



Youth Development for Young Indigenous Australians

A Discussion Paper
April 2003

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this Discussion Paper are Ausyouth's rather than those of the Commonwealth Government and are based on preliminary research undertaken by Ausyouth, on discussions with the people acknowledged on pages 78-79 and on responses to a consultation document addressing the same topic which was circulated in July 2002.

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CONTENTS

A note about terminology	iv
Introduction	1
Scope of this discussion paper	2
Organisation of paper	2
Distribution of consultation document, and responses	3
Section 1 Youth development	4
Principles of good practice in youth development	6
Section 2 Key themes: questions, responses and implications	11
2.1 Broadening the base for youth development activities	12
2.2 Positive youth development outcomes – beyond problem free	18
2.3 Respecting community identity and engaging community voice	22
2.4 Valuing and engaging young people now	26
2.5 Valuing and preserving Indigenous cultures and traditions	31
2.6 Volunteering for youth development: Indigenous and non-Indigenous	35
2.7 Collaborative partnerships	40
2.8 Building on strengths	44
Conclusions	48
Acknowledgments	49
References	52
The Ausyouth national project	53



A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

- (i) In this paper, the term '**Indigenous**' is used to describe people who identify as Australian Aborigines, as Torres Strait Islander Australians, or both. This is the terminology used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for collection of demographic data. It is acknowledged that some Australians who identify as 'Indigenous' would prefer to be called either Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or by a local or regional name (for example, Nyungar, Koori). As the issues raised in this paper are Australia wide, the term 'Indigenous' people is used for convenience.

- (ii) '**Youth development program provider organisation**' refers to the organisations, agencies and departments that provide structured youth development programs and activities. Some of the provider organisations, such as Scouts Australia, have as their core business the provision of youth development programs and run an extensive range of programs for young people in varying settings, including schools. Other provider organisations, for example St John Ambulance or Surf Life Saving Australia, do not have youth development as their core business, but provide opportunities for young people's involvement in the voluntary activities they offer.



INTRODUCTION

It is well recognised by Indigenous people that their younger generation **is** the future of Indigenous society and of Indigenous cultures. Substantial energy has been invested in reclaiming culture, building and revitalising communities and moving beyond day-to-day survival. The success stories tell us of the strength, resilience and determined commitment of Indigenous people to survive and thrive despite a legacy of dispossession which explains the widespread disadvantage amongst Australian Indigenous people today.

Nonetheless, the more positive experiences are not universal. In recent times Indigenous people have expressed serious concerns about the future of many of their communities, and the prospects for Indigenous young people. Compared with their non-Indigenous peers, a great many Indigenous young people face significant additional challenges as young people now and on the journey to adulthood – to the extent that, for some, it can literally be ‘a matter of life and death’.

On the evidence of almost all social indicators, Indigenous Australians as a category (that is, those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) experience extreme disadvantage compared with non-Indigenous groups. The forms that this disadvantage takes, and the reasons for it, are well documented.

Forty-nine percent of the Indigenous population is aged under 19. They suffer high and persistent levels of poverty, social and economic exclusion, and low rates of life expectancy. Youth suicide, especially amongst young men, has been on the increase. Indigenous young people (and adults) experience particular barriers in accessing employment and appropriate assistance in the areas of health, community services, education and training.

Racism continues to be a central issue. Many Indigenous people and Indigenous communities feel deprived of the capacity to be self-determining by racism within non-Indigenous society in Australia, and the way this is expressed through patronising control over how services or resources are provided for Indigenous people.

The National Strategies to Advance Reconciliation (*Overcoming Disadvantage*) appeal to all Australians to take up the challenge of making reconciliation a reality. A commitment to reconciliation involves recognising the reasons why Australia’s Indigenous people suffer disadvantage and actively seeking out ways that will assist them now and, as well, secure a better future. Concrete actions are needed, not just words.

Ausyouth believes that **youth development** (a concept which will be described in more detail in the following section) offers a potential way forward in making the invited contribution to the reconciliation process. It provides a framework for working with Indigenous young people, and with their communities.

Providers of youth development activities and programs, representing a collective of organisations which have committed to a ‘good practice’ approach, may be able to incorporate some of the actions outlined in the reconciliation document, *Overcoming Disadvantage* (‘All sectors’ on page 6*) into the youth development approach. However, youth development as an approach and practice applies more broadly than youth development program providers.

* Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000, *Overcoming Disadvantage*, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/overcoming_disadvantage/pg6.htm



Scope of this discussion paper

This discussion paper extends the directions set out in Ausyouth's consultation document circulated in July 2002, incorporating the views and perspectives of people who provided responses.

The purpose of the discussion paper is to promote awareness of issues that face young Indigenous Australians and have a bearing on how youth development experiences and activities might be made more accessible and culturally relevant for them (whether they are based in an urban environment, or live in regional centres, or have a more traditional lifestyle in remote Indigenous communities).

In many instances, programs and activities that give a public face to youth development in Australia have been designed for a particular time and context (in which cross-cultural sensitivities and inclusive processes did not have an explicit profile on the policy agenda). In other words, youth development activities in Australia are 'mainstream'. **As youth development** is implemented in Australia, it is important that, as a significant contemporary direction in social policy both here and abroad, it actively embraces our nation's Indigenous young people, and makes in the process the invited contribution to the reconciliation agenda.

This discussion paper does not set out or recommend a detailed, integrated youth development strategy for Indigenous young people in Australia. This would require comprehensive action across all three tiers of government, and involve virtually all sectors including the broader community. An essential element of such an exercise would be broad ranging consultation with Indigenous people, (both younger and older), Indigenous organisations and communities. This has not been possible within Ausyouth's timeframe.

Rather, it is hoped that the information generated from the initial discussion about youth development, and the responses to it, will provide preliminary assistance for programs, organisations and services which are keen to better engage with Indigenous young people across a range of settings where a youth development ethos might be applied.

Organisation of paper

Section 1, describes the concept of youth development and how it works, and the developmental goals sought for young people through their involvement in youth development programs and activities. The principles for good practice in youth development are also briefly outlined to provide some context for the consultation questions, and the responses, in the following section.

(More comprehensive discussion about good practice in youth development is to be found in *Good Practice for Youth Development. A Framework of Principles**, at www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth/)

Section 2 presents the range of broad themes on which input was sought from stakeholders about ways to improve the range and relevance of youth development opportunities and activities available to Indigenous young people. The questions were intended to gather views about existing good practice, and also strategies and actions that have been successful in achieving better outcomes for Indigenous people, particularly young Indigenous people. Input was also sought on any other issues people wished to raise, or innovative ideas they believed had potential.

* Ausyouth (2001), *Good Practice in Youth Development. A Framework of Principles*, Ausyouth, Adelaide



Discussion about the responses is incorporated at the end of each relevant section. From this, a series of implications are drawn for applying the youth development framework in an Indigenous context.

Quotes and comments from the responses have not been attributed to individuals.

Distribution of consultation document and responses

Copies of the initial consultation paper were distributed to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission;
- Commonwealth, state and territory departments with responsibility for Indigenous affairs;
- Commonwealth, state and territory departments with responsibility for youth affairs;
- key contacts with responsibility for administration of education for Indigenous people in state and territory government departments of education;
- Catholic Education Office in each state and territory;
- independent schools authorities in each state and territory;
- Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs;
- youth development provider organisations (including Ausyouth's advisory networks);
- local government networks involved in programs for Indigenous people;
- land councils;
- Department of Family and Community Services (and state/territory counterparts);
- National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group;
- National Youth Roundtable;
- National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia;
- Forum of Youth and other youth affairs networks;
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The consultation paper was also provided to various other individuals, groups, organisations and networks who expressed an interest in this work, including a number of people who participated in a workshop on this topic which was conducted in Adelaide in March 2002.

Responses were received from providers of youth development programs, providers of youth services (for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people), from Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in government agencies, and from community based organisations. A number of responses received from non-Indigenous people had been compiled with the assistance and advice of an Indigenous person.

Many people indicated that they would have liked to respond, however were unable to meet the short timeframe. A number of these commented informally via letter, telephone or email that they supported the general principles of youth development drawn from Ausyouth's document *Good Practice in Youth Development*.

Many thanks to all those people who responded. Written responses are acknowledged on page 49.



SECTION 1

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

What is youth development?

In this discussion paper, **youth development** refers specifically to a strengths based approach which provides young people with positive opportunities and experiences that enable them to meet the challenges of their lives now, as young people, as well as prepare them for their future as adults.

As a community (in the sense of a broad social network), we aim to provide our young people – generally through the education system – with the sorts of skills, knowledge and attributes they need to belong, and to take an active citizenship role. Youth development as a specific ‘good practice’ approach complements young people’s formal education through activities that may be recreation, arts or adventure based and include voluntary service to the community.

There is strong research based evidence to suggest that, by providing youth development activities and programs in a way that engages with communities (in both the broad and narrow sense), we can make our communities stronger, more enjoyable places to live in, and also provide better supportive networks and opportunities for our young people. In other words, we are ‘building’ our communities. In strong communities, each and every member should be respected and valued. This is what an inclusive ethos really means.

A framework for working with young people and communities

Youth development, understood as an approach and practice, is quite a broad concept. It provides a framework for thinking about working with and involving young people when forming policy, and when providing services in a range of different environments. Schools, education and training institutions, health and social services, voluntary services, outreach agencies, correctional services and employment and labour market programs all have scope to incorporate a youth development approach in their practice.

Youth development programs and activities

Countless activities that involve young people could be said to be developmental and to guide positive growth. However, for youth development to be understood as a common practice – a way of doing things that achieves successful results and produces common outcomes for young people – there are some important criteria to be applied.

Youth development activities need to be available to an individual young person over a substantial period of time, and they need to aim to achieve all three of the following goals:

- personal/individual development, including teamwork and leadership skills;
- skill development through activities that are structured and sequenced to build on previous learning outcomes;
- strengthened connection with community through relationships, participation and contribution to the community.



When young people are provided with age-relevant activities that enable them to 'learn by doing' over a period of time; to interact with other young people and adults in their community to pursue a common purpose; and to develop personal skills in a safe and enjoyable environment, there can be positive impacts for both the young person and for the community.

Youth development organisations

In Australia, a number of organisations offer youth development programs and activities such as:

- voluntary, not-for-profit community based organisations, many of which have been around for years (for example Scouts);
- organisations that involve young people in the provision of voluntary services to the community (for example, St John Ambulance, Surf Life Saving, or Country Fire Service);
- government-supported programs such as the Australian Defence Force Cadets, or the Victorian Youth Development Program (which rely on adult volunteers).

What these organisations have in common is the opportunities they offer to young people to develop their skills and abilities, to build social networks, and to make a contribution to their community.

'Mainstream' bias

Historically, the involvement of Indigenous people in these activities has been limited. Youth development provider organisations offering recreational programs and activities to young people have designed their programs for the 'mainstream', that is, mainstream participants, in organisations supported by mainstream volunteers.

What should be noted in terms of volunteers, however, is that voluntary and unpaid activities undertaken by many Indigenous people make an enormous contribution to Indigenous society and the Australian community. Community connection has a central place in the values and practices of Indigenous communities.

Volunteering takes many forms and there are different cultural perceptions of what 'volunteering' is: much voluntary activity in both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous context does not have a high profile and goes unacknowledged.

In an Indigenous cultural context, because of this, and also because of a long history of exploitation, the mainstream idea of a volunteering ethos can have offensive connotations. Indigenous people rightly assert that much of the progress that has been made to improve the position of Indigenous communities and the life chances of individuals has been achieved through determined commitment and voluntary effort.

So, the issue is that the institutions in Australia which represent what might be called the 'youth development infrastructure', do not have high levels of Indigenous people's involvement. This discussion paper begins to explore ways to make these activities more inclusive, but it also seeks to promote discussion about alternatives to them so that young Indigenous Australians can access the opportunities they need. Mainstream youth development will not necessarily be their preferred option.



Principles of good practice in youth development

Guide to good practice in youth development

The 'good practice guide' (*Good Practice in Youth Development. A Framework of Principles*) was developed by Ausyouth to advance youth development as an approach and practice in Australia.

How was the good practice guide developed?

The good practice guide draws on a range of sources:

- extensive review of and reflection on Australian and international literature about youth development, youth work, community development and community service;
- wide ranging discussions and workshops with key youth development organisations;
- public forums held around Australia about youth development which included exploration of good practice.

Why focus on good practice?

The focus on good practice provides a means of identifying and explaining the key features of youth development organisations and programs.

They are a way of strengthening and supporting programs for young people, by guiding practice, and acting as benchmarks for organisational self assessment and directions for improvement. They are a **starting point**, not an end point. While it is anticipated that good practice will change over time, according to changing circumstances, different understandings, and new ways of doing things, it is anticipated that the intent of each principle is likely to remain the same.

What are the principles of the approach?

Good practice in youth development requires organisations and programs to have a commitment to the two overarching principles of **empowerment** and **conscious enterprise**.

- **Empowerment** of young people is both a goal and a process of the youth development approach.
- **Conscious enterprise** reflects the commitment we make to empower young people – that is, the structured and intentional things we do to enable them to achieve positive outcomes.

Young people want to belong and to be recognised for making a contribution. They need to be respected by peers, family and community, to learn coping and surviving skills, to have experiences that are meaningful and gratifying now, and to feel part of a social network. If positive developmental opportunities are not made available for young people, the outcomes for them may not be positive either. Conscious enterprise reflects the commitment of community to processes which empower, assist self determination, and create positive outcomes for young people.

The two overarching good practice principles, as well as the fourteen **underpinning** principles identified in the good practice document can be applied within policy, organisation and program environments – or in other words across three levels from planning through to practice.



- At the **policy** level, they are characterised by participatory approaches to youth development policy and co-ordinated, whole of government services relating to youth and community.
- Within the **organisational** sphere, good practice in youth development encourages the resourceful application of strategies to strengthen community based organisations or youth development service providers: this includes productive partnerships with broader community sectors, and commitment to participatory involvement by young people in a broad range of organisational processes and decisions.
- At the **program** level, a wide variety of activities and projects incorporate structured activities that challenge and extend young people, provide opportunities for them to learn and form supportive social networks, enable them to make a contribution and be valued as citizens, and assist them to reach their potential as individuals.

So, government planning across three tiers of government, organisational policy setting at international, national and local levels, and program design and delivery at the very practical 'coalface' level, can all apply principles of good practice in youth development.

Ideally, the youth development approach would span the three environments — resulting in a saturation of services and options within a community setting to cater for changing interests and developmental needs of young people.

In Australia, a major part of Ausyouth's strategy to promote the youth development approach has been to work with and assist youth development program provider organisations to improve the quality of the programs and activities they provide to young participants. Many of the organisations have adopted the 'good practice guide' as the basis for confirming that their practices are sound, or reviewing and improving the way they do things.

The fourteen principles

In many instances, adopting youth development as an approach will require not only a stated commitment of intent, but a cultural shift in values. The good practice guide identifies 14 underpinning principles of good practice as the basic foundation for organisations and programs consciously adopting a youth development ethos. These principles are not exhaustive; they are meant to raise the level of awareness about the youth development approach as well as guide and assist organisations and program leaders in its implementation.

Briefly stated, the guiding principles for good practice in youth development for organisations and programs are:

1. strengths based, positive youth development as the foundation for policy and program development;
2. participation of young people in all levels of planning and decision making;
3. an inclusive ethos;
4. an experiential model of learning that builds on capabilities and skills while maximising opportunities for fun and recognising age and developmental phases;
5. respecting community voice and identity;
6. encouraging communities to value and engage young people;
7. partnerships;
8. quality outcomes;



9. encouraging and respecting choice;
10. recognising the contribution of all stakeholders;
11. promotion that is ethical, honest and non-patronising (that is, that young people themselves have a clear understanding of what is being offered and what they can expect to get out of it);
12. providing opportunities for service to the community that are meaningful for both young people and the community;
13. maximising formal and community recognition of learning outcomes;
14. strengthening the interconnectedness of social networks.

The good practice guide elaborates on these principles, and outlines corresponding indicators that can confirm that policy, organisation or program processes reflect good practice. Alternatively, they might be used to suggest some actions that can be considered to improve the quality of outcomes for young people.

A guide - not rigid standards

The good practice guide has been compiled specifically for broad application in the Australian context. It is emphasised that the principles and indicators can be adapted to suit the diversity of various policy, organisational and program settings. They were not developed as rigid standards. We recognise that the application of the principles to specific environments or specific groups – such as young Indigenous Australians – needs further exploration.

The discussion and questions set out in the initial consultation document, and the responses which have been incorporated into this discussion paper provide a starting point.

Question 1

- Do you think that the youth development approach can be of value to Indigenous young people and Indigenous communities?

What the responses said

In general, responses supported the youth development approach and its potential value to Indigenous young people and their communities. Indeed, the framework has already been utilised by the Cape York Youth Development Strategy¹ which is currently in its initiating phase.

Nonetheless, there was a common concern that existing youth development programs and activities were indeed perceived as 'western' or 'mainstream'. As one youth development provider commented:

... the organisations that most clearly fit and are cited as examples ... involve very traditional programs and notions of volunteer service and it could be argued have a greater focus on developing discipline, following orders and procedures than in building individuality and an ability to think ... a very large cultural shift needs to take place in organisations and government agencies. Activities and programs need to be relevant to Indigenous young people as well as a much broader range of young people. They need to be developed with Indigenous people.

¹ *Cape York Youth Development Strategy*, Queensland Department of Employment and Training, 2003



From an Indigenous perspective, the target group for these programs was:

... mainly concentrated to those youth who have already gained an education, further developed their involvement with the wider society and have the access, resources and personal leadership personalities.

The principles for good practice in youth development were generally affirmed as a sound basis for program design. One Indigenous respondent believed that it was 'essential that a development approach incorporating the 14 principles be used'. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) endorsed a principled, strengths based approach, strengthened by a 'needs based' focus. Some of those ideas will be picked up in the ensuing discussion.

Responses in general recognised the critical importance of validating and customising intended program outcomes with Indigenous people themselves:

The concept as applied to Indigenous communities may need massaging; need to reconsider with communities otherwise [it] may be regarded as an imposition.

It needs to be recognised ... that Indigenous youth development must be premised on Aboriginal people's right to self determination. Consequently, Aboriginal people would need to be directly involved in program design and implementation and service delivery. Further, while youth empowerment is an important goal, non-Indigenous persons would need to be mindful of Aboriginal people's traditions and customs where Aboriginal elders/communities/families' respective duties and responsibilities are respected and not inhibited from continuing to be practised.

This last point, about consultation with Indigenous people, and respecting their views, is central to an ethos of **inclusivity**, and is a recurring theme throughout the responses.

Implications

Policy

- **Strengths based, holistic youth development, which is young person centred, addresses needs in all spheres of the young person's life.**

The challenge for youth development in the Indigenous context is to provide skills, activities and opportunities that young people would not otherwise be able to access. Simply because Indigenous young people require special assistance in some areas does not mean they should be precluded from other developmental opportunities.

Youth development is not about advantaging the already privileged, it is about seeking to achieve specific outcomes for all young people, regardless of their circumstances or starting point. Youth development is a holistic approach which is 'young person centred'. This means that specific developmental activities cannot simply be 'added on', but must be designed to take account of the young person's environment and unique circumstances. This point was strongly reinforced at Ausyouth's Future Directions Forum by an Indigenous speaker: "Aboriginality is not something you leave at the door".¹

¹ Tanya Hosch, speaking at Ausyouth's Future Directions in Youth Development Forum held in Sydney, July 4 2002.



Organisation

- **Inclusive ethos is demonstrated by enabling ownership by local communities, marketing and promoting in places where young Indigenous people are, and using role models Indigenous young people relate to.**

Unless specific efforts are made to work with and through local Communities and enable young Indigenous people to identify with youth development opportunities designed specifically with their interests in mind, perceptions that youth development activities are 'western' or 'mainstream' are likely to persist.

Program

- **Program design is undertaken in consultation with Indigenous young people to ensure that activities and processes are culturally sensitive and appealing.**

An inclusive ethos means that people planning programs and initiatives need to be open to the possibility of offering activities exclusively for young Indigenous people, customised to their unique circumstances and developmental challenges, and conducted in a way that best meets their needs.



SECTION 2

KEY THEMES: QUESTIONS, RESPONSES AND IMPLICATIONS

This section sets out the background discussion of themes and issues presented in the consultation paper, provides a commentary on the responses to the questions, and draws implications for policy, organisation and program environments.



2.1

Broadening the base for youth development activities

Non-Indigenous focus

On the basis of anecdotal evidence, young Indigenous Australians are not taking part in youth development programs and activities to the same extent as their non-Indigenous peers. There may be any number of reasons for this. One obvious one noted in the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce report, *Footprints to the Future*³, is that, in many locations, virtually nothing is available. From talking to various people, we have heard that some of the other reasons are:

- Most youth development activities are run by and for non-Indigenous people: they are not seen as welcoming.
- Indigenous parents may not have participated in a youth club or program, or have been involved with a voluntary community service when they were growing up.
- Young Indigenous people in rural and remote communities often have little opportunity to connect with mainstream voluntary services, or youth development provider organisations.
- Programs and activities have not been well known or promoted to Indigenous young people.
- Many Indigenous people cannot afford the cost of youth development programs and activities.
- What young people call 'the cool factor', that is, the activity is not seen as desirable or acceptable because trendsetters in the group do not see it that way.

Diversity of Indigenous young people

One of the issues that must be emphasised in catering for the needs of Indigenous young people – and committing to an inclusive ethos – is their diversity. Just over 70 per cent of all Indigenous people live in urban settings. Significant numbers of Indigenous people reside in country and regional centres; others maintain more traditional lifestyles in communities that are relatively remote. Regardless of geographic location, socio-economic disadvantage amongst Indigenous Australians is widespread.

Youth development activities may need to be designed and delivered differently, to meet different local needs and preferences, and to make programs and activities better resourced and more affordable. Affordability is an access and equity issue, so we need to think creatively about how to secure resources, and optimise the use of funding which is already available.

What opportunities are there to do things differently so that Indigenous young people can participate in programs and activities that enhance their strengths and capabilities? Improving their participation in mainstream youth development activity is only one answer. It is recognised that in many instances, this may not be the preferred position of Indigenous people (older and younger) themselves.

3 Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, *Footprints to the Future*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2001



A multi-faceted strategy

What seems to be called for is a multi-faceted strategy, incorporating the following elements:

- providing customised activities exclusively for Indigenous groups (that is, affirmative processes);
- expanding the existing base of programs and resources which could potentially apply a youth development approach;
- supporting communities to provide opportunities for a youth development approach to be used;
- providing resources for Indigenous communities to own, organise and control their own culturally-specific youth development programs and activities;
- improving access and inclusive practices of existing programs and providers (particularly in urban settings where providers of youth development activities and voluntary community organisations are well-established).

The point about the diversity of Indigenous young people is reiterated. It should not be assumed that all Indigenous young people can access mainstream youth development activities (or want to), nor that all Indigenous young people live traditional cultural lifestyles. The choice to be involved in youth development activities, and choices about the sorts of activities they would like to participate in, and where, must be choices exercised by the young people themselves.

Question 2

What do you think can be done to ensure that appropriate youth development opportunities for Indigenous young people are made available across a diversity of settings:

- urban?
- rural and regional centres?
- remote communities?

What the responses said

Many of the responses to these questions acknowledged the issues raised in discussion, particularly the recognition of the diversity of young Indigenous Australians, the need for a multi-faceted approach, the uniqueness of local circumstances, and the importance of seeking the views of the young people themselves:



The recognition of the similarities and differences across all 3 diverse settings is critical to the success of the program.

... consult young people on their key interests prior to initiating any programs; study key leisure activities in geographic locations and build in activities to incorporate skill development and capacity building; utilise key people in the Indigenous community to deliver programs to extend essential life skills and cultural knowledge.

Building better communication linkages between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and networks was another consistent theme:

Communication via accepted line of communication means difference between engagement or rejection.

Local ownership and leadership was considered a further imperative, as was direct consultation with young Indigenous people themselves about their interests, their aspirations, and their preferences:

... the key is that the opportunities are **appropriate** – that is, that young Indigenous Australians and the communities they come from are involved in the shaping and implementation of these opportunities. Clearly, promotion of these opportunities to ensure outreach to all interested parties is pivotal to their success as the need to work with existing structures already operating in this domain.

The importance of youth development programs being locally owned, but with basic program design flexible enough to accommodate all cultures, was another suggestion put forward from a youth development program provider whose Indigenous participation rate was around 20 per cent:

Ownership at local level [and] program should work for any cultural group and allow for difference, available to all youth and makes welcome all cultures.

Several responses talked about the desirability of greater mobility across the three environments (urban, rural and regional, and remote communities) and of building transition points, to create more possibilities via partnerships and organisational linkages. Other comments related to parental responsibility, the support required, and the critical involvement of family and members of the community in all activities:

... the ties to the family are particularly marked in Indigenous communities. Kinship networks comprise a complex web of mutual rights, obligations and responsibilities and constitute a central organisational plank of traditional Indigenous society. Despite the overwhelming pressures on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families over the last 200 years, this sense of kinship and mutual support is still very important today.

It was pointed out too that community connection was something shared between Indigenous people, regardless of setting, and that program provision needed to be flexible and adaptable enough to accommodate family and community involvement:

Regardless of where young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live, there are commonalities between demographics as well as differences. A youth living in an urban environment is still living within a 'community', and as such, has connections and relations with members within that community. The Indigenous people within that community may not be of the same language group or from the same 'country', but have a respect and knowledge of the nuances, protocols and practices peculiar to their place of living. A significant number of urban Indigenous youth will have family and kin in rural, regional and remote communities. Likewise, Indigenous youth in rural, regional and



remote areas will visit their families in the city. Many are transient, which may affect the continuity of the program. Acknowledging this practice and including it into each localised program could enhance the program's speciality and maintain its continuity. Where programs are realistically resourced and done creatively, engaging youth from other communities could expand the potential of the program.

Young people being away from their communities for education purposes was also seen as a challenge to providing activities which were sustained over time:

... the implementation of youth development programs is made all that more difficult due to the need for many young Indigenous Australians to leave their communities for extended periods to attend secondary or tertiary education, or vocational training. Consistent, frequent, regular interaction and involvement in youth activities is difficult under these circumstances.

While identifying an issue, perhaps one of the problems associated with this observation is that it sees the young people's circumstances as the problem, rather than a more flexible approach to youth development provision being a solution. An alternative offered to meet the challenge of providing activities across all settings was the establishment of reference groups of Indigenous young people from urban, rural-regional and remote community settings to share ideas and increase social contact networks. A similar approach at state/territory and Commonwealth level was also suggested:

Establish an Indigenous youth network both at the state and Commonwealth level and hold an Indigenous youth roundtable for the purpose of identifying issues and working out ways to address issues in partnership with youth. There would also need to be involvement of older Aboriginal people.

People offered a wide range of general comments and raised a number of difficult or contentious issues, for example, the lack of funding available to improve opportunities for young Indigenous Australians, and the lack of coordination of services which impeded access and more equitable distribution of resources. Discrimination and negative attitudes to Indigenous people were noted as further issues which need to be addressed within the general non-Indigenous community, as was language. English is a second or third language for many Indigenous people.

As highlighted in the previous section, ATSIC commented on the importance of any strategic approach being young person centred. That is, recognising the diversity of Indigenous young people needs to extend to recognition of their particular circumstances, as individuals and as groups – and dealing with those circumstances in order to achieve developmental outcomes that match those of young people in non-Indigenous Australia. Circumstances cited (by ATSIC and others) included:

- unemployment;
- homelessness;
- parenthood;
- poverty;
- alcohol and other substance-related health issues;
- general health issues, mental health issues, and suicide;
- poor levels of education, and different education backgrounds;
- juvenile justice;
- lack of parental support;



- complexity of living in two cultures;
- need for leadership skills.

It was felt that acknowledging these issues, and thoroughly examining and addressing these needs, would give direction to any comprehensive strategic approach to youth development for young Indigenous Australians. ATSIC has pointed out, and this is certainly acknowledged as a valid point, that 're-engineering of existing youth programs may be [only] one of many options to address the needs of Indigenous young people'.

As emerged from Ausyouth's National Future Directions in Youth Development Forum, to develop an integrated, positive, comprehensive approach to Australia's young people, sustained action is required from a range of key stakeholders. Government led discussion needs to focus on vision, principles and practices in youth development - not on the proliferation of what are perceived to be mainstream youth development programs, but on the incorporation of the principles of the youth development approach consistently across youth portfolios in the first instance and subsequently across portfolios in other policy arenas and services, as well as those services targeted to young people⁴. This statement is more intensely to the point when applied to policy settings and service provision in an Indigenous context.

However, as indicated earlier, because of Ausyouth's timeframe, it is not possible to undertake the comprehensive development of an integrated framework for Indigenous youth development, but rather to promote further discussion amongst stakeholders and to provide a starting point for those organisations, programs and services wanting to better engage with Indigenous young people.

Implications

Policy

- Youth development for young Indigenous Australians needs to go beyond 're-engineering' existing mainstream programs and activities.

Encouraging more-inclusive practices in mainstream youth development programs, and utilising community based models, are responses which need to be nested in an integrated whole of government strategy involving public, private, and community based services. At a government policy level, an integrated strategy would explore participatory approaches to planning and decision making for youth development which include the Indigenous community and simultaneously involve young people.

Organisation

- Youth development works best when activities are provided over sustained periods of time, that foster personal and skill development, and that enable positive interaction with other young people and adults in the community.

Organisations which recognise and address the diversity of Indigenous young people will form networks and linkages to address issues such as mobility, language, community connections, peer relationships, skill building and specific needs. In this way, Indigenous young people can be at the centre of activity which is articulated to provide safe and supportive pathways and greater assurance about the future.

⁴ Proceedings from National Future Directions in Youth Development Forum held in Sydney, 4 July 2002.



Program

- Opportunities for peer interaction and networking across a diversity of settings strengthen the young person's connections and access to decision making processes.

Responding to this principle might be accommodated by establishing reference groups of Indigenous young people from urban, rural/regional and remote community settings to share ideas and participate in planning and decision making processes associated with program implementation, such as special events and joint activities across organisations. Program activity such as this enables young people to make a contribution now, and strengthens the capacity of Indigenous society in the future.



2.2

Positive youth development outcomes - beyond problem-free

Positive outcomes

The youth development approach aims to achieve for every young person who participates in the process improved opportunities for:

- enhanced self esteem, self reliance and self confidence;
- active, empowered citizenship;
- enhanced self identity and self efficacy;
- commitment to voluntary action and the responsibilities of choice (recognising that voluntary effort is much broader than high profile mainstream activities);
- acknowledgment and acceptance of differing views and ways of doing things;
- effective membership of teams and groups (that is, experiencing the range of participatory roles such as leadership);
- enhanced skill development;
- participation in different and challenging activities and experiences;
- connection and contribution to the community.

These outcomes focus on enhancing young people's existing capacities and capabilities. They reflect the individual growth and development that young people can anticipate from involvement in youth development activities, contributing to the enrichment of young people's lives, as well as increasing the likelihood of improved wellbeing in adulthood.

These outcomes support positive interaction with others, the chance for civic engagement, and fulfilling lifestyle choices. They have been described as the outcomes that parents would choose for their own children as they grow and develop, or that we as a community would expect to fully prepare members of our society for their role as active citizens.

Problem free is not fully prepared

The youth development approach is based on the conviction that problem prevention or problem remediation (while important) are not by themselves enough: **problem free is not fully prepared**. Quick fix and short term solutions to problems experienced by young people are not sufficient. Involvement in youth development programs and activities **over time** assists young people to be well prepared for taking up and carrying out their role as members of the community. Young people both Indigenous and non-Indigenous can in fact reach adulthood, and have adult status conferred, but not be properly equipped for full and fulfilling engagement in society.



There is growing evidence to suggest that involvement in youth development activities can be a means of empowering marginalised groups, and can assist in the prevention and reduction of behaviour that may have negative consequences for young people.

We know that participating in youth development activities gives young people 'an edge'. It enhances their formal education, encourages them to develop leadership skills and use initiative, provides alternative ways to gain technical competencies, and builds confidence in communicating with other people. There are significant advantages associated with young people being involved in youth development programs and activities.

Are these outcomes desirable for Indigenous young people?

Nonetheless, the youth development outcomes identified above (that is, from in *Good Practice in Youth Development*) are considered **positive** outcomes **from a non-Indigenous perspective** – a mainstream perspective. But are these outcomes also the ones that Indigenous Australians would choose for their young people, or that Indigenous young people would choose for themselves?

Some may not be considered positive for or by Indigenous young people. Or there may be other outcomes that are considered necessary or desirable. It is important that Indigenous young people's views on this matter are considered and valued, even when there are tensions between traditional cultural practices and modern participatory approaches to 'youth voice'.

An issue which has been recognised by many Indigenous young people themselves is that a strong sense of cultural identity is critical to self determination.

It is also critical to education. Much of the literature on issues about education for Indigenous young people notes that the formation of a strong sense of cultural identity can be connected with longer school retention for individuals. Longer school retention, in turn, has been connected with reduced contact between young people and the juvenile justice system (which has negative repercussions in terms of employment access – continuing the cycle of poverty and disadvantage).

Question 3

- Are the youth development outcomes listed the ones that Indigenous Australians (both older and younger) would want from youth development programs and activities?
- Are there any alternative or additional youth development outcomes from programs and activities that Indigenous Australians believe are necessary or desirable? If so, what are they?
- What sort of meaningful youth development activities could be offered to Indigenous young people to achieve these alternative or additional outcomes?



What the responses said

Most comments, including the majority of those provided by Indigenous people, affirmed that the youth development outcomes listed were desirable outcomes for Indigenous young people. As one Indigenous person saw it:

In many cases, the first three outcomes listed have not been successfully instilled into Indigenous youth by the older Indigenous people. A lot of the young Indigenous people in today's society are lacking the capabilities listed and the capacity to grow and exercise positive choices. ... It is very difficult for young people to face and overcome challenges and negativity when life skills aren't being passed on to them.

Several non-Indigenous respondents commented that the outcomes would need to be agreed by Indigenous people themselves, and that views could differ between various communities or groups. Responses also suggested that, although the outcomes might be the same as those sought for non-Indigenous young people, the processes to achieve them may need to be different. This would be to accommodate cultural learning methods, or to incorporate cultural history, knowledge, skills and 'ways of doing things' considered important by Indigenous communities.

Most Indigenous responses (and others) supported the view that additional youth development outcomes would include such things as **cultural identity formation**, and **cultural knowledge and skills**. Another theme was community capacity-building:

While the outcomes ... are all valid, youth development for Indigenous youth also needs to be seen within the context of community capacity building. While this is, in part, addressed by identifying leadership as an outcome, it needs to be within a cultural framework. An important outcome for Indigenous youth, therefore, may be decolonisation and a reconnection to culture.

An additional important issue raised was the challenge of achieving these outcomes for Indigenous young people in view of the prevalence of negative influences many of them experience: 'youth suicide, abuse, violence, and drug addiction'; health issues – physical and mental; poor parenting; early pregnancy; early school leaving; juvenile justice issues; inadequate legal assistance; problems occurring in young people's family and community environment; homelessness and overcrowding; and financial pressures. Other issues mentioned related to loss of family connection; loss of place; and severely restricted access to infrastructure services such as electricity, clean water and sanitation – that we know would not be tolerated in non-Indigenous Australia. Youth development for young Indigenous Australians cannot be seen, nor addressed, in isolation of these circumstances.

In terms of meaningful youth development activities, suggestions provided tended to focus on activities related to Indigenous knowledge and culture, particularly those which could encourage closer community connection (or reconnection) for young people. While school based approaches were included in the suggestions, one response indicated that 'classroom' type activities would not be favoured by most Indigenous young people, nor maintain their interest – and, indeed, this can also be said of non-Indigenous young people.⁵ Other activities identified included sporting activities, arts-based activities, environmental awareness, and recreational activities such as camping, climbing and fishing. Also considered important were life skills (such as parenting skills, conflict resolution, dealing with violence and abuse, addressing negative issues in the community), activities that provide challenges, and activities that enable parents to become involved and take an interest.

⁵ Ausyouth (2003), *Learning from what young people have to say: Young people talk about their youth development experiences and expectations*, Ausyouth, Adelaide, page 15



The importance of direct consultation with Indigenous communities and young people about their preferred leisure activities was strongly reiterated in responses to this section. The following comment is typical:

Rather than suggesting particular activities, it is more important that program providers work with individual communities to identify particular needs and strategies to meet these.

Implications

Policy

- **Youth development aims to achieve specific outcomes for all young people, including:**
 - enhanced self identity and self efficacy, **including cultural identity formation;**
 - commitment to voluntary action and the responsibilities of choice;
 - enhanced self esteem, self reliance and self confidence;
 - acknowledgment and acceptance of differing views and ways of doing things;
 - effective membership of teams and groups (experiencing the range of participatory roles such as leadership, **including in the context of community capacity building**);
 - enhanced skill development, **including cultural knowledge and skills;**
 - participation in different and challenging activities and experiences;
 - connection and contribution to the community (**whether 'community' is understood in either the broader or narrower sense**).

Organisation

- **Meaningful activities that achieve positive outcomes for young people will be empowering and include planned and considered opportunities for the development and affirmation of cultural identity, and cultural knowledge and skills.**

The policies and practices in place should strongly reinforce an equitable, non-racist and non-discriminatory environment, and the organisation be intentional about demonstrating its cultural diversity (that is, maintaining demographic data against which progress towards targets can be measured, taking steps to provide cross-cultural awareness training, addressing barriers that discriminate against and exclude certain groups, developing knowledge about Indigenous support agencies and appropriate avenues for special funding support, and so on). In addition, organisational linkages, partnership arrangements and personal relationships will enhance cultural diversity and enable organisations to readily assist or utilise the expertise of Indigenous people and other cultural groups who have specific cultural linkages, knowledge and skills.

Program

- **Program activities should be designed to cover a widely diverse range of interests and needs, foster community connection and contribution, and be challenging and fun.**

Consulting young people on their preferred choice of activities, offering activities that can be inclusive of parents and families, and recognising that contribution to the community can be understood in a wide variety of ways are characteristics of more flexible and inclusive programs. Developing competence in life skills for example, could be seen not only as strengths-building but also as contributing – and be acknowledged as such.



2.3

Respecting community identity and engaging community voice

Communities important in youth development

For youth development processes to produce effective outcomes, community involvement is understood to play a major part: young people's families and communities are instrumental to their wellbeing. Community values and beliefs play an integral part in shaping young people's own values and beliefs.

For those involved in youth development, understanding and respecting the values and identities of young people's families and communities is crucial for young people to be able to take an active role as community members.

Consultation and involvement

For non-Indigenous people involved in youth development, the key to developing this understanding is ensuring that effective consultation takes place with Indigenous people through their communities. The customs in one community will not necessarily be the same in another – so what works well for one Community may not suit another. The *Roadmap to Reconciliation** places high importance on consultation processes. It seeks that local programs and services be designed and developed, in partnership with Indigenous people, with local needs and preferences in mind and in deference to the wishes of Indigenous people about ownership and control.

If services and programs are offered in a way that strengthen and empower communities (as sought within the reconciliation agenda) local needs will change progressively. Communication and genuine involvement of Indigenous people (young and older) in decision making processes will continue to be required to ensure that delivery arrangements or program or service design elements remain relevant.

The importance of family and community connection for Indigenous people is arguably even more important than for non-Indigenous society. However, Indigenous people do not identify as a single group, or a single community, and non-Indigenous people quite often do not know how to go about making contact.

There seem to be more questions than answers at quite a fundamental level. Who should non-Indigenous people consult with in the first instance? Who is it important to talk to and why? How do we reach agreement when there are differing views and perspectives to be considered? How is a 'community' constituted, and who is included? How does this work in an urban setting?

There are no universal protocols, but all these issues are important to understanding community voice and identity and working in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way. It is important, too, for organisations to examine whether their own organisational culture and values may need to change to be more accommodating of Indigenous people and others not represented in decision making processes. Often mainstream bias is not easy to detect – simply because it seems so commonplace.

One suggestion that has been put forward in the *Roadmap for Reconciliation* is for organisations to make linkages and build cross-cultural understanding through the state, territory and local reconciliation groups that are made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

* Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000, *Roadmap for Reconciliation*, <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/roadmap/>



These reconciliation groups have been established specifically to lead and support action that promotes reconciliation. They may be an avenue for advocacy about the potential of the youth development approach and for exploring issues about youth development activities for young Indigenous people.

Valuing community diversity means systematically seeking out and involving a whole range of groups who are under represented in decision making processes.

Question 4

How can existing youth development program provider organisations better communicate and engage with Indigenous people and communities?

What the responses said

Understanding the local community, its character, local norms, customs and protocols was the recurrent theme in this section. The value of establishing the basis for committed, long term relationships, rather than a focus on short term 'quick fixes' was observed consistently – and seen as the key to better communication and engagement with Indigenous people. Many responses drew on direct experience of successful relationships to illustrate this point.

Direct contact with Indigenous people, made on a personal as well as an institutional basis – and involving the right people to achieve the desired outcomes – was considered critical. The message was that communication needs to be ongoing, and that approaches need to be personal, committed and long standing to build sustainable relationships of trust:

Go to Aboriginal people and peak bodies to discuss what is required. Seeking written responses and providing information will not elicit ideas nor participation.

Local organisations should make connections with Indigenous members of a community through various avenues and stay in contact ... updating them on advances and incorporating them at all steps so that they don't think their opinions were forgotten.

Trust is built by talking, listening and taking action, showing an understanding and ability to accommodate needs in such a way that recognises and respects norms and values.

Also critical was local ownership and involvement of Indigenous people at the very early planning stages of any initiative:

... involve Indigenous people in developmental processes and decision making from the outset – to take ownership of project design and input into delivery.

It was made clear that engagement with Indigenous people means that non-Indigenous people and organisations need to make an effort to understand the wider context. This means understanding factors relating to the social, cultural, political, historic, economic, health, and education status of communities that



they seek to communicate and engage with. Any ideas or initiatives with a youth development focus need to be located in that specific context.

One response cautioned about 'over consultation.'

Indigenous communities often feel as though they suffer from 'over consultation'. Communities are frequently besieged by people coming into a community, asking a range of questions and leaving again. Better communication will come with a move from consultation, which involves asking communities what they think about a particular issue, to negotiation. Negotiation requires program providers to actively engage with communities from the outset and ensure that communities are involved in all stages of program development and delivery.

and the need to appreciate the uniqueness of particular communities:

It is also important to recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate for Indigenous communities. Different communities have different needs. Different strategies may also be necessary to address these needs. ... protocols for engaging with Indigenous communities are different throughout Australia. It is essential that prior to engaging with communities, program providers are aware of these protocols and work within them.

Responses from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people offered a variety of strategies to improve communication linkages, and establish better relationships. These included:

- referring to publications on cross-cultural awareness and communication with Indigenous Australians;
- finding out about and adhering to local protocols;
- employing Indigenous people as liaison officers;
- engaging Indigenous role models as patrons and sponsors (for example, prominent sportspeople, writers, people with high profile careers and people respected in the Indigenous community);
- ensuring flexibility is factored into program design to acknowledge local nuances, protocols and practices and be able to accommodate increasing levels of Indigenous ownership, autonomy and control;
- employing Indigenous workers, or seeking non-Indigenous workers who have experience of living and working in Indigenous communities, or at least have cross-cultural awareness.

Ideas about who should be approached to make initial contact and begin to build effective relationships covered a lot of common ground and included:

- mainstream organisations to approach existing Indigenous youth organisations and Elders for ideas;
- community based organisations, that is, schools, councils, others;
- Indigenous education support units;
- local elder, governing bodies (for example, Aboriginal coordinating council or Islander co-ordinating Council in Queensland);



- local reconciliation groups;
- land councils;
- Indigenous workers in a variety of sectors;
- families;
- the most appropriate person who has links with young people.

ATSIC could also be added to these suggestions. Its elected arm comprises a body of Indigenous representatives democratically elected by Indigenous people. ATSIC has local offices throughout Australia. State and territory government departments with responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, or local government bodies, many of which have Indigenous liaison officers, or community/youth development officers, may also be useful contact points.

Implications

Policy

- **Key communities need to be engaged in policy development processes from the inception and involved in all stages of program development and delivery.**

Indigenous people's right to self determination is a human right underpinned by international conventions to which Australia is a signatory. Upholding this principle needs to be a primary consideration in policy formulation which relates to Indigenous people. It is demonstrated by respecting community voice and identity.

Organisation

- **Engagement with Indigenous people and communities is facilitated by an understanding of local circumstances and protocols, and establishing ongoing relationships with key Indigenous people.**

Developing organisational capacity for engagement with Indigenous people could include such strategies as employing Indigenous liaison officers, establishing formal linkages and regular contact with key Indigenous bodies in the area, and adhering to relevant protocols. Understanding the character of the local community is essential.

Program

- **Program design is sufficiently flexible to accommodate local protocols and practices and respect increasing levels of Indigenous ownership, autonomy and control.**

This could be undertaken, for example, by setting up local managing committees or reference groups to steer and advise on initiatives, and by ensuring appropriate training, mentoring and succession planning processes build community capacity and support changing roles and responsibilities.



2.4

Valuing and engaging young people now

Negative stereotypes – Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people

Young people are often portrayed in a way that sensationalises problems – destructive behaviour, or risk-prone lifestyles – creating a stereotype of ‘youth’ which is both negative and threatening. It would be fair to say that this stereotype is even more extreme in the case of Indigenous young Australians. They are presented either as powerless victims of circumstance or hopelessly out of control, deranged by drug abuse or substance misuse, and a threat to their parents and community alike. The only positive things said about the contribution of Indigenous young people to the community tend to be focused on sporting elites or artistic performers.

These two extremes are not the whole picture. Problems do exist for many Indigenous young people, and of course they need to be addressed in an integrated way with a ‘whole of person’ focus. But, we **also** need to build on existing strengths.

Focusing on strengths

In this regard, we need to recognise that many Indigenous young people – not just the elites – are making an enormous contribution to the community (whether we mean the broader Australian community in general, or specific Indigenous communities). We need to find more ways of acknowledging this effort and celebrating the commitment, raising awareness, recognising role models who challenge the negative media stereotypes, and building from success stories that inspire. Many Indigenous people have already taken this course, to focus on the strengths and continually reinforce the message.

Conscious enterprise, one of the two overarching principles of good practice in youth development, means thinking about what is required to encourage young people’s participation in activities that will have positive consequences, and working out how to strengthen their affiliation with social networks that can enrich their life experiences.

As with other young people, Indigenous young people need a clear, positive vision about the future. When the future looks non-existent, the quest for instant gratification can take understandably damaging forms. Hope must be rebuilt for these young people. But what practical steps can be taken to enrich the lives of more Indigenous young people **now**, that connect them with their communities, allow them to make acknowledged contributions which are community building, and foster an optimistic outlook for their own futures?

In Canada, whose Indigenous peoples face similar problems arising from dispossession, ‘culture in the form of drama, music and art is being used increasingly to raise awareness about relevant social concerns and to help young people, in particular, to speak out on issues, such as racism’⁶. Young Indigenous Australians have already done much to build ‘cultural capital’. There may be some potential here in Australia for youth development program design to include more elements that build up cultural capital – where individual young people and Communities are empowered to speak out about social concerns through traditional cultural forms.

6 Torjman, S (1998), *Strategies for a Caring Society*, paper presented at the conference, ‘Investing in the Whole Community: Strategies for a Caring Society’, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Canada, page 9.



Linking social and economic outcomes

There are other overseas examples where a youth development approach has been used successfully to link social and economic initiatives. Sustainable community development and economic development models are being implemented in a diverse range of Indigenous communities around Australia.

These arrangements could have scope to incorporate a formal commitment to youth development and provide mentoring and skill building processes for young people (many already do have training components). They could also involve young people in planning and decision making at various levels.

Youth development as an approach encourages young people's civic engagement – through providing meaningful roles that have potential to enhance social and economic outcomes. Research has shown that the youth development approach can strengthen communities and enable young people to feel they have a right to belong.

Other programs and activities

There are a number of other programs and activities that are known to be working well – programs that engage Indigenous young people in sporting and recreational activities, Indigenous youth advisory councils and networks, and programs that build skills in information technology.⁷ How can a youth development approach further enhance the outcomes of these activities?

Question 5

How can communities (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) provide opportunities for Indigenous young people to make a contribution that will benefit both the young person and their community?

What the responses said

Responses to this question tended to reflect the issues raised in the above discussion. There was a general agreement that community attitudes about Indigenous young people needed to change from negativity and indifference. As one respondent expressed it, what is needed is 'attitudinal change at the highest levels to value youth'.

There were concerns that 'meaningful activities' were diminishing as a result of decreasing skills, and perceptions that inadequate education and inattention to longer term succession planning had contributed to the situation:

... there are limited (real) opportunities due to the widening gap of poor educational outcomes, especially in remote Communities. This restriction has placed increasing pressure on social and economic development due to lack of skills and knowledge from which to build opportunities, rather a reliance on short-term, stop-gap measures.

Many people saw the need for more support for communities, and for non-Indigenous communities to provide career focused opportunities, such as work experience. Other suggestions were leadership and development camps, forums and conferences, and places for young people on boards and committees (however, not in a tokenistic way, but rather in a way which supports and empowers young people, and

⁷ See for example the *Inspire* website, at http://www.inspire.org.au/projects_indigenous.html



enables the youth voice to be heard). Mentoring processes, employing Indigenous people and engaging Indigenous role models, were also consistent themes, as were accessibility and affordability of programs and activities.

Further comments drew attention to the value of arts programs, especially those with a strong cultural base. It was observed that there were a number of these programs in operation which were extremely successful, built self esteem, gave strength to the youth voice and certainly were considered beneficial to the young person and their community as well as the broader Australian community.

However, young people cannot 'do it alone', and a number of comments expressed support for a strategic approach that gives practical support to communities. For example:

... a Community strategic plan – to identify the issues and desirable outcomes which are important to the community. Young people can't do it on their own and need to feel that they can have support when they want it but also to act independently when appropriate. This is open ended strategic planning where the goals can be really simple and everyone commits to contributing in their own way however large or small that contribution might be.

Another strategy was:

- find out what Indigenous young people are interested in (consultation);
- involve local mentors;
- long term projects (investment in future);
- provide incentives and hope for future;
- liaise with established organisations/recognised individuals.

Several approaches suggested by Indigenous respondents reflected a 'service learning' character, that is, learning from real life circumstances in a way that connects education curriculum with practical activity and generates real benefits to the young person and the community:

... problem based learning could use local problems to develop individuals' skills in analysis, consultation, research, report learning and presentation.

... incorporate Indigenous studies significantly and meaningfully into the curriculum - involve young people in the development of content and implementation.

Of interest, participation in curriculum development, involving Indigenous community members more broadly, has reportedly already enjoyed elements of success in Victoria:

A new curriculum initiative, Coorong Tongala, developed in Victoria, involves some of the elders and community members and offers a mechanism to pay for an individual's involvement. They are employed to deliver some of the culturally specific components of the program.

Youth development activity must be **meaningful** and rewarding to young people to sustain their interest over time. That is, while fun elements can be incorporated into the design of activities, there must also be some substance that is valued by young people.



The importance of valuing young people, enabling them to make a contribution, and celebrating their endeavour was considered of critical importance. This has achieved results, and is becoming recognised as a good practice strategy for working with Indigenous young people. At community level, it is seen as a highly worthwhile, community connecting activity.

However, it has been pointed out that that the youth development approach (which encourages 'age and stage' relevance) and traditional Indigenous cultural approaches to 'rites of passage' may not be consistent:

... traditionally young people are **told**, can do certain things when the time is appropriate ... and indeed there is conflict between young Aboriginal people and their elders, who like many parents, find their children perplexing and worrying.

Programs and activities that connect young people and their communities are seen as a high priority need in the juvenile justice area:

Particular consideration should be given to the developmental needs of Indigenous youth in detention centres. In New South Wales, Aboriginal youth are in detention at a rate 15 times more than that of non-Aboriginal people and make up 38 per cent of all young people in detention centres. Programs that work with communities and young people to maintain cultural ties and assist in community reintegration should be seen as a priority.

What this again confirms, is that youth development cannot be seen in isolation from the unique circumstances of individuals and must be designed to accommodate any special needs that are represented – with a focus on the young person.

Implications

Policy

- **'Contribution' should be interpreted broadly so that a young person's endeavours to gain skills, knowledge and leadership capacity is understood as making a meaningful contribution that is mutually beneficial to the young person and the community.**

Young Indigenous people who are involved in their communities in ways that enable them to be mentored and to take up traditional or other responsibilities are making a significant commitment to community life both now and in the future. The benefits are capacity building – for both the young person and the community. A policy position at the highest level needs to underpin, support, and resource Indigenous communities to make these opportunities available for young people in a way that is community owned and driven. Government funding, for example, might be tied to criteria such as application of youth development principles in the conduct of community projects.



Organisation

- **Community connection is fundamental to the positive development of Indigenous young people. Incorporating this principle into organisational projects, and program design, recognises that youth development and community support are closely interrelated.**

Organisations can support Indigenous young people and their communities by seeking out projects which assist in reintegrating communities. Providing opportunities from which to build community capacity, whether this is by sponsoring cultural and other activities, raising financial resources, supporting funding submissions, providing training and physical resources, or forming partnerships, are all things that organisations can do to open up youth development opportunities in ways that recognise the integral role that communities play and demonstrate an inclusive ethos without patronising, controlling or imposing non-Indigenous agendas.

Program

- **Program design incorporates activities that aim to respond to local needs and challenges.**

Needs and problems can be understood as opportunities from which to build strengths and move in a positive and progressive direction. In this way, a strengths based youth development approach accommodates needs and circumstances – regardless of the starting point. Culturally relevant arts based activities, for example, are fun, are meaningful, build skills and knowledge, and provide community connection. As part of a juvenile justice program they could have the potential to 'reconnect', which benefits the young person and enriches the community. Service learning, too, can use education curriculum to respond to real problems, facilitate useful learning, and strengthen community capacity. Similarly, life skills programs such as parenting, make a long term contribution to family and community life.



2.5

Valuing and preserving Indigenous cultures and traditions

Living cultures

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation talks about the importance of preserving Indigenous cultures and traditions – the ‘world’s oldest living cultures’.

Indigenous cultures are living cultures that have relevance to social and economic wellbeing in Australia today. Nonetheless, without careful management, there is a danger that traditional knowledge, customs and skills – the ‘intellectual capital’ that uniquely belongs to Australia’s Indigenous people – will be lost to the younger generation.

Languages

In the previous section, we looked at how traditional cultural forms were used by young people in Canada to speak out about social concerns. But traditional cultures have other values too. In Australia, Indigenous history has traditionally been recorded as an oral history – passed on through customs, knowledge and skills that placed considerable emphasis on ritual, drama, and storytelling in around 250 languages and many more dialects. It was common for people to speak their own language as well as a number of others. But many of those languages, with the special understandings they conveyed, have fallen into disuse since colonial times. Indigenous peoples around the world are recognising that ‘their languages are or were treasures that need to be recorded or relearned’ (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation⁸).

Cultural knowledge

Cultural knowledge about sacred places and sites of significance, and understanding the import of stories about the Dreaming can affirm important community values and customary laws, such as kinship with and respect for the land. These values can restore a sense of place, a sense of purpose, and a sense of social cohesion.

Economic value

Some communities have been able to tap in to opportunities for cultural tourism, or indigenous flora and fauna cultivation for export, as a direct result of their traditional heritage. The economic significance of Indigenous artistic works is well known. There are numerous other examples where traditional skills and expertise have been turned to advantage. The preservation of cultural traditions and knowledge is not only important because of its intrinsic worth, but because it has potential to provide Indigenous people with economic independence in a variety of ways.

Traditional cultures and younger people

A number of Indigenous people have expressed concerns that many younger Indigenous Australians do not see value in learning traditional knowledge and ways. Ultimately, of course, the choice must be theirs. But cultural preservation (together with mainstream educational competency, which is also considered important for self determination) is one means of securing a better future.

Unlike the general Australian population, the Indigenous population has a sharply declining proportion of older people relative to younger people. If cultural traditions are to survive, the need for cultural knowledge and skills to be passed on as an intact inheritance is urgent.

8 Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1993, *Valuing Cultures - Reclaiming Identity Through Languages*, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/1993/3/8.html>



What opportunities are there for youth development programs and activities to foster Indigenous young people's interest in traditional learning, or to assist in the maintenance of Australian Indigenous languages? How can young Indigenous Australians in urban settings be reconnected with their heritage through youth development programs and activities?

Question 6

How can the youth development approach assist in the preservation of Indigenous cultures and traditions?

What the responses said

Most comments expressed agreement with the notion that youth development programs and activities could incorporate Indigenous cultural aspects, or assist cultural preservation in a range of ways. Both processes (that is, imparting knowledge in culturally appropriate ways, and so on) and outcomes were seen as important.

Exploration of Indigenous culture through art forms, particularly, was believed to be a powerful and visible example of the strength and ability of Indigenous people; a way to celebrate Indigenous identity and heritage, to enable Indigenous people to reconnect with their culture, and a means of gaining understanding and respect from the broader community.

It was also pointed out that, unfortunately, because of the impact of dispossession, 'cultural preservation' will not always be possible:

Aboriginal cultures are very diverse – for some their particular cultural heritage is beyond preservation – their land, associated practices, and so on are no longer accessible.

We cannot meld Indigenous cultures and traditions into one. There are so many different groups within the Indigenous community ... hundreds of variations – dances, singing, rituals, ceremonies ... There must be great concern that changing lifestyles will mean that these are lost ...

These comments serve to reinforce the critical importance of preserving that which remains. There were numerous ideas about how this might happen, many focusing on the importance of education, institutional change, and cross-cultural understanding:

- valuing Indigenous cultures and traditions at the mainstream level, institutionally;
- embedding Indigenous perspectives into policy level frameworks through to program design and implementation;
- Indigenous cultural content could be taught to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people to remove barriers to cross-cultural understanding;



- mentoring in culturally appropriate ways;
- exploring ideas and strategies in partnership with and guidance from Indigenous people;
- employing Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to work together with young people;
- exchanging of all positive aspects that form different cultures should be explored to facilitate the need to respect different values/traditions within a community.

It was suggested that youth development provider organisations could assist by collaborating with Indigenous people and Communities on community service projects such as recording Indigenous languages and Indigenous stories for preservation; organising publication of local resources – for example, books with photographs and artworks featuring the local community; engaging dance companies (for example, Bangarra) to tour, share local dances and develop new ideas and performances; engaging elders to teach cultural dances and art expression; developing artefacts; and providing an avenue for Indigenous young people to express themselves through music, dance, and arts.

Other suggestions included incorporating bushcraft and survival techniques into programs and activities; inviting local Indigenous people to be involved, and to speak to groups; being a link between community elders, role models and young people; and generally enabling young people to make a contribution to the community in culturally appropriate ways.

As one response put it:

generally people's desire to learn more comes from learning itself. If youth programs incorporate Indigenous cultures and traditions in their teaching, Indigenous young people [and non-Indigenous] are likely to become more interested in learning more about it ...

However, there are also some challenges which were highlighted. For example, 'differing agendas of stakeholders' was an issue which made it difficult to develop and implement programs with an Indigenous cultural focus for Indigenous groups.

Ownership of culture was another issue. Some of the responses from Indigenous people emphasised that maintenance of cultural traditions and knowledge was not the responsibility of mainstream institutions, nor the province of non-Indigenous people:

Family and wider community should be encouraged to participate in activities of cultural relevance which is **their responsibility** [original emphasis], not that of mainstream educational institutions.

It was suggested elsewhere that mainstream energies could be better directed to finding 'solutions for problems occurring in communities, if youth development programs are going to assist in the preservation of Indigenous cultures and traditions'; again highlighting that youth development cannot be seen in isolation of the young person's environment.

In working towards cultural preservation, there will also be topics and activities that are sacred or secret, are the preserve of either males or females, or generally cannot be shared knowledge amongst other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Moreover, as one respondent pointed out, these issues will also have



implications for maintaining traditions of oral history, or recording traditions by engaging with new forms of information/multi-media technology.

Of note, the issues raised in this section and at Question 5 (previous section) were the subject of consideration at a recent conference hosted by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales:

The department ... recently hosted a conference entitled 'Yarn Up – Growing Up Our Leaders'. This conference brought together both elders and young people throughout New South Wales to look at ways of developing leadership in Aboriginal communities. The issues raised in both Questions 5 and 6 were discussed both within youth forums and forums of elders.

The report from the conference was not available at the time of writing, however attention is drawn to it as a potentially useful resource which should be available from the New South Wales department in the near future.

Implications

Policy

- **Indigenous Australian cultures are the birthright of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Their preservation needs to be given high priority because of the demographic profile of the Indigenous population generally (that is, high mortality rates and low life expectancy).**

Because this issue has been raised by Indigenous people themselves as a concern, and because the formation of cultural identity has been linked with self-determination and desirable youth development outcomes for Indigenous young people, cultural preservation and youth development can also be linked in the Indigenous context. The key here is that cultural ownership is respected, and any projects to assist with cultural preservation using the youth development approach be undertaken in close consultation with, and under the direction of, relevant Indigenous people.

Organisation

- **Activities directed towards cultural preservation are planned and monitored by relevant Indigenous people.**

Project steering groups established for the provision of advice and oversight by Indigenous people, and inclusion of Indigenous people in key roles, can assist in ensuring that protocols are applied, that sacred trusts are respected, that cultural inheritance is not appropriated, and that cultural integrity is not compromised.

Program

- **Program activity promotes cross-cultural awareness and pride in Indigenous cultures by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.**

Enabling people to learn more about Indigenous cultures and language can be a way of broadening the base of opportunities for Indigenous employment, and for Indigenous young people's positive development. Respect for preservation of cultural knowledge and skills is more likely to be generated by cross-cultural understanding and shared interest.



2.6

Volunteering for youth development: Indigenous and non-Indigenous

Volunteers in youth development

Youth development programs and activities in Australia draw heavily on adult volunteers to work with, guide and support young people. An important aspect of the youth development approach is that it enables young people to become more connected with their community through forming relationships with caring, competent adults outside their immediate family. Adult volunteers in youth development represent a vital part of a young person's social network.

It is suggested that increasing the involvement of Indigenous adults in the volunteering effort for youth development will encourage greater participation in these activities by Indigenous young people. It should also be noted that the elder tradition in Indigenous Communities represents a long standing culture of responsibility to voluntary community service and mentoring, providing opportunities for younger and older people to respect and engage with each other, and preparing young people for their roles as adults.

Indigenous volunteers in mainstream programs and activities

There would seem to be many advantages in increasing the involvement of Indigenous adults in youth development programs and activities:

- Organisations which are culturally diverse are enriched, as are the experiences of participants, through access to a broader range of perspectives.
- The involvement of Indigenous adults is likely to make the organisation more welcoming to other Indigenous people (both younger and older), signalling that the organisation is active about its inclusive ethos.
- Indigenous adult volunteers in youth development contribute to the number and diversity of positive role models for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.
- Indigenous adult volunteer participation could enhance cross-cultural awareness and communication, strengthening community connections.
- Young Indigenous people may feel more comfortable with Indigenous adult volunteers.

Building skills and knowledge, training and mentoring

The National Strategies for Reconciliation place emphasis on services for Indigenous people being provided in a way that empower them and their communities – that help them to take greater control and become more independent.

Too often, particularly in terms of services to Indigenous communities, assistance has been provided by non-Indigenous people, but without mentoring and training processes in place that develop the skills and



knowledge of Indigenous individuals and build community capacity and ownership. Indigenous people consider it imperative for long-term sustainability of services that appropriate mentoring and sharing of knowledge, skills and experience take place. Youth development programs and activities are no different in this regard.

In many instances, very successful initiatives – which have relied heavily on the efforts of one or two committed individuals – have collapsed when those individuals leave their area or are no longer available. Enabling Indigenous people to take up these volunteer leadership roles and share the responsibility increases Indigenous ownership, strengthens the longer term viability of programs and makes the future more predictable for young people.

Organisations need to ensure that they are well prepared for volunteers: that there are processes in place for induction, that volunteer contribution is valued and acknowledged, and that training and professional development requirements for volunteers can be met (for all volunteers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous).

Organisations recruiting Indigenous volunteers have a special responsibility to make sure that the organisational culture is non-discriminatory and intolerant of racism. This could include cross-cultural awareness training for existing non-Indigenous personnel; explicitly valuing Indigenous cultural knowledge and skills in recruitment policies and practices; learning more about Indigenous people in the local community; recognising broader family and community relationships; and understanding cultural and kinship obligations that may affect an Indigenous volunteer's time or capacity to work with the organisation.

What are the alternatives?

Increasing the participation of Indigenous adults in mainstream youth development activities reflects only part of a strategy to increase youth development activities for Indigenous young people. Another question is, what opportunities are there to build on the existing voluntary community effort, or traditional relationships in Indigenous culture, to create more youth development opportunities? What are the alternatives to mainstream?

Question 7

- How can youth development program provider organisations actively increase the involvement of Indigenous adult volunteers in youth development activities and programs?
- What other alternatives are there?

What the responses said

Responses generally agreed that increasing the involvement of Indigenous adult volunteers in youth development activities and programs could be beneficial. Nonetheless, there were concerns that involvement in mainstream activities and programs might prove difficult:

... for people experiencing great poverty and other forms of disadvantage, unpaid volunteering that seems to serve mainstream community interests will be resisted or resented.



It was felt that volunteering for youth development was unlikely to occur (whether in an Indigenous or non-Indigenous context) unless people were convinced of the value of youth development for young people, or unless other incentives were provided.

Suggestions given about facilitating the involvement of Indigenous adults in programs and activities for youth development included:

- employing Indigenous people for cross-cultural liaison;
- making programs and activities more culturally sensitive, flexible and adaptable to Indigenous ways;
- incorporating cultural aspects into programs;
- consultation with senior Indigenous community members and other influential Indigenous groups – such as women’s health organisations;
- advertising in Indigenous press;
- engaging well known Indigenous role models to assist.

Several responses supported an alternative approach whereby Indigenous communities developed specific programs for Indigenous young people, or explored opportunities for young people to participate actively in senior Indigenous community groups.

Capitalising on traditional Indigenous mentoring roles was considered another possibility:

There are identified individuals who are obligated to contribute to the upbringing of young people. Their role should be identified and reinforced in a mentoring capacity. To coordinate activities incorporating key individuals will enable a sense of community and a continuing role with youth development initiatives.

The importance of direct consultation with Indigenous people and communities was again emphasised in this section. The following comment is illustrative:

Programs and activities need to be planned and implemented in partnership with Indigenous people to ensure they are relevant and will achieve outcomes that are important to Indigenous communities. Indigenous people already volunteer an enormous amount of their time. It makes sense to work with Indigenous people to find out how ‘youth development’ organisations may be able to assist them to achieve youth development outcomes building on existing ‘volunteer’ culture within their own communities.

As part of an integrated strategy, it does make sense that Indigenous people are involved in identifying both youth development outcomes to be sought, and the culturally appropriate processes that could achieve them. This is as relevant to Indigenous people’s participation in traditional ‘mainstream’ youth development provider organisations as it is to alternative youth development activities planned specifically for Indigenous young people.



Question 8

What skills, knowledge and/or training do non-Indigenous volunteers need to work effectively with:

- Indigenous young people?
- Indigenous volunteers?

What the responses said

In the responses to this question, several common themes emerged. First and foremost, it was considered critical for non-Indigenous people to have the capacity to respect and value Indigenous people, cultures, knowledge, skills and practices; to be open to new ideas, new experiences and other world views and values; and to have a positive attitude and a willingness to create a positive environment.

Cross-cultural awareness was considered an imperative and strong support was evident for cross-cultural training to be made widely available.

Several comments indicated that cross-cultural knowledge should ideally extend beyond the 'minimalist'.

Generally, anyone working with Indigenous people should have an understanding of Indigenous culture. This understanding should go beyond the standard cultural parameters of 'communication' and 'art'. It needs to include cultural practice, values, beliefs, relationships, economy, social constructs, law, and so on.

Other comments indicated it would be useful for non-Indigenous volunteers to have:

- understanding of specific traditional cultural areas they work in;
- knowledge of local community and local protocols (what is acceptable);
- knowledge of how knowledge and skills are transferred in Indigenous communities (that is, 'shown');
- understanding of the impact of colonisation and contemporary political and social issues;
- knowledge of Indigenous organisations and Indigenous and non-Indigenous support agencies.

Additional knowledge and skills identified were mentoring and training skills, ability to engage organisations/business to participate in youth activities, community capacity building skills, and skills to recognise and deal with instances of racism and discrimination.

As well as prior experience in working with Indigenous people, being able to accommodate language differences was also cited as valuable in working with Indigenous young people and adults:

Language differences recognised and acknowledged as a major consideration when working across districts and communities.



Implications

Policy

- **Volunteering in youth development needs to be understood in a broad context, recognising traditional mentoring roles in Indigenous communities that support the passing on of knowledge and skills to a younger generation.**

Encouraging adult volunteers to become involved in mainstream youth development activities is one component of a strategy for Indigenous young people's youth development. Traditional roles and voluntary effort within Indigenous communities also need to be recognised. Regardless of setting, commitment to volunteering for youth development is more likely to flow from a belief that structured youth development opportunities, undertaken as a conscious enterprise, can empower young people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and make a difference to their lives now and in the future.

Organisation

- **Special efforts are made to recruit volunteers and paid staff from the diversity of Australian communities, and to offer appropriate training about equity issues, for example, cross-cultural communication, challenging stereotyping and discrimination.**

Organisations which demonstrate an inclusive ethos will value specialist knowledge and perspectives from elders, leaders, Indigenous liaison officers and others from Australia's Indigenous community. Inclusivity extends to exploring with Indigenous people the potential for alternative delivery of youth development processes, in traditional or other settings which are preferred to mainstream options.

Program

- **Program activities draw on the strengths, that is, specialist knowledge and skills, of Indigenous volunteers in youth development.**

Specialist knowledge and skills can be broad ranging, covering culturally appropriate ways of teaching and imparting knowledge, Indigenous languages, and being able to engage with Indigenous support agencies and understanding community capacity building processes.



2.7

Collaborative partnerships

Partnerships – key principle

A commitment to effective partnership is one of the underpinning principles of the youth development approach. Partnerships – between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organisations – have also been recognised in the *Roadmap to Reconciliation* as a means of progressing the reconciliation agenda.

Collaborative partnerships are important for youth development because they can expand the diversity of activities available for young people and extend their social networks. They can optimise the available sum of resources by avoiding duplication, and by drawing on a wider pool of ideas, skills, knowledge and expertise.

While a single program or activity may not be sustainable in the longer term, partnerships can help to provide more assurance about the future and better quality outcomes for young people. For example, the youth development approach calls for structured and sequential activities, that build on previous learning experiences, to be provided to a young person over a sustained period of time. Though it may not be viable for one organisation to do this in a rural or isolated location over a lengthy timeframe, collaboration with other organisations may be able to achieve the desirable youth development goals.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships

Several issues have been raised in relation to youth development activities and Indigenous young people which focus on the relationship between effective partnerships and sustainability of effort:

- Partnerships imply equality of power, however this is very often not Indigenous people's experience of how partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people operate.
- Pre-implementation planning time for partnership arrangements and program initiatives is important, but often insufficient time is allowed for inclusive and collective decision making processes that are customary in some Indigenous communities.
- Organisations involved in planning processes with Indigenous people and communities need to maintain a presence, or keep open the lines of communication, even if negotiation does not proceed quickly.
- Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners can often be more effective if formed at both the personal/individual level as well as organisational levels.

Some Indigenous communities are understandably wary of non-Indigenous people and organisations offering assistance. They feel they have been 'researched to death', and in the past have accepted assistance only to find it later withdrawn.

Repeated advice from Indigenous people is that non-Indigenous partners must take the time to establish a sustainable relationship of genuine rapport and trust, otherwise the partnership will not be effective. Non-Indigenous partners must understand community needs, and ensure that partnership outcomes are shared and agreed, not inadvertently imposed on Indigenous people or Indigenous communities.



Question 9

What could make partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and individuals operate more effectively?

Who should become involved in partnerships so that better outcomes for Indigenous young people can be sought?

What the responses said

In terms of what could make partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and individuals operate more effectively, many suggestions were offered. The following comment which highlights the critical importance of involving Indigenous people at the very early stages of any proposed initiative, is indicative of a number of very similar comments:

[partnerships should be] founded on a set of key values and principles ... including a belief that all people should have the right to make decisions about their own development and to participate in the development of their society. Adherence to these key values and principles coupled with a long-term commitment to Indigenous partners' organisations is fundamental to the strength of these partnerships and to the positive outcomes that accrue to the key stakeholders.

Further consistent themes that emerged included:

- equal ownership, commitment and goodwill;
- researching, understanding and respecting community values;
- understanding and adhering to protocols;
- ensuring representation from all appropriate groups and individuals;
- valuing the contribution of all partners;
- being genuine about the partnership and taking time and effort to establish a relationship of trust;
- ensuring mutual understanding and agreement on goals and outcomes;
- keeping lines of communication open.

Several responses suggested employing experienced Indigenous liaison officers to assist with partnership negotiation and implementation, and others emphasised the importance of involving the **right people**, that is, those who would be able to achieve identified outcomes. Skills required to support partnership arrangements included such things as counselling, youth work, knowledge of cultural difference, and experience in working collaboratively with Indigenous people.



It was perceived that strong partnership arrangements should also be adequately funded, accountable, flexible and sustainable, with all aspects of the longer term process underpinned by mutual understanding:

... clear outline of responsibilities of both parties; clearly achievable outcomes; clear support mechanisms; identified resources; remedial action.

Joint training and professional development, job 'shadowing' and mentoring, were additional processes that could be employed to strengthen partnership relationships.

On the question of who should be involved in partnerships, there was general agreement that in most instances these arrangements would involve community elders and leaders, Indigenous organisations and support agencies. Partnerships could be inclusive of a broad range of people, and could be formed with the view of meeting a broad range of needs. Examples cited covered:

- women's councils, elder groups and lands councils;
- legal firms (to teach Indigenous young people about the legal system and justice issues);
- government agencies, for example, education and schools, health, arts, police, defence, youth;
- youth development service providers.

Several comments supported the notion that the level of engagement should be both individual and institutional:

... collaborative and effective communication between individuals and organisations, not to work in isolation.

... representatives from three levels (policy, organisational, program) to ensure each understands the commitment required and all are working to the same goals.

Two recent Ausyouth publications, contain comprehensive discussion about forming partnerships for youth development. These resources can be accessed at www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth/⁹

Implications

Policy

- **Partnerships are fundamental to youth development for Indigenous young people, and policy initiatives should aim to encourage and reward collaboration.**

Collaborative partnerships are important because they facilitate a 'young person centred' focus. That is, they are formed specifically to address youth development needs, develop better supported pathways and transition points, and broaden the scope of the young person's positive youth development environment.

⁹ See, Ausyouth (2002) *Business Partnerships for Youth Development*, Ausyouth, Adelaide, and (2002), *School-Community Partnerships for Youth Development*, Ausyouth, Adelaide



Organisation

- **Effective partnerships with Indigenous organisations are flexible, sustainable and accountable, with all aspects of the longer term process underpinned by mutual understanding.**

Partnership agreements should identify clear and achievable outcomes, contain an explicit outline of the responsibilities of both parties, detail the resources and support mechanisms required, as well as the procedures to be used if remedial action is necessary. These arrangements should be documented, with regular review and evaluation processes involving all partners. Power must be shared equally and norms and values respected. Training and mentoring processes will contribute to greater sustainability.

Program

- **Program activities are designed to optimise the sharing of knowledge, skills and resources.**

All partners should be willing to contribute to the partnerships, and the contribution of all partners should be acknowledged and respected.



2.8

Building on strengths

Many of the programs and activities that are known to be succeeding and producing better outcomes for young Indigenous people apply what we have identified as principles of good practice in youth development. For example, a range of case studies are presented in the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce report, *Footprints to the Future*, others have been reported in literature about Indigenous health and well being, and many have been highlighted during discussions and workshops with Ausyouth. What these have in common are all or many of the following characteristics. They:

- promote the wellbeing of the whole person, drawing on the skills and resources of the whole community in an integrated way;
- are longer term and sustainable because they are built into the life of the community;
- seek to engage parents, elders, carers and other family members in all activities;
- seek to empower local community members by mentoring, training and other skills and knowledge building processes;
- provide a means for young people to connect with a broader network of trusted and supportive adults;
- demonstrate inclusivity by taking active steps to reduce barriers such as lack of finance, or transport, or make a conscious effort to embrace cultural difference;
- respect community voice, and value representative and collective decision making processes;
- celebrate contribution and achievement of everyone involved.

Another way to build on strengths is for youth development provider organisations to question their organisational culture and revise any practices that are racist or discriminatory. In the reconciliation document, *Overcoming Disadvantage*¹⁰, ('All sectors') outlines a range of possible actions that organisations can take to improve their relationships with the Australian Indigenous community. This document can be accessed at <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/8/>>.

Question 10

What youth development or other programs and activities are working well for young people, and why? How can we build on these strengths?

What the responses said

Respondents were able to identify a broad range of programs and strategies that were notable for generating successful outcomes for Indigenous young people, as well as other programs where program characteristics or strategies might be transferable. Programs nominated specifically were:

- First Contact (Indigenous organisation providing activities such as camping, rock climbing, bush walking, Internet access and computer training and games.);

¹⁰ Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000, *Overcoming Disadvantage*, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/11/back.htm>



- A Natural High (sporting activities, creative learning workshops, camping, fishing, art);
- Cape York Coordinated Approach to Youth Development;
- Conservation Bush Rangers (with 20 per cent Indigenous participation rate);
- Tamahine Girls Club (run by Girl Guides, New Zealand);
- Australian Volunteers International;
- Which Way You Mob (project funded by the Aboriginal Coordinating Council – crime prevention, youth suicide prevention diversionary program for Indigenous communities in far north Queensland with a focus on sports coaching clinics, cultural camps, reward and incentive trips for school attendance, music skills workshops and arts and craft workshops);
- Children of the Trees (Western Australia) – taking children/young adults for a week’s visit to an Aboriginal community in the Murchison region to help establish permaculture gardens in the community. This long term project has fostered friendships which have been maintained over 10 years. Each year’s work builds on the previous year’s work establishing windbreaks, orchards and vegetable gardens in collaboration with the local community. In addition, the project has received grants to employ artists and musicians to run workshops with the local children, culminating in a concert at the end of the week;
- Aboriginal Summer School for Excellence in Science and Technology, University of South Australia (which enables Aboriginal young people to come together as a group to experience and create positively – with positive Aboriginal role models and mentors);
- University of Technology Sydney – considerable work in the area of youth, arts and social change.
- Coming Up Taller – a youth development program in the United States for ‘at risk’ children with a focus on arts and humanities outside the school curriculum;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Career Aspirations Pathways Program;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Aspirations program;
- The Croc Eisteddfod Challenge (a performing arts competition for primary and secondary schools in Queensland with a focus on the education and prevention of licit and illicit substances);
- mentoring programs with local Indigenous communities in the Bendigo region which involve Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and foster cross-cultural awareness.

The reasons that these, or other programs, were considered to be working well were:

- accessibility (for example, free of charge and designed to cater for diversity);
- are flexible enough to be adapted to any culture;



-
- provide opportunities for fun, physical activity and other activities that are different from those at school;
 - improve educational outcomes, and provide education pathways and career assistance;
 - challenge negative behaviours such as drug use;
 - build skills and personal attributes, such as leadership, teamwork and self esteem, and enable interaction with peers;
 - utilise Indigenous leaders and adults as facilitators;
 - include parents and community in initiatives;
 - provide meaningful opportunities to help others, to make a contribution;
 - assist in building community motivation and capacity;
 - foster connections and friendships over a sustained period;
 - acknowledge achievement through awards or in some other way;
 - are collaborative, drawing on the efforts of a number of organisations;
 - have good leadership.

Good leaders (Indigenous and non-Indigenous people) who were dedicated, wanted to see positive change and successful outcomes for young people, were considered instrumental to the success of many programs for Indigenous young people.

Implications

Policy

- **Programs and activities that work for young Indigenous people feature elements that are recognised as good practice in youth development.**

A principled, youth development framework, customised in consultation with Indigenous people to suit specific needs and circumstances, has potential for wide application in work with Indigenous young people. The salience of the approach is confirmed by a range of examples which exhibit widely accepted indicators of good practice in youth development.



Organisation

- **Sharing and promoting good practice experiences and optimising learning from projects and initiatives involving Indigenous young people will strengthen organisational capacity to address diversity.**

Good practice is likely to evolve over time, so it is important for organisations to share knowledge, implement processes for review and reflection, and particularly, to build sustainable relationships with Indigenous people and communities in a way that maintains ongoing dialogue and builds mutual understanding.

Program

- **Program design incorporates elements of good practice in youth development which have proven successful in other initiatives with Indigenous young people.**

People who have been involved in successful initiatives are likely to be able to identify what it is about them that works well. Program planning, nonetheless, will need to be carefully customised to accommodate local circumstances. 'One size fits all' does not work when applied to Australia's Indigenous communities.



CONCLUSIONS

Youth development for young Indigenous Australians is too important to be left to chance. Indigenous young people are the future of Indigenous society and of Indigenous cultures. They deserve to be valued, affirmed as contributing members of society now, and be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to take their rightful place in the shaping of Australia's future.

The framework of principles for good practice in youth development has strong potential for application in work with Indigenous young people.

Mainstream youth development programs and activities, represented largely by a range of well known youth organisations and other voluntary community service organisations, are currently seen as the 'public face' of youth development in Australia. However, while there is undoubtedly strong support for youth development opportunities to be made more readily available for young Indigenous people, the existing youth development infrastructure – by itself – will not accommodate their needs and circumstances.

Youth development as an approach needs to be interpreted as going beyond the narrow understanding which has its focus on mainstream programs. Youth development is characterised by activities that explicitly foster the empowerment of young people and where the achievement of specific youth development outcomes is intentional. A youth development approach can be used broadly in policy spheres, organisation, program, service and community settings to effect a paradigm shift in the way we work with, value, and prepare young people in Australia. This is a task that must aim to embrace the Indigenous community.

Youth development principles need to be applied everywhere young people are – in the many spheres of their lives. It is clear from the perspectives that have contributed to this discussion paper that a key principle in any youth development strategy for Indigenous young people will be a focus on the young person – in all their complexity – and in a way that is strengths based, needs based, long term and sustainable.

The directions outlined in this discussion paper are a starting point for further exploration of youth development in an Indigenous context. Strategies for implementing principles of good practice in youth development, and for adapting them to specific environments, will need to be planned and worked through, accommodating cultural dimensions and deferring to the right to self determination by Indigenous people.

An integrated and comprehensive approach to youth development for Indigenous young Australians will require leadership and long term commitment by governments. It will also require sustained efforts by all other sectors to incorporate youth development principles consistently across the full spectrum of programs, services and activities that impinge on the lives of Indigenous young people.

The importance of engaging young people in their communities in their capacity as young people, rather than adults in training, is a vital and necessary condition for the ongoing evolution and advancement of any society. Indigenous young people deserve the best from youth development processes. Embracing good practice in youth development by all who are involved will ensure that young people and their communities gain the maximum benefit.



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Responses

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Ms Linda Burney, Director General, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Sydney, New South Wales

Ms Dimity Fifer, Australian Volunteers International, Fitzroy, Victoria

Ms Dina Gollan, Catholic Education Office, Thebarton, South Australia

Mr Jeff Hockey, Boys Brigade National Office, New South Wales

Ms Bronwyn Humphreys, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Perth, Western Australia

Ms Jenny Lee, Vocational Education and Training Equity Unit, Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia

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Ms Mandy Macky, Guides, Adelaide, South Australia

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Ms Meg Simpson, Manager, Cultural Development, Police and Community Youth Clubs, Orange, New South Wales

Ms Lee Smallwood, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Melbourne, Victoria

Ms Robin Sullivan, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Brisbane, Queensland



Mr Peter Taylor, Acting Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, National Policy Office, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

Mr Russell Wills, Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs, Darwin, Northern Territory

Mr Jim Varghese, Director-General of Education, Brisbane, Queensland

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Dr Bridie O'Reilly, Public Health Co-ordinator, Faculty of Law, Business and Arts, Northern Territory University, Darwin, Northern Territory

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Ms Judy Morris, Department of Education, Science and Training, Adelaide, South Australia

Mr John Ravenhall, Chief Commissioner, Scouts Victoria, Victoria

Ms Sue Sifa, Catholic Education Office, Adelaide, South Australia

Ms Margaret Wallace, Consultant, Muirgen Nominees (workshop facilitator), South Australia

Mr Mark Withnell, Australian Defence Force Cadets Directorate, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory



REFERENCES

This paper draws on a range of resources that are not referenced within the text. These resources include:

Australian Bureau of Statistics

- *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, ABS@Local:4704.0, accessed at <<http://150.101.248.5/abs/abs@>>
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census (Year Book Australia, 1999)*, ABS@Local: Special Article, accessed at <<http://150.101.248.5/abs/abs@>>
- *Population: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (Australia Now)*, ABS@Local, <<http://150.101.248.5/abs/abs@>>

Australian Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

- *A Roadmap for Reconciliation* (accessed through <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/10/>>)
- *Valuing Cultures* (accessed through Reconciliation and Social Justice Library at <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/toc-V.html>>)
- *Overcoming Disadvantage* (accessed through <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/toc-O.html>>)



THE AUSYOUTH NATIONAL PROJECT

Ausyouth was a national project established to provide a range of services to promote, coordinate and facilitate youth development as an approach and practice across Australia. The project was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Ausyouth's role was to work with and assist organisations and governments within the public and private sector to advance understanding about youth development, and to broaden the base for youth development opportunities.

Stakeholders in the process included youth program providers, policy-makers, practitioners in the field of youth work, youth affairs networks, government service providers, the business sector and various other organisations and agencies. Many of these organisations were represented on two groups regularly convened by Ausyouth: the Ausyouth National Advisory Committee, and the National Provider Reference Group. Together these two groups comprised a broad cross-section of the youth development constituencies in Australia. While each had a somewhat different role, they assisted the project by providing guidance and advice, engaging with their constituents, and examining issues of common interest and concern.

More detailed information about Ausyouth's role and a number of Ausyouth publications are available at www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth/.



www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth

Ausyouth was a youth initiative funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services



The Duke of Edinburgh's Award in Australia
SA Division Young Australian Challenge