
HOPE Project – Building Stronger Communities

Initiative Type

System Improvement

Status

Sustained

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Summary

Project HOPE - which stands for Harmony, Opportunity, Pride and Empowerment, is a South West Hospital and Health Service (SWHHS) initiative which has been operating since 2015 in Charleville and Cunnamulla. HOPE focuses on the social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age. These circumstances improve when people participate regularly

in physical and recreational activities. The HOPE Project applies Developmental Evaluation that focuses on innovation and strategic learning rather than standard outcomes and is a way of thinking about programs-in-context and the feedback they produce. The project won the Promoting Wellbeing Category at the 2018 Queensland Health Awards for Excellence.

Key dates

Jan 2015

Dec 2018

Implementation sites

South West Hospital and Health Service.

Partnerships

Local Councils, Aboriginal Medical Services, Queensland Police Service, Education Queensland and the community.

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Aim

The HOPE Project's vision is to support young people to lead healthy lifestyles and reach their full potential.

Benefits

- Improves physical, social and emotional wellness.
- Increases education, training and employment opportunities.
- Supports safer families and safer communities.
- Improves service integration.

Background

The project came about in response to these two remote communities coming together to discuss the challenges facing their young people. Issues of unemployment, poor educational attainment, family dysfunction, crime and justice, substance misuse and mental health and wellbeing were discussed at length. The communities delivered a mandate to their elected leaders and key service providers that they were not willing to accept the current social and health outcomes for young people in their communities as good enough. The factors contributing to these poor outcomes are numerous and diverse and extend well beyond any one agency or providers' remit. As such, SWHHS formed a partnership with local Councils, Aboriginal Medical Services, Queensland Police Service, Education Queensland and the community more broadly to adopt a whole of community approach to address the challenges affecting young people (aged 0 – 25 years), and to develop economic, social and employment opportunities to improve a range of health and social outcomes.

Solutions Implemented

Between September 2017 - September 2018 HOPE has established relationships, brokered partnerships and introduced numerous programs to address these social determinants, including:

Quantitative/Qualitative Data/Improved Physical, Social & Emotional Wellness

- AFL/Basketball/Netball/Softball coaching and mentoring programs: 478 students/90 adult participants.

Principal, Cunnamulla School: *“These programs have made a huge difference to our students’ attitudes, attendance and approach to learning. Thank you HOPE Project.”*

- QRL/NRL coaching clinics and welfare sessions addressing literacy learning, alcohol and drug misuse: 1500+ participants.
- Commonwealth Games Legacy Funding covered a 9-sport program for Charleville. 769 participants.
- Mayor, Murweh Shire Council: *“A magnificent program to promote the value of a healthy and active lifestyle. Well done HOPE!”*
- Bangarra Dance Theatre’s 3-year Youth Outreach Program, Rekindling. 40 participants.

CEO of Charleville Aboriginal Medical Service and Bidjara Elder: *“Rekindling has supported our youth to have pride in their Indigenous heritage and is contributing to them leading healthy lives. Thanks, Bangarra and HOPE.”* **Quantitative/Qualitative Data/Increased Education, Training & Employment Outcomes**

- Annual military-style camp in partnership with the Australian Defence Force: Of 23 participants, 6 have undergone recruitment testing.
- Murris on the Move Learner Licencing Program 2018: 38 students, 21 adults.

Inspector, Queensland Police Service Charleville: *“QPS fully support this program given a driver’s licence is a protective factor against offending.”*

- Construction training, Cunamulla: 7 participants attained a Cert 1 Construction, White Card and Forklift Licence.
- Barista/hospitality program: 204 school leaver participants. 30+ have since gained employment in hospitality.
- First Five Forever: 349 children and their parents/carers participated in this interactive musical program focused on literacy learning.
- Early childhood music/literacy program encouraging reading and parents to be children’s first teachers: 215 participants.

Evaluation and Results

The HOPE Project responded to a community concern that young Indigenous (Bidjara) people in Charleville had little understanding and connection to their cultural identity. Local Elders were worried that their youth were facing health and social problems due to this lack of cultural direction, which they identified as being a catalyst for risky, unhealthy behaviour including drug and alcohol misuse. The HOPE team researched various options and identified Bangarra Dance Theatre’s Youth Outreach Program, Rekindling. This program aims to inspire young Indigenous people to have pride in the knowledge of their cultural background, gain a strong sense of kinship and connection to their communities and country, and understand their role as the future custodians of their culture. Rekindling also has a track record of establishing the foundations for positive career choices. The HOPE Team personally met with the Rekindling’s Artistic Director to understand the requirements of securing this fully-funded three-year program for Charleville. Equipped with this knowledge we then

undertook extensive community consultation and garnered the support and enthusiasm essential for driving Charleville's application. Specifically, HOPE gained letters of support from the Mayor, the High School Principal, the CEO of the Aboriginal Medical Service and several Bidjara Elders. Bangarra commented that since Rekindling's inception in 2013 and its delivery across 16 communities in 4 states, they had never received such enthusiastic support from a community. Because the HOPE Project had engendered this community buy-in, Bangarra fast-tracked Charleville to be included in the 2017-19 schedule, rather than putting Charleville on the list for 2020. Charleville's enthusiasm also prompted Bangarra to invest additional funds to video Charleville's program for a documentary. It also led to Bangarra bringing its sponsors to Charleville for the initial performance night in Charleville. Thirty-six young people registered and participated in the program's series of 3 'gatherings', the first of which was held on Country at Mt Tabor Station, a place of tremendous cultural significance to the Bidjara People. The participants and Bangarra crew slept in swags under the stars and learned Bidjara stories in sacred places under the guidance of Mt Tabor Manager and Bidjara Elder, Keelen Mailman. Participants learned and rehearsed Bangarra repertoire. They also created their own dances based on their ideas and feelings about being on Country. In terms of promoting healthy behaviours, the Bangarra team emphasised the discipline required of a dancer – diet and the consequences of drugs, smoking and alcohol. They explained the importance of sleep and the positive mental health implications of regular exercise and making healthy choices. The life stories of the Bangarra crew resonated with the Charleville students, who had shared experiences growing up Indigenous in remote communities. These professional dancers were living examples of how Indigenous people from the bush had become successful on the world stage by making healthy choices from a young age. The Charleville students developed and rehearsed their repertoire and performed before several community audiences – at their school, during NAIDOC Week and at a ceremony commemorating the hand-over of a parcel of culturally significant Bidjara land. Charleville State High School has reported a marked improvement in the Rekindling participants' behaviour – motivation, team work, attendance, confidence and generosity. These students have a renewed sense of pride and self-worth in who they are and where they come from as a result of their connection to cultural knowledge and the ability to tell their own stories through dance.

Addressing the social determinants of health Many of the Charleville students involved in this program are from families that experience generational disadvantage and some students were at risk of disengaging from school. The very fact that these students were born and are growing up in the bush in poor social and economic circumstances make them at greater risk of poor health. The Bangarra Rekindling experience offered many benefits to counter these circumstances including the connection to a health service and education regarding diet and exercise, and the health risks associated with smoking and alcohol and drug misuse. The students also learned new skills from world-class dancers and had the thrill of performing to an excellent standard in front of their peers and community. The Bangarra crew also placed great importance on students working as a team and relying on each other for social and emotional support, which they willingly offered. The HOPE Project was instrumental in bringing Rekindling to Charleville. We identified the program, pursued the Artistic Director, garnered community support and coordinated program logistics from beginning to end.