



# YES, I CAN!

## ABORIGINAL ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN

### Wilcannia **Pilot** Project

Final Evaluation Report



### First Nations Graphic Design:

Award-winning designer, Brooke Ottley, has family from across Australia: Gunggari from central Queensland, Wuthathi from far north Queensland, Cape York area, and Torres Strait Islander, from Thursday Island. She lives in Darwin.

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Wilcannia Pilot Project

Final Evaluation Report

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	RSD	Remote Service Delivery
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework	RTO	Registered Training Organisation
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects	UNE	University of New England
CRCAH	Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
CWG	Campaign Working Group	WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy
CWP	Community Working Party	YIC	<i>Yes, I Can!</i>
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	YSP	<i>Yo, sí puedo</i>
DIIRSTE	Department of Industry, Innovation, Research, Science and Tertiary Education		
FaHCSIA	Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs		
JSA	Job Services Agency		
IPLAC	Institute of Pedagogy for Latin America and the Caribbean (Cuba)		
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council		
LLNP	Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program		
NAALCSC	National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Steering Committee		
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research		
NSW	New South Wales		
PACE	Parental and Community Engagement program		
PAR	Participatory Action Research		



### 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the final evaluation report on a Commonwealth-funded project to pilot an internationally-recognised adult literacy campaign model with the Aboriginal community in Wilcannia in western New South Wales (NSW). While originally envisaged as a 12 month project, the pilot actually took 16 months. Work began in July 2011, and is being completed at the time of writing, in October 2012. The aim of this report is to give a detailed account of the model and the pilot, and an evaluation of the model's effectiveness and appropriateness for wider implementation in the region and beyond.

This introduction explains the purpose of the report, its structure and authorship. Section 2 is an account of the background to the project and its Aboriginal leadership, the National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Steering Committee (NAALCSC). Section 3 is a brief introduction to the concept of mass literacy campaigns. Section 4 outlines the scope and method of the pilot, including the way in which the data for this evaluation was collected. In Section 5, the community in which the pilot occurred is described. A detailed account is given in Section 6

of experiences during each of the three phases of the campaign, as they were implemented in this pilot project. In Section 7, there is a summary and some discussion of the findings of the consultant in relation to the use of Australian Core Skills framework (ACSF) in the pilot. Section 8 concludes the report, with an overall assessment of the outcomes from the pilot, and a discussion of the viability of wider implementation of this campaign model in the future.

The report's author, Associate Professor Bob Boughton, was the Project Manager for the pilot, and took specific responsibility for coordinating the research and evaluation. However, the report is the result of extensive collaboration with and input from the members of the NAALCSC; the on-site Project Leader, Mr. Jack Beetson, and the local Campaign Working Group (CWG); the two Technical Advisers, Deborah Durnan and José Chala Leblanch; the ACSF consultant, Ms. Philippa McLean; Associate Professor Anne Hickling-Hudson and Dr Ben Bartlett from the NAALCSC Technical sub-committee, and Dr Steven Smith, the project Research Associate.




Photo: NASA Johnson. The Darling River in the township of Wilcannia.

## 2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Low levels of English literacy in the Aboriginal adult population have long been a concern of this project's proponents, most of whom were involved in the Education and Health Research program of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) from 1998 to 2004. That research program drew on international evidence of the links between education levels and health outcomes to argue that low levels of educational attainment in the Aboriginal adult population were an important determinant of poor health outcomes, and a major barrier to people's capacity to take greater control of their lives and communities (Bell et al., 2007). It also drew attention to the achievements of some countries of the 'Third World' (now more commonly called the Global South), which had achieved low rates of infant mortality and better health outcomes, through what was known as the 'low road to health.' In many of these countries, mass adult literacy campaigns appeared to have played a significant role in health development (Caldwell, 1986; Sandiford et al., 1995). Added impetus for examining this question was provided through the involvement of three of this projects' proponents in the Timor-Leste national adult literacy campaign which began in 2006. Through our work in Timor-Leste, we became aware of the Cuban *Yes, I Can!* method and gained invaluable practical experience with the mass campaign model (Boughton, 2010).

In 2009, the CRAH convened a workshop with Aboriginal health and education leaders and representatives from government agencies and universities to reflect on the initial research and the recent Timor-Leste experience. The NAALCSC was formed at that meeting, with a

mandate to find ways to pilot the mass campaign model in some Aboriginal communities. The initial membership included:

- » Ms Donna Ah Chee (Chairperson), currently a/CEO, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- » Ms Pat Anderson, Chair, Lowitja Institute/CRAH Board
- » Professor Jack Beetson, Adjunct Professor, Centre for Agricultural Law, University of New England and a/CEO, Wilcannia Local Land Council
- » Ms Stephanie Bell, Director, Lowitja Institute
- » Professor Peter Buckskin, Dean and Head of School, Indigenous College of Education and Research, Unaipon School, University of South Australia
- » Professor Mick Dodson, Director, National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University
- » Professor Marcia Langton, Australian Indigenous Studies Program, Centre for Health and Society, Melbourne University
- » Mr John Liddle, Branch Manager, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Male Health Program.

After two more years of lobbying and investigation, seed-funded by the Lowitja Institute, an invitation was received from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to apply for funds to conduct a pilot study. The NAALCSC chose Wilcannia as the first pilot site, a small town in western NSW with a majority Aboriginal population, where NAALCSC member Jack Beetson was working as the CEO of the Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC). In this position, Beetson secured the agreement of the Land Council to play the role of local lead agency, along with support from the local NSW Department of Education Central School, and from the local Community Working Party (CWP), the designated community governance body under the National Commonwealth-State Partnership on Remote

Service Delivery (RSD). While the original idea had been to establish a specific organisation to develop the Campaign, this was not practicable for one pilot project. Consequently, the NAALCSC decided to locate the overall project management and responsibility for the evaluation at the University of New England (UNE), the institution which employed Bob Boughton (author of this report), who had undertaken the earlier CRAH studies and had led the Australian Research Council-funded study of the Timor-Leste campaign. The NAALCSC finalised the submission at its meeting in Brisbane in May 2011, and UNE signed a contract with DEEWR – now the Department of Industry, Innovation, Research, Science and Tertiary Education (DIIRSTE) – on 8 June 2011.

The contract was quite specific about the aims and objectives of the pilot, as follows:

The aim of the project is to trial a 12-month pilot campaign. This must utilise an internationally-recognised mass campaign model, not previously deployed in Australia. You must assess whether this model can be applied successfully in an Aboriginal community; and to discover what would be involved in up-scaling it from community to regional level, and then to other regions.

At a more general level, the project was required to help “support the achievement of the Australian Government objectives in relation to adult literacy, increasing social inclusion and closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.”

### 3. MASS LITERACY CAMPAIGNS

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Throughout the world, over 800 million adults are functionally illiterate, of whom the majority are women, and international development agencies and scholarly opinion regularly identify this as a major obstacle to efforts to overcome poverty

and marginalisation (Archer, 2005). In the 1980s, international bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) began to see mass adult literacy campaigns as a way to deal with this problem, especially in countries of the Global South. In a seminal UNESCO-sponsored study, the Indian literacy academic H.S. Bhola defined a literacy campaign in this way:

A mass approach that seeks to make all adult men and women in a nation literate within a particular time frame. Literacy is seen as a means to a comprehensive set of ends – economic, social, structural and political... [It] suggests urgency and combativeness... it is something of a crusade (as cited in Arnove & Graff, 2008, p. 3)

This interest was sparked by the successes of such campaigns in the preceding 2 decades in a number of newly-independent countries. The best known examples include Cuba in 1961; Tanzania 1971–1983; Mozambique 1978–79; and Nicaragua in 1980. India’s Total Literacy Campaign commenced in 1988 and is still running. As a result of such campaigns, illiteracy rates, defined quite narrowly in terms of people’s ability to read and write a few simple sentences, fell by more than 20 percentage points in several countries, while many of the participants, both ‘graduates’ and teachers, went on to play a significant role in their country’s subsequent development (Arnove & Graff, 2008). International interest waned in the 1990s, in part because research commissioned by the World Bank suggested that such campaigns had not been very effective (Abadzi, 1994), a view since shown to be incorrect (Lind, 2008). Nevertheless, many countries in the Global South continued to mount literacy campaigns, with recent examples including Bolivia, Grenada and Timor-Leste. The last decade has seen international interest in the mass campaign model return, stimulated in part by the United Nations Literacy Decade, which is due to conclude at the end of this year, 2012 (UNESCO, 2005).



While each one includes characteristics specific to its country context, most mass adult literacy campaigns have three key elements, which we refer to here as phases. Phase 1, which we call 'Socialisation and Mobilisation', mobilises as many people as possible to take part, as learners, teachers, organisers and supporters, and seeks to enhance the understanding of society as a whole of the importance of literacy to wider social and economic development goals. This phase also builds organisational capacity at a national, regional and local level to lead the campaign, widening the responsibility for raising literacy levels beyond the government education authority, enlisting support and commitments from all government agencies, from non-government and civil society organisations and from the community as a whole. This process continues throughout the campaign.

The second element, Phase 2, consists of a set of basic literacy classes, run over a short period, usually 3 months or less, in which non-literate and low literate members of the community are encouraged to enrol and supported to complete. These classes are usually non-formal, rarely accredited, and taught and organised by non-professional local Facilitators and leaders in the community, with the assistance of professional advisers and materials provided by the central campaign authority. The classes often end with a local ceremony, honouring the people who have completed and welcoming the next group into the classes.

The final element, Phase 3 of the campaign, is for 'Post-literacy'. This consists of activities designed to help the newly-literate participants continue to build their literacy beyond what has been achieved in the basic classes, and to create a more literate culture in the community. In some countries, this post-literacy phase has led into more structured courses taking people up to a basic education level, or into vocational qualifications. Throughout the process, the central or national authority

maintains a close oversight of progress, with a view to ensuring that targets for literacy improvement are met at a sufficiently rapid rate. All three phases continue until virtually everyone in the community or regions has achieved a basic level of literacy, in accordance with the UNESCO definition used for the literacy targets in the Education for All policy, i.e., "the capacity of young people and adults aged 15 and over to read and write, with understanding, a simple sentence about their own life" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 29).

Literacy *campaigns* thus provide a very different approach to the problem of low literacy levels from the literacy *programs* we are used to seeing in Australia and, indeed, in most western countries. Literacy *programs* are small-scale, discrete, usually-accredited courses of semi-formal study, run through adult learning centres and vocational colleges, or in the workplace, with students who self-select and professional adult literacy teachers who are usually from outside the community. Their main focus is on individuals acquiring skills. These programs are usually the responsibility of Education Departments, though there is also a lot of activity from non-governmental organisations. The approaches are hugely varied, as are the success rates of the students in the different programs.

The large-scale mass campaign is quite different. It involves a nationally, or at least regionally-coordinated attack on the problem of low literacy, usually led by government but involving all sectors of society. It aims to reduce adult functional illiteracy by a specific amount over a specific period, and **the aim is not just to help individuals but to transform the whole community.**

For this project, it was decided to deploy the model and method we had observed and evaluated in Timor-Leste, which was developed by the Institute of Pedagogy for Latin America and the Caribbean (IPLAC) in Havana, Cuba. Known as *Yes, I Can!* (YIC) – or *Yo, sí puedo* (YSP) in Spanish

– this model has been deployed in 28 countries since it was first developed in 2000, and has been the subject of an evaluation study by UNESCO and the recipient of a major UNESCO Literacy Prize. In UNESCO's words:

[T]he YSP method is in fact more than a method. It would be more appropriate to understand it as a literacy training model that goes beyond processes, materials, strategies, etc., as it includes, both explicitly and implicitly, concepts of literacy training, learning, life skills and social mobilization, and involves a wide range of actors with varied roles from the beneficiaries of the literacy training to other stakeholders such as state entities and other concerned institutions. (UNESCO, 2006)

It follows the general form of the three phases described above, with a specially-designed method of teaching during the Phase 2 literacy lessons, using pre-prepared DVDs and workbooks, which can be used by relatively untrained local Facilitators. The method is described in detail later in this report.

## 4.PILOT SCOPE AND METHOD

It should be clear from the above that a pilot in one community is not in itself a campaign. Rather, it is an exploratory exercise, undertaken to decide whether a campaign itself is feasible. The pilot can put in place various aspects of the model, including the three phase approach; it can identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of the model and the method; it can reveal aspects of a specific national or regional context which a mass campaign will need to address; and it can therefore help in deciding how, if at all, a large scale campaign could be mounted. However, without the critical mass and momentum which the campaign proper generates, a pilot cannot be expected to have as significant an impact. That said, the pilot

was designed to provide as much information as possible on which future decision-making could be based.

UNE's contract with DEEWR/DIIRSTE specified five key elements to be included in the pilot:

In undertaking this trial you must:

- (a) Mobilise the Wilcannia community leaders to address the problem of adult illiteracy, in partnership with community agencies and government departments, including the local School
- (b) Contextualise an internationally-recognised adult literacy campaign model with associated resources to the specific local situation of an Aboriginal community
- (c) Train local Aboriginal tutors and organisers in the campaign model
- (d) Make significant measurable improvements in English literacy among 50-60 participants in the pilot, drawn from Aboriginal adults in the Wilcannia community with minimal English language literacy
- (e) Create a pool of people ready to move into pre-vocational and vocational employment programs being rolled out under the Remote Service Delivery Local Implementation Plan 2010-2014 for Wilcannia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010)
- (f) Organise rigorous testing of the campaign model by qualified adult literacy academics, to ascertain the viability of extending it to other communities in the region and elsewhere in Australia.

Following the exchange of contracts between DEEWR and UNE, there was a period of intense preparation, which included completing negotiations with the Ministry of Education in Cuba over the use of the YIC materials and method; the appointment of a Cuban-trained

Technical Adviser as a Visiting Academic at UNE; the establishment of a local CWG; the negotiation of sub-contracts between UNE, the Land Council and the project consultants; and the recruitment

of local staff.<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of this preparatory phase, the campaign rolled out chronologically, according to the timeline set out below.

Activity	Dates
Initial preparatory work commences on signing of contracts	22 June – 31 July 2011
Local Commission first meeting; Campaign promotion manual produced; Phase 1: Mobilisation and Socialisation commenced, including the household literacy survey.	9 August – 30 November 2011
First evaluation report submitted	20 December 2011
Tutor manual and Learners workbooks produced	31 December 2011
Tutor training commenced	20 January 2012
Campaign Launch, Wilcannia	7 February 2012
Phase 2. First YIC classes commenced; database established	13 February 2012
ACSF Assessment tool developed and trialled	13 February – 8 May 2012
Post-literacy subcommittee first meeting	6 March 2012
First intake graduation	8 May 2012
Second intake classes commenced	14 May 2012
Second evaluation report	31 May 2012
Phase 3: Post-literacy activities began for Intake 1 graduates	4 June 2012
Intake 2 graduation	31 August 2012
Phase 3: Post-literacy activities began for Intake 2	3 September 2012
End of pilot. Final monitoring and evaluation report	31 October 2012

The research design, which was rolled out alongside the pilot, was based on the paradigm of Participatory Action Research (PAR), a commonly-used approach to the evaluation of education and development interventions, particularly in countries of the Global South. PAR has been defined as:

A form of **collective self-reflective inquiry** undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their

understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5; my emphasis).

The participants, in this case, included the Project Manager, members of the NAALCSC, the on-site project team, local community members and representatives of local agencies, and staff from the funding bodies. The research design was approved by UNE's Human Research Ethics Committee, following guidelines for ethical

<sup>1</sup> This preparatory work proved more complex and time-consuming than originally anticipated, leading to delays in starting the campaign. This process was evaluated in the initial report which UNE submitted to DEEWR in December 2011 and the original timeline varied accordingly.

research with Aboriginal communities. The evaluation data was collected through multiple methods, as follows:

- » a review of previous research and reports on the community, and of publicly-available data sets, e.g., the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census;
- » an initial household literacy survey, administered by local survey collectors trained for this purpose;
- » development and maintenance of a project-specific student database recording enrolment, participation and outcome data;
- » maintenance of individual student files, including examples of work;
- » in-depth interviews with a selection of participants, Facilitators and community stakeholders;
- » participant-observation of campaign activities by the Project Manager, including Project Team meetings, the launch, the YIC classes, the two graduations, and general campaign organisation work, recorded in a field-notes journal;
- » written reports to UNE from the on-site Project leader, Jack Beetson, and the project's three Technical Advisers, Deborah Durnan, José Chala Leblanch and Philippa McLean;
- » regular UNE financial reports;
- » documentary records of campaign activities including media reports;
- » photographs and film of campaign activities; and
- » minutes of meetings and workshops held with the Project Team, the NAALCSC and the funding agencies.

In the period since project work commenced, nine field trips have been made to Wilcannia for monitoring and evaluation, and a total of 65 days spent on site. Dr Steven Smith, a Research Associate, helped prepare the Ethics Application, undertook one field trip to conduct some of the interviews, and assisted with analysing

the student records and survey data. Interim evaluation reports were provided to the funding agencies in December 2011 and June 2012. Additional commentary, feedback and peer review was provided through presentations to DEEWR/DIIRSTE on two occasions; to the School of Education staff seminar at UNE on three occasions; and to the annual Conferences of the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council in December 2011; the Australian Council of Adult Literacy in September 2012; and Adult Learning Australia in October 2012.

The draft conclusions of this Report were discussed at the most recent NAALCSC meeting, held in Alice Springs in August 2012, after a review of the analysis by an Evaluation Sub-Committee established by the NAALSC, consisting of Ms Stephanie Bell, representing the NAALCSC, the Project Manager and author of this report, Associate Professor Bob Boughton; Associate Professor Anne Hickling Hudson of Queensland Institute for Technology and Dr Ben Bartlett of PlanHealth Inc. The Project Leader Jack Beetson and the Technical Advisers, Deborah Durnan and José Chala Leblanch, also commented on drafts.





Photo: Rob Deutscher. Wilcannia reputedly means "a gap in the bank where the flood waters escape" in the Barkindji language. Wilcannia is located 948 km northwest of Sydney.



## 5. THE WILCANNIA COMMUNITY

Wilcannia is a small remote town on the banks of the Darling River in far western NSW, 200 kilometres east of Broken Hill. Home to the Barkindji<sup>2</sup> people (people 'of the river'), it is one of 18 Aboriginal communities across far western NSW which make up the Murdi Paaki region. This country has been a site of Aboriginal occupation for millennia, and the Lake Mungo National Park a few hundred kilometres to the south includes one of the world's oldest burial sites. British invasion and settlement of the region began in the 1830s as the pastoral frontier moved west, a period which saw "sustained violence" against the local occupants (Goodall, 2001, p. 20). The town itself was proclaimed in 1866. By the 1880s, it had become a thriving river port, with a population of several thousand, and up to 200 riverboat steamers stopping at its wharf to take on "the majority of the wool from North Western NSW" (Gibson, 2006, p. 14). Though Aboriginal labour formed the backbone of the pastoral industry workforce in the west, few Aboriginal people actually lived in the town area until after World War 2, and most were then confined to 'shanty town' camps along the eastern side of the river (Beckett, 2005). The civil rights and land rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of local Aboriginal organisations, and government housing was built in two areas, one an old 'Mission' block on the eastern side of the river, and the other, the Mallee, on the north western edge of the main town. Title to this land and the houses on them was eventually transferred to the LALC in the 1980s, and today the Aboriginal population

is now spread through these two blocks and in a significant number of old and some newer houses in the main town area.

From the 1970s onwards, the Aboriginal people of Wilcannia and surrounding area played a significant role in the wider movement for Aboriginal rights across NSW and nationally. Of particular note was the blockade mounted in 1983 at the Mutawintji National Park to the north west of the town, a pioneering claim for Aboriginal custodians rights to be recognised in national parks, pre-dating similar struggles in the Northern Territory over Uluru and Kakadu. Wilcannia's Aboriginal leaders also played prominent roles in the establishment of the Western Aboriginal Legal Service, and in demonstrations and actions from the late 1970s, which led to the 1983 NSW Land Rights Act, creating the NSW Land Council and the network of local Land Councils of which the Wilcannia LALC is one. Women played a significant role in these struggles and campaigns, through organisations such as the Western Women's Council which held a series of women's bush camps in 1984 and 1985 (Goodall, 2001).<sup>3</sup> From the late 1970s onwards, there has also been a strong Barkindji language revival movement, with local Barkindji speakers working with teachers and linguists to document the language and introduce it into the curriculum of the local schools. Barkindji artists have also achieved national and international prominence, including Badger Bates and Eddie Murray (Gibson, 2008).

Despite this strong tradition of struggle and commitment to positive development, the community has not been able to escape the impact of a steady population decline in the town over the last three decades, especially among the non-Aboriginal townspeople. This dwindling population reflected the economic decline of the

2 The spellings used in this report for First Nations Peoples and languages are those used by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (<https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/search>), although it is also acknowledged that there are alternative spellings.

3 Several of the women involved were mothers and Aunties of the current Campaign Facilitators and participants.

area as a result of drought, falling profitability in the pastoral industry, and the reduction of mining activity in Broken Hill. Today, while many of the grand old sandstone buildings of the town's colonial heyday still stand, most are in an advanced state of disrepair. Only one of the town's many original hotels is still open, many shops and offices are boarded up, and there is only one food store in addition to the takeaway at the service station. The town has a small hospital, but no resident doctor. There are several churches, but none have local clergy, and they remain closed most days. There are two schools, a public K-12 school in the town, and a Catholic K-3 school across the river, on the edge of the 'Mission', as it is still called, both of which have majority Aboriginal enrolments. The school, the hospital and the local government (the Central Darling Shire Council) are the town's major employers. The economic downturn has had a major impact on the community, reducing most families to a state of semi-permanent dependency on government income support. This has been associated with a rise in other symptoms of personal and social disempowerment, including chronic illness, substance abuse, and community and domestic violence. In recognition of the high level of need in the community, Wilcannia is one of only two places in NSW chosen to take part in the Council of Australian Governments Closing the Gap National Partnership Agreement on RSD (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

At the 2011 census, the Wilcannia town population was 602, of whom 467 (78%) identified as Aboriginal. The Aboriginal population aged 15 and over, not in school or post-school education, was 280. Of this number, 170 (60%) left school at Year 9 or earlier.<sup>4</sup> Local agencies and leaders believe that at least 40% of the out-of-school adult population have very low English literacy; and this figure was used as the initial estimated

target population for the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign pilot, which aimed to reach as many people as possible in this group.

The lead agency in the literacy Campaign pilot is the Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, whose Acting CEO, Jack Beetson, is a member of the NAALCSC, and has been the on-site Project Leader. The Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council, which is the only elected local Aboriginal community-controlled representative body, has a statutory responsibility under the NSW Land Rights Act to represent the Aboriginal community on matters of economic and social development. Beetson was appointed to his position when the Land Council was under administration, following a period of conflict and failure to comply with its accountability requirements under the Act. The problems of the Land Council in recent years have been mirrored in several other local organisations, and the population of the town is fractured along several different and quite complex 'fault-lines,' some internal to the Aboriginal community, and others between some sections of the Aboriginal community and various non-Aboriginal actors and agencies. Disagreements have been exacerbated by competing claims over Native Title rights.<sup>5</sup> In the past, it has not been unusual for conflict to erupt into physical violence, including between groups of young people, with the police, and between different families. Media reports, which tend to overstate the significance and frequency of such incidents, have added to the visual impact of economic decline to create a very negative public image for the town among outsiders and even among some residents themselves. This negative image plays back into the local community and its problems, exacerbating the sense of distress and the lack of a sense of a positive future. At the heart of the problem, though rarely acknowledged in official publications

<sup>4</sup> The population data is derived from the ABS Indigenous Local Area Tables.

<sup>5</sup> Fifteen Barkindji Native Title claims have been lodged since 1995. Of these claims six have been dismissed, six discontinued and three remain active (Gibson, 2006, p. 23).

and reports, is institutional racism, the systematic exclusion and discrimination which the Aboriginal people of Wilcannia have experienced for many decades at the hands of the dominant players driving the development process in the wider economy and society of NSW.

Low literacy levels, in this context, are both a cause and a consequence of ongoing social inequality, exclusion and marginalisation, and cannot be addressed in isolation from other social factors. Moreover, just as low literacy is a consequence of unjust social development processes, so too is addressing it a necessary condition for enabling people to begin to deal with those wider structural factors. As literature on the social determinants of health reveals, the overcoming of health inequalities can only occur if people are empowered to take greater control of their lives (Tsey, 2008).

In the tradition of popular education for emancipation, which the mass adult literacy campaign model emerged from, this process of empowerment, of taking control of their lives, begins with people acquiring higher levels of literacy which enable them to break free from the 'culture of silence' in which their own experiences and the ways they speak about them are devalued and ignored (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

## 6. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CAMPAIGN

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### 6.1 PHASE 1: SOCIALISATION AND MOBILISATION

On Tuesday 7th February, 2012, over 200 locals and visitors gathered in Baker Park, on the banks of the Darling River, for the public launch of the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign, in what the Wilcannia News, quoting a local Elder, described as "one of the best days in Wilcannia for many years."

The MC, a local Aboriginal health worker and mother, introduced the crowd to various speakers, including Jack Beetson, a local Campaign Facilitator, the Technical Adviser from Cuba who had arrived in town only 2 weeks earlier, and a visitor from Timor-Leste, who had worked on her country's literacy campaign. Save the Children had a van there, organising activities for the younger children, the students from the Central School and St. Therese's Community Parish School came, the Barkindji dancers performed, local businessman Jim Sammon provided the mobile gas BBQ on which he and two other Campaign volunteers cooked emu rissoles and kangaroo kebabs, and a band played country music. The NSW regional Aboriginal Land Councillor, Des Williams, was there, and the Central Darling Shire President, along with a representative of one of the campaign sponsors, Brookfield Multiplex, members of the NAALCSC, the newly-appointed Lowitja Institute CEO, and a delegation from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in Alice Springs. ABC Broken Hill reporter Noah Schultz-Byard captured the spirit in his story, which appeared that day on the station's website:

*Jack Beetson is the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Project Leader and he says he is passionate about eradicating illiteracy in Indigenous communities.*

*Mr Beetson says it is a strong focus on community driven education as well as a comprehensive preparation process to the campaign that separates this project from other models.*

*"I consider literacy is probably the most key human right that any person can have and for people to be denied that right to become literate is a terrible situation, in fact it's an abuse of people's very basic human rights."*

*"It really encourages everybody else to take ownership of it. Right from the get go on this project we've had a local community team that's been advising us on how to go. Every household that has an Aboriginal person... has been interviewed as part*

*of this process, to look at what people's literacy needs are, so it's been a real community effort to get it here and it will be that continued community effort that gets it over the line in the next nine months."*

*Mr Beetson says there is a need for this service in Wilcannia and the program is already showing signs of a healthy rate of community participation.*

*"The first two classes are almost full now... and people have only started getting enrolments in the last week. "It goes for 13 weeks (and) it's 1 hour a day that people do.*

*"The key to it all is that the people who are employed on this project, doing all the on ground work and the teaching in the program, are all local people. It's not somebody coming in and doing something for the Aboriginal community of Wilcannia, it's people coming in and working with the Aboriginal community, for them to do it themselves. Most projects I've seen come and go in Wilcannia have actually been outsiders coming and getting paid, and the local people getting no employment at all."* (Shultz-Byard, 2012).

This event was the culmination of the initial Phase 1: Mobilisation and Socialisation work of the Campaign, which had begun several months earlier, in August 2011, with the first meetings between the project team and local community agencies and organisations. Over a period of several weeks in August and September, a small local CWG was assembled, and the Chairperson of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group agreed to be its chairperson. Other participants included the Principal of the Central School; an Aboriginal Education Worker who was a veteran of the 1980s struggles mentioned above; a Barkindji language speaker who is the Language and Culture Coordinator for the NSW Department of Education and Communities in the region; and the Aboriginal Liaison Officer in Wilcannia for the National Partnership RSD Program. After a month more of discussion and meetings, work began to recruit the local staff to be employed by and based at the Land Council, including a Post-literacy

Coordinator, and people to undertake the initial household literacy survey. At the end of October, 4 months into the project, a Post-literacy Coordinator began working 20 hours per week. She then quickly recruited three other local women to assist with the household literacy survey. Two women from the CWG, the Aboriginal Education Worker and the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, also agreed to help. At the training session run by the Project Manager, the women quickly realised the point of the survey, and set about redesigning the questionnaire so that it would work more effectively with the community. At this point it was obvious, that these community members had decided to take ownership of the process and the Campaign, and from then on, as they worked to spread the word and mobilise others to join them, it was mainly a matter of providing appropriate structure, training and support to allow to them to do so.

By December, there was a team of employees and volunteers from other organisations working together to get the Campaign off the ground, supported by the Project Leader and his Australian Technical Adviser on the project, who had worked on the Timor-Leste campaign, and had previously worked in Wilcannia and other western NSW communities with Jack, doing governance training workshops. This period of building relationships of trust among a growing group of people who had taken an interest in the idea formed the essential basis for the Campaign to begin. The Land Council increasingly became a hub of activity, whereas a few months earlier it had been much quieter. The Campaign workers and volunteers also became engaged in other Land Council and CWP activities which centred on the Land Council offices, adding to the sense of community mobilisation, and reinforcing the point made above, that literacy cannot be addressed in isolation from the wider social issues of which it is a part. This period

of activity was covered in more detail in the First Evaluation Report provided to the funding agencies in early December 2011.

The household literacy survey continued through December and January, eventually reaching 41 households. The data is summarised in Table 1, below

**Table 1. Household Literacy Survey Summary  
December 2011 – January 2012.**

Q. Do you need help to read and write?	Male (M)	Female (F)	Total (T)
No	6	15	21
Yes	40	58	98
Overall	46	73	119

Table 1 shows that there were 119 people aged 15 and over in these households, of whom 98 were identified by themselves or a family member as needing assistance with literacy. Of these, 45 put their names down as wanting to take part in the Campaign. However, by the time the first intake classes began, only 26 had actually enrolled.

The Technical Advisor arrived at UNE from Cuba on January 12, and on January 16, we drove out to Wilcannia for him to begin his work. By the end of the week he had met the CWG, been oriented briefly to the town and the community, and held an initial orientation session for potential Facilitators. The following Monday, the two weeks of Facilitator training began in earnest. Four volunteers who worked at the local radio station came along to train as a back-up person, and the Post-literacy Coordinator, also did the training. As described above, the launch was held in the middle of the second week of this training, and the first classes began the following Monday, February 13, 2012, with a total of 25 people enrolled. It had been just under eight months since the funding contracts had been signed.

## A REFLECTION

Phase 1 of a literacy campaign does not stop with the start of classes, since continued socialisation and mobilisation work is needed to maintain the momentum and the community support for the participants, Facilitators and organisers. However, the start of the first intake provides a convenient point for evaluating what had been achieved to date, and reflecting on what had been learned.

The first and most important outcome was that 25 people agreed to enrol in the classes, from a cohort within the community that had very little prior education, a history of disengagement from employment, education and community development, and many pressing and difficult issues in their lives. For these people, enrolling in such an activity was a major step.

Second, four local community Facilitators had been recruited and received basic training in the method, as well as another staff member to work on Campaign organisation in relation to post-literacy.

Third, there was now broad support and engagement within the Aboriginal community and among local government and non-government agencies, as evidenced by the launch, and by the good will and practical assistance which many people had given to the Campaign. A Network of Supporters was established, to provide practical and moral support. One local Aboriginal organisation, Murdi Paaki Enterprises, made one of its buildings available from which to conduct the classes. The Central School provided desks and chairs, and technical help in setting up the classroom technology. Local businessman Jim Sammon gave the Technical Advisor from Cuba subsidised accommodation, well below the market rate. The local Youth Centre designed and painted a Campaign banner, and the local community radio station ran regular announcements and stories encouraging people to get involved. Altogether, 13 organisations had signed up as Campaign



sponsors, using a form designed for the purpose by the Project Team. The local Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) promoted the Campaign among its participants, and encouraged them to enrol.

These three outcomes were interconnected. The students would not have enrolled if there was not a strong feeling of support around them, and if the local Facilitators had not encouraged them to do so. Nor would the community have been as supportive, if they had not seen that the Campaign was something they could play a role in and help direct. However, it is also important to recognise that underlying the support for the Campaign, both from the wider community, from the Facilitators and staff, and from those who enrolled, was a recognition of need. As one of the Facilitators later recalled:

*Well when it first come to Wilcannia, when we got the first lot of students, one of the good things about it was the talk around town. Everyone was happy about it. The whole community was talking about this "Yes, I Can!" program. The students that got involved they go back and tell other students and mates or friends. I'm just happy to hear them all talking about it, when you're sitting around the campfire, making the 'Johnny Cake' and kangaroo stew you know. I was just happy to hear someone talking about it. (Interview, 26/07/2012)*

People do not need to be told that low English literacy is a problem, and this became very obvious in CWG meetings and training sessions, when people spoke about the difficulties that low literacy caused for individuals, families and the community as a whole. An important reflection, from this initial work, is that the concrete and specific issues with which low literacy is associated need to become central to a Campaign, and these will need to be identified in each location. Improving literacy is a path out of a specific set of circumstances, and that path can only be built from within. Circumstances in Wilcannia are not the same as in another place, and, as with all

good adult education, we must start from where people are at, from their own specific and unique experiences. However, the initial household literacy survey, meetings and discussion only reached a tip of this iceberg, and it was through the classes themselves that the project team came to know in much more detail how people wanted to use literacy in their lives.

Finally, it needs to be noted that the work of this Phase was made more difficult by a number of community crises, including several deaths in the last three months of 2011, and a serious civil disturbance following a 21st birthday party in the community hall. In a small community, which already has a history of conflict with various authorities and agencies and of disputes between different families, such events reverberate for an extended period, and make it difficult for some people to come to work, or to take part in meetings together. Funerals and court cases also take people away from other things, and sometimes from the town itself. In short, one of the consequences of a high degree of community engagement and ownership of the Campaign is that it becomes subject to the same ups and downs as the community itself. Moreover, the closer the Campaign is to the people who most need it, the more the chaos of life at the margins intrudes on the Campaign's own organisation. This is, as they say, a 'fact of life', in a place like Wilcannia; but it is one reason why things rarely go to plan, and why Campaign organisers and sponsors need to be as flexible as possible to allow it to weather these storms.

## 6.2 PHASE 2: YES, I CAN! LESSONS

Phase 2 of the pilot consisted of two intakes of students into the basic literacy classes, which were taught using the Cuban YIC method. Each intake ran for 12 weeks, the first from February until May, and the second from May until August, with a break for the school holidays. In the first intake, there were two groups, one in the morning and one

in the afternoon, while there was only one group in the second intake. Participation and outcome data is summarised and discussed below. In this section, the method is explained, and some qualitative data reported on how the students and Facilitators worked with it.

The Technical Advisor brought with him from Cuba three boxed sets of DVDs, on which were recorded a set of 65 lessons made for the literacy Campaign which had run in Grenada in 2007.<sup>6</sup> The other resources were printed work books for each student, containing the exercises to be done during the lessons, and copies of a simple Facilitator's handbook, explaining the method and the Facilitator's role. The DVD lessons, workbooks and Facilitators' handbooks were similar but not identical to those we had seen used in Timor-Leste, though these were in English, whereas the two versions used in Timor-Leste were in that country's official languages, Portuguese and Tetum.

Each YIC class followed a similar format. Students would arrive, having been picked up by a Campaign worker or having walked to class from home. They would socialise a little, and then sit down to watch a DVD lesson, each of which ran for approximately 25 minutes. During this time, the Facilitator or Adviser can turn it on and off, to allow the students to complete activities, including discussing what they have seen and asking questions. On the TV, they watch a literacy class, taught to a group of five people by a lead teacher and an assistant. All the people in the TV class are actors, working to a script. The teacher, an Afro-Caribbean women called Lauren, takes her class through each lesson, using a method the Cubans call 'alphanumeric' in which they first learn to associate letters with numbers, following a 'Guide Table' (see Figure

1), and then undertake exercises to build words, phrases and, eventually, sentences and texts of different genres.

GUIDE TABLE								
1	a	A	9	y	Y	19	n	N
2	e	E	10	k	K	20	h	H
3	i	I	11	x	X	21	m	M
4	o	O	12	v	V	22	w	W
5	u	U	13	r	R	23	g	G
6	t	T	14	p	P	24	q	Q
7	l	L	15	c	C	25	j	J
8	f	F	16	s	S	26	z	Z
			17	d	D			
			18	b	B			

Figure 1. The *Yes, I Can!* Guide Table

Each lesson begins with a 'positive message', which is a type of generative theme, a phrase in which there are words containing the letter or letters which are the focus of that lesson, but which makes a specific point or raises an idea. The first phrase is simply "Open the gate". It conveys to students that literacy is opening up a new world and they are on a new journey. An example of another phrase is "Let kids be kids" and there is also one that relates to caring for the environment.

On the DVD, discussion around these themes with the actor-students is led by a young Grenadian assistant teacher, with the help of film clips illustrating aspects of Grenadian life, including work, family, food and leisure activities. The student-actors are of varying ages, men and women, and with different levels of confidence and expertise.

Each lesson follows a predictable pattern, which the Cubans refer to as an 'algorithm', and the students in Wilcannia quickly learned the sequence. There are also 'icons' used throughout the whole 'course', which identify specific activities of observing, listening, speaking, reading and

<sup>6</sup> This was the second time that Cuban educators had assisted with a literacy campaign in Grenada, the first having occurred after the Grenadian Revolution in the 1980s (Hickling-Hudson, 2009).

writing, and the exercises in the workbook also come up as projections on the screen at different stages of the actor-lessons.

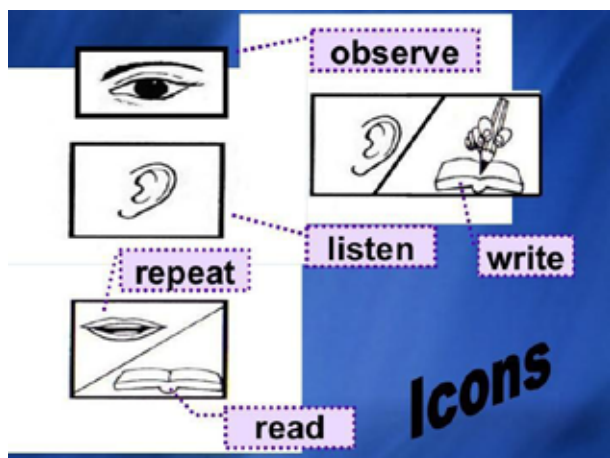


Figure 2. *Yes, I Can!* Icons

The first 64 lessons are divided into three stages. There are seven basic introductory lessons, 45 reading, writing and revision lessons, and 12 consolidation and extension lessons with assessment activities. Lesson 65 is an evaluation activity for the Facilitators. Lessons 2 to 7 are designed for people with no prior experience of reading and writing, and include exercises to practice holding a pen and forming simple shapes. Since every student in Wilcannia had at least some minimal primary schooling, the Facilitators elected, following the first lesson which introduces the method, to skip the next six, going straight to Lesson 8, which begins the work on letters of the alphabet, basic words and phrases.

To complete the full 'course', students are expected to watch the majority of the lessons on DVD. In Wilcannia, after some experimentation, it was decided to show a minimum of five lessons per week, in three sessions of 2 hours each, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. A 'catch-up' session was held on Thursdays, for people who had missed lessons or wanted to repeat them. On Fridays, though not every week, there was a



Lauren, the Grenadian DVD *Yes I Can!* Facilitator

'Literacy and Culture session', sometimes followed by a BBQ, which was an opportunity for the students and Facilitators to tell the Technical Advisor about their Country and culture, and for him to talk about Cuba and the Caribbean. This was introduced at the Facilitators suggestion. Following this pattern, it was possible to complete the course over a period of 10-13 weeks.

The most important part of the model is that the lessons are 'taught' by the local Facilitator, who sets up the class, controls the DVD, and sets and supervises the learning activities:

*It's not just locals learning from locals, but family learning from family, so they understood each other, they had an empathy with each other... that you just don't get otherwise.*

*If you bring teachers in from Cobar or Broken Hill or anywhere else, they don't belong in the community, they're not from the community [whereas] these people knew what they'd all gone through, they understood that and I think that was the key factor in it working.*

(Jack Beetson, ABC radio interview, 10/05/12)<sup>7</sup>

While there was often one or two Technical Advisers present, their role was to provide ongoing training and support. At times, they might move to

<sup>7</sup> The interview can be listened to online at: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/pm/indigenous-graduates-in-cuban-literacy-program/4001552>.

the front of the class to demonstrate or explain; but in general they stayed back, and worked as assistants to the local Facilitators.

Over time, a simple lesson plan was developed, and a fairly standard lesson structure, consisting of:

- » 10 minutes of discussion and review of the previous lesson
- » 30 minutes watching the DVD, with some stop/start for clarification, contextualisation, and exercises; and
- » 20 minutes of practice activities.

The real work of the Technical Advisers was in helping the Facilitators to prepare each lesson, to discuss what had happened in a previous class and progress of each student, and to assist with ideas on how to contextualise and adapt the materials to the reality of Wilcannia. This 'contextualisation', which is a key feature of the YIC model, involves finding local pictures, words and themes to use in lessons, either as a substitute for unfamiliar words used on the DVD, or in addition.

Completion of the basic 64 lessons indicates a minimal level of achievement on some simple tasks, even though the method does allow people to achieve more than this if they are able. However, although this is assessed through the students' work, there is no 'fine-grained' assessment, and the outcome is simply that they completed the course. Hence, we speak below of completions, meaning that everyone can do the following:

**1** **READING:** ability to independently read aloud and understand an unseen short text of one short paragraph length (about two to three sentences) using familiar basic and colloquial words and phrases on a personal or familiar topic based on his/her experience.

**2** **WRITING:** ability to independently write a short paragraph (about two sentences) on a personal topic using familiar basic and colloquial words and phrases, with capital letters and full stops.

**3** **WRITING:** ability to independently write a short (one paragraph) personal letter using a defined familiar format, greeting and sign off, and with capital letters and full stops, and commas.

**4** **WRITING:** ability to independently write and sign name and date.

The final evaluation of the students' learning occurs during the activities in Lessons 56 to 63 and the participants' work is recorded in their workbook and exercise book. There is no formal assessment test, but the Technical Advisers are expected to verify with the Facilitators that everyone who completes has reached this basic level.

The YIC lessons are designed to achieve much more than this basic level of competence in reading and writing. The "positive messages" express an underlying set of values about human development and the role of each individual within it. The Cuban Ambassador to Australia, His Excellency Pedro Monzón, who was a *brigadista*<sup>8</sup> himself in the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign, described it thus at the May graduation:

The system is very well conceived, since the process starts with the discussion of ideas [before] establishing links between numbers and words. In fact, the program is not limited to teaching reading and writing. It integrates educational, social and cultural components with the learning process of reading and writing, and the framework of the teaching refers to the cultural and social interest of the local people. (Monzón, 2012)

<sup>8</sup> *Brigadista* was the title used to refer to young volunteer literacy teachers during the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign. Over 100,000 students participated as teachers throughout the campaign, which reached over 700,000 Cuban adults with low literacy in a single year (Kozol, 1978).

There is also a significant amount of material which could be called general knowledge, which introduces students to the world of learning and the possibilities of a better future.

## PARTICIPATION AND RETENTION

In the first intake, while 25 people actually came to one or more classes, 12 withdrew after only one or two sessions, leaving 13 continuing students. Of these, 10 graduated, which is a retention figure of over 75%, an unusually high figure for Aboriginal post-school education courses. This suggests that the campaign model and the YIC method works for the people who can manage to stay beyond one or two classes. This is set out in Table 2, below.

**Table 2. First Intake Participation and Retention**

First Intake	M	F	T
Starters	10	15	25
Continuers	5	8	13
Completers	4	6	10
Retention (%)	80	75	77
Withdrawals	5	7	12
Withdrawals as a percentage of starters (%)	50	47	48

The second intake produced similar, though not such dramatic results, as shown in Table 3, below.

**Table 3. Second Intake Participation and Retention**

Second Intake	M	F	T
Starters	4	14	18
Continuers	3	8	11
Completers	1	5	6
Retention (%)	33	63	55
Withdrawals	1	6	7
Withdrawals as a percentage of starters (%)	25	43	39

Note that data for one of the students in Intake 2, who has Down syndrome, has been excluded, because even though he came for most of the classes and gained some benefit, he was not able to complete the necessary work. The second intake had a lower retention, but one which is still relatively high when compared with retention levels for basic pre-vocational courses. Moreover, the reasons for withdrawal were to do with significant personal crises, including one student being jailed half way through the classes, and two more having to leave town to go and look after a critically-ill relative in another town. Another withdrawal was a young man whose mother had withdrawn him from school, who returned to school after 6 weeks, which was an excellent result.

The participation and retention across both intakes are set out in Table 4. This shows that, of the students who attended two or more times, only eight did not successfully complete the classes. Some of these, it should be noted, have actually come back into the Campaign to take part in Phase 3: Post-literacy, suggesting that they are still building their literacy levels.

**Table 4. Combined Participation and Retention, Intakes 1 and 2**

Combined	M	F	T
Starters	14	29	43
Continuers	8	16	24
Completers	5	11	16
Retention (%)	63	69	67
Withdrawals	6	13	19
Withdrawals as a percentage of starters (%)	43	45	44

The high retention rate across both intakes for both men and women show that, for the people who were mobilised to join the Campaign, and who stayed beyond the first one or two sessions, the model and method works very well, to get them to a basic level of improved literacy. As the



data presented in the post-literacy section on page 23 will show, these people have now become part of the process of building a more literate culture in the community which places a higher value on education and training. This is a significant achievement.

A slightly more complex picture emerges when participants are broken down by age. The majority of students who enrolled were in the younger age classes (15-24 and 25-34), but they were also the ones most likely to withdraw and least likely to complete.

Statistics are useful, but numbers cannot convey anything about the participants themselves and the meaning of participation to them. A recent National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) research project undertaken with adult and community education providers found that, while Foundation Skills policy and programs mainly target employability, participants in literacy programs often have more personal and family reasons for choosing to return to learning (Dymock & Billett, 2008). In Wilcannia, many people saw the literacy Campaign as a chance to turn their lives around, build their confidence, and play a more positive role in their community. One Campaign participant put it this way:

*I heard from friends and I wanted to get involved, to build my confidence up again, because I was into drugs and alcohol. And I came along, got involved with it and I just enjoyed it. [On the first day] I felt shy. I was so shy, I hardly spoke. I knew the people in the class but I hardly spoke to 'em. I was shy in the class and even out on the street. (Interview, 27/07/91)*

The diversity of motivations is reflected in the following extract from the Technical Adviser's Report:

*Most participants were over 35 years and belonged to one of five extended family groups. Most were related to the Post-literacy Coordinator and/or the Facilitators. All had a long history of being out*

*of the paid workforce, with 50%, especially the men, wanting to gain paid employment or set up a small enterprise such as art work or cleaning or landscaping. Approximately 30% suffered from poor eyesight requiring spectacles to read the DVD and workbooks...*

*The reasons for joining the Campaign varied. Some of the older women simply wanted to have a better quality of life for both themselves and their kids and grandkids. It was not unusual for the women to comment that "they loved coming to class because it was boring at home all day everyday with nothing different to do." One older person said she hopes the young ones see her and want to do it also, to "make something of themselves. Not sitting all day at home watching videos". One younger woman said "class made me feel better inside" because it helped her deal with her sadness of losing her two young children in an accident only two years before. Two women specifically came to Yes, I Can! so they could "stay clean", "off the grog and drugs". A young man with a newly born daughter and young son spoke of becoming "a role model for family, maybe work at Shire"; an older man had decided Yes, I Can! would help him "get fit and play footy again so he can stay strong and off grog and get work". Another grandmother wanted "the rest of my family to do the course, show them if I can do it they can too"; a woman said she really wanted to "look out for grandkids"; a younger woman said she "just wanted to feel happier"; and another "my kids be proud of me, they shamed when I don't read". Two women were desperately trying to turn their life around in order to stay out of jail as they had run out of chances being on a suspended sentence (Technical Adviser, Final Report, October 2012).*

The quotations in this report were drawn from pre-assessment interviews and conversations in class.

## THE GRADUATIONS

The culmination of Phase 2 for both intakes came with the graduations, which took place on May 8 and August 31. These significant community events were actually a continuation of Phase 1, because they contributed to the socialisation

and mobilisation, building more understanding within the community of the importance of literacy and the need to honour and support the people in the community who step up to join the classes. In recognition not only of the graduates, but of the community as a whole for their efforts in mounting the Campaign, the second and final graduation was attended by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Secretary, Ms Sharon Bird, responsible for the Foundation Skills area, and by John Williams, the local National Party Member for the region in the NSW Parliament. The Cuban Ambassador, His Excellency Pedro Monzón, attended both graduations, possibly the first time such a high-level international guest had visited the community. Both graduations received extensive positive coverage in local, regional and national media, adding to the pride of the participants, their families and friends, and the Campaign's many supporters. Jack Beetson captured this in his speech to the August graduation:

*I am proud of this Campaign for many reasons but one reason is because over 40 adults were courageous enough to step through the classroom door to take a look; some stayed for several weeks; and today we are honouring the 16 who finished the course. In a community like Wilcannia this is no small achievement. Let us not forget that for a person who doesn't read and write, even taking that first step to come into the room is a giant step. So I say to you all... be proud of what you have done for yourself and for your kids and for your community. I know you have discovered learning and it is so exciting. It fills me with immense pride when I see you all now doing your post-literacy classes, using the computers, cooking healthy food and soon some of you'll be doing the Certificate II course in Catering (Jack Beetson, 31/08/12).*

These events provided further evidence of the extent to which the community itself had

taken ownership of the Campaign and were providing much of the energy driving it. The community hall was decorated by a team of volunteers; the cooking was done by two local community members, with assistance from the school staff and a local businessman. The young Barkindji dancers performed, accompanied on the didgeridoo by one of the local Facilitators. Community Elders attended and spoke, and representatives of the Facilitators and students also made speeches. Each graduate received a special certificate, which included the design from the Youth Centre literacy Campaign banner. The final graduation, which was also a farewell for the Technical Adviser from Cuba, ended in the evening with a community dance, attended by several hundred people. According to one of the YIC participants, "It was the best day of my life."

### 6.3 PHASE 3: POST-LITERACY

The aim of Phase 3 in a mass literacy campaign is to consolidate the learning that has occurred in the introductory classes by encouraging people to become part of the 'culture of literacy', and to engage in ongoing activities in which literacy and the learning which utilises and builds it are central.<sup>9</sup> For some people, this may ultimately become a path back into more formal, accredited learning, while for others, it may remain at the level of informal and incidental activities, such as more literate practices at work, in the home and in community. The post-literacy phase reflects the view of literacy currently advocated by UNESCO:

*Literacy is an indispensable foundation that enables young people and adults to engage in learning opportunities at all stages of the learning continuum. The right to literacy is an inherent part of the right to education. It is a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment. Literacy is an essential means of*

<sup>9</sup> This section of the Report relates to the following outcome in the DEEWR Contract, "C.2. (e) Create a pool of people ready to move into pre-vocational and vocational employment programs being rolled out under the Remote Service Delivery Local Implementation Plan 2010-2014 for Wilcannia".

*building people's capabilities to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society. (UNESCO, 2009, p2)*

The main thing is that the underlying theory is based on the idea of literacy as a 'social practice', done with other people in social situations, not an autonomous skill, even though skill is part of it.

The key task was to develop a coordinated strategy to consolidate and extend over a minimum 3 month timeframe, the newly acquired basic literacy skills of the learners who successfully complete the 13 week course. Post-literacy enables learners to transition to vocational and training pathways into employment and/or small scale enterprises. Others will access life skills programs to enhance confidence to engage more effectively with the requirements of everyday life such as a school, medical service, welfare agency, police, telecommunications, driving, as well as social networking. A key aspect of the model is to involve as many organisations in the community as possible in providing this post-literacy support, to emphasise the Campaign's key message that responsibility for overcoming low literacy, and supporting people who are trying to improve, lies with the whole community. It is about embedding into ongoing community life the development of the capacity of the low literate to become active agents in the development of themselves, their families and their community. In this sense, the whole Campaign is about a gradual process of social inclusion. Phase 1 encourages the community to give priority to the needs of people with low literacy, and invites everyone, low literate and more literate, to be part of the process; Phase 2 gives the low literate community members basic skills, builds trust between them and the community as a whole, and a sense of the possibility of a better future for everyone if literacy is addressed; and Phase 3 provides ongoing support for the further development of literacy embedded in other community activities and practices.

In August 2011, the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) signed a contract with UNE for an additional \$62,000 (GST exclusive) to support the post-literacy phase of the Campaign. This contract funded the employment of a part time local Coordinator to undertake the post-literacy phase of the pilot, who was to work under the support and direction of the Project Leader to:

- » develop a coordinated strategy to consolidate and extend the basic literacy skills of those who successfully complete the 13 week literacy course, with a focus on providing participants with opportunities for meaningful employment over the longer term;
- » identify existing and potential opportunities and gaps and negotiate with possible providers and funders of post literacy activities; and in particular, explore the role that CDEP can play in supporting program participants at the local level;
- » work with the project team and other stakeholders to design individual post literacy pathways for the graduates from the basic literacy program; and
- » provide on the ground support to participants to pursue their training, work experience and job seeking goals.

A further \$10,000 to support the post-literacy phase was granted to the Land Council at the end of August, for the Parental and Community Engagement (PACE) program, specifically to work with the participants around issues of community engagement with the Wilcannia Central School. However, at the time of writing, this work was only just getting underway.

UNE subcontracted the LALC to employ the Post-literacy Coordinator; while, Jack Beetson undertook the management and supervision under a separate sub-contract, as part of his role as Project Leader in the DEEWR-funded component

of the project. Recruitment of a suitable person was a major task, and the first two successful applicants both withdrew to take up other offers of employment. Eventually, someone else took on the role of Post-literacy Coordinator and began work at the end of October 2011. The new Post-literacy Coordinator had a background in education, having worked for many years as an Education Assistant in the Central School. A long time community member, she had a strong commitment to the Campaign, and was related to a family which has played a leadership role in Wilcannia for several decades. The Youth Centre, for example, is named in honour of her late mother-in-law. While she had no formal qualifications, she had a strong sense of what works and does not in her community. She became an active member of the CWG. The Technical Adviser, took responsibility with the Project leader for working with and training the new Post-literacy Coordinator in how to work within the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign model, and they began work on a Campaign manual based on their experience, which will be useful for other communities if the pilot is extended.

A Phase 3: Post-literacy Strategy was submitted to FaHCSIA in February 2012. As already explained, the three phases of the Campaign model are inter-connected, and some of the activities in Phase 1 and Phase 2 contribute directly to the development of Phase 3. In Phase 1, the key activities are the establishment of the CWG, the network of partners and supporters, the initial community survey, and the public Campaign launch, as these all help to identify and clarify what literacy means in the context of this particular community, why it is important, what the issues are for people who have low literacy, and what others are prepared to do to support the participants to build their literacy beyond the basic classes. In the period prior to the start of the first classes, the Post-literacy Coordinator played a major role in this Phase 1 work. This contextual knowledge is

important in helping the participants in the phase two classes to clarify their own aspirations and how they see their future as they build their literacy, in terms of the actual opportunities that exist around them. The Post-literacy Coordinator assisted with this work during the first intake, attending some Facilitator training sessions and classes, and helping to organise pickups, and as part of these activities engaged the participants and their families in discussions around the post-literacy options.

Because there were two intakes into the basic YIC classes, there were also two groups of graduates who joined the post-literacy phase at different times. The second intake began classes on 14th May, and the following week the first intake graduates, who had graduated a week earlier, began their post-literacy activities, including non-formal computer classes at the Land Council offices, and a cooking class at the Women's Safe House. The timetable was deliberately kept to a minimum so it could be managed locally and required few resources; whilst maintaining the same daily routine (2 hours three to four times per week) from the YIC classes. Over time, further activities came online. The program ran for 10 weeks, from 21 May until 12th August.

As with all the Campaign activities, there were major challenges. As Jack Beetson wrote in his report to UNE:

*The positive outcomes are even more remarkable because they were achieved against a local backdrop of community crises and dislocation. (August, 2012)*

Of these, the biggest issue arose in May, when the Post-literacy Coordinator was unable to continue to work her required number of hours per week because her pre-school age son contracted a serious illness, which eventually meant she had to relocate for several weeks to Adelaide to access the hospital. Her prolonged absence put a great deal of strain on the implementation of

the post-literacy phase, requiring the LALC to engage casual workers to try to fill the gaps. This proved difficult due to the limited pool of local workforce available with the appropriate skills and experience, and the other members of the project team had to absorb many of the tasks into their role. Eventually the Post-literacy Coordinator left her position in July.

Post-literacy activities also experienced the same disruptions to participation as had affected the literacy classes. In June, for example, one participant was away visiting family in Broken Hill; another was away in Dubbo visiting her children; two participants became ill; and another could only attend the critical literacy session, not the others, as she was also doing CDEP on Wednesday and Thursday which was enough for her in one week. A number of other factors operated to reduce the number of hours the participants actually engaged in the post-literacy program. Momentum was lost for nearly 4 weeks, due to school holidays, and the volunteer instructor going on holiday for a month. The critical literacy class stopped when the second volunteer left the job after the first session due to other commitments. The work experience placements were delayed due to absence by the Coordinators; the legal requirement for a police record clearance for reading with Save the Children took a long time to process; and there were long delays from the Western Institute of TAFE in responding to our requests.

Despite the problems, by the end of this phase for Intake 1, the following outcomes had been achieved:

- » there was a 70% take-up of Phase 3: Post-literacy activities, with seven of the 10 graduates involved in either classes, or work experience or both, while two of the three who did not join had left town for personal/family reasons;
- » two students were engaged to work as assistant instructors on Phase 3: Post-literacy activities;
- » one of the post-literacy assistant instructors was, at the end of this phase, engaged by LALC as a trainee Facilitator for Intake 2 YIC students;
- » one non-Aboriginal woman volunteered to be a post-literacy instructor and to mentor the two post-literacy assistant instructors;
- » four local agencies (LALC, Safe House, Shire Council and Save the Children) had directly supported the Phase 3 activities;
- » three additional agencies (Jim Sammon, Brookfield Multiplex, and CDEP Summit) had contributed resources to support Phase 3 activities;
- » initial negotiations with two Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) were underway to provide Certificate II courses relevant to graduate interest and local needs, when the post-literacy phase was completed, and for ongoing Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program tutoring.

The second YIC intake completed their classes and graduated on August 31, by which time individual Phase 3: Post-literacy plans had been negotiated with them and they were ready to move on to the post-literacy phase. The six graduates wanted to continue as one group to participate in post-literacy activities on a similar timetable to the YIC lessons. The negotiated program included three different activities per week from 10.30am to 12.30pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. As per the arrangement we had for Intake 1 students, on Tuesdays the LALC offered its facilities and laptops with internet access donated by Brookfields Multiplex for computing. On Wednesdays the Safe House agreed to continue with the cooking class. On Thursdays we offered a supplementary literacy and numeracy class to help consolidate and extend the participants newly acquired skills in reading and writing, supported by an Australian Language, Literacy and Numeracy



Program (LLNP) tutor from Western TAFE (Broken Hill)<sup>10</sup> with whom Wilcannia LALC had negotiated a partnership agreement. In addition to these learning activities, work experience placements continued, at CDEP and the Safe House. The program ran for 9 weeks, from August 21 until October 19 2012. During this time, other organisations, including the Men's Shed and the Art Centre, also encouraged the YIC graduates to join their activities.

In this second intake, attendance and participation improved on what had been achieved in the first intake, in part because the LALC once again had an employee, a local Aboriginal woman and an Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign graduate, whose job it was to assist to organise people to attend and to support them in the activities. Some of the first intake graduates also returned to continue in the post-literacy activities of the second intake group. With the second intake of YIC classes completed, two of the local Facilitators also sometimes participated in this program.

In the last week, Western TAFE opened a new course, a Certificate II in Catering, based on the new partnership that had been developed by the LALC, who continued to pay an assistant teacher (a YIC graduate) to work with the TAFE staff. This course was a direct response to needs expressed by graduates of YIC, who want to start a small catering business in town as an income generating project.

The participation and outcomes from the post-literacy phase as described above are summarised in Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8. Briefly, they show that four people took no part at all, of whom one left town after graduation and has not yet returned. The remaining 12 people participated both in learning activities and in work experience,

work or CDEP, but at very different levels. Not counting work experience and CDEP, the number of hours ranged for a low of 8 to a high of 44. Participation improved in the second intake, when there was a local Post-literacy Coordinator on staff to assist. *It is particularly noteworthy that six people have now enrolled in an entry level vocational qualification, and two people have obtained employment, one with the Shire and another with the Land Council. For this cohort, which had previously had very little interest or opportunity to work or do further study, this is a major breakthrough.*

<sup>10</sup> The LLNP tutor had been working at the TAFE campus in Wilcannia for 2 days per week as a tutor with Aboriginal students referred by JSAs for the LLNP (two women) and for the Certificate III in Health Work course (two employees at Maari Ma Health Service). However her hours had been reduced in June to 1 day per week. The Project Leader and Technical Adviser initiated negotiations with her and the Western TAFE Literacy Coordinator in May.

Table 5. Phase 3: Post-literacy participation and outcomes, for intake 1, by sex

Participant sex	Post-literacy			VET	Employment
	Computing	LLNP	Cooking	Catering Certificate II	Work/CDEP
m	n	n	n	n	n
m	n	n	n	n	n
m	n	n	n	n	y
m	n	n	n	n	y
f	n	n	n	n	n
f	y	n	y	y	n
f	n	n	n	y	n
f	n	y	y	y	y
f	y	y	y	y	y
f	y	y	y	y	y

Table 6. Phase 3: Post-literacy participation and outcomes, for intake 2, by sex

Participant sex	Post-literacy			VET	Employment
	Computing	LLNP	Cooking	Catering Certificate II	Work/CDEP
m	y	y	y	y	n
f	n	n	n	n	n
f	y	n	y	n	n
f	y	n	y	n	y
f	y	n	y	n	n
f	y	y	y	n	y

Table 7. Summary of Phase 3: Post-literacy Participation and Retention Outcomes

Activity	M	F	T
Cooking	1	8	9
Computing	1	7	8
Work/CDEP	2	5	7
Catering C2	1	5	6
LLNP	1	4	5
None	2	2	4

Table 8. Phase 3: Post-literacy participation by hours (not including work and/or CDEP)

Hours	M	F	T
None	4	3	7
10 hours or less	2	0	2
11 hrs–20 hrs	0	4	4
21 hrs – 30 hrs	0	1	1
31 hrs – 40 hrs	1	0	1
More than 40 hrs	0	1	1

### PHASE 3: POST-LITERACY REFLECTIONS AND EVALUATION

In a number of aspects, the post-literacy phase has proven the most difficult; but perhaps because of this, it has also been the phase in which we have learned most about what needs to be done in any future pilots to contextualise the model in an Aboriginal community.

Post-literacy requires the Campaign leadership to mobilise other organisations to contribute, but because this was the first pilot, it took quite a long time for the potential supporters to see the value of doing this, and work out ways in which they could. This problem was compounded by the personal circumstances of the person originally appointed as Post-literacy Coordinator, and are part of the difficulty of securing and retaining the required workforce in a small community. This same problem flowed over into the staffing of the actual post-literacy activities, where again, volunteers were unable to commit to the level we had originally anticipated. There is also the problem of resources, as the funding that other organisations access is not necessarily suited to providing support for this phase of the Campaign. The policy and program context is extremely complex, with a range of different providers accessing program funding from many different sources. An indication of the difficulties can be gained from this extract from the Project Leader's final report of Phase 3: Post-literacy to UNE:

*Meanwhile the Technical Advisor and I continued discussions with both the Broken Hill Institute of TAFE and the Murdi Paaki Enterprises Corporation, also an RTO, requesting a WELL program for Wilcannia agencies. We had identified seven workplaces (Safe House, Maari Ma Health Service, Shire Council, Schools, LALC and Save the Children) where Aboriginal workers, including four of our graduates, were employed who could greatly benefit from this service. Potential staff able to undertake*

*this role had also been identified. Unfortunately to date neither agency has been able to successfully progress this because, as I understand it, the local agencies are required to make a contribution to the delivery costs.* (Jack Beetson, September 2012; my emphasis)

There is also a degree of competitiveness built into the provision of support by Job Services Agencies (JSAs) and LLNP providers, which mitigates against a more coordinated approach, as the same report indicates:

*Despite several meetings to discuss collaboration, the local CDEP run by Summit Employment and Training, a registered JSA, proved unwilling to join the Network of Campaign Supporters and to formally collaborate with Phase 3 of the Literacy Campaign. Although four of their clients were among those enrolled in Intake 1 and another two in Intake 2, the CDEP was unable to offer any structured post-literacy activity such as Horticulture to our students. Three of the Intake 1 graduates gained casual employment in the cleaning, art or landscaping business coordinated by CDEP however this was not a brokered arrangement. This lack of cooperation by a well resourced and important agency operating in the Wilcannia community represented a serious obstacle to the success of Phase 3 of the Campaign being delivered by the LALC, the only Aboriginal community controlled representative body in Wilcannia.* (Jack Beetson, September 2012)

The move to one provider under the Remote Jobs and Communities program may make this more streamlined. However, there is also a need to develop a more coherent development strategy which is based on a realistic assessment of the current level of education and qualifications in the Aboriginal adult population.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A submission was put to FaHCSIA CDEP in March 2012 for funding to develop such a strategy with the literacy Campaign's local networks and workforce, utilising the same PAR approach as the Campaign study, but so far it has not been supported.

## 7. AUSTRALIAN CORE SKILLS FRAMEWORK: MAPPING AND ASSESSMENTS

As required by its contract with DEEWR, UNE retained the service of ACSF specialist Philippa McLean, to map the YIC lesson content against the ACSF and to use that national standard to assess the literacy levels of participants at the beginning and end of the YIC classes. The ACSF provides a detailed picture of performance in the five core skills of Learning, Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Numeracy, and “a systematic approach to benchmarking, monitoring and reporting on core skills performance”.<sup>12</sup> Over the life of the project, Philippa made an initial visit to UNE to finalise her contract and brief, and three visits to Wilcannia to observe the classes in action and to assist the Project Team with designing and administering the individual assessments. She corresponded regularly between visits with the Project Team, provided an interim report at the end of Intake 1 and a Final Report at the end of Intake 2. A decision was made at the outset, on the consultant’s advice, to confine the mapping and assessments to three skills, learning, reading, and writing, which “were thought to be the most relevant to the learners and to the content of the *Yes, I Can!* course.”

The mapping of YIC was undertaken through observation of actual classes, viewing of a selection of the DVDs and student workbooks and exercise books, and discussion with the two Technical Advisers. The Final Report explains that YIC allows students to operate at a fairly broad

range, from below Level 1 at the beginning of the classes, to Level 2 and perhaps even higher, at the end:

*The early stages of the Yes, I Can! course concentrate on single sounds for reading, writing and oral communication. As the learner develops through the course the emphasis is on building knowledge of words (ACSF Pre Level 1), then sentences working from simple to complex sentences (ACSF level 1 to level 2). Learners then spend time developing skills to write a paragraph and a descriptive informal letter to a friend using a model provided (ACSF level 2). It isn't until near completion of Yes, I Can! that learners are creating paragraphs with support....*

*There is some ACSF level 2 and 3 content, (e.g., reading and writing a paragraph, writing a letter)... [but] the pace, modelling and restricted context of the classes and step by step process means that Yes, I Can! rarely operates above ACSF level 1.*

However, as the report acknowledges, there is a lot more happening, some of which falls outside the ACSF, but is nevertheless contributing to the participants’ literacy development:

*It is clear that as the course progresses more complex skills are being developed in terms of prediction and prior knowledge, sentence complexity, distinguishing fact from opinion, learning with and from others...*

*A number of participants commented on how they enjoyed learning about Cuba and Grenada. They showed obvious interest in having their horizons extended...*

*The methodology of Yes, I Can! is such that the priority is for learners to achieve success and build confidence. Risk taking is not as strong a focus, so there is significant support and scaffolding for all activities. This means that the program is rarely able to provide the participants with the opportunity to demonstrate higher than ACSF level 2 performance and often performance opportunity is only at level 1. (Emphasis added)*

<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this section are taken from the ACSF consultant’s final report (McLean, 2012).



In summary then, YIC classes begin at a point which is appropriate for people who have not yet achieved Level 1 on the ACSF. While there is a Pre-Level 1 classification in the ACSF, the assessment tools for this level are still under development. Over the 64 lessons, people progress to the point where they can exit at Level 2, and could, if the opportunity arose and it was appropriate to extend them, perhaps reach Level 3 in at least some areas, e.g., with the final letter writing exercise. This of course would depend on the level at which they entered the classes, but also on the skill of the Facilitators.

This needs to be read against the background of both the initial pre-assessments, which found the majority of students at Pre-Level 1, i.e., not actually on the original ACSF scale. It should also be noted that the Project Team and the ACSF consultant were acutely aware of the issues around lack of confidence and fear of failure in the opening classes, and so keen to make the assessment process as less intrusive as possible.

Pre-assessments were completed with 30 participants, of whom 15 completed post-assessments. One Intake 1 graduate did not complete a post-assessment. The breakdown by intakes is set out in Table 9.

**Table 9. Australian Core Skills Framework Assessments, by intake**

ACSF assessments		M	F	T
Intake 1	Pre	5	8	13
	Post	3	6	9
Intake 2	Pre	5	12	17
	Post	1	5	6
Overall	Pre	10	20	30
	Post	4	11	15

As the consultant wrote:

*The pre-training assessments may have underestimated the reading and writing skills of the learners because they did not have the awareness of themselves as learners and lacked the confidence to demonstrate reading and writing skills.*

That said, it is significant that, of the 30 participants who completed pre-assessment, the vast majority were below Level 1 on each of the three core skills.

By the time the final assessments were done, in the last weeks of the YIC classes, things had changed dramatically for those who had persevered:

*In Intake 1, 10 students graduated from Yes, I Can! and each one of these was able to demonstrate an improvement in two or more ACSF skills of Learning, Reading or Writing... four students demonstrated an increase in each of the three Core Skills.*

Similar, though not quite such dramatic improvements were observed with the second intake:

*In Intake 2, six students graduated from Yes, I Can!. Five of these students demonstrated an increase in performance in at least one core skill and three demonstrated an improvement in two core skills.*

The fact that less movement was observed may be attributed to the fact that the pre-assessments of this intake were done with the benefit of the earlier experience and so were less likely to have understated the initial level.

Overall, the conclusion was that YIC had provided an opportunity for significant literacy building:

*It was obvious that the learners had built their literacy skills and were able to demonstrate stronger skills within the ACSF level... This was demonstrated in ways such as attempting to write more complex sentences without support, speaking up in class and coming to the whiteboard to write, reading aloud to*

*the class from the DVD, supporting class members, working in groups and connecting their classroom work with their broader life.*

In relation to the development of core skills more generally, one of the most significant findings of the consultant's study is that:

*The core skill of 'Learning' is a critical skill that needs to be explicitly addressed by teachers and learners. Development in this skill often underpins progress in the other core skills.*

We would add that, underpinning the development of the 'skill' of learning is a whole set of other factors, of which the most important are the belief the individual and the group have in their own ability to learn, a belief which has been systematically undermined in the past by the experience of racism, discrimination and exclusion, not just in the education system but within the dominant society as a whole; and then reinforced in the subculture of resistance and marginalisation which results from that experience.

In her conclusion to her Final Report, the ACSF consultant wrote:

*The situation in Wilcannia is that there are a large number of learners who have not been in a formal learning environment for many years. The effect is that these people have lost confidence in their capacity and identity as readers and writers and due to the lack of practice and opportunity have actually lost some of their literacy skills as well. Yes, I Can! has provided them with a supported formal experience to build their belief in themselves as learners, to focus on what they would like to learn, to set goals and apply strategies to develop their capacity in learning to learn. This has been the biggest advantage of Yes, I Can! Once this development has taken place, the students are actually building the confidence to demonstrate some basic reading and writing skills. In many cases these skills are not being learnt for the first time. Rather learners are being given the opportunity to remember these skills, to bring them out of a cupboard where they may have been for many years. Yes, I Can! is emphasising the*

*importance of these skills and providing a group focus whereby individuals can strengthen their literacy skills, apply them to real life situations and build a stronger community.*

The idea of literacy as a set of skills which might be kept in a cupboard, while evocative, does not quite capture the notion of literacy as a social practice, rather than an autonomous set of skills. The point, perhaps, is that the Campaign has initiated a new set of social practices in Wilcannia in which people can participate with the literacy they have, minimal as it might be at the outset, and fairly quickly move to a position where they are comfortable in extending themselves and utilising literacy in ways they have not previously had the opportunity to do, in ways that are relevant to them, and in social settings where they are welcome and supported. Moreover, because most of the participants continued to build their literacy beyond the end of the YIC classes through the post-literacy phase, the ACSF assessments, while useful and valid, may underestimate the extent to which the Campaign as a whole has helped people to develop their literacy.





Photo: Jeremy Buckingham. Tree in Wilcannia. The tree motif is used in the Campaign and popular education to show that change is rooted in the local community. Used under Creative Commons BY 2.0 license. [flic.kr/p/qsZgRY](https://flic.kr/p/qsZgRY)



8.CONCLUSIONS

There was a buzz in the air. The adults who participated in this literacy course were delighted with the results. Their ability to read will provide them with many benefits in the future. There is now talk of cooking classes, which will involve the participants reading recipes – something they were not able to do before. This first step to reading has enlightened these people and opened up another world to them...

For the people of Wilcannia, I have no doubt that learning to read is their first step to a better future. In my time in politics I have not seen another program that will deliver more benefit to the community of Wilcannia than this literacy program. (John Williams, MP. NSW Parliament Hansard, 06/09/12)

The aim of the pilot was to discover first, whether the mass adult literacy campaign model, utilising the Yes, I Can! method, could be successfully applied in an Aboriginal community; and second, what would be involved in up-scaling it from community to regional level, and then to other regions. As the account given above has shown, it can be applied in an Aboriginal community and was, in fact, welcomed by that community. In terms of success, the enthusiastic participation of so many individuals and agencies, and the outcomes achieved by the graduates and others, are an indication that, for those who joined the Campaign, it was indeed a success.

However, it is important not to overstate what the evidence from this pilot demonstrates.

The aim of a literacy campaign, as explained in Section 3 of this report, is to significantly raise the level of literacy in a region or a nation within a specific period of time. From this perspective, the important data is population level data, rather than individual outcome data. While this was a pilot, not a full-developed campaign, being confined to only one community, it is still important to ask to what extent there was significant change in the literacy rate at a population level, i.e., in the Wilcannia Aboriginal adult community. Table 10, below, summarises the evidence.

Table 10. Overall summary of Wilcannia community Campaign outcomes

	M	F	T
Adult Population according to 2011 Census	212	261	473
Estimated target (40% of the adult population)	84	104	188
People Surveyed by LFLF	56	87	143
Identified literacy need	40	58	98
Campaign Starters	14	29	43
Campaign Completions	5	11	16

The estimated target was based on an assumption that 40% of the adult population (at the 2011 census) has minimal literacy levels, i.e., 188 people. In fact, 98 people self-identified or were identified by a family member through the initial survey and enrolment process, as interested in joining the Campaign, i.e., approximately 52% of



On this basis, the NAALCSC resolved to undertake two more pilots in the same region in western NSW in 2013, both to refine the model further, but also to test whether upscaling it produces a more substantial improvement in overall literacy levels.



our estimated potential target group. The lower number is most likely the result of several factors, including:

- a) The household literacy survey only reached 55 households, less than 50% of the 119 households the 2011 census had identified with at least some Aboriginal occupants;
- b) Some people may have not been willing to self-identify as needing literacy assistance

Moreover, of the 98 who were identified, only 43 actually started class i.e., attended one or more sessions. If the initial estimates are correct, then we succeeded in reaching 22% of the target population with our two intakes, and 8% of this target population actually participated until the classes finished. In the end, if our initial assumptions were correct, this number of completions has reduced the percentage of low-literate people in the community by around 6% (from 40% to 34%).

This is a deliberately conservative estimate. As will be further discussed, some of the people who did not complete the 12 weeks of classes nevertheless did raise their literacy levels, as shown in feedback from those participants themselves, their families and the Technical Advisers. It may also be the case that the initial estimate of those with low literacy was too high and/or that the total adult population over 15 was less than the number found in the 2011

census. On those assumptions, the reduction in the overall very low literacy rate might rise to 7% or 8%.

That said, the outcome falls well short of reductions achieved in full-scale campaigns documented in other countries, such as in Nicaragua in 1980, where the reduction was in the order of 15-25%. On that basis, it is necessary to conclude that this pilot has not demonstrated that the mass literacy campaign model can be applied in an Aboriginal community to the same effect it has had in some other countries. The reasons, as this report shows, are complex; and, on the basis of the lessons learned from the Wilcannia experience, it is reasonable to believe that a more dramatic improvement can be achieved by up-scaling the pilot to a regional level.

The NAALCSC meeting in Alice Springs in August, which reviewed these findings, concluded that the pilot had produced compelling evidence to warrant the continued development of the model for use in Aboriginal communities. A 6% improvement in literacy was considered to be an important change, especially as the outcomes from the Campaign were already having significant impacts on the lives of the individuals involved, their families and the whole community. It was also noted that, **in terms of take-up and retention, the Campaign had achieved a great deal more than previous efforts in recent years to raise literacy levels with post-school adult education programs.**



**“For the people of Wilcannia, I have no doubt that learning to read is their first step to a better future. In my time in politics I have not seen another program that will deliver more benefit to the community of Wilcannia than this literacy program.”**  
– NSW MP

## CONCLUSIONS

On this basis, the NAALCSC resolved to undertake two more pilots in the same region in western NSW in 2013, both to refine the model further, but also to test whether upscaling it produces a more substantial improvement in overall literacy levels.

The contract between UNE and DEEWR/DIIRSTE, in addition to seeking an answer to the research questions above, set six specific objectives for the pilot. The evaluation findings in relation to these are set out below.

### **(A) MOBILISE THE WILCANNIA COMMUNITY LEADERS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF ADULT ILLITERACY, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, INCLUDING THE LOCAL SCHOOL.**

The Central School Principal summed up this aspect of the pilot as follows:

*There has been a lot of things happen in Wilcannia that have been done to the community. This project for me, the differences and the reasons why this has been embraced, is the fact that it is actually for the community, by the community. And, it's actually the community that is running the program. There's support there, like a lot of support obviously, but the leadership roles are being held by community members...*

*Wilcannia, with 64 agencies apparently servicing the town, Wilcannia is a town that has had many, many things done to it. But I think that the sensitivity of this project and the way that it has engaged the community, and there has been absolute determination from the beginning that it is a capacity building for the community, in terms of leadership and participation. Like, it is an ownership for the community. It's the care with that that has made it successful. (Interview, 27/07/12)*

The level of community mobilisation and partnership building is further evidenced in the 13 local agencies who joined the support network;

the active role of the Wilcannia LALC as the lead organisation, and strong support from the CWP; the significant contributions from the Central School, in cash and in kind, to all phases; the allocation of a venue for the classes by Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprises; the in-kind contribution of labour and resources from local businesses; the direct involvement of the Safe House, Maari Mar Aboriginal Men's Group, the LALC, the Shire and Western TAFE in providing post-literacy activities; and the high level of involvement, including in the launch and graduations, from community Elders and leaders. Finally, the additional resources provided by FaHCSIA CDEP, the Aboriginal Housing Office, and the Dubbo Indigenous Coordination Centre under the RSD program indicate the pilot's success in attracting funding support from other agencies.

### **(B) CONTEXTUALISE AN INTERNATIONALLY-RECOGNISED ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN MODEL WITH ASSOCIATED RESOURCES TO THE SPECIFIC LOCAL SITUATION OF AN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.**

The work to contextualise the YIC model took place from the start of the Facilitator training until the end of the last class; and in the post-literacy phase, the involvement of local agencies. Of particular importance was the training of local Facilitators to develop their own materials and exercises to supplement those set out in the DVDs and workbooks, and the development of simple lesson plans. The pilot also produced a wide range of tools and resources for use both in the classes, but also in the other phases, especially for building community engagement, including the survey instrument, the publicity material, forms for supporter organisations to sign, and a simple student record system which fed into a local Excel database. These tools and resources are being collected into a draft handbook, which can be built

on in future pilots. The development of a suitable timetable of classes to enable the 64 lessons to be completed, including the introduction of a 'catch-up' session and the Literacy and Culture Day, were also significant in contextualising the model to the reality of life in Wilcannia.

### **(C) TRAIN LOCAL ABORIGINAL TUTORS AND ORGANISERS IN THE CAMPAIGN MODEL.**

The four local Aboriginal people who worked as Facilitators in the YIC classes, two women and two men, received substantial training in the model, beginning with the intensive training before the start of the first intake and continuing on the job for the next 7 months. At the end of the first intake, one of the students asked to be trained as a Facilitator also, and she received training from then until the end of the classes and has continued to work in the post-literacy phase. The extent to which they embraced the idea of the model and understood its importance, as much to themselves as to the participants, was expressed by a Facilitator in an interview:

*When they approached me about this, about being a Facilitator, I jumped at the chance, because like I said, I've always wanted to do something to help my people. And even if it's something like this, learning to read and write, doing a simple letter, filling in a form, it feels good here (indicating the heart) on the inside – from your heart. And that's why I do it every time. It's like every time when I do traditional dancing with my young dance group. We do dances all the time, but it's a different feeling every time we dance, in the heart, and that's what it's like when you're teaching. It's a different feeling. It's a good feeling in your heart, because you know you're doing something for your people. And you feel proud on the inside, and there's no better feeling than that.* (Interview, 26/07/12)

The closeness of the Facilitators to the community created its own issues, as the Technical Adviser from Cuba found:

*The thing about the Facilitators is that they have sometimes – not sometimes, most of the time, they have the same issues the students have. So sometimes we explain to them that they are very important, they need to be here, because without them we cannot do it. It may work for some time, but then we have some difficulties. We don't know when the problem may appear.* (Interview, 27/07/12)

In addition to the Facilitators, many other local people developed an understanding of the campaign model, including the Post-literacy Coordinator, members of the local CWG and the CWP, staff in organisations which joined the Network of Supporters, and, not least, the participants themselves.

### **(D) MAKE SIGNIFICANT MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENTS IN ENGLISH LITERACY AMONG 50-60 PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILOT, DRAWN FROM ABORIGINAL ADULTS IN THE WILCANNIA COMMUNITY WITH MINIMAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LITERACY.**

As illustrated in the data in the section of the Report on participation and retention, the pilot did not manage to reach its target of literacy improvements for 50-60 participants. The ACSF assessments and the material produced directly in the YIC classes demonstrate the improvements of those 16 people who completed the post-assessments. It was also clear that the Facilitators were developing their own literacy skills through teaching the lessons. We can add to this number approximately five more adults who persisted with the YIC lessons for a significant period, but were forced to withdraw because of reasons outside their control, including a young woman who was jailed before she could finish. A

young man, 15 years old, who had to be taken out of school by his mother because of problems there and came to classes for a few weeks also made significant improvements before he returned to school, according to his teachers. On this basis, we can say that the pilot helped at least 25 people to improve their literacy.

**(E) CREATE A POOL OF PEOPLE READY TO MOVE INTO PRE-VOCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS BEING ROLLED OUT UNDER THE RSD LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2010–2014 FOR WILCANNIA (COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA, 2010).**

The post-literacy phase which is now drawing to a close has clearly demonstrated that some of the YIC participants are now ready to move into pre-vocational and vocational employment and training programs. Two women have gained jobs, and several others are engaged in CDEP work, and six people are enrolled in a Certificate II course with Western TAFE. We also expect that several more people will soon take up the option of work experience placements with the Shire, and that Language, Literacy and Numeracy tutoring will be provided under a WELL program to participants in several other workplaces.

**(F) ORGANISE RIGOROUS TESTING OF THE CAMPAIGN MODEL BY QUALIFIED ADULT LITERACY ACADEMICS, TO ASCERTAIN THE VIABILITY OF EXTENDING IT TO OTHER COMMUNITIES IN THE REGION AND ELSEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA.**

This Report has given a comprehensive account of the testing of the model, and presented quantitative and qualitative data detailing what was achieved. The PAR design of the evaluation

has been followed, using the research methods described in Section 3. This work has been undertaken by the Project Manager, with input from the Technical Advisers, and the NAALCSC Technical Sub-committee. Two interim reports have been provided along the way, as well as a number of presentations to academic peers and stakeholders. As set out above, the conclusion is that it is viable to extend it to other communities in the region.

On the basis of the analysis to date, 18 key factors contributed to the success achieved, and made the model viable in Wilcannia. A further roll out should aim to replicate these:

- 1** Leadership of the Campaign was taken by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, the Land Council, which had legitimacy, authority, and resources, and was already identified as the leading development agency by community members and other important actors, including government;
- 2** The Land Council leadership was committed to a community development strategy and approach in which empowering the local community to take responsibility was fundamental;
- 3** The campaign employed from the outset local people in key roles, people who the community respected and trusted;
- 4** Locating the Campaign office in the Land Council made the Campaign an Aboriginal project, creating an open space where Aboriginal people were talking about and acting on the issue, making literacy “everyone’s business”;
- 5** The CWG which the Land Council established to advise it included local Aboriginal people who had the community’s trust and respect, built up through a history of working on the community’s behalf;



- 6** The local staff and CWG members came from several family groups, creating links across community divisions and conflicts;
- 7** Some key community leaders and Elders over time lent their support to the campaign, and participated in its public activities;
- 8** Jack Beetson brought to the role of Project Leader a reputation within the NSW Aboriginal community and beyond as a trusted and competent leader with many years experience in development work, and a network of relationships in government, the private sector and the Aboriginal rights movement on which he was able to call for support;
- 9** The Australian non-Aboriginal team members were experienced in working under Aboriginal control, in difficult and conflict-sensitive situations, and had specific expertise in adult education and working with low-literate communities;
- 10** The Technical Adviser from Cuba won the respect and friendship of the Facilitators and participants, and of other people in the town, by virtue of his commitment to their struggle and to the principles of solidarity and respect which underpin the YIC model, and his willingness to be flexible and listen to the community;
- 11** The Facilitators chose as a classroom another Aboriginal organisation, strategically located next to the park where many potential students gathered each day, and so people could see what was happening as they walked by, and drop in if they wished;
- 12** There was a great deal of flexibility, as classes and other activities were made to work within the rhythms of community life, including a catch-up session each week for those who had not made it, the cancellation of classes for funerals, and teaching whoever turned up, even if it was only one or two people;
- 13** The Grenadian DVD lessons, and the Technical Adviser's Cuban nationality and culture, proved a point of interest and attraction, as people discovered that they were part of a wider adult literacy movement among 'people of colour' in countries of the Global South, about which they wanted to know more;
- 14** The Facilitators, students, community leaders and project advisers all fostered and encouraged a spirit of respect, compassion and solidarity for everyone involved, so that people felt safe and supported, and not judged or 'put down';
- 15** There were sufficient funds in the budget to hold social events like the launch, the graduations and the regular BBQs, which made the Campaign a 'whole-of-community' activity, something in which everyone could get involved, including the families of the participants and staff;
- 16** The participants themselves were rewarded and respected for their achievements, with the small regular scholarship payment from the Aboriginal Housing Office for attendance, and the public recognition and Certificates at the graduations;
- 17** As the Phase 3: Post-literacy activities began to take shape, people could see that pathways were emerging along which they could travel using their new found skills; and as some people began to take those pathways, they became role models for others;
- 18** Family members, including children and older people, took pride and pleasure in seeing the participants and the Facilitators working together and achieving things, and they helped maintain the positive atmosphere.

The success of the pilot owes most to the extraordinary courage and perseverance of the participants, the Facilitators and their families. It is appropriate, then, to end this Report with two local voices. First, one of the students who

## CONCLUSIONS

captured much of what this Report has tried to convey in a powerful testimony on the impact of the Campaign:

*I felt real good [at the graduation]... And everyone was proud of me, and I was real proud that everyone was coming along to see me make that speech, my family and friends came.*

*I feel like I've got a lot of confidence in myself now, and I want to get out and help others. I just want to get out and help others. It's fun.*

*It's good, because when I was, like, 'using' [indicated injecting into forearm], I sort of lost it, you know, I forgot how to read and spell things you know. Then I came and done this here. And now I build a little bit up, and refreshing my memory – and I feel good*

*about myself. Instead of doing rehab and doing it that way, my family bought me to my other family, and they looked after me and got me onto this. I just feel good about it.*

*I'd do the training to be the Facilitator, just to keep it here. To encourage more to come along. 'Cos I know there's people out there that really need it. And it can make a difference... even in the community too. It can build self-esteem up.*

And, finally, on the question as to whether the Campaign should continue:



**And this is the best thing that ever could have happened for this little town. You know, I think it should expand to more other places along the Darling River you know, 'cos it's not only needed here. It's needed in a lot of other Aboriginal communities... You know, don't stop at one town. Let's keep going. Let's keep it rolling on. You know, and as far as I can see, it's going to keep going, and it's going to get bigger and better. The message is going to get around... You know, to me it's a good thing that's started. It'd be sad to see it end. You know, you've got to spread it along, spread the word, take it to other communities, and keep it alive. Keep it alive. – student**

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