

RDA Wheatbelt - Evaluation of the Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) Program Fourth Year

RDA Wheatbelt Chairman

As the Chair of Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt, I am incredibly proud of our Noongar Enterprise development Support (NEDS) Program and the excellent and exciting outcomes it has achieved.

I am also very grateful to the Australian Government Department of Social Services for extending the program into a fourth year. This fourth year has enabled us to consolidate the program, continue to engage new clients and implement new projects.

There is no doubt the program has greatly assisted many Aboriginal groups, enterprises and individuals. It has touched so many and prepared others to be in a far better position to run a business or assist others in doing so.

In particular, our greatest success is the growth, development and overall achievements of our former Ballardong Project Officer, and now consultant, Robert Miles. Rob has been outstanding in his role and has achieved so much with so many. His delivery of our NEDS program was excellent, and this has continued as he has consulted to RDA Wheatbelt. In addition to growing his Business Development Consulting business 'Six Seasons Connect', Rob has also developed his cultural tourism business, Dudja Dreaming.

Rob's success and ongoing activities will ensure the work and influence of the NEDS program will continue.

Best wishes to all those that have been involved along the journey and to those who continue forward.

Terry Waldron
RDA Wheatbelt Chair

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Introduction

The extension of Department of Social Services (DSS) funding for the Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) program into a fourth year has enabled the program to further build on the early development of Aboriginal businesses and positive outcomes generated in the initial three year period of funding. Despite COVID continuing to have a constraining effect on delivery of the program, NEDS Project Officer, Mr Rob Miles, who assumed project delivery for both Ballardong and Yued Country, continued to work with existing clients as well as sign on new clients and supporting existing and new social enterprises.

Right up to the final month of the funding extension, the NEDS program continued to proactively support clients and enterprises and put in place strategies alongside alternative options to ensure ongoing mentoring and development assistance into the future.

At its conclusion, Regional Development Australia (RDA) Wheatbelt is confident that the NEDS program will leave an ongoing legacy that has revealed a previously unexplored source of business and enterprise aspirations within the Wheatbelt's Aboriginal population. Correspondingly, RDA Wheatbelt believes that the program has also left Aboriginal clients a legacy of self and community empowerment. As Ms. Madeline Anderson observed in the previous evaluation, the NEDS program support gave her "...*permission to dream*".



Executive summary

A one year extension of the Department of Social Services (DSS) funding of the Noongar Enterprise Development Support (NEDS) program has consolidated several existing enterprises along with the registration of new clients and development and or implementation of new projects or enterprises.

Among the high points of the year in relation to existing businesses were:

- Ms. Madeline Anderson, Beemurra Corporation, Yallalie Downs initiated two pilot camps for her community enterprise project 'Camping with the seasons on Yallalie Downs' for Aboriginal young people in Yued Country. In the process, Ms Anderson received valuable support from an anonymous philanthropic donor that enabled her to fund and purchase necessary equipment for the camps.

In addition, Tourism WA is enthusiastic in assisting Ms. Anderson establish a camp site with the necessary amenities to establish a commercial cultural tourism business on Yallalie Downs.

- Ms. Donnelle Slater, Ngala Koolangka Kaadadjin (NKK) (Our kids Learning) Ms. Slater continues to make progress in implementing NKK Aboriginal education program that was piloted in Brookton District High School into other learning institutions.

Also, a meeting with Mr. Blake Innes of Hive Publishing has resulted in Hive Publishing providing further creative and publishing development support that will result in a 500 print run of the first reading resource, 'Five Kangaroos'.

It is anticipated that schools or other learning institutions will acquire this resource as it aligns with an Aboriginal Curriculum directive for WA schools to increase the levels of Aboriginal literature and resources in libraries and classrooms.

- Mr. Rob Miles, NEDS program consultant, Director of Six Seasons Connect. Mr. Miles has continued to deliver the NEDS program as a consultant to Regional Development Australia (RDA) Wheatbelt as well as developing his own cultural tourism business, Dudja Dreaming.

Additional activities in the fourth year of funding include:

- Moora Arts Project - a 10 week creative hub project to engage potential businesses that has now been extended with funding support from Iluka Resources.
- Ballardong Astro project - development of Ballardong astronomy storytelling business opportunities, similar to the Yued astronomy project, across the Shires of Tammin, Wyalkatchem and Beverley.
- Ballardong Tourism initiative - engaging Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) to provide advice and support for potential Ballardong tourism operations in the Shires of York, Quairading, Northam and Toodyay.
- Moora Dive to the Future project – not having a drivers licences is a barrier to business and employment, this project assists Aboriginal people who otherwise are unable due to cost, and/or lack of access to vehicles, attain their drivers licence and is jointly funded by Iluka Resources and the Ngala Wele Karla NEDS project.
- Yued Tourism Plan - to explore the opportunity for a Yued tourism enterprise in the Pinnacles and the region. Developed with support from the Local Yued Elders group, representatives from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), WAITOC and the CEO of the Shire of Dandaragan. An Aboriginal ranger is now working to deliver cultural tours.
- Business Development Coaching and support sessions with 11 new clients.
- Introduction to Business Workshops - two workshops organised with one cancelled due to COVID. Eight participants attended the workshop held in the Shire of Quairading.
- Ballardong Yued Business Network - Currently 15 members, administrated by Six Seasons Connect with regular communications by email and plans for a formal structure in the future.

Learnings

While family and cultural responsibilities and expectations continue to impede some clients progress towards starting a business, a lack of or low self-confidence has also emerged as a constraint for many of the clients.

The influences that have negatively affected client's self-confidence may be derived from poor literacy or numeracy skills or lack of education attainment but generally a key influence is the historical and current socio-economic disadvantage that has characterised theirs and their forebear's lives. Essentially, they belong to a culture that in the past has been dismissed, devalued and marginalised.

Building the clients' self-confidence has been one of the critical roles Mr. Miles has undertaken during the program through cultivating a trust relationship and ongoing mentoring. In doing this, Mr. Miles has highlighted the importance of having a business development officer living on Country with community connections who is available for a 'yarn'. The high levels of outputs and successful outcomes achieved in the NEDS program reflect the effort and value of Mr. Miles work with clients across Ballardong and Yued Country.

There were several barriers confronting clients from potentially participating in the program including them not having and/or being able to attain a driver's licence, not having access to vehicle and/or not being able to afford fuel for the vehicle to attend a workshop. To address these barriers, Mr. Miles, either provided the transport or ensured the workshop was easily accessible by other means.

A further barrier was a reluctance to sign the registration forms and provide details to enable participants to be loaded to the Data Exchange reporting program. This reluctance stems from an inherent distrust of non-Aboriginal and government people and how the information might be used. This resulted in a number of participants joining many activities, without being recorded as registered.

But the most significant barrier was access to business start-up capital and initial operating finance. In most cases, limited or no ownership of property or other securities precluded or make it very difficult for clients to access finance. Whilst there are some opportunities for funding via various Indigenous agencies such as the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC), the amount required by clients was generally below the minimum level of funding or the criteria for funding did not align with the clients plans.

This is a critical issue particularly for micro and small Indigenous business start-ups in regional, rural remote areas and does require attention.

Where to next?

To ensure that the conclusion of funding and cessation of the NEDS program does not leave a support vacuum, Mr. Miles has had discussions with the Waalitj Hub, an Indigenous business development program operating out of Perth with a presence in the north and south of the state but with no presence in the Wheatbelt. As a result of the discussions, the Waalitj Hub has engaged Mr. Miles as a business development support service provider and offered the Hub's resources to support Mr. Miles services in the regions.

Background to the Project review summary

Based on outputs and outcomes derived from the initial three years of Department of Social Services (DSS) funded NEDS program, DSS offered further funding for 12 months. Essentially, this entailed the program continuing to deliver business support to existing and new Aboriginal clients and community enterprises clients across Ballardong and Yued Countries.

One difference in the fourth year, was that Mr. Miles extended his business support delivery across both Ballardong and Yued Country. Although business development and support processes were being delivered in Yued Country, these processes were mainly focused on Yued Astrotourism. Additionally, there had been limited interaction outside of Yued Astrotourism with prospective clients in the Dandaragan and Jurien Bay areas of Yued Country as this was not in the initial focus area.

The fourth year also saw a strong interest in Aboriginal Astrotourism generated in Ballardong Country among both Aboriginal communities, Local Governments and other community stakeholders. This interest was derived from the outcomes of the Yued Astrotourism project. As a result, program delivery of the Aboriginal Astrotourism concept shifted into Ballardong Country with Ms. Carol Redford and Ms. Donna Vanzetti coordinating development and delivery of the project with Mr. Miles and local Ballardong woman, Ms. Rebecca Fitzgerald, working with Noongar artists and storytellers.

Literature Review summary

As detailed in the literature review in the three year evaluation of the NEDS program, there were approximately 4,000 Aboriginal people in the Wheatbelt Region with half being 24 years or younger (ABS, 2016). The education profile of the region's Aboriginal young people was characterised by low year 12 attainment rates, low overall attendance levels (My School web site, 2020) and low levels of post school education and training participation and qualifications (ABS, 2016).

Equally, the employment profile was characterised by extremely high levels of youth and adult unemployment along with quite low levels of labour force participation (ABS 2016). Research showed that the low levels of education attainment were a considerable influence on placing the mature 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).

As would be anticipated, these factors fed into high levels of economic disadvantage for the majority of Aboriginal household in the Wheatbelt which was compounded by the higher number of persons living in Aboriginal household compared to non-Aboriginal households (ABS, 2016). As a result, there were a large proportion of Aboriginal household on or below the poverty line as described in the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and University of New South Wales (UNSW) report (Davidson, et al, 2020).

A further contributing factor to the high level of economic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people and a key element in constraining many of them participating in the mainstream economy is discrimination and vilification in the workplace (Biddle et al, 2013) and in business (Collins, et al. 2017). But, in terms of business, arguably the greatest barrier to Aboriginal people starting a business and maintaining it 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).

And then there is the lack of practical skills, capacities as well as ongoing mentoring support and access to markets for rural, regional, remotes to start and operate a business. Positioned alongside these issues is the two edged sword of family, kin and cultural responsibilities. On one hand, familial and cultural responsibilities act as influences and motivations for Aboriginal people to go into business (Rola-Rubzen et al, 2011; Collins et al, 2017). On the other hand, these responsibilities can challenge the financial sustainability of the business as there may be an expectation that revenue and profit generated by the business be shared with extended family (Collins et al, 2017).

These socio-cultural attributes may contribute to is a contested space between Aboriginal business cultural values and what the mainstream business ecosystem expects in terms of competencies and processes to develop business capabilities and deliver products or service. This dichotomy between

Aboriginal and mainstream business models is succinctly illustrated in a comparison of motivations to start a business. Of note is that while Indigenous entrepreneurs did list improving their income (at number four compared to non-Indigenous entrepreneurs at number one) becoming wealthy did not make their top five reasons for starting a business. Rather, the greatest motivations for Indigenous entrepreneurs were socially focused on community and family needs.

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.

A crucial outcome of this prioritisation of family and community is 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 element highlights the importance of supporting the development of Aboriginal businesses as these businesses offer Aboriginal people culturally relevant and safe employment pathways.

Needs and gap assessment

A summation of the ongoing needs and gaps assessment was provided by Mr. Miles. In working with new clients, Mr. Miles continued to find that many of the clients, although being able to comprehensibly articulate their business idea either saw little need or reason for a business plan or did not understand the purpose of a business plan. Similarly, several clients could not understand why they could not simply apply for and receive a funding grant. Some of these clients also did not see the point in having a business plan. Despite the initial lack of understanding and/or resistance to developing a business plan, Mr. Miles, through several client engagements has been able to show the clients the need for a business plan and has developed or referred them to a consultant to develop the plans. Although there can be challenges in helping the client to understand the need for a business plan, they are not insurmountable where business plan language is contextualised to reflect hands on business actions.

A key need that Mr. Miles identified in the first evaluation that remains contingent to the business development process is ongoing mentoring of which a major component is building the client's confidence across several domains. The ongoing mentoring is necessary as in most cases there is, for the client a conflict between the optimism they have for their business or enterprise idea and the dawning reality of what they need to learn and do to operate a sustainable business.

Realising the various additional business skills they will need to have can be quite overwhelming. Therefore, Mr. Miles has to find a balance between encouraging the client's entrepreneurial business aspirations and ensuring that the need for the client to learn the necessary business skills does not adversely impact on their enthusiasm.

To facilitate the process, Mr Miles has developed his own workshop resources that explain business methodology in a way that is easy for clients to understand and work through at their own pace. A

critical factor in the process is that Mr. Miles must avoid anything that may cause clients to feel that they are ‘shamed’. His approach to this delicate balance can be seen to be encapsulated in the title he has applied to the workshops which is: “Our business our way”.

What does act as a major blockage in clients realising their business start up aspirations is their own lack of economic capital which impedes their access to commercial finance and limited options to access start up capital either through grants or receiving financial support through Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) or the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC). As noted in the literature, very few Aboriginal people own or have substantial equity their home or have savings.

To some degree, the situation has become a source of frustration for Mr. Miles as he sees the work he has put in supporting his clients through the business development process thwarted at the most important step in the process of starting their business.

Project structure

The structure of the NEDS program was adjusted with Mr. Miles taking responsibility for the delivery of services in Yued as well as Ballardong Country. Additionally, due to just the one year extension, more emphasis was placed on supporting existing clients through the start up process to ensure a completed outcome. However, the adjusted delivery approach did not exclude the signing on of new clients which over the course of the year continued to occur.

Project delivery

Delivery of services was also adjusted to provide Mr. Miles the opportunity to develop his own business, Six Seasons Connect. To this end, Mr. Miles, role changed from that of an employee of RDA Wheatbelt to that of a consultant of Six Seasons Connect engaged by RDA Wheatbelt to deliver services to NEDS clients.

Additional outputs

In total, there were 120 clients registered with NEDS during the four years of the program. There was a solid and diverse range of outputs attained in the fourth year of NEDS funding (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary Table: NEDS Reporting to June 2022

Activity	Project Type	Summary	Status / Outcomes
Moora Arts Project	Capacity building	Local coordinator engaged 10-week program	9 client registrations received. Celebration event – 15 June Local funding secured to pay for venue hire to end of 2022
Ballardong Astro Project	Capacity building	Local cultural liaison engaged 10-week program	12 client registrations received and up to 70 participants at some of the activities. The Local Gov'ts have co-contributed to this project and in funding the Wyalkatchem / Tammin launch on the 22 July and Beverley 29 July 2022
Introduction to Business Workshops	Information and training	2 x workshops offered on Ballardong in the month of April 2022	Workshop 1 (Northam) cancelled – due to covid Workshop 2 (Quairading) – 8 participants attended

Activity	Project Type	Summary	Status / Outcomes
Ballardong Yued Business Network	Capacity building	Establishment of a regional Aboriginal business network group	Currently 15 members (informal) Administered by Six Seasons Connect Regular communications by email only Plans for a more formal structure
Yued Tourism Plan	Capacity building	Completion of a Plan for a Yued coastal tourism business	A consultant developed a comprehensive tourism plan for a potential tourism venture in the Coastal region, including the Pinnacles.
Ballardong Tourism Initiative	Capacity building	Engagement of WAITOC to support potential tourism operations on Ballardong	Initial engagement of WAITOC to provide advice and support of potential tourism operations in York, Quairading, Northam and Toodyay 7 clients engaged
Business Development Coaching and support	Coaching and referrals	Engagement of new clients into the NEDS project 2021-2022	11 new individual clients receiving individual coaching, mentoring and advice, other than clients registered in the capacity building projects.
BKB / NEDS Partnership project	Capacity building	Engagement of staff at BKB to ensure regular meetings and opportunities for business development to occur	Meetings undertaken throughout this period to discuss items such as Cultural Tourism – potential tourism training and tour guide training, Astro-tourism – (Information session on held 27 th of October 2021) - 15 attendees, Static display - showcasing business development opportunities and support through NEDS, Intro to business workshops, Business coaching & support
York Enterprise Support Project	Capacity building	Request received by local community to establish an Aboriginal Corporation to form a local enterprise	Intermittent communications to assist a local Aboriginal community group to establish an incorporated body for the purpose to develop an economic program as a function of its core business
Moora Drive to the Future	Capacity building	Assist people who otherwise are unable due to cost, and/or lack of access to vehicles, to attain their driver's licence and access business and/or employment	16 participants in a project jointly funded by Iluka Resources and the Ngala Wele Karla NEDS project. Anticipated that a minimum of 15 will achieve their licence in the first cohort. (20 registrations received by the date of this report) Iluka has committed to extending this program into 2022-23
Star Tracks Project	Capacity building	A project to capture Aboriginal astronomy heritage on film, through art, storytelling, music and culture.	3 participants working with a film maker, Beam Me Up Media, to complete an astronomy based television series that has captured Aboriginal stories and culture. The films will support the cultural and Astrotourism businesses.
Completed mini business plans	Capacity building	Plans required to assist businesses and to apply for grants	Youth camp, tourism cultural centre, education program, tourism cultural tours and horse training

Outcomes

As with the first NEDS evaluation, this evaluation will present outcomes as case studies.

Case study 1.

Ms. Madeline Anderson. Yallalie Downs, Beemurra Corporation.

Ms. Anderson was featured in the first NEDS evaluation's case study outcomes. During the interview for the evaluation, Ms. Anderson was asked what if any personal impact had there been in her being involved in the NEDS program. Her response: *"It has given me permission to dream"* has resonated with everyone involved in the delivery of NEDS. However, since that interview, it could be strongly suggested that what Ms. Anderson has transitioned her dreams into actions.

In the intervening period Ms Anderson has progress her social enterprise project which involves young Aboriginal people from Yued Country camping on Country with Elders and reengaging with their culture. The stated aim of the camp program titled 'Camping with the seasons on Yallalie Downs' is: *"...a youth camp and cultural healing space at Yallalie Downs that draws on cultural understanding and science to deliver leadership and skill development. With increased capacity and confidence, the long-term goal beyond five years, is that youth emerge as leaders, ready to lead, deliver and organise future youth camps and drive a youth led commercial tourism potential at Yallalie Downs."*¹

The first camp run as a pilot was held during the October School Holidays (2021) over two days and one night with six young people attending with their parents/guardians. Essentially, the camp was to test the concept and identify activities that could be included.

At the conclusion of the camp, the young people were asked to give a verbal evaluation of weekend. All of them declared it a success and particularly enjoyed the various activities that had occurred. Their only complaint was that it had only been for two days and one night. All the participants felt that the camp should be over at least three days and two nights.

The accompanying parents/guardians also felt that the camp had been a success and they as well as their children had benefited from the experience. The positive impacts the camp had generated created strong interest through the Aboriginal Community of Moora with other families and young people indicating that they would like to participate in the activity.

The second camp held in the April School Holidays (2022) took place over three days and two nights. Again, this camp was deemed a success by all who participated. Plans are now being made to run the camps on a regular basis in the school term breaks excluding the Christmas holidays.

Of note is that Ms. Anderson received financial support from an anonymous philanthropic source between the first and second pilot which enabled the purchase of camping equipment and a purpose-built trailer to transport the equipment and food for the camps.

One further social enterprise project Ms. Anderson is working on is establishing a mother and children's camp for all Aboriginal mothers and children in Yued Country but particularly those who have or are experiencing domestic violence. To establish the facility, Ms. Anderson has purchased a 40 Ha block that adjoins Yallalie Downs with a house on it as well as physical evidence that that the block has a level of cultural significance. Her aspiration is that the site and camps will be a place where mothers through connection with the spirituality of their culture and each other are able with their children, to reconnect with the cultural values and beliefs of their First Nation's heritage.

A crucial element in the sustainability of the social enterprise camps is funds to continue delivery. Rather than trying to rely on ongoing grants, Ms. Anderson has developed a business plan where a

¹ www.beemurra.com.au/youth camp/

commercial Camping on Country tourism enterprise will provide the necessary financial support for the social enterprise.

To this end, Ms Anderson has engaged with Tourism WA to contribute to developing camp sites and ablutions on Yallalie Downs. As part of the project, Ms. Anderson is aiming to raise additional funds to build an Astronomy viewing platform to enhance visitor experiences during the planned for regular Yued Astronomy activities.

In turn, Ms. Anderson and her grandfather, Mr. Kevin Barron, along with the Beemurra Corporation Committee are continuing to explore opportunities in the agriculture sector. The Beemurra cattle backgrounding business for cattle producers continues to be well supported by clients and has built on its reputation as an efficient low stress program which brings the animal up to commercial value in a shorter time period than other such backgrounding businesses.

To add further value, Ms. Anderson is examining ways to increase carrying capacity without compromising the quality or service Beemurra delivers. One option she is investigating is if Native grasses can be used and if the grasses offer a better alternative than non-native pastures. This approach has synergies with her grandfather's aspiration to produce native food and botanicals on Yallalie Downs with a long-term plan to incorporate value adding processing on farm to supply domestic and international markets.

Another activity, Ms. Anderson has been involved in with the NEDS project officer with Mr Miles providing the business development and the Creative Director of Gardiner Street Arts, Ms. Nyree Taylor was a 10 week creative course for local Aboriginal people in Moora. The program was well received by participants and other people in the broader Moora community to the extent that the Collective was seeking further funding to continue the program. Iluka Resources has agreed to fund the venue costs for the program until the end of 2022.

Madeline has also continued her growth in the Astrotourism industry by being one of the three Yued people involved in consulting for the Star Tracks films. This astronomy based television series was a unique opportunity that has captured Aboriginal stories and culture that are closely linked with the night sky. This important heritage reconnects Aboriginal people with country, maintains their cultural traditions and provides background for their cultural and Astrotourism enterprises on country.

In addition to all these activities, Ms. Anderson is the Beemurra Corporation Business Manager and in November 2021 was appointed Chairperson of the Noongar Land Enterprises (NLE) Group that represents six Noongar landholding groups with the aim to increase representation to at least 24 landholding groups.² At the same time, she is a mother of two teenage children and the wife of a husband who works FIFO in the mining industry.

² www.noongarlandenterprise.com.au



Yallalie Downs offers visitors a sense of connection with the earth, reaching the top of the crater one experiences the soft winds above the crater carry the scent of Yued country.

Tall gums and waterholes offer a unique nyoongar station story. Beermurra has begun to transform the landscape back to its original grasses offering an enhance experience for guests who choose to stay at the station. As both Caravan Camping and Aboriginal tourism continues to grow Yallalie would offer a unique experience for the region.

BAC Goals

- Building a financial base for community development activities.
- Promote community development in the areas of education, health, employment, and welfare to the community.
- Aid better educational outcomes, training and employment opportunities.
- Support promotion of language and culture.
- Hold land title in its own right and use the land for the benefit of the community. Registered in 1998, working with a piece of land called yallalie Downs.



BEEMURRA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (BAC)

Farming • Cultural Experiences • Camping on Country



ACTIVITIES & EXPERIENCES

- Family
- Dark Sky Tourism / Nature base / Eco Tourism
- Aboriginal Tourism
- Wildflower Market
- Young Adventurer Market
- International Tours to experience Tap Sticks & Jewellery Making.

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ACTIVITIES & EXPERIENCES

- Meteor Crater Discovery
- Waterholes / Native Grasslands / Birdwatching
- Cattle / Farm tours / Rotational Grazing tours / Hands on experience / Tag a Long Tour.
- Aboriginal Astronomy.
- Bushfood/ 15 local flora species Trail Orchids / Hiking / Photography
- Tapping Sticks / Jewellery Making.



Case study 2.

Ms. Donnelle Slater- Ngala Koolangka Kaadadjin (NKK) (Our kids Learning)

Ms. Slater and her innovative approach to improving Aboriginal education attainment was also featured in the Initial NEDS Evaluation case studies. She has had over 25 years' experience as a teacher and was motivated to develop an Aboriginal education program due to her continuously seeing many Aboriginal students enter High School at year seven with little or no literacy and numeracy skills.

Since the initial NEDS evaluation, Ms. Slater has continued to manage the Aboriginal education pilot at the Brookton District High School. She also made several presentations on the program to Wheatbelt Principals, the Regional Director and executives in the Department of Education. In addition, Ms. Slater has built the capacity of the Brookton District High School's Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) as well as conducting workshops for AIEO's from other Wheatbelt schools.

While the NKK pilot program was delivering positive results in terms of attendance and academic achievement, including five of the Aboriginal students attaining above average Naplan results, the schools and Education Department did not have funding to scale up the pilot program in the Wheatbelt.

However, there has been better progress with the reading and numeracy resources that Ms. Slater was developing for the education program. These resources grounded in education research, are written in Aboriginal English or dual language and are culturally aligned. This part of the program is being developed as Ms. Slater's business model, where Ms. Slater will enter the education consultancy sector and the sale or licensing of the various resources will be a revenue component of the consultancy package. Correspondingly, the resources will be commercially available to schools that wish to increase the levels of Aboriginal content in the curriculum.

The director of Hive Publishing³, Mr. Blake Innes⁴, has assisted Ms. Slater further in the creative development of the education resources and will proceed with an initial print run of 500 copies of the first resource, "Five Kangaroos". Moreover, Mr. Innes enthusiastic response to Ms. Slater's work has markedly increased Ms. Slater's confidence in her own creativity while her involvement with Hive Publishing has allowed greater freedom to develop and work on additional education resources. These include audio booklets spoken in dual language which can be used in conjunction with the written resource and Noongar specific nursery rhymes for pre-school children and lower primary students.

Case study 3

Mr. Rob Miles. Ballardong/Yued NEDS Project Officer, Director of Six Seasons Connect.

In the fourth year of NEDS funding, Mr. Miles worked for RDA Wheatbelt's NEDS program on a contract basis which ensured that he continued to deliver services to clients across Ballardong and Yued Country but was also able to commit time to developing his own business Six Seasons Connect.

³ HiveMind Press is a supported self-publisher. Provides publishing services to clients who otherwise might not be able to navigate the complicated and competitive world of trade publishing. The process is about the project and helping creators complete to the integrity of their vision. Hive Publishing works extensively with Aboriginal clients and provide a professional and comprehensive experience for the client. Hive Publishing handles the ISBN registrations and copyright admin, but the ownership is always with the client. If the client chooses to sell with Hive Publishing will receive 70% of the net profits of their work.

⁴ Mr. Blake Innes has a Ph.D from the Centre of Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University and has spent 10 years working in a culturally secure environment.

NEDS delivery

Mr. Miles acknowledged that accepting responsibility for delivery of NEDS services in Yued as well as Ballardong Country did mean that he had to be more strategic with his time and find a balance between NEDS and developing his own business. Nevertheless, he continued to sign up new clients in both regions and initiate discussions and activities around new community and individual enterprises. The need to manage his time more efficiently has led him to working more closely with people within networks that he has developed over the past four years. In the process he has focused on supporting and developing their skills where necessary and allowing them to drive the delivery of the enterprise. Such was the case in the Gardiner Street Collective in Moora, where the delivery of the program on ground was undertaken by two local community members while his role was kept to the initial planning stages, introducing the business concepts to the participants and supporting the organisers where necessary.

Mr Miles assumed a role of an initiator of exploratory discussions as demonstrated when Mr. Miles recognised that there was a need for NEDS to engage with potential clients in the Shire of Dandaragan and specifically the Jurien Bay, Wedge Point areas of Yued Country. Although there had been a considerable level of engagement with Yued Country clients in and around the Shire of Moora there had been limited engagement undertaken in the western coastal areas of Yued Country.

To this end, Mr Miles organised and chaired a meeting between Elders and community representatives from the Jurien Bay area with representatives of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) that manage the Pinnacles Park along with a representative of WAITOC and Shire of Dandaragan's CEO.

In bringing these groups together, Mr Miles was able to develop a strategy moving forward structured on the needs or aspirations of each of them. For instance, the Elders wanted to see a greater Yued culture profile in the Pinnacles Park that directly involved their people in contributing to the cultural integrity of the area. Representatives of DBCA also recognised the need to have a greater Yued Culture profile in the Pinnacles Park precinct and were interested in establishing a Cultural Centre in the park's facilities as well as having Yued businesses to sell products and or provide cultural tours of the park.

The WAITOC representative highlighted the gap in cultural attractions and activities for tourists between the outer northern regions of Perth and Geraldton and the need to generate such attractions in the Dandaragan Shire. In turn, the CEO of the Shire of Dandaragan, while supportive of the concept, did not want to see an Aboriginal business move into the facilities and then fail.

In organising the meeting, Mr Miles was able to construct a process moving forward and engaging with local people which has resulted in a consultant being engaged to develop a comprehensive business plan / feasibility study for a tourism venture in the coastal region and a young Aboriginal person developing a cultural tourism business.

Six Seasons Connect

The change in NEDS delivery processes enabled Mr. Miles time to commit to his own business, Six Seasons Connect which also has a cultural tourism business, Dudja Dreaming, which will operate in and around the Shire of Toodyay and Bilya Gogular (Avon River) and is looking to build on the increasing interest in in the cultural tourism market.

At the same time, the business will be a vehicle for continuing Aboriginal start up business development and support post NEDS. To ensure this occurs, Mr. Miles has met with the General Manager of The Waalitj Hub (formerly the Wirra Hub), Mr Shane Devitt. The Waalitj Hub provides support to Aboriginal business in Perth and the northern and southern areas of WA but does not have a presence in the Wheatbelt. Mr. Devitt has agreed to engage Mr. Miles as service provider to

Aboriginal businesses in the Wheatbelt Region and provide access to Waalitj resources and facilities where necessary.

This arrangement will enable Mr. Miles to continue delivering the same business support as he has done in the NEDS program (with remuneration) as well as allowing him the time to work on his own business, Six Seasons Connect.

Further outcomes

In addition, there have been further outcomes attained which include the following projects.

Yued Astronomy



Continued expansion of the Yued Astronomy enterprise. With the funding from ICRAR, planispheres were provided to both Moora and Dandaragan communities at events held in July 2021 (approximately 60-80 people). They have also reached the hands of students at Dandaragan Primary School (20 students) and the Moora Youth Group (15 students). The students helped produce the artwork that is used on the planisphere.



Development of Ballardong Astronomy

The successful outcomes being generated by the Yued Astronomy enterprise as encouraged the development of a cultural astronomy enterprise in Ballardong Country. The Ballardong enterprise mirrors the Yued Astronomy enterprise and was facilitated by Ms. Carol Redford and Ms. Donna Vanzetti who had supported the development of the Yued enterprise. It has involved the Aboriginal Elders and communities, school students and Local Governments in the Shires of Tammin, Wyalkatchem and Beverley. Coordinator of the project is Ms. Rebecca Fitzgerald a local Ballardong Noongar, who has undertaken consultation with Elders and communities in each location as well as assisting with the school incursions and organisation of events.

In addition to the success of the event, Ms. Fitzgerald has expressed interest in creating a tourism enterprise around Ballardong Astronomy.



A young aspiring Yamaji- Ballardong artist, Ms. Catrina Smith was contracted to work with the students to create the art for the Ballardong planisphere.

As the following feedback indicates, the project is being well received by those who have participated in the events.

Ballardong Astrotourism Project:

The crisp cool weather last night provided perfect clear conditions for the students from Tammin and Wyalkatchem schools to enjoy an evening of stargazing at the magical Yorkrakine Rock. Under the backdrop of a waxing crescent moon representatives from Astrotourism WA treated the kids to a laser presentation showcasing some interesting and unique constellations representing several Australian animals.



A big thankyou to the RDA Wheatbelt, Astrotourism WA and the Shire of Wyalkatchem for partnering with us to make this project possible. We would also like to acknowledge the Ballardong Elders who have been involved in this project to date as well as both the Tammin Primary School and Wyalkatchem District High School for their support. (Shire of Tammin face book (6/5/22)

Feedback from school principals also attest to the success of the project.

Good afternoon

I would like to thank you for a brilliant night last night, you catered for us so well. Our students were engaged and enthralled. Thank you for sharing your history with us. This was a fantastic event and I am very proud to have been part of it.

Thank you so very much.

Kind regards

Louise Davidson

PRINCIPAL

Wyalkatchem District High School

Hi Donna (and all involved in this fantastic event)

I too would like to thank you for allowing our school and community to engage in this terrific event! The students have been abuzz with stories of stars today 😊

Kind regards

Yvonne Darcey

Principal Tammin Primary School

Kaya Donna, Jacinta, Aliesha and Gemma

As a school principal I wish to personally congratulate you and everyone else involved thus far with this project. The ability to connect to Aboriginal culture, languages and stories through this project

is so special and needed. I believe many of the outcomes will everlasting and will develop a rich, sensitive cultural connectedness for everyone who gets the chance to participate.

Regards

Adrian Lister

Principal

Beverley District High School

Gardiner Street Creative Collective.

The Gardiner Street Creative Collective project was initially intended to operate as a 10 week creative program for Aboriginal people in the Shire of Moora. Due to its success the Gardiner Collective Art Director has sought and acquired additional funding for the program to continue running one day a week until the end of 2022. The ongoing venue funding has been provided by Iluka Resources.



York Aboriginal Community

York Aboriginal community members are continuing to explore options to enable the establishment of a local corporation that will bring cohesiveness to community aspirations in the arts and tourism sectors. This is motivated by the successful outcomes derived from the York creative pop-up studio project that occurred in late 2020.

Moora Drive to the Future Project

Moora Drive to the Future project is being delivered on Yued Country in Moora and is supported by Iluka Resources and the Ngala Wele Karla NEDS project. Due to the lack of any public transport in regional areas a driver's licence is imperative for any business enterprise owner, or for most employment opportunities. It is also recognised that the costs involved in paying for the training and permits is beyond the reach of most disadvantaged people.

This exciting program has been developed to get people their licence, with an additional incentive in that Iluka Resources is then providing employment opportunities.

The WA Police and Community Youth Centres (PCYC) is delivering the program, which includes lessons with a driving instructor and the supervised driving lessons with volunteers from Iluka Resources in order to complete the required 50 hours of supervised driving practice needed to pass the Practical Driving Assessment.

Participants also receive assistance sourcing the documents they need to prove their identity to get a learner's permit and the permits, tests, log books etc required to complete the driving program, all at no cost.

The NEDS component of the project supported 16 young people to attend safety and skills sessions as well as assistance with attaining documents/permits etc and delivered driving lessons.

An ongoing benefit of the program is that Iluka Resources has committed to delivering this program for the 2022-23 period and anticipates at least one more year. With the outcome aims of 15 licenced drivers per period, this program will have an ongoing benefit to the local community economically and socially.



Further Learnings

As documented in the initial evaluation, literacy and numeracy issues can be a challenge for clients to understand key elements in business and financial management. To counter these issues, Mr Miles has developed a business workbook that has translated and de-jargonised the mainstream language.

Family and cultural responsibilities and expectations also continue to present as constraints for NEDS clients progressing the development of their businesses. And yet, some of the NEDS clients have when they could, continued to pursue their business aspirations.

The NEDS program showed that there were several barriers confronting clients from potentially participating in the program. These barriers included them not having and/or being able to attain a driver's licence, or access to vehicle and/or not being able to afford fuel for the vehicle to attend a workshop. To address these barriers, Mr. Miles, either provided the transport or ensured the workshop was easily accessible by other means.

A key issue confronting NEDS clients and Mr. Miles in the fourth year of NEDS was the adverse effect COVID had on the program. The opening of WA borders along with the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant has resulted in higher rates of infections among clients which has led to a workshop and meetings being cancelled.

Most certainly, the greatest barrier for NEDS clients is accessing finance for capital investment and/or initial operating expenditure as was detailed in the literature. With little or no personal equity for security, derived from home ownership or other means, the clients have very few if any lending options open to them. This includes Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) which although established to provide financial access for Indigenous businesses appears to still require some form of security for loans. The other issue is that some of the clients need only relatively small amounts of funding which precludes them from approaching the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) which tends to service large funding applications.

On the other side of this issue is that many NEDS clients did not wish to go to the path of either setting up a loan or using a loan facility which would require them to repay the loan with interest. It would seem that the core reason for not doing so was the 'shame' they would experience in either not

understanding the process or having gone through the process being rejected for the loan or unable to meet the fiduciary requirements.

This is a critical issue particularly for micro and small Indigenous business start-ups in regional, rural remote areas and does require attention.

Another challenge that has come to the fore in the NEDS program is the need to build the clients self-confidence and self-belief. The lack of confidence that can override the passion of client's aspirations is drawn from a range of sources such as low literacy and numeracy skills or limited education attainments and the acute socio-economic disadvantage that has characterised their life. But perhaps the greatest factor affecting client's self-confidence is the historical dismissal of their culture and heritage which has in turn had an adverse impact on their own perceptions of sense of self and place in society.

Building NEDS clients self-confidence has in hindsight constituted a fundamental element of the program and of the work Mr. Miles as project officer and other contracted consultants have undertaken. It can be seen as a significant influence on what Mr. Miles described as 'a slow burn' in moving client's aspirations from ideas to reality that has necessitated Mr. Miles providing continuing mentoring to many of the clients during which he cultivated a relationship of trust.

From inception, trust has been at the heart of the NEDS program and arguably has differentiated the NEDS program from other Indigenous business development programs. Additionally, it could be said that the layering of trust relationships between RDA Wheatbelt, Mr. Miles and NEDS clients has, as described by RDA Wheatbelt's Regional Director, Mrs. Mandy Walker, shown the NEDS program to be a tool for reconciliation.

The key lesson that can be drawn from the four years of the NEDS program is that in order to address the multiple socio-economic disadvantages confronting Aboriginal people, it is the Aboriginal people who need to lead the processes from the front with the background support of non-Aboriginal people, public and philanthropic agencies as enablers not owners of the process.

Where to next?

What has become apparent in the course of the NEDS program is an increasing interest and desire of Aboriginal people to start a business or community enterprise within Ballardong and Yued communities. The rising momentum that characterised the third year of the program due largely to the relationships Mr. Miles developed has continued through the four years. The challenge is to ensure that with the cessation of funding and the program that there remains some form of Aboriginal business development support across Ballardong and Yued Country and the Wheatbelt Region in general.

To this end, the RDA Wheatbelt Research Evaluation Project Support (REPS) Officer approached the Waalitj Hub which had been part of the NEDS support network, to give a presentation on the NEDS program. The intention was to explore if there was an option to for the Waalitj Hub to fill the impending gap in the Wheatbelt. The Waalitj Hub is an organisation that:

*"...is here to assist the Indigenous business sector thrive in WA. We provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wanting to start, grow or sustain their businesses. With our in-house business coaching – plus direct access to independent, professional support – we inspire and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build their business capability."*⁵

⁵ <https://www.wf.org.au/waalitj-hub/>

Although the Waalitj Hub has a presence in some regional and remote areas in WA, it does not have any presence in the Wheatbelt. As a result of the RDA Wheatbelt REPS Officer's presentation and strong endorsement of Mr. Miles record in the program and his business development competencies, the General Manager, Mr Shane Devitt organised a meeting with Mr. Miles.

The outcome of this meeting was that Mr. Miles will be a business development service provider (part time) for the Waalitj Hub in the Wheatbelt Region and that in the immediate future, the Waalitj Hub would organise a joint workshop with Mr. Miles in the region for existing and new clients along with ongoing support.

Essentially, it is anticipated that this arrangement will ensure the continuation of the business support Mr. Miles has delivered through the NEDS program and be able to build on the foundations that NEDS has generated.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the outputs and outcomes of the NEDS program over the past four years it is clear that there was a gap and/or a need for business development support in the Wheatbelt; there was and is considerable interest among the region's Aboriginal population in starting a business and/or community enterprise; and if the region's Aboriginal people are given the time along with the necessary assistance and guidance, they are able to activate an enterprise.

Of note with the program was that it evolved from the initial mainstream framework that had been laid out to that of a more culturally sensitive framework which was a better 'fit for purpose'. This shift occurred because RDA Wheatbelt was prepared to empower Mr. Miles with a high level of autonomy and support him and his initiatives through the delivery process. Alternately, Mr. Miles was prepared to accept the responsibility of the autonomy and shape the program to meet where each of the clients were coming from in terms of their confidence, understanding and existing skills and knowledge.

Although actual outcomes from the program have been more conservative than initially forecast, it is important to recognise that projected outcomes were very optimistic and were made without a robust culturally based understanding of the challenges that would emerge during the delivery process.

That being said, the flexibility that characterised the program's administration and delivery methods along with the Australia Governments Department of Social Service (DSS) preparedness to accommodate such adjustments within the funding agreement has put in place a legacy that can be built on. On reflection, without the DSS funding and readiness to support the NEDS program, it is highly likely that the enterprises that have been activated or on the verge of implementation, may have remained a distant and perhaps unrealisable dream for those who participated in the NEDS program.

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