

REMOTE INDIGENOUS STUDENTS: RAISING THEIR ASPIRATIONS AND AWARENESS OF TERTIARY PATHWAYS

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ABSTRACT

The lower rates of participation in higher education of people from remote areas, together with the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education, make it less likely that students from remote Indigenous communities will aspire to attend university. Educators and community must develop working relationships and act early to raise students' aspirations through an awareness of wider possibilities within and beyond their own community. One initiative taken to accomplish these aims is the UniCamps program run by the University of South Australia's (UniSA) Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE) in partnership with Mimili Anangu School. (Anangu is the name that Indigenous people from that region use for themselves.) By showing learning pathways through the tertiary sector, leading to a range of careers, either within their community or through pursuing their own interests, this program seeks to capture and maintain Anangu students' interest in diverse educational opportunities. Beginning in 2010, groups of Mimili secondary students have been visiting Whyalla, living in student accommodation and experiencing university study and life in a large regional centre. While raising aspirations and developing tertiary experience are priorities, students also develop skills to assist them with living away from home and their remote community, acquire and refine communication skills, and learn to build relationships with unfamiliar non-Anangu people – a supportive environment is important.

The planning and initiation of the first UniCamp required full commitment from all involved – school leaders, family and community members, the students themselves and university staff – to provide optimal learning experiences and opportunities for the young people. For successful transition from secondary schooling in a remote community to a tertiary environment, students need significant literacy and numeracy skills, along with confidence to seek assistance in an unfamiliar setting. At times, the young people immersed themselves in the experience, supporting each other. On subsequent visits, through a widening range of activities – academic sessions, living skills, recreational activities, and engaging in the wider community – the students have grown more familiar with the campus and regional city environment. Students who before the program did not aspire to tertiary study now see this, including university, as one possibility for their future.

Relationship-building – between communities, educational institutions and within the university – takes time, but is a crucial foundation for implementing such a program. Support from the CRE Director and wider UniSA connections have contributed to making the program a reality. Collaboration with different areas of the University and community allows for an enriched educational experience. UniCamps is an opportunity for students to engage in career-related experiences which may be unfamiliar to them. As such, participation and learning opportunities should be targeted to achieve this goal. As the students' first language is not English, program content must be delivered in an appropriately scaffolded way, while still challenging and extending the students. What has

been learned from the Mimili–UniSA partnership will guide current plans to extend UniCamps opportunities to other rural and remote students.

INTRODUCTION

In an equitable society, it is to be hoped that members of all groups within that society will have comparable opportunities, including opportunities to undertake tertiary studies. Initiatives in Australia over recent decades have sought to address the under-representation in higher education of a number of 'equity groups' (DEET, 1990), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students from rural and remote areas. (For an overview of some of the government initiatives in the area of Indigenous higher education in the latter part of the 20th century, see Ellis, 2001.) The Bradley Review of Higher Education (DEEWR, 2008) called for greater participation by these groups as a means of increasing the proportion of the Australian population having an undergraduate degree qualification. According to the Review, the higher education sector's goals should include supporting access for all with the ability to participate, including students from diverse backgrounds, *particularly Indigenous students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from regional and remote areas* (DEEWR, 2008, p. 7). Building on that Review, the later *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* investigates how an improvement in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students *will contribute to nation building and reduce Indigenous disadvantage* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012, p. ix).

However, equitable access to and participation in higher education cannot be addressed without considering the situation in the earlier levels of formal education. As Biddle and Cameron found in their 2010 research, factors constraining Indigenous students from participating and achieving in the mainstream education system become evident quite early (Biddle & Cameron, 2012, p. 31). While in the period from 1998 to 2010 in Australia there was an increase from 32.1 per cent to 47.2 per cent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' secondary school retention rates to the end of Year 12, these are still much lower than rates for non-Indigenous students, which increased from 72.7 per cent to 79.4 per cent over the same period (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 18). Indigenous students are also less likely to gain a university entrance score (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 6). A decrease in Indigenous school enrolments as a percentage of the age cohort has been identified in the later years of secondary schooling (Hughes & Hughes, 2012, p. 5). For this situation to change, students and their communities must see the relevance of and have the desire to complete secondary school as a pathway to further employment and educational opportunities, including higher education.

It is crucial that remote Indigenous communities not be forgotten in discussions around higher education opportunities. *Excellence or Exit: Ensuring Anangu Futures through Education, A Review of Secondary Education and Vocational Training in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands)*, was released by the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education committee (PYEC) in mid-2009 (Lea, Tootell, Wolgemuth, Halkon, & Douglas, 2008). Lea et al. found a lack of understanding among students on the APY Lands concerning how schooling can shape their futures in the mainstream, and the relevance of learning as a lifelong undertaking, not viewing themselves as candidates for university study, nor conceiving of mobile and challenging careers post-school (Lea et al., 2008, p. 43). Their report identified a need to *transform training, learning and employment 'pathways' into journeys that lead to exciting destinations and not disappointing dead ends* (2008, p. 2). It further noted that, for students from the APY Lands to succeed in post-secondary study, university would need to be established as *a likely path for every student, regardless of their final post-secondary destination* (2008, p. 17).

Lea et al. also recommended that schools team up with universities, cultural institutions, businesses and community organisations to provide students with experiences that will help them develop career goals (Lea et al., 2008, p. 18). The report made a number of recommendations, all of which were supported by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS). Priorities listed by DECS included establishing a vocational education centre, programs for childcare and family support, and extended use of video conferencing to increase opportunities for both students and staff (APY Lands: Review, 2012).

In addition to the challenges outlined in the *Excellence or Exit* report, remote communities offer students limited opportunity to make connections with employers, community groups, or to develop the skills needed to navigate the challenges they face in larger communities.

Through building working relationships between communities and educational institutions, steps can be taken to raise awareness of higher education possibilities for remote Indigenous people. Young people need to know from an early age that they can aspire to achieve educational success that will allow them to contribute both to their own community and the wider society in other ways. Russell's study of Aboriginal students who were succeeding in the mainstream (i.e., according to a Western educational paradigm), including some not expected by others to complete secondary school, has relevance for these issues. While the students in her case studies were not remote students, teachers in remote schools could consider whether the various family, retention and attainment factors, teacher factors, peer factors and school factors identified in her study are applicable in their situation (Russell, 2000). More recently, Rahman's doctoral research also focused on student success and achievements in secondary education; her research indicated that *family, school support assistance programs, and cultural programs* were significant contributing factors (Kalleske, 2010). Rahman believes: *The role of culture has a significant influence on Indigenous student experiences, success and educational progress* (Kalleske, 2010). Herbert's doctoral research also focused on school success, and identified that, in individual and group settings, relationships and engagement that recognised strengths were important, and a source of guidance to people who really wanted to learn how incorporate those strengths into their work (Herbert, 2011, p. 5).

Current participation rates in higher education show that there is still under-representation of Indigenous students in higher education. Indigenous students made up 1.0 per cent of all higher education enrolments in 2011 (DEEWR, 2012), whereas it was estimated that the Indigenous population was 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Remote students are also under-represented, and 75,000 Indigenous people live in remote Indigenous communities (Hughes & Hudson, 2011, p. 5). However, with regard to the urban working population, rates of participation for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous are similar (Hughes & Hudson, 2011, p. 6). The 2011 figures show increases in Indigenous student numbers in some program areas (particularly Management and Commerce), but decreases in others (such as Agriculture, Environment and Related Studies), the most popular programs being Society and Culture, Health, and Education (DEEWR, 2012). There have been some encouraging improvements in Indigenous participation in higher education, including a diversification of programs studied (Lane, 2009, May), but much of the increase can be attributed to people living in urban areas, particularly women (Lane, 2011). Some of the earlier supports, such as targeted programs that helped people in remote communities to participate have decreased (Lane, 2009, December).

What happens in early schooling has an influence on subsequent educational possibilities. The importance of having access to education in one's own language, particularly in the early stages, has been stressed (Waller, 2012). Article 14 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2008) states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

There has been much discussion in recent years of retrograde steps, such as the Northern Territory Government's cutting back on opportunities for bilingual education (Devlin, 2011). However, recent moves there have been somewhat less negative (Murphy, 2012). Mimili Anangu School, the focus of the initiative described in this paper, has recognised the importance of education in the vernacular as

well as English. With regard to education in English, teachers in the APY Lands need expertise in teaching English as a second language (APY Lands: English language..., 2012).

After providing some of the background, we describe an initiative taken by people based at a regional university campus to raise remote Indigenous students' knowledge of tertiary pathways and foster aspirations to follow these paths.

Background to the Initiative

The University of South Australia (UniSA)'s commitment to Indigenous Australians is specifically mentioned in its founding Act of Parliament, Statement of Reconciliation (UniSA, 1997), and the Reconciliation Stones placed on each campus (UniSA, 2009). The University's 2010 statement of its aspirations for the following decade included:

By 2020, this commitment will be given expression across the University's activities in the curriculum of its educational programs, in improved graduate outcomes in a range of professions where Indigenous people are currently underrepresented, and in UniSA's staffing profile, where Indigenous employees will be well represented among both academic and professional staff. (UniSA, 2010a)

Its predecessor institutions offered a number of programs targeting Aboriginal students, such as the Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Program, and support structures were developed for students in mainstream programs (Lane, 2009, August). Beginning in 1984, the Anangu Tertiary Education Program (AnTEP) has endeavoured to prepare students in the APY Lands to teach in their own communities, and enabled Anangu Education Workers to upgrade their qualifications (UniSA, n.d.). UniSA established the first Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies in Australia (UniSA, 2009), now the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research within the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences.

For a number of years, the Spencer Gulf Rural Health School's (SGRHS) Aboriginal Health Unit (based in Whyalla, the second-largest city in South Australia outside of the capital) offered cultural awareness field trips to the APY Lands and Central Australia. (SGRHS was a partnership of the University of Adelaide and UniSA that came to an end mid-2012. The University Department of Rural Health component of the former SGRHS is now under UniSA's Centre for Regional Engagement [CRE]). Generating a relationship with people in the APY Lands was needed to make possible these field trips on which people from different areas, mainly having education or health professional backgrounds, were taken to spend a week in the community and learn about language, culture, and the way of life in the Aboriginal community, in challenging outback conditions. For people wanting to work with Aboriginal people, it was a chance to learn about cultural exchange, and informed them around cultural appropriateness. The relationships established with various communities in the APY Lands over ten years of field trips enabled insights to be gained for both parties into both cultures and ways of life. With these learnings came the understanding that pathways to further education were difficult, and career opportunities were limited for students in the community. As such, the shared passion and commitment of both community and field trip staff enabled a partnership to develop, in which reciprocity and respect were key to the development of the program. The CRE also has a strong commitment to the creation of sustainable regional communities and has, for several years, run a number of school-University engagement programs in Whyalla.

One place visited during the field trips is Mimili, situated in the Everard Ranges, and almost a thousand kilometres and 12 hours' drive north-west from Whyalla, the last part of the road trip being over unsealed roads. Its nearest urban centre is Alice Springs, 480 kilometres to the north-east. Mimili has a varying population of approximately 300. Their first language is Pitjantjatjara or Yankuntjatjara. The four main employment opportunities are at the Mimili Anangu School, the health centre, Mimili Maku Arts, and the store. (See PY Media, 2012; Taylor Burrell Barnett Town Planning and Design, 2008.) The school has a varying enrolment of approximately 60 students, for almost all of whom English is the second (at least) language. This vibrant community has demonstrated strong commitment to supporting young people to achieve the best they can educationally, as well as encouraging community capacity-building.

During 2009 one of the field trips included an opportunity for three UniSA staff members (one of whom had a background in the schools sector), to visit Mimili. All had worked with Aboriginal communities, and had previously had many wide-ranging conversations about the opportunities to support Indigenous people to undertake tertiary education, including how to capture their interest early and raise their aspirations for a range of career pathways both within and beyond their own community. In Mimili they sat down with community and school to learn what they saw as being the important aspects of education for their young people and what they thought the University could do to help them. While the reduced likelihood of Aboriginal high school students transitioning to tertiary education was identified as an opportunity for the University and communities to work together it was also seen as essential that they do so.

From the start, Mimili Anangu School's Principal and the Anangu Coordinator, along with other teachers, community members, and students, were involved in discussions on ways in which an effective, innovative and sustainable program could be developed and delivered. The aim was to raise the Mimili students' educational aspirations, making use of the Whyalla campus student accommodation so that they could come and experience life in a regional city and university site. With strong support from the community, and explicitly linking what was wanted for the young people to the community aspirations, a proposal for the UniCamps initiative was developed by the CRE Executive Officer and CRE Director, in line with needs identified by the *Excellence or Exit* report referred to above (Lea et al., 2008). A commitment was obtained from both the CRE and SGRHS to provide the resources that would enable UniCamps to happen.

The UniCamps Program

Shared consultation and planning is an ongoing feature of the program; the Pitjantjatjara concept of 'ngapartji' (give and take) provides a model for this two-way exchange process. The UniCamp experience provides a unique opportunity for regional and remote Aboriginal students: an experience of university life, the development of independent living skills, exposure to a broad range of community and industry activities in Whyalla and Port Augusta, and an exploration of education and employment opportunities.

The aims of the program are to:

- increase student awareness around educational and career pathways;
- raise aspirations among young people in remote communities to undertake post-secondary study;
- allow students to experience first-hand what studying at a university campus in a regional location is like;
- support students to explore programs and courses offered by UniSA at Whyalla;
- demonstrate to students that studying at university is both a possibility and achievable;
- build some lifelong learning skills;
- provide a scaffolded approach to independent living through shared accommodation;
- create connections between students and the Whyalla/Port Augusta communities; and
- link UniSA with their community and potential future students.

The first UniCamp

The first UniCamp, held in March 2010, was a unique experience for students and also some of the Anangu Education Workers (AEW) who had never experienced a university environment. The young people stayed together in the student accommodation, supervised by teachers and AEWs, and managed their own lives for a few days as if they were independent and attending university. They learned about living in shared quarters, cooking meals, budgeting, healthy foods, lifestyle, and a broad range of industries and workplaces in the region. They encountered many situations not found in their home community, such as making contact with staff at the campus who may never have assisted an Aboriginal person before. At workshops they found out about the university library and how to go online, practised academic skills, carried out small research projects, and discovered what the university had to offer, exploring the range of programs available at the CRE. Supportive UniSA staff gave mini-lectures, providing a taste of university through a scaffolded approach to learning, so

that the young people from Mimili were able to engage with the curriculum. They also explored the region and the Whyalla community.

There was much discussion with them about their aspirations, what they saw for themselves in the future and what they needed to do to get there. It was really important in that ongoing conversation to convey to them that it was possible for them to go to university and to show them some of the ways that they could accomplish that. While many people associate attending university with having to move from a rural location into the city, the CRE at Whyalla provides a unique opportunity for young people from rural and remote communities to live on campus.

Subsequent UniCamps

Up to the end of 2012, eight UniCamps have been held (three in 2010: March, September, November/December; three in 2011: March, June, August; two in 2012: May, September). At least two camps have been cancelled in this time due to unforeseen cultural circumstances: a reminder of the importance of remaining flexible and respectful to student needs. The size of the visiting group has varied from five to eight students, the majority female, giving a total attendance for the eight camps of 54 students (including repeat attendees). Students have been in Years 9-12, with ages ranging from 15-19 years. As the student groups have multiple opportunities to visit Whyalla, each program varies so that they have a range of experiences as they grow more familiar with the university and city environment.

Students are accompanied by one or two teachers and when possible an Anangu Education Worker. The group usually drives from Mimili to Whyalla on Sunday and Monday, arriving in Whyalla on Monday afternoon. Most workshops and activities are held from Tuesday to Friday, with concluding sessions in community organisations in Port Augusta. Students and their teachers drive home via Glendambo, returning to Mimili late on Saturday afternoon.

Students undertake sessions with UniSA academics from Engineering, Nursing, Social Work, Nutrition, Business, and Foundation Studies programs (and Education from 2013) as well as professional staff from UniSA Library, CareerShop and Indigenous Student Services. These sessions also create familiarity and confidence with lecture, tutorial, online and video conference learning environments, and are valuable opportunities for students to practise academic skills, such as critical thinking, writing, speaking and comprehension in English. They also find out what other tertiary providers offer. Camps include workshops and activities designed to build students' independence and capacity to live cooperatively with others, including urban orienteering and nutrition and cooking workshops.

Each UniCamp includes visits to community organisations and employers ('APY students ready for future', 2010). These visits raise student awareness of services available to them in larger rural centres (e.g. health and library services) and demonstrate career pathways available with post-secondary study (e.g. nurse, midwife, or librarian).

Students also participate in recreational activities with community organisations. These activities help to retain their attention and further familiarise students with the Whyalla and Port Augusta communities, building confidence in interacting with new people and using English in everyday situations. They also provide a break and reward after academic and career activities which require significant effort and concentration. So, in the spirit of 'ngapartji' compromises are reached, so that a program is designed that is conducive of learning and engagement, and still incorporates recreational activities of interest to students. Table 1 shows a selection of activities engaged in during the UniCamps (not all each time):

Table 1: Some of the UniCamps activities

University programs	Careers	Whyalla other	Port Augusta
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation Studies – alternative pathway: online and relationship building skills • Nursing: hand hygiene; living organisms under the microscope; nutrition; wound care • Social Work: group work activities; video conferencing experience • Business: decision-making model • Engineering: flying a remote-controlled device; paper towers activity; practical demonstrations • Library skills • Online skills • Support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career options opened up by UniSA programs • Self-discovery activities • Aspirations exercise • CareerShop / career profiling • TAFE SA: mining simulator; enrolled nursing; community services, hairdressing • Careers promotion Roadshow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Centre • Maritime Museum • Public library • OneSteel (Arrium) • Nunyara Aboriginal Health Service • Hospital • Stuart High School aquaculture and horticulture programs • Hip hop dance class • Indigenous Youth Mobility Project • Fire Station • Shopping • Cinema movie evening • Aerosol art – D’Faces of Youth Arts • Tenpin bowling • Introduction to yoga 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital • Youth Centre • Pika Wiya Aboriginal Health Service and Learning Centre • Umeewarra Aboriginal Media Association • Radio station – broadcasting their own music • Royal Flying Doctor Service • Vibe Alive festival

Activities vary depending on whether this is their first visit or not, and what we are able to offer in order to allow them to see a whole range of areas in health and education which may be of interest to them. The program is still evolving following feedback from the students, teachers and community. Evaluations conducted at the end of each UniCamp have given insight into students’ perceptions of their experiences and also those of the staff travelling with them; the Mimili staff have also provided additional informal feedback.

Outcomes

From anecdotal reports, UniCamps may have increased students’ levels of self-esteem and confidence, along with their feeling comfortable interacting with unfamiliar people. They enjoy coming to a mainstream facility or town and learning to understand the surroundings through their exposure to them (Murtagh, 2011).

During the last 2012 camp, it was acknowledged that there was scope to incorporate activities into the program that would be of benefit to students’ Personal Learning Plan (PLP), a South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) requirement. This has been incorporated into the program, given the challenging role experienced by the school teachers associated with teaching in a cross-cultural environment with minimal mainstream support. This is one example of how the program endeavours to meet the needs of the students as new barriers to completing their SACE emerge.

UniCamps participants have gained awareness of what university studies involve. One UniCamps participant undertook secondary education in Adelaide in preparation for university study. Students now see different career possibilities for themselves, which are not restricted to attending university.

Student feedback reveals that the UniCamps program has mainly had a positive impact on them. They have rated UniCamps as *good* or *very good*. This is encouraging, as their reports to other students

on their return home may inspire others to desire a similar experience. Student comments have included: *it was great to be here, the nursing session was great lesson and a bit fun and we learned different things, and the highlight for me at the Unicamp was the living by ourselves in the accommodation.* Some reported that, as a result of their UniCamp experience, they were now thinking of going to university, and mentioned engineering, teaching and nursing as areas of possible interest. They recognised that they would probably need extra help with mathematics and the sciences, and money, food and accommodation would be areas where support would be needed.

Teachers' responses to the program, collected in surveys undertaken from March 2011, suggest that the project is valued. Comments on what was most valuable and how the program could help students achieve their goals included:

Students need experiences such as these so they can begin to plan for their futures and make goals for themselves by seeing what options are available.

Simply by offering invaluable experiences that they wouldn't otherwise have, the Unicamp helps Mimili students identify goals which they didn't necessarily know they had access to, which is a really important carrot when it comes to their education because it provides them with a purpose. They have a better idea of possible study and career pathways. They have grown in confidence and ability to communicate with unfamiliar people.

Generally trying new things and having new and different experiences. This opens their world up and introduces new possibilities. When students try new things and engage in activities it helps to build their self-esteem. Any self-confidence boosts are amazing! Hip hop, healthy eating, yoga and the engineering experience all helped to boost the girls' self-esteem through trying new things.

Mimili students have delivered presentations to UniSA staff about Mimili, and also shared with the Mimili community what they have learned during their UniCamps experience. These knowledge exchanges are important because they can be considered a validation for how valuable and useful the program may be. A pleasing outcome for the people who had committed to this project was that it was the overall winner of UniSA's Chancellor's Award for Community Engagement in 2010, also winning the 'Best Collaboration with a Regional and Remote Location' section, and gaining \$13,000 in funding towards continuing the UniCamps program (UniSA, 2010b). While the program is considered valuable by some, a formal evaluation would be useful to better understand the outcomes of the program, including its strengths and weaknesses.

Discussion and Lessons Learned

The importance of building relationships and a reciprocal partnership (school, community, and university) cannot be overemphasised. First-hand knowledge of the community is gained by visiting, listening and learning, being respectful, honest and upfront; this can lead to action based on what community members see as important. Community support for educational aspirations has underpinned the UniCamps project. An understanding of the culture and history of the Mimili community is needed in order to be able implement a suitable program for students when they visit Whyalla. The project needs to be informed by ongoing collaboration between the University and School, so that the needs of each student cohort are identified and an appropriate program designed. Leaders play a key role in maintaining relationships. The previous principal, originally from Port Augusta, spent eight years of consistent, dedicated service in the community before leaving at the end of 2012, and other staff have also worked in the school for a number of years; high staff turnover would have been a disadvantage to the program. Mimili student and staff feedback in end-of-camp surveys also informs program direction and content. Recognising that the university certainly does not have all the answers, acknowledging mistakes and taking corrections as positive feedback are crucial. The creation of ongoing *dialogue* is essential – a one-sided monologue may be ineffective and potentially damaging, particularly in this context.

The Mimili students have access to computer technology in Mimili and like other young people have the associated skills; it is important to make the most of these strengths. The students learn quickly, and some Whyalla people, such as a TAFE instructor, have been astounded to find how quickly the

students have picked up how to operate unfamiliar electronic equipment (simulated mining machinery).

Supporting students for whom English is a second or third language needs constant consideration. It is important to confirm understanding with students (by including a community representative in learning exercises). Students require extra time and extra information, and opportunities to ask questions. Those contributing to the program need to be prepared to speak clearly, avoiding jargon that may be unfamiliar to the visiting students, and giving them time to absorb new information. The AEWs received English education and so understand English, yet typically speak in their first language. English is a challenge for some in cross-cultural communication, both for the students and also for facilitators, who need to be aware of the need for clear, jargon-free presentation. The multiple opportunities for experiential learning can assist in communicating new learning; hands-on activities are really appreciated.

Building trust and engaging Indigenous students can be challenging. Yet, it is important for remote educators and all seeking to widen the educational and vocational horizons of remote students to recognise the strengths within the remote community, and appreciate the store of knowledge held by the students and the older generations of their communities (Osborne, 2012, p. 11), and consider Anangu perspectives on what is important for learning (Osborne, 2012). As with other students in non-metropolitan regions, remote Indigenous students need to acquire the knowledge that will allow them choices for their post-school pathways, whether within their community or beyond it (Halsey, 2009). Noel Pearson (2010) presents the view that some members of a community, while still regarding their community as home, may leave and travel *in orbits around that gravitational centre*, as they gain other skills which may be useful to their community when they return.

Once people get to university (or other institutions of tertiary education), they need to find a welcoming, inclusive environment, supportive administrative and academic staff, and a curriculum that is relevant to them. As shown by a study of institutional influences on Aboriginal participation in higher education (Ellis, 1998), institutions may need to change, rather than expecting Indigenous students to change in order to fit in. These institutional characteristics are relevant for all students, but particularly for students who have come from backgrounds where university study has not traditionally been seen as a desired part of their education.

Future Plans

Potential barriers facing students in relation to undertaking further study need to be identified by the University and other relevant institutions. As students in the past have identified, money, food and accommodation are potential obstacles for pursuing further education outside of the community. Ways need to be found by school, community and tertiary institutions to break down some of these barriers. There may also be a benefit to university staff travelling to Mimili to continue building meaningful relationships with students, to assist in identifying aspirations and potential needs. Mimili staff perceptions on how the University could help students to meet their goals included:

In order for students to attend university they would need a lot of support. Providing money, food and accommodation to meet their basic needs would help. Many students would not be able to pay their tuition fees and so a scholarship would be good. A mentor and/or tutor (preferably Aboriginal) would also be a good support for students in their academic studies. An accommodation facility where other Aboriginal students reside and where there is 24/7 support. A transport option that allows students to go home frequently with no or limited cost. Regular contact with Mimili on students' pathway options. Speaking with elders and Aboriginal community members about attending university and what support you provide may help families understand why their children are leaving. This will help the community be more supportive of such ventures. I hope that you can provide some of these opportunities for students in remote locations who have aspirations of uni!

Future plans include additional reciprocal visits to the APY Lands by CRE staff, the expansion of the program to other schools on the APY Lands with appropriate community consultation, and the development of a rural stream, allowing UniCamps to be offered on a regular basis to students from country towns such as Port Augusta. Already one camp has been held with urban Aboriginal

students from Port Augusta, organised in conjunction with the Polly Farmer Foundation. It is hoped that future funding will provide a dedicated UniCamps project officer.

CONCLUSION

Despite the long road trip involved, the needed preparation, and an exhausting program, the UniCamps project has proved its worth. It makes several contributions to the region: it promotes tertiary education possibilities to students in Mimili, builds capacity to undertake further and higher education, and builds collaborative relationships between regional centres and Mimili.

The UniCamps program's long-term objective is to improve participation rates at university and other tertiary institutions by Aboriginal students from remote and regional communities; even if students do not aspire to eventual tertiary participation, they will have been exposed to other experiences and opportunities for training or possibilities for joining the workforce. It is important for the program to remain flexible, open and encouraging with regard to these different pathways and opportunities for the Mimili students. The program has contributed to the community by encouraging students to realise that university study may be achievable, in some cases to aspire to tertiary education and its associated employment benefits, by assisting students to identify careers and pathways to those careers through further education, by assisting students to acquire independent living skills that will support them if they study in a more urban environment and by encouraging cooperation between students and the Whyalla and Port Augusta communities.

This small beginning, concentrating on one remote school community, and depending very much on the partnership relationships developed, provides a template for similar initiatives. For the University of South Australia, what has been learned provides a source of experience-based knowledge that can be drawn upon in extending such opportunities to students in other rural and remote areas.

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