



**Submission by the Foundation for
Young Australians to the Review of
Indigenous Education in the
Northern Territory**

March 2014

Introduction

The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) would like to thank the Northern Territory (NT) Government Department of Education (DoE) for providing us with the opportunity to submit to their Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (the review).

FYA is a national, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated solely to young people. FYA believes that young people have the courage, imagination and will to shape their education and create social change. Our vision is for a generation of connected, confident and optimistic young people with a deep sense of purpose and belonging. Our mission is to empower young Australians to be successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens through research, initiatives and partnerships and by harnessing the passion of young people.

FYA believes every young Australian should have access to an excellent education that will prepare them to thrive in their future life and work. Based on the available evidence, FYA agrees with the review's premise that educational outcomes for young Indigenous people are 'unacceptably low' (Wilson 2014, p. 7) and that a handful of highly effective 'miracle workers' (ibid, p. 8) cannot significantly improve the situation. A long-term strategic plan for reform, developed and implemented with support of the community, including those programs and practitioners achieving excellent results, is essential to improving the educational outcomes of young Indigenous people.

FYA works with young Indigenous people across the country in predominantly regional and some remote areas. Our three-year leadership program IMPACT, delivered in partnership with DoE, works with senior-secondary Indigenous young people in the Northern Territory (NT). Our National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy (NIYLA) also works with senior-secondary school students nationally. These programs aim to help connect secondary students to their culture, build networks and confidence and excite them about the possibility of their futures. Our experience working with young people and their communities fosters our belief that processes of educational review and reform must fundamentally include those people they intend to benefit. The FYA response to the review is underpinned by this belief.

In Section A, FYA welcomes the recommendations that allow for a long-term strategic reform plan for Indigenous education in the NT. We encourage the inclusion of community, especially young people, and NT consultation with the Federal Government throughout the design and implementation process.

Section B demonstrates the capacity of adjunct leadership programs including IMPACT and NIYLA to support young Indigenous people in becoming and

remaining connected to Country and engaged with their education, improving attitudes to school and future options and increasing attendance as well as supporting students to explore and affirm their Cultural identity.

FYA values its current relationship with the NT Government and looks forward to actively participating in consultation around the review.

Section A: Towards a 10-year plan for improving Indigenous educational outcomes

FYA supports the development of a ten-year strategic plan as proposed by the review. A long-term outlook will enable the NT education system to better serve young Indigenous people by facilitating a clearer and more stable policy direction. This is a necessary precondition for the coherent alignment of NT-wide reform strategies including workforce planning, the recruitment and development of teachers and school leaders, funding and adoption of proven teaching and learning programs and early childhood programs. The 'policy churn' (Menzies 2013, p. 65) identified in the review has been a historical barrier to this longer-term strategic planning.

FYA believes the effectiveness of programs and key recommendations in the review should be measured by the educational outcomes they deliver to young Indigenous people as well as the social, cultural benefits they deliver to young Indigenous people and their communities.

Using a strategic plan to embed effective teaching and learning programs in schools and discontinuing less effective programs is an important step. As the review noted, the proliferation of supplementary Indigenous education programs since *Learning Lessons* (Collins 1999) has not resulted in significantly improved outcomes for Indigenous students. The varying array of literacy programs adopted by schools across the NT, some with questionable evidential basis (Wilson 2014, p. 61), is a case in point. A ten-year strategic plan rooted in promoting the most successful initiatives undertaken in the NT will most effectively support Indigenous students' educational outcomes.

Involving the Australian Government in the creation of the strategic plan will also facilitate the coherent and effective alignment of long-term education policy in the NT. FYA agrees with the recommendations that suggest the Australian and NT Government fund the strategic plan via a single, integrated and preferably bipartisan agreement. It also agrees that joint consultation is required to produce an 'agreed strategic plan with clear outcomes' (Wilson 2014, p. 119). While federalism presents a number of challenges where funding is concerned, it is clear that Indigenous communities 'need a concerted effort on the part of

government to address the issue of participation and achievement in education' (Education Foundation 2009).

Once a strategic plan for reform is in place, the clear specification of guidelines for implementation at the classroom, school and system level is essential. NT schools do not comprise a homogenous set, with some schools performing extremely poorly and others achieving relatively better outcomes. The McKinsey (2010) *Good to Great* framework that underpins the review categorises schooling systems along a performance continuum and advocates for a different set of actions and management strategies at each stage of performance. Applied to the NT context, Wilson (2014) argues there are effectively two schooling systems that require different management. The *Good to Great* framework (McKinsey 2010) argues that poorly performing schools may benefit from more explicit, accountable application of policy, whereas higher performing schools may benefit from greater autonomy.

Ultimately any long-term, combined government strategy to increase educational outcomes will not succeed without the support and endorsement of young Indigenous people and their families and communities. In particular, this is essential in the application of a more explicit policy framework in communities with poorly performing schools. The evidence suggests that processes of educational reform would be far more effective if they included the young people they were designed to benefit (Cook-Sather 2002; Fullan 1991; Kohn 1993). The inclusion of young Indigenous people is particularly important in this instance given the 'fatigue and real cynicism' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013, p.88) of Indigenous communities towards constant consultation processes and policy change. The successful design and implementation of a long-term strategic plan for reform requires the meaningful engagement and participation of young Indigenous people and their communities.

Section B: Adjunct leadership programs and improved educational outcomes

The systemic reform of secondary schooling in the NT can be supported by adjunct programs that address 'factors that secondary schools cannot control' (Wilson 2014, p. 70). According to the review, these factors include 'poor attendance; cultural and social factors affecting the attitudes to schooling of young Indigenous people; disengagement and disruptive behavior...social dislocation and negative community attitudes to schooling' (Wilson 2014, p. 70).

The experience of FYA is that positive, strengths-based programs for high-performing students, in the case of IMPACT, and for curious, community-minded and self-aware students, in the case of NIYLA, are an effective support to the education of Indigenous secondary school students. These leadership programs

support cultural connection, explore identity and encourage high aspirations and leadership and have demonstrated the potential to increase engagement with schooling, raise school attendance and improve community attitudes to schooling. As one of NIYLA's National Gathering participants explains:

'I have put my life one step forward. I've put my head down at school and started to really concentrate...my grades have gone up a lot and my attendance is at 81% when beforehand it was on about 55%. I am really excited about my future and I have so much more confidence' – NIYLA participant, post-program survey response.

NIYLA is a national Indigenous youth-lead initiative that runs programs underpinned by the leadership philosophy "Values in Action," which draws on a values-based approach to transformative leadership. This approach connects personal values with cultural and community values and facilitates the networks necessary to lead positive change. Evidence indicates a correlation between NIYLA's National Gathering attendance and an increase in school attendance, with National Gathering attendees attending school on average thirty-four per cent more often after the gathering.

Established in 2011, the IMPACT young Indigenous leadership program is a three-year program for senior secondary students in Year 10 to Year 12 based in the NT and developed and implemented in partnership with DoE. IMPACT students are from Darwin and Palmerston region, Alice Springs and Katherine and will also be recruited from Gapuwiyak and Jabiru in 2014. The IMPACT curriculum is underpinned by principles of strength-based learning and creates a community of high expectation. Experiential learning including community-based volunteer work and participation in work-exposure programs helps develop students' confidence in their own capabilities and connects students with possible pathways for future work and study.

IMPACT also provides peer-supported learning opportunities for young people and opportunities for students to better connect with their culture, their Country and ultimately who they are and where they fit:

'The value that I mostly see in us is strength and resilience...and believing in yourself that you can achieve anything if you put your mind to it' – Year 10 IMPACT student, post-program survey response.

To date, 100% of program alumni have engaged with tertiary study or work, including traineeships and community-based volunteering. Notable achievements of the 2012 and 2013 cohort include: first Indigenous student to receive the Vice Chancellors Scholarship to study a double degree at Bond University, securing full-time paid employment and traineeships within organisations including Menzies Health and NT and local governments,

acceptance into tertiary study and participating in global volunteering programs in India and Fiji.

FYA, through IMPACT and NIYLA, has demonstrated the positive influence on school engagement and attendance of strength-based leadership programs that foster skill development, shared purpose and networks of young Indigenous people underpinned by a philosophy of cultural affirmation. The purpose and intent of FYA's leadership programs is clear:

'IMPACT has supported me through my schooling and I have received so much support and encouragement. Last year I was ready to drop out of school, but with the support of IMPACT and my teachers I have now completed Year 12' – IMPACT Year 12 Graduate

Conclusion

FYA supports the development and implementation of a long-term plan for educational reform in the NT that is fundamentally supported by young Indigenous people and their families and communities. FYA strongly encourages the NT Government to consult with Indigenous young people in this process and encourages the adoption of proven adjunct programs to support the improved academic outcomes of young Indigenous people in the NT. We believe young Indigenous Australians have a right to an education that will prepare them to thrive in their future life and work without diminishing their identity or culture.

Acknowledgements

FYA's Centre for New Public Education

This submission was prepared by FYA's Centre for New Public Education (CNPE), an advocacy initiative dedicated to building a fairer and future focused education system for all young Australians. CNPE connects and empowers people to influence education so all young people, regardless of their background, will have access to an education which gives them the skills, knowledge and capabilities to thrive in their future life and work.

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