



Case Study I “INCLUSIVE & COLLABORATIVE” - COORDINATED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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BOURKE’S SUMMER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES DEMONSTRATE HOW COLLABORATION DRIVES COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Challenging times for communities can be seasonal. We can spot them on the horizon. We can work together to prepare for the challenges when they come. We can pull together to meet those challenges. But when one challenge has passed, the next season sits beyond the horizon. The weather will always change, but we can take what we learn from previous seasons to better understand how to better prepare for the next ones.

This case study offers insights from a successful program of youth engagement activities run through the Maranguka Community Hub in Bourke, NSW. The collaboration focussed on creating positive activities for children and young people, and contributed to outcomes such as increased school attendance, reductions in property crime and legal actions against young people, and improved relationships between the local police and the community.

The experience shows how service providers in Bourke can work in a coordinated way to support the interests and aspirations of children and young people. This way of working can feel different, yet the experience of this case studies shows that, when challenges arise, the collaborative structures available in Bourke enable the community and their supporters to successfully work together.

The Maranguka Community Hub enables collaboration around achieving the goals set by the Bourke Tribal Council in the *Growing Our Kids Up Safe Smart Strong* strategy. This includes working with community members, service providers, and other government and non-government organisations.



PARTNERS

The summer program of youth engagement activities in Bourke was a collaboration between the community and many of the service providers funded to work in Bourke. This includes the local Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC), CatholicCare and Mission Australia. It involved support from Dusseldorp Forum and the Mindaroo Foundation, Indigenous organisations BlakFit Fitness and Dinawan’s Connection, and was coordinated through the Maranguka Community Hub. One of the hopes for the future is for more of the various organisations aiming to support children and young people in the Bourke community to take part. As CatholicCare’s Buddy Moore said “All community stakeholders should be involved.”

A COORDINATED PROGRAM OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Towards the end of 2022, community leaders in Bourke identified a problem. More and more kids were getting into trouble with police and weren't going to school. Discussions with service providers through Maranguka revealed that, with the Summer School Holidays coming up, there was a real danger of the problem getting worse. A collaboration with service providers in the April 2022 school holidays had been successful, so Tracey Edwards from Maranguka and Uncle Buddy Moore from CatholicCare approached the officers running the local PCYC and asked them to partner on a program of activities to engage local children and young people.

The Maranguka Community Hub on Mitchell Street and PCYC on the corner of Wilson and Hope Streets became the two central focal points for the suite of activities, aimed primarily at children and young people up to 18, along with picnic and barbecue spots along the local river. Key collaborators BlakFit Fitness and CatholicCare helped design and run the program.

Activities were selected by asking the kids what they wanted to do, and a large focus was put on ensuring that there was always an adult or elder the kids already knew helping lead the activity. There was a good vibe amongst the service providers and community members involved. As one elder said, "Everyone got involved, slotted in and did their bit – we worked as a team and wasn't bumping heads with each other."

As part of the program, local young people participated in culturally appropriate and interesting activities such as painting art programs, boxing, culture camps, dancing, barbecues, basketball and touch footy. Each activity involved community members and service providers working in a way that was centred around creating a positive experience for the young people.

For police officers, this meant leaving their weapons at the station and focussing on taking part, building relationships, and supporting the community members running the activities. As George Dickson from Bourke PCYC said, it's important for service providers to "allow kids to see you make mistakes, so you are relatable and not seen above them, different or better, like falling over playing basketball."

The participation and resources of police and the PCYC was a crucial factor in the success of the program. Police agreed to keep the PCYC open later each evening, including making more staff available and to participate in more of the activities that the kids wanted. This prevention-based approach helped change the relationship between police and young people in Bourke for the better.

The Maranguka Community Hub is a place for community members and service providers to connect in Bourke, to "have a yarn with people" as Natalia Smith says. A crucial connection point are the daily "check-ins" where local service providers are invited to share emerging challenges and collaborate with others on the solutions.



"We recently highlighted to the service sector that during school holiday times is a peak time where services are just using a standard service delivery of case management, with little to no activities. This creates boredom and leads to anti-social behaviour."

James Moore

"I like that there were 100% active engagement of youth. There was an amazing collaboration."

Melissa Kirby

CULTURALLY SAFE & ENGAGING ACTIVITIES

One of the landmark events for the program was a Christmas party and corroboree held just before Christmas. This event, hosted by the Maranguka Community Hub, set a good tone and atmosphere for the rest of the Summer. It allowed community members, young people, police, and other service providers to connect informally and socially, outside of the roles or expectations through which they might usually interact.

Another significant event was a cultural camp to the coast hosted by Uncle Buddy Moore and CatholicCare, supported by local parents and police. This was an opportunity for young people to have a unique experience, centred around their culture. Fathers in attendance were invited to step up as positive male role models - they helped keep kids in check, including disciplining kids, when necessary, outside of the more punitive structures that the kids had become accustomed to.

More frequent and regular activities over the course of the program included Arts activities and Spirit Program cultural camps run by Maranguka, boxing through BlakFit Fitness, and rugby games through the PCYC. Various parents and elders participated in these activities, including being referees, or took advantage of the kids being out of the house to get some much-needed housework done. Buses were made available to take kids home following the after-hours activities, including movie nights, something else that parents and carers didn't need to worry about.

The successful experience of the collaborative holiday program came with positive media stories in the local press. "I love it. It gives me goose bumps," said James Moore of the positive news coverage. James has a long history working in youth engagement in Bourke, and organised a cultural dance activity with Dinawan's Connection as part of the Summer's activities. Joshua Toole, who ran the BlakFit Fitness activities said of the positive stories, "(It) makes my soul sing. It's great seeing a community, especially the one that you grew up in, excel in any area."

Overall, the program focused on having "plenty of activities run throughout holidays for the youth and families in the community to participate in," Buddy Moore said. Focusing on activities that kids enjoyed doing helped boost participation. The involvement of parents, carers and elders helped connect the young people to culture and country.

"I love it. It gives me goose bumps"

James Moore

"I liked the cultural stuff where the kids got to do painting and johnnycake making. I think that cultural stuff is important because there's not a lot of it."

Tania Edwards

"The services we provide them and the rapport and understanding of the environment that these kids come from worked together to create an appealing engagement and rapport building with the Bourke community."

Joshua Toole

"They take them out camping, or down to the river with barbecues. They love that, the kids."

Noelene Nean

MEETING STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

All activities undertaken by Maranguka work towards the meeting the shared goals and strategic outcomes from Maranguka’s *Growing Our Kids Up Safe, Smart and Strong* strategy, first developed in 2014. These goals for Aboriginal children, young people, parents, men and service providers represent the community’s leadership and vision for how government and non-government organisations can support the aspirations of the Aboriginal community in Bourke.

In general, the activities in the youth engagement program align closely with Maranguka’s shared goals for children, young people, parents, and service providers.

For children and young people, the program focused on Aboriginal children feeling safe, respected, and connected to Country; being engaged in positive activities that build life skills; and having strong support from peers and mentors.

For parents, through the engagement program, parents were able to support their children’s connection to culture and country; men were able to nurture their children, family, and community as custodians of their culture.

In terms of **goals for services**, which are operationalised in the *Maranguka Principles*, they were able to ensure Aboriginal people were involved in the design and delivery of services and supports to Aboriginal people.

Community level data collected during March 2023, compared to March 2022, gives an indication of the outcomes of the program (and other community-led activities):

- 50-60 kids attending PCYC on Friday and Saturday nights.
- 45% reduction in property crime.
- 64% reduction in legal action rate.

KEY THEMES

In preparing this case study, people involved in leadership roles in the community observed that the three core strengths of the program were:

- 1) Better strategic coordination between service providers.
- 2) A positive reset in the relationship between police and the community.
- 3) Positive role modelling by men, whether parents, elders, police officers or other service providers.

The *Maranguka Principles*, created by the Bourke Tribal Council with the Maranguka Cross Sector Leadership Group in 2020, are intended to be written into service contracts to guide government and non-government partners who want to support the implementation of Maranguka’s *Safe, Smart and Strong* strategy.



“Maranguka has influenced change to service delivery and systems change. Elevating the voice of the community from a grassroots perspective. They continue to role model inclusiveness with all their work, which has been led by the Bourke Tribal Council.”

James Moore

COORDINATED SERVICE DELIVERY

One of the key problems identified by the Bourke Tribal Council at the start of their Maranguka journey, supported by a NSW Ombudsman's Office report, was the lack of coordination and collaboration between services funded to support the people of Bourke.

Most people interviewed for this case study directly or indirectly referred to the way that service providers and other organisations worked together with community members to deliver activities. This could be as simple as team members from Maranguka, Legal Aid and Minderoo putting on a barbecue, or as strategic as the way Maranguka, CatholicCare and the PCYC intentionally designed the overarching schedule of events together.

“The kids had fun. They really enjoyed it. They were able to get transport home with the bus, so that was really good.”

Tania Edwards

In particular, the involvement of community members and elders in running the activities, and as participants, helped children and young people feel safe and connected to culture. These adults became crucial connection points between the children and service providers.

IMPROVED COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

An increase in conflict between police and Aboriginal children and young people was a clear indicator that the Summer Youth Engagement Program was needed. Local police rose to the challenge, putting on extra staff to keep the PCYC open longer hours, leaving their weapons in the station, and working with community leaders to deliver programs across the Summer in an environment without bias or judgement.

The results were significant. “The community feels different,” a local police officer observed in March. Once kids had built a relationship with police officers, instead of running away at the sight of them, kids would run towards them to say hello.

These relationships are seen as having made a significant contribution to improved justice outcomes between March 2022 and March 2023. When police focus on relationships and prevention and coordinating their activities through the Maranguka Community Hub, the results speak for themselves.

POSITIVE ADULT ROLE-MODELLING

The role of adults in providing positive role-models for children and young people is an essential part of the Maranguka strategy. Importantly, Aboriginal parents, carers and elders played a significant role in the Summer's activities, from design to delivery. This included attending culture camps, barbecues and participating in arts and sporting camps.

The role played by non-Indigenous adults was also important, particularly those without existing positive relationships with the children and young people. By stepping back and becoming participants and support people, they were able to build good relationships of their own and support the kids to engage positively with culture and country.

“More leadership, More Education. More employment. Having a voice in the community.”

Buddy Moore

REFLECTION

In reflecting on the outcomes of this program, some of the important concerns included the need for post-school activities that run out-of-hours outside of school holidays; the impact of discontinued funding for successful programs such as Our Place; and the impact on young people of technology and online gambling. Specific recommendations for the next school holiday period included the need for activities aimed at older kids and parents held in spaces distinct from those for younger kids.

“There’s still the same 15 people. Still the same core group helping. We need to see more of the services whose role it is to engage with the kids.”

George Dickson

The reflection process also raised some important questions for Maranguka and our collaborators to reflect on and discuss together. These include:

- How can more service local providers be encouraged to engage with Maranguka in the planning of future activities for children and young people, especially local schools?
- What are the pros and cons of transporting young people to and from activities, as well as providing food for participants? How can this be built into activity planning?
- What community-engaged support, particularly relating to education, can be developed for young people who are returning to community?
- Should community members be formally remunerated (paid in some way) for their participation in collaborative service delivery?

The ideal forum for exploring these will be the Maranguka Working Groups (currently Early Childhood and Parenting; 8-18 Year-Olds; and the Role of Men). When held regularly, these are spaces for service providers and community members to reflect on past successes and create strategies to deal with emerging challenges.

FACING FUTURE CHALLENGES

The key takeaway from Bourke’s program of school holiday activities is the need for ongoing collaboration that is embedded in the regular practice of Maranguka and our partner organisations until it becomes second nature.

Even though this way of working can feel very different, the collaborative structures created by the Bourke Tribal Council ensure that when challenges come up, the community and their supporters are able to mobilise and work together on solutions that work.

Community needs to be involved in the decisions. Not just services or boards or things like that. Everyone should have a say. Even if they go and knock on people’s doors to let you know about things.

Tracey Edwards

To find out more about our history and work and how you can support us, visit the Maranguka Community Hub website: maranguka.org.au

This case study has been produced by Maranguka, with the support of Dusseldorp Forum. We are grateful to the local elders, parents, young people, and service providers who took part in this successful program. Special thanks goes to the community members who agreed to be interviewed for this case study, including Uncle Buddy Moore, Noelene Nean, Tania Edwards, Natalia Smith, James Moore, Jean Anne Edwards, George Dickson, Joshua Toole, Tracey Edwards and Melissa Kirby.
