

OUTDOOR PROGRAMS IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Summary

This project visited five remote Aboriginal communities across Western Australia over a twelve month period to ascertain the opportunities for outdoor adventure pursuits. The five communities visited were Warburton Ranges and Warakurna in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Warralong (near Marble Bar) and two communities in the northern Goldfields - Morapoi Station and Wiluna. A bushwalking outdoor education program was piloted during a return visit to Warralong. An existing Aboriginal adventure tourism venture provided a case study at Morapoi. The opportunities for outdoor pursuits were considered for community recreation, education, training and employment potential.

Significant potential exists for outdoor adventure pursuits in these Aboriginal communities, largely due an abundance of natural environments and the local peoples' connection to the land. Many Aboriginal people from remote communities already participate in low level unstructured outdoor pursuits. Developing these into formalised programs is benefit.

Outdoor pursuits can have important physical, social and emotional benefits to Aboriginal people, including teaching them employability and life skills through the outdoor activities. Skill development and training programs are important develop relevant skills. Adventure tourism is also a valid employment path for Aboriginal people from remote regions. Furthermore, cross-cultural immersion programs are of benefit and interest to a number of people. Therefore, promotion of these outdoor program opportunities and benefits to Aboriginal people and their remote communities is vital.

Noteworthy constraints exist that need due consideration when planning for outdoor program in communities; particularly due to the remote locations and cross-cultural challenges. Time, costs and effort required are inherently greater in these regions. Staffing constraints and the lack of qualified and experienced outdoor guides may also negatively impact the quality of programs in remote areas.

One outcome of this project was the development of a model to promote outdoor adventure programs in remote communities. Several key strategies underpin this model; community engagement; meaningful participation; relevant skill development; targeted training; community capacity building; and, coordinated industry support. Community engagement is necessary to understand community aspirations, training needs and distribute relevant information. Quality outdoor programs in remote areas are needed, and the number of these should be increased. Training is necessary to fill identified skill gaps. A comprehensive training development scheme is needed to equip and mentor Aboriginal outdoor guides from remote areas. Community capacity building and wider industry support is needed to support this process.

Several recommendations are included in this report. Long term strategies are necessary and require an injection of significant funding over a sustained period of time to support potential outdoor adventure programs in remote communities. A list of relevant community personnel who may assist in implementing these strategies is attached for the Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) to consider.

The project was funded by DSR under the 2010/11 Dr Heather MacGowan Scholarship and was administered by Wongutha Christian Aboriginal Parent-directed School (Wongutha CAPS) near Esperance. The information gleaned from this study has informed the development of a Certificate II Outdoor Recreation for 15—17 year old Aboriginal students at this independent vocational boarding school.

Recommendations

1. *Produce a set of promotional material highlighting the opportunities for outdoor pursuits to Aboriginal people.* The material would identify the benefits of, and skills learnt through participation, training opportunities, employment opportunities and, potential career pathways. It should also explore examples of community-run outdoor programs, including adventure tourism ventures. Culturally appropriate and relevant means of presenting the information is necessary in print, DVD and website format. Simple pictorial formats can make this more accessible to Aboriginal people with low literacy. Distribution of information is best suited through DSR regional offices and ongoing community engagement trips to remote communities.
2. *Develop a set of resources for Aboriginal groups wishing to implement minimal-impact practices on outdoor programs.* Culturally sensitive and appropriate resources are necessary and should include easily understood pictures and diagrams (see point 1).
3. *Create an electronic suite of planning tools to empower remote communities to facilitate their own outdoor programs.* The planning suite should include activity planning documentation, risk management templates, medical forms, blank databases and menu planning software for camp cooking. Information would be distributed through DSR regional offices and community engagement trips. Note: This suite would be of use to the wider outdoors sector and the opportunity is available to partner with Outdoors WA to develop tools to suit any outdoors program.
4. *Develop a skill development continuum for specific skill sets within the outdoor industry.* This would outline a progression of skills from novice to competent participant to assistant guide, guide and instructor in various activity fields. It would also serve to clarify skill development needs and identify pathways to employment.
5. *Collate a series of case studies on 'best practice' for outdoor programs in remote communities.* Existing DSR structures, including regional offices, could provide collection and distribution avenues for such case studies, with the overall project responsibility remaining with the central Perth office. A website and accompanying CD-ROM would be the best format for communicating these case studies.
6. *Develop a series of outdoor adventure trails in and around remote communities.* Trails will be specific to each community but may include walk, run, bicycle, and, paddling trails where appropriate. Development of trails is best undertaken in consultation with local elders to encourage strong community ownership of trails, thereby increasing the opportunities for ongoing usage of trails by community members.
7. *Facilitate ongoing community engagement trips to remote communities.* Trips are necessary to distribute relevant promotional material, raise awareness, encourage community discussions and identify potential outdoor programs. Participatory planning approaches during these trips would help to empower Aboriginal communities, and, encourage them to take responsibility for outdoor programs within their community. Numerous trips are needed in all regions of Western Australia to ensure face-to-face communication occurs. Identified contacts from this research need revisiting to maintain rapport with communities. Repeat visits could result in the development of detailed maps and risk management documents for each community. Engagement trips will require sufficient time, effort, money, and a long term strategy.
8. *Establish an outdoor pursuits roadshow to showcase quality outdoor programs in remote communities.* This traveling roadshow would distribute promotional material to remote communities and encourage community participation in meaningful outdoor pursuits including bushwalking, rock climbing and team building activities. Operational costs for the roadshow would include fuel, vehicle hire, food, accommodation, staff time and consumables.

9. *Fund necessary upgrades to 'The Wall' as a potential vehicle for the roadshow.* This mobile climbing structure has a popular presence when in operation and is an excellent advertisement for outdoor pursuits - showcasing engaging roping and team building activities. Wongutha CAPS students who are trained in roping skills may also operate the Wall during remote community trips to their home communities. Funds are necessary to clean and paint the climbing structure, provide signage, make modifications to the structure and replace aging hardware.
10. *Support remote communities to develop sustainable high quality outdoor programs that encourage meaningful participation and skill development.* The Warralong Walkabout program could be built upon, and where appropriate, replicated to other locations. Cadets WA programs and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme are other examples of outdoor programs that are appropriate in remote communities. Engagement of Aboriginal elders is necessary to ensure programs are targeted to community needs. Communities will need assistance to develop and fund sustainable, well resourced and targeted outdoor programs.
11. *Fund equipment purchases required by remote communities for use in outdoor programs.* Equipment purchases are necessary to empower local communities, increase the number of people participating in outdoor programs and to diversify the available recreational pursuits. Note: Effective management processes are needed by remote communities to ensure equipment is well maintained and available for ongoing use to ensure outdoor programs remain sustainable.
12. *Sponsor the Certificate II Outdoor Recreation program at Wongutha CAPS.* This program provides meaningful participation in outdoor pursuits for Aboriginal senior high school students. Sponsorship could cover costs to: employ staff, finance equipment to diversify recreational pursuits, provide a four-wheel-drive vehicle, train staff, and to buy specialist student uniforms. Letters of support for Wongutha CAPS to gain Registered Training Organisation (RTO) scope could also be provided.
13. *Partner with education sectors to create specialist full-time outdoor educator positions in remote community schools within Western Australia.* Teaching positions will need to be supported by adequate resourcing, equipment and professional development to ensure sustainable outdoor education programs are delivered. A multidisciplinary approach to teaching outdoor education using themes or projects is best suited to the remote community context. These would enable programs to span most, if not all, curriculum areas. Discussions should involve the Department of Education and Training (DET), Association of Independent Schools of Western Australian (AISWA), Aboriginal Independent Community Schools (AICS), Catholic Education Office (CEO), Curriculum Council, Notre Dame University (NDU), relevant Register Training Organisations (RTO) and Outdoors WA (OWA).
14. *Sponsor cross-cultural immersion programs in remote communities that use outdoor pursuits.* These programs would involve outdoor education groups entering remote communities to participate in an outdoor program alongside Aboriginal people from remote communities. Catholic Mission Australia have already identified this as an area of interest for Catholic school groups, but could be extended to other groups such as Notre Dame Outdoor Recreation students, outdoor educators or mine-site personnel.
15. *Pilot the proposed Aboriginal Outdoor Instructor Development Scheme in a remote community and a nearby main centre.* A combination of onsite in community training, to engage relevant community members, and offsite out of community training, to broaden perspectives, is needed to provide holistic training. Training needs to recognise the skill set held by Aboriginal people from remote communities, but give them the skills required to become confident, capable and competent guides. This includes practical activity-participation skills, leadership-facilitation skills and communication skills in Standard Australian English. Costs, timing and content needs to made accessible to participants.

16. *Establish a mentoring program for potential and current Aboriginal outdoor guides.* Targeted mentoring strategies are necessary to support the needs of aspiring outdoor leaders. Adequate time, effort and funding is necessary to ensure this program is successful. Mentors will need sufficient face-to-face contact with their apprentice.
17. *Develop a collaborative strategy for supporting sustainable Aboriginal adventure tourism in conjunction with Outdoors WA and the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC).* This should encourage the development of identified outdoor adventure tourism ventures within specific Aboriginal communities, including at Warburton, Warakurna, Warralong, Wiluna and Morapoi.
18. *Facilitate an annual symposium assembling Aboriginal people and remote communities participating in outdoor activities.* This will promote best practise principles, show case high quality programs, encourage networking and provide ongoing support.

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