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OCHRE

The Continuing Conversation

Evaluation | Stage 1:
Implementation and early outcomes

Tamworth Opportunity Hub

Stage 1 Summary Report

Prepared for the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council and members of
Tamworth Aboriginal Communities

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This report belongs to members of Tamworth Aboriginal Communities and
the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council.

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub operates on Kamilaroi Country.

The evaluation team from the Social Policy Research Centre acknowledges the Kamilaroi people as the traditional custodians of the land we are working on and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and all Aboriginal peoples in the region.

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The OCHRE Tamworth Opportunity Hub: What we have found

<p>What is working?</p> <p>The Tamworth Opportunity Hub:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has the respect and trust of members of the Tamworth Aboriginal community, other service providers and participating schools. • facilitates and develops relationships with services, organisations and the wider community with a focus on supporting Aboriginal young people. • provides opportunities for young people and the wider Aboriginal community (through volunteering). • facilitates connection to culture, through cultural, sporting and other activities inside and outside school. • has committed and highly motivated staff. • is flexible in providing services and support to help Aboriginal young people engage with school and transition from school to employment or further education. <p>Important messages to NSW Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Opportunity Hub has been successfully implemented in Tamworth and the model has worked well. 	<p>What needs further work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current short-term funding cycle means that it is difficult for the Opportunity Hub to plan in the long-term. This is a source of concern for communities as there is a history of successful programs being de-funded. • Some key agencies involved in service delivery to Aboriginal children and families are not engaged with the Opportunity Hub. • Participation in the Hub relies on Principals' approval to access schools and school staff to allow students to attend. • Demand is exceeding supply – this is likely to continue as the Hub continues to grow its reputation in the community. • Burden on staff and volunteers is considerable and staff work way beyond their contracted hours. • Data collected by the Opportunity Hub does not reflect the full range of activities undertaken by staff and volunteers. • The Hub would like to access some schools outside the Tamworth area. <p>Important messages to NSW Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure and long-term funding is important for Aboriginal communities to trust that NSW Government is serious about supporting young Aboriginal people. • Improved resources can support more staff to provide services for the region.
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Summary of the *Continuing Conversation*

Researchers find out about OCHRE's history

Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council agreed to continue the OCHRE conversation (21 March 2016)

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council checked the conversations will happen respectfully (9 August 2016)

The community (the Land Council, Hub staff, and Aboriginal Affairs) met with researchers to decide how and when conversations would take place (9 Feb 2017)

Four Community Researchers and Michael Barnes had conversations with **72 members of the community**, plus other stakeholders. Nine others filled in the online survey. (31 October - 13 November)

Community helps researchers to understand the information collected (19 & 20 March 2018).

Community decides what happens with findings. Phase 2 of the evaluation begins July 2018.

The *OCHRE* Tamworth Opportunity Hub

The *OCHRE* Evaluation adopts the approach of ‘continuing conversations’. Over the past two years, SPRC evaluators have continued the conversations with members of Tamworth Aboriginal communities about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub – part of the *OCHRE* initiative. The evaluation team have used culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the evaluation.

Community-controlled research involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research *with* and *not on* communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program’s success, who the team should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the evaluation. We trained local community members to be researchers to have conversations. As part of co-design we also returned a draft report to research participants in communities and asked for their feedback (validation of findings), which has been added to this final report.

This is a summary of what we were told and what we heard about *OCHRE* and the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. This report has been presented to the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council and its members, as well as the Opportunity Hub Consortium (19-20 March 2018). The report has been updated to incorporate what we heard at both meetings, without compromising the independent findings.

Members of Tamworth Aboriginal communities involved in the evaluation have reviewed and accepted the final report for presentation to the NSW Government. The report will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (30 June 2018) and then presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

The evaluation team have drawn lessons from all *OCHRE* sites evaluated and will present a Synthesis Report to the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA).

What people told us about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

The Op-Hub is just a vehicle to address community needs as opposed to a government program that is a source of funds, just to say, 'oh, you know we've got this'.

The staff at the Hub make it a success. They are passionate, work together and have ownership over the program. They operate with trust, share information and training, and work with cultural protocols. The staff are good role models.

The Hub could not get any more culturally safe. The fact it sits within an Aboriginal community owned and controlled organisation is a huge credit to this. The staff employed are confident in their culture and are true community people. Only an Aboriginal organisation on the ground could possibly achieve this – using the connections they have built over decades in the community. They know who to engage and how to engage in terms of culture, and there is no other service in town that offers this for our children.

Findings

- We heard broad support for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. Most participants, including members of the Tamworth Aboriginal communities and NSW Government representatives, view the Opportunity Hub as very successful.
- The Opportunity Hub is Aboriginal community-controlled and is part of the work of the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, which has priorities to benefit, support and provide outcomes for the local Aboriginal communities.
- The Opportunity Hub has the respect and trust of members of the Tamworth Aboriginal communities, other service providers and participating schools.
- The Opportunity Hub facilitates connection to culture, through cultural, sporting and other activities inside and outside school.

What is working well?

Since participating in the OpHub, it encouraged me to stay in school to become what I wanted to be when I wanted to leave in Year 10.

The Hub helped him gain knowledge and experience needed to be successful in any field of work.

I've seen his confidence and everything – and his sense of identity – come from doing these cultural activities and mixing with community, which then transfers into confidence in the classroom.

My son's happier, I'm happier

We sort of help with – whether it be housing, whether it be a funeral, or whether it be whatever other events that we've contacted – so there's sort of that bit of familiarity and the comfort being inside an Aboriginal-controlled group where they sort of feel like they've got a bit of a voice.

It's the Aboriginal staff that are the champions of the Hub and that connection.

Findings

- The Opportunity Hub facilitates and develops relationships with services, organisations and the wider community with a focus on supporting young Aboriginal people.
- Participants in Opportunity Hub activities felt it was a positive influence in their lives and provided them with support and opportunities.
- The Opportunity Hub offers opportunities for mentoring and for young Aboriginal people to volunteer at the Opportunity Hub. Members of Aboriginal communities also volunteer and work with their communities, parents and children.
- The staff at the Opportunity Hub are highly committed and motivated to provide the best services for young people, often volunteering their time.
- The Hub is flexible in providing services and support to help Aboriginal young people engage with school and transition from school to employment or further education. This is important in meeting the diverse needs of Aboriginal young people.

Implementation of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

Young, local Aboriginal people have always been employed and I believe it has worked great as they are part of the community, know the community, understand what the community needs and wants are, and they are fresh out of the process they are assisting other community members to now go through in their roles with the Hub.

The implementation was effective due to:

The innovation used in the tender process, and the containing collaboration and engagement of the services who were initially involved in tendering, and establishing the Hub.

Findings

- The tender process required collaboration and formalised agreements with other services up front. In this respect it was positive for the Hub. However, there was some dissatisfaction with the tendering process.
- Formalised agreements and other local partnerships support the Opportunity Hub in delivering services.
- The implementation was well-supported by being managed by a community-based organisation.
- Demand for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub services continues to grow.

What are the challenges and how can the Opportunity Hub be improved?

What we are doing there [at the Hub] does not fit into any of the boxes that they want us to dropdown with a personal learning plan. But there is some real benefit in ... working with those young people to get them back on track.

I think where the big challenge is.... the willingness of schools.

Findings – challenges

- It requires considerable effort for a non-school based organisation to access the structured school environment and keep schools engaged with the program.
- Participation in the Opportunity Hub relies on Principals' approval to access schools and school staff to allow students to attend.
- Some key agencies involved in service delivery to Aboriginal children and families are not engaged with the Opportunity Hub.
- Demand is exceeding supply – this is likely to continue as the Opportunity Hub continues to grow its reputation in the community.
- The burden on staff and volunteers is considerable and staff all work way beyond their contracted hours.
- The tendering process and short funding timescales mean that it is difficult for the Opportunity Hub to plan in the long-term and is a source of concern as there is a history of successful programs being de-funded.

[The Hub needs] Resourcing, eligibility and boundaries.

Because that's really, I think, where the big challenge is.... the willingness of schools. Because from the school's point of view, it's about letting people come into the schools. It's about being flexible around their timetabling or whatever. Releasing kids to go off and do stuff. And wanting to ensure that what they do and what the Opportunity Hub does is complementary.

Funding reallocation at a state/Commonwealth level would be better spent in a Hub style service for Aboriginal communities that is community owned and operated.

We capture it [data and information about the Hub], but we don't sort of really feed it up. We give them numbers, now, but of non-Aboriginal kids, or we'll report on – we've started to stick in there because we believe it's relevant to – but that's not what they're asking for.

Findings – Improvements

- Increase participation through encouraging local schools and Principals to access the Opportunity Hub activities. The Tamworth Opportunity Hub would like to access schools in the surrounding areas that have indicated an interest in their programs.
- Provide more activities in the community and share information about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub more widely.
- Establish stability of the Opportunity Hub through long-term government commitment to funding.
- Increase staff support – through training and resources.
- Provide ideas for how the Opportunity Hub can be even more successful.
- Improve engagement with all levels of government departments, agencies (Local, State and Commonwealth), and service providers (both government and NGO) – apart from Aboriginal Affairs NSW. NSW Government departments (Housing NSW, NSW Health, NSW FACS, and NSW Justice) to work more closely with the Opportunity Hub and their programs.
- Support a holistic approach to young Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing.
- Develop reporting and evaluation mechanisms that reflect communities' views of what is important.

Community views of success for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

The people employed by the Opportunity Hub as individuals are a true credit to its development.

The success – is some of the stories from some of the kids that we've impacted. We've covered some of that in our reporting; we do some case studies, and we sort of highlight some good stuff in our newsletters; but I think that, and sometimes I don't know whether an impact – because I know I've been involved with other programs at times – and **it's not until the people are older that they realise that they had – that you had an impact.**

Findings

Success is:

- **Student engagement** (Aboriginal and other than Aboriginal students).
- **Aboriginal community involvement and connections to Culture.**
- **Building relationships, self-esteem and cultural identity.** The Opportunity Hub staff want to capture information that illustrates young people are participating in activities, and the value of casual conversations or interactions in supporting and building confidence. For example, engaging with a student at risk of leaving school, or building the self-esteem, confidence and cultural identity of young Aboriginal people.
- **Community building** through volunteering. Community members, Opportunity Hub staff and students play an important role in the activities at the Hub. It is valuable to capture the broader communities' engagement with the Hub. During co-design, we heard volunteers are important to the success of the program and that needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation.
- Some achievements of the Opportunity Hub may be unknown for some time.

Recommendations to NSW Government

These recommendations are based on what people told us about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.

Theme	Recommendation
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resource provision from NSW Government. • Resource sustainable and effective staffing levels for the Hub. Staff changes can be very disruptive to the program and to the progress and support of individual students at the Hub. • Identify corporate/business partnerships that could support expanded range of Hub programs.
Role and value of community volunteers to the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers are important to the success of Hub programs and their contribution needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation. • Give official recognition to volunteers and provide more resources to support and train them.
Professional Career and Training support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Training Services and NSW Dept of Industry to increase training and professional development support for Opportunity Hub employees. • Aboriginal Affairs NSW to provide more support and skill development for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal school staff.
Stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage and work more with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal organisations to respond to their identified needs.
Engagement with NSW Gov and NSW Gov Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve, expand and require engagement with the Hub from NSW Gov departments other than Aboriginal Affairs- FACS, Juvenile Justice, Local Health Districts (LHDs), Primary Health

Theme	Recommendation
	providers and networks, NSW Dept of Education to support young Aboriginal people.
Access to Tamworth Opportunity Hub Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the Regional Director of Education in the Steering Group to facilitate the engagement of more schools in the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. • Increase access to programs by including more schools in the area surrounding Tamworth. • Identify opportunities and mechanisms to increase the number of local schools involved in the program. • Expand the capacity of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub to work with more local schools. • Include young people who have left school and young people who are disengaged from school as eligible participants in Hub programs.
Range of activities conducted by the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support increased staff numbers to provide more activities in the community, including one-to-one time with Hub staff.
Promotion of the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about the Opportunity Hub more widely across the Tamworth region, and services working with young people.
Data Collection and Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve data collection (without placing additional administrative burden on Opportunity Hub staff). • Record peoples' stories in visual formats to present to others. • Start capturing data earlier, not just from Year 9 but from Year 5 or the moment of first engagement. • Track outcomes over the long-term. • Capture wider Hub activity data and demonstrate student engagement, community involvement and connection to culture.

Theme	Recommendation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve reporting mechanisms to capture the relationships and conversations. • Improve the reporting and evaluation mechanisms to adequately and meaningfully describe what happens at the Hub and include individual and community capacity outcomes.
Community determined measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting should reflect community measures regarding the success of the Hub. • Measures to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and type of Aboriginal community involvement. • Level and number of student engagements – identify cohorts. • Connection to Culture. • Specifically identify and include wellbeing indicator outcomes such as building self-esteem and cultural identity into reporting and evaluations.
Tendering Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change and improve the tendering process to provide long-term security to the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and Tamworth Aboriginal community members. • Tendering should be more collaborative between government and Aboriginal community members and organisations, focusing on developmental and capacity support for Aboriginal inclusion.

They help us, and they believe in us.

[They] help through the rough times.

First there's our culture and there's the other. We need both of them together to get anything going, because they've got to have that recognition that came from country.

Directions for next conversations

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021 will identify changes experienced by the participating communities, outcomes, including a focus on identifying Aboriginal determined long and short-term outcomes and recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024 will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

Based on the conversations to date (including co-design), we propose the next conversations include and discuss:

- What long-term data should be captured and how?
- Aboriginal measures of success for the monitoring and evaluation of the initiative during the next Stage.
- How the initiative can be more accessible for young Aboriginal peoples in the Tamworth region.
- How best to respond to the training and education needs of school staff and Aboriginal community members and organisations for the long-term development and sustainability of the initiative.
- Methods for capturing different kinds of information – including volunteer hours, impact of volunteering on young people, and impact of program on student wellbeing, Aboriginal outcomes – not just academic outcomes.

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