Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls

The Smith Family Research Report
June 2014

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Contents

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ISBN: 978-0-9874386-7-6

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1. Executive summary

Addressing disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The social and economic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is widely recognised. In response, the *Closing the Gap* initiative aims to reduce the gaps that are evident across a range of outcomes, between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. It has a particular focus on education. The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* includes national, systemic and local-level improvement actions directed at increasing school readiness, improving school engagement, strengthening literacy and numeracy skills and raising Year 12 attainment levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (COAG 2012a).

Improving educational outcomes for all Australians is fundamental to the nation's productivity agenda (COAG Reform Council 2011). With specific regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it has been estimated that if the gap in labour market and health outcomes for Australia's first people could be closed by 2031, approximately $24 billion would be added to the Australian economy (Deloitte Access Economics 2014: 8-13). The gap in employment outcomes would be 'drastically reduced' if educational attainment levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were increased (Karmel et al. 2014:50).

Although there have been some gains in recent years in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, achievement gaps still persist across the educational life course (COAG Reform Council 2013). In 2011 for example, 54 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 20 to 24 had attained Year 12 or its equivalent qualification, compared with 86 percent of other Australians of the same age (COAG Reform Council 2013).

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women

Research suggests that increasing the educational outcomes achieved by young women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds is particularly important to not only them, but their families and communities, as women are often instrumental in bringing about social change in disadvantaged communities (WHO 2014). In Australia in recent years, there has been a particular focus on the poorer educational performance of boys relative to girls. This has also been apparent in the programs specifically developed for improving the educational engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys. In contrast, there has been less attention on initiatives aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls (Doyle & Hill 2008).

Research has identified a number of success factors for programs which are effective in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women to stay engaged in school and successfully transition from school to employment or further study. These include:

- Meeting the holistic personal support, learning and development needs of participants and proactively addressing barriers to engagement
- Reinforcing positive aspirations, high expectations and goal setting
- Offering exposure to a wide range of opportunities, including in regards to education, employment and career options
- Developing participants' skills and networks
- Involving parents, families and communities
- Flexible and tailored design and delivery
- Employing staff who are appropriately qualified and able to establish strong relationships with participants (Doyle & Hill 2012).

The *Girls at the Centre* program

The Smith Family, in partnership with Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs, in the Northern Territory, designed and has been implementing the *Girls at the Centre* program since 2008, to support improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls.

Girls at the Centre annually supports more than 50 girls[1] from Years 7 to 9, to stay engaged in education and learning. The program reflects many of the features known to be effective in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. It provides intensive and holistic support aimed at strengthening social, emotional and academic skills. A central component of the program is the strong focus on providing girls with a range of mentoring opportunities – from coaches, who are available to the participants and their families on a daily basis, to community mentors from a range of education and career fields.

Girls at the Centre outcomes

An independent evaluation of the *Girls at the Centre* program was conducted by Associate Professor Tess Lea and Associate Professor Catherine Driscoll from the University of Sydney. It concluded that the program:

- Positively impacts on life goals and skills
- Impacts on community engagement with the school, especially through families
- Is highly valued by school staff, participants and their families
- Significantly improves school attendance (Lea & Driscoll 2012: 55).

The importance of improvements in school attendance is particularly noteworthy. School attendance is a high-level indicator of school engagement (COAG 2012b). Since the commencement of the program, the school attendance rates of girls who participate in

Girls at the Centre has significantly exceeded that of their school peers.

The evaluation also provided evidence of participants' increased self-esteem, confidence, connection to school as well as the development and pursuit of life goals and aspirations, including completing school and pursuing further education and training.

The evaluation noted that one of the program's most important achievements is its success in engaging families, describing this as 'an extraordinary achievement (as) both the international and Australian research on parental-school engagement make it clear that efforts usually fall short of reaching the most alienated parent groups' (Lea & Driscoll 2012:31).

Critical success factors for the program

The evaluation of *Girls at the Centre* identified a range of factors associated with its success. These included the multi-dimensional aspect of the program, its responsiveness to the needs and interests of the girls involved and, the wide range of experiences the program provides. The critical success factors identified included the:

- Skill level and effectiveness of the women employed as 'Girl Coaches'
- Significant parent engagement
- Inclusive mix of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and other girls

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1   In 2014, approximately 70 girls are participating in the program, of whom around 40 are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

- Input into decision making of the girls involved in the program
- Holistic approach to offering support across all aspects of girls' lives
- Resources and facilities, including access to a dedicated *Girls Room* in the school and to the school bus and other school facilities/equipment
- Decentralisation/independence from school and government including discrete funding and management by The Smith Family
- Site characteristics including
  - Integration with the school's approach to outreach and family engagement
  - Formal partnerships, strategic alliances, networks and coalitions that include businesses and the community (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

Conclusion

Higher levels of education are related to a range of social and economic benefits for both individuals and society (OECD 2013) but gaps remain between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared with other Australians. A critical element in reducing these outcome gaps is the provision of stronger and more targeted support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, so they can fully participate and engage in education.

Despite, the particular importance of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities, support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students continue to be dominated by options targeted at boys and/or focussed on sport.

The *Girls at the Centre* program is a school-based initiative that is highly successful at addressing many of the barriers that prevent stronger school engagement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. The program uses a holistic approach to strengthen the full range of social, emotional and academic skills required to fully engage in education and in post-school study and/or work.

The independent evaluation and the ongoing monitoring of the outcomes achieved by *Girls at the Centre* participants, provide strong evidence of the range of educational and personal outcomes that are achieved by girls who participate, particularly with regards to school attendance, achievement and engagement, and the development of life goals and skills. The outcomes achieved indicate that at the end of Year 9, participants are well placed to successfully transition into Year 10, complete Year 12 and continue into further education, training and/or work.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and education

The importance of education

Education brings significant benefits to individuals and society. Higher levels of education are associated with economic benefits, including increased employment opportunities and higher incomes. In terms of social benefits, higher levels of education are also associated with better health, longer life expectancy, stronger civic engagement and greater overall life satisfaction (OECD 2013).

Similar associations have been identified in Australian studies looking at the relationship between education and economic and wellbeing outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Biddle & Cameron 2012). Three of the six *Closing the Gap* targets are focussed on education, highlighting its importance in reversing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage (COAG 2012a).

Educational outcomes

There have been some gains in recent years in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, however these remain well below those of other young Australians.

Differences in educational outcomes are observable early in life, as shown by data from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). The AEDI assesses children in their first year of school in five areas that are linked to predictors of good health, education and social outcomes. In 2012, just over a quarter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were developmentally vulnerable on two or more of these key areas, compared with one in ten other Australian children, as shown in Table 1 (Australian Government 2013: 24).

Table 1: Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable in the first year of school, 2012

	Children in first year of school	
Developmentally vulnerable on…	**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (%)**	**Other Australians (%)**
One or more domains	43	21
Two or more domains	26	10

Source: Australian Government (2013) AEDI results, 2012, extract from Table 2.6.

Table 2: Young people not meeting national minimum standards in reading and numeracy (NAPLAN)

	Children and young people in Years 3 to 9	
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (%)	Other Australians (%)
Reading		
Year 3	16	2
Year 5	14	1
Year 7	24	3
Year 9	24	4
Numeracy		
Year 3	16	2
Year 5	24	4
Year 7	19	3
Year 9	32	7

Source: ACARA (2013). pp. 4, 48, 68, 112, 132, 176, 196, 240.[i]

Disparities in educational outcomes continue throughout school as shown by the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who do not meet the national minimum standards for reading and numeracy as assessed by the *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy*[1] (NAPLAN; see Table 2). For example, nearly one quarter (24%) of Year 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students did not meet the national minimum standard for reading and around a third (32%) did not meet the numeracy standard. In comparison, only 4 percent of other Australian Year 9 students did not meet the standard for reading and 7 percent did not meet it for numeracy (ACARA 2013: 4-240).

Year 12 completion and post school education

A key factor affecting whether or not students complete Year 12 is their academic achievement over preceding years (Lamb et al. 2004). Given the differences in NAPLAN results, it is not surprising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people remain behind other young Australians in attaining Year 12 or its equivalent. In 2011, 54 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 20 to 24 years, had attained Year 12 or its equivalent qualification (or a higher level qualification), compared with 86 percent of other Australians of the same age (COAG Reform Council 2013: 60). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 25 to 64, are also less likely to attain a bachelor degree or higher level qualification, compared with other Australians of the same age (5% compared with 22%; ABS 2011a).

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1   NAPLAN is an annual assessment that has been conducted since 2008 for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The literacy component of the assessment includes three domains – Reading, Writing and Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation).

The economic impacts of educational attainment

Differences in educational attainment can impact on a range of economic outcomes, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples much less likely to be employed compared with other Australians (44% and 71% respectively, see Table 3; Karmel et al. 2014).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are employed, are more likely than other Australians, to be employed in lower skilled occupations (e.g. as labourers or community and personal service workers) and are less likely to be employed in professional occupations.

These employment and occupational differences contribute to lower incomes. The median weekly income for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households is $991, compared with $1,241 for other Australian households (ABS 2011b).

Karmel and his colleagues argue that the gap in employment rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians, would be 'drastically reduced' if educational attainment levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were increased to that of other Australians (Karmel et al. 2014: 50).

National impact

The implications of the educational and economic gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians extend beyond individuals, families and communities, and impact on the whole nation. It has been estimated that if the gap in labour market and health outcomes could be closed by 2031, approximately $24 billion would be added to the Australian economy (in 2012/13 dollars), government revenue would increase by $7.2 billion and there would be a $4.7 billion reduction in expenditure (Deloitte Access Economics 2014: 8-13).

Reasons for differences in educational attainment

Research has shown that a range of factors contribute to the poorer educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, one of which is school attendance. For all students, educational outcomes decline with increased absences from school. However, the decline in achievement is steepest for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hancock et al. 2013). Average attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are lower than rates for other young Australians, with the gaps generally evident from Year 1 and largest by Year 10 (COAG Reform Council 2013: 23, 57). There is evidence that poor attendance could be responsible for as much as one-third of the difference in educational attainment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other young Australians (Hancock et al. 2013: 254).

Table 3: Labour market participation[ii] of persons aged 15 to 64

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (%)	Other Australians (%)
Employed	44	71
Unemployed	9	4
Not in the labour force[iii]	42	23

Source: Karmel et al. (2014), extract from Table 15.

A study examining factors associated with the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, raises a number of other potential issues related to their poorer educational outcomes. It suggests that the benefits of education may be less apparent to those living in communities with fewer or poorer employment opportunities and for those young people who live with adults who have low education levels (Biddle 2010). Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people may have relatively limited access to information or networking opportunities which would raise awareness of the range of options available to them and help them achieve their career goals (Biddle 2010).

Young people living in disadvantaged home environments may also find it hard to balance the challenges and responsibilities that accompany this while trying to study (Doyle & Hill 2012). Students in remote areas may face additional barriers, such as having to travel long distances or needing to leave home to attend secondary school (Biddle 2010).

Gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

In recent years there has been a focus on the educational performance of boys and young men generally, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys specifically. In response, a range of programs and initiatives have been developed that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys. However, fewer programs have been developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls (Doyle & Hill 2008).

Table 4: Education, labour market participation and income

	Females	
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (%)	Other Australians (%)
Educational attainment		
Year 12 or its equivalent (20 to 64 year olds)	28	60
Bachelor degree or higher (25 to 64 year olds)	7	24
Labour market participation[iv] (15 to 64 year olds)		
Employed	41	66
Unemployed	8	4
Not in the labour force[v]	47	29
Income		
Personal weekly income[vi] of less than $600	67	58

Source: ABS (2011a)

Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls

The programs that have been designed to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, tend to use sport to attract and encourage participation. This approach however, does not appeal to all children and young people and is less effective in attracting and retaining girls. For example, the 2011 evaluation of the *Sporting Chance* program, which uses sport and recreation to encourage improved educational outcomes for male and female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, found that there were considerably more boys than girls benefitting from the program (ACER 2011).

A large gap remains in the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women in comparison with other young female Australians, and this gap impacts on their future employment outcomes and income levels. Table 4 shows that only 28 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have completed a Year 12 Certificate or its equivalent compared with 60 percent of other Australian women. Similarly, only 41 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are employed, compared with 66 percent of other female Australians.

Doyle and Hill (2012) reviewed studies that examined the specific challenges that may be impeding improvement of the social and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women. They argue that two key issues need to be considered in the development of strategies and programs aimed at improving educational and employment outcomes. First, understanding and accommodating the diversity of current and historic life experiences and perspectives is essential to the development of culturally sensitive strategies and programs. Second, it is important to ensure that strategies and programs are properly adapted to acknowledge and respect cultural practices that value family, peer and community responsibilities, including family formation and carer responsibilities and extended family and kinship obligations.

These responsibilities and obligations are important from an early age. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls may provide care for younger siblings or support parents and other family members to negotiate the service system. This can negatively impact on school attendance. Young women may place particular value on family and community and this is associated with a reluctance to move away from their community to pursue educational and/or career opportunities. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are also more likely than other Australian young women to choose to have their families before completing post-school study or starting a career. The challenges all women face in balancing work and/or education and parenthood is well documented, but may be even more difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the absence of culturally appropriate and affordable childcare (Doyle & Hill 2012).

Importantly, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women value the essential role that education and employment provides in creating inter-generational change in their communities. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in general, and women and girls in particular, tend to not have access to formal and informal information networks that provide peer and professional advice and mentoring on educational and career related decisions and options (Doyle & Hill 2012).

Education is particularly important for women and their communities

Australian research shows that educational achievement is particularly important for females. While males are more likely than females to leave school early, females who leave school without completing Year 12 are much more likely than male early school leavers to be employed in low-skill jobs (Curtis & McMillan 2008).

The effect of gender on educational outcomes is also apparent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It has been argued that among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in general, females require a higher level of education, than males to 'experience the same level of wellbeing' (Biddle & Cameron 2012: 14). More specifically, among 15 to 34 year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the positive influence of education is stronger for women than men (Karmel et al. 2014: 40).

The World Health Organisation argues that women are often instrumental in bringing about social change through their role in the family and the wider community (WHO 2014). Supporting improvements in educational outcomes is associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women having a greater say in community decision making (Biddle & Cameron 2012). Therefore, investment in initiatives that support improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls has the potential to have a positive impact that extends well beyond the individuals involved.

3. Effective support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Improving school attendance

Efforts aimed at improving the educational achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have particularly focussed on school attendance. Research shows that strong academic achievement is associated with high levels of school attendance (COAG 2012b) with school attendance the strongest predictor of Year 12 completion (Balfanz & Byrnes 2012). For all students, there is a complex array of individual, family, school and community related factors that influence school attendance (Purdie & Buckley 2010). Nevertheless, encouraging and supporting higher rates of attendance is an important component in strengthening overall educational outcomes.

Success factors

At the secondary school level, Helme and Lamb (2011) identified strategies in three main areas that have been successful at increasing engagement, achievement and school completion among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These are:

- **School culture and leadership** – having a shared school/community vision and plan that encourages high expectations for success among staff and students; a learning environment that is responsive to individual needs and focuses on continuous improvement; and, involvement of the community and families in planning and providing education.
- **School-wide engagement strategies** – that take into consideration curriculum provision, including quality academic and vocational education and training options; specific programs for addressing school absenteeism; and the provision of quality career related education.
- **Student-focussed strategies** – that include programs targeting skill development, mentoring and other ways of increasing school engagement among those most at risk of low achievement and/ or early school leaving, such as welfare support and intensive case management (Helme & Lamb 2011: 1-2).

Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls

Doyle and Hill (2012) also identified a number of success factors for programs which focus on supporting young people to stay engaged in school and successfully transition from school to employment or further study.

- Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in program design, to ensure it is culturally and contextually appropriate
- Providing a culturally safe environment where participants feel welcomed and valued
- Program design and delivery that builds on participants' strengths and capabilities
- Activities/learning opportunities that are tailored to meet the specific needs of the target group, promote cultural identity, engage participants and, support them to learn
- Flexible design and delivery to facilitate access and encourage participation
- Understanding and meeting the holistic personal support, learning and development needs of participants and proactively addressing barriers to engagement
- Encouraging and reinforcing positive aspirations, high expectations and goal setting
- Employing staff who are appropriately vocationally, culturally and emotionally qualified and facilitating the establishment of strong participant-staff relationships
- Collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream organisations, networks and systems to support program delivery

- Providing exposure to a range of education, employment and career options and information about how to navigate the education and employment systems
- Developing participants' skills and providing opportunities to build personal, peer and professional networks
- Setting clear expectations and guidelines for participant behaviour
- Supporting, encouraging and leveraging parent and community involvement
- Strong support from the school principal and leadership team (Doyle & Hill 2012).

Success factors for girls

Efforts to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait young people need to take account of gender. Doyle and Hill (2012) found for example, that there was not a single activity (such as sport) that engages large numbers of girls (to the degree that sport engages large numbers of boys). To be effective, engagement programs need to offer a wide variety of recreational and personal development opportunities to attract all students who might benefit.

Initiatives need to be future focussed, encouraging girls and women to think broadly about the range of options that may be available to them. Involving families and communities ensures they are embedded in broader practices. Initiatives should also support girls and women to develop the skills and networks required to achieve their goals (Doyle & Hill 2012).

4. Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls

The Smith Family works in 96 communities across Australia, supporting disadvantaged children and young people's long-term participation in education. This includes providing *Learning for Life* scholarships to over 34,000 children and young people, including more than 5,000 who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Smith Family also delivers a number of programs with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including *Girls at the Centre*, run in conjunction with Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The Alice Springs community

The Alice Springs Local Government Area has a total population of around 25,000, of whom 19 percent identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The social, education and employment differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and other female Australians, are also evident in Alice Springs, with the gaps in outcomes even greater than those at the national level (see Table 5). For example, in Alice Springs, 17 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have completed a Year 12 Certificate or its equivalent compared with 27 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women nationally.

The *Girls at the Centre* program

At the request of the Alice Springs Indigenous Education and Employment Taskforce, The Smith Family worked with the community to design the *Girls at the Centre* program in 2008. Since then, it has been implementing it in partnership with the Centralian Middle School.[2] The initiative, initially aimed to address the absence, at the time, of programs for adolescent girls in the community, in a context of available programs (often sports-related) which specifically targeted boys.

The program was designed with the support of a Community Reference Group, comprising a cross-section of representatives from the community. The Group acts in an advisory capacity and champions the program throughout the community. Although *Girls at the Centre*

Table 5: Educational and employment outcomes, females aged 15 years and over, Alice Springs and Australia

	Alice Springs females		Australian females	
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (%)	Other Australians (%)	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (%)	Other Australians (%)
Completion of Year 12 or its equivalent[vii]	17	61	27	53
Employed	33	78	39	55

Source: ABS (2011b).

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2   Centralian Middle School (CMS) was established in 2010 following the merge of Alice Springs High School and Anzac Hill High School. CMS enrols students from Years 7 to 9.

was originally conceived as focusing on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, community consultation during the design phase of the program, recommended making an inclusive program that was also available to other girls in the school.

Girls at the Centre has annually supported around 50 girls from Years 7 to 9[3] to stay at school, build aspirations and boost their educational achievements. In line with the research on how to effectively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (see pages 12 and 13), it provides intensive and holistic support to address the range of issues the girls may face. The program draws on resources and role models from both within the local community and beyond to provide a range of additional positive educational experiences. The intention is that these experiences and outcomes will provide participants with the necessary skills to complete Year 12 and make successful transitions to further study or employment.

Program objectives

Girls at the Centre aims to support participants to:

- Improve school attendance and achievement and foster their long-term engagement in education
- Develop life goals and aspirations
- Enhance their life skills, including social and emotional wellbeing and resilience.

The program also aims to:

- Reduce school drop-out rates of teenage girls
- Increase family engagement and support participants to develop positive relationships
- Encourage schools, communities and workplaces to support the development of young women.

Program components

The *Girls at the Centre* reflects many of the features known to be effective in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strair Islander girls. It has a comprehensive range of components that participants can access, including:

- Girl Coaches
- Weekly after school activities
- Breakfast with a mentor
- Additional tailored activities through Contact Time
- The Girls Room in the school
- The Families and Schools Together (FAST) program
- Camps and experiential mentoring trips.

Girl Coaches

The program has two Girl Coaches plus a coordinator, who is also a Coach. These women are based at Centralian Middle School and are available to participants on a daily basis. The Coaches provide a mix of support and positive guidance, underpinned by high expectations and a non-judgmental approach. They spend time with each girl, discussing goals and the steps to achieve them. They also support the girls when they participate at the Homework Centre which is run twice a week by the school. The Coaches work directly with the girls and their families to help them overcome the individual challenges that might impact on the girls' education.

The Coaches are members of the school's wellbeing team, which is a forum for sharing information and concerns and, where necessary, for planning case management of individual students. This integration with other school programs and activities ensures *Girls at the Centre* is embedded into the school's overall approach to family outreach, student academic outcomes and pastoral care.

Weekly after school activities

Weekly after school activities are provided to foster interest in the program and create a unifying experience for participants. The girls help select the activities, to ensure they are inclusive for students with a range of different interests. Activities have included gymnastics, dance, textiles, jewellery making, cake decorating, touch football and rock climbing.

Breakfast with a mentor

Each fortnight a mentor from a range of community, career, education or sport areas gives a short speech over breakfast, after which the girls ask them questions. Guests are selected because of their interesting achievements, ability to offer an alternative perspective on life, and to highlight a variety of possible future pathways for the girls. Breakfast with a mentor also contributes to raising the profile of the *Girls at the Centre* students in the wider community. On the alternate fortnight, the breakfast session involves supporting the girls to develop public speaking skills.

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3   In 2014, approximately 70 girls are participating in the program, of whom around 40 are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Contact time

Fortnightly classes with *Girls at the Centre* participants are included in the school timetable, allowing program staff to run additional activities tailored to each year level. Across each of the years there is a focus on building resilience, confidence and wellbeing. There is also a strong focus on team building, personal presentation, nutrition, health and healthy relationships. In Year 9, there is an emphasis on developing employment skills and exploring career options. The activities associated with this include resumé writing, job interviewing, Work Health and Safety, setting career goals, as well as visiting a range of workplaces to give the girls a sense of the diverse range of careers available.

The Girls Room

The Girls Room is a room at the school which is exclusively available to *Girls at the Centre* participants, Coaches and invited guests. It includes a kitchen, lockers, office space and a lounge area. These resources are combined with an engaging and supportive atmosphere in which girls feel free to use the space for their own activities, in negotiation with program staff. The room functions as a location for many of the program activities, as well as a retreat and safe place for the girls and a transition space between home and school.

Families and Schools Together (FAST)[4]

The Families and Schools Together program (FAST) is an eight week, small group program, involving girls and their parent/carer in structured activities. It aims to strengthen relationships between the student and their parent/carer and increase parental support networks and involvement in the school. Skill development activities focus on improving communication and family functioning. *Girls at the Centre* participants nominate the discussion topics and help organise the weekly sessions and the activities for follow-through at home. A small number of student graduates of the program also attend as mentors.

Camps and experiential mentoring trips

Each year an experiential mentoring trip is arranged to provide some of the *Girls at the Centre* participants with new educational experiences. This includes a trip to Melbourne with the girls staying with host families and attending school. The girls are accompanied by program staff and mentors from The Smith Family and they visit Melbourne University, as well as attend cultural, sporting and entertainment events. Girls are selected for the trip based on their school attendance, behaviour and effort and it is seen by many as a highlight of their participation in the program.

In a reciprocal initiative, the *Girls at the Centre* participants host students from the same Melbourne school. This visit includes a Standley Chasm (Angkerle) Indigenous painting workshop and storytelling, enabling the students to share their culture and country with the Melbourne students.

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4   FAST is an external program, which The Smith Family brokers in for use with *Girls at the Centre* students.

Program outcomes

An independent evaluation of *Girls at the Centre* was conducted by Associate Professor Tess Lea and Associate Professor Catherine Driscoll from the University of Sydney in 2011-2012. This section draws heavily on this evaluation which concluded that the program:

- Positively impacts on life goals and skills
- Impacts on community engagement with the school, especially through families
- Is highly valued by school staff, participants and their families
- Significantly improves school attendance (2012: 55).

Attendance

Given the importance of attendance on academic achievement and Year 12 completion, the evaluation paid particular attention to examining the extent to which *Girls at the Centre* positively influences the school attendance rates of participants. Reports from both educators and school leaders of the beneficial effect of the program on school attendance, are supported by the available quantitative data. Table 6 provides an extract of some of the data available for the evaluation and illustrates that between 2008 and 2011, average attendance rates for *Girls at the Centre* participants were consistently higher than the average attendance rates for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls at the school.
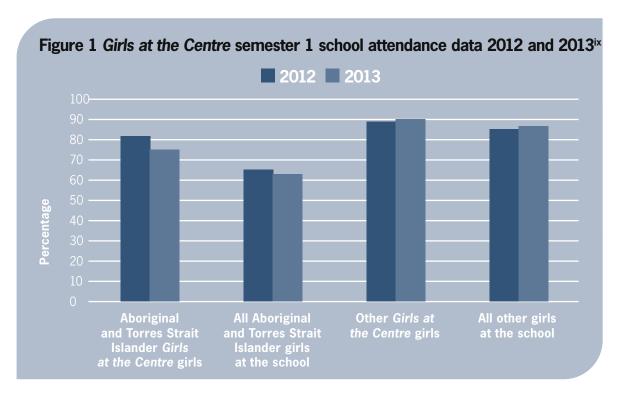
The positive effect of the program on attendance has continued, with more recent data indicating the extent to which the program is particularly beneficial for improving the school attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. Figure 1 shows a pattern of stronger average attendance rates for *Girls at the Centre* participants relative to their peers. For example, in Semester 1 in 2013, the average attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *Girls at the Centre* participants was 75 percent, 12 percentage points higher than the average attendance rate for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls at the school (63%). The average school attendance rate for other girls participating in *Girls at the Centre* was 3 percentage points higher than their peers (90% compared with 87%).

Attendance rates fluctuate slightly each year as different groups of girls complete Year 9 and leave the school and, other younger girls join the program.

Table 6: *Girls at the Centre* semester 1 school attendance data 2008 to 2011[viii]

Average school attendance	2008	2009	2010	2011
Girls at the Centre girls	86%	91%	88%	83%
All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls at the school	77%	77%	72%	66%

Source: Lea and Driscoll (2012), extract from Table 1.

Figure 1 *Girls at the Centre* semester 1 school attendance data 2012 and 2013[ix]

Source: Student Central Database, Department of Education, Northern Territory.

The trusting relationships between coaches and participants, along with the girls' desire to attend the activities taking place in the Girls Room, act as motivators for school attendance. Coaches stress the importance of regular school attendance and, in consultation with school personnel, follow up with the girls and their families on any unexplained absences and provide support to families experiencing disruptions.

Developing skills and life goals

A number of the *Girls at the Centre* activities support the development of broader life skills, which facilitate the ongoing achievement of stronger educational outcomes and the development of longer-term life goals. Activities such as breakfast with a mentor, the regular after school and in-school activities, the experiential mentoring trips and the one-on-one conversations with Girl Coaches collectively serve to increase the confidence and resilience of the girls.

The regular contact with the Coaches, in particular, encourages high expectations that the girls themselves attribute to the approach taken by the Girl Coaches.

"[Teachers] didn't expect too much, they just planned out our future for us, like we wasn't going to go anywhere or do anything – like achieve anything and then Girls at the Centre *[Coaches] like give us that confidence and like they make us believe in ourselves."*

Increases in girls' self-esteem and confidence are also highlighted by school and *Girls at the Centre* staff:

"One of our Year 7 girls who began the year with a whisper and struggled to say 'hello', now towards the end of term 2, she enters the room saying 'hello, how are you?' This is a good indicator for confidence!"

"Girls at the Centre support provides girls with the life skills and coaching that enables them to make the best of their educational opportunities and encourages them to take responsibility for their own education." (senior teacher)

The longer-term positive effect of supporting girls to achieve stronger attendance rates is evidenced in the goals these young women are pursuing. Participants from Year 9 and, also Year 10 students who had previously been involved in the program, were interviewed for the evaluation. These young women stressed that participation in the program developed their aspirations to finish school so they could go into further education and training. Many of these young women recognised that these aspirations were higher than the aspirations of their siblings (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

School achievement and long-term engagement in education

Long-term engagement in education is one of the central goals of *Girls at the Centre*. Indicators such as positive school attendance, academic achievement and school connectedness are important contributors to this engagement. As discussed above, increasing school attendance and developing skills and life goals have been major achievements of the program.

Some girls have also had significant academic and leadership achievements, including in 2012, Dux of the school, 22 academic awards and three girls chosen for the leadership roles of School Captain, Vice-Captain and Prefect.

The evaluation also noted the girls' connection to school and to each other:

"You can see Girls at the Centre *students have a greater sense of connectedness to the school. It is quite an instrumental impact." (educator)*

"We are getting to know different people. We are getting to learn new things and we are helping each other." (student)

"I love meeting new people…I like being with the girls during the activities. I like school better." (student)

Engagement with families

Involving families in their children's education is central to achieving stronger educational outcomes, with 'parent engagement…improving attainment more than any other single factor' (Lucas 2010). There is currently a major policy focus, at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels, on increasing parental engagement in education, however it remains a major challenge for many schools.

The external evaluation of *Girls at the Centre* noted that one of the most important achievements of the program is its success in engaging families. Along with the positive attributes of the coaching team, this was one of the features commented on most frequently by those interviewed for the evaluation.

"…something that I'm very impressed by is the degree to which they [The Smith Family] bring families into the school and help the school make sense to families and families make sense to the school, so it's a little bit of a broker between families and the school."

"Of the various initiatives available to foster (family) involvement, this Girls at the Centre *is the most successful."* (educator and policy formulator)

"So there are other school programs – they are much of a muchness – but they just don't have the same emphasis on family." (parent)

The Families And Schools Together (FAST) program contributes to this strong engagement with families. The delivery of it within the overall *Girls at the Centre* program, where there are strong relationships between the Girl Coaches and the families, contributes to it being particularly successful in the Centralian Middle School context. A parent who was interviewed for the evaluation and who had been involved with the FAST program at another school, noted that the *Girls at the Centre* FAST program was both more enjoyable and far more effective.

The girls interviewed for the evaluation were also strong supporters of FAST and saw it as instrumental in strengthening the relationships between parents or other care-givers and students.

"Before FAST me and my nanna wasn't really close. We used to argue all the time and not agree on anything and like I wasn't allowed to do much... She like trusts me more and like we trust each other and we can talk more now about other stuff."

More recently, a 2013 evaluation of the *Girls at the Centre* FAST initiative highlights its continued impact on building stronger relationships between parents/carers and their daughters and in strengthening the communication skills and confidence of the young people who participate.

Girls at the Centre girls who participated in FAST commented on improvements in their own confidence, family communication, parental attitudes and greater mutual understanding of each other, noting:

"[I'm] not so shy after FAST to talk with parents."

"Parents [are] now not so judgmental."

"[It] helped mum and I understand each other."

Parents and carers were equally positive, both in terms of their relationships with their daughters, and with the school and other parents, commenting that they:

"Learnt to communicate better."

"Got to know my daughter better."

"…take more time to listen now."

"Feel more comfortable to come into school."

"[see it's]…great to build friendships with parents of my daughter."

"Definitely feel more confident to talk with others and seek support."

The evaluation of *Girls at the Centre* concluded that the fact the program is impacting so clearly on family-school engagement is an 'extraordinary achievement. Both the international and Australian research on parent-school engagement make it clear that efforts usually fall short of reaching the most alienated parent groups' (Lea & Driscoll 2012: 31).

Impact on the wider community

A longer-term goal of *Girls at the Centre* is to impact on the wider community, including workplaces and employers, and their support of young women. The external evaluation noted that the program has been successful at enlisting support from multiple stakeholders, including local small businesses and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in a range of activities and, that these external groups strongly value the program.

"I was quite surprised by the level of confidence. Unlike other Aboriginal groups, they (the girls) weren't afraid of asking questions or saying what they did and didn't like. They were very impressive." (local business owner)

"From a business perspective, we need kids that want to stay at school and get ahead. The businesses need the workers and they'd prefer locals. Race doesn't come into it. It is about behaviours and expectations, making sure workers know what the requirements are. If young people have the will, then the business community is very keen to give them the opportunity. But the work ethic has to be there...Girls at the Centre gives the girls skills to be stronger. The business community was thrilled to be involved."

The evaluation also noted that *Girls at the Centre* connects with local youth services and other providers, offering a consistent link for planning, and 'getting the disengaged re-engaged'. Importantly, the program has also contributed positively to how the town views young people (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

Critical success factors

A key aim of the evaluation was to identify the factors which were essential to the success of *Girls at the Centre*. The factors include:

- Skill level and effectiveness of the women employed as 'Girl Coaches'
- Significant parent engagement
- Inclusive of a mix of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and other girls
- Holistic approach to offering support across all aspects of girls' lives
- Input into decision making of the girls involved in the program
- Resources and facilities
- Site characteristics
- Decentralisation/independence from school and government (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

Effective Girl Coaches

The evaluation noted that 'the [importance of the] qualities of the Coaches to the success of the program cannot be overstated' (Lea & Driscoll 2012: 36). The skill level of the women employed as Coaches is the essential contributing factor to the positive outcomes achieved by the *Girls at the Centre* participants, as evidenced by comments from a range of stakeholders:

'They do what they do very well – that's totally to do with the calibre of the Coaches. Girls have to have a rapport with them. In similar programs, you achieve poor outcomes with the wrong people in place." (policy officer)

"There's a quality that I am very grateful to see come into the school because I think it does give a lot of credibility to the program…it's getting the right people, getting the right program…You need to have staff that stay, that will build the relationships with the families, so that as the girls go through the program the next lot of girls coming through, aunties, grandmothers, they get to have those [deep] connections." (educator)

"…a lot of kids do not open up to total strangers. They've got to build their confidence and that's what's happened here. A lot of the kids knew [names Coach] and the other Coaches, and their confidence got built up and they helped them with their school issues." (parent)

"[You need] people with that early intervention visionary mindset, they're the kind of qualities that you're looking for. People that strive for excellence and I think people who have known real strong adversity and have come out the other side…[so the girls know] 'Oh well, you actually get us'." (community member)

Participants and stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation identified multiple characteristics thought to be essential for the Coaches to be effective. Many related to the Coaches' ability to build relationships with the participants and their families, and to being caring, non-judgemental, fun to be with, calm and having high expectations of the girls. Other important skills, knowledge and experience identified were good community networks, able to get on with other staff and stakeholders, a sense of responsibility to the school as well as the program, a commitment to the town and its future and, having a vision for young people.

The girls saw the Coaches as empathetic, positive and generous adults who they could turn to for help with all sorts of stresses.

"They're just so like calm and like they're so good about everything – they're very nice…kind of all like – an all-round person. They don't really get angry with us, like they keep their cool. They have to have patience, or they do have patience." (student)

"The Coaches, they just put it in a – I don't know, just in a better way and they don't really – if you do something wrong, they don't really tell you off, they're like – they stay calm and like work it out and stuff like that." (student)

High level conflict resolution and mediation skills and experience were highlighted as being key capacities required for the coaching role. School staff commented on the value that the Coaches' work brought to the wider school community. Their capacity to encourage positive relationships between students resulted in the avoidance of potential conflicts which had significant flow-on effects in the classroom.

"The transformation is amazing. Girls at the Centre stopped the bitchiness, inappropriate behaviours, the bullying, and inability to talk about issues properly. Dealing with these can be a waste of teacher time. It can be so disruptive to the class and it can go on for years." (school staff)

The trusted position the Coaches have with the girls and their families facilitates the early identification of any barriers to participation in different programs and opportunities. Coaches are also able to act quickly to remove various barriers through appropriate resource allocation.

"If there is a problem, either in terms of the child's welfare or a student's engagement in school or barriers at school around these children accessing everything that they can, most of the time Girls at the Centre *[Coaches] will know about it prior to anyone at the school and I would suspect that a lot of those things wouldn't come to the school's attention if* Girls at the Centre *staff didn't know about it... it's also about the welfare of young people, so if a family is travelling rough at that point of time, again* Girls at the Centre *know about it before the school and then they can work with the school to allocate resources that the school has, or indeed the* Girls at the Centre *program has, to supporting those children."* (school staff)

The importance of the positive and supportive relationship that Coaches establish with the girls is supported by other research. Students who are alienated from school often feel they are denied the opportunity to have a 'fair say' (MCEETYA 1997: 44). In this regard, the support of an adult who will advocate on behalf of students is a crucial factor in the retention of students at risk of exiting school early (Helme & Lamb 2011).

Significant parental engagement

As discussed in the section on program outcomes, alongside the importance of the Coaches, the other single most important component of the program is its success in engaging with families. It was recognised by school staff that the *Girls at the Centre* program was instrumental in creating the relationships between the school and parents that are necessary for supporting student engagement. The program also helps to empower many parents of participants, who have had negative school experiences themselves, to become more involved in the school community (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

*"A lot of our students come from family backgrounds that did not have a strong positive experience of schooling and may not have the assertive skills…to be able to engage and have power in a school context…*Girls at the Centre *helps breakdown those barriers…and that's something, that is – that certainly* Girls at the Centre *[Coaches] do better than our other on-site programs…It's a really valuable contribution to the school."*

Inclusive mix of participants

A number of interviewees, including girls and their parents, noted that the inclusivity of the program – welcoming a mix of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and other girls – is another core strength of the program. This approach to recruiting participants to the program was identified as important in the initial community consultations undertaken when the program was being developed. The cultural mix has helped bridge relationships between different cultural groups:

"This is really important. It is part of overcoming black-white tensions. You know, it was the Indigenous women [in early consultations] who said this in the initial time."

"It's open to any females in the school to participate. Whilst it's funded around the Indigenous cohort, it's not exclusive, and I think that's really important."

The students themselves noted that the inclusivity of the program was important for individuals, for relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and other girls, and, that it also helped Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls better understand each other.

"We all have different backgrounds and it's good to get to know each other, like we all have different lives, even like us Aboriginal girls have different lives to each other."

Girls at the Centre has also adopted an approach that ensures both academically achieving girls and those considered 'at risk' of leaving school are included in the program. While the building of relationships between girls who might not otherwise be friends was seen as likely to have a stronger effect on the girls 'at risk' of leaving school, it was also noted that the program benefited all the girls who participated.

"The mix of girls is important. It is not race based and they blend high achieving girls with other girls: they all benefit."

"I do see friendships coming out of there that I wouldn't have expected…The environment supports that…the fact that they're sharing (responsibilities and expectations)…is a good thing."

In line with the program's long-term goal of improving community support for young women, an external stakeholder involved in the program suggested that the program's integrated approach could help change the views of a generation in Alice Springs:

"It is good. It is not 'them' and 'us'. Aboriginal girls get on with non-Aboriginal girls. We need this in Alice…A young girl coming from a [racist] family into this program and befriends an Aboriginal girl – it changes her mindset and maybe that of her family too."

Holistic approach to girls' lives

Girls at the Centre uses a holistic approach to girls' lives and stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation identified this as differentiating it from other programs. In practice, this approach means there are a variety of activities, as well as attention and support invested in all areas of the girls' lives. The fact that the Coaches allow girls to be selective about which activities they participate in, rather than being highly prescriptive, contributes to the program's success.

Girls' input into decision making

Girls also have direct input into decision-making about the types of activities that are included in the program, which reinforces for them that they are seen as responsible and valued for their own expertise within the program.

Girls interviewed for the evaluation very frequently represented a sense of ownership of and authority within the program. Parents participating in the FAST program also highlighted this aspect, noting that having the girls nominate the discussion topics meant they would be canvassing priority issues for girls, making it a learning experience for all involved:

"The girls pick the subjects for FAST and so we get an insight into the pressures they're under. It helps us as parents. It helps a lot."

Involvement in decision making has been found to play a part in students feeling more empowered in their learning and more connected to their school (Bourke et al. 2000; cited in Purdie & Buckley 2010).

Resources and facilities

The Girls Room facilitated the success of the program by providing a discrete place where the participants could access the Coaches, as well as food, hygiene requirements and learning resources. Participants see the existence of this 'girls only' place as vital and the value of the room was also confirmed by school staff:

"You know helping to ensure, in those less supervised times, that students have a safe place to go…there's less [likelihood]…for students to make inappropriate choices…It is obviously also a good opportunity for them to check in and touch base with the staff down there, so that's one thing which is an amazing contribution to the school." (school staff)

Access to other resources such as a school bus and other school facilities/programs, as well as the wider range of resources that The Smith Family staff provide or broker in, was also identified as part of the program's success.

Site characteristics

As well as the available resources the program can access through the school, the Centralian Middle School site was identified as having a number of important features which facilitated the effectiveness of the program. These include the integration of the *Girls at the Centre* into the wider school approach to family outreach and student wellbeing. Program staff are members of the school's wellbeing team so information and concerns are shared, which assists with individual case management. The *Girls at the Centre* staff interact particularly closely with the school counsellor, school nurse, the Home Liaison Officers and the Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker enabling a more integrated and effective approach to pastoral care.

Independence from school and government

The final characteristic contributing to the success of the program is the independence of The Smith Family and the *Girls at the Centre* program, from both the school and government (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

From the perspective of the girls and their families, the Coaches play a very different role to that of teachers and other welfare related officers in the school. It is a key component of the work of the Coaches to develop the rapport which enables them to gain a detailed but respectful understanding of the girls' lives and to offer non-judgmental advice and support. Importantly, unlike the role of the government employed Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW) and Home Liaison Officers (HLO), the ratio of Coaches to girls is approximately 1:25 compared with approximately 1:300 for AIEWs and HLOs. This enhances the capacity of Coaches to develop much stronger relationships with the girls and their families.

From a school perspective, the independence of the Coaches ensures the integrity of the program is maintained. Educational administrators acknowledge that the multitude of demands within schools for extracurricular and pastoral activities, would make it very difficult for a school to quarantine to a single program school-employed staff with the valuable attributes of the *Girls at the Centre* Coaches.

The Smith Family's formal partnerships, strategic alliances, networks and coalitions were also seen as positive for the program. These enhance the organisation's ability to broker in alternate programs, independently raise revenue, and advocate for greater service responsiveness to families in need. Business representatives and community leaders appreciated that The Smith Family remain focussed on the intent and aims of the program, free from other external influences.

"… you need to have a very clear understanding of who the program is [for], who it's run by, the vision and the belief and the commitment to people rather than the commitment to policies and legislation and getting voted back in. And I think…that's the defining difference – that people need to have a confidence in who's running it and why they're running it and not just for a vote winning piece."

High turnover in both school leadership and policy makers was also cited as a risk factor for other government-run programs, as was likely competition for program funds (Lea & Driscoll 2012).

5. Conclusion

Higher levels of education are related to a range of social and economic benefits for both individuals and society (OECD 2013) but gaps remain between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared with other Australians. A critical element of reducing these outcomes gaps is the provision of stronger and more targeted support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, so they can fully participate and engage in education.

Despite the particular importance of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities, support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students continue to be dominated by options that are targeted at boys and/or focus on sport.

The *Girls at the Centre* program is a school-based initiative that is highly successful at addressing many of the barriers that prevent stronger school engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. The program uses a holistic approach to strengthen the full range of social, emotional and academic skills required to fully engage in education and in post-school study and/or work.

An independent evaluation and the ongoing monitoring of the outcomes achieved by *Girls at the Centre* participants provide strong evidence of the range of educational and personal outcomes that are achieved by the girls who participate, including in school attendance and achievement and the development of life goals and skills. Tracking the long-term participation in education of *Girls at the Centre* participants is difficult because Centralian Middle School only enrolls students from Years 7 to 9. Nevertheless, the outcomes achieved by the *Girls at the Centre* participants indicate that at the end of Year 9, they are well-placed to successfully transition into Year 10, complete Year 12 and continue into further education, training and/or work.

6. References

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7. Endnotes

Endnotes

i   These figures do not include students who were exempt from testing.

ii Percentages do not total to 100 because those whose labour market status was 'not stated' were excluded.

iii Refers to those who are not in paid employment, are not looking for work and/or are not available to start work within the next four weeks.

iv Percentages do not total to 100 because those whose labour market status was 'not stated' were excluded.

v   Refers to those who are not in paid employment, are not looking for work and/or are not available to start work within the next four weeks.

vi Refers to income the individual, as opposed to household, usually receives each week.

vii This data was not available for 20 to 64 year olds, as reported in Table 4.

viii In 2008 and 2009 data was available for approximately 80 percent of Girls at the Centre participants. Girls at the Centre data was not separately available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and other girls.

ix This graph contains data sourced from the central system utilising program participation recorded by program staff. The business rules for the data set are specific for this purpose and should not be used to make comparisons with students from other schools or for any other purpose. 2012 program participation was recorded retrospectively and may be less accurate across the full year.

The Smith Family Research Report
June 2014

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