Tennant Creek and Alekarenge Whole of Community Engagement Initiative Evaluation Report

Report prepared by David Scholz, Valda Shannon and Geoffrey Shannon
This Emu foot demonstrates how education links to direct employment, the metaphor was often used by Valda Shannon to describe WCE work in Tennant Creek and Alekarange.

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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.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Project Metaphor

The WCE team in Tennant Creek / Alekarenge has used a bird metaphor based on the Zebra Finch (Taeniopygia guttata) also known Nyinngirri in Waramungu.

![Zebra finches](image)

Figure 1: Zebra finches.

Birds, and the bird’s nest, represent children, their carers and the education system supporting their development and education.

The nest represents the safe, positive and nurturing environment that begins in the home (where the eggs are hatched), continues through the school system and then further education, preparing them for their roles as employees in the modern workforce. As they develop in this system they take small, continuous increases in responsibility and gradually become more independent. When they complete their qualifications and are ready for work, it represents the stage when the birds have learnt to fly and leave the nest for their own life. They metaphorically fly away to a career as a strong and independent individual.

Over this journey, the nest represents the broader community working with the family to build that safe learning environment. As nests are made up many different materials in nature - for example twigs, leaves, grass, spider-web and bark – so too is the learning environment made up of many efforts including that of families, community workers, health professionals, government agencies as well as teachers. Collectively the community works together to build the learning environment. Teachers and schools are important but cannot succeed if the other elements are missing.

Seeds are the primary diet of the finches and education is like the seeds of knowledge. Getting a daily dose of knowledge builds strong and prosperous students. Birds feed on different seeds to get a balanced diet. Different seeds represent both traditional and western knowledge – both are important for a balanced education. Many traditional aspects can only be learnt on country with elders and this must be woven into the Indigenous education narrative.

Cats and loss of natural food are considered to be the primary threats to finches. There are similar risks to education. There are various predatory ‘cats’ that disrupt education including poverty, poor health, drugs and alcohol as well as teenage pregnancy. Not going to school (or college or university) is like losing your educational food which leads to weakness and failure until you seek change. However a good supportive environment can keep you strong and feeding on knowledge, sustaining life-long learning and growth.

Zebra finches are loud and boisterous singers. This signifies the need for communication in the community to keep a strong learning environment. Indigenous education is at risk and needs a strong voice.
Valda Napurrula Shannon Wandaparri is a Walpiri/Warumungu woman who has been living and working in Jurnkurakurr (Tennant Creek) since 1992.

Valda has completed Bachelor of Applied Science in Aboriginal Community Management and Development from Curtin University in 2000 and also Bachelor of Arts and Education Deakin University 1987. Valda has also completed training through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters as well as a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Valda worked as a teacher at Ali Curung School in 1986 – 1992 and became Assistant-Principal-in-training at the same school.

Valda’s most recent work has included writing culturally relevant programs for the Mental Health Association of Central Australian Suicide Prevention initiative (based in Alice Springs). This led her to draw on culture to connect with communities. She then presented her work in New York at the United Nations Indigenous Forum in 2014 on the importance of addressing suicide through cultural practices in Indigenous communities. Valda has also had her stories incorporated in a book titled ‘Women’s Voices’ as part of the International Women’s Conference in Beijing, China in 1995.

Valda’s focus is on ‘walking in confidence in two worlds’; embedding Indigenous culture within education, employment and processes to strengthen her community.


He was an Assistant Teacher (cat. 1) in 1979 and in 1980 was based in Yirara College, Alice Springs. Then he studied Assistant Teacher training at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) in 1981, 1983 and 1985. In 1982 and 1984, Geoffrey taught as an assistant teacher at Yirara. In 1986, he was a student at Darwin Institute of Technology, which is now Charles Darwin University. Geoffrey studied for twelve months in the teacher education program. At the end of 1986 he graduated with a Diploma of Teaching.
Since then, Geoffrey has worked in different fields:

1987 — Worked as a teacher at Alekarenge—Principal in Training.
1993 — Voluntary worker on Julalikari Council (Julalikari) Night Patrol.
1994—98 - Assistant Administration Officer at Anyinginyi Health while studying at Curtin University.
1999—2001 - Worked at Julalikari Night Patrol.
2000-2002 – Cert III Mental Health Lecturer at BIITE.
2003—2004 - Day Patrol Officer with Julalikari.
2005—2006 – Men’s Liaison Officer
2007—2008 - Project Coordinator for the Ready for School Initiative
2008—Current – WCE Community Cultural Advisor and Liaison Officer at Julalikari

David Scholz brings more than 15 years of experience in health, community development, policy reform and research administration to the WCE program. He has extensive primary health care experience, which has fostered interest in the health-education nexus as well as the social determinants of health. Working in both government- and community-organisations has given David significant community engagement and community development experience across diverse populations in Central Australia and the Top End. In the last 3 years he has worked in senior research administration roles at CDU giving him a broad base of research, project design and grant development skills in the VET / higher education space. He has a particular interest in Indigenous health, education and research in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (NT). This includes online learning, inclusive practice and community engagement, governance and community development.

David has a Master of Business Administration (Change Management) degree and is a Fellow with the Australian Institute of Management with a background in health science (nursing).
Staff involved in establishment / intermediate phases of the project

Peta Fraser was involved in the establishment and intermediate phases of the project from October 2014 to May 2016. She is a proud Bundjalung woman from the Lismore area. Peta has worked in IT, marketing, and local government in New South Wales (NSW). From 2008 she worked in the NT with Outback Stores and Ironbark Employment. In her role with Ironbark Recruitment, Peta specialised in Indigenous Employment Programs.

Peta holds a Certificate III in Business and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Dr Lisa Watts (MA (hons), PhD) was involved in the establishment phase of the Tennant Creek project until May 2015, and has worked in remote Indigenous communities of the NT for thirty years specialising in applied research across education, political ecology, and social and emotional wellbeing, community development and social enterprise. She has worked on a number of engagement projects, collaborating with multi-government stakeholders, institutions and agencies, the Warlpiri, Anmatyerre peoples and the Yugul Mangi collective, influencing policy on water management.
Project Background

Activity in the Tennant Creek Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative has sought to identify the barriers to uptake of further education for Indigenous students in Tennant Creek and Alekerange (and by extension the broader Barkly Region) as well as the opportunities to increase the number of students pursuing further education. For the purposes of this project further education was defined as one of the following 3 streams:

1. Higher Education (HE);
2. Vocational Education and Training (VET); and
3. Direct Employment (with on the job training).

Superficially HE and VET providers can assist in this process by offering a range of support services including the following:

- Indigenous student services and support programs;
- Indigenous access programs;
- Indigenous studies and Indigenous designated programs;
- Healthcare programs; and
- Indigenous teacher education programs.

These types of support services have been offered by Australian and international HE/VET providers for a number of years now. It can be argued that Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and Charles Darwin University (CDU) have been at the forefront of these initiatives. However it is apparent that for BIITE and CDU these programs are more effective in their major campuses and centres, as the more remote students experience greater difficulty in accessing these services for a variety of reasons.

A number of studies, both nationally and internationally, identify a range of broader challenges to the uptake of further education for Indigenous populations. These include the following:

- **Language**: the first language of many Indigenous people who live in remote communities is not English which is the main language of instruction. This includes in-class or on-line lectures and almost all printed course material.
- **Financial Barriers**: financial challenges are a key reason for students not starting or completing further education.
- **Discrimination**: international research shows that former Indigenous further education students were less likely to report experiencing a “climate free from harassment or discrimination” than non-Indigenous students (Boughton, 1999).
- **Family & cultural responsibilities**: personal challenges and family responsibilities are commonly cited to explain why Indigenous students are unable to enter or continue with their education. Stress, lack of family support, problems related to substance abuse, childcare and family concerns are a few examples of these challenges and responsibilities.
- **Lack of role models**: as relatively few Indigenous people from remote communities have pursued further education in the past, particularly at the university level, Indigenous students have fewer role models and supports in place to encourage them to continue their schooling.
• **Rurality and remoteness:** Indigenous communities are often geographically remote, and poorly supported by critical infrastructure such as high speed broadband. Even when high speed internet access is available it is often not at an affordable price-point. Generally students must leave their communities and/or families to study in an unfamiliar urban environment.

The 2012 Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People revealed that the percentage of Indigenous students in universities across Australia was barely 1%. The Indigenous completion rate pre-review was 32.4%. Data released in 2015 from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training shows the situation was relatively unchanged, with 1% of Indigenous students across Australia and a 28% completion rate.

The WCE initiative is based on a commitment to interculturality where traditional Indigenous and western knowledge systems come together and reinforce one another. Koegeler-Abdi and Parncutt (2013) look at the intersection of cultures and examine how practice meets the research. They propose that solutions to intercultural challenges can be approached best by a combination of equality and strategy:

• **Equality gives all relevant parties equality of opportunity; and**

• **Strategy involves rational development of approaches that take advantage of the knowledge and experience of all relevant actors.**

Moore, Shannon and Scholz (2016) propose that acknowledging interculturality is critical to developing sustainable solutions in an increasingly diverse environment.
Community Context

Tennant Creek is located approximately 500km north of Alice Springs on the Stuart Highway. Road access to Alice Springs is good all year round. The town lies within the Central Land Council (CLC) region 6.

Tennant Creek town was named in 1860 after John Tennant, a South Australian pastoralist, by John McDougall Stuart, in acknowledgement of the assistance Mr. Tennant had provided for Stuart’s expeditions across Australia. Tennant Creek was declared a town in 1934 in the midst of a gold rush, and gold-mining became the driving force of the local economy. The town did not accommodate Indigenous residents until the 1960’s.

Mining has traditionally been the backbone of the local economy along with pastoralism and the public service. At present there is a very low level of mining activity and public administration is the major employer, comprising 24.2% of the workforce. The town has a diverse history shaped by mining, pastoralists and Indigenous culture.

A number of Indigenous languages are spoken in Tennant Creek and surrounding regions including Warumungu, Warlpiri, Alyawarr, Warlmanpa, Wambaya, Wakaya, Waanyi, and Kaytetye.

Alekerange is located 170km south of Tennant Creek by road.

Indigenous History

Tennant Creek lies centrally in Warumungu country but had few Indigenous residents for the first half of its official history. In the 1970’s Indigenous people began to move or return to Tennant Creek from Alekerange (formerly known as Ali Curung and Warrabri Indigenous settlement) as well as surrounding cattle stations.

Thirty years after being named by Stuart, it is estimated that 100 people were living at camps around the Tennant Creek Telegraph Station in 1890. People were attracted primarily by station work or the distribution of rations as well as to the perennial waterholes along the creek north of town. These waterholes were used traditionally by Warumungu people during drought years.

The discovery of gold in the 1930’s brought an influx of prospectors from across the country. Many of the new mines were located on land that had previously been the Warumungu Reserve and meant that some Indigenous people became involved in mining. Similarly the discovery of tungsten ( wolfram) at Hatcher’s Creek in 1913 brought the Warumungu and Alyawarre people into mines in the Davenport & Murchinson Ranges. The original Pioneer Mine at Hatches Creek operated through until 1970. At present the GWR Group is looking at new mines in the region.

Many Indigenous people spent substantial periods of their lives in this region including on Kurandi Station. The station is notable for an Indigenous walk-off in 1977 as part of strike action, although it is not nearly as well known as the Wave Hill event.

Substantial swathes of Indigenous land were granted as pastoral leases and were stocked from the 1880’s onwards. This development of their lands made traditional Indigenous hunting and gathering practices impractical, if not impossible, and people settled on the Warumungu Reserve, the new cattle stations or the reserve. Consequently Indigenous people formed the basis of the station workforce from droving through to domestic duties although conditions were generally very poor and payment was made only in rations.
The current approximate population of Tennant Creek (ABS, 2016) is 3,634 with a modest male bias (51.0% male and 49.0% female). The median age is 32.5 years, which is significantly lower than the Australian median (37.3). In 2011, 52% of the total population was Indigenous.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2016) data highlights that Tennant Creek is made up largely of young to middle aged Indigenous residents and working to older aged non-Indigenous residents. In the Indigenous population this is coherent with relatively high birth rates and lower life expectancy. For the non-Indigenous population it is likely that the moderately high concentration of pre-retirement aged people reflects the age profile of employment.

The population of Alekerange is approximately 535.

Work by Biddle (2009) clearly shows the Barkly region was in the most disadvantaged quartile (4th) in 1991 and that there was no change in 2006. The MySchool website shows that in 2015, 70% of the Tennant Creek High School student cohort was in the most disadvantaged quartile (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). This is very important for the context of this report.

The American Psychologists Association (2016) reports that low socio-economic status and correlated factors such as lower education, poverty, and poor health affect society as a whole. Inequitable wealth/resource distribution and discrepancies in quality of life are increasing globally.

Research by Morgan et al (2009) reveals that children from low socio-economic status communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to areas of higher rank. Initial academic skills are linked to the community/household environment. In these communities, generally low literacy levels and high levels of stress negatively impacted children’s baseline academic skills. Children in remote Indigenous communities such as Tennant Creek and Alekerange are starting from a compromised base and the gap can get progressively larger without thoughtful intervention.

**Educational Context**

Tennant Creek has two publicly funded schools, Tennant Creek Primary School and Tennant Creek High School that service the town and, to some extent, the surrounding Barkly region. The regional function applies more in the case of the high school. Alekerange School provides education services to students from preschool to middle years.

Tennant Creek town is serviced by the Northern Territory’s (NT) two HE / VET providers, BIITE and CDU. Both BIITE and CDU have reduced their footprint in Tennant Creek over the life of this project, although CDU maintains a centre there. BIITE shares a single office with the NT Department of Education.

Pre-school services are offered by the primary school and there is childcare available at the Tennant Creek Childcare Centre.

**Tennant Creek Primary School**

Tennant Creek Primary School is a large, remote primary school providing pre- and primary school education for Tennant Creek and the Mungkarta Homeland Centre. The stated aim is to offer a comprehensive education to a student cohort which comes from widely diverse backgrounds. It is an Accelerated Literacy (AL) school and staff seek to develop school programs that support and enhance AL. From the 2014 Annual Report the school states:
“We see ourselves as a full service school; we pick students up in the morning and take them home after school. We supply breakfast, recess and lunch to students through a comprehensive nutrition program.”

Tennant Creek Primary School provides education to 413 students from Transition to Year 6. Officially, 75% of students are Indigenous but if full attendance was achieved across the population this would be closer to 85%. It has total income of approximately $1.5m (excluding core salary costs) and 25 teaching staff (including principal and deputy principal).

**Tennant Creek High School**

Tennant Creek High School is located in Tennant Creek and provides education services from Years 7 to 12. Enrolments in recent years average around 200 and vary according to community circumstances. The official Indigenous student population is approximately 75% of the total student body but if full enrolment was achieved this would be more than 80%. Students come from the urban and town camp areas of Tennant Creek as well as surrounding remote communities. It services students with an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) rating of 722.

Tennant Creek High School provides middle and senior year education. Senior year students can study a combination of school based subjects, Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses on site through CDU, and correspondence courses through the Northern Territory Open Education Centre. School-based apprenticeships provide an additional pathway for senior students. All students in the senior school are encouraged to enrol in at least one VET program as part of their learning program. The Alternate Program uses preparation for the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award as a structure to allow students to obtain various skills such as horse-riding and swimming.

It has an average staffing of 40-45 people comprising 26 teaching staff and 18 administrative or support staff with a total income of approximately $1.2m per annum exclusive of core salary costs.

**Alekerange School**

Alekerange School has an average staffing of 7 teaching staff and 2 non-teaching staff. It has 117 total enrolments for years pre-school to Year 9.

**Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)**

BIITE describes itself as ‘sitting uniquely in the Australian educational landscape’ as the only Indigenous dual sector tertiary education provider (BIITE, 2016). It promotes its ‘both-ways’ philosophy through providing an Indigenous lens to a mainstream education system.

As an organisation BIITE remains in a process of reform. It is undergoing substantial change at present including a move towards becoming a ‘social enterprise’, applying commercial strategies to achieve socially beneficial objectives for Indigenous communities. The aim is to create a more sustainable and innovative business model.

BIITE offers a range of VET programs including business, community services, education, health and literacy. Details can be found here. Higher education options are focused on three key areas – education, health and Indigenous knowledges as well as a Preparation for Tertiary Success bridging program. It is also possible to do a Masters by research or a Doctor of Philosophy.

1 Both-ways philosophy refers to a way of working that respects both Indigenous and Western cultures (Yunupingu, 1991)
At the time of preparing this report BIITE had one staff member based in Tennant Creek who had a sole focus on Assistant Teacher development and travelled extensively in the region.

Charles Darwin University (CDU)

CDU describes itself as somewhat unique in that no other single Australian university serves such a large area of the continent, in such a remote location and with such a small population to sustain it.

The only university based in the NT, CDU is a dual sector university providing VET and HE pathways. The university is engaged with, and informed by, Australia’s Indigenous people through the agency of the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership (OPVC-IL) and other research institutes.

Similar to BIITE, CDU offers a range of VET programs including business, primary industries, trades, community services, education, health, and creative arts. Details can be found here. Higher education options are quite broad covering health, business, law, education, arts, humanities, engineering, science, health, emergency management and Indigenous knowledges. These are outlined here. CDU’s bridging program is known as the Tertiary Enabling Program. The university also has a growing research program offering Masters and PhD qualifications.

Charles Darwin University operates a centre in Tennant Creek offering facilities for local students and a point of contact for the public. At present only one full-time staff member is based in town, although VET and HE providers visit most weeks - either from Alice Springs or Darwin.

Local Governance Structure

A number of governance structures oversee local governance processes and these can be divided into three main classes:

- Formal local government
- Indigenous land tenure and development
- Schools and significant Indigenous service provider organisations

The Barkly Regional Council was created on 1st July 2008 and was formerly known as Barkly Shire Council. At the time of creation it was the second largest local government area in Australia at 323,514km², after East Pilbara shire in Western Australia at 380,000km². It is now the fourth largest.

The council contains Local Authorities that represent local communities and towns. This reflects the developing regional responsibility of the Barkly Regional Council.

The Barkly Regional Council is divided into four wards, and is governed by a President and 12 Councillors:

- Alyawarr Ward (4)
- Patta Ward (5)
- Alpurrurulam Ward (1)
- Yapakurlangu Ward (2)

Tennant Creek township is part of the Patta Ward which has 40% Indigenous representation. Alekarenge is situated in the Alyawarr Ward and has 100% Indigenous representation.
Indigenous land tenure and development is controlled by 2 main entities - the Central Land Council and Patta Aboriginal Corporation.

The Central Land Council provides a number of services for the benefit of traditional owners and other Indigenous residents of the CLC Tennant Creek region, including the following:

- Providing a strong voice for the Indigenous people of Central Australia.
- Helping Indigenous people get back country.
- Helping Indigenous people manage their land.
- Consulting with landowners on mining activity, employment, development and other land use proposals.
- Protecting Indigenous culture and sacred sites.
- Assisting with economic projects on Indigenous land.
- Promoting community development and improving service delivery.
- Fighting for legal recognition of Indigenous people’s rights.
- Helping resolve land disputes, native title claims and compensation cases.
- Running the permit system for visitors to Indigenous land.

One member of the Tennant Creek region represents the interests of Tennant Creek and Alekarenge on the Executive.

The Patta Aboriginal Corporation was established in 2007 and administers land on behalf of the Patta Warumungu people. Their ownership was recognised by the Tennant Creek No.2 decision of September 2007. This determination arose from a claim to native title filed by the Patta Warumungu people in July 2006 over the Tennant Creek township. This claim was negotiated between the claimants and the NT government. All parties agreed to recognise the claimants’ native title rights to use and enjoy the land and waters of the determination area.

Patta Aboriginal Corporation is governed by 13 Indigenous Directors and is currently going through a period of substantial reform.

A number of the larger Indigenous service providers in Tennant Creek are also very influential, with Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation (AHAC) and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation (JCAC) being particularly prominent. Both are governed by a board of Indigenous Directors and collectively have a substantial impact on health, social service and community development.

**School Governance**

The local schools are guided by NT Department of Education policy and procedures although the local school councils have an influence on overall school governance.

Both Tennant Creek Primary School and Tennant Creek Primary School have school councils. The Alekarenge School is governed by an Executive Committee but does not have a local advisory group.
WCE Community Engagement Process

Establishing a structure

The engagement process commenced with the employment of a WCE Mentor & Engagement Officer and a WCE Community Engagement Leader who worked to establish the project in the region. A number of meetings were held over the first two months to enable Indigenous people to come together and work out what is needed to move forward. WCE staff worked closely with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to facilitate this.

The WCE initiative had an over-arching Indigenous steering committee but the community felt that a local reference group would strengthen the consultation process. After a number of discussions a local reference group was formed. This comprised of key stakeholders from across the region. The reference group then helped identify priorities for the community researcher positions. At the meetings many key potential areas of action were discussed although no-one expressed interest in taking the positions. During this period Valda and Geoffrey Shannon’s names were often suggested as the best people for the role. At the time Valda was employed by Aboriginal Interpreter Service and Geoffrey was working for Julalikari Aboriginal Corporation. In June 2015, circumstances changed for the Geoffrey and Valda and they were able to join the WCE initiative as community based WCE researchers.

Over time the WCE reference group has remained very constant with a small number of replacements as circumstances changed with members. In 2016, the principals of Tennant Creek High School and Tennant Creek Primary School were invited to join the reference group. In contrast to many other governing or advisory groups in the NT, the WCE reference group reflected the actual demographics of the region with approximately 85% Indigenous representation.

The process of community engagement

The early stages of the project were quite difficult as many key stakeholders in Tennant Creek were aligned with particular Indigenous organisations and were viewing the project from personal or organisational standpoints, rather than a broader educational perspective. During this time there was alignment of community residents for, or against, prominent Indigenous organisations. As a result, the atmosphere was uncomfortable for some participants and, at times, it was difficult to get commitment to common goals. Some people gave their honest opinions and spoke clearly, others communicated through the media or third parties. During this difficult period, local Indigenous people provided their views as to what should happen to improve education for Wumpurrarni pikapika (Indigenous children). While they had strong ideas, there was little agreement about how it could be achieved or how to collaborate with one another.

In the first nine months considerable time was spent building relationships between people and organisations. This included working with youth and elders, working with teachers in schools, communicating with people in organisations, also sharing information with Indigenous people from various language groups. The journey was slow and difficult to start with. This was due to the large volume of ideas being generated, vastly different strategies suggested and a lack of trust between organisations as well as individuals.

In May 2015 there was still no local Indigenous staff employed under the WCE initiative in Tennant Creek. Although no-one was directly employed in this time, there was increasing levels of dialogue in the community about Indigenous education and research. People were talking about the need to become involved as Valda Shannon recalls in the quote below.
‘... Sometimes it is very difficult, for many reasons, in a place like Tennant, for us to even come around the table and have face-to-face talks. I feel that we have at least had the opportunity to be able to do that and I can recall before WCE, we’ve never really come around the table, we weren’t taken seriously and for me, I see that our people in the community that are leaders of our organisations and people that are highly regarded in our community, see that Indigenous education is an important area for us to come together, it makes us want to come together, it makes us want to work together and find a way forward together.’

Over the next 12 months people began to put their differences aside to have more productive discussions, although there were occasional flare-ups due to historical associations and allegiances. From time to time, some people actively discouraged participation in WCE events; particularly among the youth. Each time there was an outbreak of tension it was difficult to work through. However, the team worked consistently to rebuild trust and secure relationships.

In 2016 the process became more settled and productive although personal histories still caused tensions from time to time. The period from June 2016 onwards saw the development of a more coordinated approach. A series of follow-up consultations were conducted to test and refine the emerging learnings from the research and implement the elements of the community action plan that were actionable in the time available. This phase also introduced a series of presentations to key stakeholders and continued to develop relationships for possible future change.

**Key Stakeholders**

WCE initiative staff worked with a wide range of stakeholders covering the full spectrum of organisations that fall into three main categories of Indigenous organisations, government departments and community organisations. Discussions were also had with other relevant education providers and with interested individual community members. WCE activities were focused in Tennant Creek, with some travel to Alekerange. activities in Alekerenge were predominantly focused on consultation with school staff.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) was used to map the key stakeholders engaged and understand the relationships between them. The high number of people and organisations involved in Tennant Creek engagement resulted in a very ‘busy’ diagram. After the second round of data had been mapped and at the request of WCE community based staff, the next step in the process was, rather than collecting a third round of data, to break down the diagrams into smaller sectors as follows. The team wanted to assess engagement across the following sectors in early phases of the initiative:

- Indigenous corporations,
- education and research organisations,
- government bodies (local, NT and federal), non-government organisations,
- and community members.

This breakdown showed fairly even engagement across each sector.

The organisations listed below that have acronyms listed next to them are those that were consulted with in the early phases of the initiative, and were included in the first two rounds of SNA data collection (until July 2015). They are visible in the SNA diagram below.
Indigenous organisations

- Julalikari Council (JAC)
- Anyinginyi Health (AHA)
- Papulu Aparrkari Language Centre
- Wangkana kari Hostel
- Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS)
- Central Land Council (CLC)
- Northern Land Council (NLC)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit
- Winanjikari Music Centre
- Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Art & Cultural Centre (NNAACC)
- Patta Aboriginal Corporation (PAAC)

Government departments

- Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL)
- Department Prime Minister and Cabinet (RSAS)
- Tennant Creek Police
- Barkly Regional Council (BRC)
- Tennant Creek Primary School (TCPS)
- Tennant Creek High School (TCHS)
- Tennant Creek Night Patrol (NP)
- Barkly Regional Education Office
- Alekarene School
- NT Education Linguist
- Barkly Electoral Office
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)
- Department of Business
- Department of Health
- Department of Corrections – Barkly Work Camp
- Department of Education (Darwin)
- Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP)
Community organisation

- Lifestyle Solutions
- Community Members (CM)
- Australian Red Cross
- Catholic Care NT (CC)
- Barkly Region Alcohol And Drugs Advisory Group (BRADAAG)
- Barkly Youth Group
- Barkly Regional Arts
- Tennant Creek Women’s Refuge (TCWR)
- Tennant Creek Youth Advisory Group (TCYAG)
- Indigenous Affairs Network (IAN)

Education providers

- Australian National University
- North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Training and Education – Darwin and Tennant Creek visiting staff (displayed in SNA diagram as ‘BI’ and ‘BI-TC’ respectively)
- Charles Darwin University, Tennant Creek Campus (TC-CDU)
- University of NSW (UNSW)

Consultation was also categorised into the following language groups to assist reflecting on the engagement process:

Alyawarr, Warlpiri, Kayetetye, Warlmanpa, Warumungu, Jingili, Mudpurra, Wambaya and Wakaya
Figure 7: Social Network Analysis map of WCE Engagement in Tennant Creek from Nov. 2014 to Jul. 2015
Partnerships

The WCE teams approached the partnership building process with a number of objectives including:

- seeking to develop a whole of community / whole of government approach to regional education;
- establishing consistent messages for current and potential students. Christenson and Peterson (2006) report that when students get congruent messages from home and school they are more likely to embrace the messages of the learning communication; and
- enabling the community voice to be heard in schools. Historically, designs for infrastructure, curricula development, assessment processes, and school terms / operating hours are created with little local input. As a result Indigenous students do not always feel comfortable and there is little acknowledgement of local culture and knowledge.

In essence the project has sought to act as a development and coordination point for education and training efforts in the region.

A number of partnerships have been created in the region including with the following organisations:

- Department Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Tennant Creek High School
- Tennant Creek Primary School
- Barkly Youth Group
- Julalikari Council
- Barkly Regional Council
- Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre
- Partta Aboriginal Corporation
- Alekarenge School
- Catholic Care NT
- Australian Red Cross

The program has also sought to build partnerships with organisations with whom there has not been a positive working relationship previously.

During the early stages of community consultation in Tennant Creek there was an intention to work in partnership with Wangkana Kari Hostel (Aboriginal Hostels Australia). The intention was to provide cultural and academic support to further education students attending Tennant Creek High School that were staying at Wangkana Kari Hostel. Unfortunately due to change in management and operational foci this potential opportunity did not progress.

The partnership with Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre was established for research purposes. It was agreed by the Tennant Creek reference group that this was an appropriate environment for conducting interviews due to its familiarity to members of the community and its culturally rich environment.
Early engagement activities

A partnership was formed between teachers and WCE staff at Tennant Creek High School and they met on several occasions. One of these sessions involved community based staff talking about local slavery with senior students at the school. The following feedback summarises the impact the sessions have had on the students:

Comments from a Tennant Creek High School teacher:

‘I think that the students got a lot out of the experience. I wanted to share with you some of the key reflections from my students about various Indigenous rights topics we covered during the term. They came a long way over the term and were really able to better place themselves in history and the community. This was effective for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Every time I re-read these I am inspired by the thoughts and opinions of these young people.”

Student reflections:

“By promoting healing in Australia I think it is best to acknowledge the past and let go of the grief that is kept inside and dealing with the healing. To promote reconciliation we need more people talking about the issues that we face as Aboriginals also by coming up with innovative ideas and actions that make a difference and to recognise what has happened in Australia’s history.”

“To be able to reconcile between our two races we need to acknowledge and gain an understanding of each other’s point of views about issues such as these. To be able to hear the stories, passed down from people who were there allows us to gain understanding and truly be able to move forward; divided by nothing.”

“It is important to acknowledge the events of the past as we need to pay respects to people of the land and also pay our respects to people who passed away for nothing.”

“The massacres would have affected the Warlpiri and Warumungu populations greatly. The massacres were so traumatic that future generations have not gone back to their country due to be too sorry.”

“As a non-Indigenous person, who has grown up in a small predominantly Indigenous town, who has developed close ties with many Indigenous people and their cultures, I almost feel ashamed to learn about what happened my race had down to their proud cultures. I have now grown up around and developed a great respect and understanding for Indigenous people in this community.”

“As a country Australia must not let the past be repeated. It is up to the current generations of both white and black to keep that culture alive so that future generations can have a better understanding and appreciation of each other’s cultures and families.”

“I realised there are a lot of Aboriginal languages that I never knew existed. These need to be taken care of and not stolen like the past.”

“I feel as though Indigenous people are being unfairly treated, not being looked after, instead controlled, and being bribed almost forced to hand over the land they rightfully re-obtained in the Land Rights battle.”
“The stories I heard make me feel like I was there. They made me feel emotional and made me realise how much pain and stress many Aboriginal people went through in the past. The Indigenous mob felt powerless and could not do much. We have to learn from the past so we do not repeat the same actions in the future.”

“I am hoping next term to begin looking at the topic of Land Rights and any suggestions of people in this community who would be great to maybe have come and speak in class that have a really insightful and passionate perspective would be great.”

Valda and Geoffrey Shannon were involved in an SBS documentary being filmed at Tennant Creek High School about first-year non-Indigenous teacher experiences in remote schools. They were filmed providing cultural advice to new teachers as part of the WCE initiative. The documentary will air on SBS in 2017.

A group of young people from Tennant Creek, students from Yirrkala School and a number of staff members were supported by the WCE initiative to travel to Darwin for one week in September 2015. The aims of this trip were multifaceted. The team hoped to provide them with a learning experience around available study options, accommodation facilities, and support services. Meetings with current higher education students who may not necessarily have completed high school or considered themselves to be ‘academic’ were arranged with the students to demonstrate that further education is not limited to those who have achieved high grades in school. The team also wanted to expose the students to different modes of study to highlight that it is not necessary to move to Darwin to participate in further education, but that this is one amongst many options for participating in higher education.

Positive feedback was received from both students and participating staff about this event. BIITE was a popular choice of where students said they were interested in studying in the future due to the smaller campus, the location away from the busy city area, opportunity to study and not get distracted by shopping, family and entertainment in Darwin, the Indigenous cohort and smaller student numbers. Positive feedback was also received regarding the opportunity to engage with the CDU Indigenous Student Ambassadors. The Indigenous Student Ambassadors shared with the youth what courses they are studying, some of the challenges that they face and how they are able to continue to succeed.

In November 2015, in response to the request of a Tennant Creek youth, a ‘Connecting Youth and Elders’ event was held at the Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre. The event was held to connect youth with elders so that they could talk about resilience within education, opportunities within higher education, how maintaining language and culture can strengthen educational journeys and why higher education both in cultural and western contexts is important. The Elders also highlighted the importance of the sacred knowledge being shared. Partners involved in this event included Red Cross; Catholic Care; Papulu Apparr-Kari Language Centre; Lifestyle Solutions; Julalikari Council; Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre; Tennant Creek High School; CDU; Barkly Regional Arts; and Tennant Creek Youth Advisory Group. The event was catered for and filmed by local Indigenous organisations. Eleven Elders and seven youth attended the event. The event was organised relatively quickly, and miscommunication led to limited levels of engagement by the youth. The concept of passing on knowledge and support to youth remains a priority for the Elders, however, more time committed to the planning of activities such as this would be ideal.

The Tennant Creek Careers Expo was another activity supported by WCE initiative staff. In August 2016, the WCE team manned the CDU booth along with an Alice Springs Campus CDU staff member at this event. There was good interest in the various courses that CDU offers in both VET and HE streams. CDU and WCE staff ran a question and answer session for students.
Following on from the expo, links have been created between CDU lecturers and the Senior Science Teacher at Tennant Creek High School to expose local students to more science topics.

Activities in Alekerange involved WCE community researchers sharing their educational experiences with students at a family day and at the school.

**Research approach**

**Participatory action research**

The WCE project in general was based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model, as described by Chevalier and Buckles (2013) and others.
The PAR process seeks to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and following reflection. PAR emphasises collective inquiry and experimentation grounded in experience and social history.

Using a PAR approach, based on data collection, reflection and action, the project sought to find ways to improve education outcomes and reduce education inequalities through involving the people who, in turn, take actions to improve their own education environment.

Work by Bergold and Thomas (2012) notes that PAR is based on a number of fundamental principles including:

- commitment to democratic process;
- creation of a “safe space” for the research process;
- a clear definition of “community “ for the purpose of the research; and
- acceptance that there will be different degrees of participation within the project. These may ebb and flow over time.

**Data collection**

Initially data from the NT Department of Education and BIITE/CDU enrolments were examined to confirm that Tennant Creek Indigenous higher education participation figures reflect national studies including the 2012 Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, which revealed a HE participation rate of less than 1% and completion rates of approximately 28%. From that point data collection became qualitative, focused on collecting community ideas through mechanisms such as:

- Individual interviews
- Focus groups
- Observations

**Reflection**

Reflection on the discussions with stakeholders and observation were critical to this process. Our reflective process was based on the work of Taylor (2000) which suggests three elements of reflective practice:

1. **Technical Reflection** – this seeks to focus on the facts that surround the situation to encourage evidence based practice.

2. **Practical Reflection** – this element analyses the human interactions experienced, or the communication involved, to consider whether reciprocal expectations are defined and understood by the people involved.

3. **Emancipatory Reflection** - this area considers the power dynamics of the interaction, looking at elements like hegemony (domination of one power over another); reification (assigning unjustified authenticity to a concept); false-consciousness (systematic ignorance) and emancipation (the experience of freedom.)
In practice the reflective and iteration process involved a number of elements which included:

- regular Tennant Creek WCE team meetings;
- approximately thrice-annual WCE initiative team meetings;
- discussions with WCE Program Manager and evaluation staff after each field trip;
- field trip reports becoming a reflective journal; and
- re-testing of evolving concepts with stakeholders.

**Action**

The collection of information and subsequent reflection led to a series of actions throughout the project that were captured in a series of action plans and targeted activities. A high level summary of the July 2016 Tennant Creek action plan is included below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Language Literacy & Numeracy (LLN) | • Determine the key issues  
                              • What are organisation/community concerns  
                              • How can cooperation and collaboration be improved |
| Developing Assistant Teachers (ATs)  | • Increasing numbers of ATs  
                              • Integrating with other staff  
                              • Impact of ATs in classroom |
| Use of cultural metaphors in learning | • Alternative ways of teaching (pedagogies)  
                              • Classroom implementation  
                              • Integration into curriculum |
| Governance                  | • Engagement with government departments  
                              Attendance at school councils and student forums |
| Youth Development           | • Operational planning  
                              • Funder engagement  
                              • Remote delivery & support |
| VET Sector Expansion        | • Enhance CDU remote delivery  
                              • Increase enrolments  
                              • Embed LLN program & mentoring  
                              • Trial with health sector |

*Figure 10: July 2016 Tennant Creek WCE Action Plan*
Key achievements

Achievements of this program must be considered in the context of some key issues that impacted on implementation, and in the context of some other broader considerations. Some examples include: the timeframe and broad scope of the initiative; that local Indigenous WCE staff were only employed in the WCE initiative for less than eighteen months; there was a change-over in the campus based WCE staff six months before the completion of the project; and that inter-organisational harmony was a prerequisite for moving things forward and considerable time and effort was spent throughout the initiative in attempts to work towards this.

Keeping factors such as these in mind, achievements fall into several categories. These can be summarised as follows:

1. Raising community awareness of the significance of education generally and particularly the transition to higher education. Some individuals and organisations consulted reported that they had never had the opportunity to talk intensively about education before or been given certain information about education pathways.

2. Building the basis for better collaboration. The region has a history of difficult interpersonal relationships and difficulties between organisations, for which there is no ‘quick fix’. This project carefully included all stakeholders and created an awareness that the educational challenges facing the region are bigger than any individual or organisation and can only be solved by a ‘whole of community/whole of government’ effort. This, of course, takes ongoing effort.

‘There was a vast variety of people that probably – if they didn’t pull them together for that they probably wouldn’t sit at the same table. We had to smooth over a couple of issues straight away when we sat at the table, people had personal differences. Hold on – it’s not about that. This is about kids’ education and adult education.’

- Government employee.

3. Offering insights into effective community engagement. The project has provided new academic material in the field of ‘interculturality’ and working with contrasting perspectives (Moore, Shannon & Scholz, 2016). This offers potential for further exploration and development. It has also reviewed Indigenous community engagement (Cervone, 2007; Campbell & Christie, 2009; Madden et al, 2013) and higher education and community engagement (Campbell & Christie, 2009; Dempsey 2009; Bernardo et al, 2012; Clifford and Pertrescu 2012).

4. Promoting Indigenous culture and governance in the education environment. This has been achieved through a number of mechanisms including the following:

- Improving Indigenous representation on the school councils – 10% increase at the primary school and 20% increase in the high school. It is extremely positive that Indigenous representation has increased and further growth should be encouraged. In practice due to community commitments, personal circumstances etc. there is often only one or two Indigenous members present which causes them to feel quite isolated and limits effective participation.
- Adding cultural content into the curriculum by running specific education sessions with classes.
- Providing information to education staff regarding cultural protocols.
- Building on educational curriculum and pedagogy by introducing previously undiscovered materials and resources.
- Working on Indigenous workforce development with employers and government agencies.

5. Providing the opportunity for educators and people working in community organisations to engage in reflective practice:

‘I think that for me it has made me think more broadly about the purpose of my teaching and who I am as a non-indigenous Australian and how I can promote reconciliation from within a classroom and within a school setting more broadly. It’s the opportunity to engage in dialogue and explore issues and sort of open up possibilities that weren’t there before.’

- School teacher.

6. Offering an environment to test new approaches to inter-cultural learning with educators. This includes trialling of various cultural metaphors with teaching staff for use in the classroom including the 8-ways approach:

![Figure 11: Eight Ways Approach (Yunkaporta, 2009)](image)

7. Identifying key English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) issues and possible mechanisms to address them. This included the exploration of Direct Instruction with school staff.

8. Providing youth mentoring and support. Program staff worked with six young people in a range of ways to assist them to build self-confidence and leadership skills, in addition to supporting their study pathways. This included providing informational, social and emotional, and practical forms of support. Some examples include providing encouragement to pursue study and other life aspirations, information about potential study options and how these relate to local employment options, assistance to complete forms for enrolment, networking support for job application processes, and counselling when they were experiencing personal, study or workplace challenges. Two young people were provided with significant hands on support to successfully apply for and
complete Indigenous Human Rights Training at the University of New South Wales. A quote from one of the youth who graduated from this course is below:

“It will help me to advocate in my community, for the things that are blocking Aboriginal people from getting education. I want to help push them to the next level to make them feel comfortable enough to know their rights.”

- Tennant Creek youth

The Tennant Creek WCE team were also involved in taking local youth on visits to CDU Casuarina and organising events such as the 2016 Remote Youth Leadership Summit.

9. Promoting the need for action on issues of remote Indigenous disadvantage at events such as the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia/International Symposium For Innovation in Rural Education 2016 Conference in Mackay and the 2016 National Indigenous Leaders’ Conference in Darwin.

10. Developing a Local Community Action Plan. This was delayed in development due to relatively late employment of community based WCE staff and a number of other challenges that have been discussed in this report. It is displayed on page 24.

11. Seeking to influence system reform by meetings with key community organisations, NT Members of Parliament and ‘coordinating’ agencies such as the Department of the Chief Minister and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.
Key lessons learnt

There have been a number of lessons learned through evaluation of this project in a variety of different areas including the following:

• Timelines
• Project design and planning

Timelines

Perhaps the most critical lesson to be reinforced is that of time frames. Due to a range of factors the Tennant Creek project was slower than expected in the establishment phase and consequently only had full operational capacity for about 16 months. The process of building relationships and establishing trust with community members and organisations in this setting cannot be underestimated, and a significant amount of time and effort was required to do so. Up until the end of the project, work was ongoing to maintain communication with different stakeholders and attempt to achieve harmonious collaboration across organisations.

At the end of the project, in December 2016, there was an overview of ideas for education reform but no time to actually implement change. Extension funding has been sought from a number of agencies but many efforts have not been successful. Two years of implementation funding would enable real progress to be made on significant changes to support remote Indigenous learners.

Project design and planning

There was some lack of clarity about the aims of the WCE initiative, and this had an impact on the initial stages of implementation. Some stakeholder comments:

‘There was a lot of confusion right at the beginning... because it was a new initiative.’

- Indigenous organisation staff member

Further detail regarding this will be explained in the WCE initiative evaluation report, which will be available at:  www.remotengagetoedu.com.au

Research by Bergold and Thomas (2012) specifies a number of fundamental principles for success. In retrospect not enough effort was expended in building the crucial foundations for effective results. This is true in the following areas:

• Commitment to democratic process – a clearer sense of purpose and appropriate ‘ground rules’ may have eased the establishment process, reducing the degree of confusion and tension that were apparent at times. This applies to CDU’s internal relationships as well, given there were significant differences of opinion as to the preferred approach.

• Creation of a “safe space” for the research process – the lack of initial clarity and ground rules contributed to a “less safe” research environment that was compounded by existing lateral violence in the community. The Australian Human Right Commission – Social Justice Report 2011 outlines this phenomenon in Chapter 2. It is explained as being “the organised, harmful behaviours that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group: within our families; within our organisations and; within our communities. When we are consistently oppressed we live with great fear and great anger and we often turn on those who are closest to us.” In Tennant Creek (as in
other places) it is true that when asked most Indigenous people will recount stories of back stabbing, bullying and even physical violence perpetrated by community members against each other.

- Acceptance that there will be different degrees of participation within the project. As there has been different methods and degrees of interaction with the community with this project, there is a perception in some quarters that not all people have been engaged, or engaged effectively.

An example of the impact of challenges experienced during project establishment was a degree of miscommunication with Tennant Creek High School staff. However a prompt, and open, response led to improved relationships with the school and closer collaboration for the remainder of the project.

While baseline information was presented to the community initially this may not have been extensive enough. Provision of more comprehensive background data in an accessible form may have increased project credibility and subsequent community buy-in.

Future directions & recommendations

The following section detailing future directions are based on what was learnt through implementation of the project in addition to data provided by community members with regards to their higher education aspirations and needs.

What can be done to increase the uptake of further Indigenous students in Tennant Creek and Alekerange (and by extension the broader Barkly Region)? As mentioned in the project background, a simplistic (and very incomplete) answer is for HE and VET providers assist in this process by offering a range of support services including the following:

- Indigenous student services and support programs
- Indigenous access programs
- Indigenous studies and Indigenous designated programs
- Healthcare programs
- Indigenous teacher education programs

The What Works materials developed by Reid et al (2013) include a detailed analysis of transition issues in their Core Issues 12: Improved Transition, Improved Outcomes publication and provide practical guidance including a transition checklist which is reproduced below in Figure 12.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and strategies</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Transition point</th>
<th>Not evident</th>
<th>Could be improved</th>
<th>Working well</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear goals</td>
<td>A goal that describes measurable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</td>
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<td>Effective data collection</td>
<td>Effective data collection process to accurately identify a student’s current levels of social, emotional and cognitive development</td>
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<td>Capacity to use data to plan for transitions</td>
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<td>Processes to gather and use information and feedback about the factors contributing to a student’s readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>Agreed positive core beliefs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' capacity to learn and achieve</td>
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<td>Understanding the importance of school–family–community partnerships</td>
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<td>Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole-school approaches</td>
<td>Agreed and consistently applied approaches to classroom teaching</td>
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<td>Make learning content engaging, accessible and culturally responsive, for example, culture inclusion programs</td>
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<td>Early intervention to support literacy and numeracy development</td>
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<td>Processes that include, support and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</td>
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<td>Whole-school approaches to positive relationships</td>
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<td>School absenteeism and attendance programs</td>
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<td>Use of Personalised Learning Plans, pathways planning and quality career education</td>
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<td>Broad curriculum provision in senior secondary years either at the school or through other arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td>School transition programs</td>
<td>Effective leadership and planning</td>
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<td>Agreed evidence-based practice</td>
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<td>Targeted strategies and actions</td>
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<td>Culturally responsive</td>
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<td>Effective communication</td>
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<td>Inclusion of relevant people involved and building their capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student level strategies</td>
<td>Student case management, mentoring</td>
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<td>Wellbeing support/targeted financial support</td>
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<td>Targeted assistance for skill development among low achievers, eg, tutoring and peer tutoring, homework clubs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Programs to improve students’ social skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family and community strategies</td>
<td>Shared transition vision to work towards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build an atmosphere of working together to achieve the vision</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identify and use community leaders who can support transition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Locally relevant and shared action plan that identifies how all those involved will work towards achieving the vision</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communication of the key messages and action plan to the broader community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Programs that encourage parental and family involvement</td>
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Figure 12: What Works Program’s Transition Checklist (Reid, 2013).
Schools and further education (HE/VET) providers could work together to produce a localised transition checklist and associated processes. BIITE and CDU could also work on enhancing their access programs (Preparation for Tertiary Study and Tertiary Enabling Program) for remote area users. Currently these programs appear to be more effective in major campuses and centres; in more remote areas student access becomes more difficult for a number of reasons including access to study areas, availability of affordable bandwidth and direct student support.

Another practical step would be for the partner further education providers (BIITE & CDU) to improve their presence in the region through a variety of measures including:

1. Improved cultural safety including employment of local Indigenous staff;
2. Enhanced community engagement and promotion activities in the region beyond the WCE initiative;
3. Increased numbers of staff based in the region (this has already begun with a CDU VET Business Lecturer being based in Tennant Creek from 2017); and
4. Creation of an accessible study centre on Paterson Street which provides extended access for VET/HE students with internet access. In the interim, negotiating a deal with telco providers to provide affordable internet access to students should be considered.

The above was outlined further in an internal memorandum to CDU Executive.

Another key finding is that the approach to education generally is still very ‘mainstream’ or ‘westernised’ despite the population being predominantly Indigenous. There is huge scope for wide-ranging reform and indeed this is considered necessary. A paper by Aman (2015) in relation to the Indigenous people of Bolivia illustrates that this problem is not confined to Indigenous Australian people. The quote from his paper below illustrates that the ‘westernisation’ of education has devalued the true significance of local culture:

> ‘On a general basis we have sometimes rejected our culture, we who come from Indigenous cultures (los que provenimos de culturas indígenas). This is because of prejudices, of ignorance; we believe that we’re inferior, we become ashamed of our culture (tenemos vergüenza de nuestra cultura), we become ashamed of our language, ashamed of our mother tongue. They have taught us this (nos han enseñado eso), that the European culture (la cultura europea) is the superior one, that it’s the most developed, supposedly. Education here clearly has an occidental format wherein they teach us to value what is European (a valorar lo europeo) and not what is ours.’

These words very neatly paraphrase the sentiments expressed by many Indigenous people spoken to in the WCE research process including students. Many of the educationalists spoken to in this research also acknowledge the current problem of an inappropriate education paradigm that does not allow connection for many of their students. Many passionate teachers feel powerless and poorly prepared to engage their students or the community more generally.

The WCE team proposes a broad reform process that focuses on the following areas:

1. Strengthening culture and governance;
2. Revising the education approach;
3. Targeted measures to address the language, literacy and numeracy gap;
4. Systems reform; and (critically)
5. Looking at education from a community development context rather than in isolation.
These will be summarised in the following table and then expanded upon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CULTURE &amp; GOVERNANCE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of, and respect for, culture needs to be central to the education process. Indigenous governance reform needs to be implemented within education-linked organisations and there needs to be a broad over-arching Indigenous governance body in Tennant Creek to oversee change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach, content &amp; pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teaching needs to have a cultural base</td>
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<tr>
<td>- More Indigenous staff and staff development programs</td>
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<td>- Remedial programs required to build competencies to the required levels</td>
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<td>- Look to historical programs as well as new innovations</td>
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<td>- Link to brain science to maximise learning outcomes</td>
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Figure 13: Yarnti Aparr - Recommendations for Education Reform in the Barkly.
Culture & Governance

There is general acknowledgment of the importance of culture in the region from the majority of stakeholders, and in efforts to increase Indigenous participation in education management. What is not apparent is cultural acknowledgment manifesting in adapted systems and processes to any significant degree. Systems and processes remain very mainstream. Work to increase Indigenous membership on governing committees of educational institutions is positive and the increase in representation is very welcome however it may be less effective in practice as it appears on paper. As previously mentioned the increase in school council membership at the Tennant Creek High School is positive but in the words of a Council Member:

“It is good that there are five Aboriginal members on the council. For most meetings not many turn up – they may be sick, away on business and other things. Mostly there is only one or two of us there. This makes me feel lonely, exposed. It is hard to speak up with all them white fella’s looking at you. No support.”

This reflects a perception of a lack of genuine engagement in practical terms. There is no doubt that the Principal and staff at Tennant Creek High School want to make the system work but it appears to be early days in this journey with much work to be done. Schools are not resourced, or well-prepared, to undertake this type of development work.

The ‘Engaging with Indigenous Australia— exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” Issues Paper No 5 (Hunt, 2013) points out that engagement requires a relationship built on trust and integrity. It is a sustained relationship between groups of people working towards shared goals. In the spectrum of engagement, a high level of participation works better than lower levels, such as consultation, where problems are complex. Work to build trust and integrity along with effective participation is necessary.

There is also a need for a strategic level of governance that connects education with the whole community to enable coordination and integration of effort. As will be expanded on later in this section, improved education and employment outcomes are dependent on broader community development processes that provide the precursors and supporting structures for improvement.

A high level of expertise exists amongst Barkly region stakeholders but this collective knowledge is not used in a coordinated or collaborative way. Many organisations approach similar issues from different perspectives and independently of one another. This degree of division of effort is compounded by the degree of lateral violence which is counter-productive.

Possible mechanisms to achieve a strategic level of Indigenous governance that have been suggested include:

• support and development of Patta Aboriginal Corporation to assume this role; or

• creation of a governing group drawn from the boards of the existing Indigenous organisations and supported by an independent executive officer.
Education reform

Discussions with students, parents, teachers and community stakeholders overwhelmingly support the view that the education system is not working for the majority of Indigenous students. A few of the comments from students and teachers summarise this:

‘I don’t enjoy going to school. It doesn’t feel comfortable. No fun. The work is hard to understand and I am not coping. It is better to get suspended than go to school. Even if I finish school there are no jobs anyway.’

‘We push kids to go to school through the ‘yellow-shirts’ program. There is a big philosophical difference between governments and the community on this – government is worried about numbers and the community is concerned about engagement and broader community development.’

‘People come out of the school and training systems unable to read or write very well, or do simple math. They are not job ready. This is a limiting factor for many of our community residents. Catch-up programs are too hard to access and too infrequent.’

No-one that WCE staff spoke to felt that the education system was working optimally for most of the Indigenous students. There is huge opportunity for improvement, which involves reconsidering education approaches, content & pedagogy.

Sessions delivered by WCE staff within the schools during this project highlight the very positive impact a new approach, culturally appropriate content and different methods of delivery can have. As a result, the WCE team recommends the following strategies be pursued based on our stakeholder interactions:

1. Increase the cultural base of the local curriculum and approach to teaching. This can be achieved through a variety of methods including:
   - Developing a regular language program;
   - Introducing local history into the curriculum;
   - Have a regular program of community visitors into the classroom to discuss local culture;
   - Possibly utilise the cultural knowledge of the Remote School Attendance Scheme (RSAS) team more; and
   - Use holistic pedagogical processes (for example the 8-WAYS Framework).

2. Expand the Indigenous workforce and strengthen staff development programs. Indigenous students report that they feel more comfortable when they have the support of local staff. People report that there is a distinction between local Indigenous staff and Indigenous staff from elsewhere. The community values people with local language and cultural connections.

   It is noted that there are a number of Indigenous Assistant Teachers in the Barkly that have been in schools for periods as long as 20 years. This indicates that there is not a strong pathway of development for them to become a degree qualified teacher. A supportive local staff development program needs to be put in place to ensure that Indigenous Assistant Teachers not only become full teachers but are encouraged to develop into Assistant Principals and Principals.

3. Improve orientation of non-Indigenous staff to local processes and protocols. Tennant Creek-based educationalists have reported that they feel inadequately prepared to work with local Indigenous people and are unsure as to how to engage with the community. A comprehensive local induction process would benefit staff and students dramatically.
4. Development of resources including apps and booklets. It is an unfortunate reality that teachers come and go regularly within the region. Developing detailed knowledge within individuals alone often means that information departs with them.

There is a substantial collection of resources either developed, or under development, in the community but these are not widely utilised, or integrated in any way. There is scope to use this base to develop new apps and resources that facilitate cultural engagement within the education sector. The health sector has been more active in this area through agencies such as Aboriginal Resource Development Services and NT General Practice Education.

5. More appropriate facilities & support for Indigenous learning. This includes a number of points mentioned in the transition overview including:
   - Improving cultural safety through facility, procedures and processes as well as employment of local Indigenous staff;
   - Enhanced community engagement and promotion activities in the region, as education providers are as seen as isolated and disconnected from the community by many Indigenous people; and
   - Creation of accessible study areas which provides quiet and safe home environments and IT facilities and internet access.

Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN)

There is a great need for catch-up LLN programs for youth and adults who have inadequate skills to pursue further study. Work in this area has been initiated as a Strategic Priority Project within the broader WCE initiative and feedback from Tennant Creek has been used to inform this. Community based WCE staff have also actively contributed to workshops and forums on this topic.

More information about the WCE initiative LLN Strategic Priority Project is available at:

Community development

The Tennant Creek WCE team proposes that there needs to be informal education, collective action and organisational development across the whole of government and whole of community to impact on:

- **RELATIONSHIPS** – results are driven by relationships based on mutual respect and adaptability. Given the duplication of some services (for example early childhood programs) that exist in the region and the degree of lateral violence that flares up from time to time there is a critical need to build trust and integrity amongst organisations and individuals.

- **COMMUNICATION** – open and honest communication is an essential part of strong relationships. This can be achieved through taking a neutral stance on community issues, in this instance education.

- **SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASE** – creating a strong economic base is foundational to community development. Given the prevailing low socio-economic conditions for many residents (70% in the lowest quartile – see previous sections) the odds are unfavourable for good educational and employment outcomes. Raising average household income is critical to creating a base for change. Associated with this could be a review of employment policies to encourage local employment.
• **HOUSING** – establishing a culturally strong living environment providing rest, nutrition and safe learning conditions. At present factors such as over-crowding, rampant substance misuse and long-term unemployment creates a housing environment that is not a safe or quiet. This is not supportive of educational success.

• **ASPIRATIONS** – support a sense of hope and expectations of career success with education as a platform. Currently many youth report very low expectations of future employment with many expecting to follow the same path of unemployment that they have seen in their immediate, or extended families. Economic development and employment policy are critical to changing this along with a more supportive educational environment.

• **PREPARATION** – establishing a learning culture in the family environment. The Productivity Commission Report on Key Indicators (2016) reports that there is evidence to support the effectiveness of programs such as the Family as First Teachers (FaFT). There is a need for more intensive resourcing in this area along with better integration with complimentary programs.

• **HEALTH SERVICES** – a full range of services including substance misuse programs is needed to support educational outcomes. Community members were particularly concerned with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum (FASD), hearing loss, rates of teenage pregnancy and general substance misuse issues. Of particular concern is the reported high rate of volatile substance misuse including petrol and alcohol. This is consistent with observations of WCE staff during the night time of community activity and was confirmed by discussions with the police.

• **YOUTH PROGRAMS** – encourage exploration and positive development plus support for individuals in difficulty. A combination of factors such as low socio-economic environment, lack of engagement with school, limited recreational activities and substance misuse rates mean that many youth are at high risk. There have been a number of youth programs running historically, but they are dependent on volunteer support. Efforts have been made by a number of organisations to coordinate effort (including Australian Red Cross).

• **CORRECTIONS & JUSTICE SYSTEM** – seek to divert youth and young adults towards education, training and employment.

**Systems reform**

Recommendations for systems reform include:

• **COORDINATION** – create a unified educational vision for the region and support individual organisations to fulfil their work without duplication or competition

• **TIME FRAMES** – introduce time frames of 5-7 years to facilitate an improved chance of success. The current rapid change of policy and programs is destabilising.

• **PROGRAM & PROJECT GUIDELINES** – move away from narrow output focused guidelines to more flexible outcome/impact focused approaches

• **ADMINISTRATION** – reduce often onerous administration burden to allow a more results focused approach

• **MANAGE EXPECTATIONS** – in general the approach should be to promise little and deliver big

• **USE EXEMPLARS** – the most successful programs have been based on-country, intercultural, in language and based on experiential learning (for example, ranger programs).
• **LOCAL RESOURCING** – Provision of a locally based higher education staff member at CDU/BIITE to pursue community engagement and mentoring activities.
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HIPPY Australia (unpublished) Quarter 4 2015 Community Progress Report, report to Department of Social Services.


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Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

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