



DJABAAN MARRUNG EVALUATION REPORT 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre (MDECC) has developed community based peer education programs since 1999. These very successful programs were developed to target young people and parents after consultation with the Northern Beaches local community. Building onto these existing peer education models, the Djabaan Marrung project was developed in 2005. This pilot project aimed to implement the successful peer education model in partnership with the Ghinni Ghinni Youth and Culture Aboriginal Corporation. It was redesigned to be culturally specific for the Biripi community in Taree, NSW.

Ghinni Ghinni Youth and Culture Aboriginal Corporation was the key partner organisation for this project. Ghinni Ghinni brought to the project the vital community and cultural knowledge and contacts.

The aims of the Djabaan Marrung project were to prevent the uptake of harmful alcohol and other drug use by Biripi young people, to develop a capacity within the Biripi community to better address alcohol and other drug prevention issues, and to encourage cultural reconnection.

There were both primary and secondary target groups for this project. The primary being the local Aboriginal young people, and the secondary being the Aboriginal youth workers involved in the project.

Ten Aboriginal young people were recruited as peer educators for the project. One third of the peer educators were attending high school, one third attending Ghinni Ghinni and one third unemployed and not currently studying. All ten completed the training camp, with six being involved in all stages of the project, and two re-engaging after a period of absence.

The Djabaan Marrung peer educators completed 294 education conversations within a period of six months. Over fifty percent of the total number of informal conversations

were with family. This highlighted a significant cultural difference when compared with a similar MDECC peer education project not set in an Indigenous setting, with a total of only seven percent of informal conversations taking place with a family member.

Conversations took place in a variety of settings, mostly their own home or friends' houses, closely followed by school and parties. Most topics of conversation were related to harm reduction tips and misinformation. Drugs most spoken about were tobacco, alcohol and cannabis. These three drugs were also the most used by the peer educators' networks, and most studied during the training program. A further break down of the conversations showed that drug effects, making safe choices and camp content were the key conversation topics in relation to these drugs.

The Djabaan Marrung peer educators had a significant increase in their knowledge with an average score of 54.6% correct at pre test and 72.3% at 20-weeks. This result also indicates the peer educators' learning was retained. Information pertaining to harm reduction was passed on by the peer educators through their networks as the tips were clearly understood and reinforced through the process of repetition.

Information that was incorrect at 20-weeks tended to be information that was not as readily repeated throughout follow up sessions. Follow up sessions were planned in response to the current needs of the community, and this tended to be in relation to tobacco, cannabis, alcohol, sexual health and safe relationships.

Attitudinal results were somewhat confusing and difficult to analyse. Similarly, questions relating to young peoples' confidence were also very changeable and difficult to analyse. This may be reflective of the complex, and sometimes chaotic lives of this target group. Inconsistencies also raised the reliability of survey responses.

Overall the findings showed that Djabaan Marrung was a successful pilot project and that it was a positive learning process for all involved. The partnership between Ghinni Ghinni Youth and Culture Aboriginal Corporation and MDECC was fundamental to this success. The first step in developing the partnership was to gain trust on both sides and to demonstrate commitment to the principles of Indigenous health. This was certainly achieved.

The experience of the peer educators demonstrated increased confidence and skills in the area of drug and alcohol peer education. There was also evidence of positive changes in attitude and behaviour by the peer educators in relation to drug and alcohol consumption. Most key stakeholders commented that the peer educators became more empowered following the training.

It was difficult to ascertain the effect and impact this project had on other young people in contact with the peer educators. However, this should not distract from the positive impact the project had on the peer educators themselves.

The response of the peer recipients interviewed during the focus group was that they had had no interventions or education with the peer educators, however their response showed they had clearly picked up information they had learnt from the peer educators.

This exemplifies the benefits of informal peer education, as the peer recipients had not realised they had been educated, due to it not being “education” in the formal sense of the word.

There was unanimous agreement that the training provided by MDECC was of a high quality, totally professional, culturally appropriate and that the young people responded very well to the trainers. The resources provided by MDECC for the project were well received.

One of the key objectives of the Djabaan Marrung project was to ensure the sustainability of alcohol and other drug education amongst Aboriginal young people of the Taree area, and to support the Aboriginal peer leader to ensure the sustainability of peer education. This was done in three ways, supporting Ghinni Ghinni to source and apply for funding, training of an Aboriginal support worker in relapse prevention, and development of two plans of action. The first plan of action is to be completed while funding is being sought, and the second to be completed once funding is gained. The aim of the plan of action is to keep the peer educators engaged in the project until such time it can receive ongoing funding and support project sustainability.

In summary, Djabaan Marrung has met all its stated aims and objectives. The project has developed a sustainable and credible Indigenous specific peer education program, and developed a capacity within the Biripi community to better address drug and alcohol prevention issues. The program was successful in that it encouraged the young people to become responsible, involved and empowered, while encouraging further cultural reconnection.

“We were taught to love our culture and not be shamed; one thing Roy said was that we should be proud of our heritage...like we are the longest living people, like I didn’t know that.”