

Community Aspirations Program in Education (CAP-ED)

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Abstract

The Community Aspirations Program in Education (CAP-ED) at CQUniversity aims to share knowledge and information with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, enabling study options and pathways to higher education. The program has been highlighted as an important strategy to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation in higher education, and to focus on building aspirations through small manageable informative sessions and networking events. This poster presentation will outline the rationale for the CAP-ED program, the strategies underlying the initiative and the research undertaken to identify the benefits of the program and areas for future improvement.

Rationale

The need to improve need to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to and participation in post-compulsory education is well documented (Bradley et al, 2008). While acknowledging the progress that has been made in recent years (Asmar, Page, & Radloff, 2011), their continuing underrepresentation in higher education remains an area of major concern. CAP-ED addresses these concerns by adopting strategies recommended in the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012) by:

- promoting positive images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students to school students, their teachers and the wider community; and
- promoting professional pathways through collaboration with education, community and professional organisations.

CAP-ED adopts a grassroots approach, working flexibly to address the needs of communities to assist potential students gain the experience and knowledge to:

- develop self-confidence;
- connect to Indigenous culture;
- introduce participants to Schools in CQUniversity; and
- provide information as a stepping stone to alternate pathways into higher education.

Research Outcomes

Findings from surveys conducted prior to workshops/events highlight the importance of raising the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for higher education and the belief that going to post-secondary pathways is possible. CAP-ED participants reported a mixture of feelings of nervousness, excitement and pride about attending the sessions. Findings from the surveys conducted following participation in the program suggest that participants had an overwhelming sense of optimism for what the future study and career pathways hold after attendance at the CAP-ED sessions/s. Participants spoke about how going to university now felt like a realistic option and that the program gave them more confidence and knowledge regarding accessing pathways into post-secondary programs. The poster session will show how such programs can be an effective strategy for raising the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and improving pathways for them to higher education.

References

- Behrendt, L., S. Larkin, R. Griew and P. Kelly. (2012). *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report*. Canberra: Department of Education.
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. and Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.