

## **SEL04253**

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### **A Kickstart to Life for Indigenous Youth**

#### **Abstract**

*This paper presents preliminary analysis on the implementation of a particular sporting program, the Australian Football League 'Kickstart' program and describes the role that physical activity has played in the development of lifeskills which include attendance at school and no participation in domestic violence and substance abuse. It outlines some of the difficulties that are experienced by Indigenous youth in a small community in the Cape York area of North Queensland. It highlights the status of many Indigenous youth as being 'at risk', due to substance abuse and domestic violence becoming 'normalized' behaviours. Further, the paper identifies the potential for the 'Kickstart' program to be used as a tool for reducing youth crime in remote community areas while simultaneously increasing opportunities for lifeskills development.*

#### **Introduction**

This paper is based on a case study of a P-12 school in Cooktown, a small remote community in North Queensland. The study was carried out for AFL Cape York, in partnership with the School of Education at James Cook University. The purpose of the study was to investigate the successes, challenges and effects of implementing the AFL Cape York Kickstart program in remote communities. The study aimed to identify the needs and concerns of Indigenous youth, teachers, parents, community representatives and stakeholders involved in the program. It examines the role that physical activity and sport play in developing education and awareness of health; community cohesion and the importance of role models; social and moral development and enhancement of lifeskills for youth, in particular, developing skills to deal with issues such as domestic violence, substance abuse and the importance of attending school as part the process. Further topics explored include cultivating values and attitudes in sport and the Australian sporting culture and its role in providing opportunities for Indigenous Youth. The study focused specifically on the implementation of the Kickstart and AusCop program, which involves police in coaching and training students in the Auskick program. The AusCop program is one of AFL Cape York's more recent initiatives designed for the purpose of developing trust between Queensland Police and Indigenous youth with the probability of reducing youth crime in the community.

## **Background**

Key to this investigation is AFL Cape York's Kickstart program and a recent initiative the AusCop program.

### ***AFL Kickstart***

The Australian Football League (AFL) Kickstart program, supported by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, was initiated in 1997 for Indigenous Youth across remote communities in Northern Australia. The Kickstart mission statement is "To enhance the lifeskills of Indigenous Australians and increase participation in sport through the AFL game" (Australian Football League Queensland, 2000). The components of the program include health and lifeskills workshops delivered by key partners; Auskick the foundation of Kickstart (teaching children how to play the AFL game); and Crusaders the representative AFL teams (under 12's-unisex, under 14's and under 16's boys) which links with the development of lifeskills through the implementation of the selection guidelines. The selection guidelines include attendance at school at least three days a week and no involvement in substance abuse or violence. Youth participating within the program are expected to follow these guidelines to maintain membership within the program and in particular, the representative teams. The selection guidelines are monitored by staff of Cape York AFL in partnership with teachers in the school.

### ***AFL AusCop***

Initiated by AFL Cape York in 2004, AFL AusCop, endorsed by the Queensland Police Service, is a program designed to use sport as the vehicle to break down the barriers and develop trust between the remote community police and community members. Police officers are trained to assist and deliver the AFL Auskick program with other community volunteers. At present 25 police officers from North Queensland have completed level one coaching certificates.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was used for the research to gain an understanding of the participants' social realities. The participants' thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the AFL Kickstart program were vital to give a sociological account of the program (Burns, 2000). Furthermore, qualitative methods in this study were not concerned with objective truth but rather subjective truth as the participant perceives it (Burns, 2000).

A case study approach was used in this study as it "allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events" (Burns, 2000, p.460). Using a case study enhanced the efforts of the research team in dealing with a variety of data sources, all collected in context (Spradley, 1979). This case study focused on one school site in the Cape York area and the school's involvement in the AFL Kickstart and AusCop program.

This study used interviewing as the main data collection method. Focus group interviews were considered most appropriate as a large proportion of the participants were school students. In order to accommodate the students, group interviews were

considered to be less intimidating than individual interviews. Furthermore, group interviews have the capacity to bring together various opinions and a wide range of perspectives (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Punch, 1998).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a semi-structured format (Burns, 2000). This format was used to allow for flexibility of the interview to resemble conversations, pursuing the interests of both the researcher and respondent. Although the questions were pre-established the aim was to leave the process open enough to allow the interviewee to direct the flow. Therefore, questions were not followed in order but flowed from the response of the interviewee. In this process the interviewer became both facilitator and moderator. The formulation of research questions came directly from the literature review conducted in this study.

To enhance reliability of the study (Burns, 2000), the researchers clearly outlined to participants reasons and significance of the study before all interviews were conducted. The researchers explained their position and role within the interview process and the overall study. They also explained the process itself and the expected length of the interview.

### ***Sample***

One P-12 school in the rural/remote area of Cape York was chosen as the sample for this case study. The sample was selected in conjunction with AFL Cape York. The research team visited the school over the course of two days and conducted interviews with students, teachers, parents and a Queensland Police officer. One additional Police interview was conducted outside of this timeframe.

### ***Case site***

Cooktown is situated 341 km north of Cairns and the current population is approximately 1600 people. Cooktown is largely a "historic town" which sees close to 100,000 tourists passing through each year. There is one school in Cooktown, the Cooktown State School and Secondary Department, which caters for 420 students from Pre-school to Year 12. Originally a primary school only, in 1986 a separate secondary campus for students up to Year 10 was established, then in the early 1990s the secondary campus extended its offerings to Years 11 and 12 students. In 1998, the two campuses were amalgamated into a single campus. Approximately 25 to 30 per cent of the students are Indigenous. Cooktown is a service centre for the nearby Indigenous community of Hope Vale which is situated just North of Cooktown. Many of the students from Hopevale attend the secondary campus in Cooktown (Queensland Government, 2003).

### ***Participants***

The samples of students were chosen from the following age groups, under 12's (U12), under 14's (U14) and under 16's (U16). These groups are also the AFL representative age groupings. Wherever possible, both male and female participants were included in the groups. In addition, other factors for selection included participation in the Crusader Representative level of the Kickstart program, participation in Auskick (the AFL skill offered program) and no participation in either of these. The purpose in choosing such a varied sample of students was to counteract any bias and therefore produce a diverse range of responses.

Teachers, parents of the students involved in the program and Queensland Police officers were interviewed regarding their involvement with the program. Questions focused on their role in Kickstart, their knowledge of the AusCop program and any positive or negative experiences they have encountered. Participants were asked to offer their views of the possible effects on the school culture and community as a whole. Both student and adult targeted questions regarded selection guidelines and their relation to lifeskills. The questions asked of the teacher and of parents were slightly different from those asked of the Police Officers. Police Officers were asked questions more specific to crime prevention.

### ***Analysis of Data***

Content analysis was used to identify the themes, main concepts and meaning and to further classify the content (Burns, 2000). To improve internal validity and supplement the richness of data, triangulation was used to analyse three different viewpoints of participants' perceptions of the Kickstart program (Burns, 2000). These viewpoints strengthened and revealed the multiple social realities of the various participants involved in Kickstart.

### ***Limitations***

The study was limited by the small number of participants involved in the research. Furthermore, the researchers spent only a two day period conducting interviews at the case site. The lack of time may have had a diminishing influence on the number of persons available for interview. Remoteness of the case site also excluded any follow up face-to-face interviews that may have given further clarification to the data. Furthermore, this case study is presented through the reporting of common themes. It aims to increase understanding of the program through the naturalistic generalisations made by those who read the study and make their own comparisons to other studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Subsequently, the researchers have refrained from delivering statements of generalisations across the board to similar programs.

### **Analysis of Findings and Links to Relevant Literature**

The current literature and research on the relevant concepts within the study is reinforced through comments of participants and the analysis of findings. The relevant concepts emerged from key themes identified in the data, in conjunction with themes identified in current literature.

### **Health of Indigenous Youth**

Some of the difficulties experienced by Indigenous youth are related to their health status. Health issues have been a major concern for Indigenous people in remote communities as they continue to experience higher rates of ill-health and disease than any other section of the Australian population. The life expectancy of Indigenous Australians in 2002 was approximately 20 years less than that of non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

Various health behaviours such as tobacco smoking and physical inactivity have been identified as contributing a sizeable proportion of the total burden of disease in Australia. These health behaviours are especially important in relation to Indigenous

people. The 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (ABS, 1994) reported that 54% of males and 46% of females identified as smokers. This is compared to the National Australian average where 22% of men and 18% of women identify as daily smokers (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002) The 2001 National Health Survey, reported that 70% of Indigenous people, categorised themselves into the sedentary or low levels of exercise for recreation, sport or fitness (ABS, 2003). These statistics, coupled with the higher prevalence of individual chronic health problems, including higher rate of co-morbidity due to multiple conditions (Shilton & Brown, 2004) and the complex interactions among these diseases further highlight the importance of health behaviours for Indigenous people.

The AFL Kickstart program reinforces healthy behaviours through educating children about the importance of their diets, physical well-being and real life issues (AFL Queensland, 2000). The aim of the program is to increase participation in AFL and to “educate, assist and improve the attitudes and lifestyle choices of youth in remote communities” (Walker & Oxenham, 2001, p.5). This study provided support for AFL Cape York’s program to influence healthy behaviours amongst the students involved in the program. In some cases these behaviours sent messages of valuing health and fitness to the wider community. This is revealed in the responses participants’ gave when asked to describe the kickstart program:

Teacher: [The Kickstart program] encourages people to get out there and be active. There is a lot of community participation, which is great, a lot of parents helping...and fund raising.

Student: We get more fitter, it is a bit longer the football [an AFL match compared to a Rugby League match].

Student: It does get you more fitter and I just like it. It is so much fun for me.

The 2001 National Health Survey, reported that 70% of Indigenous people, categorised themselves into the sedentary or low levels of exercise for recreation, sport or fitness (ABS 2001). Considering all of these factors, the role of physical activity is potentially more important in the prevention of chronic disease among Indigenous people (Shilton & Brown 2004). Throughout the study a commonly expressed opinion by all those involved suggested that sporting programs have a positive impact on the community. Sport was the cure to relieve boredom for youth, and on the optimistic side to maintain health, fitness and bring community cohesion.

### **Community and physical activity**

There is much evidence to suggest that community solidity and physical activity are inextricably linked. Studies conducted by Cameron and MacDougal (2000) in remote communities of the Anangu-Pitjantjatjara lands ascertained that during sporting carnivals many local people noticed a significant reduction of petrol sniffing, heavy drinking and juvenile offending. Consequently, they encountered a general move towards positive behavioural changes at the time of these events. To add to this synopsis, Beneforti and Cunningham (2002, p.12) describe the potential of physical activity to not only influence behaviours and characteristics of individuals but that “the effects are likely to flow on to the community as a whole”. The Kickstart

program delivers a sporting program that stimulates community involvement, which then provides solidarity and a decrease in negative behaviours.

Policeman: When we were doing exercise with the kids, even some of the parents would become involved as well. I found that as it progressed to the middle of the course or towards the end of it, we would be getting a lot more parents coming along.

Parent: Just getting all the community together. There is a lot of area here. Cooktown people know the Wujul people, they are related, same as with Hopevale. Get all the cluster together, it is really good.

Messages of healthy lifestyles reaching the wider community are often inadvertently delivered by the children that participate in sporting programs. Walker and Oxenham (2001, p. 40) reveal “the young ones [after their involvement with sporting programs], talking in language to their parents about the effects of alcohol and smoking”. Walker and Oxenham (2001) also discovered that banners made by young people provided evidence of the level of awareness towards health and social problems. To deal with health and social problems in the Cooktown community the AusCop program was set up by AFL Cape York in partnership with the Queensland Police. The program is relatively new initiative and in its short existence has had the ability to build rapport between the Police and community members, in particular with Indigenous Youth. Although the AusCop program is in the early stages of development those that have been directly involved suggest the positive effect it may have for future community capacity building:

Police: I would like to see [the program] run maybe two nights a week [instead of one] and at the end of the course [communities] like Hopevale and Cooktown...could get together and the different communities could play each other. I think it would be something that they [Indigenous youth] would go away thinking, “I want to do that next year as well”. They would be going home telling their friends about it, their relatives and cousins, what they’ve been involved in. I’m sure if there was something like that, it would build up – there would be a lot more getting involved in it.

A recommendation given by a Physical Education teacher reinforces the need for the kickstart program to establish links with community if the AusCop program is to be sustainable, and if community members are to become involved:

Teacher: There could be some training with the community, getting a lot of parents involved. There are regular parents that rock up to Auskick every Wednesday, so what I want to try and do...is put it on one of them to become coordinator...because they are here forever. Maybe [involvement in] a little bit of coaching – coaching courses. Get all the communities in to enable, not just the teachers to have those qualifications, to have the parents as well. To have them confident to be able to run something like that, without a teacher present. To become a community based activity rather than a school-based activity. Although it is community, it is run by the school personnel.

Both stakeholders reiterate the importance of community involvement, which is paramount if authentic community needs are to be addressed. At the National Rural Health Conference in 2003, the draft framework for addressing the needs of

Indigenous Australian communities highlights the requirement for a holistic approach, which recognises the interconnectedness between family and community. Strategies in providing policy, services and programs to communities stress that, “it is about capacity building at the community level [to deliver the services] according to community needs and circumstances” (Adams, 2003, p.2). Therefore, if a partnership approach is to occur, the implementation of physical activity and sporting programs will need to consider holistic aims that are “inclusive of diverse spirituality, political beliefs, economic status, sexualities and lifestyles” (Adams, 2003, p.2) as well as specific input from the Indigenous people in the communities. These factors are a consideration for the long-term sustainability of physical activity and sporting programs in remote communities.

Community contribution could take on the form of involvement in assisting with organisation of carnivals, coaching, helping with training sessions, umpiring games, taking part in administration, ensuring maintenance and monitoring of equipment and resources. Contribution to sporting programs from community members in this regard has been highlighted by Beneforti and Cunningham (2002) to enhance community cohesion through the opportunity to develop skills, self-esteem and a sense of purpose.

Indeed, the kickstart program has created opportunities for parents and community members to be involved in training programs. AFL Cape York conducts training and development through Level 1 coaching courses to volunteers in the communities involved in the Kickstart program. These sessions are offered free of charge for participants. The following comments are some examples of parent training and the possibility of further education:

Parent: I’ve got the card and certificate. Then I go to Level Two I could go and do some courses, the first aid course.

Parent: Last year I started off as an assistant coach with the under 12’s and this year I did the under 14’s mainly because I have two boys, three kids. I grew up playing Aussie Rules.

Further reinforcement of the importance of community contribution is again noted by Beneforti and Cunningham (2002) in suggesting that the main indicators to the success of sporting programs in communities involves their support through community ownership and control, planning and delivery, a holistic approach, and links to partnerships with the programs and agencies. Reciprocal partnerships with Education Queensland, Queensland Health and Queensland Police have been established by Kickstart to enhance the program and to ensure collaboration and sustainability within the community. At each of the Crusader Cup Regional Championship, key partners such as Queensland Health, Queensland Police, Apunipima Cape York Health Council and the Queensland Cancer Fund are invited to deliver workshops with students on various health issues. These workshops are incorporated to present relevant and important health information to the children with the view of the children taking the information back to, and sharing with their communities. These workshops are vital links to the development and reinforcement of health education and lifeskills for Indigenous Youth which may serve as role models for their family and community.

### ***Role models***

Providing role models in physical activity for Indigenous students has been an issue raised by remote communities. Many communities advocate the salience of providing role models from outside the community to encourage the young to participate in physical activity. However, others have highlighted a need for “the older community men to get involved in the training and coaching, to take up these roles of role model/mentor on the ‘community side’” (Walker & Oxenham, 2001, p.43). Sourcing role models from the local community may assist in long term sustainability of programs through providing a cycle of role models as Indigenous students themselves become role models for the younger participants in the community. As suggested by a Policeman involved with AusCop, it may further help to develop positive relationships between older and younger children, with the possibility of enhancing the self-esteem of the older children acting as role models.

Police: Some of the older kids from out there have taken more time to teach the younger ones with what they are learning. Whereas before hand you would go out there and watch them play by themselves. The little ones would be excluded or there would be fighting over whose football it is and that sort of thing. Now after a training session you will see all the kids go and play each other. The older ones will go through and teach the smaller ones how to hold the football and how to kick.

Furthermore, local role models are likely to be family members or well known to the students. Tatz (1995) purports the effect of family role models by pointing out the way families have achieved and continued the cycle in the sporting arena.

First, each brother or cousin serves as a role model within a family grouping, [Aborigines have large extended families]; second, playing together in the same venue and in the same milieu becomes a base for togetherness, especially when called upon to play well away from home country (Tatz, 1995, p. 183).

This familiarity may have the ability to create further community cohesion and motivation to be involved in physical activity and sporting programs.

Police: If they keep going on with it that later on in life it might turn into a career, and especially with AFL recruiting so many Aboriginal people that are fantastic footballers. Most of the kids know who they are. You only have to mention their name and they will tell you who they play for and how long they have played. So it gives them a goal to work towards.

Although bringing popular sporting heroes into the community is positive and exciting for young students, local role models are paramount due to the close ties in Aboriginal families and the long term effect that will have on the young students they mentor.

## **Kickstart Lifeskills and Education**

Education is strongly linked to improved health and to the future of generations. It is common practice for preventative health education programs to be implemented across Australia in Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts that focus on the enhancement of personal skills and supportive environments. The Cape York Justice Study (Queensland Government, Department of Communities, 2001) identifies education as central to improving the opportunities for Indigenous Youth. Of most concern in Indigenous communities is the attendance rates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schools. In general, attendance rates for Indigenous students are significantly lower than all Queensland non-Indigenous rates, and continue to fall as student age increases.

Physical activity has been utilized as a method to encourage students to attend school and thus improve attendance rates. Lehmann, Silva, Tennant, McAullay, Johnston & Nannup (2002) investigated the 'no school, no pool' initiative in Western Australia aimed at increasing and maintaining school attendance. This strategy has also been applied in the Northern Territory and is relevant to Yarrabah, an Indigenous community south of Cairns. Yarrabah has recently received funding for a pool and is likely to employ this strategy. The Kickstart program links attendance at school with the selection guidelines for eligibility into the Crusader program. The attendance at school aspect of the guidelines and fairness of the guidelines process have met with positive action by students as the following comments by a teacher, parent and student reveal:

Teacher: Their attendance has been one hundred percent almost, which is great and when they are not here there is always a note or something like that.

Parent: He would do anything to stay on the team (a parent talking about his son).

Student: Sometimes I reckon it's a good thing...because you don't want too many people mucking up.

However, Beneforti and Cunningham (2002) suggest that due to students leaving school grounds during the day measuring school attendance can be difficult if relying on only one record per day. Therefore, recording attendance both in the morning and in the afternoon will be paramount to obtain accurate records.

Physical activities, in this case in the form of recreational programs, have been sighted as being useful in the primary intervention of petrol sniffing in Australian communities (d'Abbs & McLean, 2000, in Healy, 2004). Nonetheless, their effectiveness relies on the programs sensitivity to the needs of the community, provision of a range of programs, provision of experiences that are engaging and exciting and provide opportunity for risk-taking, provision of opportunities for both sexes, availability after hours, and target youth (d'Abbs & McLean, 2000, in Healy, 2004, p.34). The Kickstart program achieves intervention of substance abuse through the use of the selection guidelines. Many of the Indigenous Youth participating in the program were considered at risk due to the behaviour problems they displayed within the school and community. Many of these students have gone on to participate in

football at the Crusader level and display the development of lifeskills through positive changes in their behaviour.

Student: Yeah I have changed. That [is what] everyone reckons to me, I have changed. Normally like, whatever I had done before. They always come up to me and say, "You have changed".

Student: There was one team older than us and our team started going hard (playing football). They kept on elbowing...you just walk away. Walk away, cool down.

Students are educated by the development officers and coaches about how to deal with emotions on the field. This has been an effective tool in moderating behaviour during the game. Students also began to use this as part of dealing with incidents in the school and community. Indeed, the success of the Kickstart program and the positive behaviour changes amongst the students influenced teachers to adopt the selection guidelines as part of the schools behaviour management program. The framework of the selection guidelines is not directly integrated as part of the curriculum, but infused as part of the schools philosophy on what kind of behaviour is expected if students are to participate in extra curricula activities, such as going on camps, excursions and sporting trips. Students are given SAP forms (a behaviour recording) for inappropriate behaviour or non attendance at school. Working in the same way as the Kickstart program, if students are given three SAP forms then their opportunity to participate in extra curricula activities is forfeited.

Teacher: That is one thing I guess as a school we have looked at, when we talk about the kids who are in the Crusader program, SAP is a behaviour recording. We mention to them that if they get too many negative SAPS, there goes your chances of Crusader...it has effected the behaviour management of the school.

Teacher: I think it is very appropriate that we implemented it to our own school selection policy, when it comes to Rugby League, Soccer, Netball, any of those other ones where you travel down to the Peninsula. We implement the same guidelines.

Beneforti and Cunningham (2002, p.11) purport that "the salience of sport may attract pupils to educational programs". A possible attraction could be literacy and numeracy attainment. An innovative program in Victoria is attempting to achieve this. Associate Professor Richard James from the University of Melbourne has joined with the Rumbalara Football, Netball Club in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria, to establish the Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE). James (University of Melbourne, 2003, p. 12) states, "ASHE will be a unique educational institution for Victoria in the use of studies in sport to engage young Indigenous people in education and training [and] central to this concept is the commitment of indigenous youth to sport and the passion for sport in the Indigenous community". In 2004, the Certificate II in Sport has been introduced to help address dropout rates among Indigenous teens. Andy Cowan (University of Melbourne, 2004, p. 23), ASHE's program coordinator states, "using a sport-based curriculum, the Certificate II in Sport focuses on health, lifeskills and general education". These include personal development, leadership, computers, literacy and numeracy. The Kickstart program has certainly influenced Indigenous Youth of the importance of education to enhance lifeskills and life

opportunities. Students' success in the program has bolstered self-esteem. The development of self-esteem has encouraged students to improve and extend on what they have already achieved. An example below is of an Indigenous student who is eager to leave the community and take on a scholarship.

Teacher: He actually came up to us a couple of weeks ago saying, "I want to do more, I want to possibly look to move down south", and he is not just talking about the footy, he is talking about school work, he wants to get more involved in school and the opportunity for sport on the weekend.

This teacher further conveyed the student as a prime example of someone who really wants to keep pushing himself through his willingness to get a traineeship outside the school. All participants interviewed revealed overwhelmingly affirmative responses to how the AFL Kickstart program has affected students within the school. At this point in time it is difficult to determine whether the positive affect the program has had on particular students has transpired into affecting the community as a whole. However, all participants expressed that AFL Kickstart did create community cohesion during intercommunity carnivals. As pointed out by Cooktown community members, "Cooktown State School plays an important leadership role in the community" (Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott, 2002, p. 38). The staff of the school work together with the community on Youth issues, namely high unemployment, low school retention rates and low self-esteem. Also, building trust and strengthening relationships within the community is a primary focus. The Kickstart program touches on all these areas within their program through the set up of the selection guidelines and by working together with students on the steps in the Kickstart developmental pathway. The importance of the philosophy behind the sporting programs set up by AFL Cape York is to encourage Youth to play the AFL game and to enhance their lifeskills. Furthermore, heavy emphasis is placed on the importance of education and attendance at school. Consequently, the primary focus becomes the large percentage of Youth who participate in Kickstart programs, not just on the small percentage who make it to the higher levels on the Kickstart developmental pathway.

### ***Linking Lifeskills with Social and Moral Development***

AFL kickstart has helped to provide disadvantaged youth with the possibilities of enhanced lifeskills through the participation in its sporting program. The program not only provides the much needed physical activity to assist healthier lifestyles but it also provides Indigenous youth with the opportunities to develop social and moral skills to make healthier life choices. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2003) highlights that engagement in play and sports gives children opportunities for social interaction and integration, as well as for learning the spirit of solidarity and fair play, and can foster the adoption of other healthy behaviours.

The Kickstart program aims to develop lifeskills for youth through the implementation of the selection guidelines. The program uses these guidelines for students to abide by in order to maintain their position in the Crusader team. The selection guidelines are made up of the following criteria:

- Must attend school at least three days a week
- Have no involvement in substance abuse (petrol/paint/glue sniffing, smoking or drinking alcohol),

- No recent history of violence within the school and community.

These criteria must be strictly followed to remain a part of the crusader team. The developmental pathway of the Kickstart program begins with the introduction of participating in the Auskick program, which focuses on the skills of AFL and playing as a team. At the end of the Auskick season students are involved in school competitions. From these competitions students have the opportunity to attend the Crusader camps. Those students who show potential to be serious about their commitment and the willingness to develop leadership qualities are then chosen for the crusader team. Participation in the Crusader team gives members the opportunity to play AFL outside the community at a regional level and the possibility to play at a state level in the Queensland Country Championships.

Students in this case study made a direct correlation between their behaviour and the Kickstart selection guidelines as a means for changing behaviour and enhancing their life.

Student: It is not only for AFL skills. It is to gives you more manners. They pick a camping ground at Weipa. We all have to stay there and they watch our every move.

Student: [We had to show] leadership and our behaviour and there had to be no fights.

Student: I remember I was in class, and I was a bit of a bad boy, and then when I started doing AFL and Rick let me go through, I was alright. He started looking at me and gave me a scholarship and I couldn't take it because I was young.

In 2003, students who showed particularly strong leadership qualities were invited to take on scholarships that were offered by AFL Cape York, in partnership with schools and individual families. The scholarship provides an opportunity for selected students to leave their communities to attend a Cairns boarding school and continue their progress on the AFL Queensland developmental pathway.

Teachers also made comments about student's progress due to behavioural changes and highlighted this as a successful part of the program:

Teacher: There is probably a handful of children I've seen in the last year whose behaviour has been extremely modified because of opportunities in Crusaders. There is one particular fella, he has been in it for quite a few years. Around grade six or seven, he was a very big handful, quite violent...in the classroom and since then he has just- once he was given the opportunity, he was given the "ok, this is what you can do, this is football players, this is where you can go, any more crap and it is over for you". And since then, he has been a model student. A real turnaround, and it hasn't been forced either, I think it has just been a natural thing that he can see some of these goals he may reach one day and he has just turned around. It has been amazing.

Many of the students within this study who have participated in the kickstart program revealed positive behavioural changes in their attitudes towards school and a building of self-esteem. Hellison (1995) is noted for his utilisation of physical activity to

promote social-values development, and more importantly, levels of responsibility. He believes that “physical activity can act as a powerful vehicle to help kids with their personal and social-moral lives outside the physical activity setting” (Hellison, 2000a, p.4). The majority of students were very aware of what their responsibilities involved to abide by the selection guidelines.

Student: Good behaviour.

Student: If we don't go to school three or more days [a week], we get kicked off the team.

Student: No smoking, drinking and sniffing.

Although most students held positive attitudes towards the criteria, one student in particular expressed his difficulties because of peer pressure. Nevertheless, due to his determination he developed a strategy of staying close to a team mate to help him through the difficult period.

Student: It was hard because Rick told me a day before the Under 12 team and a lot of people around me, they were drinking and smoking. It was real hard for me to follow those guidelines.

Interviewer: How did you get through that, was that pretty tough?

Student: Yeah, some of them were. One of my team mates for here...he made it to the [under] 12 one too. Us two were together. We didn't listen to anyone else, to go and drink this and sniff and smoke.

Many students began to develop a sense of pride and confidence within themselves, through achieving success with maintaining the selection guidelines. Further success was highlighted through their experiences within the program of developing teamwork skills and representing the community. With a grounding of social and moral development students began to move beyond simply abiding by the selection guidelines to goal setting for their future developments.

Student: I want to make it down to Brisbane and then down to Adelaide. So far I have made it down to Brisbane but I don't know if I'm going to Adelaide yet.

Student: I want to play in the Kookaburras. Like you go for Crusaders and you play other teams and from there they decide on the Kookaburra.

On the AFL Kickstart developmental pathway, the Kookaburras are the representative Queensland Country team. For the students who have experienced the opportunity of playing outside the community a common element exists. Their broadened understanding has enabled them to practice lifeskills and experience the challenge of new social circumstances. Subsequently, many students began to consider and feel confident about possible life choices outside the community setting. Development in social and moral understanding has provided growth of self-esteem and confidence. These new skills and experiences have brought about a change and development of new values and ideals, new opportunities, new ways of viewing oneself and their successes within society, their community and the sporting arena.

## **Values and Sport**

Australian mainstream sporting culture values ideals of competition and the egalitarian belief of providing an equal playing field, or 'a fair go for all' (Kell, 2000). Values of competition can be problematic in creating a fair go for all or rather, it actually counters the idea of an even playing field. As recent research points out, many participants are often extremely focused on winning the competition as the driving force. The competitive nature of the need to win "produces values, attitudes and behaviours [opposed] to high moral aspirations and attributes of an idealised sporting ethic ('having a go', 'doing one's best', playing for the team, encouraging struggling team-mates)" (Walker & Oxenham, 2001, p.29).

For students from this community, participation in sport was more than just competing in competitions. For example, making the Crusader team gave students the opportunity to visit other communities, with the relative safety and security of being around friends, teachers and parents in a friendly and fun atmosphere. In these environments students were able to feel confident enough to take the risk of leaving their communities, some for the first time without their immediate family. The level of confidence and self-esteem the students have developed from involvement in the program has meant many are ready to challenge themselves with the possibility of taking on a scholarship outside their home community. The following comment reveals participation in sport at the regional competition level for this student goes beyond competitiveness to valuing sport for the enjoyment it brings:

Student: We don't go out there to win, we go out there to have fun.

Despite the problematic nature of competition in the sporting culture, some Indigenous Australians view their "strong determination to win as one means of being accepted as equal or even superior, since in all other things in life they have to accept, or be, second-fiddle" (Tatz, 1995, p. 183). Many Indigenous Australian sports persons have expressed their participation in sport as an enriching and educational experience. Tatz (1995) describes ways in which football has given Indigenous Australians "an open door to a better life and a decent living". These inspiring experiences and affirmative behaviours have helped to shape the building of positive self-esteem for many Indigenous Australian sportspeople and are reiterated in the following comments.

Student: I like going away with a group of people, getting away from home and hanging out with a whole different people, different grades and that.

Student: You find out what they are really like (other students). You get to share your interests.

Student: Getting to go to different places. Having fun.

Too few sporting programs consider the explicit needs and values of Indigenous Australians, primarily those in remote community areas. The AFL Kickstart program specifically targets Indigenous Youth in remote communities and assists families financially through seeking sponsorship and funding from various stakeholders to support youth with their participation in competitions outside the community. However, the AFL Kickstart program has not included Indigenous childrens'

perspectives on sport and their participation in sport is largely ignored in current literature. Kickett-Tucker (1997) argues that their needs, perspectives and how they perceive themselves in sport must be explored in order to devise sporting programs that are culturally relevant to Indigenous children and are particular to community needs and values.

### ***Sport Culture in Mainstream Australia and Opportunities for Indigenous Youth***

Children are encouraged to participate in Australian sporting culture from an early age. Community sport is widely available to all classes, both genders and most ages. Godwell (2000, p.2) points out that “sport offers one accessible opportunities in Australian society, to examine the sphere of interaction between non Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, and the associated power relationships”. Subsequently, this illustrates that sport can be an opportunity for attitudes towards race and social equality to build positively through team partnerships. Students in the study expressed encouraging views of the Kickstart program to bring various schools together. The following comments reveal a feeling of team spirit rather than one of competing against one another.

Student: More schools united.

Student: Small schools. They all joined together.

Student: You get to meet lots of people, cross country.

The interest and involvement in sport of the students in the Cooktown community reveals the heavy emphasis that sport has in their everyday lives. Tatz (1995, p. 357) suggests from the Toomelah Report that “sport is the major thing that holds the community together”. Therefore, the AFL Kickstart program can be a major factor in advocating reciprocal partnerships between schools and communities as it is the social force that brings these stakeholders together. This idea is reciprocated by Cameron & MacDougal (2000, p.1) who suggest that sporting programs in Aboriginal communities “act as catalysts for social and traditional cohesion”. As a result, participation in sport and physical activity provides a sense of belonging, loyalty and support for young people. On the contrary, despite the ability sport has to bring people together, sport in mainstream Australian culture is still firmly embedded in social hierarchies. These social hierarchies have perpetuated social inequalities and racism still evident in Australian sport today (Kell, 2000).

Studies in Australian sporting culture provide evidence of the prolonged existence and replication of inequality and racism in sport. In a study on professional rugby league, Godwell (2000, p.7) found that “racism was a common experience among all subjects, which curbed their full participation” in the game. Despite the cyclic nature of racism in sport, recent studies have revealed positive aspects for Indigenous Australians’ participation in sport. Contrary to his earlier argument, Gowell (2000, p.1) proposes that “for many Indigenous people sport provides opportunities for positive life experiences ...and a way out of difficult social situations”. This view is also reinforced by Cameron and MacDougal (2000, p.2) who suggest “sport and physical activity have the potential to improve quality of life...and allows one to escape from day-to-day reality of family conflict, homelessness, or the temptations to use alcohol, drugs or inhale petrol”. Many of these experiences can be a continued cycle or self-fulfilling prophecy for Indigenous Youth in remote communities. Essentially, the

implementation of sporting programs can be one way to divert Indigenous Youth from negative behaviours and serve as a possible crime prevention strategy.

### **Crime prevention**

Cape York communities are experiencing unacceptable levels of social disadvantage (Cape York Justice Study, 2002). Compounding this disadvantage is the isolation of communities, climatic conditions, and lack of access to educational and health facilities. For Indigenous Youth truancy, vandalism, alcohol and substance abuse, suicide attempts and domestic violence have in recent times become normalizing behaviours. This has helped to create a climate of both uncertainty and hopelessness amongst youth in these remote communities, which has led to increased crime levels. In recent times, sport and physical activity have become a strategy for crime prevention in remote communities.

Crime prevention is about creating safer and more supportive communities and fostering the development of community networks (Queensland Government, Department of Communities, 2004). The Department of Communities, Queensland Government (2004, p.2) suggest proven strategies that have reduced youth crime:

- Provision of activities to increase social and personal development of youth people;
- Recreation/leisure activities at times when young people are most at risk of offending;
- Community events that promote family involvement;
- Workshops or training sessions for young people to develop skills and strategies to resolve/reduce violence and reduce anti-social behaviour;
- Peer education and leadership development programs; and
- Cultural education programs.

An example of a recreational strategy is the development of the Police Citizens Youth Club at Yarrabah south of Cairns. Neill (2002) suggests a reduction in youth crime due to the introduction of extended day activities.

Several American communities have implemented recreational programs in under-served youth contexts. Hellison (2000b, p.15) reports that the use of physical activity extended day programs designed for the underserved youth have “shown some reduction in crime and gang involvement”. McCann & Peters (1996, p.38) state that “recreation has come to be viewed as an important component of intervention programs for at-risk youth”, and that “parks and recreation services are not luxuries, but investments in the security and stability of our cities”. In Phoenix, Arizona, recreational programs included a Kool Kids Program (free swimming) and City Streets Outreach Program (extended day physical and social activities).

As mentioned earlier, the AusCop program was devised to build positive relationships between Police and Indigenous Youth in Cape York communities. This initiative works two fold, by implementing a sporting program to keep youth entertained and occupied and by involving Police to establish rapport with Youth that may be likely to be involved in juvenile crime. Consequently, the AusCop initiative has the potential

to be used as a tool for crime prevention in the community. In a study conducted by Tatz (1995, p. 303), police and people in the community suggested that “when sport is on, crime rates drop down”. When sport was on people were focused on sport and consequently interest in alcohol consumption decreased and the general health of the people and overall community well-being noticeably improved. This kind of improvement was evident in the Cooktown community as suggested by police officers who were involved in the AusCop program:

Police: There was a lot of vandalism going on. That has quietened down. I would see kids wandering around, whereas after the nights when there wasn't a training session going on, the kids would actually be on the field playing themselves. They would take their footballs down to the field and they would be there playing after school, and in the afternoons. So it has taken them off the street and given them a goal to work towards.

Police: The kids used to roam around in packs here and after school they would be down in the school grounds damaging equipment. The course [Auskick] gave them some sort of goal to look forward to.

A Student revealed the issues of boredom that can generate in remote areas because of lack of facilities and activities for youth:

Student: I just want to get out of this town because it is boring and there is nothing to do. Not much sports here.

This particular student is hoping to be offered a scholarship through the Kickstart program as he expressed the idea of better opportunities down south in Cairns. Much research suggests sport and physical activity have the potential to improve the quality of life, not just for health benefits but also for social development. Sport and physical activity can give youth a sense of belonging, loyalty and support which may mean that substance abuse, drinking alcohol and truancy are no longer appealing (Cameron & MacDougal, 2000). The AusCop program focuses on supporting youth through building relationships with Police while participating in the Auskick program. Building rapport and trust between Police and youth has the potential to benefit the whole community and how they perceive the role of Police in the community. The following comments by students reveal how youth view Police in the community at present. The students were asked about maintaining the selection guidelines. Both students referred to behaviour, however the second student specifically named behaviours involved with breaking the law and highlighted those types' behaviours being connected to Police law enforcement:

Student: Good behaviour

Student: Outside of school, not just in school. Like using drugs, break-ins, robberies, anything to do with the police.

The AusCop program is designed to break down barriers between Youth and Police that may be produced due to the role of Police as law enforcers within the community. The importance of building rapport and establishing Police in a role other than that of law enforcer will ultimately benefit Youth, benefit Police and benefit the community

as a whole. The Police Officer involved in the AusCop program also stressed the importance of all Police to work with the community apart from their job status.

Police: I think I am developing a personal understanding of what happens in their communities. The kids will come up and talk to you as a person, not just a policeman in a uniform. I've got a lot of benefit out of it because I can go out there now and the kids will come up to me, and speak to me as a person.

When it is us doing this type of course with the kids, teaching them how to play football, and the comradeship between everybody, they have developed a better understanding of us and the same with us to look towards them.

If you are going to be working in one of these places or further up the Cape, you have to be doing something with the communities as well as policing them. It is to your benefit as well as theirs. That is what I have found, since it started.

Police: In my view it has been a good communication exercise as well. It builds a better relationship between police and the kids out there. The only time they basically saw us was when we were out there working. Being able to work with the kids and show them that we are not just police, we can get involved with them as well in sport and it has been good.

Tatz (1995) stresses that Police involvement in the community through sport has improved attitudes and helped to reduce the arrest rates of youth. Developing relationships and building rapport takes time. This implicates a possible weakness of the AusCop program. The training runs one night a week for a period of ten weeks. The Police Officer involved in the AusCop program suggests a solution could be that the program runs for two nights a week, finishing with a carnival between the surrounding communities. Despite the implication that rapport takes time to build, participants have expressed positive results of the relationships that have developed between Police and Youth. Even though the program has only been in existence for a short time, those involved express the possibility of rapport building and the youth beginning to feel comfortable and confident with the Police who train them.

Police: The kids do come out of their shell and they are not afraid to ask questions. They will come up to you and ask different things, whereas before they would be too frightened or they would be too shy.

Police: They would be a little bit inhibited in what they would do and what they wouldn't do. But after the second [training], they understood what you were there for and what they were there for and they had no problem with asking questions about what was going on.

Overall, the utilisation of physical activity as a medium for reducing youth crime is not adequately researched at this time. Possible links have been created through strategies of keeping youth busy, a diversionary tactic to relieve boredom. However, it is apparent that other factors are involved, such as peer pressure and substance abuse. More research specific to the types of crime and ages of youth is needed (Beneforti & Cunningham, 2002). In this particular case study of Cooktown, the implementation of the AusCop program certainly appears to be generating positive

outcomes in the early stages, especially through the development of rapport between Police Officers and Indigenous Youth. However, rapport may not be sustainable when Police Officers are stationed in remote areas for short periods of time (usually six months).

Teacher: The Police have had trouble being involved this year. The Police involved last year, one has moved away, and the other one got married and then had a child and the other one has been pretty full on. So they haven't been able to get involved this year.

Irregularity in staffing and implementation of the program may affect the relationships Indigenous Youth have established with Police. Therefore, the AusCop program may need to ensure consistent running and training of police involved in the program to maintain a constant level of rapport between police and youth. Furthermore, measurement of crime statistics involving juveniles whilst the AusCop program is being implemented will assist in adding evidence of the productivity of sport as a tool for crime prevention.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, sport and physical activity provide an arena for Indigenous Australian children to engage encouragingly in the community. The AFL Kickstart program has provided overwhelming evidence of the success and the positive impacts this kind of program can have on the Cooktown community. Although the program is very successful and continues to gain large numbers of student participation, stronger ties with community involvement and input are crucial to the program's long-term sustainability in Cooktown.

The Kickstart program encourages appropriate behaviours by providing opportunities for students to participate in sport both within and outside the community. Many of the students who have successfully made it into the Crusader team have become role models for peers and for younger children in the community. As role models these students can encourage and educate others in healthier lifestyles such as eating healthy foods, discouraging health-compromising behaviours such as substance abuse, and encourage peers to avoid violence through the walk away, cool down principle. All of these behaviours relate directly to the selection guidelines and hence the development of lifeskills. Despite these positive aspects some parents were concerned about many of the role models being offered scholarships, which mean they leave the community to finish their education in Cairns. However, these students are likely to return to Cooktown during the holidays. From an optimistic point of view, scholarship students may educate their peers on the possible opportunities that exist outside the community and provide positive reinforcement as a role model when they are home.

In essence, the Kickstart program emphasizes that sport and physical activity has been used as a tool to develop positive behavioural changes and build on self-esteem (Cameron & MacDougal, 2000). Further, the AFL AusCop initiative has shown positive outcomes of building good communication and trust between community Police and Indigenous Youth. However, the high transience of staff may become a

barrier to development of rapport between the Police and Youth involved in the program. Consequently, the transient nature of staffing in remote areas could debilitate the strategy of the AusCop program to serve as a possible tool for crime prevention remote communities. However, if AFL Cape York and Queensland Police take steps to improve the consistency of AusCop the overall initiative of the program would look promising. Also, steps must be taken to record juvenile crime rates whilst the program is in place so that program's effectiveness regarding crime prevention may be compared with the off season.

Participating in the Kickstart program gave students the chance to experience life outside the community. Consequently, students began to see other life choices and a variety of options of education and training that might be available in their future besides employment in their own communities. After experiencing success in the Kickstart program some students were beginning to articulate goal-setting. Furthermore, success helped to build positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging, especially when playing as a team and representing the community. Representing the community helped to foster the development of loyalty, discipline, feelings of belonging and support amongst team members and those involved in organising the program. As a result, students could see a sense of purpose in continuing through school as a bridge to further sporting development and opening opportunities for future prospects.

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