



**YES, I CAN!**

**ABORIGINAL ADULT  
LITERACY CAMPAIGN**

# **Campbelltown**

**Final Evaluation Report 2020**

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MARCH 2020



### 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.

Photo supplied.

Readers are advised that this document may contain images of people who are deceased.

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Report designed in 2025.

**Cover image:** Facilitator Judy McGuinness (left) talks with student Charles Booth aged 63 years (right) during his first Yes, I Can! literacy class. Photo credit: Kate Geraghty/The Sydney Morning Herald.

The Literacy for Life Foundation acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we meet, work and live.

Campbelltown

Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign

Final Evaluation Report

2020

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	1
Abbreviations .....	3
Introduction.....	4
Context of the Community .....	4
Literacy for Life Foundation Coming to Campbelltown .....	5
A Unique Context.....	6
Overview of the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign .....	7
Phase 1: Socialisation and Mobilisation.....	7
Phase 2: <i>Yes, I Can!</i> Lessons .....	8
Phase 3: Post-literacy.....	10
Literacy Outcomes .....	11
Qualitative Outcomes .....	12
Graduate Destinations .....	13
Case Studies .....	14
Female participant, mid 50s, Intake 1 .....	14
Male participant, early 60s, Intake 2 .....	14
Key Strengths of this Campaign .....	15
Issues to Consider in Future Intakes.....	16
Conclusion.....	18
References .....	20

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF) ran the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign for the first time in an urban setting, in Campbelltown in Southwestern Sydney.

This evaluation of Intakes 1 and 2 of this Campaign concludes that the Campbelltown Campaign was highly successful, with key achievements identified as substantial literacy gains, strong graduate outcomes, and effective Aboriginal control and leadership.

Four key factors in this success are:

The Campaign team's experience, qualifications and prior experience, and the fact that all were Aboriginal people known to the community, made them particularly effective.

Intensive support provided by the Cuban on-site Technical Adviser was valuable in progressing students through to the end of the *Yes, I Can!* lessons.

Leadership and support provided by the Literacy for Life Foundation Director, Board and staff of Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service created a connected system of support at the local and organisational levels.

Effective 'wrap-around' support was provided to participants by Literacy for Life Foundation staff and partners.

Students successfully engaged with pathways beyond the Campaign, including further study, paid employment, small business ownership, and gaining driver's licenses. These outstanding results were supported by the Campaign's urban location, the local team's networks and the resources of the lead agency.

The key strengths of this Campaign include:

- » The experience, passion and commitment of the staff and, for the first time, an all-Aboriginal team;
- » Strong support from Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service as lead agency;
- » Location in a known community centre, where other support services existed;
- » Wrap-around care including provision of transport and lunch each day
- » Growing connection and networking among the participants.

Several challenges future intakes can consider include:

- » managing staff workloads;
- » ensuring staff training is adequate to accommodate some agility within and between roles;
- » managing overlapping intakes to factor in training, resources and experience;
- » the importance of staff continuity; and
- » achieving a balance between professional support and local ownership.

The Campbelltown Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign was a major success, matching the results of Campaigns in other locations and garnering strong community leadership.

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We pay our respects to Kay Bussell, a proud Yorta Yorta woman and Facilitator on the Campaign in Campbelltown during this evaluation. Kay's contribution to the Campbelltown community and the Literacy for Life Foundation's work will be remembered by all. May she rest in peace.

Jack Beetson

Executive Director for the Literacy for Life Foundation

## ABBREVIATIONS

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ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
CPO	Campaign Project Officer
CWG	Campaign Working Group
LFLF	Literacy for Life Foundation
NSW	New South Wales
PAR	Participatory Action Research
TAMS	Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service
UNE	University of New England
UNSW	University of New South Wales
YIC	<i>Yes, I Can!</i>



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## INTRODUCTION

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In 2019, the Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF) ran the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign for the first time in an urban setting, in Campbelltown in South Western Sydney. This Campaign, consisting of two intakes, was funded by the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Aboriginal Housing Office NSW. The aim of this report is to document and evaluate the conduct and outcomes of the Campaign. The report begins by considering the local context in which this Campaign was undertaken. It then presents an overview of the three-phase Campaign model before providing a more detailed analysis of each of the Campaign's two intakes. The final sections of the report include qualitative outcomes, participant case studies and a discussion of issues and suggestions for any future intakes.

The evaluation research utilises a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework which has been used in each Campaign since 2012. The PAR framework requires the evaluation leader and team to actively engage with the LFLF staff and managers, students, community members, and donors, to discover from them and dialogue with them about what they are learning as the Campaign unfolds. The evaluation framework reflects the 'program logic' of the mass literacy Campaign model across its three phases. That is to say, we evaluate the Campaign on its own terms, to discover whether and how it is achieving the objectives the Foundation has set itself and the outcomes for which it has been funded.

In total, seven field trips were undertaken to meet with staff, students and local organisations, and to take part in Campaign activities, including observing and participating in some lessons. This was in addition to regular phone conversations with local staff. The evaluation also involved

reviewing data provided by LFLF, including initial household literacy survey data, weekly attendance reports, assessment reports, examples of student work and the written reports of local staff and consultants.

The intent of each visit was to immerse ourselves in the community and various aspects of the Campaign. These visits also establish and build relationships with people so we can do an evaluation representative of the real situation on the ground. We make it clear that we are not there to judge or test. We are there to get a sense of how things are progressing and to see what, if any, improvements are needed.

## CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY

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Campbelltown is the ninth community in NSW to host an Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign and the first in an urban area. Every community is different, reflecting their different histories, and a Campaign only works by taking into account the specific features of the context in which it is run. Campbelltown is located in South Western Sydney which is a broad geographical region comprising seven different Local Government Areas (Bankstown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Campbelltown, Camden, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult population of Campbelltown in 2016 was 3,293 (18 years and over) (Campbelltown Council, 2019). As a 'relocation' area, Campbelltown is home to people from around 30 different First Nations including Dhanggati, Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri, Gumbaynggirr, Ngunawal and Yorta Yorta, although the Kamilaroi people are one of the largest groups in the area.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The spellings used in this report for First Nations Peoples and languages are those used by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (<https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/search>), unless a local community organisation uses a different spelling for its name. Variations of spellings exist for many First Nations, Peoples and Languages.





**Photo:** Literacy for Life Foundation Campbelltown student Eileen Lardner.  
Photo credit: Adam Sharman.

## LITERACY FOR LIFE FOUNDATION COMING TO CAMPBELLTOWN

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A key element of the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign is its whole-of-community approach. In the months and years leading up to the launch of the Campbelltown Campaign, LFLF leadership engaged with a range of Western Sydney communities and community groups to determine the need for an adult literacy Campaign and capacity to effectively co-deliver one in the region. This work is essential to ensuring that a community has the requisite passion, commitment, capacity and resources. After wide consultation within Campbelltown, a community organisation, Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service (TAMS), evinced both the desire and capacity to partner with LFLF to deliver the Campbelltown Campaign. The resultant partnership between LFLF and

TAMS in delivering the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign is one of the factors attributable to the strong outcomes detailed in this report.

TAMS is a large and well-resourced organisation which has been run by the Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation for 35 years and has been under the current administration for 18 years. This relative stability has no doubt contributed to TAMS' reputation as the central point for the wider Southwestern Sydney community. According to one community member, without TAMS, the community would not have been as strong as it is now. 'Tharawal', as the locals call it, is considered 'the heartbeat' of the community.

As lead local agency for the Campaign, TAMS was able to secure office and classroom facilities for the Campaign in the Bradbury Central Community Centre in Airds, a suburb within the Campbelltown region. Apart from providing a convenient central location for classes, the collocation of the

Campaign with other local community services and agencies afforded opportunities for collaboration and facilitated the provision of wrap-around care for Campaign participants, as will be reported on later.

## A UNIQUE CONTEXT

The Campbelltown Campaign has several unique features compared with previous Campaigns. To begin with, this Campaign is the first one delivered by LFLF in an urban context. As such, local staff and students had potentially enjoyed more opportunities for interaction and engagement with the English-literate 'mainstream world' than Campaign participants in other more remote parts of NSW where LFLF has delivered Campaigns. Secondly, the Campaign Project Officer (CPO) charged with managing the day-to-day running of the Campaign and supervising local staff was himself an Aboriginal person from the community.

Moreover, the CPO had established networks within the community and with all the major service agencies, most notably TAMS, and had several years' experience working in various community development roles.

Third, this was also the first time that the local Campaign Coordinator, the role which is the 'local face' of the Campaign, had tertiary qualifications, extensive work experience, and high-level professional skills.

Fourth, the two Campaign Facilitators who deliver the literacy lessons are respected Elders from the community, whereas in other sites, Facilitators have often been younger community members. Both Facilitators in Campbelltown also had experience working in the education system as Aboriginal Education Workers. Together, these unique factors have arguably been major influences in the way the Campaign developed in Campbelltown.

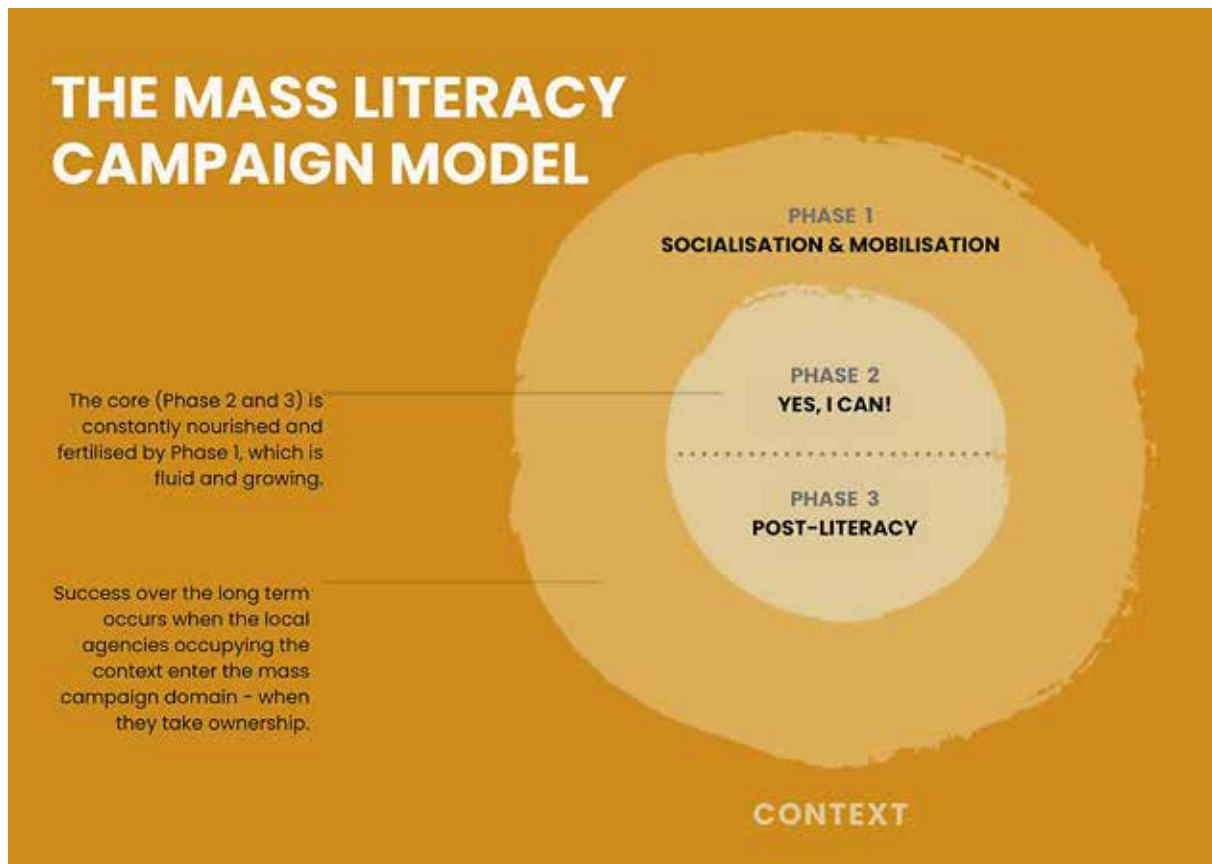


**Photo:** Facilitator Kay Bussell (standing) working with students Eileen Lardner (2nd from left) with Eileen's sister Stephanie (left), Jennifer Quinlan (2nd from right) and Judith Quinlin (right) during their first literacy class in the Campaign. Both Campaign Facilitators are respected Elders from the community and had experience working in the education system as Aboriginal Education Workers. Photo credit: Kate Geraghty/The Sydney Morning Herald

## OVERVIEW OF THE ABORIGINAL ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN

There are three phases to the LFLF Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign model, as illustrated in the diagram below, reproduced from the LFLF 2019 Campaign Handbook.

Figure 1. Overview of the three-phase Campaign model.



### PHASE 1: SOCIALISATION AND MOBILISATION

The aim of Phase 1 was to socialise the Campaign in Campbelltown, and to mobilise supporters and participants to take part. Phase 1 work continues throughout the Campaign, through regular meetings with the Campaign Working Group (CWG), a local Aboriginal steering committee and ongoing liaison with local organisations and

agencies to engage them in the Campaign and to seek their support for the participants and staff in achieving the goals of the Campaign.

The CWG established for this Campaign was organised by the CPO, and he was the main staff member who attended its meetings, where he already had authority and standing. Unlike in other communities, the CWG consisted largely of people working as professionals in other local agencies and had less direct family and other relationships with the participants than has been the case in the



more rural and remote communities in the west. A major benefit of this arrangement has been the agency support on which the local staff could call when participants needed help with other issues and problems.

Interviews with stakeholders, including local Aboriginal organisation leaders and government agencies have provided evidence that the Campaign is regarded as an important initiative, and the achievements of the staff and participants are well known and greatly appreciated.

Another key activity of Phase 1 is to undertake a household literacy survey which functions as a measure of the extent of low English literacy among the adult population, a way of identifying and prioritising those most in need of literacy classes and a means of socialising the Campaign in the community. Table 1 below summarises the survey data on self-reported literacy levels.

## Q: HOW WELL DO YOU THINK YOU CAN READ AND WRITE?

**Table 1. Self-assessed literacy results from the household literacy survey**

Self-assessed Literacy	Count	Percentage (%)
a. Very Well	89	57
b. Ok, but trouble filling out forms	36	23
c. Not very well	13	8
d. Not at all	4	2
e. Not specified	14	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	

As can be seen, more than half of those surveyed assessed their own literacy at the highest level (a = reads and writes very well). However, according to sources within TAMS, this finding does not accord with experience. This is further backed up

in recent findings from a longitudinal impact study which found that 66% of household literacy survey respondents across the Campaign communities have overestimated their literacy level when self-assessing (Lin et al., 2020).<sup>2</sup>

## PHASE 2: YES, I CAN! LESSONS

Phase 2: *Yes, I Can!* (YIC) lessons consist of 59 basic reading, writing and learning lessons delivered utilising a set of DVDs. The lessons typically run over 13 weeks for up to eight hours per week with a maximum of 20 people in each class. For Intake 1, YIC lessons ran from 18 February to 30 May 2019 and Intake 2 YIC lessons went from 10 June to 19 September. Table 2 below provides participation and retention figures for both intakes.

**Table 2. YIC Participation and Retention for Intakes 1 and 2**

Intake	EOIs	Starters	YIC Completions	Retention (%)
1	30	18	13	72.2
2	25	11	10	90.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>79.3</b>

As Table 2 shows, the conversion rate of Expressions of Interest (EOIs) to starters (those students who remain enrolled after the 'census' date at the close of Week 3) across both intakes was over 52%, a figure consistent with LFLF Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaigns to date. The main reason provided for withdrawal in the early stages of the lessons related to chronic health issues including mental health.

The overall retention rate for both intakes was nearly 80%. This figure is not only above

<sup>2</sup> This is an Australian Research Council-funded study involving the University of New England (UNE), University of New South Wales (UNSW), the Lowitja Institute and LFLF.

the Campaign average to date, but it is also considerably higher than completion rates for TAFE NSW qualifications, which for 2016 sat at 48.5% across the state (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER], 2019).<sup>3</sup> Informants, including the participants themselves, attribute the high course completion to the ongoing support of the CPO, Campaign Coordinator and classroom Facilitators as well as the respect with which the Facilitators, who were both local Elders, enjoyed in the wider community.

In addition to a high retention rate, actual lesson completions were very high. In order to meet the requirements of Phase 2: YIC lessons, students must complete a minimum of 70% of lessons including a number of compulsory lessons. For Intake 1, the average number of lessons completed

was 56 out of a possible 59, representing an attendance rate of 94%. This dropped slightly in Intake 2 with an average of 82% of total lessons attended. The CPO commented that Intake 2 student attendance was impacted by a number of deaths in the community; however, in a testament to the highly supportive nature of the Campaign model and pedagogy, the enrolled students 'pushed on and they all made it to the end' (CPO written report, December 2019). Since lesson completion rates correlate highly with literacy improvement<sup>4</sup>, the high attendance figures across the two intakes no doubt contributed to the strong literacy outcomes (see page 11 for details).

The final lessons of YIC include a series of embedded assessment tasks that are used to determine if a participant has, in fact, learned what

<sup>3</sup> Whilst 48.5% is the completion rate for all VET courses in NSW, the rates are lower for Certificate I and II courses. Completion rates are also substantially lower for Indigenous students (NCVER, 2019; Williamson & Boughton, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> This is based on analysis done by researchers at UNSW and UNE on literacy progression across LFLF Campaigns to date. For more information see Lin et al. (2020).



**Photo:** Facilitator Judy McGuinness leading the first class in the Campbelltown classroom. Yes, I Can! lessons consist of 59 basic reading, writing and learning lessons delivered utilising a set of DVDs, with the support of Facilitators from the local community. Photo credit: Kate Geraghty/The Sydney Morning Herald

## PHASE 3: POST-LITERACY

was taught in the previous lessons. A student is only considered to have completed YIC when they can successfully complete these tasks, at one of two levels – with some support or without. These assessments identify what need there is for further literacy skills-building in Phase 3: Post-literacy, with the aim of moving people from ‘with support’ to ‘without’ for basic literacy tasks. As has been the practice in other Campaigns, the Technical Adviser from Cuba, managed the assessment for Intake 1, and all but one student completed them to the required standard. For Intake 2, the assessment tasks were delivered and moderated by other LFLF staff as the Technical Adviser had returned to Cuba. The assessment process for Intake 2 from a staff point of view was not ideal, as will be discussed later. Despite this, again, all but one student met the requirements of YIC.

## PHASE 3: POST-LITERACY

Phase 3: Post-literacy consists of a minimum of 100 hours of structured literacy-based activities for approximately 8-10 hours per week. Students are expected to complete a minimum of 70 hours in order to be eligible to graduate. Each activity in post-literacy is designed to consolidate the literacy gained in Phase 2 through an integrated and sequential program of *social context literacy learning*. The activities aim to fall within four of the eight impact domains (see Figure 2) and where possible, include a work experience component and one accredited module. The curricula for both Intake 1 and 2 were planned in consultation with the CWG, addressing the needs and priorities of the students in each intake as well as the community as a whole. Both Intake 1 and 2 Phase 3: Post-literacy programs covered several thematic areas that the community deemed important: Community and Citizenship; Culture; Housing; Health and Nutrition; Reading and Writing (mandatory); and Work Skills.

Figure 2. Adult Literacy Domains of Impact



Unlike in Phase 2, the CPO and Campaign Coordinator are responsible for the design and delivery of the program. For Intake 1, the CPO was often absent due to ill health and so this task fell largely to the Coordinator. This task was made somewhat more challenging by the decision to overlap intakes; that is, while Intake 1 students were moving into Phase 3: Post-literacy, Intake 2 students were commencing Phase 2: YIC lessons. Apart from the logistics of managing student transport and accommodating two groups of students in the one building, the overlapping intakes saw staffing resources stretched thin. To mitigate these impacts, the Coordinator was well-supported in her role of delivering Phase 3: Post-literacy through two intensive face-to-face training sessions in post-literacy curriculum development and delivery with national LFLF staff trainers. This was then followed up with ongoing phone and email support in lesson preparation to ensure literacy development. The training evaluation was positive. For example:

*I thoroughly enjoyed the post-literacy training and came away with much more than I was expecting. It facilitated a crystallising of what LFLF is about and gave me a more defined sense of what we are*

*trying to achieve at a community level. This assists my ability to step back from my need to 'do it all' for the community and I now ask myself 'how can I help them do things for themselves'. (Campaign Coordinator, 29/04/19)*

By Intake 2, the CPO's health had stabilised and he was able to design and deliver the Phase 3: Post-literacy program, incorporating feedback and lessons learned from Intake 1 post-literacy.

Summary participation data for both Intake 1 and 2 Phase 3: Post-literacy are set out in Table 3 below. For Intake 1, the average hours students spent in post-literacy was 93 hours, well above the minimum, indicating that students were engaged in the program. The average participation for Intake 2 was lower with one student being hospitalised for most of the program.

**Table 3. Post-literacy Participation Summary, Intakes 1 and 2**

	Intake 1	Intake 2
Total hours delivered	113.5	124
Duration (weeks)	10	10
Number of students	14	11
Average hours of participation	93	71
Number of activities	31	32

From the students' point of view, the post-literacy program was engaging and challenging. In an evaluation completed towards the end of the program, students reported that the health topics such as basic First Aid and 'managing diabetes' were particularly interesting. The students also commented positively on the guest speakers, learning about their Aboriginal history and the support they received for getting their driver license and learners permit within the post-literacy program.

There were some negative comments from Intake 1 students about the classroom for post-literacy, which was a basketball court, due to the classroom

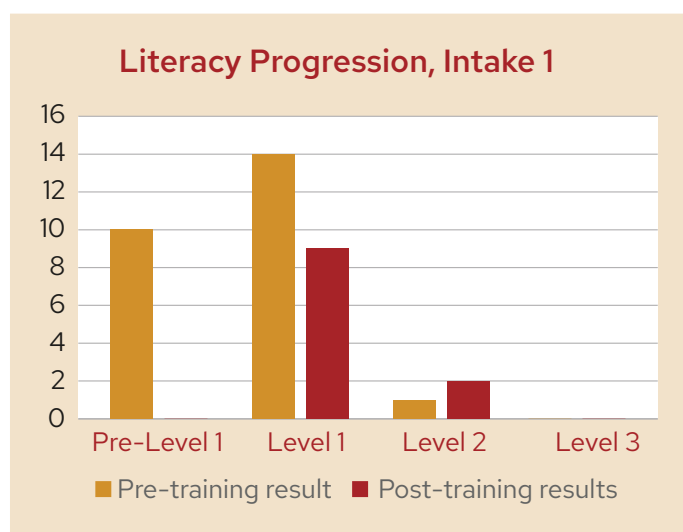
space being used by Intake 2 students. Many students also commented they would like Phase 3: Post-literacy to have been longer and some thought there should have been more help for the Campaign Coordinator, especially when working with slower students.

## LITERACY OUTCOMES

In addition to the YIC embedded assessments, it has been LFLF practice since 2012 to validate these results against the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system benchmark, the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). This normally includes a pre-training assessment in Week 3 or 4 of Phase 2: YIC lessons and a post-training assessment towards the end of Phase 3: Post-Literacy, each conducted by an experienced ACSF assessor. Pre-training assessments were carried out for both intakes. However, due to time constraints, post-training assessment was undertaken for Intake 1 only. A total of 25 students completed the ACSF pre-test, of whom 10, or 40% were assessed at Pre-Level 1B (the second lowest level in the framework). A further seven students or 28% were assessed as operating at ACSF Level 1, and only one student was assessed at ACSF Level 2. These results indicate the appropriateness of the Campaign for the participating students. It also confirms that there is a high rate of over-estimation of literacy in the community (see Table 1).



Figure 3. Comparison of pre- and post-training ACSF results



As can be seen from Figure 3 above, post-training test results clearly show progression up the ACSF scale. Eleven students from Intake 1 completed both the pre- and post-test, all of whom moved up one level on one or more of the six indicators across the three domains of reading, writing and learning. The post-test also reveals that no students remained at ACSF Pre-Level 1 after YIC and that there was an increase in the number of students operating at ACSF Level 2. These results indicate the success of the Campaign in moving participants up a whole level on the ACSF. According to the ACSF assessor's report, this is a significant outcome for any learner and especially outstanding for a program of this length. The ACSF assessor reported:

*These results are outstanding... It was obvious to me that key components of the program, e.g., having Aboriginal Facilitators, is working really well. It was also great to see two students who rose to lead the group and would now like to be trained as Facilitators – a wonderful capacity building outcome. It also seems that the message that the Program is really worthwhile, has spread around the community with a number of people indicating interest in joining the next Intake.*

## QUALITATIVE OUTCOMES

As has been found in previous LFLF evaluation reports, as well as an Australian Research Council-funded longitudinal impact study (Ratcliffe & Boughton, 2019; Wise et al., 2018; Boughton et al., 2013), the participants in the Campbelltown Campaign experienced a range of psychosocial and behavioural changes as a result of taking part in the Campaign. These include:

- » Greater independence, self-confidence and personal pride. For example, one student took great pride in being able to write her own shopping lists;
- » A new ability to support literacy and learning within families. Several students reported being able to assist their children and grandchildren with homework and greater confidence to read to preschool aged children;
- » An avenue for personal expression. Several students commented that their newfound literacy skills enabled them to better express their emotions in writing to family members;
- » Greater connections with community, especially for those who have relocated from elsewhere. This includes participants being more knowledgeable and confident to access support services such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Housing Support;
- » A reduction in alcohol consumption;
- » A reduction in personal debt. One participant was able to reduce his significant personal debt through engaging in a Work Development Order facilitated by the Campaign staff;
- » Work experience through volunteering in the second intake of the Campaign. This desire for continued involvement in the Campaign indicates the value that participants see in the Campaign;
- » Strengthened cultural connections. For several participants, the Phase 3: Post-literacy program



**Photo:** Facilitator Judy McGuinness supporting student Charles Booth with reading. Assessments against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) clearly showed students' progression from the beginning to the end of the Campaign. An achievement the independent assessor attributes to local Aboriginal community members in the role of facilitator and the community support for the Campaign as a worthwhile initiative.

Photo credit: Kate Geraghty/The Sydney Morning Herald

helped them to connect with their Aboriginal heritage and culture.

Many of these outcomes are encapsulated in a letter written by two students from Intake 1, reproduced below:

*This story is about C and L [students] and what Literacy for Life has done for us, it has given us knowledge. Now we can read and write better, we have more confident so now we don't hide in the corner anymore. It has gave us social skills and life long friendships, we are very happy within our self. The teachers do not let us get left behind. Now we can spell better read better and write better and give us self respect. The teachers have given us knowledge and now we want to learn more and more this Campaign has made us determined.*

## GRADUATE DESTINATIONS

A key aim of the Campaign, in particular Phase 3: Post-literacy, is to assist students to identify and then follow pathways for themselves beyond the Campaign. As mentioned earlier, the urban location of this Campaign plus the networks of the local staff and resources of the lead agency all combined to produce outstanding results in terms of graduate destinations:

- » Further study – a total of 20 graduates (80%) have gone on to further study including a Certificate I in Information Technology, organised by the Campaign Coordinator; a Certificate III in Community Services and a cadetship;

- » Paid employment – two graduates have secured paid employment;
- » Small business – two graduates have begun their own small businesses – one in garden/lawn care and another selling her artworks online;
- » Driver's licences – two graduates have earned their learners licence.

## CASE STUDIES

The following vignettes illustrate the impact the Campaign has had on the lives of participants:

### FEMALE PARTICIPANT, MID 50s, INTAKE 1

This Intake 1 student joined the Campaign by her own initiative. As the Campaign Coordinator described it, one day this person attended TAMS in tears with some letters in her hand. She managed to tell someone that she had been receiving these letters but did not know what they were and that she was afraid that she would be evicted from her home. The letters the student had been receiving were arrears letters. Working with TAMS, the student was able to stay in her home. TAMS staff then took this opportunity to tell her about the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign and encouraged her to join because learning to read and write would help her in the future with some of these issues.

The student had great challenges when she first started, almost withdrawing twice. The Coordinator observed that the student was 'very hard on herself' and suspected that she had not been very well supported in her life and so this Campaign is 'really building her'. With the support of staff, the student was determined to continue.

One night, the student went home after a lesson on reading comprehension and proudly spelled the word 'comprehension' aloud for her adult son and school-aged grandchildren. Her family was greatly

impressed. After realising that her granddaughter in Year 6 could not spell the word, she has vowed to go to her grandchildren's school and ask them to repeat her granddaughter so that her grandkids do not end up like she was.

### MALE PARTICIPANT, EARLY 60s, INTAKE 2

This student, like many of those enrolled in the Campbelltown Campaign, had lived a hard life. He spent many years trying to overcome drug addiction, homelessness and habitual crime. He first enrolled in Intake 1, but after suffering a heart attack, he was unable to continue. Determined not to lose the opportunity to turn his life around, the student enrolled again in Intake 2. By the end of the YIC classes, this student had gained enough literacy and confidence to write and read his own story in front of 200 people at the Official Launch of the South Western Sydney Local Health District – Health Literacy Roadmap. It was the first time in his life he had done something of this nature. His speech is reproduced here:

*I left school in sixth class, I never learnt too much at school and hung around the wrong crowd. I got my first job at 15 in a factory and stayed there for a few years. Further down the track I met my children's mother, I am a grandfather of six grandchildren at 63. Not being able to read or write my whole life, I still have managed to cope in life but I have to trust a lot of people telling me what things said. I lived with my mother until she passed away two years ago and then I now live by myself. I got sick and ended up in hospital, that's where I met the Aboriginal Chronic Care Team. Both of them came to visit me at my home. There they suggested that I go to the Literacy for Life Program. I attended the first class but I got sick again. I waited for the second class. I have met some great people there that are also like family, learning to read and write. I can read and write now, I even wrote a letter in class for the first time. I am looking forward to the day that I can read a book to my grandchildren and I would like to thank the*





**Photo:** Facilitator Kay Bussell working with students Jennifer Quinlan (3rd from right) and her daughter Judith Quinlan (2nd from right). A key aim of the Campaign, and especially Phase 3: Post-literacy, is to assist students to identify and then follow pathways for themselves beyond the Campaign. Photo credit: Kate Geraghty/The Sydney Morning Herald

*Aboriginal Chronic Care Team, my teachers, my class of Literacy for Life for all of the help and support they have given me.*

Sadly, this student was again unable to meet the requirements to graduate from Intake 2 due to ill health.

## KEY STRENGTHS OF THIS CAMPAIGN

Based on observations, documentary evidence and feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders, the elements which worked well across both intakes include:

- » The experience, passion and commitment of the staff and, for the first time, an all-Aboriginal team, with the exception of the Technical Adviser from Cuba;
- » Strong support from TAMS as lead agency;

- » Location – in a known community centre, where other support services existed;
- » Wrap-around care – being able to transport students and provide lunch each day helped maintain attendance. The CPO reflected on the importance of wrap-around care commenting that ‘the food got them here, but the class kept them’;
- » Growing solidarity and networking among the participants, some of whom reported that they learnt to communicate for the first time and developed new connections with other participants.

## ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN FUTURE INTAKES

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**Staff workloads:** The CPO had multiple commitments beyond the Campaign due to his existing positions within the local community. This meant that the Coordinator picked up more of these duties than in other Campaigns to date. Additionally, the CPO was off sick on a number of occasions, which left the Coordinator to cover the workload.

**Staff training:** Despite having three weeks of Phase 2: YIC lessons training along with the classroom Facilitators, the Coordinator initially lacked sufficient grounding in the overall three-phase Campaign model and in principles of adult and popular education needed to perform the additional duties required with the CPO being

absent or unavailable. Some of these gaps were filled with four days of intensive Phase 3: Post-literacy training.

**Overlapping intakes:** The issues with workloads and training were exacerbated by running overlapping intakes. A new staff member was appointed as CPO for Intake 2 while the existing CPO and Coordinator concentrated on Intake 1 Phase 3: Post-literacy. While this additional resourcing should have alleviated workloads, the combination of the new staff member being inexperienced in the Campaign model and the fact that the decision to hire a new staff member was not discussed adequately with the local team led to some friction.

**Staff continuity:** The Technical Adviser from Cuba was off-site for some weeks during Intake 1 YIC lessons, working at another Campaign site. Whilst this undoubtedly affected the continuity of Phase 2 delivery and support, the Technical Advisor role



Photo: Student Eileen Lardner sharing a book. Photo credit: Adam Sharman.



**Photo:** Stephanie, a student in the Campbelltown Campaign, reading to children during a visit to the local childcare centre. With their newfound confidence and skills, graduates have gone on to further study, paid employment, self-employment and getting driver's licenses. Photo credit: Adam Sharman.





CONCLUSION

was filled by another experienced member of the national team. The excellent literacy results achieved by the students indicates that this staffing change did not adversely affect outcomes. However, for the majority of Intake 2, the Technical Adviser had returned to Cuba and so the daily lesson preparation and internal assessment of YIC was undertaken for the most part by the new CPO. This again impacted continuity but was unavoidable due to visa constraints and the budgetary decision to run overlapping intakes.

**Achieving a balance between professional support and local ownership:** Local staff felt there were issues around the cultural sensitivity of the Technical Adviser from Cuba and they suggested that some local cross-cultural training was needed to mitigate these. In general, there was a strong feeling among local Campaign staff that all the team should be recruited from the local area. This view impacted their relationship with the Technical Adviser. This friction increased during the assessment period for Intake 2 Phase 2: YIC lessons when an additional LFLF staff member with training and experience in assessing was brought on board. The CPO and Coordinator satisfactorily worked through these issues with both Facilitators and the Technical Adviser, and again, the literacy results indicate that the communication and cultural issues did not impact outcomes.

CONCLUSION

It is clear the Campbelltown Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign has been a major success, matching the results of Campaigns in other locations. The main achievements of this Campaign include:

» **Literacy gains:** The majority of Intake 1 participants moved at least one level on at least one indicator of the ACSF. The number of participants with ACSF Pre-Level 1 literacy was reduced to zero. Although ACSF testing was not

undertaken for Intake 2 due to time constraints, 10 out of 11 students met the requirements of YIC. Based on mapping previously undertaken by an ACSF consultant, successful completion of YIC can be equated to a high ACSF Level 1 or low ACSF Level 2 proficiency. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that over 90% of the Intake 2 cohort exited the Campaign with high ACSF Level 1-Level 2 English literacy.

- » **Graduate outcomes:** This Campaign has been particularly successful in identifying and securing further study and employment outcomes for participants.
- » **Aboriginal control and leadership:** All on the ground positions for Intake 1, except the Technical Adviser from Cuba, were local Aboriginal people.

In our view, based on our research, the success was due to four major factors. First, the experience, qualifications and prior experience of the CPO, Campaign Coordinator and Facilitators, and the fact that all were Aboriginal people known to the community; second the intensive support provided by the Cuban on-site Technical Adviser in progressing students through to the end of the YIC lessons; third, the leadership and support provided by the LFLF Director, Board and staff of TAMS; and fourth, the 'wrap-around' support provided for the participants by LFLF staff, TAMS staff and other agencies. A fifth factor, which needs more examination, is the urban 'literacy environment', which in our view may provide greater opportunities than exist in more remote locations for 'natural' literacy practice as people acquire basic literacy skills through the Campaign. This idea can only be tested with the roll out of further Campaigns in the area.



In keeping with the strong local ownership and investment in the Campbelltown Campaign, the concluding perspective presented here should be that of the CPO. In his final report, the CPO lamented that:

**The Aboriginal community of Campbelltown is devastated to see the Campaign leave as it has had such a major impact on the community. As of today Campbelltown has a wait-list of 40 people who wish to be a part of the Campaign, these are members of the community who have heard about the program and walked in off the street to put their name down. If we get 40 people by word of mouth wanting to do the Campaign, I can only imagine how many people are out there who need our help.**



**Photo:** Students on an excursion during Post Literacy. Credit: Adam Sharman.

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