Gunbalanya Whole of Community Engagement Initiative Evaluation Report

Bininj and Balanda knowledge systems working together

Report prepared by
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Funding for this project provided by the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme.

DISCLAIMER
This report was written by the stated authors and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative of the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor - Indigenous Leadership of Charles Darwin University. It provides multiple perspectives and reflections on engagement with a range of stakeholders over time and is not intended to be definitive, comprehensive or imply community consensus with the views expressed.

Warning: Images of deceased persons may appear in this report.

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Acknowledgements

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A note on language used: The terms ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Bininj’ (men) and ‘Daluk’ (women) are used interchangeably throughout this report to refer to First Nations people of Australia living in the remote West Arnhem community of Gunbalanya. ‘Balanda’ is used to refer to Western people or knowledge systems.

A note on quotes: The identity of the research participants has intentionally been kept confidential; consent was obtained to record these quotes.

A note on photos: Where first names only have been used to identify people in photos, this was intentional.
Gunbalanya Higher Education Pathway Research

Background

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative is funded by the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme.

The aim of WCE is to engage six remote and very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to build aspiration, expectation and capacity for higher education, supporting strong, sustainable pathways from early childhood through to lifelong post-secondary education.

Objectives include:

- Exploring current community perspectives of higher education, and linking with existing strategies for achieving quality of life aspirations;
- Co-creating ongoing opportunities for community, research, academic and public policy leaders to engage in mutually beneficial and critical relationships; and
- Identifying means for making education relevant and culturally and physically accessible

Gunbalanya is one of the six communities participating in the WCE initiative in the West Arnhem region. Other communities include Maningrida (West Arnhem), Yirrkala, Galiwinku (East Arnhem), Tennant Creek and Yuendumu (Central Desert).

In West Arnhem, the Community Engagement Leader and Mentor and Engagement Officer worked across both Gunbalanya and Maningrida communities, following a similar community engagement approach that was agreed and supported by both communities.
The research teams – WCE and ARPNet

Between October 2014 and December 2016, a total of six researchers were employed by the Office of Pro-Vice Chancellor-Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University (CDU), to lead Participatory Action Research, exploring remote Indigenous higher education pathways in Gunbalanya, West Arnhem. An additional team of 15 community-based researchers were employed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Service Level Agreement between the OPVC-IL and the Aboriginal Research Practitioners’ Network (ARPNet), auspiced by the Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL) at CDU.

This is the first time, to our knowledge, that two teams of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers have come together in this way, combining their research skills and knowledge to explore the perspectives and experiences of remote Indigenous young people, families, key community leaders and traditional owners, service providers and other key stakeholders living in community.

Some WCE and ARPNet researchers also worked in Maningrida (the other WCE community in the West Arnhem Region).

Current WCE Staff

**Millie Olcay – Community Engagement Leader (Sep 2014 - Dec 2016)**

Ms Millie Olcay (MEd by Research, Grad DipEd, BA Hons, Exec Dip, Dip, Cert IV TAE) brings over 18 years of experience with her in early childhood, primary and tertiary education, community engagement, inclusion and equity and in more recent years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and research in remote Indigenous communities in the NT. Her research specialises in participatory action research methodologies; engaging educators to design curriculum and pedagogy according to students’ voices, experiences and perspectives; pre-service teacher perspectives on online learning, reflective practice and community engagement; and perspectives on inclusive practices in remote Indigenous early childhood settings.
Dean Yibarbuk – Mentor and Engagement Officer (Jan - Dec 2016)
Dean has taken a prominent leadership role in developing contemporary land management programs to deal with conservation issues on Aboriginal land. A driving force behind the development of the Djelk rangers at Maningrida, Dean is also a senior ranger. He has also been a chairman of both Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and Demed Association Inc.

Dean has been a key figure in the development of Warddeken Land Management Limited, the declaration of the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area and the development of a ground-breaking use of traditional knowledge of savannah burning practices to deal with climate change.

Dean is the Mentor and Facilitator of Warddeken Land Management Limited, a not-for-profit established to support a movement back to country linked to critical conservation issues. He has travelled widely in Australia and overseas to speak on fire management and other conservation issues.

Dean also is also founding director of the Aboriginal Research Practitioners’ Network (ARPNet) hosted by Charles Darwin University (CDU) and is currently working as the Mentor and Engagement Officer for the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative in both Maningrida and Gunbalanya. Dean has participated in a number of conference and projects – locally, nationally and internationally.

Seraine Namundja – Community Liaison Officer (Jan - Nov 2016)
Seraine Namundja has been working for the past 14 years in early childhood and primary education (as a Crèche Worker and Relief Teacher), in land management (as a Ranger) and Supervisor at DEMED Association, in employment (as a Centrelink Liaison Officer) and at the Department of Children and Families as a Community Worker. Currently, Seraine is the Cultural Liaison Officer, working in the West Arnhem Region in Gunbalanya community on the WCE initiative. She says, “This work is important because it involves working with my community about education to make it better for the future of my people.”

Seraine holds a Certificate III in Children’s Services and will be commencing her Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care in July 2016 at Charles Darwin University. She says, “I have chosen to do further study because I enjoy working with the little ones. Maybe one day I will become an early childhood teacher in the School.”
Former WCE Staff:
- Dean Yibarbuk – Lead Community Researcher (Feb-Dec 2015)
- Jamie Hagan – Mentor and Engagement Officer (Oct 2014- Jan 2016)
- Donna Stephens – Teacher Liaison Leader (Jan 2015 – Jan 2016)

ARPNet researchers (2015-2016):

Team 1 -November 2015
1. Serina Namarnyilk
2. Dean Yibarbuk
3. Evelyne Narronga
4. Gwen Nayilibidj
5. Christella Namundja
6. Sophia Nawirridj
7. Deborah Daniels
8. Geraldine Daniels
9. Eddie Phillips
10. Hmalan Hunter-Xenie

Team 2 -April 2016
1. Eddie Phillips
2. Dennis Naroldol
3. Timothy Nabegeyo
4. Kingswood Dirdi
5. Godfrey Blitner
6. Andy Wood
7. Hmalan Hunter-Xenie

Figure 5: ARPNet researchers in action.
Community context

Gunbalanya, also known as Oenpelli, is situated approximately 300 kilometres east of Darwin on the western border of Kakadu National Park. Gunbalanya is a community of approximately 1,500+ mainly Indigenous (with some non-Indigenous) people. The main language spoken is Kunwinjku, however, the community operates administratively in English. Access is gained with a permit (obtained through the Northern Land Council), but is limited due to seasonal conditions. In the dry season (May-Sept) there is road access, however, during the wet season (Oct-Apr), the tidal East Alligator ‘croc-filled’ river at Cahill’s Crossing, is usually impassable.

The community is well serviced through the school, West Arnhem Regional Council, health clinic, police station, Demed Association Inc. (servicing the homelands), post office agency, a variety of other visiting government and non-government agencies and the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s Government Engagement Coordinator and Indigenous Engagement Officer. Recreational facilities include a 25-metre swimming pool, fishing, boating, hiking, arts and craft, sports ovals, youth centre and basketball facilities. The major employment industries are education, ranger programs, community-owned supermarket, council services, the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) - station and meat works, service station, sports and social club, and Injalak Arts and Crafts Association.

Figure 6: Shopping at Adjumarllarl Store in Gunbalanya.

Figure 7: WCE staff Seraine Namundja and Millie Olcay.
Gunbalanya School – from community school to independent public school

Originally a community school, the school council was awarded independent public school status in 2016. In early 2017, the school board will be established (currently an interim Board). Half of its members will be family representatives. Classified as a very remote school, it is surrounded by the beautiful Arnhem land escarpment.

![Aerial view of Gunbalanya school.](image)

The school caters for students from birth to Year 12. The Child and Family Centre of the school operate a crèche, preschool and Families and First Teachers program (FAFT). Although bilingual education was introduced in the school in 1974, it was discontinued in 1984 due to a variety of administrative, social and cultural reasons.

In the dry season, there are a number of students who move to and from the homelands with their families. In the case of Kabulwarnamyo homelands, a shared partnership has been developed under a MoU between Gunbalanya School and the newly established Nawarddeken Academy, to support student movement between the two sites.
Please see http://www.nawarddekenacademy.com/ for more information about this Homeland School. A few photos from this school are pictured below.

A flexible calendar has also been developed at Gunbalanya School to cater for seasonal conditions. The school year starts in early January, completes 22 weeks in the first semester, followed by a long recreational leave to allow families to work and live on country and conduct ceremony and funerals.

A number of programs are embedded within the school curriculum, including:

- Junior Rangers
- Music: Count Us In facilitated by Arts Empower! and NT Music School
- Work Readiness
- Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) Pathway
- Girls Academy
- Clontarf

The school enjoys considerable support from a range of industry partners – both local (e.g. West Arnhem Regional Council, Meat works, Demed Association, Rangers) and external (e.g. CDU, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), Menzies School of Health Research, GTNT, as well as interstate schools including Trinity Grammar, Billanock and Steiner). In future years, the school hopes to expand its performing arts and music curriculum.
Engaging key stakeholders

The following diagram shows the engagement of the Community Engagement Leader, the Mentor and Enrichment Officer and the Mentor and Engagement Officer from November 2014 to March 2016. Data for this diagram comes from the field reports of these WCE campus-based staff, for which all meetings (and attendances) have been recorded. Information about who participated in meetings, the organisation(s) that person/people were representing (if any) and dates were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet template designed for this purpose. This information was then organised, imported into ‘Gephi’ SNA software for the development of this diagram and for analysis by Dr Gretchen Ennis (Lecturer/Researcher in the School of Health at CDU), who was consulted to support this work. This WCE community engagement network data was gathered at three points in time:

• Mid November 2014 (to demonstrate initial engagement)
• End of July 2015 (mid-life of project)
• End of March 2016 (toward the final stages of the project)

This diagram does not record the engagement of the ARPNet researchers, the WCE Lead Community Researcher (2014-2015), the Community Liaison Officer (2016), the Teacher Liaison Leader (2014-2016) or any visits from the Program Manager and Project Coordinator. However, it provides an indication of the depth of engagement across the community.
Features of Gunbalanya engagement network between November 2014 to March 2016:

Number of organisations (blue dots) engaged with: 28
Number of individuals (orange dots) engaged with: 103

Figure 10: Social Network Analysis diagram showing engagements from November 2014 to March 2016.

The lines between the WCE campus-based staff (blue central dot), the organisations (blue dots) and the individuals (orange dots) who are affiliated with that organisation carry information about the number of times that specific person or group was engaged; the thicker the line, the greater the engagement. Organisations are named in the diagrams, but people are not. From this diagram, WCE engaged the most with: the Gunbalanya School, Child and Family Centre, West Arnhem Regional Council (WARC), the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, key community members, Injalak Arts and Craft. The least met with organisation was the health centre/clinic. Despite attempts to meet with health staff, competing work commitments appeared to limit engagement. However, WCE staff met with Regional Department of Health staff members in Darwin who oversee training needs of clinic staff.
By November 2016, WCE campus-based staff had engaged the following organisations/groups:

- Charles Darwin University (CDU)
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC)
- NT Dept. Local and Regional Services
- Gunbalanya Community School (GCS)/ Independent Public School (IPS), including:
  - Child and Family Centre (CFC) - Families as First Teachers (FAFT), Crèche, Pre-School
  - Clontarf Foundation
  - Girls Academy
  - Remote School Attendance Strategy team
- West Arnhem Regional Council (WARC), including:
  - Youth Centre
  - Community Care Centre (Aged Care)
  - Local Authority Board (LAB)- also known as Local Authority Group
  - Women’s Safe House - previously managed by Katherine Women’s Crisis Centre (KWCC)
- TEAM Health
- Adjumarllarl Aboriginal Corporation
  - Adjumarllarl Store
  - Stronger Communities for Children
- Arrguluk Reference Group
- Gunbalanya Economic Development Aboriginal Corporation (GEDAC)
- Mengerr Aboriginal Corporation (MAC)
- Injalak Arts and Crafts Association
- Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS)
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)
- Northern Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
- Demed Association Inc.
- Adjumarllarl Rangers
- Njanjma Rangers
- Stronger Smarter Institute
- Aboriginal Research Practitioners’ Network (ARPNet)
- Gunbalanya Sports & Social Club (Club)
- Gunbalanya Health Centre (Clinic)
- JobFind, including:
  - Creative Industries
- Meatworks
- Gunbalanya Police Station
- Department of Trade, Business and Innovation
- Indigenous Contractors (INTRACT)
- Forward Thinking Consultants
- Northern Land Council
Local governance

The following local governance structures oversee the operations of some of the key agencies within the community. They include, but are not limited to:

- Adjumarllarl Aboriginal Corporation
- Karrimudrowk (Stronger Communities for Children committee) of the Adjumarllarl Aboriginal Corporation
- Arrguluk Reference Group
- (Interim) Gunbalanya School Board
- Arrmunbu Child and Family Centre Advisory Board
- Local Authority Group of the West Arnhem Regional Council (WARC)
- Housing Reference Group
- Injalak Arts and Crafts Association Inc. Board
- Gunbalanya Sports and Social Club Management Committee

Community engagement and research process

There were four phases to the community engagement and research process. Some phases operated at the same time.

Phase One (Oct 2014- Jan 2015):

- WCE team established – including the identification of Indigenous researchers, employed by CDU;
- Ethics approval received by WCE to conduct the research;
- Permit granted by Northern Land Council (NLC) for the WCE research team to access the remote community;
- Introductory visit to community – overview of HEPPP funding and the aims and objectives of the WCE initiative were shared;
- Key leaders and community organisations invited to participate in and support the initiative;
- Community interest expressed and local consent obtained to go ahead;
- ARPNet researchers identified and MoU/Service-Level Agreement (SLA) with RIEL developed, with funds attached.

Phase Two (Oct 2014-Oct 2016):

- ‘Whole of Community Engagement’ initiative explored as a ‘concept’ - What does ‘whole’ of community engagement look like? How would it be achievable? Who is ‘community’? For us, WCE meant engaging a representative sample of families across all clan groups, traditional owners, key community leaders, heads of agency and key operational staff from all services operating in community, visiting staff from external organisations, and any other individuals/organisations as directed by community.
- Model proposed through discussions between WCE staff, the Program Manager and ARPNet (see diagram below); ARPNet to conduct 3 waves of research * with Indigenous families and community members at grassroots level; WCE to conduct their own research cycles with service providers, key community leaders and other agencies; WCE to plan/act/reflect on the ARPNet findings as well as their own findings throughout the research journey to guide and inform each stage.
• It was decided that in the instance of the ‘same individual’ being consulted by both ARPNet and WCE, that it would be made clear what perspective they were being asked to provide – for example, as a parent (via ARPNet) or as board member (via WCE).

• Research process agreed: data collected, interpreted/analysed, actions taken in continuous, ongoing cycles.

• Research participants identified: ARPNet researchers and WCE researchers. Each of these agents conducted their own ‘plan, do, review’ cycles.

• In addition, community members who attended action planning workshops invited to conduct their own Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles.

• In this way, the model was unique. All cycles operated in parallel, by multiple agents (people) collectively informing each and every stage of the research process.

*Due to the depth of research data collected by ARPNet in Wave 1, and challenges with the remaining timeframe, Waves 2 and 3 of ARPNet research did not go ahead as planned. WCE staff, however, continued with their PAR cycles, using wave 1 ARPNet data to inform their ongoing work.

Figure 11: West Arnhem participatory action research model.

**Guiding principles**

Throughout the WCE initiative, both the WCE and ARPNet research teams were guided by the principles developed by the wider WCE campus-based staff team. All agreed that communication (external and internal) would be:

• Thoughtful – this will involve adopting a consultative and strengths-based approach; communication will be timely, consistent and regular.

• Genuine – this will involve taking time to establish relationships with community leaders and families that are built on trust and respect; expectations will be carefully managed; communication will be community focused, inclusive and transparent.
• Meaningful – this will involve clear and concise messaging (not too academic); with the support of community leaders communication will be delivered in local language, wherever possible.

• Ethically appropriate – this will involve a commitment to community engagement and decision-making that is guided by national and global Indigenous ethical frameworks; this also involves acknowledgement and ownership of intellectual property.

• Culturally respectful (in both approach and delivery) – this will involve an awareness of matriarchal and patriarchal decision-making processes, which will ensure responsiveness to local cultural practices; community leaders will be adequately remunerated for sharing and contributing Indigenous knowledges.

• Participatory – this will involve project partners working collaboratively (‘with’ not ‘on’ or ‘about’) to enhance a sense of ownership and minimise feelings of disempowerment; this will ensure that outcomes are directed by, and benefit, the local community.

• Considerate of, and responsive to, first languages – this will involve honouring primary/first languages; the use of trained interpreters will also be supported.

• Underpinned by two-way learning approaches – this will involve engaging with both Indigenous and Mainstream/Western (academic) knowledge systems equally, with a view of supporting the co-creation of knowledge and aspiration development.


• WCE met with key individuals and organisations for one week in every month, recording data collected, by facilitating meetings, key interviews, workshop activities, making observations, taking field notes, photos, videos and audio recordings.

• In between each visit, WCE staff regularly maintained engagement with community contacts via the following methods: phone calls, meetings in Darwin, Facebook Messenger. WCE staff also shared back information to WCE partners, as appropriate.

In May 2015, WCE funded five days of ARPNet training at a camp on the East Alligator River. All ARPNet researchers, who were interested in being involved in the WCE research, were invited to participate. Due to a number of issues beyond our control (funerals, events in community, timing when ARPNet Training Coordinator and Project Coordinator were available to conduct this work) numbers were more limited than originally proposed (up to fifteen senior community members and youth). Two very young females (under sixteen year olds), one male and four female youth (in their twenties), and one senior female (a total of nine) engaged in this training opportunity.
The training was delivered by Dr Bev Sithole and Hmalan Hunter-Xenie from ARPNet. Three WCE staff members (Community Engagement Leader, Mentor and Engagement Officer, Evaluation Manager) attended to provide some background of the aims and objectives of WCE and to discuss and reflect on which of the ARPNet research tools might best fit with the work proposed.

- Arising out of conversations among the West Arnhem WCE staff and WCE campus-based staff about the value of bringing together the Top End and Central Desert WCE Indigenous researchers together, a Remote Indigenous Researcher Forum (RIRF) was suggested to all six communities and other Indigenous research organisations across the NT. WCE funding was approved and the forum took place on CDU Casuarina campus (Aug, 2015); Indigenous research ethical protocols, methodologies, and visions were shared.

- ARPNet researchers conducted Wave 1 of their research (Nov 2015-May 2016) - see Appendices I-III for a summary of ARPNet research findings.

- ARPNet asked five key questions (listed below in bold), using a range of participatory research tools (taken from the resource entitled: ‘The ARPnet DillyBag by Dr Bevlyne Sithole: A practical field guide to participatory and other research tools for use by Aboriginal Research Practitioners in Australia’). A representative sample of family members – taking gender, age and clan into account – were invited to participate in the research.

**What do you think of higher education?**
(Do you know what that is? Would you let your kids get higher education?)

**What is both ways education?**
(Is there Bininj education? Is this different from Balanda education?)

**What kind of education do you want for your children?**

**Is getting an education important for Aboriginal people?**
(What is education for, why get it? Is getting an education important to you? What happens to you mob after you get an education?)

**What 3 things are important for you about getting an education?**

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Figure 13: Preferences for different types of education.
figure 14: Distribution of research participants by gender and age.

- Due to constraints of time, other ARPNet commitments, and the good quality and volume of data provided to WCE following Wave 1, it was decided not to go ahead with Waves 2 and 3 of ARPNet research.
- MoU was revised, ARPNet research report was finalised.
- Two school council members were invited to participate in a Joint School Council Gathering in Yirrkala – which brought together council members across the six WCE sites to discuss educational priorities and concerns (May, 2016).
- In Sept 2016, an interagency workshop in community was facilitated to develop a Draft Community Education Action Plan based on discussions about the ARPNet research findings [see Appendices IV and V]. All organisations listed in the section entitled Key stakeholders were invited. Despite keen interest being expressed, some staff members were unable to attend for a variety of reasons, apologies were sent, and requests made for draft action plans and reports to be provided back to them to circulate to staff. Twenty-one staff across eight agencies attended. The draft plan was then circulated to all key stakeholders (whether they attended or not) to edit or add to the plan.
- Between September and November 2016, WCE research conducted with youth (following the suggestion made during a meeting with Arrguluk Reference Group members) to gain their perspectives on their education and to discuss their plans for their future pathways/dreams/aspirations [See Appendix VI for the project outline] and below for more information.
- WCE in collaboration with CDU International Graduate Centre of Education organised a two-day Remote Indigenous Youth Summit prior to a two-day Indigenous Leaders Conference (Nov, 2016). Emerging youth leaders identified by WARC Youth Centre and Team Health staff were invited to participate.
- WCE staff participated in three Career’s expos - two at the Gunbalanya school (November 2014-2015) for middle and senior school students and one as a WCE-led collaboration with WCE partners (CDU, Menzies, BIITE, NAILSMA) in November 2016 – providing relevant higher education pathway information to CDP participants from the Gunbalanya community.
Youth perspectives on Education: film project

The film project was a collaborative effort between WCE, Team Health staff and the Youth Centre (WARC), with the support of community-based film maker Curran Brown. Unfortunately, the first shoot started but was rained out. A follow up plan was put into place and individual times were set up to connect with other youth in community when and where it was suitable and comfortable for them. A total of nine youth participated in the project (five female, four male). The youth were given the option of speaking in their first language (Kunwinkju) or English. Captions in English were added to the clips at editing stage, as appropriate. The final clips are available via a YouTube weblink, which is located on WCE website: https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/communities/gunbalanya/gunbalanya-youth-perspectives-on-education/

See also the following web links for more information about the project:


Figure 15: Conducting the youth perspectives film project.

Figure 16: Youth involved in the youth perspectives film project, clockwise from top left: Angelo, James, Kirsty and Vicky.
Phase 4 (Oct-Dec 2016)

The following evaluation questions were circulated to key Gunbalanya community individuals and reviewed by WCE [See Appendix VII]:

- What has been the most valuable part of the WCE Initiative for you or your organisation?
- What could have been done better/differently in the WCE Initiative?
- What changes/impact have you seen in your community as a result of the WCE Initiative?
- What will you/your organisation change as a result of being part of the WCE Initiative?
- Any other feedback?

An additional anonymous Survey Monkey evaluation tool was circulated to key stakeholders also, to be reviewed by the WCE Evaluation Coordinator.

WCE work to be presented at conferences (Nov/Dec).

Gunbalanya WCE Research and Evaluation Report finalised.

Hard copies of reports to be mailed out to key agencies and individuals to distribute in community (Dec).


Summary of research experience

Illustrated below is an upwards spiral representing the knowledge that is built up over time – read from the bottom up - through PAR cycles of planning-action-reflection, as represented also in the tree trunk of the ‘Five Rights’ on page 22.

17 Knowledge built over time!
16 Future planning (field notes). And so on….
15 Collaborative writing (reports).
14 Reflections (notes, audio recordings).
13 Workshops delivered.
12 Workshops planned with community (workshop presentation slides and resources).
11 Findings reported by ARPNet (report).
10 Reflection and debrief (audio recordings, field visit reports), ongoing.
9 Data analysed (audio recordings, field notes), ongoing.
8 Data collected (field visit reports, field notes, audio and video recordings, workshop notes, emails, Facebook messages), ongoing.
7 Research process refined: Wave 1 only; WCE to continue working with service providers, key stakeholders and community leaders/TOs.
6 Wave 1 ARPNet research conducted.
5 Analysis and reflection.
4 Research approach designed.
3 ‘Whole of Community Engagement’ defined.
2 ARPNet training delivered.
1 Issue defined: PAR exploring higher education pathways.

Figure 17: Diagram demonstrating the research process.
Key partnerships

- ARPNet (Aboriginal Research Practitioners’ Network) through a MoU and a service level agreement, under the auspices of RIEL. This has involved ARPNet engaging a team of Aboriginal researchers to research with Indigenous individuals, families, Elders and young people across a number of clan groups – see prior section on research process for more details.
- WCE staff conducted monthly consultations with all key stakeholders – listed in earlier section - to develop and build partnerships with all of these agencies.
- WCE staff facilitated workshops with interagency staff to identify actions that can be taken to best support Indigenous higher education pathways. Existing partnerships with key individuals and organisations were strengthened through this process, and opportunities identified.
- Throughout the initiative, WCE campus-based staff shared research findings and information about key activities with the WCE partners, and invited them to collaborate and participate, where and when appropriate.
- NAILSMA remained actively involved with land and sea management education and training activities in the region, and joined up with WCE staff on two visits to community.
- RIEL continued to progress the development and piloting of fire curriculum materials and training in the region. WCE staff attended fire curriculum meetings in Darwin, where applicable.
- BIITE continued to support education and training in the region, and provided advice and infrastructure support (accommodation/vehicle use) on occasion.

Key achievements

In reflecting on the research work conducted over the past two years, the following achievements were identified:

Our community engagement process

The way that we have engaged with community:

“In our blood is a code of rules: respect is the most powerful thing in Indigenous communities. The code of rules, we understand that when we approach, we approach with manners ... you’ve got to talk to the people in the right place and the right people at the right time, and the right way, and respect the communities. This should always be happening. Sometimes ... those people in other places. Well it’s not the right place for them to consult with... making sure that they’re available, then you can go and make contact with these people... we asked the people ... have they got time to sit down and talk about it. If they say, “Come back later,” well, we take that opportunity to come back later and work with this group... if you’re going with your manners and approaching the way that you want to consult with a person and talk to him, you want to have a good yarn with him, to sit down and give you his story, he will relax, he knows. He knows that you want to have a good conversation with him and he wants to hear your stories, where you’re coming from .... So two-ways... Indigenous learning ... as well.”

WCE Mentor and Engagement Officer
The Five Rights: Right People, Right Time, Right Place, Right Language, Right Way
(This title is borrowed from a resource developed from a Community Governance Training program in Maningrida presented at the Garma Forum in 2004 by JET Centre board & staff in Maningrida’)

The following illustration was developed in conversations between the Community Engagement Leader and the Mentor and Engagement Officer about the process involved in undertaking the research in an Indigenous education policy environment. This image tells a story about past and present research practices and future visions for Bininj people. It captures the important recognition of the skills and knowledge that exist already within Bininj people and the impact of external influences on Aboriginal communities. Done the ‘right way’, research can empower Indigenous people, if given the opportunity to drive the research agenda ‘the Bininj way’ following many unwritten rules and protocols (some of which are captured by metaphors contained in this image).

![Illustration of the process of undertaking research in an Indigenous education policy environment.](image-url)

**Figure 18: Illustration of the process of undertaking research in an Indigenous education policy environment. This image is strictly not to be reproduced without gaining prior consent from the authors of this report.**

1. **Bush yam** – researchers with the skills to know how to dig up the yam (the stories from community) and the knowledge about when is the right time to harvest the yam (to do the research). When you harvest the yam correctly, you make sure you dig up the yam with the whole root system (the whole story, big picture), not collecting only a small part of the yam (a part of the story). Also, you always leave some of the yam behind (take the stories back to community) so that the yam can regenerate and grow (self-determined actions can be taken).

2. **Grassroots and root system** – the research is conducted with the Bininj families and the communities at the grass roots by ARPNet, then these stories are shared/fed back up through the rest of the system (tree trunk) – to local community, to WCE partners, to the wider community.

3. **Research cycles** – continuous feedback loops - from the families/community members through ARPNet to WCE campus-based staff, from WCE through to community-based workshops with teachers, service providers, TOs and Board members and others. The information was continually shared and knowledge built up over time as we did so.
4. **Leaves/seeds** – ideas that are germinating, actions that are being identified.

5. **Seedlings** - actions that are being taken by community members to strengthen education pathways.

6. **Busy bees** – WCE researchers, sharing the ideas and passing the messages on (pollen), leaving some behind, fertilising the seedlings along the way.

7. **Sun** – the resources needed; ‘Right People, Right Time, Right Place, Right Language, Right Way*’ to sustain this work (ecosystem). Without the right support from the government and elsewhere, it will dry up (the work stops). It is like a big smiling face – the journey is going in the right direction.

8. **Cyclone** – rapid changing policy environment and government changes that impacts the environment we find ourselves in.

9. **4WD vehicle** – outside influences (programs, people, laws, regulations) that are not naturally found in the environment (community) impact it.

10. **Buffalo** – both the 4WD and the buffalo make tracks (creates issues and problems) and erodes the country (impacts on Indigenous people - needs and rights are not being met). It costs money to eradicate these issues once they have been created.

11. **Rain water** – natural resources (skills and knowledge) that exist in the community.

12. **Billabong** – when nature runs its course, the water fills the billabong it nurtures and sustains the environment. These natural resources flood out, if there is erosion, taking the water down a different path that Indigenous people cannot cope with or manage within their existing knowledge systems.

13. **Ripple effect** – if ideas are allowed to come at the right time in the right way in accordance with the seasons, the ripples (information) can flow in and out, shared with everyone.

14. **Rainbow** – symbolises the research journey, the education pathways of community members and the visions and dreams of the children, youth, Elders, families. Pride in our children, our organisations, our school. When there is the right combination of factors in place (5 Rights), the pathway shines bright and we are happy. We are happier when we are all working together, connected and supporting each other, providing accessible, inclusive education pathways; bright futures.

15. **Bush fire** – regenerates the plants and supports the animals, is a symbol of a healthy landscape, provides healthy food, supports birth and rebirth. A natural system (respecting Indigenous knowledges) supports self-determined futures for Indigenous people.

Our partnership with the Gunbalanya school. As illustrated in the SNA diagram (on page 11), we engaged the most with the school, including the Child and Family staff. The leadership team supported our work throughout the initiative and invited us to run the interagency workshop at the school - “to inform the Business Plan of the School... you can invite anyone you want” (Principal). The timing of the workshop was coordinated with a visit from Forward Thinking Consultants who were supporting the school with their transition to an IPS. The consultants attended this workshop. After the workshop, WCE staff members were invited to meet with the consultants to discuss the new proposals for school governance.

In addition to monthly visits and meetings with individual service providers, WCE staff brought service providers together around the common concern of ‘education’ – to workshop with heads of agency and key operational staff. During this workshop, participants were invited to develop action plans to strengthen higher education pathways in Gunbalanya based on the ARPNet and WCE research findings to date. The aim of the interagency workshop was to facilitate opportunities for different agencies to share information and to identify areas that they could work on together – for example, Gunbalanya school
and JobFind discussed possibilities for work experience opportunities to be provided to senior school students: “The feedback workshop was particularly insightful and provided food for thought regarding how we can work with the community, the school and young school leavers…”

Traditional Owners/Board Members (e.g. Adjumarlarl), Government Engagement Coordinator and Indigenous Engagement Officer invited us to attend meetings with them every visit we made to community and they made regular phone and email contact with us, both in community and in Darwin if they were visiting. They consistently showed great interest in working closely with us: “the education about what you are trying to do and trying to achieve within the community and how it can be available was an education.”

Our visits were the occasion to

• Provide a platform to listen and respond to community voices about their perspectives, experiences and ideas about education – “first demonstrated investment in consulting with Aboriginal families”.
• Collaborate with partners – e.g. NAILSMA (e.g. sharing discussions about Outdoor Education and Tourism at the school, Ranger Program training needs); BIITE (e.g. mentoring of Child and Family staff enrolled in or thinking about a higher education course; supporting enrolment, supporting tutoring needs, liaising with BIITE lecturing staff. Passing on relevant information to BIITE campus-based staff, when requested by BIITE or community members. Connecting community members to relevant BIITE staff for course advice).

Figure 19: WCE West Arnhem and Forward Thinking Teams talking up remote Indigenous education.
Mentoring

“When they heard about our visits and our work, about our involvement in the community engagement, they started to come up to us, they started to wait around when we got to Maningrida or Oenpelli, there were people saying, “I’ve been waiting for you guys,” and that expectation that I see in people’s faces, it’s real and they’re looking for somebody. They’re looking for those pathways as well. So that’s very, very strong sharing and learning together and connecting with the key Indigenous leaders, people who work in the different areas and belong to the different governance areas … Making a connection with those people and talking… Sharing our stories and learning together was a really powerful way of getting people more motivated, more interested in following up education pathways… They were sharing their visions and concerns as well.”

During the length of our work in Gunbalanya we mentored over twenty community members to support their educational aspirations (e.g. Child and Family staff enrolled in higher education).

Through mentoring we were able to support the community to build a picture of what they want in terms of their education to feed back to the system – including discussions about homelands education, ‘both ways’ education, boarding school education. Some early feedback at the end of 2016 provided by stakeholders highlights this:

“More confidence, especially in the recent graduates in talking about their pathways and what they need.”
“People talking about pathways”
“Greater exposure to career pathways”

We also facilitated a workshop with twenty one interagency staff to access family and community perspectives on education in a workshop where the theme of ‘mentoring’ was one key issue highlighted and discussed.

We supported the community to identify actions to strengthen education pathways. In the words of one workshop participant: “In my opinion, and having not seen a programme like this before in action on the ground, the valuable thing that I have seen is the start of a pathway and an education about what higher education can do, and [how it can] be available for people within community.”

We provided opportunities for students to celebrate their educational achievements and share their journeys with others (e.g. film project with nine graduates/school leavers to learn about youth perspectives on their education).

We also made sure to engage in activities to promote ‘Uni’ or higher education as an option for community members through the sharing of information, resources and connections with relevant staff – e.g. WCE researchers requested by Maningrida community to provide higher education pathways resources and information for senior school students from Gunbalanya, Milingimbi and Ramingining (as well as Maningrida) at a two-day Career’s Expo, funded by the Community Champions Program and WCE, Nov 2016. WCE has coordinated and part-funded the participation of CDU, Menzies, BIITE and NAILSMA staff members. 7 staff attended from this collaborative group. We raised awareness about CDU and BIITE and what ‘Uni’ and other higher education providers can offer (approx. 60 students across the two Career’s Days as well as the Career’s Expo in Maningrida).
Another aspect of our mentoring was to provide professional development for staff in key community organisations – through meetings and workshops – “it was an education for them” – giving them access to educational experiences and learning opportunities that they previously were not getting. In addition, funding provided by WCE enabled ARPNet to deliver training to build the research capacity of its newer members.

**Acknowledging, valuing and embracing complexity and cultural differences**

“Our [Binin] relationships and our aspirations across the communities, that is most important, the reuniting of our relationships... Before, there was a really good uniting when there were less impacts, but when the settlement got bigger and bigger until today, it’s impacted ... different clan groups - had good connections, those relationships were a very, very strong bond and they were very, very proud of themselves across different clan groups in our community, but nowadays, sometimes that relationship goes down and they need to rebuild that relationship again because of a lot of things happening in this life. Some people are moving out and all that, it’s happening all the time.”

The WCE staff employed brought together both ‘toolboxes’ of Indigenous and non-Indigenous skills and knowledge. Both were valued equally, views were shared, and complexity explored and acknowledged.

WCE staff understand that Indigenous people, like other ‘groups’ in society, are not a one singular (homogenous) group – not everyone is the same, nor do they share the same perspectives on education.

The research exposes the varied viewpoints of Indigenous people about education.

WCE staff worked with cultural differences and complexity by maintaining a respectful, open-minded, flexible attitude and approach.
Governance, leadership, and management

In discussion with key community members, it was decided not to establish an additional governance structure for the initiative, but rather to work through existing governance structures such as heads of agency meetings and meetings with boards.

Over five hundred meetings were held with individuals or small groups across all key organisations, with over two hundred people (in addition to the ARPNet research conducted) over the two years, recorded in SNA spreadsheets and field visit reports.

Through workshops, twenty one key staff members from eight key agencies were brought together as well as ten board members/traditional owners, connecting them around the shared concern of education (see http://eepurl.com/cIVRd5).

This was identified by some to support clan as well as mainstream leadership and governance – “We need to organise the [Indigenous education] action group as soon as possible so that they can work with any agency within the community.”

Figure 21: Some of the youth that attended the Remote Indigenous Youth Leadership Summit.


During this trip, one key youth participant from Gunbalanya was interviewed by the ABC about his perspectives on child removals – see: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-10/young-leaders-call-for-change-after-child-removals-report/8011018.

Two school council representatives attended the Joint School Council Gathering (Yirrkala) and contributed as a signatory to a ‘collective school council statement on remote Indigenous education’.
Understanding the systems and policies where students and educational staff navigate was an important step in our journey to enable us to provide the best support and facilitate our research activities. We contributed to it by:

- Building knowledge at the local systems level in order to support learners (e.g. education pathway resources and information provided at career expos; family and community perspectives on education shared through interagency workshop to inform Gunbalanya IPS Business Plan)
- Participating in other CDU research – the ‘Bininj Kunwok online learning pilot’ - and in doing so, contributed to curriculum and course offerings. See [http://bininjgunwok.org.au/](http://bininjgunwok.org.au/).
- Creating opportunities for the research to inform academic and public policy decision making (including the Pre-Tertiary Success course, and the new Strategic Plan of the University, 2015-2025 – ‘Connect, Discover, Grow’) through key meetings with staff and participation in focus groups. See [http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/strategic-plan.pdf](http://www.cdu.edu.au/sites/default/files/strategic-plan.pdf) for more information.
- Contributing to other research and engagement efforts, at the request of other WCE partner/researchers – e.g. Menzies research, Rheumatic Heart Disease PhD research, BIITE Indigenous Education Implementation Evaluation for the NT Department of Education.
- Sharing our methodological approach with postgraduate researchers (both PhD and Masters), to support reflections on their own research methodology – “One of the main limitations of my previous work (as a self-study) was the absence of the considered voice of Indigenous people as co researchers or participants... the model you described is something that would fit nicely as an example of methodology aligned more closely with priorities of the community and also as repositioning indigenous people as subjects as opposed to objects of research.” In this way, the WCE research contributes more broadly to the field of Indigenous education research.
• Building the Indigenous researcher profile within and outside of CDU through the employment of Indigenous researchers in the initiative, the RIRF, Research ‘Us’ and participation in a number of national conferences this year, presented by West Arnhem WCE team in Darwin, Adelaide and Melbourne - “great presentation and lovely to see the whole integrated and considered approach.” See also References and Resources for more information.

• Responding to requests from other key Departmental staff to learn about our community engagement approach – for example, to support a new Family-Nurse Partnership program to be delivered in West Arnhem communities of Gunbalanya and Maningrida.

Key lessons

Below are listed some key lessons learnt 1) through the process of implementing the research, and 2) from the community members who engaged in the research itself. In addition, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model is presented as a useful consideration; a systems theoretical framework that illustrates the complexity of the pursuit of further education in remote Indigenous contexts.

Lessons learnt through the process of implementation

The location of WCE staff and the limitations on the WCE funding and timeframe impacted upon outcomes achievable. In the words of one Traditional Owner, “How can you engage the community when you are not here? You should stay here”. WCE staff living in Darwin or on an outstation and working in, out and across two remote WCE communities was hugely challenging.

Negotiating the Service Level Agreement with RIEL and MoU with ARPNet was complex and took several months to finalise. There were moments of confusion between ARPNet staff and WCE staff about their roles and focus, and the location of key ARPNet staff (oversees, interstate, or in other communities) at times made it difficult to resolve matters quickly and easily. A great deal of flexibility and professionalism was required to navigate this partnership.

Concern continues to be raised at a community and WCE partnership level, as to how and whether this work is going to continue, given the HEPPP-funding of the WCE initiative ends in 2016 – “if we are going to be serious about doing our work and achieving and ticking boxes and kicking goals, or doing however you want to describe it, then such things as what we have been doing need to continue.” However, it is hoped that the draft action plan will be useful to guide continued discussions at the community-level, and that the information arising out of the work that has been passed through to WCE partners, will continue to initiate and support existing efforts to strengthen higher education pathways for remote Indigenous people.

Very little time was available for writing up the final report, following the final community visit, and due to word limitations, the report provides a summary of research activities and outcomes. Despite the funding ending, the authors of the report hope to write and publish papers exploring the methodology and some of the key issues and recommendations in greater detail in 2017.
Lessons learnt through the research with community

There are many issues identified by families in the ARPNet research that require attention and due consideration - “Working with families is key” (see also Appendix II) -

Education (both Balanda and Bininj) appears to be a priority for most remote Indigenous families and community members (see Appendix I).

The drafting of a Community Education Action Plan was beneficial, shared back with key agencies (who participated and who were unable to attend). Interagency staff are talking about higher education pathways and some, have identified key actions for change. Some service providers have defined shared actions to strengthen education pathways (see Appendix V).

Mentoring relationships established with community members – past, current and potential higher education students has been valuable – demonstrated by continue d discussions with community members about their interest to pursue further study.

Many Indigenous people view ‘society’ and the education and government systems as problematic, where government position Indigenous people as having a problem - ‘a gap’ – that needs fixing/filling, without taking into account due consideration of the ever-changing policy context (in education, as well as employment, housing and so on) – “Government changing, future is coming back to old days, if kids not going to school, the parents not getting money. The parents are forcing kids to go back to school, same as in the old days.”

Indigenous knowledge systems add value and benefit the education of Indigenous learners in the mainstream; the maintenance of first languages in education supports the acquisition of English language and literacy – “as an Indigenous teacher, I teach in English, but I check back with the kids that they have understood what I taught them in language.”

Language, literacy and numeracy skills development in English is a priority and needs to be embedded within ‘on the job training’ and accredited courses- so that Indigenous people can move into roles, and up through roles into more senior positions of control in organisations (see Appendix I-III) – e.g. “…. you got to learn and get more educated, get more numeracy and literacy, to me young kids got to go to school so they can get their education. But they are not getting educated enough and they are not going to get any skills by not going to school, it is for them and their kids and (for them) not to let the Balanda take over this community, they got to think about that…..

Families are choosing to send their children interstate to attend boarding schools at secondary level, despite the challenges this presents: “…in Year 6-7, I was getting good marks, I was getting A and Bs when I was in high school here, but then I went to boarding school, I was getting A, B, C, that educational system im (it is) different system, it was different for me, got me confused and lost...” More research is required to understand how best to support young people transition in and out of boarding school and the community.

Community members are talking about educational pathways, for example, the school bus has the following text printed on it - “Turtle steps” – “Are you on Track?” and the school staff have been working with students in recent years to develop educational goals to support the visions for their future careers.
Situating higher education within the broader system

Ecological systems theory – see diagram below – provides a useful framework in which to locate individuals in context.

![Ecological Model Diagram](image)

**Figure 23: Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012).**

Education appears to be viewed by Indigenous people as a ‘collective’ rather than an ‘individual’ pursuit; and as such, it involves and is impacted upon by the ‘microsystem’ (e.g. family), the ‘exosystem’ (extended family, School Board, workplace e.g. school) and the ‘macrosystem’ (Balanda law; Bininj language, history and culture; socio-economic conditions).

Education, in this way, cannot be viewed in isolation of other social and economic conditions – for example employment, housing, health, and safety.

**Future directions (recommendations)**

The following combined recommendations arose out of discussions with service providers, traditional owners and key community leaders in meetings and the interagency workshop, as well as WCE researcher reflections on family and community perspectives on education. See also Appendix III for ‘Recommendations’ highlighted by families in the ARPNet research.

It is the belief of the authors, that attention needs to focus on changes required at all levels of the ‘system’ – macrosystem, exosystem, and microsystem, not just at the individual level – in order to strengthen higher education pathways for remote Indigenous communities. Systems theory thus provides a useful framework in which to situate these recommendations, and as such, they have been organised according to the levels described in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. The recommendations listed are both broad and specific, and listed in no particular order of priority.
Recommendation 1: Macrosystem (e.g. History, Laws, Culture, Economic system, Social conditions)

- An attitudinal shift is required from a deficit to a strengths-based focus, reflected in policy and practice, to create better education outcomes for Indigenous people.
- Coordination across Territory Departments and between State and Federal Departments is required, particularly between the NT DoE and Commonwealth Department of Education to advance Indigenous education in the best interests of remote Indigenous people.
- Partnership within and between Departments is required as education, employment, housing and so on are all issues that are linked.
- Policy-makers to involve key Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to design deliver and evaluate education policies and practices, in order that the particular issues experienced in remote Australia are reflected and addressed.
- More investment in homelands education is required – where young people can connect better to two-way learning opportunities, feel safe, access better health and wellbeing, connection to country, balance family and cultural commitments, reduce access to drugs and alcohol, and so on – “Outstation education is what we want.”
- More Indigenous politicians working across all government levels and working together with their non-Indigenous colleagues, to inform policy development, and practice.
- More funding and resources given to Aboriginal-controlled organisations to support their own education and training agendas.

Recommendation 2: Exosystem (e.g. Neighbourhoods, School board, Extended family, Parent’s work environment, Mass media)

- For heads of agency and operational staff to progress, monitor and further develop the actions drafted in the Community Education Action Plan.
- For community organisations to foster a culture of genuine ‘two way’ mentoring in their workplaces – to support intercultural communication, Bininj-Balanda knowledge and skill acquisition, relationships and partnerships – employees working with and alongside each other, ‘learning together’, equally valuing mainstream and Indigenous knowledges.
- For induction programs to be developed that all employees who are new to community are required to complete (e.g. new teachers) – that teach individuals about the community context, to support the building of relevant cultural knowledge and to provide organisations with a mechanism to build relationships and support people in the most appropriate ways.
- To continue interagency workshops – to support service providers to work together and to monitor and evaluate the progress of these actions taken.
- Place-based community engagement positions required – to maintain CDU presence (or at least a minimum of five-ten years) to build good community understanding and knowledge about University and higher education.
- More engagement with remote Indigenous communities about education is required through initiatives like WCE, over a sustained period of time.
- This community engagement is required in order to continue existing relationships/partnerships (between WCE, WCE partners, government, community) – to strengthen and maintain education pathways.
• For the Gunbalanya community and the WCE partners to receive feedback – a response – from the Commonwealth Department of Education - on the WCE reports and to come out and talk to the communities; to continue the cycle: “We [researchers] were sent here to do a job. What is the point of the research if there is no follow up? Why invest in education research this way, if the government is not going to respond and take actions based on these recommendations?”

• For the WCE partners to provide feedback on the reports to the communities.

• For the Commonwealth Department of Education (DoE) to pass this information on to the NT DoE and other Ministers to talk to them about the recommendations and actions to be taken.

• Governance support, training and Indigenous and non-Indigenous champions required to support the education agenda.

• For Gunbalanya community leaders (e.g. Adjumarllarl Aboriginal Corporation and School Board) to sit down together and invite key politicians and ministers along to community to reflect on the report and WCE work together.

• For NLC to consider their role and responsibility in supporting Bininj education pathways, within a community development function.

• For the WARC to review how far they have got with their newly implemented training program with embedded Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) and to work with staff to meet their training needs.

• For the two key educational institutions in the Northern Territory – CDU and BIITE - to review their remote VET delivery in community and to work together with service providers and community members to identify the best ways to support Indigenous learners to access and participate in further study opportunities.

• For CDU and BIITE to continue their advocacy with the government regarding the funding and provision of community-based training and education.

• For community organisations, CDU and BIITE to consider co-funding remote trainer roles in community, and scholarships for identified individuals.

Recommendation 3: Microsystem (e.g. Family, Peers, Siblings)

More engagement with families required – to build trust and knowledge of what school and other agencies can provide in terms of education and training opportunities for local people.

Recommendation 4: Individual (e.g. child)

More consultation with youth required – to build a better understanding of the reasons why young people are not attending school (as a means to better address school attendance issues) – e.g. funding the Youth perspective on education film project, and to gain better perspectives on boarding school experiences to support transition of students from community to urban school settings – e.g. youth attending the newly established Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS) – see [http://www.mits.vic.edu.au/](http://www.mits.vic.edu.au/).
Data sources

- Conference post-it evaluation, Nov 2016.
- Facebook messages (various), Nov 2014-Dec 2016.
- Gunbalanya interagency workshop reflections, 14 September 2016.
- Gunbalanya school data profile (provided by Gunbalanya IPS).
- Interagency workshop notes, held in Gunbalanya on 14 September 2016.
- ‘Life Journeys: Pathways to Higher Education in Gunbalanya’, report provided by ARPNet to WCE in May 2016.
- Social Network Analysis spreadsheets (Oct 2014-March 2016)
- Whole of Community Engagement initiative: Developing pathways into higher education for remote Indigenous communities:
  - https://remotengagetoedu.com.au and
- WIRE Edition 354, 28 October, ‘Higher Education Pathways Explored’:
References


APPENDIX I

Selection of quotes from families and community, recorded by ARPNet

“Government changing, future is coming back to old days, if kids not going to school, the parents not getting money. The parents are forcing kids to go back to school, same as in the old days.”

“I wanted to go to Kormilda College but dropped out because my grandfather wanted me to go to ceremony, I got Bininj education, big mob Bininj education, but western not much. I wanna try to make it both, wanna build myself up and have it both ways, wanna make it equal.”

“Yeah, I would let me girls do more studying so they can come back and help, and also they can do Balanda one, study and our Bininj knowledge. They can come back and learn our culture way, they can go and study.”

“Biggest mob been to school but no job. Many of them been to school but don’t work I know. Lots of them young people, no school, no job, lots of young people walking around at night, some never went to school, no job, just wanna sit at home.”

“gambling, smoking ganja or running around here all the time arguing…”

“yes, I want to do further study”

“to learn a bit more education and some ideas”

“Yes to get good job – ranger, doctor or something, or policeman”

“yes, keep on moving up”

“little bit of education then job…. get little bit training then get job… treadmill going nowhere”

“before (during old time) everyone attend school, there was more discipline and everything was running good. When you see like today, those kids have more but they not interested in school, but other things than education, they interested in something else, more interested in money to buy grog and ganja, they need more money, that’s all they really want, government giving them money, spoiling them that’s why, there is no money, they want ganja, but mother lose it in card game…….Balanda stick with it, they keep going till they find good job… but our mob, they get half way there, they just pull out, say it’s not interesting…”

“They have BIITE, I think some people go to BIITE for studies, they fly to Darwin and do studies there. To me it’s good, but I don’t know about other people. For me I would like to do studies to help TOs [Traditional Owners] because I am a TO, and I like to help TOs and other young people like me. Because some of my family are not really well educated, and to help them work for this community…..”

“….Most of them (young people) have no school, no job, a lot of young people walk around all night. Some never went to school, they have no job, they just wanna sit at home.”
“We see Balanda managing, we should see Bininj managing or helping. Bininj should go with him, Balanda should be teaching him not going on his own.”

“Yes they call you balanda.”
“Yes they say you learning more balanda way.”
“Yes you are mixing culture.”
“I think some Balanda be alright (are okay) when get together with Bininj. Not just all Balanda, it is good to learn both ways. We need to get more balanda education to help us (ourselves). Some Bininj don’t get us when we talk, they have to get balanda to do it.”
“Bininj people look at you got (you have) more balanda in you... Because you will have more power and influence I guess.”
“I have seen them when they come back, they don’t wanna talk language, that sort of thing, only talk back in English, sometimes they don’t wanna attend ceremony...”

“... in Year 6-7 I was getting good marks, I was getting A and Bs when I was in high school here, but then I went to boarding school, I was getting A, B, C, that educational system im (it is) different system, it was different for me, got me confused and lost..... I didn’t know how to do that, maths was hard, after completing year 12. I went back to country... graduated on how to party ..... Now I have big mob certificates, conservation and land management from BIITE, welding, small motors, fire arm, weed control, bush fire, and chainsaws. I am not too sure how education helps you. I went from A student to D, E and F, it was a cultural shock, now I am sending my son to a school away from here..... I think it is better, I am not too sure about the quality of school here .... I am not happy because I don’t have enough education, it is never enough still learning all the time, an ongoing thing – still getting that education all day of the week.”

“... in senior school my grades dropped to Ds and Fs because the maths science and English, social studies were a lot different than in our high school. It was different from top to bottom. I spent year 11 and 12 failing because the teachers there didn’t help me through the maths, wood work, metal work especially with the maths. Once we did a market game we had to choose our market, buy and sell things. But our teacher came and he just sat there looking at the sums and just said do it, he didn’t explain anything. Whole two years I used to sit outside his class for a whole hour. After that I left and started working .... I ended up going back to Edith Cowen to do Aboriginal Studies and I failed in that. Just did work, work, work and didn’t think of going back to higher education. Now in my 40s I am thinking of going back to University.....”

“I want to go to university but it is too hard because of money problems and who would give us funding to go. They don’t want to leave this community and they don’t connect with others from outside. If government give us money it we can go forward, but we get homesick, too far from home some kids think about their families...”

“... We want a little bit of both, sometimes now our kids get a little bit of both – art and language, and there is culture week, the school is not teaching enough Bininj, they are learning more from home.”

“One needs both ways, that way you get easy access to Balanda, you can’t talk to Balanda you get nowhere, you can’t get to know these Balanda and all that, you gonna communicate by speaking English......”

“Should go more than year 12. No one getting support to get a job after school”
“Yes be educated and get qualified”
“Yes, better chance to get job”
“Get job to make money”
“To get more education and better job”
“It’s a big (yes) for me it goes the same as even”
“…. you got to learn and get more educated, get more numeracy and literacy, to me young kids got to go to school so they can get their education. But they are not getting educated enough and they are not going to get any skills by not going to school, it is for them and their kids and (for them) not to let the Balanda take over this community, they got to think about that…. When Balanda bring paper (paperwork and contracts) they should learn and ask questions about the paper they got, what is this paper I am signing, and not just signing paper for nothing. Some people can’t understand that, they need an interpreter or that they need for big words to be broken down, we need to break it down so we can understand what the meaning of those big words is… young people should go to school.”

“….get good qualification, it's your ticket so you can get a good job, mainly in education, healthy, mechanic or become more involved in accounting or bookkeeping, you can also probably get job as cultural advisor...”
“...later on when I was bigger then I started to realise the importance of school, I looked at those making it and I wanted that too, all things came to my mind about why it was important. There were a lot of young people going to school, to Kormilda college. I thought, I must wait my chance. It worked out for some of them, maybe for half the group. I started to put things to us mob, having that role model for us when they came back, there would be a job available, in office, school, forestry or health, maybe machinery operator, I got little bit excited, big things make us want to have a good qualification...”

“There is nothing for them here, when they come here, there is nothing here, they go to school and come back and still there are no jobs.”

“I reckon the whole lot should go to University, and then instead of Balanda, we have Bininj, when they get that proper education, one come back as a scientist, one blackfella scientist instead of Balanda , we gonna be able to take over that scientist business...”

“If people agree, tell government what we do, Bininj people all right. Keep talking, so keep owning, don’t lose job. If you go outstation do own job, that’s what I planning to do. Do Bininj way, both ways. Like used to do before. So when get more better (better) education can run own business. Run own community. To me, that’s what I thinking doing, farming all that, gardening, and doing weaving, Pandanus, painting, stuff like that. Every weekend take kids’ culture camp teach Bininj way. Balanda way can learn like reading, writing all that. Especially read and write.”

“I would tell government every community needs university and school for study. I would tell them I want to see both ways education. Instead of flying (people to town) maybe they say it’s not enough money to send you in town. They are wasting money to go there (town). Every community needs a university school. Every community needs one. They go to town and waste too much money, miss home and get bored there (in town). In Oenpelli they spoke about needing writing and reading here in school. At the moment people are not focussing on future. Parents especially.”
APPENDIX II

Issues impacting on education, documented by ARPNet

- Government changes
- Ceremony
- Boarding school education
- Balanda education
- Bininj education
- Jobs in community
- School attendance
- Housing
- Ganja
- Grog (alcohol)
- Smoking
- Gambling
- Not listening to elders
- Homesick
- Get called balanda
- Lose culture
- Family issues
- Money issues
- Low literacy and numeracy
- Overcrowding
- No training
- Teenage pregnancy / young mums
- Truancy
- Cultural obligations
- Policies changing all the time
- Not enough trainers/lecturers in community
- Studying away from community is not easy
- University is for Balanda, Batchelor is for Bininj
- Service providers not always talking together
- Not all kids want to go to school
- Not all families want to send their kids to school
- Bullying
- Shaming
- Jealousy
APPENDIX III

Recommendations to strengthen education pathways, documented by ARPNet:

• Re-admission of young parents back to school into the correct ‘level’ of education (according to the right stage, not the right age)
• Taking young people to ceremony and recognising this ‘as educational’
• Supporting local people with on the job training into local jobs
• Addressing substance abuse issues
• Addressing teenage pregnancies
• Adult education – especially literacy and numeracy
• Computer skills training
• Admin training – completing forms, emails, using telephone
• Enterprise development/business training
• Governance training for Indigenous leaders and board members
• Mechanics training/ vehicle maintenance
• More funding and support of Homelands Education and Outstation Schools
• Work experience opportunities for school students
• Linking school graduates with ‘real’ jobs
• VET training in community
• University courses delivered in community
• Consultation with elders to develop curriculum
• More Bininj education
• More Balanda education
• More ‘both ways’ education with a balance of Bininj and Balanda – valuing of different knowledge systems
• Aboriginal knowledge and practices incorporated into mainstream education
• Bilingual education
• Listen to Bininj’s education needs
• Short courses – not necessarily accredited
• Allow for periods of absence for cultural or family business (e.g. funerals)
• Funding to send kids for higher education (e.g. scholarships)
• More VET courses/training delivered ‘on country’ or in community – e.g. Conservation Land Management or Indigenous Land Management.
### APPENDIX IV

Staff who participated in the workshop to draft the plan from: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the School, JobFind, WARC, Catholic Care NT, Forward Thinking Consultant, Child and Family Centre and Team Health. The School Principal also contributed to the draft following email circulation.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT action should be taken?</th>
<th>WHO should do this work?</th>
<th>HOW will this happen?</th>
<th>WHEN will we do this?</th>
<th>BENEFITS - what we hope to see when this action is taken?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Strengthen work experience program | Senior school teachers in collaboration with service providers (including JobFind) | Mentoring training  
Clontarf and Girls Academy to provide mentoring and inspiring role models  
Leadership (training)  
Workshop for service providers | TBC | Work ethics  
Empowering our youth?  
Building resilience  
Relationship building |
| Work on getting kids to school (7am) | RSAS team (SAOs, SAS) work together with IEO, GEC, families, CEPO and whole community | Non-confrontational  
Change Bininj habit & attitude towards education | Every day | TBC |
| More home visits | Family Educator  
Family Liaison Officer | Visiting families tell them FaFT is open for 0-3 years and families | Every Friday | To support families in early education  
To be strong in both ways  
To learn about school culture  
To be strong to start school |
**WHAT action should be taken?**

- More home visits
- Family Educator
- Balanda to learn some Kunwinkju language

**WHO should do this work?**

- Family Educator
- Family Liaison Officer
- All Balanda and Binjin workers

**HOW will this happen?**

- Specify time and activities
- Source resources
- Identify translations for key conversations
- Professional development around translation

**WHEN will we do this?**

- Every Friday
- Fortnightly language session/lesson (designated)
- Practice every day

**BENEFITS - what we hope to see when this action is taken?**

- To support families in early education
- To be strong in both ways
- To learn about school culture
- To be strong to start school
- To be strong to be strong
- Balanda to learn some Kunwinkju language
- Balanda and Binjin to learn more about partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More home visits</td>
<td>Family Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family to learn Kunwinkju language</td>
<td>Family Liaison Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHO will this happen?**

- Managers
- Trainers
- Training providers
- WARC – within the workplace training

**When will this happen?**

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### APPENDIX V

**Gunbalanya interagency workshop reflections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the most important thing you have learnt from listening to community voices today?</th>
<th>What opportunities are there for you and your workplace to best support education pathways?</th>
<th>What support do you need to help you provide these opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have learnt a lot about helping people about both ways (Bininj and Balanda)</td>
<td>Build in a culture of two way mentoring based on the strength of relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support to learn about Bininj culture and two way learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That community input and voices need to be heard to understand and make plans and move forward together leaving no one behind</td>
<td>To let PMC understand local issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A mentor for the mentor (training in how to be an effective mentor and how to be mentored)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To keep communication going in all ways</td>
<td>To be open to work experience students, job pathways Actively find solutions to make it work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I need my employer to allow time and resources to build the relationship in order to develop two way mentoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to make mentoring meaningful</td>
<td>Strengthening existing opportunities by taking the time to listen and respond to needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That listening, really listening to Bininj and their experiences is so important That building supportive relationships is key</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX VI

Youth film project outline

Aim: to gather youth perspectives on their education experiences/perspectives

Commitment:
• to identify suitable youth (current senior school students/ school students/ school graduates) and interview them on film
• to identify suitable people to interview the youth (e.g. Bininj youth centre staff OR other community members they felt comfortable to talk to and share their stories with).

Process: interview youth wherever they feel comfortable – work to be completed by end Oct; edit and upload as a series of video clips; links to be provided to WCE to be shared with community and others, as appropriate.

Details: youth can speak in any language they choose (video clips can be interpreted later and English captioning added, if needed)

Questions: guideline drafted by WCE staff to prompt youth to tell their stories, but anything goes, it is their ‘real’ experiences that we are wanting to capture and learn from, only rule is ‘no swearing’.
• Invite you to share your story about your education...
• What was your education like?
• How far did you go with your education?
• What did you find difficult/what challenges did you face about your education?
• What helped you?
• Why do you think it is good to go to school?
• Why do you think some kids don’t go to school?
• What do you think they need to best support them at school?
• And what about after school?

Why do this?
The government has hugely invested in school attendance strategies and want to know why children to not go to school. The government has not talked to the ‘experts’ – that being the youth themselves - about their thoughts and ideas about education. The WCE researchers hope to learn about school experiences past and present, including bush, interstate and Darwin boarding school experiences etc. from the youth themselves. This information can be provided to WCE partners and the Commonwealth in the hope of making education more accessible, enjoyable and ‘school’ a place where remote Indigenous young people want to be.
Funding for this project provided by the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme

Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

www.remotengagetoeedu.com.au