Centre for Remote Health

A joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University

Youth Programs
in Remote Central Australian
Aboriginal Communities

Melissa Lindeman

Anna Flouris

Jess Lopes

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Centre for Remote Health
A joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University

Authors:

Melissa A Lindeman, Anna Flouris, Jess Lopes

Enquiries or comments about this publication may be directed to:
Centre for Remote Health, a joint Centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University
a partner in the Centre of Research Excellence in Rural and Remote Primary Health Care.

PO Box 4066
Alice Springs NT 0871

http://www.crh.org.au/

T: 08 8951 4700
F: 08 8951 4777

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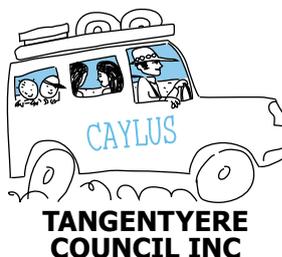
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OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Aboriginal: In this report the term "Aboriginal" is used in acknowledgement of the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in Australia and in recognition that this terminology is not universally accepted. The term "Aboriginal" is used in this discussion to refer to Aboriginal people in Central Australia, since this is the term most commonly used and accepted in this region. Please also see "Indigenous".

Cultural safety: An approach or philosophy that requires an examination of one's own culture and its impact on others through principles of reflection, decolonisation, examination of power and privilege [1].

Indigenous: The term "Indigenous" is used in this report to refer to a person who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives or has lived. This term is used to refer to the broad Australian Aboriginal population and also includes Torres Strait Islander peoples. Please also see "Aboriginal".

Opal fuel: Opal fuel is a low aromatic unleaded fuel that does not contain the properties associated with creating a 'high', and was designed to discourage people from petrol sniffing [2]. The Opal roll out region in Australia includes across Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory to the eastern parts of Western Australia and to the north of South Australia [3].

Petrol sniffing: Involves the deliberate inhalation of petrol fumes to achieve mind altering effects [4, 5]. There are a number of short and long term consequences of petrol sniffing, particularly extreme mood swings and severe depression [6].

School holiday program: A program that includes a variety of activities for young people, similar to those in a youth development program (refer to definition). However, school holiday programs are only conducted during school holidays as it is identified as a time of high risk for substance misuse, crime and other risky behaviours among young peoples in remote communities [7].

Sport and recreation programs: Sport and recreation programs typically include a variety of organised activities similar to those in a youth program. The NT Government's 'Sport and Recreation' department provides funding for a range of activities for the development of sport in schools and Aboriginal communities and management of government–owned sporting facilities [8].

Sport and recreation worker: A sport and recreation worker generally has a narrow and defined role and involves the facilitation of regular and specific diversionary activities to promote an active and healthy lifestyle for participants [9].

Volatile substance abuse (VSA) / Volatile substance misuse (VSM): these terms are often used interchangeably, and refer to the use of chemical compounds that give off fumes at room temperatures. These are also called 'inhalants' in recognition of their route of administration. They are central nervous system depressants, and their use involves deliverable inhalation to produce a state of altered consciousness or intoxication [6].

Young people: Young people, as defined by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) are those aged 15 to 24 years. Given that youth programs in Central Australia are attended by a significant proportion of those aged under 15 years, this report will define young people as those 10–24 years of age [10].

Youth development programs: Includes a variety of activities such as sports, arts and crafts, painting, games, music, discos, movies, bush trips and cooking, delivered throughout the year to provide ongoing support to young people and their families [7]. Youth development programs are also generally conducted by an experienced youth worker who is trained to deal with more complex needs of young people (e.g. volatile substance misuse). The term 'youth development program' is used interchangeably with 'youth program' in this paper.

Youth worker: Youth workers contribute to the development of young people aged 10–24 years, providing services and meeting needs, building relationships, and building connection to and participation in communities [11]. A trained youth worker normally has a broader skill base that includes delivering sport and recreation activities as well as being able to identify issues affecting young people and offering them help or referral to external service [9].

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth development programs have been a popular and successful approach to address various health and social issues among young Aboriginal peoples in Central Australia. Yet, little research has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of youth programs in the region and much of the knowledge from local, national and international work is dispersed and often unpublished. A study was undertaken in a partnership between the Centre for Remote Health (CRH) and the Central Australian Youth Link–Up Service (CAYLUS) to explore the enablers and barriers of youth programs in remote Central Australian Indigenous communities. The study involved interviews with stakeholders such as community members (including young people), youth workers and community service providers (teachers, store owners, police and health workers). Participants (n=60) were drawn from one community in each of the three Central Australian Shires (Barkly, Central Desert and MacDonnell).

Participants' perceptions of effective youth programs operating in remote Aboriginal communities vary within communities and throughout the region; however, there are some identifiable common characteristics, including offering a broad range of sport and recreational activities. Consistent with findings from the literature review, programs need to be constant, reliable and regular, offer variety, focus on engagement, and be context–specific, meaning they should focus on the provision of meaningful, culturally relevant, gender and age status appropriate activities. They should incorporate the involvement, guidance, and support from older family members, and employ skilled youth workers who develop ideas and lead activities. It is also crucial that programs have appropriate funding and resources, including infrastructure. A 'whole of community' involvement in youth programs was often raised as the ideal.

'Youth–centred, context–specific' provides a positive frame for the delivery of youth programs in remote settlements. Culturally safe service planning and delivery suggests locally–determined processes for decision–making and community ownership. In some cases, this may mean a community preference for all ages to access the service to engage in intergenerational and culturally relevant activities. Where activities are targeted at young people, yet open to and inclusive of all ages, they provide a medium for cross–generational interaction which requires a high degree of flexibility on the part of staff and funding programs. This also enables a 'life skill focus', with an emphasis on building connections (such as youth to youth, youth to adult, as well as between community groups), and requires coherent program design and implementation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. The foremost–identified priority is the need for regular and ongoing youth programs.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. As a core priority a basic set of services are established that ensure the occurrence of a consistent, ongoing youth program with regular activities. As outlined in Section 6, programs should be organised, stable and regular, fun and engaging, varied, locally directed and culturally appropriate.

At a basic level, basic service development effort is required in the area of communication and collaboration:

2. As strong relationships and collaborative work with other agencies are features of successful youth programs, it is recommended that this interagency work should be viewed as core to the role of local youth workers. Workers should have access to training and support in implementing such collaborative approaches, ideally through their employer agency.

3. Remuneration of workers needs to reflect the increasingly high skill levels required of youth program staff in remote communities. Appropriately remunerating workers will help to attract and retain skilled staff, which has long term benefits for program outcomes.

Young people in remote communities have a right to access an adequately resourced program to meet their needs. In order to achieve this:

4. Service providers need to be supported and resourced to ensure youth program staff are adequately prepared to take up these challenging roles.

5. Youth service providers should be resourced so that they can provide ongoing support, mentoring and training to their staff in the critical areas of cultural safety, empowerment and enablement skills of community development, and consultation and intercultural communication.

In order to achieve 'youth–centred, context specific' programs that all young people in remote communities can access, such programs need to be regarded as essential services in their own right, in the same way that primary health care services are regarded. Therefore:

6. The establishment (and funding) of a benchmark minimum for each youth program per community is required, including an evaluation framework to apply to all funded programs.

2 INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal young people are among the most disadvantaged groups in Australia [12]. In 2006, children and youth aged 0–24 years represented 57% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia [13]. The age range for Indigenous youth includes several pivotal stages of transition – primary to secondary education, schooling to employment, child to adult [14]. These are uncertain phases for all young people, but particularly for Indigenous young people. If these transitions are not well handled, there is significant risk for immediate and long lasting harm to occur.

Aboriginal young people are fundamental to the continued vitality of Aboriginal identity, but often experience poor health, boredom, and inconsistent care from family members [15]. Of particular concern in certain Aboriginal communities in Central Australia has been the high occurrence of petrol sniffing among Aboriginal youth [16]. In response, the Federal Government implemented the Eight Point Plan, which included the expansion of low aromatic Opal fuel across affected areas and the provision of alternative or diversionary activities [17]. The prevalence of petrol sniffing has decreased following the introduction of Opal fuel in specific communities in 2005 [16, 18, 19], however, outbreaks continue to occur throughout the region. Opal fuel is only one part of the overall solution and to achieve long term benefits to communities concurrent and comprehensive strategies are required [19]. It has now become common for regular ongoing sport and recreation or youth programs to be conducted in a number of remote Central Australian Aboriginal communities [10].

The focus of youth development programs over time has expanded beyond petrol sniffing and other VSM related behaviours to address broader health and social outcomes of young Aboriginal people. Youth programs have shown to have a positive impact on crime prevention [20, 21], juvenile criminal re–offences [22], self–harm and other risky behaviours [23]. Programs are having positive health benefits, including reducing the risk of emotional difficulties [24]. Anecdotal feedback also suggests that activities are promoting child and maternal health, child nutrition and suicide prevention. Organised sport and recreation activities for young people have also shown to influence educational outcomes such as enhancing school attendance and performance, retaining young people in the educational system and improving employment opportunities [25, 26]. Some youth programs have been designed to promote cultural renewal, foster self–esteem, enhance confidences, and develop teamwork, social interaction and skills [27].

Youth development programs and sport and recreation programs have historically been conducted to address VSM (including petrol sniffing) in Central Australia and they continue to be a vital part of the continued response to petrol sniffing outbreaks in the region. While there are significant short and long term health risks for individuals who engage in petrol sniffing, there are also serious consequences for families, local communities and the broader society [3, 4, 28]. The cost of petrol sniffing in the Opal fuel roll out region in 2005 was estimated at $78.9 million [3, 29]. Specifically, the net cost of disease burden of petrol sniffing was a considerable $38.1 million with health, while the long term care and rehabilitation impacts accounted for $12 million. It is recognised that the provision of early intervention against

petrol sniffing is critical with people much more likely to stop early in their 'sniffing career' before the practice becomes entrenched [30].

Youth programs that are well conducted have the ability to keep young people safe and teach pro–social attitudes and behaviours to counter negative influences [31], poorly designed activities may have negative consequences. Yet, few studies have been conducted to explore the value of youth programs given their relatively new status within the research field (Hirsch 2005, cited in [31]), particularly within remote contexts. There is also limited exploration of stakeholders' perspectives (including client, community and professional perspectives) about the effectiveness of youth programs in Central Australia.

Of the limited studies that currently exist that assess youth programs in remote Aboriginal communities they remain focused on assessing an individual program or community. Instead, this study collected data from three communities, each from a different part of Central Australia. Programs in these communities were delivered by three different service providers. By doing this we aim to provide a foundation to guide subsequent research to build new knowledge in the field.

2.1 Project aims and objectives

The aim of this project was to explore the enablers and barriers to success for youth programs in remote Central Australian Indigenous communities by obtaining various perspectives from stakeholders.

Specific objectives were to:

1. Investigate what constitutes a youth program according to stakeholders in remote communities.

2. Explore community and professional perceptions of whether the youth programs conducted in Central Australian remote Indigenous communities are effective and appropriate and why.

3. Explore ways to improve the scope and quality of youth programs in remote Central Australian Indigenous communities.

3 WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE TELL US? [1]

Youth programs in Aboriginal communities have historically been given a lower priority than other standard community services [15]. Only recently has the need and benefit of these programs been recognised and they are now given equal if not more importance. With the increasing number of youth development programs that have been created and delivered in Central Australian remote Aboriginal communities over the last decade, it is vital that programs are assessed and important lessons are shared.

This review involved a comprehensive search through online databases (ATSIHealth, SCOPUS, CINAHL, Wiley and Google Scholar) and the collation of grey literature from government and non–government agencies. The search strategy involved the following key terms: youth, development, programs, Indigenous or Aborigin*, and evaluation. Some grey literature was also accessed opportunistically, such as through reference lists and personal contacts. The review outlines the current context of Indigenous youth development programs in the Central Australian region. Focus is then given to the key elements of successful youth programs drawing on local, national and some international literature.

3.1 Background of Central Australian youth development programs

The Central Australian region is comprised of the Alice Springs Town Council and the three Shire Councils: MacDonnell, Central Desert and Barkly. In the past, before the creation of Shires, generally, each Community Council was responsible for the delivery of a youth program in their community [10]. The provision of these programs and other youth services in Aboriginal communities was generally irregular, ad hoc and subject to the difficulties of recruiting and retaining quality youth workers and the insecurity of ongoing funding arrangements [15]. In 2002 there were only five communities with youth services, and two of these five were only delivered occasionally [16]. Most councils received funding from the NT Government for sport and recreation programs, but generally it was difficult to recruit and supervise youth and sport and rec workers given the low wages that were provided, and the remoteness of the community. There were also some communities that received specific funding, although these programs often lasted for a short period of time and then collapsed [16].

Although few formal evaluations of youth programs in Central Australia have been reported [10], anecdotal feedback in the region suggests that youth service providers (Shires) are having positive outcomes for Aboriginal young people in these communities where adequate infrastructure and funding exist [33, 34].

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1 A version of this section of the report – literature review – is published elsewhere 32.   Lopes J, Flouris A, Lindeman MA. Youth programs in Central Australian Aboriginal communities: a review of the literature. Youth Studies Australia 2013; 32(1): 55–62.

The Central Australian Youth Link–Up Service (CAYLUS) commenced in 2002 and has become recognised as a leading organisation in the reduction of substance abuse in Central Australia [35] aiming to support community initiatives that improve quality of life as well as address substance abuse affecting young people [36]. CAYLUS has been working with the local shires and government agencies to extend youth development programs across Central Australian communities, with the philosophy that a preventative approach to substance misuse will be the most effective [16]. Other examples of local organisations involved in the delivery and support of youth programs in Central Australian remote communities include Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytatjara Women's Council (NPYWC), Waltja Tjutankgu Palyapayi, Bushmob and The Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (commonly known as the Mt Theo program [37]. There are also various youth diversion and youth development programs operating in the region, however, many are not regular, ongoing programs or are limited to town based activities. In addition, few of these programs have been evaluated or published in the literature.

3.2 Important elements of youth development programs

Since there is limited formal literature available locally, the key elements that contribute to functional and successful youth programs have been predominantly drawn from practice and grey literature. These elements have been substantiated by evidence based studies when possible and national and international literature incorporated where relevant. The key elements are discussed in turn below.

3.2.1 Variety

The evaluation of the youth development programs in the MacDonnell Shire [10] found that there was considerable age variability among participants, where in some communities certain age cohorts were over represented and in other communities they were under represented. In general activities are needed to cater for the full range of young people, especially those in the 18–24 years age group. Some of the core activities include bush trips, cultural activities, sports, arts and crafts, cooking, discos, movies, music programs, multimedia activities and computer programs [10, 38].

In relation to VSM related youth programs a Senate Select Committee [39] identified that youth programs should be available at different times – after school, evenings, weekends, and during school holidays – and should incorporate a range of activities to cater for the diverse characteristics of participants, including gender and age status appropriate activities. The Mt Theo program for example adopted a multi–faceted approach to petrol sniffing in recognition that a number of concurrent strategies are required [5]. Aside from youth and recreation programs, communities with high prevalence of "chronic sniffers" ideally should have access to a range of other support services [30, 37]. Chronic users with often have complex needs and will be harder to engage in youth programs than those who have recently started or occasionally engage in sniffing [30].

In Central Australia, outstations like Ilpurla [2] have also been created to host youth specific intensive residential rehabilitation facilities [40]. However, because of their remote locations, outstations may not be appropriate for those young people who are violent or seriously disabled. They can provide a meaningful program, but town based support is also needed to help with referral and placement of young people. Importantly, while outstation programs and other forms of rehabilitation can provide a restorative break, people who engage in substance misuse are likely to resume the practice if conducive changes have not been made in the home community to encourage other activities when they return. It is vital therefore that these programs do not place all the focus on young people that engage in VSM and disregard the importance of the community and other distal factors [40].

3.2.2 Engaging

In order for a youth program to be engaging it needs to be exciting and include opportunities for risk taking [30] with activities relatively informal and unstructured [41]. An evaluation of school holiday programs in Central Australian remote communities [35] found that the most effective activities for community engagement included those that catered for a variety of age groups such as bush trips and discos. Those activities that taught new and practical skills were also beneficial.

For those programs aimed at addressing issues of substance abuse it is recommended that activities avoid giving youth who sniff preferential treatment and include measures to avoid stigmatising drug users [40]. It is also essential that youth programs are delivered regularly and reliably, particularly at high risk times like school holidays when risky behaviours like petrol sniffing are more likely [15].

3.2.3 Context specific

As noted elsewhere [42], community youth program models are often underpinned by the assumption that Aboriginal youth and the wider Australian youth population have the same aspirations, needs and interests. The broad application of mainstream youth programs does not take into account the differences that exist not only between Aboriginal and non–Aboriginal youth, but between Aboriginal communities and groups. As d'Abbs and Maclean [28] argue, interventions are context specific, with no single solution applicable for all communities. Programs that are locally developed, context specific and culturally relevant may be more effective and appropriate for young minority and Aboriginal peoples [16], themes also echoed in projects described in the international literature such as the Hui Malama O Ke Kai (HMK) Program [31].

Fietz [42] proposes equipping skilled youth workers with the capability to understand the complexities of Aboriginal family life and activities developed with consideration of the specific context of implementation. It is also crucial that young people and their families are involved in the planning and development of youth programs to ensure activities are locally driven and not externally imposed [42]. The international literature suggests programs should address 'deeper topics' that allow youth to view how their culture can enable them

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2 This service was no longer operational at the time of writing this report.

to succeed in present society. To ensure programs are appropriately targeted, extensive collaboration with and involvement of community members is required throughout every stage from project development to implementation [31, 43]. This includes partnering with elders, parents, families, schools, medical representatives and other relevant tribal and/or urban stakeholders from other organisations [44].

3.2.4 Program staffing

3.2.4.1 Capacity building

Skill and capacity building is vital to the success of youth programs [15, 37]. Successful youth programs often incorporate educational and employment opportunities and utilise local resources, including involvement of role models, promotion of strong intergenerational relationships, and community development and participation. Participation and support of older family members is important since they can provide advice on the cultural content of programs and influence wider community support [5, 15, 45].

The Mt Theo Program is a well recognised example of a community initiated, supported and operated program [5, 41]. Warlpiri elders whose own children were sniffing petrol, worked with non–Indigenous staff to initiate the program. Although Mt. Theo continues to be supported by non–Indigenous staff, the decisions are still made by the Aboriginal management committee and are considered crucial to the ongoing success of this program. The MacDonnell Shire youth development program has also recently shifted from a sole focus on youth engagement to an emphasis on "sustainability and community ownership and nurturing strong local youth workers" [38, p. 1]. Activities are only delivered when local youth workers are available in order to achieve a culturally and contextually relevant service that is run by young community role models, although the change in policy has yet to be reported on [38]. The Mt. Theo program, recognised as a good practice model in the region, clearly indicates however, that such a goal is a slow process, and likely requires consistent support over a long period, from both Aboriginal and non–Aboriginal staff [41].

3.2.4.2 Youth worker workforce

Skilled and committed youth workers are a fundamental part of a successful youth program [15]. The Select Committee on Volatile Substance Fumes (as cited in [30]) comments on the importance of employing staff who have some previous understanding of the problems of petrol sniffing, who would provide activities that were "purposeful, interesting, exciting and educational" and who are sensitive to the needs of the community. In addition, both male and female youth workers may be required and activities or even separate gender specific programs need to be provided.

It has been argued that youth workers rather than recreation workers should be employed in remote communities since they are more likely to have a broader skill base and are therefore capable to work with young people with complex needs (McFarland, 1999 & Shaw, 2002 as cited in [30]). Youth workers that operate within a community development framework would also aim to enhance the capacity of local staff to run programs, rather than directly providing activities. Currently, only one shire employs staff that fit within the definition of a

youth worker, as opposed to a sport and recreational worker [38], however anecdotal evidence suggests that this is shifting.

The study of the Mt Theo program by Preuss & Brown [5] also highlighted that perhaps one of the important factors in the success of this initiative is the strong cross–cultural partnership between co–workers (local Warlpiri people and non–Warlpiri community members). Non Aboriginal members are acknowledged as an essential part of the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the program, gaining and managing resources, and negotiating between government agencies and communities in a way that is beyond what most Aboriginal people are willing or able to do. Since non Aboriginal people do not have strong Aboriginal kinship obligations, it was also beneficial that non Aboriginal people were able to deal with sniffing action promptly, without complications of family affiliations [5].

3.2.5 Resources and infrastructure

CAYLUS suggest basic infrastructure required for a youth development program includes a recreation hall or other suitable building with shelter and shade, accommodation for two youth workers (a male and a female), and two vehicles [18]. For operational requirements they suggest salaries for the youth workers, a team of local workers and an adequate budget for activities. The reality is that in some Aboriginal communities there is a severe lack of basic resources which is preventing youth programs from functioning effectively [37].

With the funding announcement of the $55 million for the implementation of the Eight Point Plan there was hope that infrastructure needs in the region would be fully met; instead, most funding has been allocated to short term programs and there is concern that at the end of the federal funding allocation, the situation in the region will not be much better off [19]. Ray and McFarland [46] commented that "···the availability of youth services is inconsistent across the region; some communities have adequate funding, others almost none". Reports have also expressed some concern at the tendency for funds to be granted to larger national and international NGOs instead of smaller community driven organisations [37], some have viewed this as wasteful and a duplication and devaluation of existing service providers. The infrastructure and resources required to support programs such as recreational and youth activities cannot be provided by communities alone [40]. Governments must also be prepared to commit to support evidence based interventions and to funding resources to create recreational, educational and employment opportunities. It is suggested that relationships between government and community organisations needs to be enhanced and strengthened [37].

Recently, there have been some inroads in addressing the deficit in youth service infrastructure. Specifically, the Aboriginals Benefit Account (a mining royalties fund) and the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA) have jointly invested around $13 million in youth infrastructure in Central Australia in the last five years. This work has led to much improved facilities in affected communities.

Despite this, youth service providers operate on limited funding across a wide geographic region in a very complex environment, thereby struggling to meet basic administrative

and operational requirements [10]. Programs have limited capacity to move beyond day–to–day business to work on forward planning and strategic direction. Given the limited resources that are available and the community demand for provision of youth services, regional services are also faced with hard decisions in terms of allocating resources to core administrative functions compared to on the ground services.

3.2.6 Conclusion

Few studies have been conducted that explore the benefits and value of Aboriginal youth development programs in Central Australia due in part to their relatively new status in remote settings, with most information about these programs reported in grey literature. These services are viewed by many as being necessary and essential in the NT remote community context [47], in the same way that primary health can clinics or local power stations are often viewed. As identified here there are also basic elements that need to be present in order for a community–driven youth program to be a possibility. Since there are inherent differences among Aboriginal groups and communities there are also limitations to the application of programs across diverse settings.

The international literature offered few studies with results on efficacy. There have also been few attempts to adapt mainstream programs so they are more culturally appropriate and attempts are too often tokenistic and do not effectively incorporate meaningful attempts at meeting community objectives. In addition, the majority of Indigenous targeted programs reported in the literature exclude an assessment of the cultural relevance of the program. Of the studies that are available the research design and methodology may lack rigour. Most youth development programs are also implemented as school or family based and very few are community based. Although the findings from the international literature is generally limited in relevance to the Central Australian context, these studies provide some insight into broad themes and emphasis the importance of further local evidence based studies in the area.

Overall, this review identified a number of key elements of a successful youth program. Successful programs are those that build on local opportunities, priorities and objectives and incorporate local skills and talents. Youth programs should focus on the provision of meaningful, culturally relevant, gender and age status appropriate activities. They should incorporate the involvement, guidance, and support of older family members, and employ skilled youth workers who develop ideas and lead activities. It is also crucial that programs have appropriate funding and resources, including infrastructure. Collectively, the effectiveness and sustainability of a youth development program may be dependent on the successful functioning of the various key elements outlined.

4 METHODS

This study was conducted in close partnership with the CAYLUS which has established relationships with the communities and service providers involved in this study. When possible, CAYLUS employ staff members who are already well known in the communities meaning that personal relationships exist with senior Indigenous and non–Indigenous decision makers in most communities in Central Australia. These relationships ensure that the study was conducted with consideration to the communities preferred ways of operating. The principles of cultural safety formed the conceptual framework for the conduct of this project, with an Indigenous researcher [3] advising the project. He participated in the design of the study and was available for consultation throughout. All Indigenous participants were offered the use of interpreters during their interviews.

4.1 Ethical clearance

Ethics approval was obtained from the Central Australian Research Ethics Committee (CAHREC) (approval granted on 14/10/2011), and the Flinders University Social and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) (approval granted on 7/10/2011).

4.2 Recruitment

4.2.1 Selection of communities

Youth development, and sport and recreation, programs in Central Australia are delivered and supported by the three Shires (Central Desert, Barkly and MacDonnell) and a number of key agencies. Although Central Australia geographically incorporates parts of Western and South Australia, in this study, we refer only to the Southern part of the Northern Territory (refer to map overleaf). This qualitative study involved interviewing participants from one remote community in each of the three Shires, which were chosen since (a) regular ongoing youth programs were operating at the time, and (b) CAYLUS staff members have established relationships within these communities. Due to confidentiality, the names and locations of these communities will not be revealed in this study.

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3 John (Binda) Reid, Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, Flinders University

Figure 1: Map of study area – Central Australia (Southern Northern Territory)

4.2.2 Participants

A poster (Appendix A) was widely disseminated throughout the three selected to inform potential participants about the project and outline the dates the researcher was visiting the communities. A researcher (JL) travelled to all three communities and stayed for up to a week in each community. During this time, information sheets and consent forms were distributed by the researcher to potential participants. CAYLUS also assisted in the distribution of these documents, when appropriate. Youth workers or sport and recreational workers also assisted in introducing the researcher to potential participants and were an important part of the recruitment process.

Focus was given to recruit a variety of stakeholders involved in the youth program or sport and recreation program conducted in the relevant community in an effort to gain a balanced perspective from community members and service providers. For community members, a male and female participant was targeted for specific age categories: <16, 16–20, 21–25, 26–35, 35+. The service providers targeted for recruitment were youth workers (both local Aboriginal youth workers and non–Aboriginal youth workers), teachers (including Principal and Aboriginal teaching assistants), health workers (e.g. Aboriginal Health Workers, Nurses and Doctors), General Store employees (Managers or general staff), Shire employees (including Shire Managers, Night Patrol workers, and other general staff) and Police (including Constables and Police Officers).

In addition to these service providers, each community had specific agencies that were also approached for participation where appropriate. In recognition of the high rate of staff turnover in many remote communities, an effort was made to interview staff who had been in the community for the longest period of time or who had worked in similar rural and remote contexts in the past. Similarly, community members who were predominantly based in the respective community were targeted.

The categories for participant recruitment were developed by CAYLUS and the researcher with the intention of maintaining a systematic way of capturing a variety of stakeholders' perspectives equally from each community. The categories also aimed at representing the general demographics and characteristics of the three communities. To protect confidentiality, we have chosen not to link the name of the community with individual quotes presented in the findings. Instead they are identified as community A, B or C, with each participant given a number (e.g. A2, B15, C6). There were 21 participants in community A, 18 in community B, and 21 in community C.

Table 1:

Participant category and assigned codes

Category[1]	Code (linked to individual quotes in findings) [2]
Aboriginal community members (aged under 16)	A5, A6, A7, A19, B9, B10, B11, B13, C16
Aboriginal community members (aged 16–20)	A12, A20, B3, B17, C4, C5, C20
Aboriginal community members (aged 21–25)	A8, A11, A16, B4, B16, B17, C13, C14, C15, C19
Aboriginal community members (aged 26–35)	A2, A10, A13, A14, A15, B6, B8, C3, C6, C12
Aboriginal community members (aged over 35)	A3, A17, A18, B7, B14, B15, C17, C18
Service providers – Aboriginal – non–Aboriginal	A2, A3, A8, A18, B6, B8, C6, C12 A1, A4, A9, A21, B1, B2, B5, B12, B18, C1, C2, C3, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C21

(Footnotes)

1 We have not identified participant gender in this table to ensure anonymity is protected.
2 Some respondents fit in more than one category.

Overall, a balanced and wide range of age groups were interviewed and mostly equal numbers of males and females. Community members included young people (users of youth programs), parents, and senior Aboriginal community members. The service providers interviewed in each community were mostly non–Aboriginal, although some Aboriginal youth workers were also included (where this is the case, these individuals are coded as an Aboriginal service provider, and also included as a community member). A total of 60 people were included in the study.

4.3 Data collection

4.3.1 Direct observations

A researcher (JL) accompanied CAYLUS staff to the three communities to observe the delivery of the youth program(s). Observations provided context to the study; the researcher noted how the youth program is run, engagement of youth in activities and any additional interactions from other community members and service providers. All staff members, youth workers, sport and recreation workers and program participants were notified about the presence of the researcher prior to commencing observations and permissions obtained. When groups were divided according to gender during the conduct of the program, the researcher respectfully acknowledged gender relationships and only observed the relevant group.

4.3.2 Interviews

An interview schedule (section 8.2) was formulated and revised with CAYLUS staff members and our Indigenous advisor. Interviews were conducted by one researcher (JL) during a one month period in late 2011. They were undertaken in locations and at times of participants' choice and were mostly conducted near the community stores, people's homes, or near to the site of the youth program. Interviews were semi structured and included questions about perceived definitions of a youth program, benefits and satisfaction of activities, appropriateness, impact on community and suggested improvements.

Due to familial and shyness issues, coupled with English being most participants' second or third language, interpreters were made available, and participants were given the option to be interviewed individually or with others in a focus group. Most interviews were conducted individually, however, in each community there were a few focus group sessions (ranging from 2–3 participants). The length of interviews varied from a few minutes to an hour. Most interviews were voice recorded and transcribed while some were hand scribed by the researcher. In a few circumstances the youth worker, sport and recreation worker, or CAYLUS employee sat in on interviews since the participant(s) expressed they felt more comfortable undertaking the interview in their presence.

4.4 Limitations

As with all qualitative studies, the findings are not generalisable to other contexts. They reveal themes that may be of relevance to other services in similar remote contexts, but are not representative of other locations. The data represent the views of various stakeholders in the current programs in the three communities included in the study. As we have been careful to protect confidentiality of participants and the locations where they live, we cannot report on the different perspectives of individuals in each community (as it may be possible to identify respondents), and therefore comparisons cannot be drawn between the communities. The data can be analysed for this purpose at a later stage but we have not done so at this point. A more detailed analysis of the data would require a different

approach to coding and analysis and would be more time consuming than the time we have had available to complete this pilot study.

There were some limitations to data collection in individual communities including:

- data collection coinciding with 'sorry business' (which meant some community members were not available);
- Store closure, resulting in community members leaving for a few days;
- Rain and road flooding (which meant that data collection had to be delayed from the optimal week that had been agreed for one community).

These limitations impacted on the time that it took to obtain the data, but did not impact on the number of participants in the study overall, as the target number was reached.

4.5 Data analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically by three researchers. Each transcript was read by at least two researchers. Each researcher used 'Post It' notes to identify themes in the transcript and a code to identify the location of each note. Individual researchers also had a different coloured highlighter and marked the identified theme on the original transcript. This allowed the second researcher reading over the transcript to identify what themes had already been identified in order to cross check but also eliminate duplication of Post It's.

After each transcript was read and coded, the 'Post It's' were collated and placed in groups of key themes on a board. Once all transcripts coding was complete and key themes were identified, researchers went through each group and identified sub themes. Significant quotes were then chosen from each subtheme to best represent the results. Outliers and quotes that highlighted additional pertinent points were also used.

5 FINDINGS

In this section findings are presented demonstrating the themes and sub–themes identified through the analysis. This essentially represents the outcome of a 'data reduction' process, meaning that the data have been summarised from the interview transcripts and emergent commonalities highlighted. Data have been aggregated as much as possible, and quotations are used to demonstrate participant responses.

5.1 Defining features of youth programs

5.1.1 Organised activities

Respondents were clear about the sorts of activities that define a youth program. They included but are not limited to:

- Sports (basketball, football, soccer, volleyball, cricket, skateboarding, bike riding, swimming, walking, gym, water slides)
- Art and craft (painting, drawing, sewing, quilting, photography)
- Music and drama (disco, singing, rapping, drumming workshops, recoding, drama, circus)
- Computing (Internet café, DVD making, computer training, games, Wii)
- Games (bingo nights, board games, cards, darts, pool table)
- Excursions and trips (bush trips for hunting and learning about bush medicine; visits to Alice Springs or other neighboring communities; gemstone fossicking)
- Miscellaneous activities determined by participants (cooking, movie nights, community BBQ's, girls makeup and jewellery nights)

Occasional rewards for consistent re–engagement in the program were thought to be important such as targeting programming and offering prizes (examples given included clothing, jewellery, gift vouchers, and skateboards). Disincentives for bad behaviour were also suggested such as being banned from attending if young people had been behaving badly.

Commonly throughout the interviews, structured, regular, consistent, stable and frequent hours were considered crucial, as well as programs operating after hours and during the school holidays. For example:

... something quite consistent so that people, the community begins to know what they can expect and that's what they knows happening on a certain day or whatever ... Makes it easier for kids to know what the routine is and creates a bit of stability in their lives which there isn't a lot of necessarily, coming and going from different communities or back and forth from town, moving houses every once in a while.. C21

Respondents also identified that activities needed to include variety, to be evolving and interchanging, to be fun, and to be clearly developing in a positive sense:

I think it's very difficult to put it into one thing because of the vastness of ... what it could be and what you make it and that your boundaries are what you set for yourself ... and the program out here has to provide for five years to twenty five year olds. Huge differences. And the different cliques within those structures; boys, girls and that, the mix of different age groups. A4

The range in ages that the individual programs needed to cater for was frequently identified as a challenge, but also one that could have many positive elements as programs could take a 'whole of community' approach:

... to develop the kids and the community and the elders, the parents ... because it's something for everyone, not just something for a group and it's something for everyone's benefit. B1

In general, the sorts of activities that were the domain of youth programs were easily identified. However, gaps and difficulties in catering to diverse needs were also recognised in the three communities. Some of the gaps arguably go beyond what is normally accepted as the core business of youth programs, and could be seen to be moving towards a service responsive to a broader community base. Some of the groups said to be not catered for easily include:
- Specific age groups for both males and females
- Younger women
- People aged 19–20 who sniff petrol
- Young men
- Post school age (18–23)
- Older people
- Families

These gaps were not universal – they differed between the three communities and over time with gaps possibly emerging depending on the age/ gender, skills and interests of the program staff at the time.

5.1.2 Cultural relevance

Undertaking planning for youth programs using approaches that are culturally appropriate or could be considered 'Aboriginal way' were considered important.

... the program where they go bush, very appropriate ... it's not boring and you often get the complaint in the classroom that it's boring but you take them in the bush and it wasn't that long ago that it was home. C11

One youth worker recognised that cultural activities were important but ... were often left up to individual workers to decide what they were. This respondent had the feeling that programs in general were more focused on "try[ing] to convert them to our way". A9

Certain 'culturally appropriate' activities were identified such as bush trips and traditional dance, but most agreed that delivering culturally appropriate services required employing a local workforce, and regularly consulting with elders and community members (refer also to section 5.2.7).

A good person to employ would be someone who was brought up on an Aboriginal community ... Every culture is different. Especially out here some things you don't do and some things you don't say. A9

The possibility of youth programs having a greater role in important cultural events (such as 'men's business' and catering for this transition among boys) was raised but is reliant on having a high level of community involvement and an engaged local workforce. There was also recognition that catering for different Aboriginal communities would often mean different outcomes in program activities and modus operandi of the service, as well as different interpretations of what it meant to be operating 'cross culturally' or achieving 'cultural integration'. These understandings can only be arrived at within each community using approaches decided locally.

They need more consultation, but on their terms. The head office can't expect to have these things done on their terms all the time ... There has to be more give and take on both sides and the only way I can see that it's going to happen is that you work on community time, you work in with the community. B1

5.1.3 Unrealistic expectations of youth programs

Generally, community expectations are in line with the stated role of youth services in the development of youth in communities around physical fitness, creativity, and specific and general skills and personal development. However, sometimes there can be discordance from community members or other service providers that can be challenging, placing unrealistic (and unfair) expectations on youth workers.

The 'ideal' is for community members to participate in, and have ownership of the youth service. However, there are instances where services are treated as having lessor importance and even an insignificant role, such as 'babysitting'.

... it gives them mothers a change to sit down and that sort of thing too you know ... Nah nah just leave it up to [the youth worker] and that's it or the other people. The parents sort of don't sort of get wrapped up in the program ... It would be good if they did. The mother's always say "Oh I'm tired". A17

I think they're happy that someone else is looking after their kids ... They really can engage with what's going on and become a bit more involved but they don't, seems like it's all left up to the youth workers. ... to kind of fill the void and keep them out of their hair, it occupies the kids and I think they use them as built in babysitters. A21

... why aren't you doing things with our kids to stop them getting into mischief? B1

Up to the parents to step up and take responsibility. Like with basketball. Little kids shouldn't play at all [at the time it is played] and should be winding down and getting ready for sleep at that time. C12

5.1.4 Purpose of youth programs

While the general activities of a youth program are not necessarily in contention, there is less concordance with the overall purpose of a youth program. These range from 'diversion' versus 'skill development'; 'community development' versus 'administration'; 'empowerment and engagement approaches' versus 'entertainment and diversionary approaches'. Many held the view that youth programs need to move beyond entertainment, to stretch young people physically and mentally, and to broaden their world view to develop them as young people fitting into a wider community. There was clearly value in broad–based activities that played a role beyond simply diversionary, although the emphasis on sport was still recognised:

... most of the funding that we get is for youth development which means that it's more than just kicking footballs and sort of diversionary activities. It's really hoping to stabilise kid's lives a bit and help them get a sense of their pathway ... It's not just good enough to sort of "Here's a basketball and go and play for a few hours". Let's try and actually think how can we get more sort of building a field that's more learning can take place and building up relationships and those kids starting to feel that it's a safe space where they can actually make choices or feel valued and that sort of stuff which maybe just the basic sports sort of event we don't really do necessarily for them. C21

Others were very clear that programs had a broader purpose in countering many of the challenging aspects of remote community life with the view that "just keeping them entertained is not going to solve it". C9 The difference in philosophies underpinning different providers' approaches to youth programs was noted: "They've all got a different philosophical approach to this". B12

I don't think there is enough structure ... it's put on some music and everybody dances around, which is basically a containment program rather than a youth program, it's not developing skills ... There is so much stuff that gets made up in communities just to, well time fillers really. B5

... the more these sorts of organisations begin to understand what sorts of best practice community development is about then it will become easier for them to meet their staff in terms of what they're really meant to be doing ... There's a lot of administration stuff is expected of staff whilst also hoping to engage in a whole wide demographic of young people ... C21

An activity is just really, oh it's important, but it's actually that process of a youth picking up a process or a skill of how to make that activity successful, there's the real power and to see them actually participate because then it becomes leadership and that's passing the ball. B12

... helping them to think about their futures because it's not really a thing in Indigenous communities to think about futures anyway ... it's subsistence living, so you live for today ... [Youth programs offer] ... something to help them open their eyes to different possibilities so they don't have to necessarily be grandiose ideas about working outside of the community but you know there's different jobs that they can do with the community that I don't think they even think are options ... they could be teachers' aids, they could work at the Shire office, they could work at childcare, they could be health workers. It doesn't seem to be "oh that could be a goal for my life" you know. C2

5.2 Youth program workforce

In this section we report findings relating to the workforce for youth programs in remote communities including attributes of non–Indigenous workers, and preparation and support for staff. Issues concerning employment of staff (both local and non–Indigenous) from the local community are also reported.

5.2.1 A long term workforce

Although not always realistic, the ideal of a long term workforce was discussed by respondents. When any new worker arrived in the community time needed to be allowed for adjustments, both for the worker to adjust to the community, but also for the community to adjust to the worker. Engagement, trust, acceptance, continuity and integration in the community were all attributed to successful youth programs, but all take time to develop. This can be very time consuming when workers turn–over frequently and communities can be slow to engage if they have to go through this often. When a community has had the experience of a very good youth worker, it can also be slower for them to 'warm' to a new person coming in to the role.

... the continuity is good, to have the same person back that the kids recognise and that she is coming back for them and they really appreciate that so that second and third time ... you just carry on. A4

We need this to continue, we need this to be brought back. But we've gone back to square one again. We're going to have to gain trust again, going to have to build those relationships again. B2

We need to have somebody that's going to be here for 12 months, have somebody that's going to live in the community, that's going to do the training ... When you get someone in here you've got to build that relationship with them. And then you built it and then they go ... B7

… it comes down to this trust from the community … It takes a lot for a community to just openly accept them and say "come in" and get on with your work … watching the community adjust to [the new youth worker], and watching [the new youth worker] adjust to the community. So yeah, that transition there was quite evident to start off with. But the good thing was that if [the youth worker] was unsure he [went into the] store and asked, or he would ask the elders of the community, which is what [the previous youth worker] put in place for him to start off with. You know, if you're not sure, then ask. B1

5.2.2 Individual attributes

There was strong agreement that the personal attributes of workers impact significantly on the function of programs, with some being able to identify what the positive attributes were. Some participants simply felt that "some people … can handle it real easy and … some … can't". A9

There was a couple here a few months ago but they ran away. They didn't seem to get in properly or something. It was quite sad. But then again, people have got to be properly picked for it. A happy go lucky person, that's what you've got to get. You got to get someone that, they don't have to be academically [qualified] but they have got to have a lot of gift with their hand. A9

… it depends on how strong they are too. You know [one youth worker] had this manner and this attitude that he will make things happen and he will involve people it in … But that's a different calibre of person. [The next youth worker] didn't have that same ability or same level of confidence as the first person. B1

… the kids just love him and I think it's because he's always smiley and happy … he's got this aura about him I don't know that kids just like him. C1

Confidence, experience, skills, interest, attitudes, commitment, and consistency of approach were all identified as positive attributes:

… it depends on the worker or workers and how much confidence and I suppose relationship stuff they they've got with the community. A2

A person whose really committed to it … He's got to have that drive, self–motivation, wants to be here, has a desire to do it that is very important. Because if you're here just for the money, you're here just for a car, if you're here for the free accommodation (the free package and all that), then nah. B2

A genuine care for young people, as well as high level of empathy and good listening skills (including being able to 'listen' to the community needs and wants) were also commonly raised as worker attributes contributing to successful programs:

You must have that empathy. But you don't have to be able to be in the community and have that experience, a lot of people do, but you must have that empathy. You must have ears. You must not think you know it all. B12

[One particular youth worker] is the best youth worker I have ever seen because she gets involved with the kids. She gets more involved in my opinion than she should, but that doesn't matter. But she does and she cares about them genuinely and she does a whole lot of things with them. She tries to teach them and help them and they do things that they probably shouldn't have to do, like teach girls about sexual health and that sort of thing. Yeah and she does things like that and I don't even think that is part of her job. I think she does it because she cares about them ... A21

Cultural understanding and skills in working cross–culturally (or the ability to develop that), was identified as a positive personal attribute, and when not in place can result in negative consequences:

... give them a process because a lot of this comes down to experience. As I say not many people 'do' remote community, so it's limited to those that have the experience. So to have something ... you know it'd be nice to have 'cross culture', a good cross culture. B12

... [the youth worker] hasn't been able to really do a lot because now with [that incident] with going off with the kids and things like that and not knowing where the sacred sites were, it's sort of drew criticisms from the community and they were quick to put him down for it, quick to blame him for. So from there on, if anything goes wrong, he will be the target, he will be the blame. ... Now because of [that incident], [the elders] will sit down and say to those kids "you must not go" "you must not do this" "you must come and see us. B1

Finally, and related to all of the above attributes, was the skill of 'public relations' in communities, including the ability to build rapport with community members and parents. These attributes were considered important for the success of youth programs (impacting particularly on attendance levels) requiring both a high level of interpersonal, as well as cross–cultural skills:

She had notices around, like posters. So everybody knows what's going on. At the shop, clinic, offices. A15

They should come around and meet the people and introduce themselves, especially the ones with the children's then they'll know who they are and what they're there for. Just say hello. Just introduce themselves and say "I'm so and so and we'll be doing this and that for the kids". That'd be good. Because we just sit here and we just say "Oh more people". We see you walking around you know ... B14

... come to the community, go to the elders on arrival and ask for permission to bring their programs into the community to help the children, ask them to assist, ask them for ideas, you know "how can you help me to make this program work?" and give back to the community ... You know, involve the community right from day one and the right thing is giving respect to the community on arrival and introducing yourself to the elders in the community. B1

5.2.3 Skills and training

Although the value of formal qualifications that provide a theoretical perspective was acknowledged, it is the practical experience in cross–cultural settings that was most highly valued and often sought by employers:

I think if I jumped straight into this job from no experience it would have been a struggle like anything ... and I'm sure that if someone just did like a Degree or whatever ... then come up there they'd get a shock ... While I've come [and] actually done the practical experience. B18

... people might have a youth work degree but they've never done any cross cultural work ... so I think those people start to get more awareness of what the skill base is that's going to help them in that remote context and the organisations will start to be aware of that and look for that. C21

Formal qualifications were regarded by some employers as important, particularly for leadership roles:

…generally they want a Diploma or a Bachelor or Degree in Social Sciences or Sport and Recreation [for a] team leader position ... B18

Regardless of the requirement or not for formal qualifications, it is the need for cultural awareness training, cross–cultural skill development, and mentoring for work in remote communities that was most crucial for participants:

... [cultural awareness training] should be compulsory ... We all live differently. Even though the ultimate laws are the same, how they live, it differs and it's very important for these [youth workers] to go in there with that knowledge, just being aware of the cultural differences. B1

... it's sort of good to sit down with the Indigenous bloke that was teaching it [cultural awareness] – he told us all about how stuff worked, how stuff used to work and how it's changed ... Not just about what the cultural stuff is but why it's like that you know, so you get an understanding of what you can and what you can't do ... B18

5.2.4 Induction and support for staff

Support from employers such as orientation, handover, and on–going support can create the conditions for a successful service and retaining a good youth worker. Attention to documenting the history of the individual program, including who from the community has been involved, was suggested as a simple, but positive step. Conversely, when these things are not in place, individual workers, and therefore the service, seem to struggle:

... currently ... he is only told what to do by ... his bosses and things like that. He is given a program to run by, but he doesn't get 100% support and he needs it, he certainly needs that support for him to maintain that level of enthusiasm, that level of confidence ... At the moment he stands alone. B1

... like yeah it would be a lot easier for me if I had another person that was qualified with me all the time. Like to have that one person come in for the first four weeks and go yeah this is how we're doing it, you can discuss it, you can work it out. ... I sort of learnt the other stuff along the way from [the local staff]. B18

In rare instances, support from employers can be misconstrued with workers instead feeling pressure to keep the service operating a certain way, so that funding isn't jeopardised and the program continues.

5.2.5 Community integration and role boundaries

One sub–theme that arose in relation to non–Indigenous workforce related to their integration in the local community, with positive potentially challenging outcomes. Such 'cultural boundary' issues, often related to gender and age, need to be acknowledged and handled sensitively. Sometimes the support of an external employer, mentor or respected community member may be needed to help negotiate the role boundaries.

... [the local female Aboriginal youth worker] wasn't allowed to work so closely side by side with [the non–Aboriginal male youth worker] without another Indigenous person working with her. It was unsafe in a cultural way for her and [the non–Aboriginal male youth worker] to work together ... Because he is so young the community [members] weren't so forthright in accepting him ... Poses a threat on the young men and their girlfriends and their women because they are very possessive. B1

They got to know me a little bit but still they find it easier to hang out with sort of the local guys. It's also a bit hard with the jealously that they have between like me and [the local Aboriginal youth worker] because [her] partner is all jealous ... ..It's just so much harder for someone this [young] to get the respect in the community ... It almost does need someone a little bit older in the role. B18

The demands on the personal life of youth workers living in the community were acknowledged by respondents. This related to issues such as expectations of youth worker time, a lack of privacy and sometimes a lack of respect of workers' personal boundaries.

> [One youth worker] was saying that they were always down there and they don't respect that sort of division and when you're here [in the community] and that goes for most of us, they think you are working 24/7 ... some of them do [respect your privacy] but some of them don't ... hounding you all the time. B18

> ... there is an expectation that activities will take place for their children, for their groups. There is an expectation that when a person has been appointed to a role, that things will happen. B2

> ... sit down and let them see you cranky or hurt when something happens because they know, and I mean if you keep being nice and oh don't worry about that, they'll just walk all over you ... A2

Workers themselves also held the view that role boundaries could not (and perhaps should not) always be adhered to, feeling the responsibility of their role acutely. This view was also held by some community members:

> ... when you work in a community you work from eight to four, four o'clock you do not shut your gates, you are in the community, you still have to be, and that's where the problem is. They go home and shut their gates and lock themselves out ... If you're not going to mingle with the community after hours you shouldn't be in the community. B7

> But I don't have days off because the kids come and annoy me, they get bored and I get into trouble if they might go and do something silly. So that's why I've got to keep them busy ... They might end up getting into trouble, like go petrol sniffing or go breaking into the shop. B8

5.2.6 Staff retention

The retention of the non–Indigenous workforce was seen as crucial for many of the reasons already identified, including fostering continuity, trust, rapport, cultural understanding and so on (for retention of local staff, refer to section 5.2.7). Some even attribute negative behaviour to young people feeling 'let down' when a worker is no longer available to them:

> ... yeah ... the kids feel let down and that's when they go and take it upon themselves to go and do silly things. A2

Worker burnout is a huge problem and one that was identified as contributing to the high turnover of staff on remote communities. Proper remuneration, 'forced' and regular breaks from the community, personal use of vehicles, being allowed to have visitors come and stay, adequate housing, and overlap of staff when the regular worker was leaving for a period of

time were suggested as retention strategies. Some felt that there was little understanding by their employers of what is involved as a youth worker, living and working cross–culturally.

Lots of people that don't know the program think you just have fun, you just play games. It's more than that ... it's a huge task. B12

Working too many hours and not getting paid for it. But these blokes they were putting in terrible amounts of hours. B14

Youth workers are some of the less paid community workers ... C21

So there is usually a big gap between someone going and someone coming or they send someone out on an ad–hoc basis ... There's too much of a gap between the workers and it's not easy finding the right workers. ... they should have a pool of people who are trained as youth workers so that they can take shifts. A21

Some respondents felt that recruiting 'couples' to a remote youth service is more likely to attract and retain the 'right sort of person' as well as helping to counter the sense of isolation and loneliness that can be the experience of single or 'lone' staff. Some also felt that couples are more likely to integrate into the community better.

I think you need a couple because if you come out with your partner this place is too small and dull not to be working ... And with a couple too they have got two sets of different skills. So if one person likes doing something and the other likes doing something else then they can complement each other. And it's hard to find a couple, a young couple who have got energy and drive and no kids who want to work out here and who want to stay. A21

... once they get into a remote community like this they have to let go of all the city living ways and how they do things in the city ... isolation is one of the biggest problems ... When you are new to a community, imagine what it's like when you're single and you come out into a community straight from the city ... It's overwhelming. B1

It's pretty hard just to sort of be out here, especially like to be single it's sort of harder, or not living with a partner ... you're sort of by yourself all the time. B18

5.2.7 Local workforce

One of the most frequently raised issues was the importance of employing local workers in the youth service. Local community members can be employed as youth workers on an on–going basis, or can be employed on a casual basis for specific events, or for specific tasks such as helping at the canteen – individuals may choose regular employment or not. Either way, employment of local community members has many benefits including enhancing cultural

appropriateness of programs (and understanding of local language), providing positive role models for young people, and fostering greater community involvement, integration and ownership of the program by the broader community.

… always discuss and talk to them and ask them "which way, should we do it this way or which is a good way, which is the better way?" Because they might tell you a real simple way and they can tell the kids in their own language … A2

So it would be good to have people from the community to work here because if white people come [the kids] get too carried away then they'll start showing off. B8

The kids feel more comfortable with them for a start. Like at the last place if I didn't have any Indigenous workers, I'd have one or two kid's rock up. B18

… it is really important that they have Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women working with them because the sport and rec managers are also learning and who better to learn from but the men and the women that they have employed to help them. And it makes their transitional period a lot easier for them in the community, for acceptance … they are easier accepted if they have an Aboriginal man or woman working with them. B1

… there's always been the hope and expectation of trying to mentor and work alongside local staff to get them understanding what a youth program is and what the running of it involves … We've had a whole number of people work with us for a while and stop and come and go … C21

… with young people in the past you know my knowledge and they engage in that knowledge by having them active in that knowledge, that's passing the ball. And it must be passed. My job is to pass the ball … It's not for me to hang around, it's to pass the ball and have someone else run with that ball and start passing, that's the goal, that's the outcome. B12

While there was universal agreement that employment of local community members was crucial, this was also commonly one of the most difficult areas identified by respondents. Lack of funding for casual staff was problematic, particularly in community B:

But I keep telling them, the boss in town tells me that they don't have enough money to pay for people and we really need more people to work … There's people here that wants to work but there's not enough money. B8

… with two more staff members it would be easy to run three or four programs at a time with no problem at all … we could just run continuous programs for six hours … but we can't do that now because mandatory break times and whatever. B18

Respondents articulated that it can be very difficult to identify appropriate local workers due to things like cultural obligations and family responsibilities and pressures. Sometimes local staff can feel the pressure of living and working in the community – without boundaries – which can be a disincentive to recruitment and retention.

> *... they're family to those people so they have different obligations. So if [local sport and rec workers] seen to be like might be disciplining or using some behaviour management strategies on one of her family members it might come back around to her that she is being mean ... A2*

> *You know they're entitled to have some time off as well. I think that's pushing the boundaries a bit much, seven days a week. B7*

Other problems associated with the employment of local community members related to inadequate training opportunities, and inadequate provision of support for them.

> *We have our own sports and rec people in the community but they take on the role but they don't really get properly trained ... Yeah, they struggle a bit from other standards ... C4*

> *Like it could almost be a whole job on its own, just trying to help staff get the hang of what it means or this is how you clean the troopie or this is how you fill in the time sheet or this is how email works ... there's a lot of stuff. C21*

> *As soon as [non–Aboriginal youth worker] leaves they are lost. They need ideas. A3*

> *Like to get volunteers or like another two employees to help us out ... We like to have people from this community willing to work and stick around with the job. But it's hard to get people out here to work. I don't know what to do ... Because I've got responsibilities here too, at home. I've got my kids that I've got to come back and cook for them, clean, wash their clothes and stuff like that. And I've got no one to support me here, just my little sister and my mother. A8*

Some respondent also felt that due to a serious legacy of substance abuse in earlier generations, and poor educational attainments, there are no suitable people the right age that are capable of working at a level that could enable them to eventually take over the running of programs.

> *[...one particular local youth worker] is totally involved and totally into it but is quite illiterate and a lot of that generation or that demographic of age group people mostly were sniffers and missed out on school ... C21*

5.3 Youth program outcomes

In this section we report on the many outcomes of youth programs reported by respondents, including on substance abuse, crime prevention, antisocial behaviours, educational benefits, and benefits to the broader community.

5.3.1 Substance abuse prevention

The impact of curbing petrol sniffing and alcohol use was recognised by respondents:

> *If there are programs then it's good, and there doesn't seem to be a petrol sniffing problem here ...*
> *You hear the odd rumour that there might be one or two getting petrol from somewhere in town*
> *but it's not what it was. C11*

> *We all know what happens when teenagers have got too much time on their hands, they got*
> *nothing to do and all day to do it, and that leads to all sorts of results, and if I was living out here*
> *and I had no job, no prospects I would want to be stoned on 'gunja' and pissed all the time quite*
> *frankly and anything to make time go fast or blur time ... So when those kids come out of school*
> *they need something because they are pregnant by the time they are 16 or 17 and that's probably*
> *the result of lack of education, nothing to do, drinking, and when they smoke and sniff petrol. A21*

5.3.2 Prevention of crime and antisocial behaviours

The positive impact on preventing criminal behaviours (such as theft and break–ins) was a frequently reported outcome of youth programs with a strong correlation noted between a functioning youth program and a reduction in anti–social and criminal behaviour:

> *There was normally a large amount of crime during the school holidays and when [the youth*
> *worker] was working it was evident that crime rates reduced A1*

> *Yeah, there were heaps of breaking ins in this community. Like, they used to steal at the council*
> *office, at the shop, at the clinic, at the women's centre. A lot of kids were sniffing out here. A8*

> *When they're home they got nothing to do, they go around stealing and things like that. They just*
> *being a nuisance around the community. A17*

> *... school holidays is huge because if the kids aren't doing anything, they are shoplifting. They are*
> *getting into mischief. B1*

Youth programs have big impact on countering anti–social behaviours caused by boredom, some of which potentially cause long term harms, for example substance misuse. At a base level programs provide distraction, occupation and some stability that may not always be present in family and community life. There was also strong recognition that young people appreciate being involved in their youth program in their home community However, there is little evidence to indicate that people stay away from these behaviours when programs aren't operating.

> *We can see ... when the workers aren't here ... the kids just walking around throwing shoes onto*
> *the power lines, throwing rocks into the transformers, they knocked the power out, just throw*
> *rocks on our roofs, they just do it for fun, and they just laugh at us. They smash windows, torture*
> *dogs it just comes down to parental control, the kids are out there causing trouble. A21*

And that helps them, it sort of gets them away from here and occupies their mind. Otherwise they all get in gangs and they all walk around here and want to break glass and all that sort of thing. But you know, just by doing that, it takes them out and gets them out of the way. It teaches them something too ... As soon as [the youth worker] went away they started breaking everything, they smashes the lights over here at the tennis courts, basketball court. They broke the lights down at the rec hall ... it sort of went backward for a while. B14

I remember going to a Court case, this young fella was on charge and a hundred other charges of stealing and carrying on and that. The lawyer said "These kids have got nothing to do so they're quite justified to go round breaking in because there's nothing for them to do. C11

They got a lady here now, lady and man. Keep them kids strong. When they was away, they was a bit sad, they are wandering around everywhere in the streets. Hang around ... A18

5.3.3 Education, life skills and valuing of community

Youth programs in remote communities were seen as 'safe places', often offering refuge from unsafe situations for some young people. These were places where positive role modeling could take place, as well as general education and learning for life. Young people attending youth program have the opportunity of improving their self–esteem, having a place of expression and a place where they can obtain advice.

... giving them not only stuff to do and to look forward to doing, it is keeping them safe and educated. Whether it's, doesn't have to be school education could be life skill education too ... C1

... the kids are our future and we need to encourage them in everything in every kind of way. So if they get older, if they want to do stuff here as well. Keep them in the community and it's better for the community, make it grow stronger. A8

... keep all the young man's and women from this communities to stay in one place in their community. Because they might go and drink and bad things at town and it's not good. Then they bring trouble into this community that's why we want to give all the fellas and the young girls safe here to, from like, through this, they get busy and they love their sports that's why they want to stay here. C3

Having older kids for the kids to look up to is good because they misbehave less ... like if the kids are doing something stupid and they're not finding it funny the kids will stop doing it ... 18 to 25 year old blokes really ... the kids sort of behave more sensibly when they're around and having the adults around. B18

Very concrete ideas offered for directions that youth programs could take (or have already taken) included:

- cultural activities and cultural learning:

  ... learning to know with school mob and youth workers and local people who know more about the land and give all the kids a test to name all the trees, mountains in the area. The younger ones got to know their own totems then they can grow up and make money from dot paintings. C18

- health promotion (including sex education, hygiene, healthy eating and nutrition)

  They should have a drop in centre and have someone there to supervise, somewhere to hang out. Because girls and fellas hook up at the moment and get up to no good. For the teenagers you could have a drop in centre and could have brochures and stuff about sex information ... They don't have higher education here so maybe the community should have a night for sex–ed. C12

  I think there needs to be a bit more education but I don't know how a youth program could do it ... going to the shop and getting too much sugary stuff is a big problem. I want to do some lessons on diabetes but I think that's an area that needs work. C11

- and organising opportunities for work experience, although other agencies are often funded to run such employment programs:

  They could do work experience at the Store or Office because lots are on Centrelink at 16 years old, but they should be working. Once school is finished they go to town for boarding school but come back and waste it and don't work and get Centrelink. C12

5.4 Collaboration and relationships

A 'whole of community' involvement in youth program was often raised as the ideal (and something that has been achieved at times), with many positive outcomes. A trend towards viewing such programs as something other than for young people exclusively was evident in the data. Intergenerational outcomes – in particular, elders teaching young people – was a commonly expressed theme.

... [the youth worker] invited, he got everyone involved, everyone: the school, the cookhouse, even ... the store you know ... It was just the way he mingled with people, he brought everyone in on the event and on the project ... I would love to see this a program where everyone can work together, everyone can weave together ... B1

... what was excellent was the total participation by children, families, mothers, family groups ... B2

... make sure you take them elders out there with you to teach them ... It's good for the elders and it's good for the kids to teach them culture. A21

I think being integrated to the community is definitely an important part of any good youth program. Like knowing what's going on and checking in with, listening to what the community actually wants which again having local staff is a great way for that to happen as well as listening to elders and elders saying "Oh we should go and do this with the young children; they should be learning this or that". C21

Other common sub–themes identified in the interview data included youth programs providing networking opportunities such as access to social interaction (various ages and genders), a structured avenue to enable parental support and involvement, and even an avenue for reconciliation between conflicting family groups in local communities.

... doing a certain number of activities that are really open door for everyone and when a family starts to come all together that's when you're really engaging a whole lot of people and the family know what you're doing so they're more likely to be happy when kids are doing stuff on their own, they know what you're doing. C21

[in this community] there are two families experiencing conflict, the community is divided in half. This has been a long standing issue ... Youth programs could show, all family things aside, they can move forward from this. A1

Respondents identified a variety of ways to achieve a 'whole of community' approach to the provision of youth programs, but essentially community development approaches were evident through the analysis. For example, one respondent stated program rules needed to "come from community", and pride and ownership of the programs would result from good community consultation (versus top down approaches). The involvement of young people in determining the direction of programs was also paramount, resulting in a lack of engagement where this did not occur. Approaches to consultation, involvement and participation needed to be handled sensitively and developed to suit each community, and groups within each community. For example, in some places one–on–one discussion can be more effective, and in others group meetings are favoured. The high level skills of the youth worker being able to determine the best approach to facilitate an environment where "people are more willing to open up" is evident.

They've got to realise that our people here want to work but they want to work as a team and you have to come as a team, our community needs to be involved in the decision making. ... [and the] kids should be involved in the decision making and the responsibility. B7

... trying to check in with [relevant community members/elders] and make sure that we're supporting stuff that they're trying to do or that they're aware of what we're doing and asking someone like (female elder) if it's related to women or someone like (male elder) for young fella stuff or helping them to help us identify young community leaders ... C21

Sure I've got experience and all that but the answer will come from within the community. So that's why it's so important to build these processes that are easily understood so it does remain in the community. It wouldn't matter if [the youth worker] left. B12

And you know for the future like they'll be, they're own future, the kids. We need to tell them, if they want to run the Sports and Rec if they get older and they can have their own things (ideas) and stuff like that. Whatever they want to do ... A8

5.4.1 Interagency relationships

Another side to the 'whole of community' ideal, was for youth programs to seek collaboration and partnerships with other services within the community, including visiting services.

... I think the more organisations begin to enjoy and accept working together that whole difficulty that's historically been the case with clinics or youth programs or police or school not managing to actually be on the same page and work together in unison rather than criticising each other. C21

Ways to achieve such collaboration included purposeful, regular communication and consultation to set up collaborative processes that can continue even as program staff change over. The importance of following through on ideas proposed was also evident.

There's been some effort by our government business manager to kind of get everyone talking, having a meeting once every six months so there is a bit of that happening and that does happen if there's good relationships amongst those people anyway ... it doesn't have to be formalised but it's dependent on personalities, that's the sad thing ... which will probably be always the case ... [The] politics of small town communities amongst different agencies or the different white people who are there can often be ... harder than engaging with the local population ... C21

We don't have meeting as such, not formal, but there's often good positive communication about the different things and chats and stuff. I think it's good and does help, just to talk over issues and reinforce things and all that. C11

They don't consult, they don't go ahead. You can put an idea but it never goes ahead. B7

... [town meetings are a] way of communicating generally to the people but I don't know how much of feedback they get at the town meeting ... but it's not really for the community to speak from what I gather ... C2

... nobody seems to talk to nobody else around here much, for lots of different reasons. There's been the wrong people in the wrong places in this area for a long time. C9

Some of the results indicated a limited awareness of youth programs by the broader community. For example, one store manager commented that they have never been formally told what the youth program is or aims to do, and has never been invited to have any input into the program, despite seeing the benefits of doing so and being "linked in". Others also expressed a lack of awareness and communication, and whilst there was a strong desire for greater involvement this could be hampered by the other service providers' capacity and too reliant on individual people driving the processes.

Youth programs are clearly viewed as a good opportunity for other agencies and service providers to establish rapport with young people, foster intergenerational contact, offer seamless service provision and pathways, as well as providing the opportunity for resource sharing. Relevant agencies identified that could to benefit from greater links to youth programs included night patrol, police, schools, arts centres, aged care services, stores, employment/training agencies, and other visiting agencies.

... if they don't see the Police, except Police locking up people, what picture do they form in their head? ... I reckon to have that interagency relationship you know what everyone because we all/ they all live together and they're all family in most of these communities here. A2

5.5 Resources and infrastructure

In this section we report results relating to resources and infrastructure (not including workforce issues which are reported elsewhere) including both enablers and barriers to successful youth programs. Issues relating to facilities and equipment were commonly mentioned, particularly how limited they can be, poor treatment of equipment and problems ensuring adequate maintenance of equipment and buildings so that activities can run.

They have got a lot of infrastructure in place here ... It needs constant maintenance. So that's where money needs to be channelled. If something is broken, fix it. B2

But when we go and walk into the office about the Rec Hall, they don't like come and do it straight away ... And Ill go in tomorrow again and tell them about it and they'll do nothing. B8

... they buy a whole lot and inevitably before long it's all wrecked, or damaged or stolen. A part of that is to say they got no money to buy anything and then the kids have got nothing and then it's hard to invent a program. But they have got to have gear ... As fast as it gets broken the faster you have to replace it and fix it because that's just the way it is and so there's got to be the resources there too you know. A21

In some sites where infrastructure upgrades have been implemented the difference this made was noted.

... [One agency] has done a great lot of work to assist those things in the communities, housing and infrastructure and fixing up basketball courts and all those cost heaps of money in the remote context. C21

Transport, as might be expected, is an important issue. Access to adequate and reliable vehicles was said by some to be crucial, and is an issue that could benefit from resource–sharing within communities.

> *… we need to have more vehicles, like a bus, to get them around … A8*

5.5.1 Funding and accountability

Funding processes were said to at times require burdensome administration and 'paperwork' through the accountability required by administrative and funding bodies. Supportive policies were suggested to ease the burden for workers in communities.

> *… reaching a balance where obviously collecting some stats and someone helps with funding and is really necessary part of the job but if you're asking people to sort of be two days a week writing report an three days or days a week … C21*

The way funding is allocated to programs can sometimes be counterproductive to community development approaches in that it can foster a top down approach:

> *Often we bring in the sports thing or the youth program, we bring it in and impose it and instead of trying to develop it … But we tend to run everything to death because the money's there so we use it, we have to use it. B5*

Of most concern however, was for the need to ensure better sharing of resources (such as vehicles) in communities with the recognition of silo funding causing many problems. Working with other, neighbouring communities was also raised as a potential avenue for resource sharing. The issue of unequal distribution of funding for youth programs among communities was highlighted.

5.6 The context of service delivery in remote communities

In this section we aggregate some of the comments and issues raised that paint a picture of the context for youth program service delivery in remote Central Australian communities. The sorts of contextual issues mentioned included:

- extreme weather conditions, including the absence of access by road after rain;
- the high possibility of personality clashes in remote communities such as between service providers, and between community members;
- high turnover of staff in communities resulting in fractured services and having to constantly rebuild the relationships on which they often rely;
- community politics and tensions such as between families, or between service providers which can make the day–to–day work of running a youth program very difficult and tiring;
- the high burden of grief and loss experienced by Aboriginal families the effects of which can be unsettling for communities and bring activities to a standstill;
- the impact of poor health outcomes of local community members resulting in things

like hearing and language problems among children;

- poor nutrition knowledge amongst young people and their families, and poor quality nutrition options (e.g. high sugar and highly processed foods common);
- many young people lacking skills in dealing with anger and emotion, and exhibiting high levels of problem behaviours such as bullying/teasing and violence.

But we've had a lot of 'sorry' too so that will mess up a lot of your program and people coming in and doing things because they have been requested not to come you know so community cultural obligations mess up the implementation ... and it's probably I reckon that's when the problems occur during the community when adults are off doing cultural stuff then the kids are left and then we get problems especially if there's no workers A2

... back then we used to like heaps of activities. But now it's a bit like with the 'sorry' stuff and you know like fighting has been going on. So we didn't have time to be opening the sports and rec at the moment. A8

... apparently there's certain groups ... that clash and they won't go to school because it's the wrong people going. C2

Many of these contextual issues can challenge the success of youth programs, and it is by no means an exhaustive list. The point is to recognise such issues and acknowledge the resources, skills and knowledge required of workers who choose to practice in such contexts. The programs themselves can also help to mediate some issues that pose challenges to young people and their families.

6 DISCUSSION

As distance increases from major cities, population dispersion increases, health outcomes decline, access to services becomes more difficult, prices rise and the wherewithal to meet these costs declines [48]. The Central Australian region is further characterized by vast distances, considerable levels of poverty, poor infrastructure, low levels of educational attainment, and high levels of substance use [16]. There is little doubt that the delivery of youth programs in Central Australia is inextricably linked to the characteristics of remote Indigenous communities (see section 5.6) as well as the unique features of individual communities. These form the context of service delivery and need to be acknowledged as factors that can create barriers to effective service delivery, but in many ways also provide their 'raison d'être'.

Participants' perceptions of effective youth programs operating in remote Aboriginal communities vary within communities and throughout the region; however, there are some identifiable common characteristics. The findings in this report reflect the results of the literature review, in defining the key elements that should be present to increase the likelihood of success [32]. Programs need to be constant, reliable and regular, offer variety, focus on engagement, and be context–specific, meaning they should focus on the provision of meaningful, culturally relevant, gender and age status appropriate activities. They should incorporate the involvement, guidance, and support from older family members, and employ skilled youth workers who develop ideas and lead activities. It is also crucial that programs have appropriate funding and resources, including infrastructure. In this section we return to the objectives which guided the study and review our findings in the light of these key elements identified in the literature.

What constitutes a youth program according to stakeholders in remote communities?

Participants clearly identified organised activities with an emphasis on sport and recreation as the key feature of youth programs (section 5.1.1). Such activities needed to be locally directed, and need to be fun and engaging in order to promote attendance, with some participants indicating their preference for rewards as incentives for on–going engagement in some programs. Youth programs were also identified as needing to be structured, stable and regular (including school holidays), and offer variety. Gaps in some programs were identified and these often referred to the broader community rather than youth, for example 'families' or 'older people'.

The purpose of youth programs (reported in section 5.1.4) was identified as broader than simply the provision of activities. Many participants recognised that youth programs need to move beyond entertainment, to stretch young people physically and mentally, and to broaden their world–view to develop them as young people fitting into a wider community.

What are community and professional perceptions of whether the youth programs conducted in Central Australian remote Indigenous communities are effective and appropriate and why?

Cultural relevance is also a key feature of youth programs in Central Australia, and was often the feature that was the most significant in determining effectiveness and appropriates, although there were various definitions of what 'culturally relevant' may mean (section 5.1.2). Community expectations included community ownership and participation with some differing expectations evident between community members and program staff of what are reasonable expectations of youth programs and staff (section 5.1.3). Some of the finding related to success in the area of VSM prevention (section 5.3.1) and also the prevention of crime and anti–social behaviour (section 5.3.2) with a strong correlation between positive outcomes and the existence of a regular, well–functioning youth program. The broader role of programs in the provision of education, like skills and valuing of community (section 5.3.3) was well articulated by participants.

The greatest identified priority for youth in communities is simply the actual occurrence of a consistent, regular and organised youth program with daily activities – without this, the developmental and training, etc, component of a program is much less achievable. The kinds of tangible tasks and approaches that are likely to contribute to more successful programs (measured in terms of likely impact of the program, higher attendance and high levels of community support and engagement) would include:

• First priority – consistent, regular, organised activities
• Community consultation and engagement mechanisms in place (such as regular community meetings, and deliberate strong working relationships between program team and other service providers and stakeholders)
• Regular communication of program activities via timetables/posters in community
• Well maintained equipment and vehicle/s
• Well staffed, including both local and non–Indigenous staff consistently employed on flexible and appropriate terms that build on workers interests and availability (supported by adequate funding and enough capacity in the program to adequately support staff)
• Volunteer program to support youth workers (resourced)
• Structured handover, support and mentoring for all staff.

Arguably, these features are more likely to be identified as belonging to a 'youth development' model of service rather than a 'sport and rec' model, and requiring higher allocation of resources and infrastructure. Indeed, this study indicates that for many participants, 'sport and rec' is perhaps a component of a 'youth development' program. It is however also arguable that many of these features would be key to operating any successful program in the remote Central Australian context.

Cultural safety principles require service providers to engage in dialogue with their clients, reflect on power relationships and systems that may continue to colonise and disempower already marginalized people, and use reflective processes to minimize the risks associated with dominance and powerlessness (Ramsden, 2002 cited in [1]). Although cultural safety per se was not mentioned by participants, there was evidence of culturally safe practice, including individuals attempting to learn local languages and customs, effective intercultural

communication using interpreters and appropriate elders, employment and support of local youth workers and short term staff for specific purposes, and flexibly offered services catering to cultural requirements such as 'sorry business' and 'men's business' in individual communities. There was also some evidence in the interviews with some non–Indigenous youth program staff of reflective practice. This included consideration of their own role, and the role of their employer (the youth program), in perpetuating status quo rather than transforming program delivery in line with Aboriginal aspirations.

'Planning Aboriginal way' was identified in the data as an important process although interpretations of what this actually means in practice was less clearly articulated. However, it was clear that cultural safety needs to be determined locally – what counts as culturally safe in one settlement or community will be different in another. This is aligned with the community development ideal of locally developed solutions to foster empowerment [49], but highlights the high skills levels and reflective practices required of staff, and thus the types of training and preparation that should be available for staff. The findings clearly indicate that while remuneration for youth workers is generally low (and also varies between organisations) best practice approaches to youth development programs require them to function from a high level skill base. The ideal of employing a local (Aboriginal) workforce or otherwise meaningfully engaging community members was viewed as essential for culturally safe program delivery, with acknowledgement of the challenges of achieving this (section 5.2.7). In Australia, there have been some cases where employing local staff has in fact lead to the disengagement of other community members who were previously active [50, 51].

What can be done to improve the scope and quality of youth programs in remote Central Australian Indigenous communities?

Fostering interagency relationships and collaboration between service providers is essential for effective youth programs (section 5.4). Data from the current study shows that some programs experience difficulties in this area, and is a problem frequently shared by the full range of health and community service providers operating in remote communities [52], to the extent that some existing initiatives are uncoordinated, fragmented in their purpose and unable to express a clear sense of the role of other agencies [14]. Enabling Aboriginal groups to provide integrated services and initiatives is widely recognised as a culturally appropriate alternative to traditional program models based on target groups such as ages [53]. As studies in similar settings, but in different service sectors, have shown 'whole of community' involvement is important to create the conditions for effective service planning and delivery [52]. This requires high level skills in consultation and participation enablement as well as the organisational structures and policies to support such processes.

A large proportion of the findings relate to the youth program workforce (section 5.2) with particular themes relating to the challenges of creating a long term workforce (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.6), the individual attributes required for work in this setting (which are often related to intercultural communication and cultural awareness) (section 5.2.2), and the skills and training required (also largely related to the requirements of working cross–culturally)

(section 5.2.3). Other sub themes related to the orientation, handover and support required for the staff and the many issues relating to living and working on a remote community relating to community integration and role boundaries (section 5.2.5) with various responses and support provided by employing organisations and funding bodies.

A number of respondents highlighted examples of practical external support that have assisted and built the capacity of local programs. One example given included the provision of material and information that assisted youth program development to be responsive and culturally appropriate to local workers. It was also noted that external support agencies that place an emphasis on the importance of relationships within communities and the desire to work effectively with a wide range of stakeholders were well received. Respondents noted that such relationships and supports can be very valuable, and should be instilled in practice, within internal and external stakeholders.

However, many staff in youth programs in the region do not have access to adequate support, despite the high level of skills required for best practice, and the high probability of stress related to working in cross cultural roles, including the possible impacts of 'culture shock' [54]. The effect of stress on youth workers [55] and how this may impact on the functioning of youth programs is poorly understood, although ultimately may result in the worker leaving the position and the community. Staff continuity – the ideal of a long time workforce – was consistently identified in the findings (section 5.2.1) as important for fostering effective community relationships at all levels so adequate staff preparation and support for these roles is paramount.

Given the developmental stage that youth development programs are in at present, and the elements of successful programs that have been gleaned in this study (and available elsewhere), there is both a need for, and scope, for the development of an evaluation framework comprising principles for successful and effective models. This has been done for primary health care services in small rural communities based on health service models shown to be sustainable, responsive and able to deliver local quality health care [56].

6.1 'Youth–centred, context–specific' services [4]

Research elsewhere suggests that positive youth development approaches that are based on building strengths may provide more positive outcomes than programs focused on eliminating undesirable behaviours [57] which to some extent has been the focus of youth programs in Central Australia. To take this point further, Trudgen [58] is critical of many programs, arguing that they treat the symptoms and not the underlying cause of behaviours like petrol sniffing. He suggests most programs have had the effect of further disempowering communities, and the only programs he believes are successful are those initiated by community, and continuing under their responsibility. Collaborative community–driven approaches have since been shown to have the potential in increasing connectedness and in addressing youth problem behaviours in Indigenous communities [45]. In addition to the importance of community empowerment and control, it is now commonly recognised that broad based strategies that deal with the full range of social determinants of health and

4 This term is attributed to Dr Phil Crane, Queensland University of Technology.

wellbeing are essential in dealing with behaviours such as VSM [14]. The process of service delivery then, is perhaps the most important factor in successful programs, with program foci being significant, but heavily contextually–dependant.

The importance of locally developed approaches to youth programs that cater to the unique differences of each community is a common theme in the broader literature base [14, 59, 60]. Further, principles of community development are often cited as crucial for effective service delivery [61, 62]. Community development has 'community competence' as its ultimate goal, with community development approaches referring essentially to partnership approaches to shift power structures towards community empowerment and community decision–making [63]. It was clear in the current study that workers articulated community development approaches in descriptions of their work, and others identified the need for sound community development approaches to the provision of youth programs. Despite this, there was further evidence in each of the communities that youth programs were still reliant on the existence of non–local (often non–Indigenous) personnel to operate the program. Numerous examples were given of how activities cease and young people engage in problem behaviours (such as VSM and crime) when programs stop running, even for short periods of time. Such data can be compelling in arguing for the proper resourcing, staffing and support of youth programs, as such programs appear to be essential services in remote Central Australian communities. Whilst community development practices may enable local community members to take over operations of the service, if they so choose, this study shows that there are significant barriers to overcome before that can be achieved. This may be indicative of the need to 'up skill' the youth program workforce in empowerment and enablement practices. Alternatively, and perhaps as well, it may be indicative of entrenched problems with remote communities and a legacy of generations of colonization and disempowerment that will require multiple and very long term strategies to counter.

A more helpful way to describe appropriate approaches to delivering youth programs in remote Central Australia (and elsewhere) than 'youth development' versus 'sport and rec' models is what Crane (personal communication, 2012) has described as 'youth–centred, context–specific' service models. Framing service models in this way enables the local adaptation and responsiveness that is called for, and gives the flexibility to local communities to adopt the approach that best suits their needs, and their stage of development. The compelling arguments for the effectiveness of sport and recreation programs in suicide prevention in Indigenous communities [59] is a reason to ensure that sport and recreation programs remain a core part of service delivery, especially as Aboriginal participants in this study consistently identified these activities as very positive and inherent features of youth programs. Sport and recreation have an impact on health, wellbeing and social inclusion often providing the 'soft entry points' for (re)engaging young Indigenous people at risk; participation in such organised activities can foster self–esteem, social interaction, develop skills and teamwork, and well as reinforce and preserve culture [64].

Some of the data indicate a need for a greater focus on younger and older Indigenous people (outside the traditional age bracket) in youth programs. This is indicative of the need to contextualise programs, that is, to ensure that they are 'context specific'. If youth

programs are required by funding or auspice bodies to only provide a service to certain age groups at the exclusion of others, basic principles of community development are effectively ignored. Being 'Indigenous centred' in community development or community work [49] encompasses empowerment approaches that address barriers to people exercising power with the goal of community decision–making. In some communities this may mean that youth programs may be better understood and operated as 'community programs for the benefit of young people' with the operational principle of community inclusiveness rather than having exclusion criteria such as age eligibility. Where programs already operate from this philosophy their programs may be described using terms such as intergenerational programming or as involving family and community role models.

'Youth–centred, context–specific' provides a positive frame for the delivery of youth programs in remote settlements. However, the data from the current study also point to the need for programs that operate for the benefit of the whole community. Culturally safe service planning and delivery suggests locally–determined processes for decision–making and community ownership. In some cases, this may mean a community preference for all ages to access the service to engage in intergenerational and culturally relevant activities. Where activities are targeted at young people, yet open to and inclusive of all ages, they provide a medium for cross–generational interaction which requires a high degree of flexibility on the part of staff and funding programs (Bengston and Kyupers, cited in [35]). This also enables a 'life skill focus', with an emphasis on building connections (such as youth to youth, youth to adult, as well as between community groups), and requires coherent program design and implementation [57].

7 CONCLUSION

This pilot study explored the enablers and barriers to success for youth programs in remote Central Australian Indigenous communities. Results provide an understanding of how various stakeholders define a youth program and whether the programs are perceived to be effective and appropriate.

Sport and recreation or youth programs are conducted in a number of remote Central Australian Indigenous communities. This pilot study reflects the importance of youth development programs in the Central Australian region to address a variety of health and social issues among Aboriginal youth, while also recognising the core role that sport and recreation activities play. Framing programs as 'youth–centred and context–specific' may be a more helpful way of defining best practice approaches. Adequate support and resources are required in order for equitable provision of sustainable and effective programs across the region, with the need for a particular focus on workforce preparation and on–going support.

7.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. The foremost–identified priority is the need for regular and ongoing youth programs.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. As a core priority a basic set of services are established that ensure the occurrence of a consistent, ongoing youth program with regular activities. As outlined in Chapter 6, programs should be organised, stable and regular, fun and engaging, varied, locally directed and culturally appropriate.

At a basic level, basic service development effort is required in the area of communication and collaboration:

2. As strong relationships and collaborative work with other agencies are features of successful youth programs, it is recommended that this interagency work should be viewed as core to the role of local youth workers. Workers should have access to training and support in implementing such collaborative approaches, ideally through their employer agency.

3. Renumeration of workers needs to reflect the increasingly high skill levels required of youth program staff in remote communities. Appropriately remunerating workers will help to attract and retain skilled staff, which has long term benefits for program outcomes.

Young people in remote communities have a right to access an adequately resourced program to meet their needs. In order to achieve this:

4. Service providers need to be supported and resourced to ensure youth program staff are adequately prepared to take up these challenging roles.

5. Youth service providers should be resourced so that they can provide ongoing support, mentoring and training to their staff in the critical areas of cultural safety, empowerment and enablement skills of community development, and consultation and intercultural communication.

In order to achieve 'youth–centred, context–specific' programs that all young people in remote communities can access, such programs need to be regarded as essential services in their own right, in the same way that primary health care services are regarded. Therefore:

6. The establishment (and funding) of a benchmark minimum for each youth program per community is required, including an evaluation framework to apply to all funded programs.

8 APPENDICES

8.1 Poster

Have your say about YOUTH PROGRAMS

Youth Programs have been running in your community and we would like to know what you think about them.

On the *(insert date)* Jess and *(inset name)* will be in *(insert name of community)* asking people about these things…

- What do think about the youth program?
- What are the best parts of the youth program?
- What things don't you like about the youth program?
- How could the youth program be made better?

Jess would like to talk with you. She will be at the Store and around town. For more information please call Jess on 0403 425 394.
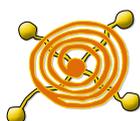
Centre for Remote Health
A joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University

8.2 Interview schedule [5]

1. Do you know about the youth program in your community at the moment?
2. What do you think about the youth program?
3. In general, what do you think a youth program is?
   a. What sort of activities does it include?
   b. How often do they run and for how long?
   c. When are they run?
4. What are the best parts of the youth program? Why?
5. Do you think the program is run in the right way for:
   a. Aboriginal people
   b. People in your community?
6. What are things about the program that you don't like or don't think are good?
7. In what ways do you think the youth program could be made better? Can you provide some examples?
8. Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

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5 This was administered as a semi–structured interview schedule. In practice, the interviews were conversational in style and the interviewer had the flexibility to allow the respondent to introduce other, related topics and to follow other leads.

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