Building Indigenous Leadership

Promoting the Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing of Koori Communities through the

Koori Communities Leadership Program

VicHealth

THE KOORI COMMUNITIES LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

VICTORIAN KOORI NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

**KOORI COMMUNITIES
YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECTS:**

- Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association
- Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-operative
- Rumbalara Football Netball Club
- Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative

**IMAGING PROJECT
PHASE 1**

MULTI-SITE EVALUATION

ON THE FRONT COVER: (and throughout) is from the original painting by Lyn Briggs.

Lyn Briggs, a Wiradjuri–Yorta Yorta woman, explains her painting with the following words:

The painting shows the importance of nurturing our youth… our future leaders of our communities.

The Elders pass the message sticks, sharing their wisdom and knowledge to help strengthen the spiritual wellbeing of each young person.

Our people are linked together to build safe and healthy communities.

Rising up is a colourful vibrant rainbow full of hopes and dreams that will lead them to the future.

BUILDING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

PROMOTING THE EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING OF KOORI COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE

KOORI COMMUNITIES LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Acknowledgments

In this report, the term 'Indigenous' is used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in general. The term 'Koori', although used to describe any Aboriginal peoples from south-eastern Australia, including New South Wales, refers here only to Aboriginal people living in Victoria.

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Foreword

A focus on the support and development of Victorian Indigenous leadership is central to the process of ensuring the long-term emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and their ongoing survival and growth.

Indigenous leadership is complex and draws on the wisdom and experience of Elders and others, integrating the spiritual with the political, while entertaining leadership in the expanding diversity of Australian society. This is a challenge for cultural protection and safety.

We need to identify what we want our future to look like, to feel safe, to feel connected and to have a sense of ownership and control over our destiny. Young Aboriginal people have an important role in the defining of our future. They provide the sense of perpetuity. Their voice can be heard and must be heard.

The Koori Communities Leadership Program is the first of its kind to include community-based youth leadership projects and a state-wide leadership network. The community youth leadership projects based in metropolitan and rural areas in Victoria provide leadership training for young Kooris, mentoring by senior community members and support and resources to develop leadership skills through the development of community activities. At a state level, the network for the future has developed into the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network involving leaders in Koori community, arts, sports, education, legal, justice, health and academic settings. The network is a response to the challenge of developing long-term planning and a vision for the future of communities.

Supporting the development of leaders gives us hope that the future can be much more culturally alert, vibrant, healthy and safe for Aboriginal people, in particular, and, in general, for all cultures that co-inhabit the traditional lands of Aboriginal nations.

The Koori Communities Leadership Program has been developed with VicHealth in response to the challenge of promoting the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous communities in Victoria. The program gives us opportunities to broaden community leadership, strengthen family structures and face the challenge involved in creating a long-term future for the Indigenous communities of Victoria.

Paul Briggs and **Daphne Yarram**
Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network

Introduction

In 1999, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) developed its Mental Health Promotion Plan (MHPP) 1999–2002, which established a framework for the development of programs, research and evaluation activities relevant to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. The MHPP targeted a number of populations including new arrivals to Australia, young people, older men and women, rural communities and Koori communities. Promoting the Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing of Koori Communities through the Koori Communities Leadership Program was one of the funded programs established as part of the MHPP.

To facilitate the response to the challenge of promoting the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Koori communities, a Koori Task Group with broad representation from the Koori community – including community members, academics, and leaders in sport, art and education – was established. The Koori Task Group confirmed the significance to Indigenous Australians of a holistic approach to health. In doing so, they shifted the scheme's focus away from the mental health of Indigenous people towards their emotional and spiritual wellbeing. In striving to develop a program with clear relevance at a local community level, as well as giving consideration to the broader regional and national agenda for Indigenous women and men, the importance of supporting emerging leaders within Koori communities was identified as a priority. As a result, a set of integrated projects was developed to form the Koori Communities Leadership Program.

With a focus on building a leadership base in Koori communities, the Koori Communities Leadership Program offered participants in its projects the opportunity of developing the skills and abilities necessary for the strengthening of Koori identity and culture. The guiding principles underpinning the Program addressed the need for a long-term vision for the future that would ensure the survival and growth of Victorian Koori communities.

In short, the aim of the Koori Communities Leadership Program has been to strengthen Indigenous communities in Victoria by fostering an environment in which individuals, families and communities can increase their self-reliance, and develop a sense of shared purpose and vision.

As a fully integrated program, the Koori Communities Leadership Program included several components including:

- *Victorian Koori Network for the Future* – a support, resource and planning network made up of key Koori membership from across a broad range of areas including art, sport, education and health.

- *Five Koori Communities Youth Leadership Projects* – involving older community members and Elders acting as mentors and role models for young people as they developed and undertook training and community projects.

- *A Multi-Site Evaluation* of the five leadership projects.

- *An Imaging Project* in response to the need for positive Koori images to strengthen communities and foster an environment in which individuals, families and communities can develop skills to deal with the challenges facing Koori communities.

  Note: The community consultation phase of this project plus a literature review has been completed. Phase two of the project is currently in development.

A significant outcome of VicHealth's investment in the Koori Communities Leadership Program has been the development of the second phase of the leadership projects – the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy. With funding from VicHealth and the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC), and with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) as the auspice, this Strategy is building on the earlier work and encouraging the development of sustainability for effective programs. The Strategy involves a partnership between the members of the Victorian Indigenous Executive Working Group (founding members include Mr Paul Briggs, Ms Daphne Yarram and Ms Karen Milward), the Victorian State Government and VicHealth. Details about the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy can be found in the 'Future Directions' section of this report.

This report records the experience and key learnings of the Koori Communities Leadership Program. It includes: 1) a summary of the context of the VicHealth Mental Health Promotion Plan; 2) the factors that influence the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous communities; 3) the significance of Indigenous leadership at a state and national level in Australia; and 4) the future directions of the Indigenous leadership projects in Victoria. It also 5) outlines the five key projects established under the Program: Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation, Shire of Glenelg; Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-operative, Melbourne; Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd, Melbourne; Rumbalara Football Netball Club, Goulburn Valley; and Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Ballarat.

This publication is one of a series of reports of VicHealth-funded mental health promotion activity which:

- contribute to knowledge about the processes of promoting mental health and wellbeing;

- assist VicHealth and its community, government and business sector partners in future planning of mental health promotion activity in Victoria;

- provide information to assist VicHealth in the further development and implementation of mental health promotion activity; and

- support ongoing development of mental health promotion projects at the field level.

Other publications in this series focus on VicHealth-funded mental health promotion activities concerned with new arrival communities, young people, rural communities, arts and environment and community arts participation.

VicHealth's approach to mental health promotion

A conceptual framework for planning and implementing innovations to promote mental health and wellbeing

VicHealth developed its first Mental Health Promotion Plan (MHPP 1999–2002) to provide a framework to guide the planning and implementation of programs, research and evaluation activities that promote mental health and wellbeing. The framework identified strategies and processes to address key determinants of mental health. This original framework, discussed in detail below, is summarised in the figure inside the back cover of this publication. The framework has since been developed and is accessible through the VicHealth website.

Defining mental health

Mental health is defined by VicHealth as the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Mental health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals, and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just.

Mental health promotion: VicHealth's approach

The approach to mental health promotion taken by VicHealth aimed to achieve better mental health and wellbeing across populations by:

- focusing on improving the social, physical and economic environments that determine the mental health of populations and individuals;
- focusing on enhancing protective factors such as coping capacity, resilience and connectedness of individuals and communities to improve emotional and social wellbeing;
- taking a whole-of-population approach, although interventions may focus on specific population groups; and
- measuring outcomes in terms of public policy, organisational practices and community capacity.

Determinants of mental health and priority themes for action

A number of factors influence a person's mental health and wellbeing, and among them are individual attributes such as heredity, luck, knowledge, attitude and skills. However, there is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates social, economic and environmental conditions also play an important role. In particular, VicHealth identified three determinants as the priority themes for action.

Social connectedness, including:

- Social and community connectedness.
- Stable and supportive environments.
- A variety of social and physical activities.
- Access to networks and supportive relationships.
- A valued social position.

Freedom from discrimination and violence, including:

■ Physical security.

■ Opportunity for self-determination and control of one's life.

Economic participation, including:

■ Access to work and meaningful engagement.

■ Access to education.

■ Access to adequate housing.

■ Access to money.

Theme one: Social connectedness

There is growing evidence of the link between social connectedness and mental health and wellbeing. Studies have consistently demonstrated that people who are socially isolated or disconnected from others have between two and five times the risk of dying from all causes compared to those who maintain strong ties with family, friends and community (Berkman & Glass 2000). For instance, young people reporting poor social connectedness (that is, having no-one to talk to, no-one to trust, no-one to depend on, and no-one who knows them well) are between two and three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared with peers who reported the availability of more confiding relationships (Glover *et al.* 1998).

In recognition of the link between social connection and mental health, the Mental Health Framework focuses on strategies to increase connections between individuals and communities.

Theme two: Valuing diversity and working against discrimination and violence

The link between discrimination and poor mental health outcomes is well established. Experience of racial discrimination is associated with poor mental health outcomes including a poorer sense of wellbeing, lower self-esteem and sense of control, psychological distress, depression, anxiety disorder and other mental disorders (Brown *et al.* 2000; Kessler *et al.* 1999; Williams & Williams-Morris 2000) and associated reductions in productivity (Krieger 2000; MacKenzie 2003), and suicidal feelings (University of Surrey 1998). Suicide rates for Indigenous Australian males and females are over twice the rate for non-Indigenous males and almost twice the rate of non-Indigenous females (AIHW 2004).

Victoria is a diverse society and some individuals and communities experience less favourable treatment than others. Accordingly, this aspect of VicHealth's work focuses on strategies that address racial discrimination, religious discrimination, homophobia, ageism and gendered discrimination.

Theme three: Economic participation

Economic participation includes not only employment, but also the money to feed and clothe oneself and one's family and to participate in community life. A growing body of evidence links poor mental health with limited access to resources including income, employment and education. Mental health is relatively poor among those with low education levels, low-status occupations, and low incomes (Schwabe & Kodras 2000; WHO 2000) and among unemployed people or those with job insecurity (Creed, Machin & Hicks 1999; Power *et al.* 2000). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high rates of unemployment, poorer educational outcomes and lower rates of home ownership (AIHW 2004). Indigenous high school retention rates are half that of non-Indigenous youth (35% compared to 70%) and Indigenous young people are more than twice as likely to experience unemployment as non-Indigenous young people (Muir *et al.* 2003).

There is also evidence indicating that economic and social inequality can undermine broader social cohesion and, thus, negatively impact on social connectedness and community safety (Wilkinson 1997; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). For these reasons, VicHealth focuses on strategies to enhance people's access to economic resources such as education, employment and income.

Health promotion action

Traditionally, health promotion practice has focused on behaviour modification and social marketing strategies to assist individuals to combat unhealthy conditions. While VicHealth recognises the importance of these strategies, it complements them with interventions to combat unhealthy conditions at their source. Therefore, a range of strategies are supported, including:

- research;
- workforce development;
- participation pilots;
- community strengthening;
- organisational development;
- advocacy for legislative and policy reform; and
- communication and social marketing.

Target population groups

A person's location in the broader social and economic structure, both as an individual and as a member of a particular population group, has a profound influence on their mental health. The risk of mental health problems is higher among the poor, homeless, the unemployed, persons with low education, victims of violence, migrants and refugees, Indigenous populations, children and adolescents, abused women and the neglected elderly (WHO 2003). VicHealth adopts a whole of population approach to the promotion of mental health. However particular emphasis is also placed on working with sub-populations experiencing significant barriers to health.

Settings for action

VicHealth's work in mental health promotion is based on the understanding that successful action to promote mental health and prevent mental ill health can only be achieved and sustained with the involvement and support of the whole community, and the development of collaborative partnerships across sectors. These partnerships include those in public, private and non-government organisations across the sectors in which people live, are educated and work.

Accordingly, VicHealth identifies a number of settings for action including the community, workplaces, and organisations dealing with sport, education, health and the arts.

Anticipated outcomes

Mental health promotion strategies are implemented with the aim of reducing preventable mental ill health and promoting mental health at the population level. This will enhance productivity, contribute to improvements in physical health, and reduce the social and economic costs associated with mental ill health. These longer term outcomes are made possible by building the capacity of individuals, communities and organisations to take action to foster the conditions required for mental health.

This report should be seen in the context of VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Framework.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Factors influencing the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous communities

Indigenous Australians collectively make up approximately 2.5 per cent of the national population with, importantly, two-thirds under the age of 25. Around two-thirds of Indigenous Australians also live in large rural towns and cities. (ABS 2001). These numbers represent a considerable diminution of those who originally owned and managed the land.

The perception of many non-Indigenous people as to the state of Indigenous health is often informed by stereotypical images of Aboriginal peoples living in a traditional way, such as those in the top-end of Australia. This stereotyping is often at the cost of Indigenous Victorians, or Kooris, who live in urban areas and have perhaps suffered the extremities of colonisation such that cultural connections have been severed through forced removal from family and land.

In a report in *The Age* newspaper, Professor Ian Anderson, Director of the VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit at the University of Melbourne, suggested that:

> *Many Victorians assumed that Aboriginal health problems were more prevalent in northern Australia. The issues in south-east and urban Australia are consistently ignored because of the perception that all the problems are in remote Australia. Yet more than half of Victoria's indigenous population, thought to be underestimated at 27,925 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, lived in metropolitan areas…it is a problem of visibility.*
>
> (June 2004)

The poor state of Koori health was highlighted in the *Aboriginal Services Plan: Key Indicator's Interim Report* to June 2003. It reported that the rates of death and disease appear to be worsening for Victoria's Indigenous peoples, with life expectancy – 57 years for men and 63.8 for women – remaining much lower than for the wider population (DHS 2004). This finding was echoed in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Australia's Health 2004,* which noted that such short life-expectancies were last seen in non-Indigenous people in 1901 for men and in the 1920s for women (AIHW 2004).

Although Australia's life expectancy is among the best in the world, ranking fourth for both women and men in 2002, the World Health Organization indicates that the current life expectancy for an Indigenous woman is lower than the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI) for a woman in India. For an Indigenous man, life expectancy equates with the UNHDI for a man in Papua New Guinea. Indigenous Australians die on average 20 years younger than non-Indigenous Australians.

As for the state of Indigenous peoples' mental health, the indications are that in this, too, the outcomes are worse than for non-Indigenous Australians. In 2001–02, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander peoples were hospitalised for mental health and behavioural disorders at a higher rate than the general population, and rates of admission for mental disorders due to substance abuse were four to five times that for the non-Indigenous population. Similarly, the death rates from suicide among Indigenous Australians were more than twice those for non-Indigenous, and depression was among the six individual problems most frequently managed by GPs for Indigenous patients (AIHW 2004).

Overall, the state of Indigenous peoples' health is such that in the most recent *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Report,* published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the Social Justice Commissioner Bill Jonas wrote:

> *There is an overwhelming sense that the crisis situation that Indigenous peoples face is highly likely to worsen substantially over the next decade due to the faster growth rate of the Indigenous population (in other words, that government programs will not be able to keep up with the growth of the Indigenous population with the result that it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the status quo or prevent a further deterioration in key areas of well-being).*
> (Jonas 2004)

Central to the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians is the belief that health is:

> *…not just the physical well-being of the individual, but the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community. This is a whole of life view and it also includes the cycle of life-death-life.*
> (NATSIHSWP 1989)

Concepts as diverse as harmonised relationships, spiritual wellbeing, care for land and self-determination are seen by Indigenous Australians as vital to an understanding of health (Swan & Raphael 1995). Such beliefs have led to unique notions of illness and wellness in Indigenous communities, along with well-developed (if weakened in some areas through colonisation) traditional medicine and healing systems.

To understand the 'level of inequality experienced by Indigenous peoples' (Jonas 2004) in relation to health outcomes, it is necessary to examine those factors that have impacted not only on Indigenous peoples' physical health, but also on individuals' emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Outlined in detail below, these include: the long-term effects of colonisation; institutionalisation and child removal policies; economic exclusion and entrenched poverty; the age of the population; racism and vilification; alcohol and drug abuse; family violence and sexual abuse; an over-representation in the criminal justice system; and the loss of traditional Aboriginal male and female roles and status.

The health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples is intimately connected both to history and to more recent experiences. The relationship between spiritual and emotional wellbeing and legal rights, justice and land is – as is evidenced below – inextricably linked to the individual and collective self-esteem of the Indigenous community in Victoria, as it is elsewhere in Australia.

The effects of colonisation on health and wellbeing

It is impossible to understand the disparities in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples compared with other Australians without acknowledging the continuing impact of colonisation on Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples and communities have suffered 'the most extensive, unrelentingly violent and culturally damaging' conflict with non-Aboriginal settlers given that this conflict has been suffered over a longer time period in the more heavily populated areas of Australia (VicHealth 1999: 39).

With the loss of lands, languages, social systems and basic human freedoms, many Indigenous peoples have understandably suffered extremely high, intense and continuing levels of grief (Swan & Raphael 1995). That loss and grief has for many evolved into traumatisation (Phillips 2003). Traumatisation occurs when any person or people suffering the trauma have no healthy or balanced way of recovering from the loss, and psychologically restoring or integrating the loss into a new level of healthy functioning (Middelton-Moz 1996). Thus, not only have Indigenous peoples suffered the loss, and felt aggrieved because of this, but they have also become traumatised as a result of having no recourse or pathway to redress such inequities and injustices. Similar patterns of traumatisation have been reported in other Indigenous (Hodgson 1996) and non-Indigenous populations (Perry *et al.* 2000) where loss of control and forced relocation has occurred, such as the experience of First Nations peoples in the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand.

Traditionally, Indigenous Australians lived in hunter–gatherer communities, and often moved around the land and sea to improve access to food and water resources, as well as for important cultural and spiritual ceremonies and responsibilities. Governance was highly ordered, as were social structures and kin relationships. Indigenous communities were concerned with survival and the maintenance of lore and law. Thus, prior to colonisation, Indigenous peoples lived respectfully according to a clear set of values and beliefs, in balance with the land and sea, each other, animal relations, and the world of ancestors, creator beings and spirits (Jonas & Langton 1994).

From the early days of European settlement in the late eighteenth century, the original colonisers brought with them previously unknown diseases (e.g. influenza and small-pox), lifestyles (sedentary), social practices (classist, sexist and racist) and spiritual beliefs (Christianity based on the fear of a God) (Reynolds 1999). The later forced removal by the colonisers of Indigenous children from their families and the establishment of a system of reserves and missions also achieved the systematic imposition of practices, beliefs and values on Aboriginal peoples. (Notably, the South African government used this model in 1911 to establish apartheid, which institutionalised racism in that country for nearly a century.)

The settlers' subsequent policies of extermination and massacre, protection and assimilation, and the outlawing of traditional languages, practices and ceremonies all conspired to annihilate cultural identity and pride. Church and state collaborated to deny Indigenous Australians basic human rights such as freedom of movement and association, and access to paid employment, education and health care (Jonas 2001). It was only in 1967 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were recognised as citizens in their own lands, through a referendum which allowed them the right to vote.

The colonisers also denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples any claim to land ownership by declaring Australia to be *Terra Nullius,* a land without legal owners. With emotional and spiritual wellbeing always closely connected to land ownership for Indigenous peoples, such a policy compounded the sense of dispossession. It was not until 1992 that Native Title was first recognised in the Australian legal system with the High Court's historic Mabo decision. The *Native Title Act 1993* has since been enacted to legitimise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land and waters according to their traditional laws and customs, rights which are already being eroded.

Importantly, colonisation needs to be understood not just in historical terms but also in its contemporary practice. For example, there is substantial evidence that Indigenous Australians continue to be denied such basic human rights as access to appropriate housing, education and health care (Jonas 2004). Thus, while survival and the continuance of some practices and beliefs have been maintained, they have been maintained despite efforts by white settlers over two centuries to extinguish them and by land law as it operates today.

Within this context of survival, there are a number of factors directly related to this process of colonisation which affect the wellbeing of Indigenous women and men. Zubrick *et al.* sum these up as:

■ [Indigenous peoples'] forced removal from their land and its spiritual connection;

■ the systematic undermining and destruction of Indigenous family, cultural and spiritual life, including the forced removal of children;

■ racism and discrimination;

■ markedly poorer physical health;

■ extreme legislative control and intrusion;

■ exclusion from employment, education, health services and housing;

■ substance abuse; and

■ incarceration (Zubrick *et al.* 2004).

However, the preceding data and the detailed summary of the above factors that follows, should not be taken as a representation of 'who Indigenous women and men are', but rather as an analysis of 'what Indigenous women and men experience at the moment'. Indigenous peoples' identity is derived from cultural heritage and an ability to survive, despite the odds, rather than from the negative factors that resulted directly from colonisation.

Institutionalisation and child removal policies

The *Bringing them Home Report* (HREOC 1998) described in detail the effects of the policies of forced removals and separations of children from their families. It particularly emphasised how sustained removals over generations – with little counselling, reunion or other healing forms to balance the loss – has resulted in high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder in affected individuals and families. The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation has identified that 90 per cent of Victorian Koori families have been affected by such policies (VACCHO 1998). This has impacted on social connections, familial cohesion, and community development over generations.

Economic exclusion and entrenched poverty

On most social and economic indicators, Indigenous Australians fare worse than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and recent research suggests that the Federal government policy of 'practical reconciliation' has actually resulted in some health, education and employment statistics worsening for Indigenous Australians (Hunter & Schwab 2003; HREOC 2003). The average annual income for Indigenous Australians, for example, is significantly lower than for other Australians.

Education is generally considered to be a key factor in improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and improved health and socio-economic status are directly linked to educational participation and achievement. Indigenous students engage in education and training at lower rates of participation and achieve lower levels of educational attainment than for all Australian students (Muir 2003). A snapshot of the education and employment status of Indigenous Australians indicates:

- Indigenous youth are more than twice as likely to experience unemployment as non-Indigenous youth (31.4 per cent and 15.4 per cent respectively) and their low educational attainment may be largely attributed to this;

- the high school retention rates for Indigenous youth are only 35 per cent compared to 70 per cent for non-Indigenous young people;

- if Indigenous youth complete Year 10 or Year 11 their employment prospects are increased by 40 per cent and completing Year 12 adds another 13 per cent of employment likelihood; and

- post-secondary education increases employment prospects by between 13 and 23 per cent.

Age structure

The Indigenous population is considerably younger than the non-Indigenous, with 40 per cent of Koori communities under 20 years of age compared with 25 per cent in the total population (AAV 2004). In a public policy context this means that the areas of high priority for Indigenous peoples do not necessarily reflect priorities in the non-Indigenous population. For example, the non-Indigenous population is ageing, therefore public policy and program development must plan for a future to accommodate and support older people. Conversely, special policy and program consideration is required to address a young Indigenous profile. It can be misleading to make comparisons of certain characteristics between populations with a different age structure.

Racism and vilification

Racism is a form of structural violence that adversely affects health in at least three ways, according to Williams and Williams-Morris (2000):

1 institutionalised racism can lead to restricted socio-economic mobility, differential access to resources, lower socio-economic status and poor living conditions;

2 experiences of discrimination can induce physiological and psychological stress reactions; and

3 acceptance of negative cultural stereotypes of inferiority can lead to unfavourable self-evaluations that affect psychological wellbeing.

The high incidence of suicide is an indication of the impact of discrimination on marginalised populations. Suicide rates for Indigenous Australian males and females are over twice those for non-Indigenous males and almost twice the rate for non-Indigenous females:

- The age-specific death rate from suicide for Indigenous males was highest in the 25–34 year age group at 83 deaths, compared with 24 deaths per 100,000 for males in the same age group in the general population.

- For Indigenous males in the 15–24 year age group, deaths by suicide occurred at a rate of 54 deaths, compared with 15 deaths per 100,000 for non-Indigenous males in the same age group.

- For Indigenous females, the rate was highest in the 15–24 year age group at 20 per 100,000, compared with 3 per 100,000 for non-Indigenous females in the same age group (AIHW 2004).

Alcohol and drug abuse

The prevalence of problematic usage of drugs and alcohol in Indigenous communities is well documented, and Indigenous peoples themselves have made renewed calls for culturally appropriate policies and services to combat this growing epidemic (ATSI Women's Task Force on Violence 2000; Pearson 2000). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's Health Policy in 2001 indicated that 'substance abuse in Indigenous communities must be seen in its social and cultural context – where it impacts on the physical, emotional and spiritual health, not just of individuals, but of whole communities'. It is recognised that while many communities urgently need decentralised development support and counselling – as well as a greater range of alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs to address existing substance abuse issues – prevention and early intervention strategies are most urgently needed among young people.

Family violence and sexual abuse

Regular calls to address violence and abuse have been made by Indigenous women and some men over the past twenty years (Atkinson 1990; VIFVT 2003), yet only recently has government begun to listen. There are now a range of reports, programs and strategies currently in operation that seek to build capacity and infrastructure to redress such urgent needs (ATSI Women's Task Force on Violence 2000; VIFVT 2003).

In 1989, the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Working Party stated that domestic (or family) violence, which is frequently associated with alcohol consumption, cannot be attributed to any one cause. In 2003, the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce (VIFVT) agreed with this proposition and endorsed a further proposal put forward by its predecessor, NAHS, which it held still to be true:

> *Domestic violence has its roots in institutionalisation, incarceration, and loss of role, loss of parental role models, low self-esteem and alienation.*
> (VIFVT 2003:16)

Family violence and its relationship to a lack of positive male role models in the Indigenous community is currently being addressed through programs and services that are attempting to address Indigenous men's fatherhood and parenting needs in light of such factors as incarceration, substance abuse, violence and forced separations (VIFVT 2003).

Over-representation of the Indigenous population in the criminal justice system

While the high levels of incarceration of Indigenous men has received attention for some time, the rates of black deaths in custody actually increased after the Royal Commission into such deaths (ATSI Women's Task Force on Violence 2000). Since the Royal Commission, the greatest relative increase in incarceration has been for Indigenous women. In June 2003, Indigenous women were being incarcerated at a rate 19.3 times that of non-Indigenous women. Similarly, Indigenous young people (up to the age of 18) have been consistently over-represented in criminal justice processes. In June 2002, Indigenous juveniles were detained at a rate almost 19 times that of non-Indigenous juveniles.

Loss of traditional Aboriginal male and female roles and status

With the general erosion of Indigenous men's roles, women have had to take over the bulk of leadership and decision-making functions, which has placed an undue burden on their emotional, mental and financial resources (Hammill 1999). However, a raft of Indigenous men's programs and services has recently been set up to try to redress this imbalance. Further, regional, state and national Indigenous leadership initiatives have sought to address such concerns, and they are discussed more fully in this report.

Despite the Odds: A Strong Foundation

Despite the significant and enduring assaults on Indigenous Australians and their families and culture, there is an overriding strength that has facilitated survival and growth.

It is this same strength of Indigenous peoples that forms the foundation stone of the future and the potential that lies ahead.

(Dr Rob Moodie, 2004, at the launch of the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy)

HOLISTIC APPROACHES AND RESPONSES TO WELLBEING IN KOORI COMMUNITIES

Holistic approaches and responses to wellbeing in Koori communities

Indigenous peoples – 'one mob', different experiences – all have different life-stories. Yet many regularly refer to themselves as 'one mob', as having common (not stereotypical) experiences, and as all 'coming from the one Mother Earth'. This means that spirituality and the essence of our connection to land and sea is a common link between differing cultural and language groupings (ATSIC 1994).

Indigenous communities often identify in groupings according to where they live – whether in urban, rural or remote communities (each with their own distinct experiences). Individual and family experiences within these groupings vary greatly (Jonas 1994). Geographic and cultural distinctions, experiences of colonisation and history also differ and inform identity. Some peoples were forcibly removed from their homelands and families, and have grown up away from their traditional ties. Yet each person is no less 'Aboriginal' or no less 'Torres Strait Islander' than the next because of these different experiences and histories (HREOC 1998).

Indigenous peoples in Victoria have unique cultures, languages and experiences, and have endured considerable persecution through the processes of colonisation. In spite of this systematic persecution, they have survived and continue to practise their languages, ceremonies and customs, as well as to respect and observe their beliefs and values today.

While there are many complex factors that impact upon the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous Victorians, such factors will not necessarily prohibit successful prevention and intervention programs. Nor do such factors solely define Indigenous experience. Indigenous communities have many strengths, including respect for Elders and cultural processes, a rekindling of language and cultural expression, artistic richness, sporting prowess, humour, contributions to scholarly and political pursuits, and environmental protection (which Indigenous communities hold dear). These strengths form an important foundation on which to continue the rebuilding of individual and community spiritual health and wellbeing along holistic lines.

This holistic understanding of social and emotional wellbeing acknowledges the role of culture, history and traumatic experiences and their impact upon the mental and physical health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such an approach seeks to ensure not only that theoretical and diagnostic criteria are addressed and made more appropriate, but that policy-making and implementation systems are also designed in a more holistic fashion (OATSIH 2004). In this way, social and spiritual wellbeing concepts and programs imply that history, power relations, culture and experience are all taken into account in the development of policies and the delivery of services.

Thus, nine guiding principles were developed by the Commonwealth Government when putting together its National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Policy for Australia to inform policy development for all Aboriginal health initiatives. The principles are that:

1 the Aboriginal concept of health is holistic;

2 self-determination is central;

3 Aboriginal experiences of trauma and loss must be recognised;

4 culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services;

5 the human rights and the Indigenous rights of Aboriginal people must be affirmed;

6 the impact of racism and stigma must be acknowledged;

7 the centrality of kinship must be recognised;

8 there must be recognition of different communities and their different needs; and

9 the strengths of Aboriginal people must be recognised (Swan & Raphael 1995).

These principles were endorsed and supported by the Koori Task Group at VicHealth as the principles that should inform the development of strategies to address the promotion of emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Kooris in Victoria. The planned activities, therefore:

■ were developed and implemented by Kooris;

■ were linked with existing activity in Koori health and community services;

■ built upon the capacity in Koori communities for the sustainability of the programs and activities;

■ were supported partnerships between Koori communities and mainstream, with preferential support to the community end of the partnership;

■ ensured that the mainstream took responsibility for discrimination; and

■ promoted self-determination for all individuals and communities.

It is critical that non-Indigenous mental health systems and workers respect Indigenous community values and aspirations, and ensure that they are taken into account in their operations and policy making. It is also critical for researchers and policy makers to ensure that Indigenous health, and the values assumed in Indigenous medicine and healing, are considered in their own right, rather than merely as a reactive part of Western health systems.

Over the long term, workers will need highly developed cross-cultural and translational skills to know what interventions are appropriate when and for whom (Timpson *et al.* 1988). Indigenous beliefs around medicine, healing, illness and wellness also need to form part of the diagnostic and theoretical criteria, rather than non-Indigenous mental health programs being made 'culturally appropriate' merely by appointing Indigenous workers to hand out the medication at the treatment point (Phillips 2003). Policy makers and service deliverers may wish to support initiatives that Indigenous peoples identify and establish in relation to the development of such processes, protocols and paradigms.

Rather than treating merely the physical or mental aspects of health, so often focused on in Western health paradigms, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities have reasonably and clearly argued for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness on social, emotional, cultural and spiritual levels as well. Further, 'just as the cycle of self-destruction is a process which has unfolded [over time as a result of colonisation], healing and change is a process, not merely a strategy' (Phillips 2003:165).

Indigenous-controlled programs need to operate at a pace and use methods that are not overly bureaucratic and which value the input of Indigenous communities. They should be tailored to the community at hand rather than imposing the timelines of government, or other, policies and programs.

Healing and change are possible in Indigenous communities, as can be evidenced by the exciting and positive projects described in this report. It is now the task of those in policy and service delivery to move with communities in true partnerships and respectful working relationships to progress and consolidate this work.

KOORI LEADERSHIP IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Koori leadership in the national context

In almost all areas of Indigenous affairs, leadership has been identified as a priority. Leadership projects and activities encourage personal growth, enhance self-confidence and build self-esteem in individuals, which in turn enhances mental health and wellbeing and strengthens communities. Well-designed leadership initiatives can also provide hope for Indigenous peoples to work towards fulfilling dreams and aspirations, particularly so among Indigenous youth.

Active participation by Indigenous peoples in leadership projects and activities can create other benefits too, such as opportunities in employment and training. For example, the education sector has prioritised the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students through various policy initiatives, and aims to involve Indigenous peoples in decision making and leadership for Indigenous education as an essential strategy (DEST 2004). The vocational education sector has developed a range of scholarships and training incentives to encourage Indigenous peoples to take up leadership roles within their communities (ANTA 2004). And the Australian Institute of Sport has fostered the development of Indigenous sporting athletes, coaches, managers and leaders through the Indigenous Sport Program (AIS 2004).

The implementation of such strategies and services has been the subject of intense debate and scrutiny both by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. However, it is widely agreed that if Indigenous children and adults do not have access to suitable and effective education and training, their ability to lead fulfilling and productive lives will be severely affected. Thus, developing Indigenous leaders to advance Indigenous interests is essential if future generations are to have the resources required to do so. It is an ongoing challenge for all Australians to ensure that such equity, policy and moral objectives are met in a culturally safe and appropriate manner.

It is also important to acknowledge that Indigenous Australians have markedly different leadership styles to non-Indigenous Australians. Leadership traditionally has been characterised by having Elders in cultural guidance roles; group and community contributions to governance and decision making; consensus decision-making styles; and an awareness of, and being responsive to, community needs without prior reference to ego or power-driven motives.

Father Tolowa Nona, a Torres Strait Islander community leader, describes eloquently the leadership style in Indigenous communities:

> *In our culture, a good leader is one who walks out the front and his people follow. A great leader is one who walks beside his people with them. But the greatest leader of all is the one who you will never see.*
>
> (Nona 2000)

He proposes that good leaders do not necessarily have to be in the spotlight; that, in fact, leadership is about working with people, being one of them and moving forward together. This is the essence of what many Indigenous peoples understand effective community leadership to be.

However, it can also be said that contemporary leadership styles may not always reflect such an ideal. Indigenous leaders today find themselves working within changing social, economic and political environments, and have had to adapt their styles to account for present realities. But working with Indigenous communities requires an awareness of differing leadership styles, the capacity to be open and willing to learn, and an ability to take into account many community perspectives, rather than just siding with one section of the community.

As Karen Milward and Daphne Yarram suggest, despite the burden of colonisation Indigenous peoples retain an optimism that stems, for a large part, from the leadership programs which are taking up the challenge of addressing the very real spiritual, emotional and material conditions of Aboriginal peoples:

> *We have suffered the atrocities of the past and taken on what Governments have thrown at us for many years. Still, we continue to survive! We keep on fighting for our basic human rights as Indigenous Australians to hopefully one day see the pot of gold at the end of that colourful vibrant rainbow!*
>
> *The rainbow only shows itself every once in a while and tends to fade into the distance very quickly, but soon enough it rises up to give us hope for a future that pushes us to continue this journey of self-development and awareness towards recognising our spiritual growth that is often supported by those that are closest to us – our families!*
>
> *We need to keep on fighting, we need to gather our strength in numbers, we need to be united on all issues – we need new leaders to take us forward into the 21st century so our hopes and dreams do not become one very big grey cloud that hovers above, but a colourful, vibrant rainbow that continues on and on and on…We can't give up, we must push ourselves forward so that our children can find their rightful place in today's society without grief, without racism and without hatred!*
>
> (Karen Milward and Daphne Yarram, Conference 21: Positioning Our Future, Workshops)

OTHER NATIONAL AND STATE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

There are many different Indigenous programs presently available throughout Australia, all at varying stages of development, emphasis, and geographic reach and location. While many Indigenous organisations, individuals and communities often passionately support leadership development in their everyday operations, and in more informal ways, what follows is a snapshot of some of the more specific programs available.

General leadership programs include:

- the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre which has developed a successful program of accredited training in leadership theory, styles and implementation. Intensive one-week courses are offered in regional and urban areas. A partnership between the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and corporate, philanthropic and government supporters, the Centre is fast developing its profile and reach; and

- the Lingiari Foundation based in Sydney which is an organisation committed to developing leadership within Indigenous communities.

Elders' leadership and cultural guidance programs include:

- in Victoria, the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES), which provides a point of reference for engaging Koori Elders in community affairs;

- in NSW, Elders Gatherings, which have successfully refocused community attention on the role and place of Elders in maintaining social cohesion and healing;

- Elders Councils or Groups, which are also found in many Indigenous communities either in an informal or formal capacity. In Brisbane, Cairns and other communities, there are specific Elders Councils; and

- Elders playing increasingly important leadership roles in the Koori Court in Victoria, and in Elders Justice Groups in some remote communities.

Women's leadership programs include:

- Black Women's Action in Education Foundation based in Canberra;

- a one-off program run by the Young Women's Christian Association for Indigenous young women, held in Sydney in 2001;

- an initiative of the Australian Labor Party that aims to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in politics for networking, mentoring and leadership development; and

- Koori Women Mean Business, a Victorian-based program providing support and access for Koori women to build their capabilities as businesswomen.

Youth leadership projects include:

- the National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia, whose two key concepts are creating safe spaces for Indigenous young people, and modelling right relations in life and community affairs;

- the Foundation for Young Australians, which has run young people's leadership programs specifically aimed at developing Indigenous young leaders. The first was aptly named 'Leadership for the 41st Millennium' and was held in Brisbane in 2000;

- government initiatives such as national Indigenous youth roundtables aimed at bringing young Indigenous people together to discuss issues that affect them, yet such initiatives are advisory in nature only. There have also been some key national and international conferences in the past decade at which Indigenous young people have caucused and developed plans of action. Key among these have been the Second World Indigenous Youth Conference (WIYC) in Darwin and the World Indigenous Education Conference in Woollongong, both in 1993; the Fourth WIYC in Sweden in 1996; and the Fifth WIYC in Aotearoa in 1998; and

- Dulin Incorporated – an Indigenous young people's mentoring service.

The leadership projects discussed in this report and included in the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy are based in the following organisations:

- Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation;

- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL);

- Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-operative (VAYSAR);

- Rumbalara Football Netball Club;

- Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative; and

- Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation.*

Note: The report on this project and its outcomes is not included in this publication due to the development of the project taking place at a much later date.

KOORI COMMUNITIES
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
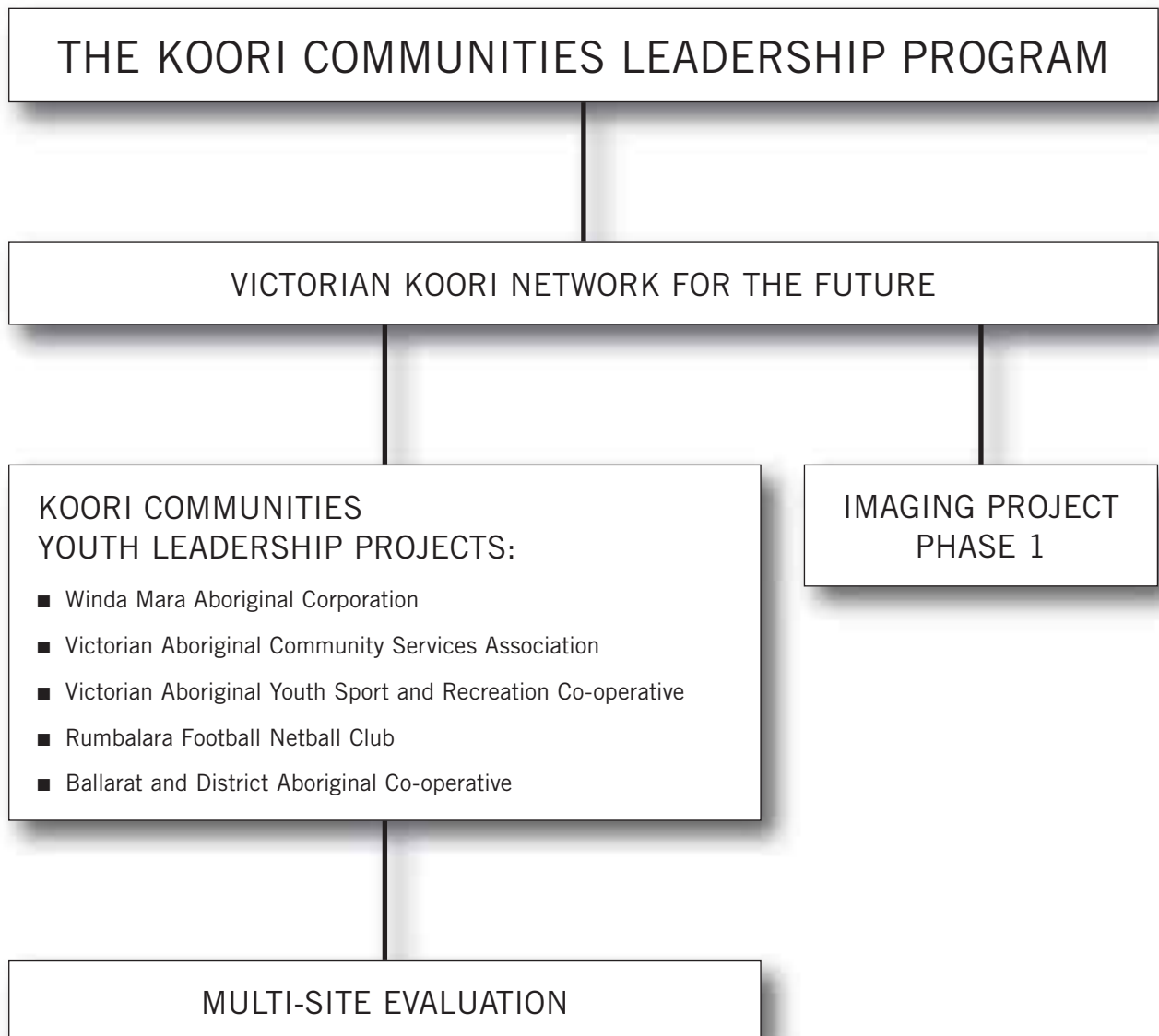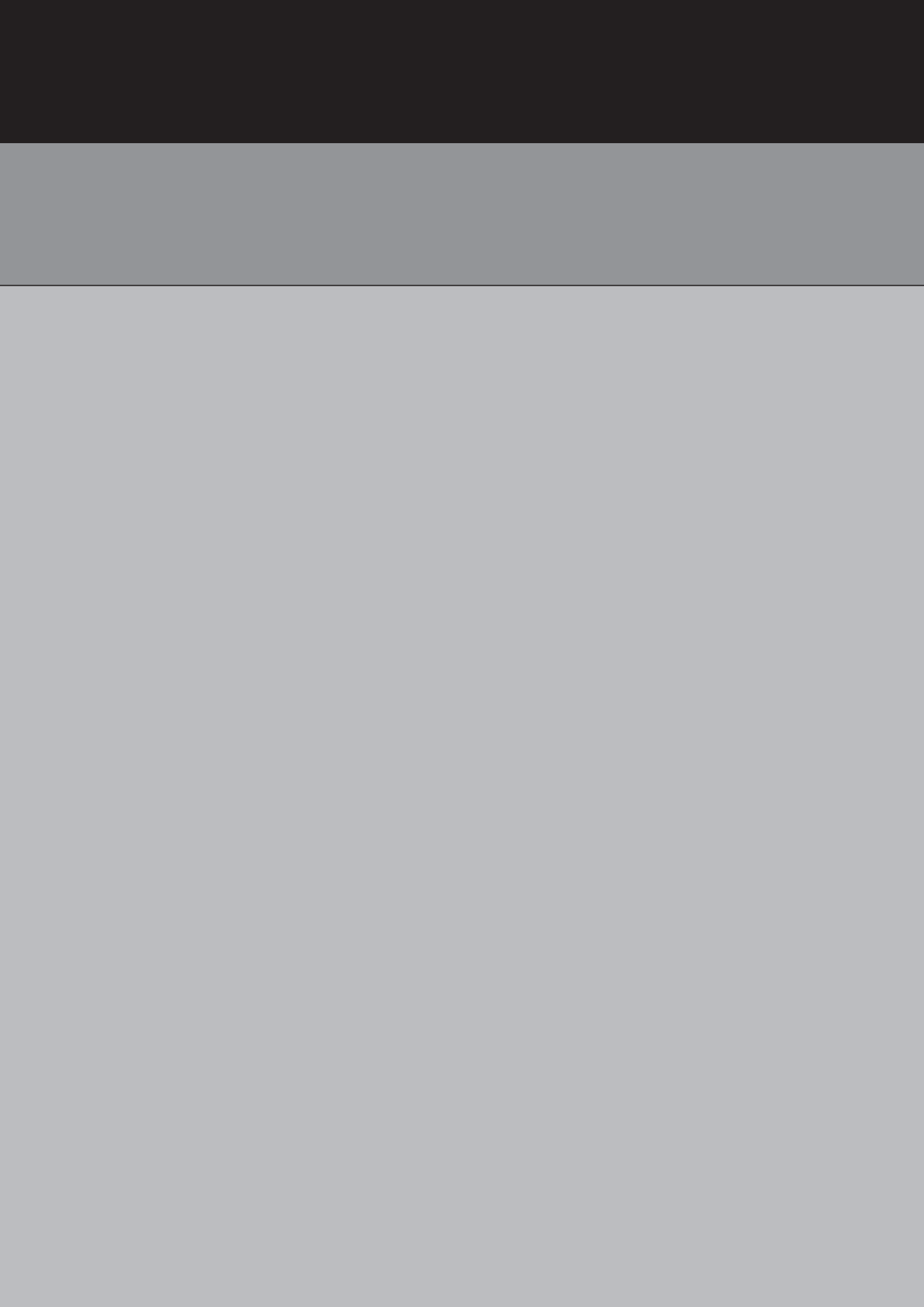
Koori Communities Leadership Program

THEMES

The Koori Task Group, made up of community leaders and academics, led the comprehensive consultation, which identified three major themes as critical to the promotion of emotional and spiritual wellbeing within the Indigenous population:

- **A long-term vision is central to the future strength and capacity of communities.** Such a vision needs to go beyond the confines of government-funding cycles, to be inclusive of all communities and their members and to address community agendas. It needs to encompass the next thirty years during which time communities must develop the skills to work toward self-determination, economic independence, strengthening infrastructure and building capacity to realise the vision and to plan for an economically and socially sustainable future.

- **Leadership is critical to the long-term survival and growth of Koori communities.** Indigenous models of leadership are complex, based on cultural frameworks and holistic approaches. They draw on the wisdom and experience of older people and integrate the spiritual with the political. Leadership in Koori communities is not just about the work of prominent members; it is about all members having a diversity of roles and responsibilities, as well as opportunities to develop skills and a vision to work towards a stronger lasting future. It is essentially about building the individual and collective capacities of all community members.

- **Young people are an important group in realising community visions and building community capacity.** Koori communities have proportionally much higher numbers of young people than the rest of the population with 57 per cent of Victoria's Indigenous peoples under the age of 25 compared with 39 per cent in the non-Indigenous population (AAV 2004). Young Kooris currently have limited opportunities for education and vocational training, so any investment in developing their skills is an investment in the community planners and leaders of the future. Young people need to have hope, opportunities and choices, which they can then combine with the relevant skills and resources to succeed.

These themes were incorporated within a program aimed at integrating the promotion of emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Koori communities with the future of leadership in Koori communities on a state-wide and community level. As a result, the program funded by VicHealth included the range of activity shown in the following diagram. Supported by the Koori Task Group, these activities were seen as a way of enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous young people while at the same time addressing the challenges for the future survival and growth of Koori culture, community and self-determination.

THE KOORI COMMUNITIES LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

VICTORIAN KOORI NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

**KOORI COMMUNITIES
YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECTS:**

- Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association
- Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-operative
- Rumbalara Football Netball Club
- Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative

**IMAGING PROJECT
PHASE 1**

MULTI-SITE EVALUATION

THE PROJECTS

The projects

VICTORIAN KOORI NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

The Victorian Koori Network for the Future was established in response to the identified need for time and resources to undertake long-term planning in Victoria's Indigenous communities. The key focus of the Network is to build on community strengthening of Indigenous individuals in the areas of the arts, culture, sports, education, child care, the law, economic development, and health.

The Network was set up as a state-wide 'think tank', with an Indigenous membership of more than 300, representing Indigenous Elders, academics and leaders in community arts, health, the law, and sport. It provides co-ordination between Indigenous leadership initiatives, and liaison with peak Indigenous and mainstream organisations, bodies and industries.

During 2002–03, the Network consolidated its role as the 'umbrella' body for the five community youth leadership projects, which formed part of the Koori Communities Leadership Program. It provided direction, support and advocacy, as well as organising regular forums on Indigenous leadership and current community issues. During this period, the Network co-ordinated several meetings within Victoria's Indigenous communities to identify:

■ current gaps in leadership and management development;

■ potential opportunities to encourage leadership development;

■ existing leadership programs that encourage Indigenous participation; and

■ other forums that the Network should be co-ordinating for Indigenous people.

In 2003, networks and partnerships to facilitate young Indigenous people's access to employment and to mentors were put in place through lunch-time forums with the Victorian Building Commission, the Legal Aid Commission and the Eureka Project. These forums were based on particular themes, namely, leadership and the media, employment and a young people's caucus group.

The forums served several functions. Not only were they building social capital and helping to promote the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Victoria's Indigenous community members, but they were also enabling self-determination through better future planning. Participants at the forums recommended that an Indigenous Leadership Conference be held so that Kooris could have a more detailed and broader discussion on Victorian Indigenous leadership issues.

In November 2003, the Network organised and convened 'Conference 21: Positioning our Future' over three days in Melbourne. Attended by more than 300 Victorian Indigenous representatives, the conference provided a forum where participants were able to:

■ share their experiences and knowledge with Maori and Canadian First Nations peoples on strategies of working with nation–state governments to achieve agreements such as the historic Canada/Mohawk Agreement of 1991;

■ share information about the Australian and Victorian status of Indigenous peoples with specific reference to the conference themes of governance, imaging, history of path, leadership in a cultural framework, assimilation or integration, and capital – an economic base and social capital;

■ listen to Victorian leaders, and emerging leaders within their communities, and to have a voice on issues of importance to Indigenous people both nationally and internationally;

■ showcase the leadership programs that had been operating across Victoria in the past 12 to 18 months;

- plan directions and priorities for the year 2004; and

- develop collaborative partnerships and networks beyond those which currently exist.

Other recommendations included holding regular luncheons, developing a newsletter and establishing a membership database.

Now known as the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network, the Network has strengthened its role and is supported as part of the newly funded Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy. Details of this Strategy, are included in the 'Future Directions' section of this report.

IMAGING PROJECT

A focus on Koori image, identity and culture is seen as critical for the future survival and growth of Koori culture and communities. The promotion of positive and realistic Koori images will strengthen communities and foster an environment in which individuals, families and communities can develop coping skills to deal with the challenges facing Koori culture and communities. A focus on positive images will also assist in diminishing racist attitudes existing within the broader community.

The community consultation phase of this project, plus a literature review undertaken by the Monash University Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies (CAIS), was completed and a new project is currently being developed to build on this earlier work.

MULTI-SITE EVALUATION

An evaluation of the Koori Communities Youth Leadership Projects was undertaken by the CAIS. The process provided a co-ordinated approach to the overall evaluation of the five community leadership projects. It also identified common themes and models of good practice for developing leadership skills and opportunities for young Kooris within the context of national and international Indigenous leadership models. In addition, the evaluation process provided support and resources to the five community organisations running the leadership projects to assist them in monitoring and evaluating their individual projects. The findings of the multi-site evaluation can be found in the detailed descriptions of the five projects that follow.

KOORI COMMUNITIES YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECTS

Five community-based leadership projects were developed by the following organisations: Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation; Rumbalara Football Netball Club; Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd; Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-operative; and Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative. The projects were developed and led by a range of metropolitan and rural Indigenous organisations, with local Koori communities identifying priorities for action within their own regions.

While each of the projects is unique to the individuals, families, and communities involved, all reflect strong themes of:

- strengthening culture, community and family;

- drawing on the skills and experience of Elders;

- concentrating on young people;

- mentoring by older community members; and

- accessing the relevant skills and training from the broader non-Indigenous sector.

A total of 250 young Kooris have been directly involved in the projects with an additional 250 providing project support, community mentoring and leadership. However, these figures do not adequately reflect the extensive involvement of families and other service providers in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations who offered encouragement, resources and partnership with the projects.

There are innumerable stories of positive and memorable experiences for all of those involved including individual participants, Elders, project leaders, community members and high-profile mentors.

> *It was fantastic to see so many students take responsibility and care for the community. The involvement of the whole community has to be congratulated also…many people would have been proud to see this project through…*
>
> (Community Member, Community Dreaming, Winda Mara)

Each project managed to reach beyond the groups of individuals at various sites, and include extended family and social networks in various aspects of the work and its celebration. Elders, in particular, enjoyed the contact with the younger women and men, who developed a greater appreciation of the importance of positive leadership in the community.

The outcomes of the projects have facilitated extensive skills development, as well as clearly demonstrating the benefits of investment in community action planning for the present and the future. These increased levels of competence are illustrated in the more confident and active community network building that has been undertaken.

There has also been significant involvement in the projects by parents, families, teachers, health and welfare professionals and other service providers in the local areas. Parents, for example, have described their amazement at the achievements of their children in the various community development projects implemented across the state.

> *Fantastic program – great result, real growth for the kids, based on their passion. [These projects should be made] an ongoing program across the country.*
>
> (Community Member, Community Dreaming, Winda Mara)

Over the period of development and implementation of the five Koori leadership projects, two additional initiatives were funded by the Premier's Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee. One of these projects, based in Gippsland, has as a focal point the Bataluk Cultural Trail, which is of significant cultural relevance for the region. The second, the Koori Arts Project, is based at Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-Op. Ltd and aims to increase access for young Kooris to participate in arts organisations and activities across Victoria.

The following section of this report focuses on the achievements of the five Koori Communities Youth Leadership Projects instigated in the first phase of the program during 2001–2003.

COMMUNITY DREAMING PROJECT

The Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation is well known for the broad range of programs it offers the community in the Glenelg region of south-western Victoria. It developed the Community Dreaming Project to enhance the self-confidence, resilience and leadership skills of young people living in the Shire of Glenelg. The Corporation worked in partnership with local schools and a range of community and business organisations on the project, which sought to reach 50 Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. It was designed to offer opportunities to develop a community development project through experiential learning and a facilitator approach to leadership.

Project aims

Community Dreaming aimed to improve the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the Winda Mara community through:

- the development of an enterprise learning leadership program that was able to draw on existing resources and networks for support;

- the facilitation of an enterprising culture among young Indigenous people in the shire;

- the use of action-learning techniques that focused on the growth of self-esteem, confidence and leadership abilities of young Kooris;

- the mentoring of young people by existing community leaders to encourage leadership succession planning for the community;

- the strengthening of family relationships;

- the development of an integrated program that offered personal, social, cultural and economic development for young Indigenous people based on their vision for the future; and

- the establishment of a core network of youth workers and teachers who had a sufficient level of competence to ensure the continuation of the enterprise learning approach.

Activities undertaken

The Community Dreaming Project worked with 30 Indigenous and 35 non-Indigenous young people from secondary schools, employment groups and community job programs in the district. The leadership facilitators were drawn from the Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation, Heywood and District Secondary College, Portland Secondary College and community health services. The program was supported by more than 25 local businesses and reached in excess of 500 people in the community through the twelve community development projects.

There were three distinct phases for the Community Dreaming Project. In the preparatory stage, young people explored the relevance and meaning of community. They attended an intensive leadership development camp at which the fundamentals of effective participation and leadership were explored. They were also introduced to a broad network of community agencies, and then required to develop their understanding of the function and relationship within and between those organisations.

> *In the beginning I didn't think that it was a good idea because I thought it would be hard to do, at the end I was very proud of our achievements and it wasn't as hard as I thought.*
> (Participant, Community Dreaming, Winda Mara)

In the second stage, the young people were asked to identify an area of interest based on their personal experience of, and research into, community organisations. Working in small teams in areas of common interest, participants designed and then managed their own community projects with the support of leadership facilitators. A substantial level of community activity was generated by these community projects, including:

- planning, implementing, marketing and managing music, dance, travel and entertainment activities for young people of all ages;

- organising venues, catering, insurance, adult supervision for children and young people of all ages to raise funds for local organisations, including the Portland Housing Program for young people, local aged care facilities, and local day care centres for people with disabilities;

- fund-raising carwashes, 'bad hair' days, raffles, marathons for charitable donations to the Portland Hospital, Royal Children's Hospital and the Anti-Cancer Council;

- fund-raising casual dress days for the refurbishment of community resources, including the Lake Condah Mission;

- researching, resourcing, designing and publishing of the school yearbook;

- awareness-raising campaigns for SIDS and people with disabilities; and

- identifying, and advocating for, the establishment of social support groups.

Community Dreaming is good because it gives people the skills, ability and confidence to be able to run and organise something...
(Participant, Community Dreaming, Winda Mara)

Strengthening of links with other agencies has been fantastic and useful in other areas of my work.
(Facilitator, Community Dreaming, Winda Mara)

In Community Dreaming's final stage, a community celebration was planned, organised and then attended by families, local businesses, schools, and community and government organisations. This forum provided the opportunity for the young people involved to be awarded their certificates of participation.

For the celebratory event, each of the teams was required to prepare a presentation that included the background to, and development of, their community projects, and a report on their experience of teamwork and leadership. The feedback from those who attended the celebration was overwhelmingly positive:

Congratulations on a wonderful project. The participants clearly found it rewarding and the partnerships forged will be valuable in our community.
(Pam Stringer, local community worker)

...all the young people involved impressed with their enthusiasm, commitment and achievements. It was great to see young people teaching others about the contributions they can make to their community...
(Glenelg Community member)

Key outcomes

Benefits for young people

The 65 young people involved in the project developed skills in teamwork, leadership and communication, and gained extensive experience in community participation. A significant growth in the self-confidence and resilience of most participants was also reported, with many claiming they had gained a greater understanding of community and how they can contribute positively to its growth and development.

Indigenous ownership and control over the development and implementation of the Community Dreaming Project has helped to establish a sense of belonging for both young people and the community. The training and experience in planning, implementing and evaluating community development activities has enabled participants to be more flexible and persistent and to introduce change as required. All of those involved have demonstrated a greater awareness of networking strategies with the wider community, and gained significant exposure to a diversity of organisations.

Benefits for community

The relationships forged through the networking opportunities created by the project have increased the trust and confidence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the Glenelg region. Both communities have been rewarded with tangible results that were achieved by the fund-raising and advocacy efforts of many of the small teams. Community Dreaming also provided further opportunities for reconciliation because it showcased the effectiveness of Indigenous leadership.

In addition, the project provided the opportunity to encourage and affirm the contributions of young people and to offer them a more positive portrayal in the local media. It stimulated the establishment of new social support groups and promoted cross-sector work, which has enhanced co-operation between local health, education, youth and social service agencies.

Finally, the Community Dreaming Project generated a strong interest from local businesses, community organisations and schools to participate in the program in an ongoing way. The learning approach has been incorporated into the secondary school curriculum and is now a recognised subject, with the course name 'Community Dreaming', in the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning.

KOORIE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL) is recognised for its contribution to the Koori community throughout Victoria. VACSAL's interest in the Koori Communities Youth Leadership Program stems from its commitment to providing Koori Victorians with the skills needed to respond to a rapidly shifting social, political and economic landscape.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Institute of Studies 1998 report, *Indigenous Leadership: A Concept Study,* significantly influenced the content of VACSAL's Leadership Program. Helen Kennedy, the co-ordinator, believes that this concept study represented a watershed in Aboriginal affairs because it asked thousands of Indigenous peoples throughout Australia what their communities most needed:

> *It clearly demonstrated the need for a range of leadership programs to be developed to meet the particular and unique circumstances of Aboriginal people at national, state and regional levels.*
>
> (Helen Kennedy, Program Co-ordinator, VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program)

As a result, VACSAL worked in partnership with RMIT University to develop an award-winning project that offered accredited learning to young Kooris in the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne.

Project aims

The project aimed to improve the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of participants and their communities through:

- encouraging and supporting young people to participate in community life, to value their cultural diversity and to feel proud in sharing their experience and knowledge with Koori and mainstream organisations and communities;

- creating opportunities for skills development among young people;

- providing an accredited leadership training course;

- encouraging community project development;

- facilitating mentoring by community Elders and community leaders; and

- integrating the promotion of emotional and spiritual wellbeing with the future of leadership in communities on a state-wide and community level.

Activities undertaken

The leadership project provided four modules that were nationally accredited in the Diploma of Community Services at RMIT University. The key course components incorporated an examination of the major issues influencing Aboriginal affairs. This included a forum at which future Koori leaders could share their ideas, experiences and skills around meeting the challenges facing the Koori community. The course relied heavily on contemporary Aboriginal culture and continuously sought to reinforce cultural identity and promote self-esteem. So as to maximise the opportunities for participants to gain exposure to the diversity of experience in Aboriginal communities, six intensive residential training modules were held in various regional and rural settings. This facilitated direct contact with local Aboriginal Elders, leaders and community members about the issues and challenges relevant to that community.

Participants were provided with a range of opportunities to develop and enhance their leadership, policy development, management and communication skills, particularly in public speaking and working with the media. They were offered contacts with key Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders from a wide range of business, community organisations and government bodies at state and national levels.

Key outcomes

This project won the Most Innovative Training Program of the Year at the Victorian State Training Awards. It also achieved national recognition from the Australian National Training Authority when it received the Australian Training Initiative Award. It was commended, too, both by RMIT University and VicHealth.

The project clearly demonstrated its capacity to engage young community members in leadership training, experiential activity and mentor support. Participants also experienced significant personal development evidenced by their increased self-confidence and improved communication skills, particularly in public forums.

> *This program has given me the confidence…and I have learnt more about people's struggles. I hope to take up the fight in the near future.*
> (Justin, Participant, VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program)

In addition, both family structure and broader community leadership have been strengthened and enhanced through developing the skills of young community members:

> *This course has built my self-confidence and changed my attitude within myself and the community.* (Jyka, Participant, VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program)

Community organisations are now recognising the value of the leadership project and have begun to seek the involvement of graduates from the course in local community programs. However, perhaps the most significant outcome of this project stems from the effect it has had on individual participants. One-third of the young women and men involved have opted for further education, while the achievements of others have been acknowledged by their families and workplaces, and in cultural and community settings. The participants have also formed strong connections and continue to 'network' with each other in their own working and community environments. All recognise the importance of their active participation in Aboriginal affairs over the next decade and into the future.

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL YOUTH SPORT AND RECREATION CO-OPERATIVE LTD
'THREE TRIBES' LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The 'Three Tribes' Leadership Project was developed through a partnership between the Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Co-operative Ltd (VAYSAR) and Athlete Development Australia (ADA). Indigenous and non-Indigenous sportspeople worked alongside young community leaders from Glenroy, Northlands Secondary College and Dandenong to encourage them to explore their own project ideas, maintain their focus on leadership and demonstrate how they could become better leaders in their own communities.

The project, designed to develop a model for information exchange and linkages between the three participating groups, was founded on traditional Indigenous community relationships within the Melbourne metropolitan region. It provided an opportunity for different communities to gather and share ideas, knowledge and community events.

The project targeted young Kooris from the three Melbourne communities. It provided them with formal leadership training, and supported various mentoring processes that enabled them to undertake leadership activities in local communities.

Project aims

The project aimed to improve the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of participants and their communities through:

- identifing and utilising positive role models among young Kooris;
- providing training as leadership facilitators;
- resourcing and supporting the leadership facilitators to undertake experiential leadership training with young people; and
- supporting the development of leadership activities in local communities.

Activities undertaken

The 'Three Tribes' Leadership Project was guided by a committee made up of representatives from each community, VAYSAR and ADA. This committee was responsible for the nomination and selection of high-profile role models and community leaders to participate in the project. Once identified, these role models and community leaders undertook an accredited intensive leadership training course, which was then offered to the young community leaders selected by the regional communities.

Following the course, the young people met at Parliament House, Melbourne, to share ideas about their experience of leadership. They also identified a range of potential community development projects for their regions. The leadership facilitators and representatives from VAYSAR and ADA then provided ongoing support and mentoring to the young community leaders in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their community development projects, which included:

1   The establishment of a working canteen at Glenroy Koori Open Door Education (KODE). This project resulted in major infrastructure, program and cultural change to the KODE campus. A breakfast program can now be offered and the facilities utilised for ongoing food education purposes. The school community now has access to healthy food on the school grounds at affordable prices.

2   Northlands Secondary College sought out projects that would increase the self-awareness of Indigenous young people through participation in cultural activities. This, combined with a significant motivation to make a visible contribution to the broader community, resulted in the renovation of the local soup bus used to feed homeless people.

3   The Dandenong project focused on cultural pride, community confidence and connection, and culminated in the organisation and demonstration of Marngarook, a traditional game of football. This was complemented by an Elders' welcoming ceremony and traditional and modern dancing, a focal event for the region. Marngarook also reached the broader Victorian community through the interest of the Australian Football League (AFL), which invited the group to conduct a demonstration game prior to an AFL match at the Telstra Dome.

Key outcomes

The 'Three Tribes' Leadership Project has had a tangible and lasting impact on communities and organisations. It captured the attention of many of the young women and men involved, as well as the interest of the broader community. It worked by strengthening and enhancing family structure and Indigenous community leadership through the development of new skills for young people across a range of sectors – sport, arts, culture, health, justice and education.

At an individual level, the project provided the young women and men with opportunities for skills growth and development. They reported that their involvement had given them improved self-esteem, greater confidence, dedication and perseverance, self-awareness, a sense of achievement, positive emotions, goals identification and a realisation of their capacity to make a positive contribution to the community. Their interpersonal communication skills were enhanced through extensive exposure to a diverse range of people from the industrial, business, sporting and community sectors. Participants were able to diversify their existing skills through their exposure to new competencies in a range of areas, including budget management, project planning, delegation, role identification, setting goals, acquiring information, meeting management, submission writing awareness, and reading and writing skills.

KOORI YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The Rumbalara Football Netball Club (RFNC), located in the Goulburn Valley, is well known for offering a range of activities that reflect its organisational mission to:

strengthen the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of our people, promote recreation, and enhance public understanding of and reconciliation with our culture.

The leadership project was developed within the context of Rumbalara Football Netball Club's overall health promotion program for its community in the Goulburn Valley region.

Project aims

The project was designed to complement the RFNC Healthy Lifestyles Program. Using a mentoring approach to leadership activities, the project aimed to provide emotional, spiritual and cultural supports for young people in pursuing their personal growth, employment options and community aspirations through:

■ assisting them to pursue personal goals in terms of leadership, and professional and personal development;

■ building self-esteem and confidence;

■ increasing their knowledge of, and participation in, community networks and organisations;

■ supporting them at the critical stage of making key choices for the future;

■ developing incentives for them to become role models and mentors for others;

- increasing their participation in the Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the Healthy Lifestyles Program; and

- empowering them to contribute to, and become active in, the community.

Essentially, the RFNC aimed to equip young people with the necessary skills to take responsibility for their own lives, to practise these skills within a safe group environment, and to apply them to the Koori community as a whole.

Activities undertaken

A broad range of opportunities enabled young people to participate in a program that increased their understanding and experience of mentoring and leadership for the Koori community. The use of an existing leadership structure – of captains, coaches, and team leaders – allowed for the integration of new activities into the ongoing Healthy Lifestyles Program. A focus on assisting young people to feel safe enough (free from racism) to function in private, community and public settings underpinned much of the leadership project.

Understanding mentoring and leadership

Rumbalara Football Netball Club worked in partnership with Athlete Development Australia to design and facilitate a mentor training project to demonstrate how the principles of leadership could be applied to a range of settings, including the family, the sporting arena, the workplace and the community.

The mentor training program consisted of three modules which explored:

1 the nature and role of an effective mentor;

2 developing effective communication skills and relationships; and

3 understanding the key issues and needs of young Koori women and men.

Through their participation in the project 'young people were able to reflect on their values and beliefs about the future':

> *It gave us the opportunity to encourage them to see a broader range of pathways and consider their options for a future in education and employment that they may not have thought about before the project…*
>
> (Joyce Doyle, Project Co-ordinator, Koori Youth Leadership Project, Rumbalara Football Netball Club)

Applying mentoring and leadership

An intensive weekend 'leadership challenge program' gave participants the opportunity to experience the importance of mentoring and of leadership skills. Facilitated by Athlete Development Australia, the program was attended by participants from Rumbalara and Ballarat Koori leadership groups.

The weekend intensive consisted of two modules, which were designed to encourage participants to apply learning to practical problem-solving and team-building activities. These aimed to:

1 Build understanding and recognise personal qualities and characteristics that influence teams, groups and social connections.

2 Link leadership skills, values and teamwork to the planning of community projects.

A number of participants took responsibility for 'project-based' roles within the club, some of which included:

1 The Media Project, which involved completion and distribution of the club's newsletter and the development of positive articles later published in the local newspaper.

2 The Catering Project, which provided opportunities to gain experience in food preparation and food safety in the club's canteen. It is anticipated that this component of the program will offer longer term options for young people interested in formal education and employment in food and catering services.

3 The Dance and Fitness Project, which involved participants in the development of an ongoing program that combines cultural and modern dance. The group hopes to form a dance troupe that will perform at community functions.

Key outcomes

The trauma that many young Indigenous women and men have experienced cannot be underestimated, and needs to be given due consideration in the design, and the evaluation of the effectiveness, of programs both for individual and community development. The outcomes of this leadership project can be measured by the significant achievements that participants attained at an individual, family, community and organisational level.

The young women and men involved reported that they now have greater self-confidence and a more comprehensive understanding of the issues confronting the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Koori communities, evidenced by their ongoing commitment to community development activities. They also believe themselves to be better equipped with the tools and practical experience necessary for them to participate in a range of activities in personal, family, community and public settings. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of those individuals who contributed to the project as mentors, have now progressed to full-time education or employment.

> *It is important that young people are proud of who they are and where they come from…*
> *so that we can build a strong and active group of Indigenous leaders who can speak out about*
> *our people and our culture in the future…*
> (Joyce Doyle, Project Co-ordinator, Koori Youth Leadership Project, Rumbalara Football Netball Club)

The project has offered a platform for mentors and existing community leaders to be acknowledged for their ongoing contribution to the community. The formal recognition of local leaders, in partnership with higher profile identities, is a demonstration of the understanding that participation is valuable at all levels – local, regional, state and national. The local leadership has become energised by the enthusiasm of the younger community members.

The project has also shown that these younger women and men are making a visible and meaningful contribution to the community, which in turn has served to strengthen the positive recognition of project participation within individual families. This strengthened social connection has also provided additional entry points for broader participation at the Rumbalara Football Netball Club and within organised activities in the larger community.

Overall, the project has made a significant contribution to the shared vision of a vibrant Koori community of the future. A clear direction for building on community awareness, and creating diverse opportunities for skills development and practical experience, has been set by the achievements in the Goulburn Valley.

BALLARAT AND DISTRICT ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE
KOORI YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC) is recognised for the extensive range of programs it offers throughout the region. In partnership with the University of Ballarat it designed an innovative leadership project relevant to the local community. So as to provide a welcoming and familiar environment for participants, a specifically tailored Certificate III in Community Services Leadership course was developed to be taught primarily on the BDAC's premises.

Participants in the leadership project were recruited through nominations from the community, promotion in schools and in direct contact with

young people that needed a little direction in life, youth who although they might not have finished a formal education, or lived on the borderline of poverty but still need[ed] the opportunity to showcase their capabilities of becoming leaders.

(Paul Clarke, Project Co-ordinator, Koori Youth Leadership Project, BDAC)

Project aims

The project aimed to integrate the promotion of emotional and spiritual wellbeing with the future of leadership in Koori communities at a local and state-wide level through:

■ encouraging and supporting young people to participate in community life, value their cultural diversity and feel proud to share their experience and knowledge with Koori and mainstream organisations;

■ providing opportunities for skills development among young people;

■ recruiting and training community mentors; and

■ offering an accredited course within a community development framework.

Activities undertaken

There was an extensive recruitment process that involved nominations from the local community, schools and existing programs targeting young people in the area. Direct contact with young women and men was the most successful method for engaging interest as it allowed for detailed discussions about the requirements and responsibilities of participating.

The leadership project coursework involved the development of a range of modules which related directly to the competencies that were recognised as part of a Certificate III in Community Services Leadership. This aspect of the program was delivered by academic staff, but was based at the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative to ensure that all participants were at ease in the learning environment. This was an important strategy and resulted in high attendance levels, even though the academic requirements were the most challenging aspect for many of the participants.

The formal coursework was complemented by a broad range of personal development, decision-making and team-building activities, which included an outdoor education program. These allowed participants to venture outside their familiar environment and be challenged to co-operate as a team in a range of situations.

The academic and experiential components of the project were used to inform participation in a range of community development activities, which included:

1 A Cultural Tour of Lal Lal Falls, the home of Bunjil, the great spirit of the Kulin people, whose resting place is at the Falls.

2 The organisation of the Charity Bike Ride from Ballarat to Canberra to raise funds for Suicide Risk Awareness Training for Aboriginal peoples. Bike riders travelled 800 kilometres over ten days.

3 The production of a number of video records to promote the achievements of the leadership program. These activities led to an increased awareness about the challenges and rewards of film-making. It also encouraged young women and men to undertake a range of film-making projects, including *Makin' Pitchas,* which facilitated participation in the writing, production and dissemination of dramatised life stories.

These projects gave the young people involved an opportunity to apply coursework and practical experience to meaningful activities in the community.

Key outcomes

The Ballarat leadership project provided young women and men with an introduction to the benefits of participation and leadership within the Aboriginal community. Participants developed new competencies and an increased sense of confidence in their capacity to contribute to, and advocate for, the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the Aboriginal community. Some individual participants also experienced change in their educational and employment status, which reinforced their sense of achievement in participating in the project. However, in view of the structural barriers that confront many of these young Aboriginal women and men, their participation in itself was considered to be a commitment to community leadership.

As for the local community it directly benefited from the community development activities, with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative establishing a foundation to build on the work for the future.
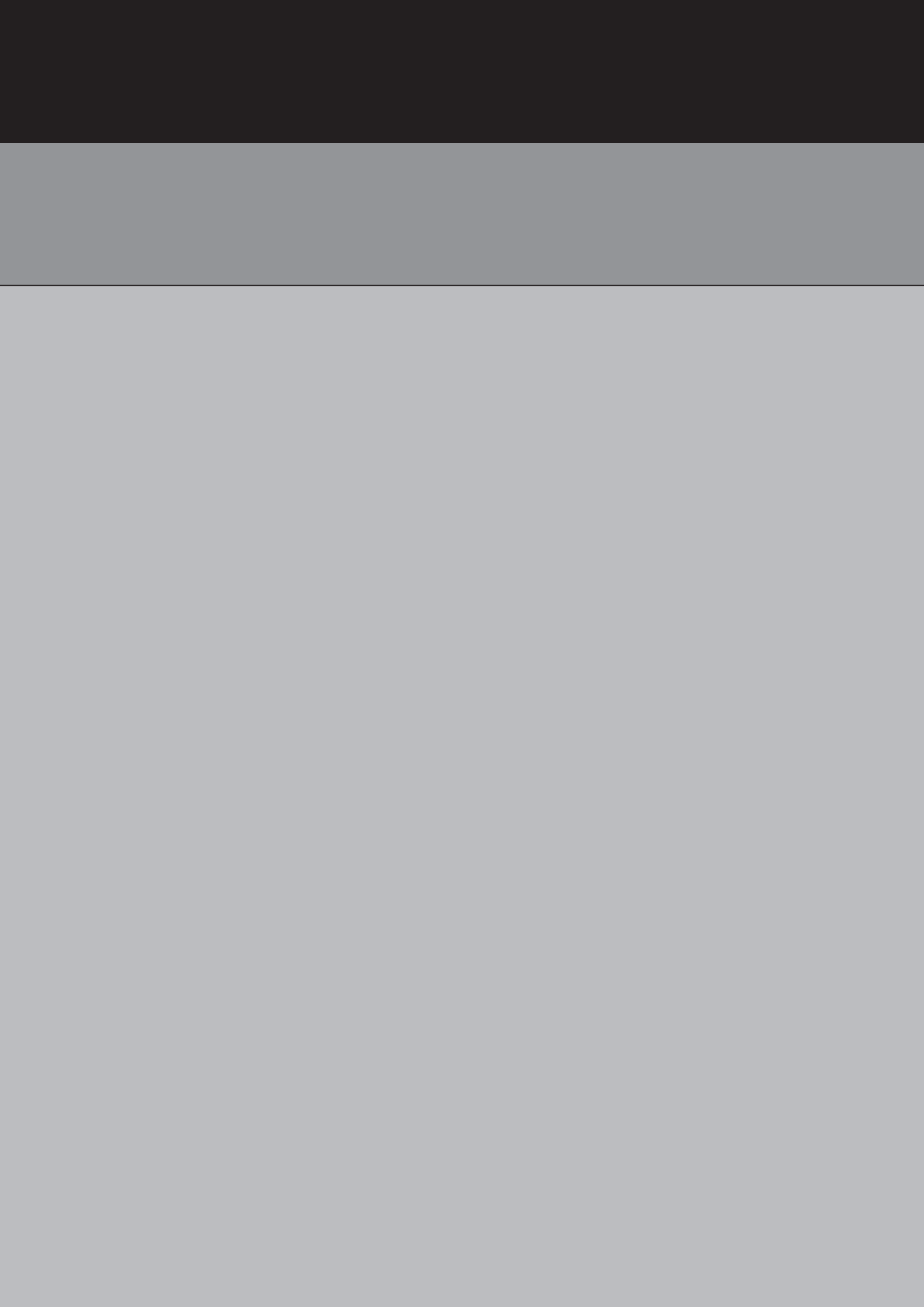
KEY LEARNINGS ARISING FROM THE KOORI COMMUNITIES LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Key learnings arising from the Koori Communities Leadership Program

The design, implementation and evaluation of the Koori Communities Leadership Program was considered a significant development in VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion activity. It demonstrates the key principles informing the investment in the Koori Communities Leadership Program, including:

- an acknowledgment of Indigenous history and a strengthening of Indigenous culture;

- the importance of community control of initiatives and the work of communities toward self-determination;

- the need to address the underlying determinants of emotional and spiritual wellbeing within a long-term framework; and

- the building of community infrastructure, capacity and skills in collaboration with the mainstream community.

The projects detailed in this report have addressed state-wide leadership issues, communicated leadership information and activities among Indigenous communities, and established community-based leadership projects targeting young Indigenous people. They have also provided the opportunity for those involved to network at a state-wide level, thereby enabling potential leaders to form collaborative and supportive relationships with one another.

Each project was developed from the 'bottom up' by local communities, whose members have defined what they mean by leadership and what is important for their community, and devised programs within the parameters of the funding guidelines. The programs are based in schools, sporting clubs and Aboriginal co-operatives.

While each project is unique to the communities involved, all have in common the strong themes of: strengthening culture, community and family; drawing on the skills and experience of Elders; concentrating on young people; mentoring by older community members; and utilising relevant skills and training from the non-Indigenous sector.

Importantly, all five projects have generated enthusiasm and commitment within their respective local communities. The basis of this support is that the projects have been timely, specific and have provided continuity between the long-term visions of communities and current planning for sustainability through community building. All the participating communities have recognised the importance of the initiatives and expressed a commitment to continuing support for the projects.

Since the start of the projects many other Victorian Indigenous communities have identified similar priorities for engaging young people in leadership issues. They have all sought information and requested support to implement similar projects in their local areas.

Each project has had considerable numbers of young people requesting places in future leadership training courses. It is estimated that to date a total of 250 young Indigenous women and men from across Victoria have been directly involved in the projects. An even larger group – consisting of around 250 older community mentors, leaders, families and service providers in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities – has been involved in project support.

The outcomes of the current projects are a testament to the capacity of Koori organisations to reach young people, engage with the community and offer innovative models of education and community development. They also highlight the critical need for continued leadership training to secure the future sustainability of Koori communities.

KEY FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION IN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

Victorian Indigenous people need support to participate and to develop their skills and confidence as leaders so they can effectively plan and create a future path based on self-determination. Immediate and active involvement now will strengthen the social and economic status and lifestyle choices of Indigenous Elders, young people, families and communities over the ensuing years.

To be effective in the long-term, Indigenous leadership initiatives must provide support mechanisms that include:

■ a high-level of mentoring throughout the life of a project or activity;

■ resources and infrastructure which is readily accessible to participants;

■ education and training support designed to meet the specific needs of participants; and, most importantly,

■ the support of Indigenous families and Elders who can provide the emotional, spiritual, cultural and social support for community members who actively participate and aspire to be potential leaders in their chosen fields and communities.

Moreover, any program that promotes the future development of Victorian Indigenous leaders must be delivered in a culturally safe environment so that individuals have enough confidence to speak openly about what is needed, and to feel sufficiently empowered to affect the events shaping their future.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements of the Koori Communities Leadership Program confirm the value of a continued focus on activities that impact at an individual, community and organisational level.

At an individual level, participation in leadership projects improved self-esteem and confidence, facilitated supportive relationships and developed skills required for future growth. The opportunity to gain both leadership skills and a greater understanding of the Koori community's key issues assisted participants in making informed choices about meaningful community development strategies.

At a community level, the inclusive design of the projects facilitated a greater sense of community cohesiveness and a recognition of the value of participation as a contribution to the future. While there was a commonality of approach, each of the projects was allowed the flexibility to grow in accordance with locally identified priorities. This gave local communities the opportunity to celebrate young Indigenous people with a positive focus on leadership and the future.

At an organisational level, the sponsoring organisations developed further experience in working with a broad range of partners. Overall, this experience highlighted the importance of negotiating clear agreements and protocols with external organisations in the early stages of project development to ensure that all expectations and anticipated outcomes are mutually agreed.

In terms of social connectedness, the team-based mentoring model was in accord with traditional Koori culture. Individual project reviews and the Multi-Site Evaluation affirmed that participation not only improved the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals but also had a 'ripple effect' on families and the community as a whole. The design of the projects allowed for broad participation by Elders, and other local and high-profile community leaders, to act as role models and mentors for younger members of the community. This not only enhanced the content of activities but also served as an affirmation of the work done by existing community leaders.

in terms of reducing discrimination, there were advantages and disadvantages to bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people on the projects. Many of the projects reported improvements in the relations between the two groups and attributed this to the fact that the clear leadership of these programs rested with Koori organisations. Those who worked with both groups indicated that the use of a traditional approach served to increase cultural awareness with non-Indigenous young people. Although many of the projects operated from a range of venues and settings, the principal location was readily identifiable as a Koori-friendly environment. This was considered an important aspect of ensuring an environment free from discrimination.

In terms of increasing access to economic participation, the projects did allow young Koori women and men to explore potential education and employment options that may not have been considered prior to their participation. However, while the projects promoted the importance of encouraging leadership for the future, the structural barriers to enable real economic participation should not be ignored.

The Koori Communities Leadership Program intentionally operated in a diverse range of settings and included organisations whose foci encompassed community activities, sport and recreation programs, health services and education links. As the evidence indicates, many young Koori women and men have had negative experiences in formal education settings, so the leadership projects developed learning programs that were task and activity oriented. They encouraged self-directed learning with a focus on developing competencies rather than on academic achievements.

The projects devoted significant energy to accreditation as formal accreditation is considered essential for the enhancement of both educational and employment prospects. These efforts were rewarded with accreditation of course material at both secondary and further education levels. The experience of the projects indicates the need to continue developing more intensive one-to-one mentoring partnerships and to create further opportunities to 'broker' pathways into additional professional development and training.

Communities are committed to affirmative, all-of-community approaches to working with young people that focus on prevention and early intervention, as well as on developing skills which will contribute to the overall strength and capacity of the community. The need to have young people actively involved in establishing meaningful networks across Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities contributes to this approach.

For the ongoing sustainability of the Koori Communities Leadership Program, and to maximise the gains already made, it is necessary to recognise:

- the increased levels of voluntary participation required of Elders and community leaders;

- the considerable demand that the projects place on organisational infrastructure so as to ensure continued growth and development; and

- the significance of coinciding the timing of activities with academic years. This is essential both for negotiating clear contracts with partners in educational institutions and enabling graduates to plan their ongoing education and employment.

A significant contribution to the sustainability of the projects outlined in this report is the commitment of further funding by the Victorian Government and VicHealth to develop the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy through to 2006.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

Future directions and sustainability outcomes

VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

In April 2004, the Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Steve Bracks, and Dr Rob Moodie, CEO of VicHealth, officially launched the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy which aims to build upon the earlier Koori Communities Leadership Program described in this report. The new Strategy will develop the capacity of Victorian Indigenous communities and organisations by:

■ providing effective program co-ordination and support and development processes to consolidate and further develop Indigenous leadership;

■ establishing strategic linkages between the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy and other Indigenous community capacity-building initiatives;

■ developing and consolidating sustainable approaches to leadership initiatives in Victorian Indigenous communities;

■ providing community-based training programs and structured activities for young people to develop and consolidate leadership skills;

■ increasing the number and capabilities of young Indigenous people to participate in civic life;

■ developing and consolidating networks, professional development and support mechanisms for Indigenous community members participating in community leadership; and

■ supporting community capacity-building and leadership development initiatives across the Victorian Government.

The Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy will involve the development and consolidation of the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network (see next page for details), the Koori Communities Leadership Program and the Multi-Site Evaluation of the overall Strategy. It will implement an evaluation framework that will build on the findings of the initial Multi-Site Evaluation, and will involve the participation of communities and government on a state-wide, network and local basis. The Strategy will also establish indicators for monitoring medium- and long-term outcomes, and recommend transferable models of Indigenous leadership and the future development of leadership as an integral part of community capacity building.

The key principles underpinning the strategy will continue to be that:

■ a long-term vision for the future is central to the ongoing strength and capacity of Victorian Indigenous communities, and will involve the inclusion of all members in active participation to mobilise community agendas;

■ community capacity building in Indigenous communities involves developing the skills and competencies of individuals and groups so that they can actively contribute to community decision making and activities;

■ leadership is critical to the long-term survival, growth and capacity of Koori communities. Indigenous models of leadership are complex, based on cultural frameworks and holistic approaches. Current imperatives include the need to increase leadership skills and opportunities in communities;

■ young people comprise a proportionally much larger group in Indigenous communities than in the overall population. Thus, they are important in realising community visions and building community capacity. There is a need for structured activities that develop their skills, and strengthen Indigenous culture and networks; and

■ collaborative partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are important both to maximise opportunities for young Kooris, and to work towards long-term community-wide reconciliation.

VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP NETWORK

The next two years will be both exciting and challenging for the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network (which evolved out of the Victorian Koori Network for the Future) as it negotiates with the mainstream and private sector agencies to work towards establishing a long-term vision for the future. This will be based on positive, inclusive leadership that builds on the capacity of our young people, and is founded on cultural frameworks and collaborative partnerships between all stakeholder groups.

One exciting new direction will be the start of negotiations for the establishment of a Victorian Indigenous Leadership Centre in 2006. This centre will aim to:

■ recognise, support and encourage the leadership potential, knowledge and skills of Victorian Indigenous people;

■ co-ordinate courses, forums and conferences in leadership and professional development;

■ develop an accredited leadership course for young Indigenous people;

■ provide communication and competency development;

■ promote leadership activities through effective communication, proactive professional development, and informed discussion within a culturally safe environment;

■ concentrate on and support cultural business activities specific to Victorian Indigenous communities;

■ promote role modelling and mentoring programs;

■ be autonomous and encourage individuals to participate from across Victoria;

■ support and assist existing Victorian Indigenous leadership projects;

■ enhance the overall Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy;

■ be a clearing house for information through documenting Victorian Indigenous history in relation to key events and activities, which need to be expressed in a culturally appropriate manner for our young Indigenous community;

■ develop and maintain linkages with existing networks; and

■ support leadership development in target areas – sport, the arts, business, government, private sector, cultural heritage, etc.

To achieve this aim, the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Network will employ a project officer to co-ordinate positive opportunities for members of Victoria's Indigenous communities and support all participants in the Koori Communities Youth Leadership Projects.

This will include:

- holding network meetings in metropolitan and regional areas;

- producing additional newsletters and an interactive website to promote the work of the network and the progress of the leadership projects;

- organising theme- and issue-based luncheons and seminars with the support of high-profile leaders both from the private and the public sectors;

- holding additional leadership forums, education and training opportunities, and role model programs; and

- encouraging more Indigenous women to participate in the network and leadership initiatives.

For further information regarding the Victorian Indigenous Leadership Strategy and its future programs and initiatives, please contact Aboriginal Affairs Victoria on 1300 366 356.
Website: http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/aav.htm

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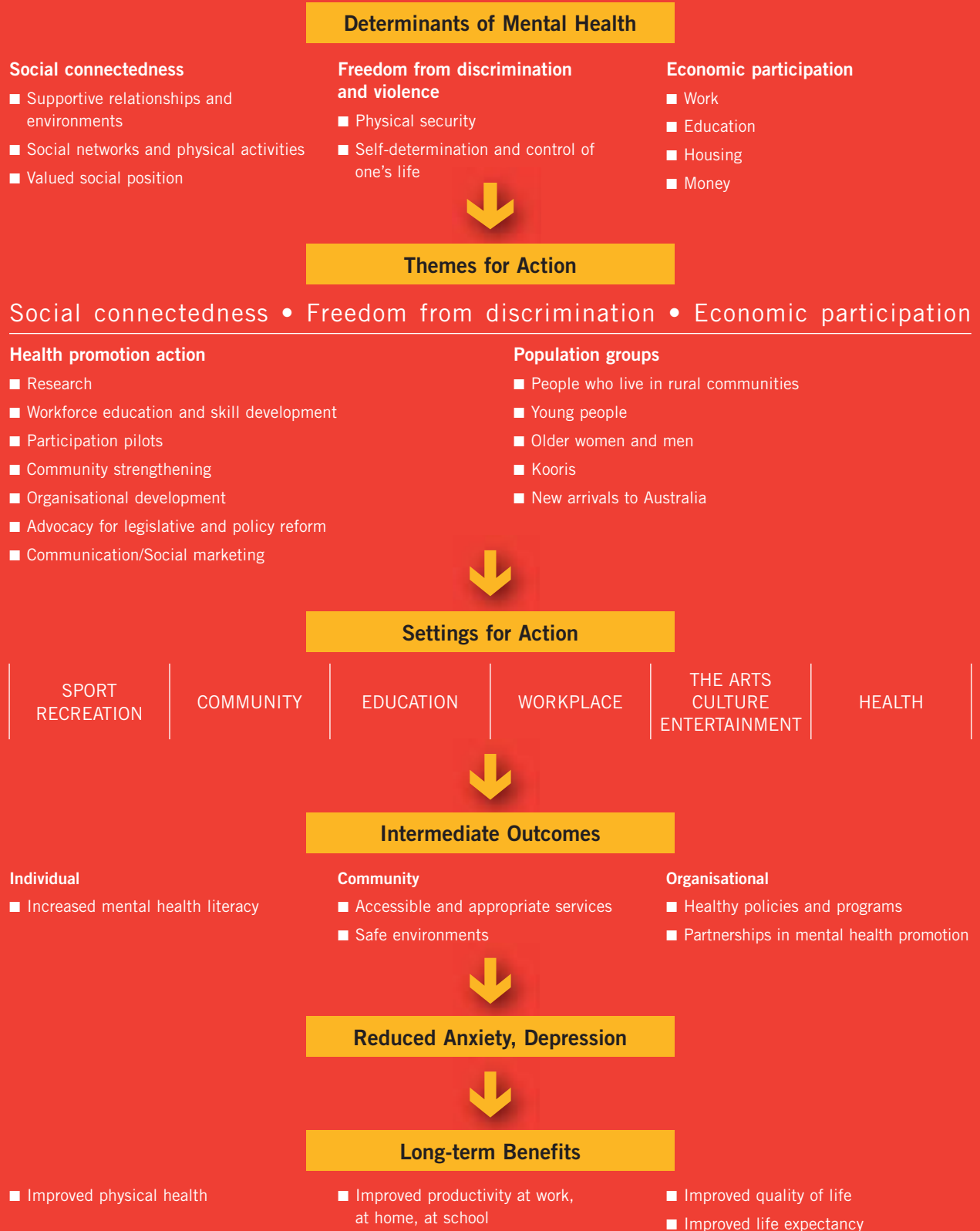
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Koori Task Group membership

The Koori Task Group mentioned in the introduction of this publication was established to develop VicHealth's response to the challenge of promoting the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous communities in Victoria. The membership of the Koori Task Group included:

Professor Ian Anderson	University of Melbourne (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Berg	Koorie Heritage Trust
Ms Salina Bernard	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), Victorian Regional Spiritual Healing Training Centre
Mr Paul Briggs	Koori Resource and Information Centre
Mr Alan Brown	VACCHO
Mr Shawn Coade	VACCHO
Mr Michael Fisher	Koorie Heritage Trust
Mr Ron James	Department of Human Services Koori Health Unit
Mr Mark Lutschini	Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
Mr Tony McCartney	Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Co-operative
Ms Robynann Morgan	Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
Ms Kerry O'Neill	Maribyrnong City Council
Mr Mark Rose	RMIT University
Ms Angelina Tabuteau	Department of Human Services, Protection and Care
Ms Lisa Thorpe	Resource Unit for Indigenous Mental Health Education and Research
Ms Nancy Walke	Victorian Director, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
Ms Trudy Wyse	The Stegley Foundation
Ms Dot Campbell	VicHealth
Ms Lyn Walker	VicHealth

Mental Health Promotion Framework 1999–2002

Determinants of Mental Health

Social connectedness
- Supportive relationships and environments
- Social networks and physical activities
- Valued social position

Freedom from discrimination and violence
- Physical security
- Self-determination and control of one's life

Economic participation
- Work
- Education
- Housing
- Money

Themes for Action

Social connectedness • Freedom from discrimination • Economic participation

Health promotion action
- Research
- Workforce education and skill development
- Participation pilots
- Community strengthening
- Organisational development
- Advocacy for legislative and policy reform
- Communication/Social marketing

Population groups
- People who live in rural communities
- Young people
- Older women and men
- Kooris
- New arrivals to Australia

Settings for Action

SPORT RECREATION	COMMUNITY	EDUCATION	WORKPLACE	THE ARTS CULTURE ENTERTAINMENT	HEALTH

Intermediate Outcomes

Individual
- Increased mental health literacy

Community
- Accessible and appropriate services
- Safe environments

Organisational
- Healthy policies and programs
- Partnerships in mental health promotion

Reduced Anxiety, Depression

Long-term Benefits

- Improved physical health
- Improved productivity at work, at home, at school
- Improved quality of life
- Improved life expectancy

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