

# Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya

(Place of Learning)

Evaluation of the Early Implementation Phase

Final Report

2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023



Australia

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Kristine Battye, PhD  
Director, KBC Australia

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## ACRONYMS

ACLO	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AELO	Aboriginal Education Liaison Officer
CAPO	Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
DoE	Department of Education
FACS	Family and Community Services
LAECG	Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
MoA	Memorandum of Action
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NESA	NSW Education Standards Authority
NGY	Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya
OAMS	Orange Aboriginal Medical Service
OLALC	Orange Local Aboriginal Lands Council
PCYC	Police Citizens Youth Club
RTHS	Rural Technology High School
SSO	Student Support Officer
YEP	Youth Engagement Program

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya (Place of Learning) Program is an initiative specifically designed to target young Aboriginal males aged 12 to 16 years who have become disengaged from education for varying reasons. The program is underpinned by the Partnership Agreement between the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG) and the NSW Department of Education (DoE), *Walking Together, Working Together (2020-2030)*.

The NGY Program is an Aboriginal-led program governed by the Orange local Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG).

The aims of the NGY Program are to support young Aboriginal males to:

- Maintain engagement with school
- Achieve educational success, including improved literacy and numeracy levels, and transition to further study, training or work
- Provide a trauma-informed educational setting to address issues arising from personal and intergenerational trauma.
- Confidently express and demonstrate their knowledge of the cultures of their own Peoples
- Improve their mental and physical health.

### **Overview of the evaluation.**

The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the appropriateness, effectiveness and value of the NGY program and identify lessons learned to inform flexible learning options to improve engagement and educational outcomes for young Aboriginal people.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders including students participating in the program and their family or carers; NGY staff; Canobolas Rural Technology High School (RTHS) staff; representatives from the local CAPO; local organisations that have supported implementation and representatives from health and community services engaged with participating students. Analysis of program data was undertaken and included attendance, changes in reading and spelling scores. The focus of the evaluation was the two year period 2021 and 2022.

### **Key Findings**

An alternative learning environment external to Canobolas RTHS at Lake Canobolas has been established using re-purposed buildings at the Scout Camp. While the buildings include two rooms used for multiple teaching purposes, and another building for gym and fitness activities, the facilities need improved utilities, internet connectivity and secure storage. Current facilities and the open site limit expansion of the program.

A small team of three implement the program using trauma-informed teaching practices and learning support. The NGY program adopts the 8 Ways Aboriginal Pedagogy. The educational component embeds culture in the six integrated programs designed in consultation with the NSW AECG, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), the former Canobolas RTHS principal and local CAPO members to promote attendance and improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The programs

include: Connecting to Country; Connecting to Culture; Yarning Circle; Food for Life; Healthy Body, Healthy Mind; English (Literacy); Mathematics (Numeracy).

The NGY program facilitates access to health care for students including health checks undertaken by the Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (OAMS) on entry to the program with referral of students to other services as needed.

The NGY staff take a holistic approach working with families to support student participation and ongoing engagement in the program as well as facilitating referral or connection of parents or families with other local support services where needed.

Over the two year period 2021-2022, 33 students have participated in the NGY program. At the end of Term 3 2022, 25 students had transitioned from the program and eight that were continuing. The majority of students were in Year 8 (43%), with Years 7, 9 and 10 students fairly equally represented (18-21% of participants).

The NGY program has been very effective in promoting student engagement in learning. Average full day attendance was 94.3% across year groups at the Lake Canobolas site, improving from an average of 44.3% full day attendance prior to participation. The average improvement in reading age was 25.4 months (range 0 – 49 months) and average spelling level improved by 12.6 (range 3-26).

Factors identified by students, parents and carers that promoted high attendance and educational outcomes included:

- The *positive, caring, supportive, trusting, safe, respectful and nice* environment created by the NGY staff for the boys, their families and carers
- Locating the program at Lake Canobolas which is away from the busyness of a big school and importantly has a strong connection to culture with the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area incorporating the traditional land of the Wiradjuri people
- Learning about culture and embedding culture in the curriculum rather than being a co-curricular activity
- Opportunities to undertake a range of activities including sport, gym activities and learning practical skills like woodworking and cooking
- Enabling students to have ownership of the program e.g., crafting their own acknowledgement of the program in Wiradjuri, input into planning activities, feedback to teachers on what's working well and what's not
- One to one teaching and presentation of concepts in different ways to assist the student to understand and formulate an answer
- Implementation of curriculum at level matched to the individual's capability
- Recognising and mitigating triggers for a student to minimise behavioural issues, and using activities such as drumbeat and clapsticks to help regulate
- Reinforcing positive progress and positive messaging to improve self-esteem
- Focusing teaching on core subject areas
- Structuring teaching time so that formal learning and other activities are mixed to maintain the students' attention on learning

- Reading books to the students in a group, particularly books relating to culture which is highly regarded by the boys, and where they see the value and benefit of their learning.

Parents and carers valued knowing that their sons were looked after and protected while at NGY, having the support of the NGY staff to deal with issues as they arose and being able to go to work knowing that they were not going to get a call to pick their son up from school.

However, student engagement in learning falls off after transition back to Canobolas RTHS. While transition plans are developed for students to facilitate re-integration into mainstream school, targeted support to individual students during transition is challenged by staff shortages at Canobolas RTHS and lack of capacity to backfill the NGY team to provide support during transition. Furthermore, students usually return to Learning Support Classes or lower streamed classes where attendance is variable and as such expectations are low. While there has only been one student transition to another school in Orange, this student has maintained high attendance (over two terms) and is actively engaged in learning and co-curricular activities.

### **Opportunities to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the program**

- **Additional staff resourcing to improve sustainability of the program**, enabling staff to undertake planning, programming and resource development and meet professional development requirements. Currently there is no capacity for backfill.
- **Identify a cohort of teachers and support staff at Canobolas RTHS with the aptitude and attitude that aligns with the intent of the NGY program to undertake rotations and training to work across the NGY program and Canobolas RTHS** on a part-time or full-time basis to add capacity at NGY and build trauma-informed teaching capability at Canobolas RTHS and provide the foundations for succession planning within the NGY program.
- **Create career path for teachers with expertise in child behaviour**, recognising the NGY teaching positions as Behaviour Specialist positions.
- **Establish an Educational Unit to train teachers and Student Support Officers to work with children at risk of disengaging from school.** As a school of excellence, NGY could provide education and training for teachers and university students who want to learn how to better engage with Aboriginal students and learn how to work with the local Aboriginal community organisations.
- **Consider adopting an early intervention approach to engagement in education.** The NGY program could provide the targeted numeracy, literacy and cultural support to Stage 3 students at risk of disengagement to prepare them for transition to secondary school.
- **Identifying and agreeing what success is, how it will be assessed and how partner organisations and agencies contribute** to the (re)engagement of students in learning, including students and families at risk of disengagement, may mitigate tensions evident in the current relationships between organisations at a state and local level and enable medium to longer term planning.
- **Commitment by partner agencies to identify resources for dedicated facilities and increased staffing establishment to enable increased student intake in response to identified need.**
- **Identify and support a cohort of senior Aboriginal students at Canobolas RTHS to mentor NGY students during transition.**



- **Better celebrate wins and raise the profile of the program** recognising the efforts of the students, their parents, the NGY staff, Canobolas RTHS, the local CAPO, DoE, NSW AECG and Orange City Council in participating and backing a program that is innovative, outside the comfort zone for many and requires a partnership approach.

## Conclusion

The early implementation phase of the NGY program has been highly effective in re-engaging young Aboriginal male students in learning and improving educational gaps in numeracy and literacy. Leadership by the Aboriginal community through the local CAPO and NSW AECG in program design, in conjunction with teachers and student support staff with expertise in trauma-informed teaching has resulted in the development and implementation of a culturally embedded, evidence-based education program. Working with and addressing the needs of families through connection with OLALC, OAMS and other local services has facilitated student participation. However, the fragility of partnerships at a state and local level challenges the stability of the program. There is a need for strengthening partnerships at a state and local level to ensure the sustainability of the NGY program.

## Next Steps

NSW AECG and the local Orange CAPO present the findings of this evaluation to the NSW DoE and to the Commonwealth Department of Indigenous Affairs and Department of Education.

A meeting of NSW AECG, local Orange CAPO, NSW DoE, Commonwealth Departments and local partners is convened to:

- Scope potential to work together for continued operation and strengthening of the NGY program during remainder of current funding period and beyond
- Identify expectations, interest and motivations for collaboration
- Develop a shared vision
- Identify resources parties can bring to the collaboration
- Determine activities and infrastructure to be delivered/ available with the resources
- Agree on what success look like (through the collaboration) and how this will be assessed
- Determine those parties committed to partnering
- Identify appropriate governance arrangements to progress the partnership
- Canvass opportunities to expand the model in other locations.

Key priority areas for focus under the partnership in 2023-2024 include:

- Identification of appropriate infrastructure to sustain current NGY program at the Lake Canobolas site with opportunity for expansion of student numbers
- Increase current staff establishment by 1 FTE teaching position (identified as Behaviour Specialist) with additional staffing if student numbers are to be expanded (and infrastructure in place)
- Identify a cohort of teachers at Canobolas RTHS to undertake rotations at NGY, with rotations commencing during Term 2, 2023.

- Canobolas RTHS engage with CAMHS School Link Coordinators in conjunction with NGY staff and OLALC cultural advisors, to progress a rolling professional development program for teachers and support staff focused on trauma-informed teaching practices and cultural safety.
- Canobolas RTHS executive, NGY staff, OLALC family support service managers, OAMS and the local AECG develop a transition strategy that can be tailored to support individual students and their families in their transition back to school.

Progressing the concept of an Aboriginal School for Educational Excellence is contingent upon having stable and sustainable NGY staffing and, appropriate infrastructure to support delivery of the NGY education program and training of teachers and university students. NSW AECG would take leadership in the development of the model recognising that it would be a resource for teacher training and development across NSW inclusive of a training pathway to increase Aboriginal participation in the teaching workforce.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya (Place of Learning) Program is an initiative specifically designed to target young Aboriginal males aged 12 to 16 years who have become disengaged with education for varying reasons. The program is underpinned by the Partnership Agreement between the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG) and the NSW Department of Education (DoE), *Walking Together, Working Together (2020-2030)*.

The Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya program aims to provide a positive learning environment where the educational needs of young Aboriginal males are individually tailored with associated well-being and health support plans maximising effect and success. Facilitators provide a student focused environment addressing engagement, attendance, literacy and numeracy along with culturally driven programs aimed at establishing and/or improving the young Aboriginal males' connection to culture.

Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya is fully supported by the Orange City Council, the Local Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) including Orange Local Aboriginal Lands Council (OLALC), Orange Aboriginal Medical Services (OAMS) and Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), all of which are dedicated to working collaboratively with facilitators to address and strategically tackle growing concerns with young Aboriginal males in the Orange area.

### **1.1 Program History**

The Ngurang-gu-Yalbilinya Program has evolved from an educational support program which operated on the Canobolas Rural Technology High School (RTHS) campus in 2018/19, known as the Youth Engagement Program (YEP).

The YEP was developed and implemented by two teachers, Tim Bennett and Scott Sullivan in conjunction with Mark Polley a Student Support Officer (SSO) and focused on numeracy and literacy, health, fitness and design and technology activities to promote continued or re-engagement of boys (Years 7-10) with the education system. The majority of students were Aboriginal boys. While no formal evaluation of the YEP was undertaken, a number of the boys returned to and/or remained engaged in school, while others went onto employment or further training.<sup>1</sup>

The program was initially developed on a trial basis and as such was susceptible to closure with changes in school leadership. When it appeared likely that the program would cease, the NSW AECG in collaboration with the Local CAPO advocated to the NSW DoE for the development of alternative arrangements to continue the program.

### **1.2 Program Implementation**

In conjunction with Orange City Council, OLALC, OAM and the Local AECG, a location was identified within the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area to implement the Program. The site has a building available as a classroom for students' educational needs and an abundance of area/bushland

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<sup>1</sup> The Youth Engagement Program enrolled 31 students in total of which eleven gained employment, nine successfully returned to mainstream education and three moved interstate and continued their education. The eleven who gained employment took roles as a kitchen hand, apprenticeships with bricklaying, landscaping and roofing/plumbing and one student gained employment full time with Centrelink while the other is at Woolworths. The remaining eight students returned to their original classes at Canobolas RTHS.

containing natural flora, fauna and Aboriginal Heritage. Ngurang-gu-Yalbilinya program (NGY) commenced operating at the Lake Canobolas site in 2021.

Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area incorporates the traditional land of the Wiradjuri People and has a strong Aboriginal connection as an important place for male initiation ceremonies and stone tool making. This location provides an ideal setting where a strong connection to Culture can be established while they gain skills and education to function and succeed within society.

NGY is delivered by three facilitators, namely Tim Bennett (Teacher), Scott Sullivan (Teacher) and Mark Polley (Student Learning Support Officer). All three men are currently employed by the NSW DoE. Further external resources are utilised including local Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal women and men and other resources to facilitate the Connection to Culture component of the Program.

### **1.3 Targeted Students/Participants**

NGY is specifically designed for Stage 4 and Stage 5 students. Stage 4 includes students enrolled in Years 7 and 8 (aged 12-14) and Stage 5 includes students enrolled in Years 9 and 10 (aged 14-16). The Program initially commenced with boys across Stage 4 and Stage 5. The Program now only takes Stage 4 students because it is expected that earlier intervention in students' engagement with education will reap greater benefits.

The selection process involves collaboration between the teachers/facilitators, the Local CAPO, and parents, where individual student needs and the needs of the Orange community are considered. Further consultation may be conducted with NSW Police, Juvenile Justice and Family & Community Services (FACS) regarding possible students and their suitability to take part in the Program. The Aboriginal community is central to the selection to consider the broader needs of the student rather than their education needs in isolation. At the commencement of engagement in the Program the boy and his family each sign a contract to participate in the program for a minimum of two terms.

While notionally there is capacity for 14 students to participate in the program (i.e., 1 teacher to 7 students), this is not logistically feasible as a minimum of two teachers are required with students at any time. Currently the program supports eight or nine students.

### **1.4 Program Partners**

In addition to the NSW DoE and NSW AECG, the key organisations that have partnered to implement NGY are described below.

**The OLALC** is a major financial contributor to the program initially contributing two buses and fuel for the transportation of students to the Lake Canobolas site. Cultural activities are conducted and funded by OLALC, providing Cultural Advisors for the various programs e.g., art, dancing and language and linking students with Elders.

OLALC runs a number of programs and services that families of students involved in the program can access either independently or through referral by Facilitators. These programs include:

- Ability Links
- Designing Futures, an early intervention program for children Year 5 to Year 9 at risk of disengaging from school
- Supported playgroup delivered in the early childhood education setting
- Mirganha- a safety program for women and girls.

OLALC also runs an Employment Pathways program and can provide work placement opportunities for the students.

**NSW AECG** has been instrumental in progressing the implementation of the program through the Partnership Agreement with DoE. In partnership with the Paul Ramsay Foundation, the NSW AECG has provided funding of \$110k pa for three years to support the local CAPO to build the NGY program including local administration support and resource development, support on-country excursions and secretariat resources for preparation of grant applications.

**Paul Ramsay Foundation**, under the *Thriving Children, Strengthened in Culture* program, is contributing significant funding to the NSW AECG to support sustaining and growing the NGY program as well as expanding the program into an additional location in NSW.

**OAMS** is contributing to the program through the provision of health services to students such as general check ups, health assessments, hearing and eyesight testing, assessments and referral to Social and Emotional Wellbeing programs or psychological services, dental checks and vaccinations.

**Orange City Council** has provided access to and use of the Lake Canobolas site as a location to run the program and granted permission to place demountable buildings on-site for classroom and gym facilities and meets utility costs (electricity and gas).

**Canobolas RTHS** supported the salaries of the two teachers at NGY in 2021 and 2022. In 2023 these positions are being directly funded by DoE. Canobolas RTHS meets the cost of a Wiradjuri language teacher 2 hours/week and provides \$20,000 to pay for books and consumables.

**Newcrest Mining** donated \$32,000 for the purchase of fitness equipment to establish a gym room in a building at the Lake Canobolas site.

#### **Other contributors**

- Woolworths donate fruit and bread for the program on an ongoing basis
- Officeworks has made a donation of books and stationery
- Headspace Orange provides on-site mental health support for students.

### **1.5 Governance of Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya**

The NGY Program is an Aboriginal-led program governed by the local CAPO and includes representatives from:

- OLALC
- OAMS
- Local AECG

At a state level the NSW AECG and NSW DoE provide oversight and, under the lead of NSW AECG are working towards formal state level governance with the intention of rollout of additional programs in other locations in NSW.

### **1.6 Aims, Objectives and Outcomes**

The aims of the NGY Program are to support young Aboriginal males to:

- Maintain engagement with school

- Achieve educational success, including improved literacy and numeracy levels, and transition to further study, training or work
- Provide a trauma-informed educational setting to address issues arising from personal and intergenerational trauma.
- Confidently express and demonstrate their knowledge of the cultures of their own Peoples
- Improve their mental and physical health.

NGY takes a wholistic approach to improving student engagement in education and improving learning outcomes working with the young person and their family.

**The objectives of the Program** focus on the student, family and community.

At a student level:

- Create an environment where students are supported to engage in learning and develop confidence in their heritage, cultures and languages
- Develop student focused programs and implement individualised learning plans that address learning difficulties to improve numeracy and literacy; and develop confidence to return to mainstream education
- Identify and address physical and mental health and wellbeing issues, including trauma-related and any other impediments to their learning
- Identify and address factors to maintain student engagement and participation in the program
- In partnership with Canobolas RTHS and community partners, support students as they transition to mainstream education, further training or work

At a family level:

- Strengthen parents and families' capacity to support their child's learning and participation in the program through engagement with support networks and services where required
- Encourage participation of parents and family in the program's cultural and community activities to strengthen their knowledge and confidence in their heritage and culture

At a community level:

- Through the partnership with OLALC, Local AECG and OAMS, enable students and their families to engage with their culture and promote self-respect, self-confidence and self-determination
- Establish partnerships with local employers to progress opportunities for work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships.

A program logic has been developed which describes the drivers for the program, key financial and in-kind inputs, activities and outputs, short- and longer-term outcomes and underpinning assumptions (Appendix: Program Logic).

## **2 OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION**

The NGY program builds on the YEP, a flexible learning initiative, previously trialled within the precinct of Canobolas RTHS in 2018-2019. While the YEP demonstrated positive changes for boys participating in the program, the relocation of the YEP from the outer boundaries of the school to a building located above the school canteen resulted in progress being reversed. The YEP ceased at that time.

The NGY has been established at a site external to the school. It is currently funded for four years (2021 to 2024). The focus of this evaluation is on the early implementation phase covering the period 2021-2022.

## 2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the appropriateness, effectiveness and value of the NGY program and identify lessons learned to inform flexible learning options to improve engagement and educational outcomes for young Aboriginal people.

## 2.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the extent to which the design and delivery of the NGY program is achieving the program's aim of supporting young Aboriginal males to:
  - Maintain engagement with school
  - Transition to further study, training or work
  - Confidently express and demonstrate their knowledge of the cultures of their own Peoples
  - Improve their mental and physical health.
- Consider the benefits of engaging with community and culture in the development and implementation of the NGY program.

## 2.3 Key Evaluation Questions

- **To what extent has the NGY program been implemented as intended?** *What have been the enablers and challenges to implementation?*
- **To what extent has the NGY program achieved its objectives?**
  - **Educational outcomes:**
    - **Promoting student engagement in learning?** *What factors have helped or hindered this?*
    - **Improvement in educational outcomes?** *What factors have helped or hindered this?*
    - **Successfully transitioned back to mainstream education?** *What are the key factors that help or hinder re-engagement in education?*
    - **Successfully transitioned to further training or employment?** *What factors help or hinder transition to employment?*
  - **Knowledge and engagement in culture:**
    - **Increased student confidence and knowledge of their culture and language?**
  - **Health and wellbeing:**
    - **Contributed to students physical and mental health and wellbeing?**
    - **What have been the advantages and disadvantages of operating the NGY program outside the school precinct?**
- **Governance:**
  - **To what extent has the Partnership Agreement facilitated implementation of the program?** *Areas for improvement?*
  - **To what extent have local governance arrangements facilitated implementation of the program?** *Areas for improvement?*

- **Benefits:**
  - **Is the design and delivery of the program meeting the needs of students, parents and families, community?**
  - **To what extent has the NGY program provided value/benefit to students; families; Canobolas RTHS; community and community partners?**
    - *What contributed to or prevented on-going benefit?*
    - *To extent can and should the program model be replicated in other locations?*

## 2.4 Methodology

The evaluation has undertaken a mixed methods approach. The main component of the evaluation has been interviews with key stakeholders including:

- Representatives from the local CAPO
- Students participating in the program and their family or carers
- NGY staff
- Canobolas RTHS staff including Indigenous language teacher, Aboriginal Education Liaison Officer (AELO), Principal and Deputy Principal
- Representatives from local organisations that have partnered with the program to support implementation
- Representatives from health and community services engaged with participating students.

### *Students and family*

Interviews with students were undertaken on-site at Lake Canobolas. There was a group discussion with the students (n=7) facilitated by the Wiradjuri language teacher and AELO. Following this group interview, three boys indicated they would like to meet with the evaluator independently.

Interviews with parents and carers were undertaken by the evaluator and a local Aboriginal woman employed with OAMS. Interviews were conducted at locations preferred by the parent or carer, usually in their home or at a local café. Interviews were undertaken with 11 parents or carers of boys currently participating in the program or participating in 2021 as well as one previous student.

### **Quantitative data**

Quantitative data routinely collected by the NGY facilitators include:

- Daily attendance (full day) by individual students in the NGY program as well as full day attendance at school prior to commencement in NGY program and after transition
- Reading age using the Waddington Test at commencement in the program and at transition
- Spelling level at commencement in the program and at transition, as well as regular spelling tests conducted each week.

These data are analysed and reported.



### **3 KEY FINDINGS**

This section sets out the findings in response to key evaluation questions.

#### **3.1 Implementation of the Program**

The key components of the NGY program include:

- Establishment of an alternative learning environment/ learning space for Aboriginal boys external to Canobolas RTHS at the Lake Canobolas site inclusive of gym equipment, library resources and some IT facilities
- A team of staff to provide teaching and learning support focused on literacy, numeracy, woodworking, fitness and life skills, tailored to the individual needs of the students
- Cultural program inclusive of language, dance, artwork, Aboriginal tool construction and other activities
- A bus to transport students from their homes to the Lake Canobolas site and return each day
- Health checks for students on entry to the program undertaken by OAMS with referral to other services and ongoing monitoring as needed
- Referral of families to support services where required
- Individual plan to support student transition back to Canobolas RTHS.

The components of the NGY program have largely been implemented as planned.

##### **3.1.1 Infrastructure**

The program is operating from the Scout Hall at Lake Canobolas under an agreement with Orange City Council. The Scout Hall has two rooms that are currently used for teaching and woodwork. A kitchen and activity room are located in another building about 100m from the Hall, together with another small building that houses donated gym and fitness equipment.

While the Scout Hall provides a basic facility for teaching, it is also used by Scout groups at times and hence limited opportunity for secure storage such as student files, equipment, IT. The uncertainty of continued operation of the program has hindered further development of infrastructure at the site such as a basketball court or a dance circle.

##### **3.1.2 Staff**

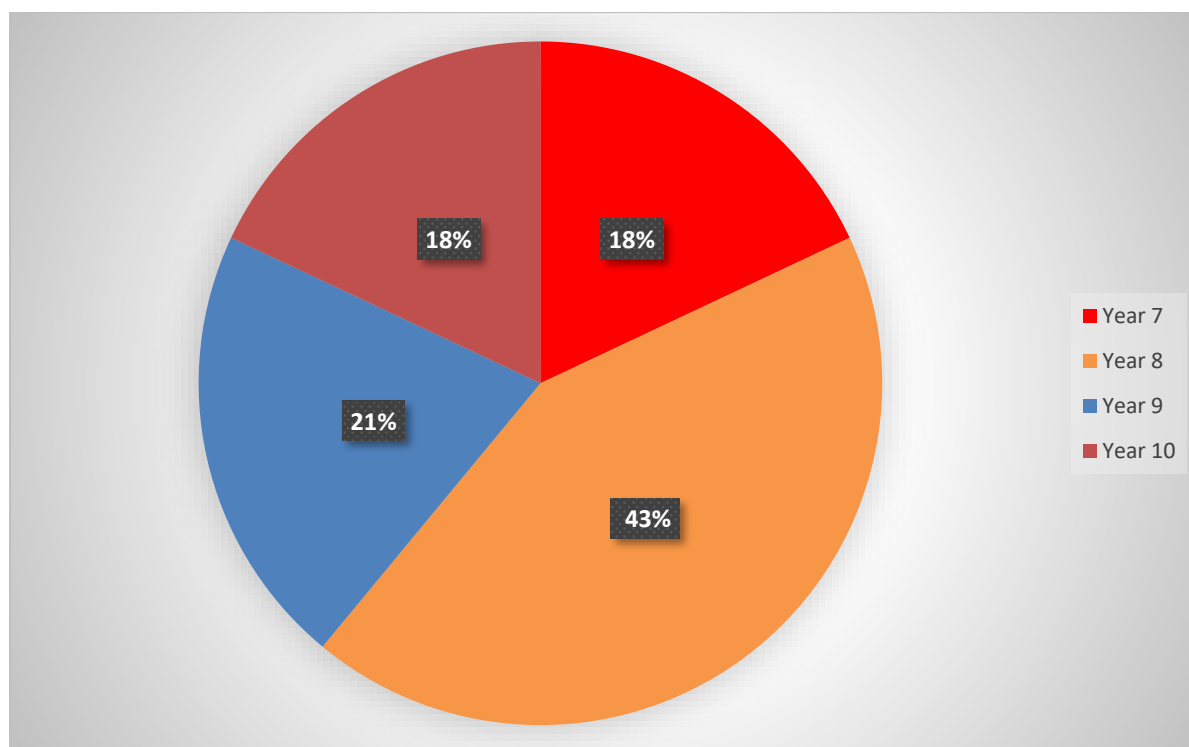
The current staff have a broad skill mix and employment experience in addition to teaching. This includes previous trades qualifications and experience and fitness qualifications. Two staff members were previously police officers.

The two teachers that established the YEP at Canobolas RTHS, in conjunction with the Student Support Officer, have driven the development and implementation of the NGY program at the Lake Canobolas site. However, with a staffing ratio of 1 teacher to 7 students, and the requirement to always have two staff on-site, there is very limited flexibility for staff to take planned (or unplanned) leave or access professional development. Release time for staff to plan programs and update resources is very limited. Much of the liaison and coordination work to support implementation of non-teaching elements of the program including engagement with the CAPO, community and families, other local agencies and the DoE occurs in the staff members' own time.

### 3.1.3 Students

Thirty three (33) students have participated in the NGY program in the two year period, 2021-2022. This included 25 students who had transitioned from the program by the end of Term 3, 2022 and eight that were continuing. The majority of students have been in Year 8 (43%), with Years 7,9 and 10 students fairly equally represented (18-21% of participants in these year groups) [Figure 1].

**Figure 1. Students participating in NGY by year group (%), 2021-2022.**



### 3.1.4 Overview of the Educational program

The NGY program adopts the 8 Ways Aboriginal Pedagogy with a strong focus on identifying what the student is interested in and tailoring their learning.

The educational component of the NGY program is made up of six integrated programs which work across Key Learning Areas. The programs include Connecting to Country; Connecting to Culture; Yarning Circle; Food for Life; Healthy Body, Healthy Mind; English (Literacy); Mathematics (Numeracy). The programs were designed in consultation with the NSW AECG, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), a former Canobolas RTHS principal and local CAPO members and are designed to address some of the key issues identified in the Closing the Gap report (attendance, literacy, numeracy and health).

Research has shown that improving education has a greater effect on life expectancy than any other measures (even health), highlighting the importance of addressing many of the issues in Aboriginal communities through educational programs at the forefront.

#### **Connecting to Country, Connecting to Culture**

The cultural element of the educational program is designed to help engage the students with their learning and improve their sense of identity. The Closing the Gap report outlined the importance of recognising the rich cultural practices, knowledge systems and cultural expressions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how they can be a source of great strength, resilience, and pride. It also stated that a “Strong cultural identity is fundamental to Indigenous health and social and emotional wellbeing.”<sup>2</sup> In this unit students interact with local Aboriginal community members and participate in various cultural activities including Aboriginal art, Aboriginal dance, identifying and preparing traditional foods, identifying and constructing traditional weapons and tools, Wiradjuri language, looking at the significance of totems in Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal astronomy, traditional interaction with flora and fauna, locating and identifying significant local cultural landmarks.

All elements of this program have been led by the NSW AECG and the Local CAPO and delivered in collaboration with NGY staff, local elders and community members. The cultural activities are delivered by the Indigenous language teacher, AELO employed by Canobolas RTHS, and an elder engaged through OLALC and are approved by the local OLALC before being designed and implemented. This process aligns with the *Walking Together, Working Together –Partnership Agreement between the NSW AECG Inc and the NSW Department of Education (2020)*.

The “Solutions that Work” evaluation of strategies to address suicide prevention amongst Aboriginal people highlights the importance of cultural activities to help build a sense of identity and stresses the importance for young people to connect to country, culture and elders.<sup>3</sup> This directly relates to Target 5 of Closing the Gap: “Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero”.

The delivery of Wiradjuri language in this program directly relates to Target 16 in Closing the Gap “There is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken by 2031.”

### **Yarning circle**

All students who enter the NGY program have been affected by trauma to some extent, whether it be intergenerational trauma, personal trauma or both. Studies have shown that trauma can have a profound effect on brain development and learning. Learning to share stories and connect with others can help buffer the effects of trauma. Recognising and addressing intergenerational trauma is central to healing for Indigenous peoples. The Yarning circle also embeds many of the 8 ways practices into classroom practices.

This program focuses on supporting each child to establish membership in the class while developing a classroom community and culture. The circle includes the four components of The Responsive Classroom Approach: greeting, sharing, group activity, and news and announcements (Kriete, 2002).<sup>4</sup> Strategies such as embedding the instruction of Personalised Learning Plan, Individual Learning Plan and Individual Education Plan objectives, differentiating instruction, encouraging the active involvement of students, and creating opportunities for communication support the participation of disengaged students.

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<sup>2</sup> [Home | Closing the Gap](#)

<sup>3</sup> [ATSISPEP Report of the Critical Response Pilot Project \(uwa.edu.au\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Cited in The Morning Meeting Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Kriete R and Davis C. 2016

Students engage in a daily routine of greeting each other and reviewing the date and day of the week, the day's class schedule and any other important activities that may be occurring and discussion of any events which are topical in news and current affairs. It is an opportunity to check-in with students and ascertain their mood levels and any issues they may be having at school or home.

Students will also engage in rhythm sessions with their clapsticks designed to help students address trauma related developmental and regulation issues. Perry (2009) uses brain studies to argue that since trauma has a visible impact on the brain, interventions which also operate at a pre-conscious level should logically be more effective than cognitively mediated strategies.<sup>5</sup> Porges (2011) has developed a more complex theoretical explanation, labelled Polyvagal theory, to propose that trauma symptoms are mediated by an amygdala that has become hyper-vigilant to threat-related cues, and therefore activities which regulate physiological arousal can be helpful in stimulating the vagally modulated social engagement system in positive ways.<sup>6</sup> Van der Kolk et al. (2007) adds that rhythmic activities can fulfill this function by reawakening feelings of pleasure and engagement dulled by prolonged trauma exposure, and that rhythm stimulates patterned, repetitive neural brainstem activity necessary for restoration of brain functioning.<sup>7</sup> The use of the clapsticks adds cultural relevance to the rhythmic activities.

Staff also read Indigenous literacy resources to the students and the class discuss themes in the writing and messages in the literature. This further integrates literacy and cultural outcomes into the Yarning Circle sessions.

The "Solutions that Work" outlines success factors for preventing suicide amongst school age children and young people as<sup>8</sup>:

- School-based peer support and mental health literacy programs
- Culture being taught in schools
- Peer-to-peer mentoring, and education and leadership on suicide prevention
- Programs to engage/divert, including sport
- Connecting to culture/country/Elders
- Providing hope for the future, education – preparing for employment

The Yarning circle, as well as all the other programs at NGY look to implement elements of these success factors in the programs and relates to Target 5 of the Closing the Gap report "Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.'

### **Healthy Body Healthy Mind**

This unit focuses on engaging students with concepts that relate to strengthening health, wellbeing, and relationships as well as information and resources available that encourage students to develop knowledge, understanding and skills of these concepts. Students engage in learning activities that explore relationships between personal identity, transition and change, respectful relationships, and

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<sup>5</sup> Perry, B. D. (2009). Examining child maltreatment through a neurodevelopmental lens: Clinical applications of the neurosequential model of therapeutics. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 14(4), 240-255.

<sup>6</sup> Porges S.W. The Polyvagal Theory. Neurophysiological foundation of emotions, attachment, communication and self-regulation. W.W. Norton and Co. 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Van der Kolk, B. A. *The Body Keeps the Score: Approach to psychobiology of post-traumatic stress disorder*. In: Traumatic Stress. The effects of overwhelming experience on mind, body and society. Ed. B.A. Van der Kolk and C. Alexander. 2007. Guildford Press. New York and London.

<sup>8</sup> [ATSIPEP Report of the Critical Response Pilot Project \(uwa.edu.au\)](http://uwa.edu.au)

communication. Students identify and explore their uniqueness, build understanding of personal change, including strategies to manage change, and plan and action strategies that support respectful relationships.

At a time when students are becoming increasingly self and socially aware, they will expand upon their ability to explore how they should act in different environments and how to be responsible for their own and others' health, safety, and wellbeing. Students develop a stronger understanding of how to make positive decisions and the impact these have on themselves and others, including decisions about their hygiene, rest and play. They also develop specific fundamental movement skills while participating in individual/group/team physical activities. They apply decision-making and problem-solving strategies to develop and perform movement skills and sequences, building their self-awareness and communication skills in the process. Through this program they develop an understanding of the importance of managing all aspects of a healthy lifestyle and develop the skills needed to adopt a holistic approach to living a healthy lifestyle.

During all sporting events or activities winning is defined in the program as "doing your best" and it is explained to children that this is totally within their control. External factors such as scores or refereeing decisions are explained as external factors that are outside the student's control. Students are taught to use scores and results as external feedback and not to let them be their overarching measure of success. This gives students the confidence to try and fail as part of the learning process and helps build resilience and self-efficacy. A number of scientific studies have linked levels of self-efficacy to improved life expectancy.

Extensive research has shown how cardiovascular exercise can support neurogenesis in the brain and have a positive impact on mood and wellbeing. Circulatory diseases account for the largest gap in mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and cardiovascular exercise and diet are two of the most powerful ways to target these diseases. This provides the rationale for the implementation of cardiovascular exercise (walking, rowing, skiing, airbikes and stationary bikes) as a major component of the Healthy Body, Health Minds program. This program attempts to address Target 1 of Closing the Gap, "Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation by 2031", through early intervention, nutritional educational and building healthy habits at an early age.

### **Food for Life**

Students explore a range of familiar foods from across different cultures and identify some common ingredients. They recognize the state of matter for a variety of ingredients and investigate what happens when ingredients are combined and separated. They also develop a basic understanding of the macronutrients in food. Students develop and follow a process for producing a familiar food item, engaging in a range of measurement activities. They learn to follow basic routines to ensure food is prepared hygienically and learn how to modify recipes to make them healthier. Students plan and prepare meals for groups with specific dietary requirements. Where possible students will have opportunities to purchase food items for their meals.

This program uses narrative-driven learning, visualised learning processes and hands-on/reflective techniques as outlined in the 8 Ways Aboriginal Pedagogy. Students share stories about their eating habits and the class discuss ways we can eat the foods we like but make them healthier and better fuel our nutritional needs. Staff use demonstrations to outline techniques and then meals are prepared and shared by the staff and students and discuss what was successful and what could be improved.

This program attempts to address Target 1 of Closing the Gap, “Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation by 2031”, through early intervention, nutritional educational and building healthy habits during at an early age.

### **English (Literacy)**

This unit focuses on developing basic literacy skills with an emphasis on improving literal and inferential comprehension skills. It involves explicit and systematic instruction in reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension, writing sentences, punctuation, word usage, grammar, sight words, spelling and phonics. Students are placed on individual programs and given diagnostic testing to identify areas which they need to work on.

This unit is designed to operate in line with the literacy continuum with the aim to move students to the next cluster of their literacy development. Students develop their literacy skills through an opportunity to read aloud to staff each day and work on various literacy activities depending upon their individual needs. Students access Wiradjuri Language Teachers and resources and use Aboriginal Language Lessons to help them re-engage. There is also a systematic spelling program developed by the NGY staff designed to target phonics and commonly misspelt words which each student works through at their own individual level and pace.

The Literacy program uses the Fitzroy Readers and method and MULTILIT. These systems use a systematic and sequential approach which involves phonics and sight words. Each new concept is introduced in small, sequential and manageable steps which mean the books and resources contain only words the students are ready to actually read. This helps to develop reading confidence and mastery as simply and effectively as possible. This approach is about teaching children to read with maximum success and minimum struggle and leads to a feeling of personal empowerment for the students. This is important for students who have often felt that they have lacked power and self-efficacy in their lives.

An important part of the Literacy program is developing a reading culture in the classroom. All staff and students read aloud and accept that everyone reads at their own level. Staff continually reinforce the importance of reading as a lifeskill and link reading to real world outcomes. The Closing the Gap 2020 Report has stated: *“Successfully progressing through and transitioning from school is important for children to improve social mobility and intergenerational outcomes.”* Education has a strong association with employability and income, health, and control over one’s life (Pagnini et al. 2014; World Bank 2018). Better education outcomes can also have positive intergenerational flow-on effects. More educated mothers, for example, have been associated with healthier children (Ewald and Boughton 2002; Schochet et al. 2020).<sup>9</sup>

This program attempts to address the following Closing the Gap targets through early intervention with deficits in Literacy:

- Target 7: Increase the proportion of people aged 20-24 years attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent by 2031
- Target 8: Increase the proportion of people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent by 2031.
- Target 9: Increase the proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent by 2031.

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in [Literacy and Numeracy | Closing The Gap \(niaa.gov.au\)](https://www.niaa.gov.au/literacy-and-numeracy)

- Target 10: Increase the proportion of people aged 25-64 years who are employed to 62 per cent by 2031.

Improving the Literacy outcomes of aboriginal students also aligns with the objectives of The Three Rivers Local Decision Making Accord (2018) which states that: “The Education Objective of the Three Rivers Regional Assembly is to substantially strengthen the access, participation and educational achievement for Aboriginal peoples within the TRRA footprint.”

The program involves exposing students to a number of literacy resources written by indigenous authors and containing cultural content. This aligns with The NSW Aboriginal Education Policy which commits the NSW Department of Education to affirm the inherent right of Aboriginal students to fair, equitable, culturally inclusive and significant educational opportunities.

### **Mathematics (Numeracy)**

This unit focuses on developing basic numeracy skills with an emphasis on improving basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, money, and time skills. It involves explicit and systematic instruction in addition, subtraction, multiplication, time, and money. Students are placed on individual programs and given diagnostic testing to identify areas, which they need to work on and to help catch up on any pre-requisite numeracy skills which they have not mastered.

This unit is designed to operate in line with the numeracy continuum with the aim to move students to the next cluster of their numeracy development. Students will develop their numeracy skills by being provided with an opportunity to work one on one with staff members and independently.

The numeracy program utilises concepts and principles outlined in the text “Direct Instruction Mathematics”. This textbook provides a comprehensive blueprint to organize and teach specific content for major mathematical topics that appear in the numeracy continuum. Staff use strategies to address the needs of struggling learners and use content to promote conceptual understanding (teaching language concepts and providing visual representations) and procedural fluency (teaching explicit strategies). Embedded in the numeracy program are recommendations to promote adaptive reasoning (asking students to explain their answers) and to determine strategic competence (monitoring student performance).

Numeracy is important for individuals to develop logical thinking and reasoning strategies in their everyday activities. We need numeracy to solve problems and make sense of numbers, time, patterns and shapes for activities like cooking, reading receipts, reading instructions and even playing sport. It is believed that understanding basic numeracy and mathematics will make a huge difference in all aspects of life: it makes you more employable, helps you achieve a greater understanding of the world around you, can save you time and money and may even improve your well-being and reduce stress. Research has indicated that “numeracy is associated with income and financial well-being”.

This program attempts to address the following Closing the Gap targets through early intervention with deficits in Numeracy:

- Target 7: Increase the proportion of people aged 20-24 years attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent by 2031
- Target 8: Increase the proportion of people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent by 2031.

- Target 9: Increase the proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent by 2031.
- Target 10: Increase the proportion of people aged 25-64 years who are employed to 62 per cent by 2031.

### **Assessment and Testing**

The NGY program is an engagement program which looks to re-engage Aboriginal students who have been marginalised and disengaged by mainstream educational settings. Mainstream curriculums are aimed at capturing the mythical “average student” and sit in the middle of this educational bell curve. Unfortunately, students who have suffered trauma sit at the back of this Bell curve when they start school and move progressively backwards as they progress through the education system. At some point students can move so far behind that mainstream curriculums fail to capture them at all. This is why the most important aspect of assessment and testing in the program is diagnostic. Testing is used to assess where the students are at and then use this knowledge to design educational instruction aimed at moving them forward in the Literacy and Numeracy continuum. Testing and assessment give a clear picture of what the students know and what they need to be taught to fill in the gaps in their learning so teachers can help them re-engage with mainstream education.

The assessments used in the NGY program include a mix of teacher developed diagnostic assessments and conventional tests. Numeracy assessments consist of teacher developed diagnostic tests which are administered pre and post instructional interventions and timed testing in basic facts. The literacy assessments involve York Assessment of Reading and Comprehension (YARC), South Australian Spelling Test, Waddington Reading Test, NGY spelling placement test (teacher developed). Canobolas RTHS has made a commitment to deliver the YARC testing and SA spelling test with each student prior to entering the program and when they return to school. All other assessment is delivered by the NGY staff at the Lake precinct. The students who are required to complete NAPLAN and check-in assessments while at the Lake Canobolas site are also brought back to the school to complete this testing.

While testing and assessment have their place in the program and are used to guide instruction, the teaching and the manner in which the content is delivered is considered far more important. The NGY program is a holistic educational program which utilises the most valuable resources in Aboriginal Education: Culture, Community and Families. All of these things are interwoven in every aspect of the program and it is hard to isolate and measure each component. As Albert Einstein said “Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.” The social and cultural inclusion in the NGY program extend beyond the school and into the broader community.

The ultimate goal of the program is to help students feel culturally connected, educationally supported, enjoy learning, be relatively stress free and in the long run, when they transition away from the program, promote their health and wellbeing.

#### **3.1.5 Transport**

To enable attendance at the Lake Caobolas site, some 7km from Orange, a dedicated bus and fuel supplied by OLALC is available to pick up boys from their homes each morning and drop-off in the afternoon. In addition, the bus is used to take boys to activities in town such as attending basketball games at PCYC, activities at the school, or taking boys to health appointments. While there were



initially two buses supplied, OLALC needed to have one repurposed to support other programs it offers.

Students and family highlighted the value of the transport. For parents and carers it relieved the burden of working out transport arrangements to get the student to and from the Lake Canobolas site. In addition, having a teacher turning up at home to pick up the boys made them accountable to be ready to go, knowing that they would come back if they weren't.

### 3.1.6 Health and wellbeing

At commencement with the program, each student undergoes a health check at OAMS including a physical health check, dental check and mental health assessment. Individual students are referred to other services as required. For example, students have been referred to psychology services at headspace; enrolled in after-school programs to promote social skills development.

Fitness is a key element of the program with students participating in regular gym sessions on-site at Lake Canobolas as well as participating in team sports in conjunction with the Police, Citizen, Youth Club (PCYC).

### 3.1.7 Support services for families

Families and parents are supported to access services and programs available through the OLALC. Regular connection with parents and/or carers by members of the NGY team, often as part of the daily pick up/ drop-off, enables conversations about family or home issues and the NGY staff facilitates coordination or linkage with OLALC, OAMS or other services e.g., FACS, housing, as needed. Parents and carers highlighted the importance of feeling they were being involved in their child's education and being supported by the NGY staff [see Appendix; Letters from Parents and Carers].

### 3.1.8 Transition Planning

Students are engaged with the NGY program for a minimum of two terms. Planning for transition back to Canobolas RTHS is tailored for each student. Factors considered in transitioning include whether the student and family indicate readiness to return to school; how the transition will be staged e.g., whether the student will split the week between NGY and Canobolas or whether they attend Canobolas for a period of time each day during transition and availability of parents or family to supervise the student if required; negotiation with Canobolas RTHS of the class the student will be returning to and identification of support required for the student.

The transition is discussed with OLALC CEO and signed off where there is agreement between parties for the transition to proceed.

## 3.2 Alignment with local, state and national policy objectives

The NGY program demonstrates alignment with and response to a range of local, state and national educational policy objectives and commitments. The table below and section 3.1.4 provide a brief description of some relevant policies and how the NGY responds to the policy objectives and commitments.

### *The Three Rivers Local Decision Making Accord (2018)*

<b>Education Objective: to substantially strengthen the access, participation and</b>	The NGY program is governed by the local CAPO.
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***educational achievement for Aboriginal peoples within the TRRA footprint.***

Aboriginal community-controlled governance is recognised as an effective means towards strengthening Aboriginal community **access** to education.

As demonstrated in this report, the program delivers a local Aboriginal language and culture education program, and targeted literacy and numeracy program for boys who have become disengaged with education. The high attendance rates, zero suspensions, high engagement in cultural learning and performance activities and improvements in literacy and numeracy illustrates it is delivering significant Aboriginal student participation and educational achievements.

*Walking Together Working Together – Partnership Agreement between the NSW AECG Inc and the NSW Department of Education (2020)*

*Overarching objective: use our best endeavours to ensure that every Aboriginal child and young person in NSW achieves their potential through education.*

The NGY program was formed through the partnership between the NSW DoE and the NSW AECG and through the governance and leadership of the Local CAPO.

The program is achieving exceptional results in supporting Aboriginal boys and young men who disengaged with education to re-engage.

There is potential for expansion in its current location and to extend into other locations across NSW. However, attention will be needed to strengthening the partnership (see 4.1)

*NSW Aboriginal Education Policy*

Commits the NSW Department of Education to ***affirm the inherent right of Aboriginal students to fair, equitable, culturally inclusive and significant educational opportunities and to work with other government agencies and non-government organisations to build capacity within Aboriginal communities to ensure that Aboriginal people participate as equal partners in education.***

The NGY program provides a unique educational setting at Lake Canobolas for Aboriginal students which, through the Local CAPO's governance and leadership, is able to deliver a level of cultural safety and inclusivity which mainstream schools cannot.

The program has been developed and led by the NSW AECG and the local CAPO, in partnership with the NSW DoE and Canobolas RTHS.

The local CAPO and NGY staff have forged a range of productive partnerships to connect with the education program, develop opportunities for work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships, and provide in kind resources including Woolworths, Newcrest Mining, Office Works, Orange Police and the Orange City Council.

Additionally the local CAPO and NGY staff have established student support networks through engaging parents and families to support student's learning and participation and to strengthen the program's cultural and community activities

	The NSW AECG has partnered with the Paul Ramsay Foundation to provide additional resources for expanding the NGY cultural education program.
<i>Footprints to the Future: A 10-year plan to strengthen education for Aboriginal learners in NSW public schools and beyond</i>	
<b>Strategic commitment to <i>developing, growing and strengthening partnerships at all levels, including commonwealth, state, regional and local to ensure that Aboriginal people have the opportunity to self-determine and advocate for the rights of Aboriginal children and young persons in NSW to achieve their potential through education and training.</i></b>	The NGY program’s local CAPO governance structure directly actions the Footprints to the Future strategic focus on partnerships for ensuring Aboriginal people can self-determine and advocate for the educational rights of Aboriginal children and young people in NSW.
<i>Closing the Gap</i>	
<b>CTG Priority Reforms 1 and 2 identify the need for <i>Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making</i> along with <i>Building the Community-Controlled Sector</i></b>	There is opportunity for developing formal partnerships between NSW AECG and NSW Department of Education to solidify joint support for the NGY program and its potential for future expansion.
<b>CTG Priority Reform 5 refers to increasing opportunities for <i>Employment, Business Growth and Economic Prosperity</i></b>	There is opportunity to formalise and further define the existing partnership between the Orange Local CAPO, the Canobolas RTHS and the Department of Education’s Regional Directorate. Expansion of the NGY model into additional suitable locations as well as building on the existing NGY program provides ample opportunity for the NSW Government and its Department of Education to support the leadership of Local CAPOs and the NSW AECG, and in turn support building the community controlled sector. The NGY program has linked students with local job providers and supported the development of employment pathways. The NGY program can be closely linked with Targets 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 16 identified within the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan (See Section 3.1.4)

### 3.3 Promoting student engagement in learning

The NGY program has been very effective in promoting student engagement in learning with an average full day attendance of 94.3% across year groups, improving from an average of 44.3% full day attendance prior to participation (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Average full day attendance by NGY students at Canobolas RTHS and NGY program, by year group (2021-2022).**

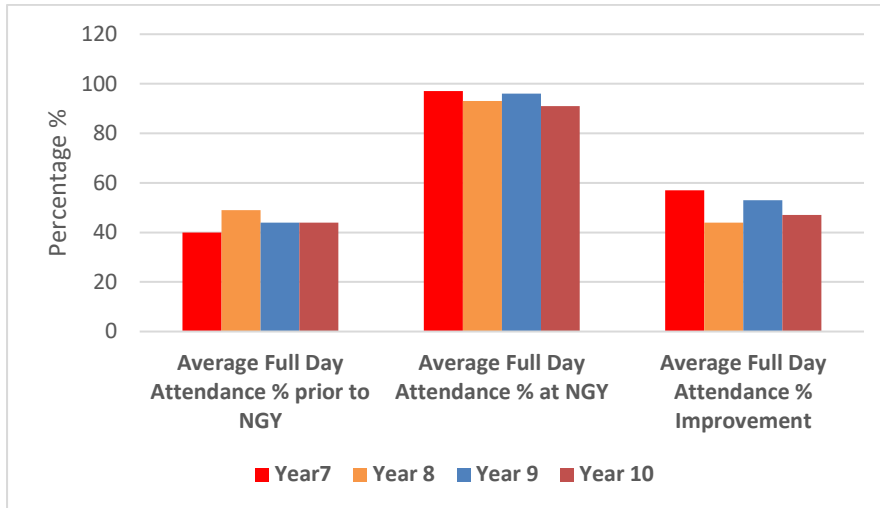
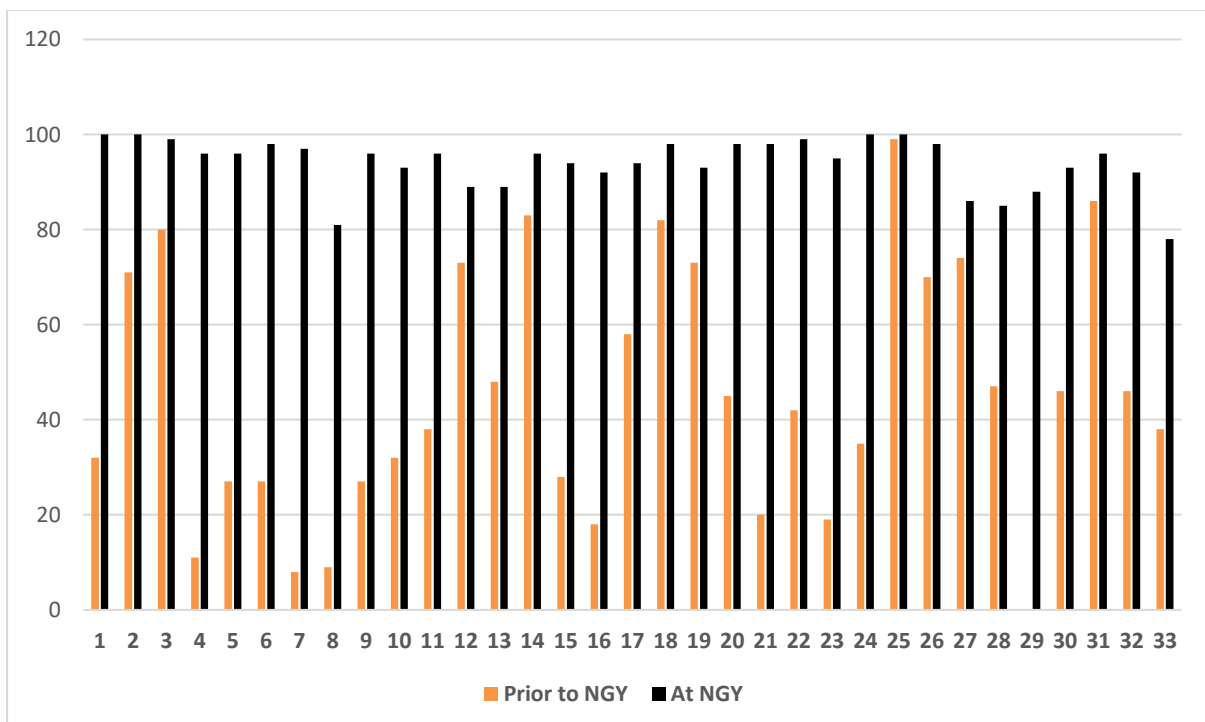


Figure 3 shows full day attendance for individual students. The data demonstrates attendance improved for all students that participated in the program, and for some students from a very low base.

**Figure 3. Individual student attendance at Canobolas RTHS and the NGY program (2021-2022).**



Multiple factors have contributed to high attendance and engagement with the program.

**The positive, caring, supportive, trusting, safe, respectful and nice environment created by the NGY staff for the boys, their families and carers has been central to engagement.** These are key words that have been used by parents, carers and boys to describe the staff team [and see Appendix: Letters from Parents and Carers; Appendix: Letter from ACLO]. While the program is focused on addressing the individual needs of each student this cannot be done in isolation of their home environment. To that end, parents and carers appreciate engagement by the staff to check on any current or pending issues or concerns they have that could impact on their son so that the team are aware and can mitigate or address as needed.

The students appreciated that the teachers were someone they could talk to outside the family, they “*know where you are at*” and give strategies to help deal with issues. While the staff are highly supportive of the boys, they also hold them to account – as one student said, “*they expect a lot but they help us*”. In response to a question about what was important if this program were being established in another community one boy said “*... you would hire them again*”.

*Yindyamarra (respect) underpins the implementation of the NGY program. The students respect the staff, the staff respect the students, the staff respect the families, the families respect the staff and the students respect each other.*

**Locating the program at the Lake and away from the busyness of a big school has supported engagement.** Small class size was an important feature and students highlighted the importance of a calm and quiet environment where there was control and structure maintained their continued participation in NGY. Comments made by students identified the importance of:

*“time to think and do more stuff”*

*“...(things) are planned and you know what’s happening”*

**Learning about culture was a key ingredient to ongoing engagement with the program.** While there is a strong focus on cultural activities that the boys enjoy i.e., dance, learning language, making Aboriginal tools, doing art, they also talked about the importance of understanding totems so “*...don’t break Aboriginal laws*” or “*mess up family*”. One student indicated the importance of culture being built into the school program and not extracurricular. The importance of integrating culture into the NGY is exemplified in a speech a student from 2021 gave to the student cohort in 2022 (see Section 3.5). Letters to the Canobolas RTHS principal and the ACLO, (Appended) re-iterate the importance of embedding culture within the program to promote understanding and expansion of cultural knowledge as well as educational improvement.

**Including sport, gym activities and learning practical skills like woodworking and cooking** were key factors students identified to support continued engagement in the program.

**The students have ownership of the program.** This is evidenced by the students crafting their own Wiradjuri acknowledgement of the program as well as being invited to choose activities to be undertaken across the week. Furthermore, at the end of each term the teachers seek feedback from the students about what is working well and what’s not. This has resulted in several changes including restructuring the maths program to focus on one area for two weeks to bed down learning e.g., addition before moving onto subtraction for two weeks etc. Exercise and gym sessions previously took

place in the afternoon but feedback from students indicated the morning would be more effective when they weren't tired.

### 3.4 Improving educational outcomes

Changes in reading and spelling scores during their period of engagement with the program is evidence of the effectiveness of the learning strategies implemented. For the 25 students who undertook the program in 2021 and until end of Term 3 2022, the average improvement in reading age was 25.4 months (range 0 – 49 months)<sup>10</sup> and average spelling level improved by 12.6 (range 3-26).

Strategies include:

- One to One teaching
- Implementation of curriculum at level matched to the individual's capability, assisting the student to stay focused and not become frustrated when having difficulty
- Presenting concepts in different ways assist the student to understand and formulate an answer
- Recognising and mitigating triggers for a student to minimise behavioural issues, and using activities such as drumbeat and clapsticks to help regulate
- Reinforcing positive progress and positive messaging to improve the student's self-esteem
- Focusing teaching on core subjects areas – literacy and numeracy. Students talked about being able to focus on what they see as important subjects and getting better at these, then being able to use these core skills in other areas such as science
- Structuring the teaching time so that formal learning and other activities are mixed to maintain the students' attention on learning for a period of time knowing that they will then move onto another activity
- Reading books to the students in a group, particularly books relating to culture which is highly regarded by the boys and they can see the value and benefit of their learning.

Comments from students and parents indicate the importance of being able to ask for help in a non-judgemental environment.

*"if (you) can't do something, (they) work with you..."*

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<sup>10</sup> Facilitators with the NGY program used the Waddington Test for the first three semesters/six Terms (Jan 2021-June 2022) to ascertain a reading age of students. The test was conducted when the student commenced at NGY and subsequent tests at the start and end of each Term present in the Program. A final Waddington test would be completed at the end of a student's time in the program to assess overall improvement.

During Term 2/2022, the Senior Executive of the Department of Education determined that the Waddington testing was no longer to be used and was to be replaced with YARC testing conducted by staff at Canobolas RTHS. Students were to undergo the YARC testing prior to attending NGY and then tested again on return to mainstream education at Canobolas RTHS. This method of testing has only been in place for one semester/ two Terms, there have not been enough students who have been subjected to a test prior to starting and a test upon transition to create a subsequent data set.

*“...all the boys worked together, even if slower, all work together and then go out and do something (outside activity)...”*

*“... can ask for help and don't feel dumb...”*

### **3.5 Transition to School and further training or employment**

In the period Term 1, February 2021 to end of Term 4, December 2022, there has been 33 students participate in the program, of which seven were continuing in the program in Term 4.

Of the 25 students who had transitioned from the program before Term 4, 2022, 19 had returned to Canobolas RTHS, two attended OCTEC, one gained the ROSA Yr 10, one attended a private school in Orange and two moved away.

However, student attendance at school and engagement in learning was reported to fall off after transition back to Canobolas RTHS.

Family and carers of previous students who had transitioned back to Canobolas RTHS indicated their disappointment with the transition. Key issues related to being bullied (and re-traumatised), lack of help with concepts they don't understand and feeling dumb, negative attitude toward the school and teachers, not attending classes. While the Clontarf program operates at Canobolas RTHS, not all boys connect with it and there has been staff turnover. Current NGY participants indicated they were concerned about returning to Canobolas RTHS and hoping to be able to stay at NGY for longer than two terms and one student indicated he would be more comfortable to go back if he “was caught up”.

For the student transitioning to the private school, attendance was at 70% in the initial term and increased to over 90% by the end of his second term at the school (Term 4 2022). This student has subsequently become engaged in the basketball team and the cadet program at the school and in 2023 will be leading and teaching a dance group at the school.

*Embedding culture within the NGY program has been a key factor in re-engaging the boys in learning, but this connection to culture isn't overt when they go back to school. How can culture be embedded in transition?*

NGY staff and Canobolas RTHS staff recognise that significant work is needed to improve transition back to mainstream school. Canobolas RTHS has been challenged with staff shortages limiting opportunities for targeted support. As such students return to Learning Support Classes or lower streamed classes where attendance is variable and as such expectations are low. While personal learning plans are developed for students returning to Canobolas RTHS, the extent to which they are implemented is not clear. The lack of capacity to backfill NGY staff at the Lake Canobolas site limits options for a team member to support a student for an extended period upon return to school.

While Canobolas RTHS is expected to be fully staffed in 2023, strategies need to be developed to manage the tailored transition of students back to mainstream school. Furthermore, whatever mechanisms are developed need to be sustainable.

### **3.6 Knowledge and engagement in culture**

The extent to which students have knowledge of their Aboriginal culture and participated in cultural activities prior to attending NGY was variable. Some of the students are living with family members or carers that are not Aboriginal and the NGY program has given them the opportunity to learn about

and explore their culture. While students may not be Wiradjuri, they are encouraged to seek out family members to ask them about their language and culture.

### **Examples**

*In 2021, students were invited by the Local Aboriginal Lands Council to perform at the handing over of Title Deeds to the Old Orange Police Station in Byng Street. They were also involved in performing with the adult Aboriginal male dance group at the Orange Corroboree in June at the Orange Showground.*

*In 2021, Term 2 students undertook a trip to Yuranigh's Grave site situated near Molong, NSW. This allowed the students an opportunity to connect with history in the very area they live. A great appreciation was shown from all the students who took the time to read the information tablets and observe the burial tree carvings on the site.*

The extent to which the program has developed confidence and knowledge of culture for participants is demonstrated in a speech previous student gave to students in 2022.

### **My culture speech**

*Today I have been asked by Mr Bennett to speak about what culture means to me.*

*Many see culture as a painting or a dance, although this is only a part of culture. Culture is the way you act, it is how you see the world and other people. Culture is life. My culture as a Wiradjuri man is very important, it is how I see myself, my family and my life. We all have problems in life and culture is always there to fall back on.*

*Nguarang-gu yalbilinya has helped me find my culture through learning Wiradjuri language with Mary McLean and traditional dance with Ricky Ah-See. It has helped me find who I really am as a Indigenous man and what it actually means to be Wiradjuri. Another part of my culture is strength and perseverance. The Wiradjuri people have been through many tough times but they have never given up, they always pushed on, and are still pushing on to this day. I instil these values within myself everyday.*

*The Wiradjuri people never hurt the earth either, they took only what they needed and when they needed it. The earth gave to them and they gave back to the earth.*

*The final part of my culture I will speak about today is respect and representation. I believe culture should never be seen as shameful or embarrassing but quite the opposite. I am extremely proud to be Wiradjuri as should others in my position. Respect is a big part of Wiradjuri culture. Respect must be payed (sic) toward the elders and knowledge holders of the land as I probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for them.*

*That is what my culture is to me thank you for listening and enjoy the rest of your day.*

(Transcript)

In Term 1, 2022 the Young Mentors Program was introduced. The Young Mentors Program was designed for NGY students to attend Primary Schools and engage with young children who are



becoming disengaged in education and build meaningful relationships through art, dance and physical activity as an early intervention strategy.

The Young Mentors Program was developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO), NSW Police. While the Young Mentors Program was offered to primary schools across Orange, Calare Public School was the only school that participated. One NGY staff member and the ACLO attended the primary school with several NGY students. The program has ceased for the time being due to: logistical issues including the need for two staff members to attend with the NGY students (the ACLO has moved away) and there is not sufficient NGY staff to work across two student groups; availability of transport; and reluctance of primary school executive staff to engage with the Young Mentors Program.

### **3.7 Health and wellbeing**

While there has been no objective measurement of wellbeing, family members have reported improvements in confidence, self-esteem, happiness, engagement with family and participation in local sporting teams and extra-curricular activities, development of significant relationships (previous Stage 5 student, long-term girlfriend) and for several students improved management of mental health conditions. Several students have engaged with a Headspace gaming group to improve social skills.

The gym sessions and sport are enjoyed by students. In addition to the regular fitness sessions and healthy lifestyle messaging through the NGY program, and health checks conducted by OAMS, students are referred to other services as needed. One of the key referral destinations has been headspace. However, some students have been reluctant to attend individual appointments at the headspace centre. To overcome this barrier, an Aboriginal Headspace staff member has commenced a weekly visit to NGY in Term 1, 2023 to engage with the students as part of their cultural activities with the intention that building connection with students through art, tool making and dance in a setting where they are comfortable will improve students' willingness to access therapeutic services.

In 2023, a number of family members of current students have approached NGY staff to request that they too be able to talk to the Headspace staff member.

### **3.8 Value and Benefits of the Program**

Students and families

The NGY program has provided a range of benefits to the participating students and families. Benefits to the students have largely been described in earlier sections and can be summarised as:

- Learning improvement – including able to read closer to their age range, using learning in their day to day activities e.g., shopping
- Developing understanding of culture and identity
- Development of practical skills and life skills
- Development of routine and being accountable
- Improved attitude with parents, carers and siblings and more communicative
- Development of confidence, self-esteem and social skills leading to participation in a wider range of activities e.g., local sporting teams and town competitions
- Learning to deal with behavioural issues in a more mature way and learning to get over differences

- Being able to visualise a future and having plans for a job and for some obtaining a job.

Key benefits identified by family and carers were:

- Knowing that the boys are looked after and protected (while at NGY)
- Having the support of the NGY staff to deal with issues as they arise
- Being able to go to work, or return to employment, knowing that they are not being phoned to pick up their son from school

Comments made by families and carers demonstrating the benefit of the program to themselves and the boys included:

*"...It take a village ..... , the program is becoming the boys' village...."*

*"NGY is one way helping kids break the cycle"*

*"... (the boys) are proud of who they are and show they can do it...."*

*"If he hadn't been in the program he would have been in gaol or dead. It has helped him so much."*

Also see Appendix: Letters from Parents and Carers.

## 4 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### 4.1 Issues

Issues challenging the effectiveness and sustainability of the NGY program have emerged through the review.

**Inadequate staffing capacity at the Lake Canobolas site.** Lack of staff resources impedes staff time to plan program activities, update or develop new resources; provide backfill for leave or undertake professional development; provide support to students when transitioning back to school and; sustain innovative activities (e.g., Young Mentors program) that have benefit to current students and other young students.

**Lack of proper facilities:** The current facilities are not classrooms but are repurposed scout buildings without running water, staffroom facilities or adequate heating. Cleaning services are not provided to the building, and all cleaning and rubbish removal is currently undertaken by NGY staff.

**Absence of succession planning for the NGY team.** The effectiveness of the NGY program hinges on the professional and personal attributes, and dedication of the current team. Currently there is no mechanism to grow this team, provide a career path to support retention or develop capability in the existing Canobolas RTHS staff to work in the program. Staff shortages at the school have not enabled opportunities for staff rotations to the NGY site, indicating that targeted strategies and resources are needed to commence succession planning.

**Expansion of the program is limited by current staffing capacity and facilities.** The waiting list for the NGY program is usually between 40-50 students. However, the maximum number of students that can be accommodated at the NGY program is 14 (i.e., mandated teaching staff to student ratios is 1:7). While there is clearly demand to expand the boys' program this is not possible under current staff establishment. Furthermore, the absence of dedicated classrooms for the NGY program with

adequate amenity hinders expansion and recruitment of additional staff (if positions were established).

**Absence of equivalent culturally embedded education program for girls.** While the NGY program has provided significant benefit to the boys (and their families) participating, the absence of, and need for a similar program for girls was identified by parents, Canobolas RTHS staff and other stakeholders.

**While the NGY program is very effective in engaging students in education, their attendance and participation in school falls off after transition to Canobolas RTHS.** In addition to needing a tailored and supported transition process, the students also need to be in an environment that is safe, respectful, and risk of triggers to re-traumatise are minimised. Building trauma-informed teaching into the basket of skills of teachers at Canobolas RTHS was identified as an area for professional development, particularly in a school with high social need. While the DoE runs a trauma-informed teaching activity, the extent to which current staff at Canobolas RTHS have participated in it, or its effectiveness in change in approach by teachers has not been investigated as part of this review.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Western NSW Local Health District employs School Link Coordinators who are available to schools in the area to provide training, support and professional development. The Orange/Bathurst School Link Coordinator has conducted professional development days in trauma informed teaching for Orange High School and this could also be offered to Canobolas RTHS.

Transition back to school needs to be supported by parents and carers. It was suggested that cultural safety training to enable teachers to engage with parents and carers who may not have had positive experience of school themselves and speak in a way that doesn't trigger them could improve relationships between teachers, families and students providing benefits more broadly. Given staff turnover, professional development for teachers would need to occur regularly (i.e., not a one-off).

In addition, targeted support is required to support families during transition and for some families longer term to mitigate issues that may have contributed to disengagement. While providing transport and pick-ups for school may be useful for some students and families, mechanisms are needed to flag when families require other support or services which may be in conjunction with OLALC, OAMS, housing or other agencies.

**Unstructured partnership and consultation process between the NSW DoE and NSW AECG.** In mid-2022 the NSW AECG shared a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support implementation of the NGY program through increased partnership and collaboration between the Canobolas RTHS, DoE Regional Directors and the Local CAPO. The draft MoU was distributed by the Regional Directors, without Local CAPO or NSW AECG consultation, to the NSW DoE's legal team. This resulted in issues raised by the Department in relation to whether:

- The curriculum delivered by the NGY meets NESA requirements and;
- The program meets legal requirements under the Education Act.

When designing the NGY program in late 2019, NGY staff consulted and shared draft programs with the Local CAPO, the former Canobolas RTHS principal, the NSW AECG and NESA. Each of the stakeholders were happy with the program to go ahead and provided supporting comments for the program, its structure and content. Regarding the 2022 Department issues raised above, there has been little clarity given as to how the NGY program may not meet the requirements of NESA and the

Education Act. Subsequently, the Department engaged an educational consultant in late 2022 to work under NSW AECG and Local CAPO leadership to review the program

The delay in finalising the MoU and limited clarity provided on why or how the NGY program is not meeting Education Act and NESA curriculum standards creates uncertainty in relation to the commitment of the DoE to the program; ongoing implementation; medium to longer term planning in relation to staffing, staff retention and infrastructure improvements. As a result the NSW AECG, Orange Local CAPO and the DoE have agreed that a State level NSW AECG – Department Memorandum of Action (MoA) would be a more effective means to collaborate in support of the NGY program. The draft MoA document is currently under consideration by NSW AECG and the Department.

**Benefits and risks of the NGY being off-site and separate to a state school campus.** The engagement in learning, educational improvements and cultural benefits to students attending the Scout camp site have been identified. However, the students remain enrolled with a state school and are participating in a program where the school has limited day to day control. To what extent this issue is hindering finalisation of the formal partnership through the MoU or MoA needs to be clarified and a way forward determined.

## 4.2 Opportunities

Opportunities to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the program were identified by stakeholders and are presented as a layered approach that not only strengthens the NGY program but offers benefits to Canobolas RTHS and the broader region.

**Additional staff resourcing to improve sustainability.** Within the NGY team additional staff capacity (FTE) is required to enable the teachers and SSO to undertake operational activities (planning, programming, resource development) and meet their professional development requirements.

**Identify a cohort of teachers and SSOs within the current Canobolas RTHS with aptitude and attitude that aligns with the intent of the NGY program to undertake rotations and training to work across the NGY program and Canobolas RTHS on a part-week or full-week basis.** This strategy adds capacity within the NGY program, builds trauma-informed teaching capability within Canobolas RTHS, and is foundational for succession planning. Recognising that Canobolas RTHS also operates the Clontarf program, the Aboriginal Learning and Engagement Centre, the Girls Academy and Special Education program, there may be opportunity to identify staff that can work across programs.

**Create career path for teachers with expertise in child behaviour.** The retention of the current team is central to the sustainability of the program in parallel with recruiting and training new staff. Recognition of NGY positions as Behaviour Specialist positions presents a career pathway for teachers working in the program. Furthermore, as a Behaviour Specialists, NGY teacher(s) could work across the NGY program and Canobolas RTHS offering the opportunity to develop capability in the wider teaching and student support staff.

**Establish an Educational Unit to train teachers and Student Support Officers to work with children at risk of disengaging from school.** The NGY program has received requests from other schools in NSW to visit and learn about the program to improve learning engagement in their area. This indicates there is recognition of the work being done by NGY within the sector, presenting an opportunity to not only develop capability within the Canobolas RTHS but NGY could be expanded as an Aboriginal school of excellence. As a school of excellence, NGY could provide education and training for teachers

and university students who want to learn how to better engage with Aboriginal students and learn how to work with the local Aboriginal community organisations.

**Consider adopting an early intervention approach to engagement in education.** Over the last two years the focus of the NGY program has shifted from Years 9 and 10 (Stage 5) to Years 7 and 8 (Stage 4). Some stakeholders suggested that the target group could include Aboriginal boys in Years 5 to 8. Many of the students start to disengage from school in Year 7 for a range of reasons including numeracy and literacy learning gaps from primary school that challenges engagement in Year 7 curriculum, adjusting to the transition from a structured single classroom/ single teacher environment to multiple classrooms and teachers, size of the school and busyness. It was suggested that the NGY program could provide the targeted numeracy, literacy and cultural support to Stage 3 students at risk of disengagement to prepare them for transition to secondary school.

**Identifying and agreeing on what success looks like – with shared responsibility.** On measures such as engagement in learning, educational improvement and engagement in cultural activities, the NGY program has demonstrated success. Other benefits to the students, parents and carers are more difficult to measure e.g., self-esteem, confidence, connection with family, planning for a future, but are equally or some might say more important than objective measures. Another objective measure is school attendance after transition. Current metrics indicate that this has not improved on an aggregate basis. Is this a shortcoming with the NGY program, is it a shortcoming with Canobolas RTHS, is it an issue with families or is it an issue with the individual student? The NGY program is built on a partnership between the Aboriginal community (through the local CAPO and NSW AECG), the DoE and Canobolas RTHS and the families and their sons. Identifying and agreeing what success is, how it will be assessed and how each partner contributes to this for the wellbeing of the students may help to mitigate some of the tensions evident and provide the basis for a sustainable program that shows such a lot of promise.

**Mentoring NGY students to support transition.** As outlined earlier, the Clontarf program and Aboriginal Learning and Engagement Centre operate on the Canobolas RTHS campus. Senior Aboriginal students participating in these programs could be linked with NGY students in the transition to school to mentor them through the re-integration phase as beyond.

**Engagement with Orange City Council Youth Hub and other initiatives.** The Orange City Council has a number of youth programs currently in place including the Youth Hub which operates a Drop-In Centre for young people aged 12 to 24, offering after-school and weekend activities (e.g., pool and pizza nights, cooking and music activities) as well as a sports club in conjunction with the PCYC (which some NGY students participate in). Orange City Council Youth Program also runs a mentoring program where young people are connected with a mentor and also have small financial allocations to support a particular activity they may be interested in. In early 2023, Orange City Council will commence the MERGE program to provide after school and weekend extracurricular activities for students in Year 3 to 6 (currently not eligible for the Drop-In Centre) and activities for students in Years 7-10. For the older age group, activities and courses will include resume writing, relationship building, developing social skills and dealing with trauma. While there is already a good connection between NGY staff and the Youth Program Coordinator, there is clearly opportunity to (continue to) integrate NGY students into the extracurricular activities.

**Better celebrate wins and raise the profile of the program.** Interviews with organisational partners and other stakeholders indicated that there was general awareness of the program but not necessarily knowledge of the outcomes or benefits achieved. Promoting the wins resulting from the NGY program

for individual boys, their families and the program recognises the efforts of the students, their parents, the NGY staff, Canobolas RTHS, the local CAPO, DoE, NSW AECG and Orange City Council in participating and backing a program that is innovative, outside the comfort zone for many and requires a partnership approach. Opportunities suggested to promote the program include joint posting and cross-posting of activities and successes on NGY and Canobolas RTHS Facebook pages on an ongoing basis and could be expanded to include OLALC, OAMS and local AECG; presentation to Orange City Councillors through Friday briefings; snippets in newsletters (e.g., local member newsletters, Newcrest); as well as dissemination of the findings of this review.

## **5 CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

This review of the early implementation phase of the NGY program indicates that is highly effective in re-engaging young Aboriginal male students in learning and improving educational gaps in numeracy and literacy. Leadership by the Aboriginal community through the local CAPO and NSW AECG in design of the program, in conjunction with teachers and student support staff with expertise in trauma-informed teaching has resulted in the development and implementation of a culturally embedded, evidence-based education program. Central to re-engagement and achievement in educational improvement has been the commitment by the NGY team, cultural teachers and liaison officers to create a safe, supportive and respectful environment where teaching strategies are tailored to the individual student. Working with and addressing the needs of families through connection with the Orange local CAPO managed services, and other local services has facilitated student participation.

Development and implementation of the NGY program aligns with local, state and commonwealth policies to improve access to education and educational achievement for Aboriginal peoples through a partnership between the DoE, NSW AECG, the local CAPO, Canobolas RTHS and Orange City Council. However, the fragility of the partnership is recognised. This partnership needs to be strengthened for the sustainability of the program and to proactively reduce disengagement of Aboriginal children from school more broadly.

### **5.1 Next Steps**

Drawing on the findings of this evaluation the proposed next steps are offered to strengthen the NGY program.

NSW AECG and the local Orange CAPO present the findings of this evaluation to the NSW DoE and to the Commonwealth Department of Indigenous Affairs and Department of Education.

NSW AECG and local Orange CAPO invite NSW DoE and Commonwealth Departments to participate in a meeting with current local partners to:

- Scope potential to work together for continued operation and strengthening of the NGY program during remainder of current funding period and beyond
- Identify expectations, interest and motivations for collaboration
- Develop a shared vision
- Identify resources parties can bring to the collaboration
- Determine activities and infrastructure to be delivered/ available with the resources
- Agree on what success look like (through the collaboration) and how this will be assessed
- Determine those parties committed to partnering.

Following this meeting(s), parties co-design appropriate governance arrangements to progress the partnership.

Key priority areas for focus under the partnership in 2023-2024 include:

- Identification of appropriate infrastructure to sustain current NGY program at the Lake Canobolas site with opportunity for expansion of student numbers
- Increase current staff establishment by 1 FTE teaching position (identified as Behaviour Specialist) with additional staffing if student numbers are to be expanded (and infrastructure in place)
- Identify a cohort of teachers at Canobolas RTHS to undertake rotations at NGY, with rotations commencing during Term 2, 2023.
- Canobolas RTHS engage with CAMHS School Link Coordinators in conjunction with NGY staff and OLALC cultural advisors, to progress a rolling professional development program for teachers and support staff focused on trauma-informed teaching practices and cultural safety.
- Canobolas RTHS executive, NGY staff, and Orange Local CAPO managed services providers develop a transition strategy that can be tailored to support individual students and their families in their transition back to school.

Progressing the concept of an Aboriginal School for Educational Excellence is contingent upon having stable and sustainable NGY staffing and, appropriate infrastructure to support delivery of the NGY education program and training of teachers and university students. NSW AECG would take leadership in the development of the model recognising that it would be a resource for teacher training and development across NSW inclusive of a training pathway to increase Aboriginal participation in the teaching workforce.

## APPENDIX: PROGRAM LOGIC

Drivers	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes (Short – med term)	Outcomes (long-term)
<p>A positive learning environment for young Aboriginal males disengaged/at risk of disengaging from school are supported to achieve their full academic potential and aspirations</p> <p>Young Aboriginal males have opportunities to develop confidence in their heritage, cultures and language</p> <p>Community partnerships underpin and inform strategies to improve participation in education and employment for young Aboriginal males</p>	<p><b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitator salaries</li> <li>Buses and fuel</li> <li>Gym equipment grant</li> <li>Cultural education resources and excursions</li> <li>Local CAPO governance support</li> </ul> <p><b>In-kind</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language teacher</li> <li>Cultural mentoring and support</li> <li>Food donations (breakfast and lunch program)</li> <li>Physical and mental health assessments, screening and referrals</li> </ul>	<p>Alternative learning plans tailored to student</p> <p>Case management by Facilitators</p> <p>Wiradjuri language program</p> <p>Cultural activity days</p> <p>Health and wellbeing program</p> <p>Families/ parents referred to family support services</p> <p>Vocational preparation and work experience</p> <p>Individualised transition planning to Canobolas School, TAFE or work</p>	<p>Students attend and actively engage in educational activities and programs</p> <p>Students maintain engagement with program for agreed period</p> <p>Students participate in cultural days and language lessons</p> <p>All students have a health assessment</p> <p>Students access specialised health services where indicated</p> <p>Parents and families access support services where indicated</p>	<p>Students have: Improved reading age Improved spelling level Improved maths level</p> <p>Students confident in their heritage, culture and language</p> <p>Parents and family members have capacity and capability to support student learning and participation in program</p> <p>Successful transition from program to Canobolas Rural Technology High School, TAFE or work</p>	<p>Students have successful transition to post-school training, further education or work</p> <p>Canobolas Rural Technology High School more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal students and the community.</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services and supports for families</li> <li>• Scout camp facilities</li> <li>• Work experience placements</li> </ul> <p><b>Governance and Management</b> DET and AECG partnership agreement</p>		<p>Parents and families participate in cultural days and activities</p>		
			<p>Businesses willing and able to support work placements</p> <p>Students undertake work experience placements (paid with flexible enrolment and unpaid)</p> <p>Canobolas RTHS supports students to transition into school</p>		
<p><b>Assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are willing to engage in education in settings that have the flexibility to meet their needs</li> <li>• Parents and families value education and support students to participate in the NGY program</li> <li>• Canobolas Rural Technology High School supports flexible learning options and allocates resources for implementation of the NGY program</li> </ul>			<p><b>External Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of employment and work experience opportunities</li> <li>• OLALC program capacity to take additional referrals</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canobolas Rural Technology High School has capacity and capability to support students as they transition back to mainstream education</li><li>• OLALC has programs and supports available to families to enable them to support students' participation in the program</li></ul>	
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## **APPENDIX: LETTERS FROM PARENTS AND CARERS**

Leanne Leahey

34 Discovery Drive,

Orange NSW 2800

07/04/2021

To The Principal of Canobolas Rural Technology High School,

My name is Leanne Leahey and I am the Mother of Jayden Leahey, a student at Canobolas High School, who is currently in Year 10.

I just wanted to express my feelings and give you some insight on what has transpired in regards to the turnaround from my son attending school and now attending Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya .

When he was attending Canobolas he was being suspended consistently. He wasn't attending class when he was there. Otherwise, there were certain teachers that would let him stay in the Learning Hub for the day which was not beneficial to his learning at all.

Jayden was an angry young man and the teachers didn't understand that going off at him or other students doesn't help them but hinders. The staff don't bother to find out the underlying reasons for the behavior, they would rather suspend them and put them in the too hard basket. These students have a trauma background, coming to school can be a safe space for them and some staff make that impossible for these kids. In fact they can make it worse.

Since he has started attending Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya he is a different young man. The staff are amazing with these students and I couldn't be happier with how my son is progressing in this encouraging, culturally

safe environment. The staff are understanding and supportive of all the boys in the program. They care for each boys individual needs from both a school and a personal level, they respect these boys and in turn the boys respect them back. Unfortunately this does not always occur at Canobolas High School.

The cultural aspect of this program is a breath of fresh air, learning language, dance and didgeridoo is an important part of our boy's upbringing. They need to be exposed to their culture and have strong mentors around them, so many of our young men grow up without strong male role models to look up to and I believe that the staff at Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya are filling a very big gap. Uncle Ricky Ah- See is a much respected member of our Community and our boys learn so much from him, just having him around is exposing them to something they can't get at Canobolas High. I believe this program would benefit greatly if there could be more Aboriginal men involved to teach our boys how to become strong, proud individuals.

I'm sure you have seen the improvement of the attendance of all the students compared to when they were supposed to be at Canobolas High. I know my own son has improved dramatically. At this stage I don't want my son returning to Canobolas High again as I believe nothing would be any different if he did return. My child's Mental Health is of the utmost importance to me and returning to Canobolas would not be beneficial in my opinion.

I hope you take my letter into consideration moving forward with this program and support it. I'm happy to discuss it further if you would like any clarification.

Yours Sincerely

Leanne Leahey

To whom it may concern,

I am providing this feedback in relation to the Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya Program ("The Program") and in particular the importance of its impact on my son Flynn Ruddy. Flynn is a Year 8 student and a Wiradjuri boy.

Flynn was fortunate to have been given a placement in the program, after what I can only describe as catastrophic circumstances and appalling mishandling by the school and Department of Education which led to Flynn missing over 3.5 months from his first year of high school at Canobolas High School.

Flynn received no education, no supports nor any peer interaction during that time and as a result took himself of all medications, withdrew from social settings and suffered significantly both emotionally and mentally.

To say we had a rough start to the higher education system through Canobolas High School and the dealings with that school in particular would be a total understatement, so the task ahead for anyone was going to be a tough one.

I was made aware that Tim Bennett, Mark Polley and Scott Sullivan were going to be the educators in the program and Flynn commenced in the first week of February 2021.

You cannot teach empathy, you cannot teach commitment and you can definitely not teach dedication, all of which Tim, Mark and Scott have demonstrated towards Flynn. Not having had much to do with any of these teachers, to say I am impressed would be an understatement.

Flynn having had no education for the amount of time he did, the distrust he had in anyone let alone teachers and those with authority was already a hard task to begin with. The program in the very short time frame it has been operating, has been patient yet consistent with Flynn, they have worked with not only Flynn but myself, they have made a safe, open, learning and cultural environment to start to break down those walls and barriers Flynn has.

Flynn has only missed 1 day from the program, not bad for a kid that had had such a poor start to his high school education.

The educators have made me feel involved, I have attended the program, been shown around and at all times felt involved, kept up to date as well as reassured that Flynn is in safe hands whilst at school, something that was never the case previously unfortunately.

I think the biggest impact it has had is the cultural aspect, involving this alongside the learning and education is not only beneficial but highly engaging for Flynn. It gets him out of the "4 walls classroom" setting whilst still learning and getting him out of his head space and pushing him out of his comfort zone (not an easy thing to do for Flynn).

The program picks Flynn up and drops him off daily, so he knows that there is no getting out of going, people are relying on him to show and turn up. He has begun to interact with his peers and make friends, again something so trivial for most kids is huge for Flynn and the changes it has made to my boy I cannot express in words.

I could go on and on about the benefits of the program, little things like the buses made available to collect and drop off, the attention to the boys health and wellbeing through health checks or just the 1:1 care and commitment from the teachers themselves all valuable and impactful instances but overall is the impact it has on the kids themselves, in the 9 short weeks Flynn has been at the program he has learnt more, ATTENDED more as well as grown and committed more than he has ever!

The Aboriginal council's support to these boys is such a valuable and genuine commitment to steer these boys on the right path and cultural learning.

I hope that the Department of Education continue to support and maintain to uphold the value, culturally and educationally of this program for the kids in need, particularly like my son Flynn.

The programs value knows no words and the difference and impact in the short time on Flynn has my heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

I am more than happy to provide any additional feedback or talk further relating to the program and specifically my son Flynn as may be required.

Thanking you for taking the time to allow me to provide this feedback in support of not only the educators, Tim, Mark and Scott but the viable success of the Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya Program.

Kind Regards,

Amanda Ruddy  
0408232452

To the Principal Canobolas High,

I thought that you may be interested in some feedback on the programme Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya currently being run by Mr Bennet and Staff members.

Our grandson Nathen Schwarz is in year 9 has been attending the programme and all we can say is **Thank you Thank you** it has been absolutely encouraging the change it has made from a boy who has been in trouble a lot since starting high school, not wanting to go to school to fighting.

To someone who is more positive and now wants to attend school and is always up and ready to go of a morning with no fights.

Nathen is now joining in the activities with the other students which is a big step forward for him as he normally is very reserved. While he still has the occasional off day, there is still more good days, and he is talking to the staff if he has a problem something new for him.

He currently attends a weekly psychologist appointment at Kids HQ with Emily Smith, and she has also noticed the change in Nathen so much so that his appointment will be changing to fortnightly which is encouraging to say the least.

We would like to encourage everyone to give their support to keep this programme growing for boys like Nathen this may be their one chance to turn things around and teach them that there is a better way to do things rather than getting into trouble all the time. Maybe in time something may begin to help out troubled girls as well.

So, Mr Bennett and Staff deserve a big pat on the back for their patience and encouragement that they give to these boys.

Kind regards

Julie and Paul Schwarz.

Mrs June Baart  
21 William Street  
Millthorpe NSW 2798  
Phone 0408416737

29<sup>th</sup> March 2021

TO THE PRINCIPAL OF  
CANOBOLAS HIGH SCHOOL

RE: BRANDON BAART YEAR 10 - NGURANG-GU YALBILINYA PROGRAM

I feel I need to inform you of the difference this program has made in Brandon's school work and attitude to school.

Brandon when he started at Canobolas High School did not fit in. He did not cope with the bullying, the disruption and noise in the class room and could not concentrate in class. From year seven until year nine Brandon missed a lot of school on suspension and was not coping in class or school. He had no self-esteem or confidence in himself.

With the help the Ngurang-Gu Yalbilinya program and the committed teachers in this program Brandon is attending classes, and wanting to go to school. He is wanted to be better at Maths, reading and learning his spelling words, he is also improving in his writing. Brandon has completed his White Card for work and is looking forward to work experience during the year.

I am very grateful to this program, the teachers and yourself. I feel Brandon would have dropped out of school by now except for this program. I do hope you continue with this program, with Brandon being a prime example who really does want to learn, he really is a good kid with a kind heart.

Yours sincerely

June Baart

Brandon's Grandmother



## **Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya**

My name is Dylan Bruce William Wright and I am a Kamilaroi man, who's family come from North-western New South Wales but I have grown up majority of my life in Wiradjuri country, in my home of Orange.

I have been lucky enough to be a part of the Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya program from the moments it began up at the scout camp, next to lake Canobolas. My first interaction with the education program was when I was a "Health and Wellbeing Coach" working up at our local Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (OAMS). This saw me, training the then cohort of Year 7 – 10 young males (14 in total) from Canobolas Rural Technology High School in various fitness sessions and team games. My role at the time was physical and mental health based, so providing physical training sessions and mixing in yarning, saw me build rapport and have a greater understanding of what our young mob are going through.

Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya takes an approach that no school has done before, by bringing our young men to country and off site from school to provide education and most importantly, learn our culture (Tuesdays and Thursdays). This opens up the young men to an environment they are familiar with and comfortable in, for those who aren't familiar, it's an opportunity to expand their young minds. Throughout my time as a Health and Wellbeing coach I saw the students open up on a level you don't see at school and can't achieve on the basis of how its delivered. As this is a classroom of only fourteen students, with three teachers seeking to give the outcomes of a successful turn around back to the schooling environment.

Seeing the positive reactions, I would receive coming out on a Wednesday to train the students, was always great to see and hear. As attendance for all students rose nearly double and missing a day back at school, was more common than not. As an absence from the classroom wasn't being seen at Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya, as I would hear amongst the boy's countless words of encouragement and a bond that was being shared amongst all the cohort. It wasn't just a classroom that had been brought to the area of the scout camp, it was a team of young men working together to achieve the same goal and defeat some of the patterns that had been created through the flow of behaviours that is found more often than not amongst a classroom.

Moving on from my time as a Health and Wellbeing Coach, I became the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO) for the Central West Police Department here in Orange. This saw my involvement in the program near double, as I was in the classrooms with the students and seeing firsthand what was being achieved. I would spend Tuesdays for up to an hour, learning with the student's language and hearing the progress over the coming weeks. I can't put it into words how terrific it was to hear our young mob speaking language, saying introductions on themselves and acknowledgements of country in the classroom. It is something my grandparents would've dreamed of hearing and seeing being done/taught in a classroom.

Behavioural issues became a rare sight, compared to what some of the students had been previously in school, as what these students came into the program became nearly unrecognisable to most of

what they had become. Assessments handed in on time, work being completed without a second of hesitation and most of all, the manners and pride these young men brought themselves to was something truly to behold.

Lastly, the work the teachers have done is truly unbelievable and I can not praise them enough for the countless effort they have all put into Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya. The time the staff took to link in and make sure a direct line of communication was created between community was something you don't see often but was truly appreciated by all involved. This was done by working closely with our Local Aboriginal Land Council and the education system, to bring each level of support on the same wavelength, was no easy task.

My involvement with the program is something I will cherish and carry with me for the rest of my journey, as I believe Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya is something that will only continue to grow and be the staple of what's to come for future methods of education.