communities in terms of access to the broader market.

Further to these challenges are those of family, kin and cultural responsibilities. In one study it was found that there was contested space between personal capital accrual from the business and cultural expectations that the wealth be shared with extended family (Collins et al, 2017). At the same time, these familial and cultural responsibilities are also what influence and characterises motivations for Aboriginal people to go into business and Indigenous businesses (Rola-Rubzen et al, 2011; Collins et al, 2017). Additionally, these socio-cultural attributes do at times contribute to a contested space on the interface between Aboriginal business capacities and what the mainstream business ecosystem expects in terms of competencies and processes to develop business capabilities.

2.4. Indigenous business cultural constructs

A review of several studies (Rola-Rubzen, 2011; Collins et al, 2017; PwC, 2019) showed that motivations for most Aboriginal business entrepreneurs entering into a business were structured around family, community and culture. These were markedly different from the motivations of non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs as the table derived from the PwC study (2019) illustrates (Table 14).

Table 14 Comparisons of non-Indigenous and Indigenous motivations by ranking to start a business

Reason	Non-Indigenous entrepreneurs	Indigenous entrepreneurs
To improve my income	1	4
To become my own boss	2	
To improve my lifestyle	3	3
To become wealthy	4	
To create employment for myself or my family members	5	2
To contribute to my community by increasing employment opportunities		2
To contribute to my community by providing a needed service		1

Source- PwC 2019. *Realising the potential of the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP)*, p. 3.

As demonstrated in Table 14, non-Indigenous motivations primarily focus on actualisation of self through increasing financial and personal positions and status with the lowest ranking acknowledging opportunities for family. Conversely, the two highest ranked Indigenous motivations are focused on community and family members. Of interest is that financial gain and becoming wealthy are ranked lowest or not at all.

This dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous motivations extends to business structures and business operations. In the case of the 12 Aboriginal businesses Rola-Rubzen et al (2017) interviewed for the Ninti One case study, all cited family and community themes as motivation to either start or grow the business and none mentioned increasing income or personal wealth. In addition, several of the businesses also included preservation and nurturement of their cultural heritage. For example, Ms. Pat Mamanyjun Torres, founder of Mayi Harvests, an Aboriginal Australian native produce business based in the West Kimberley region believed that bush foods were a key element in the culture and *“...so pursuing the business means ensuring culture continuity. It helps maintain spiritual health, health of the land, language and culture, and people.”*

Another example derived from the Ninti One study (Rola-Rubzen et al (2017) that demonstrated the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous motivations and approaches to business was that of the Scotdesco Espresso Café, an Aboriginal roadside tourist café enterprise located on remote, traditional homelands in desert Australia. The motivation to start café was driven by the community’s need for healthy food for the physical wellbeing especially for the elderly.

The business structure is centred on the Scotdesco community structure with the business being owned and managed by 75 Aboriginal people, with a chairperson and a community manager. At its essence, Aboriginal culture is a continuous theme throughout all elements of the business.

This cultural theme extends to providing family and community members with employment which has a direct effect on overall Aboriginal employment. As Hunter (2014) estimated:

“Indigenous businesses are still about 100 times more likely to employ an Indigenous Australian than non-Indigenous businesses. Indigenous enterprises in Australia thus provide an opportunity for

generating Indigenous employment – central to any ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy – and a way out of welfare dependency within the framework of self-determination that entrepreneurship offers.” (p. 16).

However, while Aboriginal businesses diverge from non-Aboriginal businesses in motivations and business structures, they do share the need for business skills and capacities to grow, maintain and economically sustain their businesses. The research indicates that it is this area of business skills and capacities that constrains many Aboriginal business entrepreneurs of embarking on the business journey or constrains expansion and or threatens the economic sustainability of the enterprise.

2.5. Financial and business capacity issues and constraints

Several studies have shown that there are limited financial and business competencies in addition to literacy and numeracy issues many Indigenous communities (Loomis 2000; Dodson & Smith 2003, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2007). These limitations may act as a barrier for Indigenous people in developing formal business and financial plans for commercial lenders which adversely affects their ability to raise start-up capital (Lindsay 2004).

However, the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous entrepreneurial motivations and business structures have been found in research (Whitford and Ruhanen, 2009) to extend to business related attitudes (Table 15). These attitudes in turn may have a direct influence on developing Indigenous people’s business and financial skills as Table 15, derived from Whitford and Ruhanen (2009) work illustrates.

Table 15 Differences in business-related attitudes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians

Attitudes towards	Aboriginal Australians	Non-Aboriginal Australians
Possessions	Utilise/share	Accumulate/acquire
Land	Relationship with	Ownership of
Interaction	Cooperative	Competitive
Rights	Kin obligations	Individual rights
Basic operating unit	Society (community)	Individual

Source: Schaper (1999)

Lee-Ross and Mitchell’s (2007) study articulated these differences in comparisons between Indigenous (Torres Strait Islander) and non-Indigenous entrepreneurs. While it was found that non-Indigenous entrepreneurs supported or possibly accepted power disparities and expressed aspirations to dominate their social structure, Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs had very little tolerance of inequitable power distribution. In line with other studies, Lee-Ross and Mitchell (2007) found that Torres Strait Islander businesses were commonly built around the cultural collective of family ties and profits being divested within the community.

Additionally, non-Indigenous entrepreneurs exhibited a high level of locus of control believing that strategies for success and success were the domain of the individual whereas Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs believed change and success was through consensus of the community collective.

From Lee-Ross and Mitchell’s (2007) study, this would suggest the potential for a contested space on the business and culture interface in that many Indigenous businesses place little or no importance on acquiring fundamental business and financial skills in lieu of cultural propriety. In Lee-Ross and Mitchell’s (2007) study of Queensland Indigenous tourism businesses, several operators admitted to not having a business plan or could not see the point of having one. Overall, the majority of respondents in the study, while identifying access to funding as an issue were also aware that this issue was more likely exacerbated by limited education, a lack of financial experience along with a lack of education and training in the tourism industry.

2.6. Business and financial education and training

A lack of business and financial education and training appears to be a core theme threaded through the research (Daly, 1994; Lee-Ross and Mitchel 2007; Miller, 1985; Morrison et al, 2014). In Whitford and Ruhanen's (2009) study of Indigenous tourism businesses in Queensland, many participants acknowledged that they had limited education and training to enable them to access business capital and finance.

In as much as there is a lack of business and finance skills development among many Indigenous businesses, there were very few Indigenous specific business skills development programs available with just Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) "Into Business Workshop" being cited in Morrison et al's report in 2014. More recently State and non for profit providers have entered the Aboriginal business development space with a greater accent on culture. However, these providers may still leave gaps in the market due in part to their limited capacity to reach into the rural, regional and remote regions and their capabilities to flex and adjust to the socio-cultural heterogeneity across and within Aboriginal communities.

Similarly, it has been found that Indigenous business training programs, with particular reference to tourism in Queensland, focused on Indigenous participation in tourism rather than focusing on the business constructs necessary for participation (Buultjens et al. 2002). This lack of focus on business skill development had the potential to coalesce with Indigenous tourism entrepreneur's assumption that the type and distinctiveness of their product or service would ensure success and offset any or all shortcomings in business and management skills (Whitford and Ruhanen, 2009).

An additional challenge in the Indigenous business development training domain is acknowledging and integrating Indigenous socio-cultural holistic values into the financial and management aspects of the business training. While non-Indigenous businesses measure success by financial gain and wealth increase, Indigenous values measure success across interconnected economic and non-economic aspects (Foley 2000). Therefore, it has been seen as essential to incorporate Indigenous socio-cultural dimensions within the business development process and business itself as they align with the edict to mitigate any harm arising from business activities and generate economic, social and environmental value (Whitford and Ruhanen, 2009).

The case for more Aboriginal involvement in the extension of business and financial management skills to Aboriginal entrepreneurs is further supported by what Supply Nation (2018) identifies as being true for Aboriginal businesses in that they:

- Are a 'safe place' for families
- Create economic independence
- Enable their owners to build resilience and pride in their workplaces and communities
- In working directly in Aboriginal cultural industries Aboriginal businesses return more social value than businesses working in mainstream industries, and smaller Aboriginal businesses return more social value than larger businesses
- Employ more than 30 times more Aboriginal people than other businesses
- Strengthen their Aboriginal employees' connection to culture and allow them to thrive
- Reinvest revenue in their communities
- Use their businesses to create a place of belonging and healing.

The process of incorporating the socio-cultural and environmental values into Indigenous business training and education posits the contention that the training and education should be undertaken by qualified Aboriginal people who know and understand the culture. This view is shared by Tony

Wiltshire, general manager of the Pilbara Aboriginal Contractors Association (PACA) who was quoted on the Creative Spirits web site (2021) as saying:

"Aboriginal businesses are the best recruiter and trainers of Aboriginal people because they understand the cultural requirements and obligations and conditions and circumstances of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara far better than any of these [non-Indigenous] resources companies operating in the Pilbara."

2.7. Discussion

There were a number of key interdependent themes derived from the literature review that illustrated the constraints on Aboriginal business start-ups as well as options to overcome the constraints.

A critical component that emerged was poor school education outcomes that left many Aboriginal business entrepreneurs with limited or deficient numeracy and literacy capabilities. It could be proposed that not only did this have a negative effect on their capacity to apply for loans and start-up capital but was also an impediment in operating the business and undertaking financial and management training.

Given that much of the literature called for increased business financial and management training, it would seem that without addressing the fundamental literacy and numeracy issues that such training would be a challenge to deliver. Whilst there is the option to increase young Aboriginal people's academic attainment in school and post school domains through specifically targeted strategies, there remains the matter of the older generations with limited education capital who to a large extent continue to be excluded from participating in the broader economy.

Another primary theme was the contested space in business between Aboriginal culture (Collins et al, 2017) and mainstream conventional business entrepreneurship expectations of generating financial profit and wealth accumulation (Cassidy, 2009; Quiggan, 2010). The family, community and cultural responsibilities and obligations that characterise Aboriginal business approaches could be seen as both an advantage and constraint (Collins et al, 2017). Collins et al (2017) found that businesses in industry sectors such as tourism and art were enhanced by Indigenous culture. However, the cultural obligation of sharing wealth with extended family conflicted with the conventional business aims of building wealth and reinvesting into the business.

However, on the other hand, cultural responsibilities influenced the propensity of Aboriginal businesses to employ Aboriginal people at a rate, according to Hunter (2014), of 100 times more than non-Aboriginal businesses. This facet of cultural responsibilities illustrates the importance of supporting the development of Aboriginal businesses as it offers a way to increasing Aboriginal employment rates but also offers opportunities and a future for young Aboriginal people coming through the education system.

3. NEDS project structure and delivery

From the outset, Aboriginal agencies such as the Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI), Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet as well as Aboriginal Elders and community leaders were involved in the development of the project.

RDA Wheatbelt met with two Aboriginal community leaders from the Wheatbelt to explore options to improve Aboriginal economic participation in the region. Key elements that comprised the final design of the project and are part of the delivery process were put forward by the community leaders at this meeting. These were:

- The project should focus on building business and employment competencies
- The project should be delivered by Aboriginal people with Clan and heritage connections to the target population and area
- There should be a limited non-Aboriginal (RDA Wheatbelt) profile in the delivery of the project
- RDA Wheatbelt's role in the program would be that of providing project oversight, governance, administrative and capacity building support to the project officer(s)
- Evaluation would be ongoing, and the RDA Wheatbelt Research Evaluation Project Support (REPS) officer would have an integral role in evaluation.

The community leaders also made the point that RDA Wheatbelt should continue discussions with Elders and leaders from other Wheatbelt communities during the design phase of the project.

3.1. Desk top review

A desk top review of Indigenous business and employment literature and collation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ABS Community Profiles data across the 42 Local Government's that comprised the Wheatbelt Region.

A review was also undertaken of business and employment development resources available to Aboriginal people in the state and Wheatbelt Region.

The desk top review of data and business and skills development resources suggested a disconnection between availability of resources and Wheatbelt's Aboriginal population ability to access the resources. There were a reasonable number of resources available, but most were either only available in Perth or online. Data also showed that there were high rates of unemployment within the region's Aboriginal population, coupled with low rates of labour force participation.

Additionally, around 40% of the population were on or below personal weekly income poverty levels and about one in three Aboriginal households were on or below household weekly income poverty levels^{3 4}. Added to these figures was that just 6 Aboriginal people described themselves as being self-employed. The data also showed low levels of year 12 attainment and post school qualifications among the adult population.

³ Poverty level personal weekly income in 2016 was defined as \$426.30 and \$895.22 for a household of two adults and two children by ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services) (2016). Poverty in Australia 2016; The fifth edition of 'Poverty in Australia', part of the 'Poverty and Inequality in Australia' series from the Australian Council of Social Service and the Social Policy Research Centre.

⁴ ACOSS placed the 2014 headline poverty rate at 13.3% which was substantially lower than the rate in the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal population.

3.2. Needs and gap assessment

The disconnect between the available resources and lack of on ground outcomes was further examined in consultation with a number of Elders and community leaders. From these consultations, RDA Wheatbelt learned that:

- Many potential Aboriginal Wheatbelt clients were either unwilling to leave their Country and travel to Perth to take advantage of the resources or could not travel due to not having access to a vehicle or not being able to afford the cost of travel and
- The majority of the population had little or no access to computers and the internet. ABS data showed that only 45% of Aboriginal households in Wheatbelt had internet connection while consultations revealed low levels of computer literacy within the population.

A further issue that was identified was the language and processes used in business extension with Aboriginal people. RDA Wheatbelt attended a regional business information workshop for Aboriginal people delivered by some of the resource providers based in Perth. After the workshop RDA Wheatbelt spoke with some of the Aboriginal attendees who reported:

- Not being able to understand the language and business jargon used by presenters
- Feeling inferior or stupid because they could not understand the language or jargon
- Feeling overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of the information provided
- Not understanding the context examples were presented in or feeling that the context and examples used were not relevant to them
- Because of some or all of the above, they were going to give up or not try and start their own businesses.

In the pre-design phase, it was also acknowledged by the RDA Wheatbelt project developers that in not being Aboriginal, they needed a strong Aboriginal perspective to continue to guide the design of the project. To that end, extensive consultations were entered into and continued with organisations such as the NCCI, Reconciliation WA, and Committee members of the Seabrook Aboriginal Corporation along with Elders and community leaders in the WA Wheatbelt Region. There were five key messages that came back from the consultation process which were:

- It was seen as a good project, but it needed to be delivered by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal people did not want to be told what they needed to do by white experts but did want to pursue their own business ideas and aspirations and be supported in the process
- It was not to be an exercise in assimilation
- Literacy and numeracy issues could be barriers to Aboriginal people starting their own businesses therefore there would be a need to provide a higher level of support that would reduce the constraints caused by these issues
- Aboriginal people did not want to participate in another education and training program that did not deliver real opportunities to earn good incomes and get ahead in life.

Follow-up consultations added more depth to the design process and more direction in the development of the project. Additional factors identified in the consultation process that needed to be built into the project design were:

- Do not think that any Aboriginal Project officer would do. On this point, the Elders and community leaders were clear. The Project Officers had to be local people with connections to Country, community and culture.
- The WA Wheatbelt Region was mainly the traditional Country of the Ballardong and Yued Noongar people. Ballardong Country encompassed approximately 17 shires out of the region's 42 shires while Yued Country covered 7 shires.
- The project should be delivered in Ballardong and Yued Country by people with the respective heritages, living in the respective regions or with strong connections to the respective regions.

The project should be delivered to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander living in Ballardong and Yued Country and not restricted to only Ballardong and Yued people. It was pointed out that many people in these areas, were from other First Nations or other Noongar language groups. They or their forebears had originally been removed from their traditional communities and Country but had become long term residents in the Ballardong and Yued regions.

In the very early stages of project development, discussions with the Aboriginal stakeholder's also raised some potential challenges for the implementation of the project that included:

- The majority of Aboriginal people in the Wheatbelt Region were not ready for such a project or in the position to take advantage of the opportunities the project offered. The reason for this was the position of social and economic disadvantage the people were coming from precluded them from thinking about anything else but getting through each day
- While it was recognised that every effort was being made to ensure that the project was delivered in culturally sensitive and appropriate manner, there were doubts that there were any people in the Ballardong or Yued region's that had the abilities to fulfil the roles of Project officers.

Finding suitable Ballardong and Yued candidates was a concern for the RDA Wheatbelt project developers. Preliminary enquiries indicated that there would be a limited pool of candidates with the necessary attributes as most of those with the required capabilities were being employed in mining or other industries that were offering higher salaries than that of Project Officers.

3.3. Project design

The information drawn from the secondary research and extensive consultations identified the following as being critical in developing a project that would deliver meaningful and measurable outcomes for the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal people.

- Delivered by project officers with connections to Country, Clan and heritage who, if feasible also lived in the respective regions
- Provision be made to develop or increase project officer's business capacities, competencies and knowledge
- Establish a cohesive network to support project officers with resources and professional development
- Ensure a low profile of RDA Wheatbelt in the delivery process and build in an exit and end of funding strategy to facilitate the continued and sustainability delivery of business capacity building in the region

- Ensure that the project was Aboriginal led. This was facilitated by having the Project Officers of Ballardong and Yued establish their own programs under their own branding with accompanying websites and emails
- Evaluation would be built into the project and all aspects of the project would be evaluated from commencement until the exit of RDA Wheatbelt. Evaluation approaches would be designed to assess project delivery, capture outputs and anticipated and unanticipated outcomes. Project Officers would be actively engaged in the evaluation process and directed to collect quantitative and qualitative data with specific reference to changes in attitudes and confidence of clients and communities.

3.4. Project delivery

The NEDS project completed three years of the Australian Government Department of Social Services funding in June 2021 and was funded for another 12 months up to June 30 2022. All learnings from the consultations with the various Aboriginal stakeholder organisations have been incorporated in the project and the evaluation processes. This incorporation of learnings has resulted in a project that on the ground, is delivered by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people in culturally sensitive and accommodating formats within local constructs and contexts that have relevance for the target populations.

Project Officers with connections to and residing in Ballardong and Yued Country were appointed. These were Mr. Robert Miles in Ballardong and Ms. Stephanie Mippy in Yued. To ensure the legitimacy of the project being Aboriginal led, each Project Officer developed and branded their own project with its own website as a program unique to their Country. Mr. Miles branded his project, Moorditj Yaakiny (Standing Strong) while Ms. Mippy branded her project, Ngala Wele Karla (Our Dream on Fire).

The Project Officers undertook extensive professional development and capacity building with direct access to a consultant who has also mentored the Project Officers through the processes. Project Officers delivered introductory workshops, engaging with interested individuals and/or families and supporting those who wish to progress their ideas for business through financing enquiries with Indigenous Business Australia.

The Project Officers are able to access an additional network of support and resources that include:

- Prime Minister & Cabinet
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Supply Nation
- Many Rivers
- Indigenous Professional Services (IPS)
- Wheatbelt Development Commission (WDC)
- WA Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development (DPIRD).

One important component of the project for RDA Wheatbelt was that it would be invisible on the delivery front and working only with the Project Officers. This was achieved to the extent that in the early period of the project, RDA Wheatbelt was receiving phone calls and emails from various stakeholders encouraging RDA Wheatbelt to connect with Moorditj Yaakiny and Ngala Wele Karla Project Officers and programs.

3.5. Planned project outcomes

The outcomes intended to be achieved over the 3-year program were:

- improved wellbeing of young people through the addition of 'hope'
- improved retention in year 11 and 12 school programs with the provision of employment pathways and work experience
- opportunities for the provision of voluntary work to the unemployed Ballardong and Yued community members through engagement using work for the dole as a mechanism for initial engagement in social enterprises prior to commercialisation
- a minimum of 30 Ballardong and 30 Yued Noongar people in employment with an additional 30 work experience places in each social enterprise by end year 3 (from a zero start)
- a minimum of 2 social enterprises at the end of year 2 (from a zero start) in both Ballardong and Yued regions
- improvement in community self-worth through improvements in expectations for the future.

4. NEDS Evaluation methodology

Impact evaluation

The approach used in the evaluation of the NEDS program was an 'Impact' evaluation for quantification and qualification for:

- accountability of investment in the program
- advocacy - to support a continued NEDS based approach to Aboriginal business development that is based on grounded evidence and
- analysis to inform improvements- provides information areas in which funding has been more or less than effective in the delivery of outputs, outcomes and impacts.

(Rogers et al, 2015)

Outputs

Outputs will describe the metrics of the project:

- Number of individuals engaged and number of engagements per individual
- Number of communities engaged, number involved in the engagement and number of engagements
- Number of businesses by individual and community in:
 - Predevelopment
 - Development
 - Start up
- Development of collaborative networks with NEDS and or support new businesses.

Outcomes

Outcomes will focus on the socio-economic effects of engagements and business developments on participants, Aboriginal communities and the broader mainstream community. The outcomes will be based on interviews, media reports and comments drawn from the various sources involved in the program including Project Officers responses drawn from their evaluations of the processes. The outcome section will include case studies of business and community enterprises that have progressed through the program drawn from the interviews and presented in the interview form.

The interview process will be semi structured with a core base of primary questions with a background of secondary questions that may be needed as prompts during the process (see [Appendix 1](#)). The semi structured interview approach is being used as it allows for rapport to be developed with the participant, lead to more interaction between interviewer and participant that lends to a more conversational exchange rather than the rigidity of a more structured formal process (Jennings, 2005).

Learnings

New information and knowledge regarding Indigenous approaches to business has been derived from the NEDS project. This is empirical information and knowledge that has not been examined in previous case studies or research. This knowledge has been derived from observations and conversations between the RDA Wheatbelt Director Regional Development, Research Evaluation Project Support Officer and the NEDS Project Officer Mr. Miles and is contingent to further development of Indigenous business development models for rural, regional and remote areas where there are low levels of literacy and numeracy capacity combined with the ongoing intergenerational trauma derived from the forcible removal of children.

External independent evaluation

Filmed interviews with participants, the Project Officer, external business consultant and RDA Wheatbelt staff were conducted and are available to accompany this written report.

5. Evaluation Outputs - Ballardong

5.1. Client services - groups

Over the last three years, the NEDS Ballardong Moorditj Yaakiny Project Officer's engagements with all prospective clients in Ballardong Country has comprised the following (see [Appendix 2](#) for detailed tables).

- Number of registered clients supported - 27
- Number of unregistered clients supported - 20
- Number of client activities by service type - 216

Source - DSS Data Exchange

There were 17 industry and business sectors that clients were interested in or had begun to develop a business in, that comprised:

- Tourism - 4 businesses
- Consultancy - 4 businesses
- Art and design - 3 businesses
- Floral/Flora design and retail - 1 business
- Garden maintenance - 2 businesses
- Transport - 2 businesses
- Health and wellbeing - 1 business
- Electrical - 1 business
- Sandalwood -1 business
- Landcare - 1 business
- Ranger- 1 business
- Retail - 1 business
- Seed collection - 1 business
- Cleaning - 1 business
- Management - 1 business
- Education - 1 business
- Water - 1 business

Around three quarters of the services that the Ballardong Project Officer delivered to clients were related to general information and referrals to other agencies (29%), mentoring support (24%) and Community capacity building (23%) with education and training accounting for 16% of services delivered (Table 16).

Table 16 Percentage of service type delivered to clients

% Of service type delivered	Information advice referral	Mentoring support	Community capacity building	Education & skills training	Community engagement
Tourism - 4 businesses (Services 40)	8%	31%	33%	17%	11%
Consultancy - 4 businesses (Services 43)	33%	26%	28%	8%	5%
Art and design - 3 businesses (Services 39)	36%	3%	42%	14%	6%

% Of service type delivered	Information advice referral	Mentoring support	Community capacity building	Education & skills training	Community engagement
Garden maintenance - 2 businesses (Services 0.8)	17%	33%	0%	50%	0%
Transport - 2 businesses (Services 7)	33%	33%	0%	33%	0%
Floral/Flora design and retail - 1 business (Services 15)	14%	43%	7%	7%	29%
Health and wellbeing - 1 business (Services 12)	0%	36%	0%	64%	0%
Electrical - 1 business (Services 8)	86%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Sandalwood -1 business (Service 15)	21%	64%	0%	0%	14%
Landcare - 1 business (Services 6)	20%	0%	20%	20%	40%
Ranger - 1 business (Services 0.6)	20%	0%	60%	20%	0%
Retail - 1 business (Services 0.2)	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Seed collection - 1 business (Services 4)	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Cleaning - 1 business (Services 1)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Management - 1 business (Services 2)	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Education - 1 business (Services 4)	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Water - 1 business (Services 4)	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total % of service types delivered (n.191)	29%	24%	23%	16%	8%

The weighting of these results indicates the importance of having a locally based consultant that is able to meet face to face with clients who are unable to access information from the internet or are unable to travel to Perth or major regional centres to speak with consultants. In addition, the Project Officer being locally based had a good understanding of the cultural and local context and could support clients within those contexts. This support included a final output of the Ballardong program in the form of an Aboriginal Business Development manual and workbook. Mr. Miles produced the manual through translating mainstream business development language and jargon into language that is easier for Aboriginal clients to understand. Additionally, he incorporated a more cultural approach in including the social dynamic in the process and shifting the focus away from the mainstream wealth creation dynamic.

5.2. Client services - groups

The Ballardong Project Officer engaged with 14 groups aspiring to develop community enterprises (see [Appendix 3](#) for detailed tables). Of the 14 groups, which constituted 108 engagements, nine could be classified as emerging enterprises and had clear ideas on what business activities they wanted to undertake (Table 18). Of note was that cultural tourism or allied tourism ventures featured prominently with seven out of nine groups nominating tourism ventures as an aspirational business activity. In regard to the number of sessions delivered per service, information, advice and referral accounted for a large proportion of sessions delivered despite only accounting for 3% of group client services (Table 17) Conversely, while community engagement accounted for 67% of group client services, it only accounted for 5% of total sessions provided.

Table 17 Percentage of sessions per service

	Information- advice referral	Mentoring support	Community capacity building	Education & skills training	Community engagement
% of client services	3%	2%	18%	10%	67%
% Of sessions per service	45%	14%	17%	19%	5%

In terms of constraints, access to start-up capital was a common theme across all nine groups which aligns with findings in the literature. Similarly lack of business planning also features prominently with seven out of the nine groups citing it as a constraint.

Table 18 Client services - groups

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	Constraints
Wyalkatchem Djidi-Djidi AC*	Set up a social enterprise.	Cultural tourism ventures Cultural land management services Consultancy services Contracting services	Land tenure Funding Business Planning Start-up Capital
Northam Reserve AC*	Have a more structured business platform.	Artefact making Cultural activities Lawn mowing and yard service Fire-wood supply Land management	Funding Start-up Capital Licences / approvals Lack of business knowledge
Ngagagin Marmun Mia AC (Northam) (Noongar Mens Shed)	Add other revenue streams. Secure a building as a more permanent base.	Commercial Worm -Farm Venture Headstones- placement	Start-up Capital Licences / approvals Business case Land tenure?
Noongar Kaartidjin AC* (Toodyay)	Become a viable resource, business and tourism base for the region.	Tourism and arts venture Business support Heritage and language	Start-up capital Business case RAP
Bilya Koort Boodja Cultural Centre (Northam)	Strengthen business ties with local Aboriginal suppliers. Offer business support and training through the MYP	Cultural tours Artefact making Visual arts Language Story telling Cultural Awareness Dance and performance Festivals	Suppliers not being business ready Seasonal factors Purchasing restraints Role confusion

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	Constraints
Six Seasons Golf Club Inc (El Caballo)	Establish sporting club to increase participation of Aboriginal people in golf.	Club management Academy of Golf	Capital funding Sponsorship Equipment Course management Business case
Seabrook AC* (Brookton)	Operate a Cultural Centre in Brookton as part of a tourism venture for the region.	Cultural Centre, including visual arts, artefact making, cultural tours, language, storytelling, performance and other commercial / cultural opportunities	Top up funding Shire approval Business case Project management Community support
Kellerberrin Aboriginal Community	Look at economic and employment opportunities for people in Kellerberrin	Cultural tours Yard and lawn services Home support services Visual arts	Capital funding Community division Lack of business knowledge High unemployment Status quo
York Aboriginal Community	Establish a new incorporated body for its membership base in York.	Enterprise centre for arts, crafts, cultural education, tourism etc	Funding Planning Incorporation Tenure (office / meeting place.

*AC- Aboriginal Corporation

The other five groups that the Ballardong Project Officer engaged with could be classified as aspirant or pre-aspirant groups with two having a developing idea of what they want to do while the other three are still in the formative stage (Table 19).

Table 19 Aspirant groups

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	Constraints
Goomalling Aboriginal Community	Develop a strategic plan to enable the community to move forward.	Further discussion and planning are required	Community differences
Northam Aboriginal Community (Northam Arts Pop-up Studio)	Has the potential to form its own arts group as part of a flow-on effect of the Northam Pop-up initiative.	Further discussion and planning are required	TBC
Northam Toodyay York Noongar Arts Alliance	Formation of this group has yet to be fully realised.	Further discussion and planning are required	TBC

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	Constraints
Wheatbelt Aboriginal Leadership & Business Group	Formation of this group has yet to be fully realised.	Further discussion and planning are required	TBC
Wheatbelt Noongar Tourism Advisory Group.	Formation of this group has yet to be fully realised.	Further discussion and planning are required	TBC

The services to the nine groups should be seen as a positive output as it was the NEDS Ballardong Project Officer that engaged with these groups and has been working through their aspirations with them. Although outcomes from the five other pre aspirant groups engagements may be seen as highly limited, the fact that they did occur could also be seen as a positive action which could be attributed to the NEDS program and the locally based NEDS Ballardong Project Officer. This view is based on the lack of or very limited support that existed for the groups prior to the NEDS program. It could be strongly proposed that the NEDS program led with a locally based Aboriginal Project Officer has given groups such as these, a level of reassurance and encouragement to explore opportunities within a culturally safe and accommodating environment.

5.3. Client services - elevated assistance program

In 2020 the NEDS Ballardong Project Officer requested the services of Strategy Matrix (Ms. Ann Maree O’Callaghan) to facilitate and assist selected clients with more complex business needs with elevated business support.

Each client was assigned 10 hours initially for Ms. O’Callaghan to undertake strategic work with them. Within the 10-hour timeframe, Ms. O’Callaghan would engage each client directly and develop a strategic document, and or options paper or business case with recommendations, key steps, and critical success factors.

A critical component of each engagement was the participation and input of each client. In some cases, additional work was needed to undertake further planning and analysis. In all cases the NEDS Ballardong Project Officer would review the documents produced by Ms. O’Callaghan with the client to determine the next steps of the project.

Clients that participated in the Elevated Assistance Program in Ballardong Country comprised the enterprises listed in Table 20. The summary of each of these enterprises shows the diversity of aspirations that have come to the fore during the NEDS program.

Table 20 Ballardong elevated clients

Business / Enterprise Name	Enterprise Summary
Northam Nursery Ranger Business Centre	Male client wants to establish a complete land management and rehabilitation services – from seed collection, propagation and planting to on-going land care and Ranger services.
York Digital Art Innovation Hub	Female client has a clear vision to establish a new way for Noongar people to prosper in a place where culture, art and business sit side by side. Where young people can come and make and create what they want, learn about business, change their thinking and build their confidence.

Business / Enterprise Name	Enterprise Summary
Aboriginal Education Program	Female client has a strong desire to see well-being and opportunity for Aboriginal people improve via the early intervention and delivery of tailored education models specific for young Aboriginal children, the schools they attend, their families and the communities in which they live.
Business Consolidation Project	Male client is keen to consolidate his business interests into a corporate business structure as part of a strategic approach to incorporate the Moorditj Yaakiny project and his brokering and management services.

5.4. Summary

The outputs of the NEDS program in Ballardong Country indicate a number of key factors in the engagement of Aboriginal people in business. The first is grounded in the number of clients (27 registered and 20 unregistered) and services delivered (216). This shows that there is solid interest within Ballardong people and communities in entering the business environment given that just six people described themselves as self-employed in the 2016 Census and there were only two registered businesses in Ballardong prior to the implementation of the project.

The second factor is the industry sector diversity of business and group enterprises that were proposed. There were 17 different types of businesses proposed in the individual section covering nine industry sectors that included:

- Tourism
- Professional, scientific and technical services
- Arts and recreation services
- Transport, warehousing and postal services
- Healthcare and social assistance
- Retail
- Electricity, gas, water and waste services
- Education
- Other services

While tourism and allied sectors featured prominently in the group enterprises there were also proposals for a worm farm, placing headstones on unmarked graves and a golf academy.

The range of diversity in business and enterprise proposals could be said to indicate the untapping of a latency of ideas in Ballardong Country that otherwise may have been missed or taken longer to come to fruition without the intervention of the NEDS program.

6. Evaluation Outputs - Yued

Outputs for the NEDS Yued are presented in a different format to Ballardong as the resignation of the Yued Project Officer, Ms. Mippy, required a change to the delivery processes of the program in Yued Country.

With the resignation of Ms. Mippy in March 2020, RDA Wheatbelt was concerned that leaving these clients with no on-ground support during the transition period to a different delivery process could have had a negative impact on the future of the delivery of NEDS in Yued Country. Three processes were actioned to engage with these clients. An Aboriginal consultant, Mr. David Collard, spoke with the Yued Elders social enterprise members and established that they were not in a position to proceed, the Ballardong Project Officer, Mr. Rob Miles, followed up with several of the clients that had engaged with Ms. Mippy and a non Aboriginal business consultant engaged with some of the remaining clients. The non Aboriginal consultant has continued to work with two of these social enterprise groups to develop their project plan and business development, whilst other clients have indicated they are not ready to continue due to external pressures of work, family and community commitments.

The transition of the delivery process in Yued Country after Ms. Mippy's resignation from the Project Officer position also involved a targeted delivery via an Aboriginal Astrotourism project managed by Ms. Carol Redford, Founder and CEO of Astrotourism Western Australia and Ms. Donna Vanzetti, Executive Producer of Beam Me Up Media. The Aboriginal Astrotourism project partnered with the NEDS Ngala Wele Karla program in developing and implementing the Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project. This project encompassed school STEM incursions, stargazing nights, art and story gathering for Yued planispheres, tour guide training, and business assistance for business development.

Outputs for the two different delivery processes will be presented in separate sections and where relevant will be presented as aggregated data.

6.1. Client services - Individual (including the Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project)

During the course of project, the NEDS Ngala Wele Karla program and Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project have delivered services to 46 clients over 77 sessions and covering 106 service types⁵. Clients were interested in 13 types of businesses that covered six industry sectors and comprised the following.

- Tourism: Astro-cultural tourism - 6 businesses
- Cleaning - 5 businesses
- Garden maintenance - 4 businesses
- Horticulture/Aquaculture - 2 businesses
- Advocacy and consultancy - 2 businesses
- Administration and bookkeeping - 2 businesses
- Civil construction - 2 businesses
- Seed collection - 1 business
- Water Cartage - 1 business
- Art - 1 business
- Florist - 1 business

⁵ Source- Data Exchange, <file:///D:/NEDS%20EVALUATION%20DOCS/Neds%20Quant%20data/DEX%20Yued%20individual%20client%20activities.pdf>

- Project planning - 1 business
- Aged care - 1 business

While community capacity building, information, advice, referral and community engagement accounted for just over four fifths of client services, education and skills training accounted for almost half of the sessions despite only accounting for 11% of client services (Table 21).

Table 21 Distribution of individual client services and sessions per service

	Community capacity building	Information-advice referral	Community engagement	Education & skills training	Mentoring support	Family capacity building	Child/youth focus group	Employment pathways
% Of client services	31%	27%	23%	11%	5%	2%	1%	1%
% Of sessions per service	10%	25%	6%	49%	4%	2%	2%	2%

Source - Data Exchange

As with the Ballardong outputs, the weightings of these client services highlight the need for locally based consultants that are able to meet with clients and support them through the business development processes.

6.2. Client services - groups

The NEDS Ngala Wele Karla program and Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project have to this point delivered 161 group clients services and 179 sessions. Community capacity building and information, advice and referral accounted for almost three quarters of the services provided, however education, skills and training accounted for over half of the sessions provided per service (Table 22).

Table 22 Distribution of group client services and sessions per service

	Community capacity building	Information-advice referral	Community engagement	Education & skills training	Mentoring support	Family capacity building	Child/youth focus group	Employment pathways
% of group services	43%	29%	6%	12%	1%	2%	6%	1%
% of sessions per service	11%	27%	6%	54%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Source- Data Exchange

The higher number of groups involved in the Yued group services compared to Ballardong reflected multiple engagements that Ms. Mippy had with Yued Elders. This was driven by the Elders desire to establish a Yued Elders Commission along the same lines of the Ballardong Elders initiated by Mr. David Collard that had brought together 43 Ballardong Elders to re-establish Elders governance and leadership in Ballardong.

While this process could be conceived as outside the remit of the NEDS program charter, it does have an underlying relevance as creation of a strong Elders group could provide a steady and positive influence in Yued Country that would support community and business enterprises in moving forward.

In addition, Ms. Mippy worked with a relatively high number of youth and young adults recovering from substance abuse in developing business and employment pathways for them.

Other group services provided included the Djookan Yorgas, a group of Yued female Elders providing cultural knowledge and services in the Yued region and a Yued family, looking at a seed collection and propagation business to provide environmental rehabilitation services to mining companies.

Added to the Ngala Wele Karla program group services were the group engagements delivered by the Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project. These included school incursions where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were introduced to Yued astronomy. As part of the incursions, Aboriginal students created Yued specific planispheres⁶ of the emu and kangaroo Astro formations in the Yued night sky. Copies of these planispheres will be sold in conjunction with Stargazing events and other Astro tourism activities.

These school incursions provided a way of meeting the early focus of the NEDS program being on connecting with school children. These activities have begun to reengage Aboriginal students with their culture as well as shown the students the importance and value of their culture and heritage. According to Dockery (2020), increased engagement with culture can lead to increased school attendance and attainment, increased employment and better life outcomes for Aboriginal young people. Therefore, it could be reasonably proposed that the incursions are building a more robust platform for the future generations of Yued people to proactively participate in the economy.

6.3. Client services - groups elevated assistance program

The clients accessing the elevated assistance program comprise those listed in Table 23.

Table 23 Elevated assistance Yued Region

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	Constraints
Together We Can Grow (TWCG)	Become a profitable and sustainable 100% owned Aboriginal business employing Aboriginal people	Produce via an aquaponic system, sustainable, organic Barramundi, lettuce, and cucumber	Start-up capital
Beemura Aboriginal Corporation, Yallalie Downs	Diversify business into Astro-cultural tourism and setup an on-Country Camp for local Aboriginal youth.	Establish a commercial Astro-cultural tourism venture that diversify business revenue streams and fund NfP on Country Camp for local Aboriginal youth.	Accessing funding for capital investment in necessary Astro tourism and on Country Camping infrastructure.

⁶ A circular star chart attached at its center to an opaque circular overlay that has a clear elliptical window or hole so that only a portion of the sky map will be visible in the window or whole area at any given time. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planisphere>

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	Constraints
Assorted Astro-cultural tourism group operators	Attain skills that enable them to be effective Astro-cultural tourism guides for domestic and future international visitors	Work as a group and or independently as guides for Astro-cultural tourists.	Accessing some start-up capital. Gaining traction in the tourism market.

Together We Can Grow has been working in the elevated assistance program with Ms. O’Callaghan from Strategy Matrix. In the course of the engagement a business plan has been completed. The principal, Mr. Mark Borinelli now has a comprehensive document that he can go forward with that will both guide his business and support his capital raising ventures.

In turn, Beemura Aboriginal Corporation, through its manager, Ms. Madeline Anderson, has been working with both Ms. O’Callaghan from Strategy Matrix and Ms. Redford and Ms. Vanzetti from Astrotourism WA and Beam Me Up Media. The engagement with Strategy Matrix has centred on developing an inclusive business plan that addresses the commercial aspects of the proposed Astro-cultural tourism enterprise along with the NfP social enterprise of camping on Country for the local Aboriginal youth.

The third group, the assorted Astro-cultural tourism operators have also been working closely with Ms. Carol Redford and Ms. Donna Vanzetti from Astrotourism WA and Beam Me Up Media. They have undertaken some practical on ground experience in a trial with potential industry stakeholders as well as a two day course in tour guide training at Muresk.

6.4. Summary

As with the Ballardong outputs, the outputs in Yued Country show a strong engagement through the NEDS Ngala Wele Karla program and Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project. Given that in the 2016 Census, no Aboriginal person in Yued Country described themselves as self-employed, and there were no registered Aboriginal businesses, the responses of the individual and group clients suggest that this may not be the case for much longer.

Equally of note, is the volume of interest exhibited in the program by Aboriginal people living in Yued Country. Based on the 2016 Census population data for Yued Country, the 46 individuals that have engaged with the NEDS program represent around 7% of the Yued population. It could be proposed that this level of engagement illustrates a latent demand within the Yued population to engage in meaningful participation in the broader economy and to build the necessary skills to do so.

The other component these outputs illustrate is the value of having locally based Project Officer and facilitators. While the delivery of NEDS in Yued Country shifted from that of a locally based Aboriginal Project Officer across to two non-Aboriginal project facilitators, the initial work undertaken by the local Project Officer was carried forward into the transition of delivery processes. Thus, there was a base for the non-Aboriginal facilitators to work from and with them being local people, they were able to connect back into the Yued community through individuals that could carry the program forward within the local context.

While the outputs of the NEDS program through Moorditj Yaakiny program in Ballardong and the Ngala Wele Karla program and Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project in Yued indicate solid levels of engagement, they are limited in showing the outcomes on a personal level. As described in the evaluation methodology, outcomes of the program, both positive and negative were captured through a series of interviews with the Project Officers, Consultants and participants undertaken by the RDA Wheatbelt Research, Evaluation, Project Support (REPS) Officer.

These interviews will be presented in their transcribed form Section 9. It should be noted that given the nature of responses in the interviews where interviewees responded in a conversational and at times in a somewhat disjointed manner, the REPS Officer has made some necessary edits to maintain the comprehensibility of replies in the written form. At the same time, the REPS Officer has ensured that the key words and themes communicated in the interviews were retained within the context of the interviews.

7. Outcomes

Overall, the Moorditj Yaakiny, Ngala Wele Karla program and Yued Aboriginal Astronomy Project engaged with 92 individuals which represents 10% of the 18-64 years population in Ballardong and Yued Country. In addition, there was another 179 individuals participated in group engagements bringing the total percentage of individuals engaged across the program to 30% of the 18-64 years population in Ballardong and Yued.

In terms of businesses activated or supported in diversifying or expanding their market in Ballardong there were:

- 10 clients assisted in starting a business
- 7 assisted in diversifying or expanding their business
- 10 clients who had or were advised to put their business plans on hold or advised not to proceed with their business idea and
- 20 non-registered clients who did not proceed with their business idea.

There were no businesses activated in Yued, but several enterprises are in the position to move forward to activation or either diversify their revenue streams and or expand their market segmentation. These businesses are:

- Together We Can Grow (TWCG) – aquaponics horticulture, fresh food market; and
- Beemura Aboriginal Corporation, Yallalie Downs. Diversifying from backgrounding cattle to the Astro-cultural tourism market and an Aboriginal Youth Culture program.

Fundamentally, it was felt that activation of between three and six businesses across the two Countries could be achievable and that a possibly a higher level of interest in business development among Aboriginal people in the target area would be generated. Essentially, the program at one level was viewed as a first small step towards a much greater initiative that could effectively link and activate the economic development in Ballardong and Yued communities with the economic and asset resources that would be derived from the SWALC treaty.

For the most part, RDA Wheatbelt initiated and delivered the NEDS program with a conservative approach to anticipated outcomes. This position was taken on a number of considerations being:

- That a project such as this in embedding locally based Aboriginal people to develop, manage and deliver a business development program to individuals and communities in targeted areas had not been previously undertaken in this exact form.
- That the availability of business development services for pre-start-up and start-up Aboriginal entrepreneurs in the Wheatbelt Region were virtually non-existent, therefore the program was entering a new market where there was very limited knowledge associated with business development processes existing in the targeted segment.
- The unknown capabilities of the Project Officer candidates to acquire the necessary competencies through the professional development process. To a very large extent, the success of the program was reliant on the Project Officers capacities to engage with people, effectively disseminate the information and mentor clients through the process.
- The logistics associated with the delivery of the program. In both NEDS programs, given the dispersal of the populations, the Project Officers had substantial distances to cover in the delivery process.

- RDA Wheatbelt was aware of existing literacy and numeracy issues in the target populations that could constrain the delivery of the program.
- RDA Wheatbelt was also aware of the economic disadvantage that many of the prospective clients were in and acknowledged that this would be a constraint in them starting a business if solutions were not found.

What was unanticipated was how strong the sense of empowerment to aspire and act that individuals and communities drew from their involvement in the two NEDS programs.

This was illustrated both in words such as those of Ms. Anderson, who said;

“I feel as though I have been given and have given myself permission to dream and aspire for great things in the future.”

Or the community response to the creative popup studio in York which brought community members together in a safe communal space. As Ms. Narkle observed.

“The community became involved and there was a lot of community spirit. It became a gathering place for community members, the oldies, younger people, and the school kids. Everyone could just come in without worrying or being judged. They’d sit around and do their projects and yarn about all sorts of things.”

The social effect of the York creative popup has stimulated a desire within the community to form an Aboriginal Corporation and establish a permanent place where community members can come together and be creative or just simply yarn.

A second unanticipated outcome was that of the Project Officers taking on roles to act as a bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities that is beginning to connect both cultures on a shared social interface. This is illustrated in Mr. Mile’s reflections on the program (section 9).

“I feel as though I have personally grown and become entrenched in the general and Aboriginal communities of Toodyay. I have and go on being approached to build bridges and relationships between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in town and the wadjelas are supporting me in the process...”

Equally, Ms. Mippy initiated a more open dialogue with elements in the non-Aboriginal community of Moora that has laid the groundwork for a greater degree of cooperation and collaboration between the two cultures during the Aboriginal Astrotourism Project.

The third unanticipated outcome was less so unanticipated but surprising in scale. That was the number of individuals that have participated in the program. While RDA Wheatbelt expected a reasonable level of engagement, it was unexpected that the program would engage 30% of the 18-64 years Aboriginal population across Ballardong and Yued within three years.

Along with this unanticipated level of engagement was the unexpected range and diversity in proposed businesses and enterprises. Based on the literature review, it was expected that a majority of businesses and enterprises would be focused on tourism activities with a secondary stream being associated with health and wellbeing. The reality that businesses and enterprises proposed by participants covered almost every industry sector was somewhat surprising. In addition, it also demonstrated the latent ideas and aspirations that existed within the Aboriginal population prior to the implementation of the NEDS program and have been able to emerge during the program.

8. Outcomes case studies

8.1 Ballardong Moorditj Yaakiny Program

At the time of writing, Mr. Miles through his Moorditj Yaakiny program has worked with 23 businesses across a range of business life cycles from pre-start-up through to expansion. In addition, he has and continues to work with pre-start-up and emerging businesses, such as the ones detailed in the following case studies.

Mr. Rodney Garlett – Cultural Tourism

Mr. Garlett has cultural connections with both Ballardong and Yued Country. He intends to develop a cultural tourism venture based in and around the town of Northam in Ballardong Country. The tour through storytelling, site visits, music and food will take tourists on a cultural journey through Ballardong Country in and around the vicinity of the Shire of Northam and Toodyay.

Mr. Miles referred Mr. Garlett to the CEO of the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC), Mr. Rob Taylor who travelled to Northam to assess a pilot of the cultural tour. Mr. Taylor thought it was a viable product and offered Mr. Garlett start-up assistance. Unfortunately, this occurred just prior to the first COVID regional lockdown which has meant postponing further development.

Mr. Garlett continues to work full time in the health sector but intends to revisit his enterprise start-up at more opportune time.

Mr. Judd Davis - Maalak Marany Traditional land management practices consultancy

Mr. Davis is a Ballardong man from the Shire of Wyalkatchem. His consultancy specialises in traditional land management practices and growing native Australian plants. He sees his potential clients as schools, shires and community groups. Currently he is unemployed and is unable to access capital to operationalise his business. In the meantime, he has been referred to the NEIS program which is a 39 week business assistance program.

Mr. Vincent Ryder - Tool and artefact workshops

Mr. Ryder lives on the old Aboriginal reserve in Northam. He has original ties with the reserve and leads in the preservation and curation of the reserve as a cultural and heritage space for local Noongar's. He has skills in tool and artefact making which place him in a good position to hold workshops on the processes. He has already held a pilot workshop at BKB Cultural Centre in Northam which demonstrated that there was sound potential as a tourism activity in the enterprise.

Mr. Ryder has engaged with the NEDS Project Officer, Mr. Miles on several occasions to map out activities for a business start-up. This will be a continuing process as Mr. Ryder needs a level of support as he moves towards starting a business.

Ms. Nancy Henry - Mungart Yok (Jam Tree Women) Online art, clothing accessories and homeware retail

Ms. Henry is a Ballardong woman for the Shire of Quairading and is a prominent artist who also writes poetry and stories for all ages. Her aspiration is to transition from employment in the health sector to owning and managing her on business.

Her plan is to develop an online platform through which she can sell her art and prints and diversify her revenue stream by also selling clothing accessories, homewares and cultural tourism products.

Mr. Miles referred Ms. Henry to Many Rivers in 2020 to explore opportunities for micro financing her business start-up.

Ms. Donnelle Slater - Ngala Koolangka Kaadadjin (NKK) (Our Children's Learning) Aboriginal education program

Ms. Slater is a proud Ballardong woman with 25 years in the education sectors as a classroom teacher, Noongar language teacher, Program Manager and Administrator. In these roles she has carried the experience of being an Aboriginal child in the education system, a student in the tertiary system as well as a parent, grandparent and a community member. These experiences ensure the understanding of ALL those involved in every Aboriginal child's education.

In addressing the gap in Aboriginal education, Ms. Slater believes it is time to consider what needs to be done to change the outcomes. She feels that the education system in WA is not meeting the needs of Aboriginal children, nor the challenges faced in educating them. These issues have motivated her to develop an Aboriginal centric program that can be implemented in schools and work in parallel with the mainstream curriculum and supports Aboriginal students learning ensuring that none are 'left behind'.

The education program has been implemented as a pilot in the Brookton District High School with the support of the Principal and staff and the local Aboriginal community. The program's ethos is that the local Aboriginal community as well as the staff need to work together to improve Aboriginal students education outcomes.

The program's approach is very much ground up in the delivery and focuses on academic achievement, engagement, Aboriginal culture, health and wellbeing, and attendance. Strategies and actions in the program include personal learning plans, homework classes, cultural dance and language, workshops, parent meetings and referrals and mindfulness.

During the pilot, regular attendance of Aboriginal students has increased. Similarly academic outcomes have improved with almost half of the Aboriginal students showing considerable improvements in test results.

8.2 Yued- Aboriginal Astrotourism Project

Yued Astrotourism Pilot

the Yued Astrotourism Pilot facilitated by Ms. Carol Redford and Ms. Donna Vanzetti with additional support provided by Yued local, Ms. Madeline Anderson delivered a series of incursions and events that included:

- STEM engagement in local schools
- Campfire stargazing evenings with Yued Elders and families
- Art workshops with students and Aboriginal artist guidance
- Aboriginal astronomy planispheres design and printing
- Storytelling and tour guide training
- Collaborative demonstration event to produce an Aboriginal Astrotourism event experience.

There has also been a high degree of interest in Aboriginal Astrotourism in Ballardong and plans are being formulated to deliver an Astrotourism pilot in that region as well.

9. Outcomes - interviews

As outlined in the evaluation methodology, a part of the outcomes section is presented in an interview form. The reason for this approach was to capture the efficacy and effects of the NEDS program through the eyes of some of those who had participated in it as clients, Project Officers and consultants. Those who agreed to be interviewed for this purpose were:

- Moorditj Yaakiny Project Officer, Mr. Rob Miles
- Ngala Wele Karla Project Officer, Ms. Stephanie Mippy - Ms Mippy expressed a keen desire to participate in an interview unfortunately Ms Mippy's personal circumstances have not enabled this.
- Strategy Matrix Consultant, Ms. Anne Maree O'Callaghan
- Astrotourism WA CEO, Ms. Carol Redford and Beam Me Up Media Executive Producer, Ms. Donna Vanzetti
- Individual client, Ms. Donnelle Slater
- Individual and Group client, Ms. Madeline Anderson
- Group client, Ms. Sarina Narkle

In addition, a phone conversation was conducted with Mr. Robert Taylor, CEO of Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) as to the potential of NEDS to contribute to the cultural tourism sector in WA.

There was also an intention to interview clients who had withdrawn from the program, however, attempts to set up interviews were not successful. Despite this, feedback on what led these clients to withdraw from the program was provided by Mr. Miles and Ms. O'Callaghan both in the interviews and through previous discussions.

9.1. Moorditj Yaakiny Project Officer, Mr. Rob Miles

Do you think the Professional Development provided by RDA Wheatbelt adequately prepared you for your role in NEDS?

Most definitely. Although I had run a business previously, I didn't know the basic elements. I really knew nothing (*about running a business*). I didn't know where to go for information or support. The professional development consolidated what little I knew and supported with me with the new information. It brought me back to basics and gave me a reality check.

What worked well in the program?

The coaching and mentoring. Being mentored by Anne Maree (*Strategy Matrix consultant*) has really helped. The Ag Tech workshops were good. Showed me that there was an elevated level to be attained. It exposed me to a different mindset of the main aim was to make money. There was no social context. That's different to developing an Aboriginal business. But those people were motivated, and they had some really different business ideas. It was good to experience that.

What didn't work so well?

The IBA (Indigenous Business Australia) workshops. Their location was an issue, being in the city. Makes it difficult for Aboriginal people in the country to get to. They mightn't have a car, or fuel for the car. But if they get to the city, then they have to find parking and have the money to pay for it. The information in the workshop was very mainstream and dry. It needs a lot more work to make it relevant to Aboriginal people from the country.

Delivery issues

There were also issues in delivering a workshop format in communities. To start with, advertising didn't work if people weren't interested. The next issue was that the generic business, financial management approach (*mainstream approach*) was difficult for a lot of participants to understand, and it did not have any relevance for them. A more specialised approach was needed. One that took into account the context of the local community and individuals within it. Workshops only worked if you had a local champion who could get people there and if the workshop was done in a way they could understand and felt comfortable with.

Positive changes in delivery

Switching to the community pop up creative cultural hub model brought positive changes in the delivery approach. It really allowed people to feel their way through the process in a culturally safe place and gave them the freedom to be creative and yarn together as they did their artwork.

The other good move was using local facilitators for the various art workshops. This got the local people interested and it gave the facilitators the opportunity to show their talent and pass it on, which is the Noongar way. The great thing was that the people's talent was proven to themselves when they sold their artworks to visitors at the York Motor Show, with the pop up group selling everything they had made. Also, some artwork was sourced and sold through Bilya Koort Boodja, (Northam cultural centre) which encouraged the artists to keep going. The other good thing was the York Aboriginal community as a group got behind it and they want to keep it going.

But the pop up wasn't just about art. I received two enquiries from participants who wanted to look at starting a business. They had been yarning amongst themselves during the pop up art sessions and the group had encouraged these people to have a try at setting up their businesses.

Other parts of the delivery process or the program itself that could be improved on

I have worked at improving the format of the Business Guide. When I started, the information came from multiple websites and sources which was confusing and also meant that because a lot of Aboriginal Wheatbelt people didn't have computers or internet at home, they couldn't access it.

I have worked through the sources of the information and brought it together into a workbook and laid it out in a practical instructional approach in words that Aboriginal people find easier to understand. Where it was possible, I got rid of or translated the jargon or phrases into language that they could understand. The mainstream business development language makes Aboriginal people feel inadequate if they don't understand it and generally, they will just give up. The workbook gives them a clear guide to where they are going and what they need to do to get there. They need Aboriginal examples and cultural considerations need to be included.

Further challenges

Another challenge that is not really covered in mainstream business information is the concern those people on Centrelink have in losing their payments. The first question they have is, why give up a guaranteed money from Centrelink for something that isn't guaranteed?

It's difficult to work through, to pull people away from the reassurance offered by welfare. I mean, they feel they have got by on the welfare payments so why take the risk on the unknown. A lot of these people have great skills, but they don't feel they could earn an income from the skills. It's a self-confidence thing or maybe for the older ones remembering that they and their culture and heritage has been dismissed and ignored by wadjelas (white people) since settlement. And now we are telling them that they can have a business based on their culture's art and heritage. They just don't seem to understand how that could be.

How has been involved in the NEDS program affected you from a:

Professional perspective

Being involved in NEDS has helped me build personal resilience. It's changed my perspective to challenges in showing me to take small steps and expect a longer process. It has built my skill sets and increased my confidence.

Looking back, I can see I was quite naive about business even though I was running one. In the beginning I was talking the talk, but I had doubts if I could I walk the walk. Now I feel that I can walk the walk as well as talk the talk. An important part to building my confidence was having RDA Wheatbelt in the background. Their support was magnificent and without it I think I would have really struggled.

The other thing was that I realised that the mob can be quite sophisticated in their thinking if given the opportunity. You just have to sit back and wait, be patient and let them work through things at their own pace. That can take a long time for most of them. Like, I wouldn't say I have had any permanent withdrawals from my program. With some of them, they'd be going along quite well and then just stop. So, I'd give them a bit of time and then call or catch up with them. Most times the reason they had stopped was because of illness- them or someone in the family, bereavement, or they might have had to take over looking after the children of other family members. So, it didn't really have anything to do with the program. It's the Noongar way- family comes before self and most times the mob comes before self too.

Personal perspective

From a personal perspective, it has helped me increase community engagement in my own community as well as others. I feel as though I have personally grown and become entrenched in the general and Aboriginal communities of Toodyay. I have and go on being approached to build bridges and relationships between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in town and the wadjelas are supporting me in the process. I, we, the Aboriginal people, need the wadjelas to support us to change things otherwise nothing will happen. The mob can't do it by themselves. I also feel a more personal responsibility to the Aboriginal and general community in taking a role in active reconciliation which is about showing that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can find and meet on common ground and achieve positive shared outcomes.

If a role in a program like you have undertaken was offered to a family member or friend, would you encourage or discourage them to take it on?

Absolutely encourage them. It's a no brainer, go for it. There are so many parts to it. It builds life skills and builds capacity. It fills the gaps with training and education and the flow on effects are immediate and into the future. Being involved in the NEDS program has developed me as a person, making me stronger, resilient and more aware of what I can do for the community, my family and myself.

9.2. Ms. Anne Maree O'Callaghan, Strategy Matrix Consultant to NEDS clients

Do you think the Professional Development prepared the Project Officers for their roles?

The Ag Tech Business Growth was absolutely essential. The content, mentoring, sharing among the group and the added knowledge was integral to them delivering the program. Really, there needed to be more focused professional development which I tried to get going accompanied with more mentoring, but it didn't take off.

I think they didn't like the professional development I was proposing as it made them more accountable to me. Rob (Mr. Miles) and Steph (Ms. Mippy) did not like that aspect of accountability and pushed back.

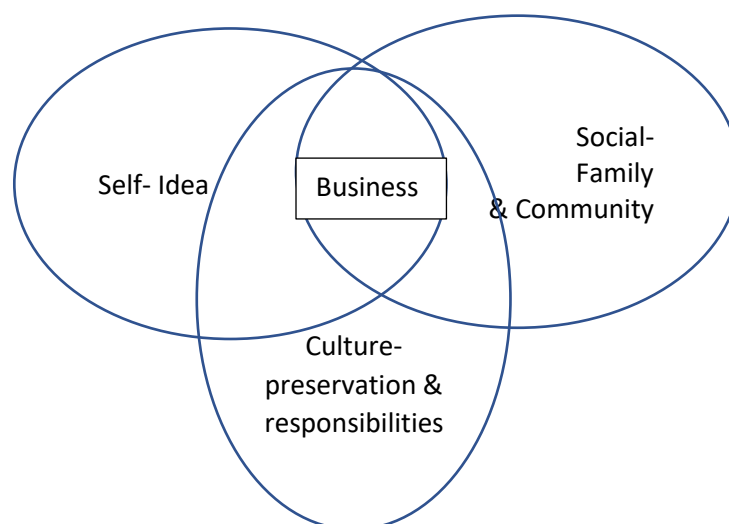
Were there issues working with clients that had been referred to you?

The main issue was time. I would allow time, but the client wouldn't use it. There was an ingrained expectation that someone else would do for them what they didn't want to or felt they couldn't do. That being the case, Rob was the exact person to work through those issues with the clients and bring them into those spaces they weren't comfortable with or felt they didn't have the necessary capacities for.

A lot of the ceased clients needed that local place based person to give them continuous support. I also think the project reinforced the need for clients to work in groups with the local place based person giving continuous mentoring.

The other issue I had was getting in contact with referred clients, setting up meetings and having the clients attend the meeting. There were a couple of times where I travelled to a town for a scheduled meeting with a client and they just didn't show up. What was frustrating was they didn't contact me prior to the meeting date or even when I was driving to the meeting to say they couldn't attend. It was also disappointing that there were no follow calls to apologise or give reasons why they didn't attend.

Another issue was having the clients think strategically and longer term. A big part of this was to do with the cultural perspective. For many the clients the business or the idea for the business intersected the social and cultural domains (*replication of Anne Maree's hand drawn diagram below*).



This made it difficult in developing management and financial strategies for the business as these could differ or even conflict with desired strategies or outcomes in the social and cultural domains. There is a need to tease the three elements out for clients to realise that the business needs to make money and be sustainable for the individual, their family and community. They need to work out how to undertake their community responsibilities without undermining the economic sustainability of their business. The challenge is to create focus by asking the right question and allowing them to come up with answers and not coming in over the top with the solutions.

How has been involved in the program affected you from a professional perspective?

Working with the variety of emerging proposals, I have been inspired by the clients' personal stories and ambitions. I have also been inspired by their commitment to community in it being so powerful. Working with and mentoring clients has helped me develop further skills and understanding that has and will help in the future in solving problems and finding ways to come up with solutions.

I also have real pride in seeing the NEDS project come together as part of the RDA Wheatbelt team. The project has been delivered in a very professional and respectful way for both those working in it and the clients. There were no egos, just a centred team approach on delivering the program.

Being involved in the NEDS project has been great exposure for my business and I hope to use it as leverage for future work.

How has been involved in the program affected you from a personal perspective?

It tested my ability to immerse myself in the coach/mentoring role. It was very challenging and at times frustrating but at the same time greatly rewarding. When it worked it was profound. It taught me how to conduct relationships through learning to step back, listen and build or earn the right to build support. It was a watershed moment for me when after Rob and Steph said they no longer wanted me as their mentor and then Rob came back and renewed our mentoring relationship.

Where to next?

I think there needs to be a unit or team working long term in the region. The clients really need long term follow up and support. What would normally take a person, a non-Indigenous person, a month to do takes these clients six to 12 months. During that period, they need constant support through the process. I would have liked more time with the clients just to get them a bit closer to setting up their businesses.

There also should be more group workshops. Getting a group of people into a room together is very powerful in progressing businesses through the various stages. I think there is an ongoing need for a tailored Noongar business development program for aspirants and start-ups specifically to unpack their business growth model. All the components of the model need to be looked at. What happened in the York pop up is a good example of what occurs when each component is unpacked and addressed individually across a group. It takes the process into a lot more detail.

9.3. Astrotourism WA CEO, Ms. Carol Redford and Beam Me Up Media Executive Producer, Ms. Donna Vanzetti

Background

Ms. Carol Redford and Ms. Donna Vanzetti became involved in the NEDS program when the Project Officer for Yued Country, Ms. Stephanie Mippy resigned from her role. Ms. Redford is Founder and CEO of Astrotourism Western Australia and Ms. Vanzetti is Executive Producer at Beam Me Up Media. With the resignation of Ms. Mippy, RDA Wheatbelt designed another delivery approach for the NEDS program in Yued Country. RDA Wheatbelt had assisted Ms. Redford and Ms. Vanzetti in the past including a project around Aboriginal Astrotourism in Yued Country.

With the approval of the funders, the Dep't of Social Services, Ms. Redford and Ms. Zanetti worked with RDA Wheatbelt in delivery of an alternate NEDS delivery approach in Yued Country. This approach focused on the rising tourism market's interest in cultural tourism and specifically in the increasing market segmentation of Aboriginal astronomy. With the increased tourism interest in the sector, there is a growing need for Aboriginal businesses to develop products and Aboriginal tour guides to deliver the products and allied services. Therefore, the delivery of NEDS in Yued Country concentrated on training and education around product and services development of Aboriginal Astrotourism enterprises along with other enterprises such as camping and yarning with Elders on Country.

What worked well?

Carol - The administration of the program. The flexibility that delivery of NEDS allowed in going through the project process. This helped as it was the first time, and we didn't know what may or may not happen.

Carol and Donna - Another thing that worked well were the relationships formed with the participants, Beemura Corporation, particularly with Madeline, the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) and RDA Wheatbelt. In many ways, Madeline was the one who drove it and brought a lot of it together. She was the one who contacted and organised the other Yued people to join in and be a part of the Yued Astrotourism project. Madeline was invited to speak at an Aboriginal Tourism conference. Her presentation was very well received and the MC who is involved with WAITOC commented after she had finished her presentation that he could see her becoming a future board member of WAITOC.

All these relationships can be expanded on to support the ongoing development of Aboriginal Astrotourism and cultural tourism in Yued Country and there is a real opportunity for Madeline to develop cultural incursions into schools.

The other element that worked well and wasn't anticipated was the Moora Mens Shed involvement with program. That just happened organically and came out of left field.

What were the challenges?

Carol - it was challenging for us in developing relationships and working with the community especially in regard to explaining the process to the community while being cognisant of cultural sensitivities. A major challenge was finding the key contact in the community. Without that key contact, it was very difficult to get things happening.

The other challenge was finding someone with Aboriginal astronomy knowledge who could work with us in the schools. There was also a level of vagueness around cultural knowledge protocols in who had authority over the knowledge and who could be authorised to communicate the knowledge.

What could be done to improve the delivery?

Carol - I think taking the classes outside rather than having them inside would be better but overall, it was really good. Not being able to collect the cultural knowledge was a challenge as well. That came from not knowing who in the community was the curator of the knowledge. One thing that would help is more camping on Country. Bringing the students and Elders together on Country would give the process real context.

Has being involved in the program affected you and if so, how?

Carol - For me, it was the young Aboriginal female student who had been at a star gazing event and had become interested in astronomy. At the next event, she sought me out to show me the astronomy book she had borrowed from her school library. I was delighted that a star gazing event and fired her interest in astronomy but disappointed that the astronomy book she had was based on Greco-Roman astronomy. It strengthened my resolve to really extend cultural astronomy knowledge into the mainstream.

Donna - Being involved and learning about Aboriginal astronomy has made me in awe of the Astro-cultural. It's given me much more respect for Aboriginal people's connection to the land and sky. Another great moment was the breakthrough with High School boys using art and music. It moved them from total disinterest to enthusiastic participants.

9.4. Ms Madeline Anderson, NEDS Client, Yallalie Downs Manager, Beemura Aboriginal Corporation

How did you find out about the program?

Carol and Donna rang me to see if I was interested in becoming involved.

Prior to joining the program, did you have a clear idea of what business you wanted to start or was it a bit of an idea that became clearer as you worked in the program?

I had a bit of an idea, but I didn't have a lot of knowledge. But the tourism guide training at Muresk showed me what we had started doing on the farm informally was tour guide training. The training at Muresk was good.

Was it easy or difficult to understand the information provided?

The information was easy to understand, and the facilitators were great, very experienced. However, it would have been good to have an Aboriginal perspective which is about needing to share information about cultural boundaries and understanding the different group's cultural protocols. You need that information to protect the tour guide and the knowledge. Although the information in itself was easy to understand, it was difficult in trying to understand it in a Noongar way. How it could be applied in a Noongar context.

What did you think worked well?

The training at Muresk. It was great to have more Aboriginal people there. Working with Carol (Ms. Redford) and Donna (Ms. Vanzetti). They were amazing, really patient and good listeners. They could really interpret what I was trying to say, and they allowed me to take ownership of what was involved. It was very empowering with no judgement. I could tell my story my way.

How did you find working with the consultant?

Anne Maree (Ms. O'Callaghan) with Carol and Donna really helped with the business idea. Watching Carol and Donna and seeing what they do showed me that we could do with the camp out idea. It really empowered us.

Working with Anne Maree was really special. I showed her the plan of going on Country and she got excited. She has been really great in the business development and beyond it. Got me thinking about how I can work at the two variants of the business. Showed me how to separate the social side from the commercial side and how both could work in a business sense.

Has the program helped you move your business on?

Yes, definitely. I was looking for other business options for the farm and the program gave me a clear direction. We have already tried out a stargazing activity and are now looking at building a proper viewing platform and my kids found a great place for us to set up a campsite for camping on Country. We are now looking at being able to pay a full time and part time wage on the farm in the next six to 12 months. That's a big step forward as we all have to work at other jobs now and work on the farm for free.

Has been involved in the program made a difference in other parts of your life?

I'm really creative and love being in nature. I never thought I would be talking about stars. I was raised by my grandparents and everything they taught me I have passed onto my kids. I feel like I'm blessed, privileged and honoured, but with a responsibility now to my family and the community. At the same time, I can still be me, but it has centred my beliefs. I have to find ways to keep myself balanced but work harder to find solutions to help others in the community. Life's up in the stars for me both literally and metaphorically. It's brought the past to the present and forward to the future.

I feel as though I have been given and have given myself permission to dream and aspire for great things in the future.

Has been involved in the program made a difference in your family's life?

Yes. My kids showed articles about the stargazing to their school mates and teachers in Perth. They were proud of that. It was their idea for the campsite and the opportunities that could come from it. It's been great having them involved and letting them have ownership. Pop (*grandfather*) is really excited and keen to get things happening. It's given him the opportunity to tell his story and talk about the success of the corporation.

The exciting thing now is that we don't know what the possibilities are until you link up with other people and have the conversations.

9.5. Ms. Donnelle Slater, NEDS client, Ngala Koolangka Kaadadjin (NKK) (Our Children Learning) education project

How did you find out about the NEDS program?

From Michelle, my sister, who was manager at Bilya Koort Boodja (BKB) Cultural Centre in Northam and had been doing some work with Rob Miles (NEDS Ballardong Project Officer) and RDA Wheatbelt. She knew about my dream for my Ngala Koolangka Kaadadjin (NKK) (Our Children Learning) education project, so she suggested I contact RDA Wheatbelt and find out about the program. RDA Wheatbelt put me in touch with Rob and then Anne Marie, their business development consultant.

Prior to joining the program, did you have a clear idea of what business you wanted to start or was it a bit of an idea that became clearer as you worked with the project officer and consultant?

I had a pretty clear idea about the education project. I had been working on it for a number of years but I wasn't so clear about the business and governance structures that were needed to take it forward so it would be eligible for funding and if there was an option to be able to charge fee for service.

How did you find working with the project officer, consultant and in the program?

Was it easy or difficult to understand the information provided?

Yes, Rob was very good in the information he gave me and in explaining parts of it that I didn't quite understand. What was good was that when Rob had worked through the initial information, he passed me onto Anne Maree who worked with me through the various options that I could take. That process has helped build my knowledge and has given me more control over how I want to take the project and my business forward.

What was difficult?

I think the difficult thing is choosing what business structure I should use. It's not that I don't understand the options but choosing one that is best suited to me and my future and works well with the education project.

What did you think worked well?

The support, the encouragement and guidance. It has been very important. I have been asked to present at various education workshops and prepare briefing papers for Department of Education Directors and Managers. I had done presentations in class to students but never to people in the Department and I had never written a briefing paper. In the beginning it was challenging, especially writing a briefing paper, but with the guidance and support I received from the program and RDA Wheatbelt, I am now very comfortable in what I present.

The Dream Summit⁷ was a good experience. Seeing and being with all those other Indigenous people who were starting or had started a business was inspiring. Listening to their stories and seeing the ideas they had gave me the confidence and courage to take the next steps. It showed me that it could be done and that there were Indigenous people already doing it.

What could be improved in the program?

Nothing, it meets every need from start to end.

Overall, do you think that the work you have done with the project officer and consultant has helped or not helped you with your business idea or your business?

It's definitely helped working with Rob and Anne Maree. It's given me options around what type of business structure would be best for me and NKK and also helped in working on a strategic plan for NKK into the future.

Has the program helped you move your business on?

Yes, it's slowly slowly but it's moving forward. After the Dream Summit, I had some health issues, so I moved back to Brookton. My health improved in the early part of 2020 and so I volunteered to be an aide in the Brookton District High School. The Principal found out that I had 24 years' experience in teaching and he asked me if I could help to improve the regular attendance of Aboriginal students in the school. I showed him the NKK program and he asked if I could begin running it in the school.

The program has become a pilot in the school and now other Principals and Education Department representatives in the Wheatbelt want to see it other schools in the region. This is the next step. If NKK can get some funding support, I will look at expanding the pilot to another two or three schools in the region. This is something Anne Maree suggested as getting too big too quickly may have a bad effect on the program and its delivery. It's better to build it gradually and get everything right.

Has been involved in the program made a difference in other parts of your life?

Yes, it's given me courage and confidence especially around setting up the NKK pilot in Brookton District High School. It's really built up my self-confidence and self-belief. Going back to my early years, I didn't have the confidence to be a teacher even though teachers were telling me I could become one. I went and got my degree, but it is only now that I have the confidence in me and what I know.

Being in the program has given me the confidence to take that leap of faith. Noongar people and communities put limits on themselves. They don't think they can do things that will bring about change for themselves and the community. NEDS has shown me that if we feel culturally safe and can be ourselves, we can take that leap of faith.

Has been involved in the program made a difference in your family?

Yes, it really has. They see the excitement in me and are beginning to see the opportunity. It's inspired their own aspirations. My son wants to open his own Noongar food business, so he is going up to Kakadu for six months to do hospitality training and my daughter has actually started to think about her future which is a big change for the better.

⁷ The Dream Summit funded by the Minderoo Foundation was held in Sydney in September 2019 and brought together Indigenous people from around Australia who had an idea for a startup business or who were in the position of growing their business. NEDS participants were sponsored. The Summit had a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous key note speakers who also mentored participants in developing their pitch for funding or support opportunities.

9.6. Ms. Sarena Narkle, NEDS group client, York popup Creative Cultural Hub

How did you find out about NEDS?

Rob Miles (*NEDS Ballardong Project Officer*) approached me to run the pop up studio program. I knew Rob from when I was working at the York CRC. (*York Community Resource Centre*).

Prior to setting up the studio pop up, did you have a clear idea of how it was going to work?

I had a bit of an idea, but it became much clearer working with Rob. Teamwork - it was awesome working with another strong Aboriginal person. We bounced ideas around and worked really hard to put something together that would help the community and make a difference. That was good you know, two Aboriginal people working together to do good things for Aboriginal people.

What worked well?

Creating a safe place for our people for them to come together and do their art and yarn. The pop-up studio gave them opportunities to show their creative skills and learn new skills. What was really great was that it was an Aboriginal led program. The people really liked that.

What did not work well or were challenges?

There were no negatives and no challenges. Everything flowed and worked well. The good thing was that the responsibility didn't just fall on my shoulders. The community became involved and there was a lot of community spirit. It became a gathering place for community members, the oldies, younger people, and the school kids. Everyone could just come in without worrying or being judged. They'd sit around and do their projects and yarn about all sorts of things. The school kids would come in after school and do their art. Even though the session was meant to finish at 3 pm, I'd keep it open for another hour or so, so they could do the art. That was good because they would sit with the oldies and listen to their stories.

The other thing to come out of the pop-up was when we sold the art works at the York Fair. We sold everything. That really gave everyone confidence. Afterwards one of the artists was asked to put her work into BKB (*Bilya Koort Boodja Cultural Centre, Northam*) and it was sold so she went and started doing more. We have started a bit of a relationship with BKB. They have asked our art facilitators to go to BKB and do art workshops. It's all been great, and it has encouraged the community to set up an Elders Group and try to keep the pop up going.

Has the program helped you move on?

Yes, I'm doing the same in my new job at the school. I'm getting the kids involved in doing art. I'm using the people who were involved in the pop up studio to give workshops in the school. It's showed me the opportunities out there for my people and it's showed me that we can work together to achieve them.

Has been involved in the program made a difference to you personally?

Yes, yes definitely. Being a strong Noongar woman for my family and community, I have realised that there are others in the community that can share the load which allows me more time with my family. It has opened my eyes to the talent, skills and knowledge that is in the community and the knowledge of culture. I have become part of a group of strong Noongar women standing together. It's very powerful.

Has it made a difference to your family?

Yes definitely. They supported me and I have realised that I need to be there more for them. They are proud of me and when the pop up was running, they would call in after school and spend time making

art. That was very good for my son who suffers from anxiety. Doing the art and being with the Elders would calm him. It was healing for him.

9.7. Mr. Rob Taylor, CEO of WAITOC-A cultural tourism Industry perspective

In a phone conversation with Mr. Taylor, the RDA Wheatbelt REPS Officer asked him, given his attendance at the cultural tourism pilot in Ballardong and the Yued Astrotourism pilot in Yued, what was his views of the program's outcomes.

In summary, Mr. Taylor, felt that it was a good beginning but there was a lot more work to do to develop the products and get the businesses functioning at an acceptable level for the tourism market. He was encouraged that there were people in Ballardong and Yued coming forward with tourism business ideas but was concerned that they would launch their businesses without fully understanding the tourism market and the market's expectation.

10. Clients who ceased or postponed engagement with the NEDS program

Unfortunately, despite attempts to contact these clients, none were forthcoming. However, during the course of the program, the NEDS Project Officers and consultants discussed some of the various issues that were constraining these clients continuing their involvement with the RDA Wheatbelt's REPS Officer. The following is a summation of these issues.

10.1. Constraints and barriers

In discussions with Moorditj Yaakiny Project Officer, Mr. Rob Miles, he identified several key issues, some of which fall outside those covered in the literature.

Looking after family

Mr. Miles cited a number of instances where clients were unable to continue in the program due to them taking on caring responsibilities for family members. Generally, this involved a grandparent or uncle or auntie having to take over full time caring responsibilities for young children of adult children, siblings or members of the extended family. It may have also involved adult children having to care for ill parents, elderly family members, cousins or siblings. In either situation, the responsibility to family need overrode the individual's personal needs and choices.

However, Mr. Miles did not list these clients as ceased, but rather postponed, as he had found that in some cases the situation was temporary or that additional family help alleviated the initial pressures of the situation. This is he said is why he gave these clients time and would contact them periodically to see how they were going. Experience derived from the program has shown that this approach has merit as one older client who had to cease engagement in the program due to caring responsibilities of grandchildren was able to re-enter the program six months later.

Literacy and numeracy issues

Low literacy and numeracy capacities proved to be a critical barrier for many clients particularly in the initial stages of the program when the mainstream workshop approach was used. For those clients who had difficulty with reading, writing and arithmetic, the formal workshop setting with the associated power point presentation were a source of embarrassment eliciting the sense of 'self-shame', a response particular to Aboriginal people. This response of shame is derived from point of the interface of the racial divide and as Kwok (2012) stated in the abstract of her paper, shame is "...to be informed both by traditional orientations and by the hegemonic ends of the dominant order."

Using this explanation as a guide it could be reasonably proposed that the mainstream format and approach in the initial workshops reinforced the social dominance clients had experienced throughout their lives. This was despite the workshop being led by an Aboriginal person, that dominance was still present on the room and for the clients, reinforced their personal sense of shame in not being able to adequately read and understand business and financial processes.

The shortcomings of the mainstream workshop approach along with these observations underpinned Mr. Miles decision to look for an alternative approach to the program delivery which took the form of the creative cultural pop up model which was operated at a local community level with a community champion managing and guiding the delivery process within local community social constructs and contexts. As Mr. Miles concluded, for a workshop environment to feel culturally safe for Aboriginal people, it needed to be held and led in a culturally appropriate way which included the type and tone of the language used. Mr. Miles summarized this approach as 'Our business, our way'.

As RDA Wheatbelt had taken a background role in supporting Mr. Miles and Ms. Mippy's programs, so Mr. Miles took a background role in supporting the creative cultural pop up. One of the important influences behind the creative cultural pop up was trust. Trust in the manager, Ms. Sarina Narkle, who was embedded in the York Aboriginal community and had close relationships with its members. The beneficial effect of this approach was shown in the steady increase in numbers of participants during the nine weeks of the program and the community's desire for the pop-up hub to continue operating after the conclusion of the funded program. The importance of a manager client relationship based on trust in building a culturally safe environment for the client to work in and why it was important for programs such as these led by Aboriginal people was summarised by one of the pop up's elderly female clients in a conversation with the RDA Wheatbelt's REPS Officer who commented that:

"We know that there are good wadjelas who want to help us but it's hard for us to trust them no matter how good they are because they come from a people who stole our land, our children and tried to destroy our language and culture. This pop up's good because it us helping ourselves."

Concern of losing guaranteed employment income or welfare payments and benefits

This was an issue that both Mr. Miles and Ms. Mippy came across early in the program. Clients who were employed, were concerned that their business revenue would not replace their salary and after the initial engagement were inclined not to take the risk. This response is applicable to all business start-up founders and not restricted to Aboriginal start-up founders and is intuitively understandable.

However, for those clients on welfare payments and benefits (that included housing), the response at one level seemed to be counter intuitive. Here, they had a business idea that could after a reasonably short period of time provide them with an income far in excess of what they were receiving in the form of welfare payments. Despite the Project Officers explaining that their welfare payments would be at some level, incrementally decreased as personal income from their business increased, the majority of potential clients on welfare thought that it was not worth the risk.

In exploring the influences behind this response, Mr. Miles suggested that it was the tangible security and reassurance the welfare payments represented rather than that of a financial crutch for the recipients. Added to this view was that of Ms. Michelle Winmar, previous manager of BKB, who had had issues obtaining consistent suppliers of product for the centre from the local Northam Noongar population. Ms. Winmar observed that Aboriginal people on welfare payments were used to 'getting by' on the comparatively low income offered and were disinclined to change their personal status quo for fear of losing the payments or housing support assistance.

However, the hesitancy to step away from the welfare assistance leads into the next issue of lack of financial capacity to participate and activate their enterprise idea.

Limited financial capacity

Being on a low income left many potential clients in a financial position where they were unable to access transport to attend meetings and/or workshops or could not afford to buy the necessary materials for the products needed for their intended enterprise. What the mainstream would consider to be straight forward activities such as having access to a car or being able to buy fuel for the car, to travel to a meeting or workshop was beyond many of the prospective clients. As Mr. Miles observed in his interview, even being able to travel to Business Development workshops in the city was outside the financial capacity of many Wheatbelt Aboriginal people.

In a lot of cases, the limited financial capacity extended to lack of access to computer and the internet. For many Aboriginal households in the Wheatbelt, such access is problematic at best, due to affordability and reliable digital connectivity. Alternately, while the majority of prospective clients had

mobile phones, most were on pre-paid options and if they were out of contract allowances, would be uncontactable until they could afford to pay the required instalment. This has made contact with participants difficult resulting in missed consultancy meetings as cited by Ms. O'Callaghan from Strategy Matrix or for the Project Officers trying to arrange meetings and workshops or just simply following up with a participant.

Health issues

The adverse state of some of the participants' health or their family members' health has also affected delivery of the program. In one instance, a participant passed away, while on a number of occasions, participants engagement in the program was stalled or ceased because of personal or family health issues or family bereavement.

10.2 Discussion

The constraints and barriers described in this section show why it is important to have locally based Aboriginal business development support people and for them and associated agencies to have patience with the development process. As shown in the interviews with NEDS clients, building relationships of trust along with ongoing support and mentoring are integral to developing Aboriginal businesses and community enterprises. Generic mainstream approaches delivered via professionals with no connection to the communities or local areas have had limited success with pre start-up and start-up Aboriginal business entrepreneurs in rural, regional and remote areas.

These additional issues show that engaging rural, regional and remote Aboriginal people in business development is not a straightforward or linear process that can be delivered with a 'one size fits all' generic program.

11. Learnings derived from the NEDS program

In view of the number of engagements with potential pre-start-up or start-up clients over the past three years, it would be reasonable to propose that the NEDS program has initiated a growing interest in starting a business or community enterprise among Aboriginal people living in Ballardong and Yued Country.

To put that response into perspective, the 92 individuals that have engaged in the program represented 10% of the 18-64 years population across the two Countries. Added in the people who attended community enterprise engagements and that percentage increases markedly to 30% of the 18 to 64 years population in Ballardong and Yued. In addition, the RDA Wheatbelt REPS Officer attended two group activities in Brookton and Kellerberrin with Mr. Miles where around 35 community members in Brookton and 25 in Kellerberrin participated in the events.

Furthermore, the Moorditj Yaakiny program crossed the southern border of Ballardong Country and undertook some preliminary engagement with one individual and two community groups in Wilman Country in the Shires of Pingelly and Narrogin. While these locations fell outside the remit of the project, the Project Officer felt it was important to follow up as people in these two locations had kin living in Ballardong Country or had previously resided or were intending to move back to Ballardong Country.

The individual and group engagements in the NEDS program have contributed to a better understanding and provided new information that will assist in the continuing process of developing Aboriginal business and community enterprises in rural, regional and remote areas. These learnings are as follows.

11.1. The challenges of disadvantage

The NEDS program brought into sharp focus the multiple layers of socio-economic disadvantage many of the Aboriginal population in Ballardong and Yued face that in aggregation act as barriers to their economic participation. The following illustrates these areas of disadvantage.

- Literacy and numeracy issues. It is innately difficult to undertake business development processes and operate a business if a person has difficulty with reading, writing and arithmetic.
- Discrimination. This includes both overt and unconscious discrimination that is not necessarily communicated through actions but can include the written and spoken language used in client engagement and workshops.
- Health and wellbeing. A number of clients were dealing with serious health issues that at varying points caused them to cease or postpone involvement in the program. In one instance, a client died during the process.
- Psychological trauma and intergenerational trauma derived from the forcible removal of children. The loss of a childhood spent with family and the experiences of the appalling treatment the majority of the Stolen Generation received has extended through theirs and their children's lives. The major constraint this has resulted in is a lack of trust or extreme difficulty in forming trusting relationships with people who could help them with their business or enterprise aspirations.

- Economic disadvantage. This ranges from clients not having basic limited capital or assets as security for investment in their business to being unable to access a car or afford to put fuel in a car for transport to a workshop.
- Economic/financial security. A number of clients were reluctant to start a business as they were unwilling to risk the security of their welfare payments and housing support benefits. From the client's perspective, this should be seen as a reasonable concern as their welfare payments and housing support represent their only consistent source of income and housing security. In effect, it could be proposed that they saw the welfare payments and housing support as a reliable assurance of (limited) economic security rather than as an economic crutch.
- Family and kin responsibilities and obligations. While the social aspect of Aboriginal businesses of family and community is seen as a positive element, it may also be a constraint. In several instances NEDS clients had to cease or postpone involvement in the program to care for family members who were ill or care for children of family members, who for a variety of reasons were unable to.

11.2. Business development delivery

The outputs and outcomes derived from the program support the delivery strategy of a locally based Aboriginal Project Officer who has the background support, is given autonomy and is empowered to deliver the business and enterprise development as they see it fitting within the local contexts and socio-economic constructs. Key learnings drawn from this approach, especially given the layers of disadvantage described in the previous section are:

- Patience - allow the client or group to work through the process at their own pace.
- Patience - accept that clients and groups may have the process interrupted due to family and cultural obligations.
- Be a good and patient listener - this is an important facet in developing a semi-personal/professional relationship with the client or group.
- Allow time to build and nurture relationships with clients.
- Be available to provide ongoing formal and informal support, mentoring and coaching.
- Remodel the mainstream business development process from the wealth gain focus to be more aligned with the strong social aspects of the Aboriginal business model.
- Recognise Aboriginal cultures and acknowledge the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures and refrain from imposing mainstream beliefs, values and expectations on Aboriginal people.
- Translate the mainstream business development language and jargon into a comprehensible form so the client:
 - is able to understand the process and does not experience 'shame' in not understanding,
 - is not marginalised or made to feel inadequate by the hegemonic power of mainstream language
 - is empowered by their understanding and capacity to apply the new information in the business development process.
- Accept that some Aboriginal people do not want to start a business but would rather keep what they are doing as a hobby.

11.3. Selection of locally based Aboriginal Business Development Project Officers

As with any professional position, it is important to select candidates with the necessary competencies or with the capabilities to develop the competencies through professional development. Equally, in the NEDS program, it was important to select people who were living locally and had connections with their local communities. While Mr. Miles and Ms. Mippy met the criteria of living locally and having connections with the local communities and came into the NEDS Project Officer positions with elements of experience that could be applied in the program, there remained gaps in their knowledge. To address the gaps, both underwent, what was a very intensive process of professional development early in the program.

Ms. Mippy did during her time in the program, was able to use her wide-ranging community and elder involvement to engage with clients and actively promoted the concept of Aboriginal people developing their own businesses to the point that some of her clients crossed over into the Aboriginal Astronomy Project in the second phase of the NEDS Yued program.

In Mr. Miles case, he is also Chairman of the Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation, and the main organiser of NAIDOC celebrations in Toodyay as well as consulting on the Shire of Toodyay's Reconciliation Action Plan. This community involvement also provided him with another avenue of having business start-up conversations.

The learning from this experience is that it should be acknowledged that a locally based Aboriginal Project Officer will have a wider range of roles in the communities besides that of their professional role as found in previous projects. This in effect essentially presents as a 'two edge sword' in that on one hand it allows the Project Officer to build trusting relationships in communities but on the other hand can lead to the Project Officer being overwhelmed by community demands and resulting in the Project Officer becoming susceptible to burnout.

12. Where to next?

Before discussing where to next for the NEDS program and possible future iterations, RDA Wheatbelt would like to acknowledge DSS not only for the funding that it made it possible, but for the support they have given through the program and the flexibility they have allowed in its delivery at particular stages. Without the department's ongoing commitment to the program and making allowances for adjustments, there is every likelihood that the program would have been stifled and unable to deliver the outputs and outcomes it has achieved.

Short term

At the time of writing, the NEDS program will continue to be delivered by RDA Wheatbelt for another 12 months across Ballardong and Yued Countries.

- Mr. Miles, the Ballardong Project Officer will transition to his own business and act as a consultant to the NEDS program. His experience with the contacts and networks he has developed across the communities, Government agencies and other stakeholders along with his local leadership roles will add value to his position.
- Delivery of the Aboriginal Astrotourism Project in Ballardong.
- Astro-cultural tour guide training in Jurien Bay (Yued).
- Star Tracks documentary filmed in Yued continuing the development and support of the storytellers businesses.
- Tourism product development- cultural trails developed across the Wheatbelt Region.
- Support the implementation of an aquaponics enterprise in Yued.
- Ongoing support and advocacy for the expansion of the pilot Aboriginal Education Project NKK (Our Children Learning) into two or three more schools in Ballardong and Yued.

Medium to Long term

- Keep in place and continue to develop the capacities of locally based Aboriginal Business Development Project Officers.
- Expand the Locally based Aboriginal Business Development structure to include other rural, regional or remote Noongar language groups Countries and other First Nations language groups Countries in WA.
- Develop a mentoring network to support the locally based Business Development Project Officers.
- Look to develop solutions with government and corporate agencies and other stakeholders to overcome existing commercial lending and funding impediments to increase Aboriginal entrepreneurs' access to capital finance and initial operating finance.

13. Conclusion

From the first stages of concept design through to delivery of the NEDS project, the priority of RDA Wheatbelt was to ensure that the project was not or did not become a 'box ticking' exercise. The underpinning objective was that the project would begin to shift the incumbent underserved and economically disengaged paradigm to that of active engagement. In addition, there was an aspiration that the NEDS project would be a catalyst in establishing an accessible Aboriginal business and enterprise development model for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and communities in rural, regional and remote communities.

It would be disingenuous to suggest that the delivery of the project from the perspective of RDA Wheatbelt and the Project Officers was a smooth process. Rather for both, it was a process of learning, gaining understanding, being patient, collaboration and negotiation. Perhaps what assisted through those processes was that both parties were entering unknown territory.

In the case of RDA Wheatbelt staff, they were acutely aware that they had limited knowledge and understanding of the intrinsic facets of Noongar communities socio-cultural contexts and constructs. This limited knowledge and understanding led RDA Wheatbelt staff to accede to the Project Officers knowledge and work to accommodate and incorporate that knowledge into the program. An example of this is when Mr. Miles approached RDA Wheatbelt staff with the concept of the creative pop-up model because he felt that the conventional workshop approach was not working well and lacked cultural appropriateness. RDA Wheatbelt staff acknowledged his view and supported him in developing and implementing the creative pop-up model in York and Northam.

In conclusion, the NEDS project although not meeting the initial aims in terms of numbers, can be seen as having delivered beneficial outcomes. But more importantly, it is a project that has begun to enable Aboriginal people in the Wheatbelt Region access to a greater level of self-determination and economic sufficiency as well as providing the groundwork for further development of an Aboriginal business development model for rural, regional and remote areas.

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15. Appendices

Appendix 1- Semi structured interview questions

NEDS evaluation semi structured interview questions

Project officer or consultant

Delivery processes

- When you began the role of NEDS project officer, you went through a period of professional development. Do you feel now that the PD adequately prepared you for the program?
 - i. What would you say worked well in the professional development?
 - ii. What did not work so well?
 - iii. What could be done to improve the professional development process?
- Reflecting back on the delivery of the program, you indicated in your evaluation reports that you found issues in the delivery process that had initially been proposed- could you describe and expand on what these issues were.
- Could you describe how you adjusted your delivery of the program to overcome these issues.
- At this point in time, what would you say is or did work well?
- What would you say worked less well?
- Do you have any thoughts on how what did not work so well could be improved?
- Are there any other parts of the delivery process or the program itself that could be improved on?
- From a personal standpoint:
 - i. How has been involved in the program affected you from:
 - a) Professional perspective
 - b) Personal perspective
 - ii. If a role in a program like you have undertaken was offered to a family member or friend, would you encourage or discourage them to take it on?

NEDS participants evaluation semi structured interview questions

- How did you find out about the NEDS program?
- Prior to joining the program, did you have a clear idea of what business you wanted to start or was it a bit of an idea that became clearer as you worked with the project officer?
- How did you find working with the project officer-
 - i. Was it easy or difficult to understand the information provided by the project officer?
 - ii. What was easy to understand?
 - iii. What was difficult?
 - iv. What did you think worked well?
 - v. What would you say did not work so well?
 - vi. What do you think could be done to improve those things that did not work so well?
 - vii. Were you involved in working with a consultant?
 - viii. If you were, how did you find it?
- Overall, do you think that the work you have done with the project officer has helped or not helped you with your business idea or your business?
- Has the program helped you move your business on?

- Has been involved in the program made a difference in other parts of your life?
 - How?
- Has been involved in the program made a difference in your family's life?
 - i. How?

NEDS interview questions for participants that did not continue

- You did not continue with the program after the first stages- what was it that led you to stop your involvement.
 - i. Did not have the time.
 - ii. Information was difficult to understand.
 - iii. There was more to starting a business than you thought.
 - iv. Because of the information received, began to think the business idea wouldn't work.
 - v. Realised there be money needed to start the business and could not see how to get it?
 - vi. Other reasons
- What do you think would have made it better and would have kept you in the program?

Appendix 2 - Ballarong Business Support Summary Data

Client services - Individual

Number of registered clients supported	27*
Number of unregistered clients supported (Approx)	20
Total Number of Registered and Unregistered clients	47
Number of client activities by service types (27)	216*

Ref: Data Exchange

Client Activities By Service Types

Client #	Business Type	Intake Assessment	Info Advice Referral	Education Skills training	Community Engagement	Mentoring Peer Support	Community Capacity Building	Total
001	Floral	1	2	1	4	6	1	15
002	Tourism	1	1	5	3	2	12	25
003	Self-Care	1		7		4		12
011	Lawn Care	1	1			2		4
012	Transport	1	1	2		2		6
017	Tourism	1		1		4		6
018	Electrical	1	6			1		8
021	Transport	0	1					1
034	Sandalwood	1	3		2	9		15
035	Consultancy	1	1	1	2	9	1	15
036	Consultancy	1	1			1	3	6
037	Consultancy	1	5	1			7	14
043	Art & Design	1	1	1				3
044	Consultancy	1	6	1				8
045	Art & Deign	1	11	1	1	1		15
046	Land Care	1	1	1	2		1	7
047	Tourism	1	1		1	4		7
048	Tourism	1	1			1		3
064	Lawn Service	1		3				4
066	Ranger	1	1	1			3	6
067	Retail	1		1				2
070	Art & Design	1	1	3	1		15	21
069	Seed	1	3					4
072	Cleaning	1						1
073	Management	1					1	2
074	Education	1	3					4
025	Water	0	4					4
		25	55	30	16	46	44	216

Appendix 3 - Ballardong Business Support Summary Data

Client service - Groups

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	What's holding them back
<p>Wyalkatchem Djidi - Djidi AC (Wyalkatchem)</p>	<p>This group wants to pool their resources, skill sets and cultural knowledge to start-up a local enterprise that would allow the group to prosper as a social enterprise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cultural tourism ventures ➤ Cultural land management services ➤ Consultancy services ➤ Contracting services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Land tenure ➤ Funding ➤ Business Planning ➤ Start-up Capital
<p>Northam Reserve AC (Northam)</p>	<p>This group wants to pursue a more structured business platform where they are better placed to act as a preferred supplier of services and products to the Shire of Northam, BKB and the community as a whole.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Artefact making ➤ Cultural activities ➤ Lawn mowing and yard service ➤ Fire-wood supply ➤ Land management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Funding ➤ Start-up Capital ➤ Licences / approvals ➤ Lack of business knowledge
<p>Ngagagin Marmun Mia AC (Northam)</p>	<p>This group wants to add other revenue streams to their current operations as well as looking at securing a building to use as a more permanent base for the men to feel safe in.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Commercial Worm - Farm Venture ➤ Headstones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Start-up Capital ➤ Licences / approvals ➤ Business case ➤ Land tenure?
<p>Noongar Kaartidjin AC (Toodyay)</p>	<p>This group wants to explore real opportunities to advance their corporation to become a viable proposition as a resource, business and tourism base for the region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tourism and arts venture ➤ Business support ➤ Heritage and language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Start-up capital ➤ Business case ➤ RAP
<p>Bilya Koort Boodja Cultural Centre (Northam)</p>	<p>This entity wants to strengthen their business ties with local Aboriginal suppliers where they can confidently procure services and products from, underpinned by business support and training through the MYP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cultural tours ➤ Artefact making ➤ Visual arts ➤ Language ➤ Story telling ➤ Cultural Awareness ➤ Dance and performance ➤ Festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Suppliers not being business ready ➤ Seasonal factors ➤ Purchasing restraints ➤ Role confusion

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	What's holding them back
Six Seasons Golf Club Inc (El Caballo)	This group wants to establish a viable sporting club that is committed to increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in the game of golf. Inclusive of women and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Club management ➤ Academy of Golf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Capital funding ➤ Sponsorship ➤ Equipment ➤ Course management ➤ Business case
Seabrook AC (Brookton)	This group wants to establish and operate a Cultural Centre in Brookton as part of a tourism venture for the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cultural Centre, including visual arts, artefact making, cultural tours, language, story-telling, performance and other commercial / cultural opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Top up funding ➤ Shire approval ➤ Business case ➤ Project management ➤ Community support
Kellerberrin Aboriginal Community	This group wants to explore a range of economic opportunities for families and individuals in Kellerberrin to work with, as a way forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cultural tours ➤ Yard and lawn services ➤ Home support services ➤ Visual arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Capital funding ➤ Division ➤ Lack of business knowledge ➤ High unemployment ➤ Status quo
Goomalling Aboriginal Community	This group wants to develop a strategic plan to enable the community to move forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Further discussion and planning are required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Community in-fighting
York Aboriginal Community (York Arts Pop-up Studio)	This group wants to establish a new incorporated body for its membership base in York. The group is keen to follow up the good work and vibe created out of the York Pop-up initiative in 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enterprise centre for arts, crafts, cultural education, tourism etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Funding ➤ Planning ➤ Incorporation ➤ Tenure (office / meeting place).
Northam Aboriginal Community (Northam Arts Pop-up Studio)	This group has the potential to form its own arts group as part of a flow-on effect of the Northam Pop-up initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Further discussion and planning are required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ TBC

Entity	What are they trying to do?	What business activities are they proposing to do?	What's holding them back
Northam Toodyay York Noongar Arts Alliance	The formation of this group has yet to be fully realised.	➤ Further discussion and planning are required	➤ TBC
Wheatbelt Aboriginal Leadership & Business Group	The formation of this group has yet to be fully realised.	➤ Further discussion and planning are required	➤ TBC
Wheatbelt Noongar Tourism Advisory Group.	The formation of this group has yet to be fully realised	➤ Further discussion and planning are required	➤ TBC