



YARRABAH

ABORIGINAL ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN

Evaluation report

2021–2022

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

© Literacy for Life Foundation & University of New England, 2023.

Report designed in 2024.

Cover image: Student painting in Yarrabah.

Photo credit: Leanne Hardy

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.

Yarrabah

Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign

Evaluation Report

2023

Dr Vegneskumar Maniam

University of New England

March 2023



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1	4. Additional post-training participant outcomes	28
Abbreviations	2	5. Community feedback.....	28
Introduction.....	3	Conclusion.....	29
The Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Model..	4	References	30
Evaluation Methodology	6		
The Yarrabah Community	6		
Campaign Implementation	8		
1. Preparing the Ground & Phase One	8		
1.1. The Household Literacy Survey	8		
1.2. The Local Campaign Team.....	10		
1.3. Establishing the Local Campaign Working Group	11		
2. Phase Two: "Yes, I Can!" classes.....	12		
2.1. The lessons	12		
2.2. Student Progress Review	13		
2.3. YIC Advisors	14		
2.4. Assessment	15		
2.5. Schedule and Catch-up.....	15		
3. Phase Three: Post-literacy	16		
4. Graduation	18		
Outcomes.....	20		
1. Participation, attendance and completion	20		
2. Literacy and Learning progression.....	20		
3. Participant feedback	26		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the evaluation findings from the first three intakes of the Yarrabah community's Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF) Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign.

Yarrabah is the largest discrete Aboriginal community in Queensland, comprising diverse language and kinship groups. The LFLF Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign uses a three-phase model to improve literacy at the community level. Since 2012, LFLF has used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework to conduct regular self-evaluations and create opportunities for action learning as part of the Campaign.

This report covers three intakes of students in the Yarrabah Campaign from 2021 to 2022. In each intake, there was a high proportion of students operating at Pre-Level 1 on the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF); for context, Level 3 is widely accepted as the skill level needed for daily life.

Overall, 100% of students in each intake made improvements on at least one indicator by at least one ACSF level. This impressive result is reflected in reports from an independent ACSF assessor which stated that the Campaign had positively impacted participant literacy.

The report details a series of key outcomes from the Campaign:

- » High Participation, attendance and completion rates
- » Strong literacy improvement and learning progression
- » Positive participant feedback
- » Additional outcomes such as employment and further study
- » Community feedback supportive of the short- and long-term impacts of the Campaign

This evaluation indicates that Yarrabah Adult Literacy Campaign has been highly successful, with an overall retention rate of 76% - reaching as high as 90% in Intake 3. High engagement, retention and literacy results are underscored by the views of participants themselves, who report greater confidence and ability in their literacy. Community feedback also indicates that participants are more engaged in services and willing to seek help and employment opportunities within their community.

Led by the Yarrabah community, the Campaign has delivered positive results.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
AFCA	Australian Financial Complaints Authority
CPO	Campaign Project Officer
EOI	Expression of Interest
LFLF	Literacy for Life Foundation
NSW	New South Wales
PAR	Participatory Action Research
YIC	<i>Yes, I Can!</i>

INTRODUCTION

During 2021–2022, the Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF) ran the first Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign in Queensland, in the community of Yarrabah. The Campaign followed the mass literacy Campaign model which LFLF has been employing in New South Wales (NSW) since 2012 and in the Northern Territory since 2019. The Yarrabah Campaign was funded from a grant of \$1 million from the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, Queensland Government, under a funding contract executed on 28th February 2020.

Under the funding agreement with the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, the Foundation was asked:

- » To establish a 'Learning Hub' in the Yarrabah community.
- » To develop a position description for the Learning Facilitator role.
- » To recruit and appoint two local Learning Facilitators (one female, one male) from the Yarrabah community.
- » To assist 60 participants (three intakes of 20 participants) over the two-year period.

This report details the findings from the evaluation of the first three intakes of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign, undertaken by Dr Vegneskumar Maniam and covering the two-year period, 2021–2022. It restates some material originally presented in a stand-alone Intake 1 evaluation.

After delays relating to COVID-19, the three intakes rolled out as follows:

Table 1. Start and end dates of Intakes 1–3

	Phase 2: YIC lessons	Phase 3: Post-literacy
Intake 1	07/06/21–16/09/21	20/09/21–02/12/21
Intake 2	21/02/22–26/05/22	30/05/22–21/07/22
Intake 3	01/08/22–20/10/22	24/10/22–01/12/22

The report begins with a brief explanation of the Campaign model used by LFLF and the evaluation methodology I chose to employ. This is followed by background to the Yarrabah Community. The next section of the report follows the Campaign structure, reporting and reflecting on how each phase of the Campaign was run in Yarrabah, before presenting the Campaign outcomes.



Photo: Campaign team Renee Pollard, Nadine Cannon, and Romaine Yeatman, with Executive Director Professor Jack Beetson at the 2021 Yarrabah Campaign Launch. The Campaign builds local leadership and commitment by actively involving the community as a whole in the process of building a social culture which values literacy and learning.

THE ABORIGINAL ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN MODEL

The version of the model which LFLF utilises was developed by Cuban literacy experts and is known as *Yo, sí puedo* (in English, 'Yes, I Can!' or YIC). This model has been deployed in Australia since 2012, when the first pilot Campaign started in Wilcannia, NSW. The YIC Campaign model consists of three interlinked phases:

Phase 1: "Socialisation & Mobilisation" – in which a community development process is used to build local leadership and commitment by actively involving the community as a whole in the process of building a social culture which values

literacy and learning. During this stage a local community steering committee is set up (known as a Campaign Working Group), local Aboriginal staff are recruited and trained to raise the community's awareness about the impacts of low adult English literacy, numeracy and digital skills, a Household Literacy Survey is conducted, and the collected data is used to tailor the Campaign to the local community, participants are enrolled and local Aboriginal Facilitators and a Coordinator are trained to deliver lessons in ways that are appropriate for their community.

Phase 2: "Yes I Can!" lessons – in which a simple audio-visual method of basic literacy learning is used to deliver three months of face-to-face classes. These classes follow a predictable pattern, or 'algorithm' with which students and local Facilitators readily become familiar and

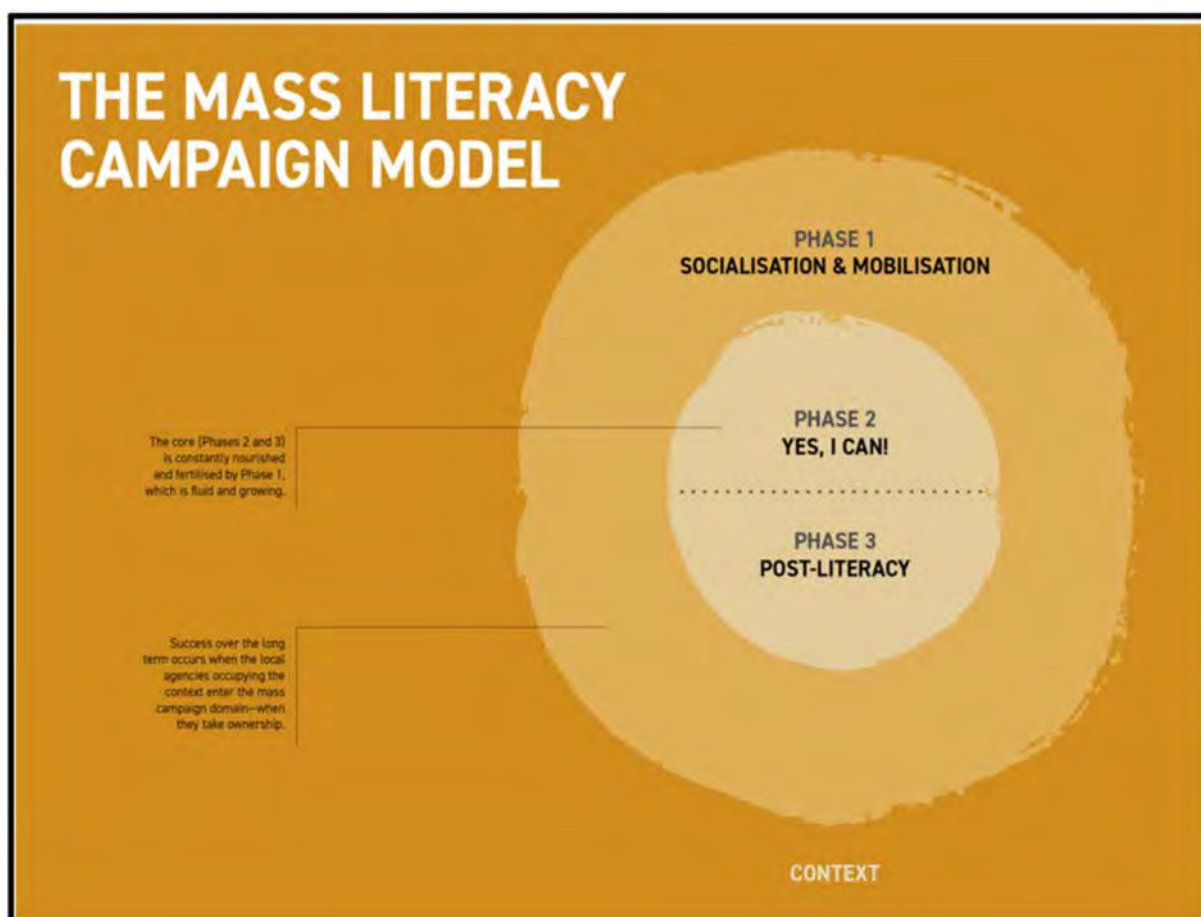
comfortable. The literacy learning is supported through the use of an alphanumeric method in which students first learn to associate letters of the alphabet with numbers by following a 'Guide Table'. The curriculum moves in a highly scaffolded and structured way through three stages: seven basic introductory lessons; 45 reading, writing and revision lessons; and 12 consolidation and extension lessons with assessment activities. As they progress, students move from letter and sound recognition to building words, phrases, sentences and by the last stage, simple texts of different genres.

Phase 3: "Post-Literacy" –in which a sequential, structured program of English literacy, numeracy and digital literacy-based activities is delivered over a further three months. This involves at

least 100 hours of delivery over three to four days weekly. Post-literacy aims to consolidate and extend the newly acquired literacy and independent learning skills of those who completed the basic literacy lessons in YIC as well as provide basic digital literacy and numeracy instruction, embedded in content and activities that the students and community value and require.

Fundamental to this model is that *all three phases* contribute to the literacy outcomes, not just the literacy classes. In the LFLF Campaign handbook, this is illustrated as an egg, highlighting the interconnectedness of each Phase and that the groundwork of Phase 1 continues throughout the Campaign (See Figure 1):

Figure 1. The Mass Literacy Campaign Model (LFLF Handbook, 2021).



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Since 2012, LFLF has used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework to conduct regular self-evaluations and create opportunities for action learning. This framework is closely aligned to the objectives of each literacy Campaign and so has been adopted for the evaluation of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign. The PAR framework requires the evaluator to actively engage with the people who play various roles in the Campaign and evaluation data has been collected through multiple methods, including:

- » Background research, particularly on the context of the Yarrabah Community.
- » On-site participant-observation and dialogue with the different stakeholders (see Table 2 for further details of site visits).
- » Examination of the following Campaign records and documents:
 - » Household Literacy Survey data
 - » Participation and attendance records
 - » Examples of student work
 - » Literacy assessment data, including entry and exit reports against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)
 - » minutes of local Campaign Working Group meetings.
 - » Semi-structured evaluation interviews and focus groups with participants, staff, community members, local organisations and external stakeholders including donors.
 - » Data was collected through a combination of field trips and zoom-based interviews. This was necessary because of interstate travel restrictions due to COVID-19.

Additionally, there was semi-regular email correspondence between myself and the Campaign Project Officer (CPO). Administrative data was generated from the LFLF database and supplemented with reference to previous academic research and government information, including Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.

Table 2. Summary of data collection points

Data collection	Dates
Field trip	21–24 June 2021
Zoom-based interview	15 November 2021
Zoom-based interview	2 December 2021
Zoom-based interview	22 April 2022
Zoom-based interview	15 July 2022
Field trip	23–29 October 2022

THE YARRABAH COMMUNITY

Yarrabah is Queensland's largest discrete Aboriginal community occupying the traditional lands of the Gunggandji and Mandingalbay Yidinji¹ peoples who have been here since time immemorial. The 2021 census puts its population at 1,273 (ABS, 2021); however, this figure is considered a significant undercount. Members of the Yarrabah Local Disaster Management Group cite a figure of closer to 4,500 permanent residents.

This figure is based on data collected by both the Queensland Police Service and Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services Aboriginal Corporation (Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, n.d.).

Yarrabah occupies a narrow strip of coastal land some 35km long and 2.5km wide. Rather than one

¹ 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>), unless the name of a local community organisation uses a different spelling. Variations of spellings exist for many First Nations Peoples and languages.

community, Yarrabah is actually comprised of a number of small townships – Yarrabah, Reeves Creek, Mourigan and Djenghi. There are also a number of smaller housing settlements spread throughout the shire (Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council, n.d.).

Today, Yarrabah is still made up of descendants from Gunggandji and Yidinji as well as many other tribal groups – peoples forcibly brought to Yarrabah during the days of the Anglican Mission (1892–1960). It enjoys strong local governance through the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council. Despite this, Yarrabah was ranked in the first percentile of disadvantage in the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index in 2016.

In Yarrabah, 86.8% of people report speaking a language other than English at home, with the Cape York Peninsula Languages being the most widely used (ABS, 2021). While only 7.9% of people reported using Aboriginal English at home,

‘Yarrie Lingo’, a creole built from English and Yidiny languages, is widespread throughout the community.

In terms of education, approximately a quarter of the population have post-schooling qualifications, while over a third of residents left school by year 10 or earlier. These figures are well below the average for Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ABS, 2021). In terms of labour force participation, over 38.8% of people in Yarrabah were unemployed at the time of the 2021 Census. For those in work, community and human services is the biggest employment sector.

Photo: Yarrabah occupies a narrow strip of coastal land some 35km long and 2.5km wide. It is Queensland’s largest Aboriginal community occupying the traditional lands of the Gunggandji and Mandingalbay Yidinji peoples who have been here since time immemorial.



CAMPAIGN IMPLEMENTATION

1. PREPARING THE GROUND & PHASE ONE

The Foundation Executive Director, Professor Jack Beetson visited Yarrabah in late 2020 to meet with local leaders and service providers. The response from the community to this visit was very positive, with local leaders and service providers agreeing that the Campaign was needed in Yarrabah and anticipating a positive response from the community. As is their practice, 'Preparing the Ground' activities saw LFLF leadership engage with members of various organisations including Wugu Nyambil Employment, Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd (ICAN), Yarrabah Knowledge Centre, Gunggandji Aboriginal Corp, Yarrabah Women's Centre, Gindja Healing Centre, local schools, Yarrabah Leadership Forum, and the Community Supermarket. An effective component of this preparatory work is a community showing of the documentary "In My Own Words" where a community can see first-hand what the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign entails.² The documentary was shown to several small groups of community leaders and members who went away with an enhanced understanding of the LFLF Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign.

In early 2021, Phase 1: Socialisation and Mobilisation began in earnest. National LFLF staff spent three weeks in Cairns and Yarrabah, securing and arranging the necessary infrastructure to support a Campaign including a training space in Yarrabah, housing for the CPO, and a van for student transport. During this time, the Campaign was further socialised through the administration of a Household Literacy Survey, conducted by community members following a week of intensive survey training.

1.1. THE HOUSEHOLD LITERACY SURVEY

The Household Literacy Survey, as a principal activity of Phase 1 of the Campaign model, allows the local staff to 'socialise' issues around low adult English literacy. The survey is the chief means by which the local team secure a community wide commitment to support the Campaign and mobilise people to join in various capacities. The very process of conducting the Household Literacy Survey, whereby community members go door to door, having a 'yarn' about people's educational experiences, encourages people to see literacy as a way to talk about and address some issues in their everyday lives.

Importantly, the Household Literacy Survey also allows the Campaign team to assess the level of need in the community for English literacy classes. The local staff recruited to do the surveys had significant work experience and skills, which were leveraged in the survey training and work. After three days of intensive face-to-face training in administering the survey in a culturally appropriate manner, the survey team reached 98 individuals (48 male; 50 female) from approximately 28 households visited. Results from the survey follow in Figures 2 and 3.

² The film is available to stream on Vimeo and other sites. For more information on how to watch it see <https://www.lflf.org.au/in-my-own-words/>.

Figure 2. Highest school attainment among Household Literacy Survey respondents

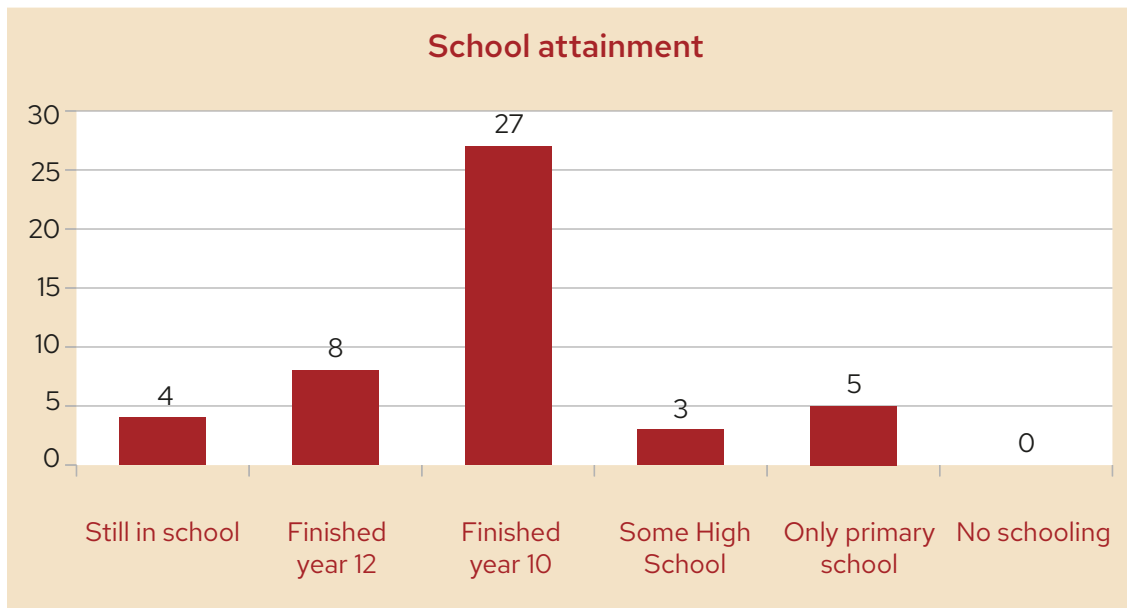
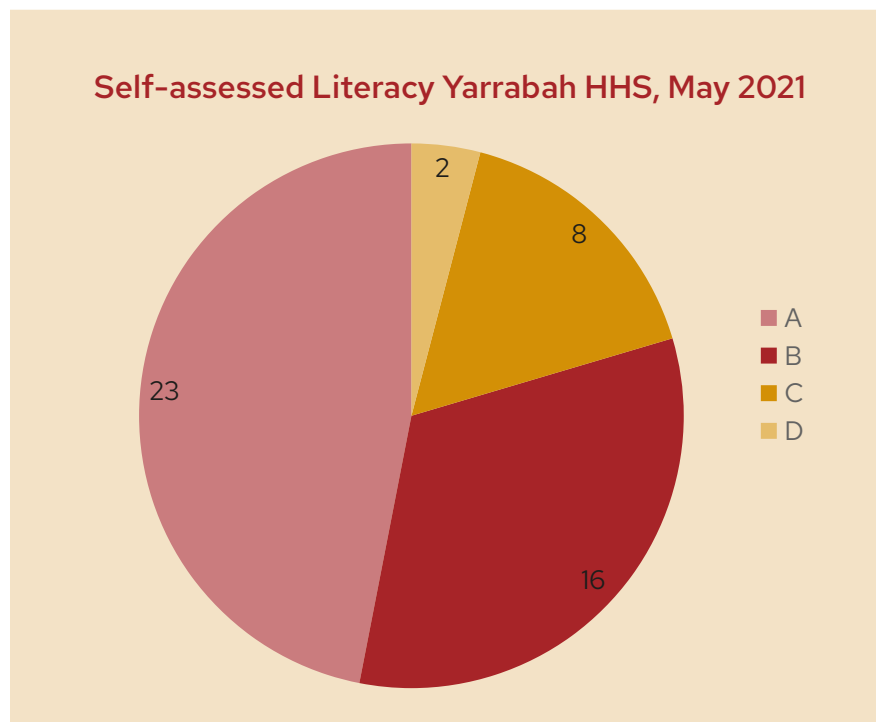


Figure 3. Self-assessed literacy results from Household Literacy Survey.



The two charts above detail the educational background of the adults (15 years and over) surveyed. Of those who provided data on this question, nearly three quarters (74%) completed Year 10 or Year 12, while 11% said they had completed primary school only.³

In terms of self-assessed literacy rates, nearly half of those providing responses (47%) stated that they have 'No Problem' in reading or writing independently. Another 33% indicated that they were 'Ok but have trouble filling out forms. A further 16% indicated they read and write 'not

³ The survey response options are as following:

A – No Problem: Reads and writes independently

B – Ok but trouble with filling out forms: Needs some support to read and write more complex texts on familiar topics

C – Not very well. Needs a lot of support to complete most reading and writing tasks on familiar topics

D – Not at all. Needs full support to complete reading and writing tasks.

very well', which means they need support to complete most reading and writing tasks. Only 4% of respondents indicated they did not read and write at all and required full support to complete reading and writing tasks. These results need to be considered in light of recent research which reveals a significant tendency towards overestimation of literacy proficiency in the communities where LFLF has worked (Boughton et al., 2022). In particular, research shows that adults who have completed Years 10–11 are nearly 30 times more likely to overestimate compared to people who only complete primary school (Lin et al., 2021). This suggests that the real level of low English literacy in the community is likely to be much higher than survey results indicate.

1.2. THE LOCAL CAMPAIGN TEAM

In April 2021, a new CPO was appointed. This role oversees the day-to-day delivery of the Campaign and plays a vital role in training and supporting a relatively inexperienced team of local Facilitators. The incumbent brings valuable strength to the team with an education background in English and Applied Linguistics, and vast experience working locally and internationally. This CPO has been retained throughout the funding period and beyond.

As per the funding agreement, two Campaign Facilitators were recruited from the Yarrabah community. Clear Position Descriptions were developed to enable both Facilitators to quickly learn their key duties. The Facilitators received three weeks of intensive face-to-face training and support in the Campaign model, pedagogy and facilitation skills prior to the commencement of classes. There has also been a program of ongoing on-the-job training and professional development. After Intake 1, one of the Facilitators left their role and was replaced by a male Facilitator who had been a student from Intake 1. This person

and the other Facilitator continued in their roles throughout Intakes 2 and 3 and have grown in confidence and ability over that time.

The other key local role within the Campaign model is that of the Campaign Coordinator. This person was recruited and trained at the same time as the initial two Campaign Facilitators. The role of the Campaign Coordinator is to be the face of the Campaign in the Yarrabah community. As such, they need to have well-developed networking and communication skills and be able to work across the whole community in a culturally appropriate way. As with the Campaign Facilitators, the Coordinator received intensive training prior to the commencement of Campaign classes as well as on-the-job training.

Early interviews and observations of the local Campaign team indicate a strong commitment to the Campaign and its broader objectives. Further, the Coordinator is observed to be an effective communicator with existing strong relationships with different organisations in the community, most notably, the Yarrabah Council. Similarly, the two Facilitators enjoy a cordial relationship with the students, the CPO, and the Coordinator. All three local staff members have remained in their roles throughout the project, suggesting that they are well-suited and effective in their positions. This is significant as the cohesion of the local Campaign team is one of the key factors required for success of the Campaign as a whole.

Field observation note: My observation clearly shows a positive relationship between the local Campaign team members when I visited the Campaign site. There is explicit coordination and leadership, and everyone knows their responsibility. The good thing is that all this was done in a friendly and community-oriented manner; there is no indication of top-down instruction style management, which can sometimes be a barrier in this type of working environment.

1.3. ESTABLISHING THE LOCAL CAMPAIGN WORKING GROUP

As mentioned before, the establishment of a local Campaign Working Group is essential to ensure the community buys into and drives the Campaign. In Yarrabah, the Campaign Working Group consisted of members from the following organisations: Yarrabah Shire Council, Family Pathways to Safety, Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services, Wugu Nyambil, Remote School Attendance Strategy and Seahawks Rugby League Club. The group also includes staff and student representatives from the Campaign itself.

In 2021, the Campaign Working Group met four times. Discussion centred on co-design of Phase 3: Post-literacy curriculum, including what local resources could be contributed to support student and community aspirations. Other issues discussed include processes around reporting participation of individuals to Centrelink and Wugu Nyambil, future Campaign funding for Yarrabah and how to support students into post Campaign pathways.

During 2022 there was only one face-to-face Campaign Working Group meeting held due to active COVID-19 cases in the community making it unsafe to host in person meetings. However, other means of maintaining a high degree of community ownership and governance of the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign were found. Wugu Nyambil continued to be a strong advocate and contributor to the Campaign through regular communication with the local team and by actively promoting and referring Job Services Australia clients to the Campaign team. Weekly phone and email contact was kept with the staff at Wugu. Similarly, the CPO met with staff from Gindija Treatment and Healing Centre and Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services regularly as both services provided extensive support during Phase 3: Post-literacy by delivering sessions on family wellbeing, women's and men's health, addiction, anger management, local history, and trauma among others. The

Elder's group of Yarrabah were also kept informed of LFLF's work by having a yarning circle with the students and staff each intake and being honoured guests at all events. Council staff and both Prescribed Body Corporates and Rangers were consulted, when necessary (they also delivered Post-literacy content), and informal catch ups with the Football Club managers were regularly conducted (fortnightly to monthly).

In my email communication with the General Manager of Campaign partner Wugu Nyambil, it is evident that the Campaign enjoys strong support:

I can honestly say that it was a pleasure to be involved in this program and to see the dedication that the participants put towards this program. I can honestly say that of all the programs that have been delivered in Yarrabah that this was probably the best attended and most engaged that we've ever seen (over nearly 4 years) [...] I can see the satisfaction of achievement that they [the students] had at the graduation. The LFLF has definitely impacted their life in a positive way. With the commencement of the new program [Intake 2] starting last week, there are already over 15 people engaged which is amazing considering the COVID-19 situation. It's been viewed as a very positive program with long lasting benefits. Wugu Nyambil do expect there to be ongoing benefits from LFLF through training, engagement, motivation, job readiness and actual jobs from this program.

In my discussion with the Community Engagement Manager for Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA), a similar level of support was expressed. This organisation donated laptops to support student digital literacy learning. According to the Community Engagement Manager, the donation of laptops was part of the organisation's consumer advocacy initiative, and this is the first time AFCA have engaged with LFLF. Engagement was inspired by a speech given by Professor Jack Beeton in which he raised the issue of low digital literacy among Aboriginal adults. Taking this into consideration, the AFCA IT team assembled decommissioned laptops and rebuilt them to



Photo: Student-painted banner. Students in the Yarrabah Campaign have adapted 'Yes, I Can!' to local 'Yarrie Lingo': 'Yes, Youfla Can'. Tailoring the YIC material to the Yarrabah context creates a safe learning environment and is key to a community led Campaign.

be used in Yarrabah. AFCA reports being glad they were able to contribute something to this Campaign and they have a desire to contribute further with future LFLF Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaigns.

2. PHASE TWO: "YES, I CAN!" CLASSES

2.1. THE LESSONS

The Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign uses a staged approach to enrolments to allow potential students to make an informed decision about whether the literacy class is right for them. In the first instance, local staff collect expressions of interest (EOIs). People who complete an EOI are then invited to attend classes. Week 3 is considered the end of the 'census' period. At this

point, students who have attended a minimum of six lessons are considered official 'starters' and the class is closed to new enrolments. This is because students enrolling this late are unlikely to be able to successfully complete the classes. In this case, such students are referred to the next intake.

The Phase 2: YIC lessons themselves consist of 20 minutes of DVD presented material, followed by 40 minutes of facilitated discussions and supervised and supported practice. Each of the 60 DVD-based lessons guide students through building letter and sound awareness, basic punctuation, and reading and writing words, phrases, sentences and finally a short paragraph. The principal method of learning is what the Cubans refer to as 'alphanumeric'; that is, each letter is learned through association with a specific number, using a Guide Table e.g. a-A-1, e-E-2.

The Campaign Facilitators are themselves guided in lesson delivery by detailed lesson plans. These lesson plans provide the structure that novice learning facilitators require and the local Facilitators are expected to follow the lesson plans closely to ensure effective and sequential learning takes place. That said, Facilitators are encouraged to tailor the scripted parts of the lesson plans to the learner cohort, using vernacular language and local examples to explain concepts or check for understanding. This customising of lesson plans to include concepts, vocabulary and modes of communication that have local resonance is a strength of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign. One of the local Facilitators even initiated simplifying the lesson plans by reformatting them and making small adjustments to better suit the local team. These changes were checked by the CPO to ensure the integrity of the learning method was retained. Initiatives like these clearly indicate the local ownership of the Campaign, right down to the lessons themselves. Equally important is that tailoring the YIC material to the Yarrabah context creates a safe learning environment. This, along with having local people lead the teaching and learning process results in participants feeling welcomed and that the Campaign and the classes belong to them.

This creation of a safe learning space is considered essential in adult learning literature (see, for example, Balatti et al., 2007) as it allows those returning to learning to take risks in a supported setting.

Field observation note: From my own classroom observations, I can see that the learning environment, whilst somewhat cramped, was one of comfort and safety. Students were very engaged and committed to the lessons and they were able to share ideas and support one another. Another important note is the Facilitators were able to explain in detail each of the lesson activities to the group and also more specifically to each student. Especially for the slow learners in

the class, explaining each of the letters they were studying, and the instruction that is required for them to complete the task is crucially important, and I clearly see in my observation the Facilitators were able to do this with lots of patience in their teaching commitment.

2.2. STUDENT PROGRESS REVIEW

As with best practice in any learning context, ongoing monitoring of the progress of learners is an important feature of the Phase 2: YIC classes. Each week the CPO worked with the Facilitators to review each student's progress in reading and writing to identify relative strengths and weaknesses and agree on a focus area for improvement for the following week. The CPO approached this task collaboratively, slowly building the Facilitators' competence and confidence in basic language analysis. Together, the team would complete a brief report such as the extract shown in Table 3. This report became the roadmap for the Facilitators over the following week to support the students with specific needs. Arguably, this close and regular monitoring of literacy development contributed to the strong learning outcomes achieved (see Outcomes section of this report).

Table 3. Extract from Intake 3, Week 4 Student Progress Review Report

	Student Name	Comments	Focus for improvement over next week
1	CC	Neat, mostly correct work, minor spelling mistakes	Capitalisation
2	CD	Neat work, good copying, takes her time to get it right	Some minor spelling errors
3	CJ	Almost perfect work, neat writing, a few missing capitals	Will need to be extended and challenged further
4	DB	Neat handwriting, correct copying, correct use of full stops and capitals	Offer extension activities
5	DC	Struggles with reading, can sight read many words though, mostly correct copying	Help with sounding out new words, more space between words
6	DD	Good participation, some spelling errors, and capitals, already improved in handwriting	Self-correction of capitals and spelling
7	GN	Good copying, some missing letters, spelling issues, low confidence in writing, good participation	Check reading ability, start with self-correction to check missing letters and spelling
8	HN	Mostly correct copying, some missing letters and incorrect spelling	Encourage to self-correct, capitalisation
9	LE	Neat, correct work	Will need to be extended and challenged further
10	SL	Difficult to read handwriting, but mostly correct copying, ALL CAPS, more gaps between words, able to sight read some words. Disorganized layout	More encouragement, work on capitalisation

2.3. YIC ADVISORS

When the first pilot Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign started in 2012, YIC Advisors from Cuba played an essential role in training and guiding the local staff to succeed in being effective learning Facilitators. This practice has continued in each new Campaign site. Back in 2018, I had the opportunity to be involved in the evaluation of the Boggabilla and Toomelah Campaigns in NSW and did some classroom observations. I had a long conversation with the then Cuban Advisor, to understand the operation of the YIC adult literacy pedagogy. I observed how the Facilitators were guided by the Advisors, and all the advice and help that they provided.

The Yarrabah Campaign does not involve a YIC Adviser from Cuba, initially because of the COVID-related restrictions on international travel. However, when travel restrictions did make it possible, the decision was made not to bring a YIC Advisor on board. This was because the Campaign was established and running well according to the model and pedagogy. This is only achievable because the CPO is a qualified and very experienced English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher. Their attention to detail and close supervision of lesson delivery and student progress has meant that the quality and rigour of the YIC model has been retained.

2.4. ASSESSMENT

While being non-accredited, the Campaign still uses formative and summative assessment to measure student learning progress. Formative assessment consists of the local staff continually reviewing student work by closely observing and supporting students in their written work each lesson, as well as regular reviews of student workbooks (discussed above). The goal of this formative assessment is twofold: to be able to tailor support to the individual learner within a group learning environment and to gradually transition new learners to semi or full independence with their literacy.

The summative assessment within YIC supports accountability to the individual learner, community and funders. However, being non-formal and non-accredited, it is an important component of the YIC model that assessment is 'invisible' from the point of view of the students; that is, assessment takes place within the normal class activities and appears as normal literacy tasks the students are accustomed to performing. Assessment judgements are based on two variables: the standard to be achieved and the level of support given to the students to complete the given task according to the required standard. The results of the internal assessments, as well as those undertaken against the ACSF will be discussed in detail in the Outcomes section of this report.

Observation field note: From my observation, a good thing about the assessment is that the students were not under pressure to complete the task in a given time. Most of the students completed the job according to their own pace and asked for help whenever they needed it. My only concern was the large class size; I am not sure if all the students were able to get the level of support needed when trying to complete a given task. I noticed that students who have learning or visual difficulties and require complete support (Level 3) were placed at the front desk and were given

more attention than students sitting behind. Even though students sitting behind may be relatively more independent learners, they may still need the Facilitator's attention once in a while, but in my two-day observation, this only happened rarely.

2.5. SCHEDULE AND CATCH-UP

For each Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign that LFLF implements, the schedule for the lessons is generally decided by each community through a discussion among on the ground LFLF staff, the Campaign Working Group, and potential students. The Yarrabah Campaign weekly timetable was decided through this process, with the lessons every Monday to Wednesday in the mornings. Like any other LFLF Campaign, part of Phase 2: YIC lessons involved catch-up sessions. For Yarrabah, every Thursday was the day for a catch-up. The 'catch-up' schedule is designed by local staff with students who have missed a regular lesson to ensure no one falls too far behind. In the Yarrabah context, students tended to miss classes because of family and/or health reasons and sorry business. The inclusion of catch-up classes helps students feel safe about bringing their lives into the classroom as it recognises that the lives of many community members is complex with many competing responsibilities.

Observation field note: From my observation of the catch-up sessions, both the Facilitators and the CPO worked together to decide which students required catch-up classes and how these would be approached. I observed the same quality of learning being delivered in scheduled classes as well as catch-up sessions. Because the catch-up classes often consisted of only one, two or three students at a time, there was great scope for providing detailed one-to-one support. This is another factor that has contributed to the strong literacy results across the three intakes of the Yarrabah Campaign.

3. PHASE THREE: POST-LITERACY

Phase 3: Post-literacy is underpinned by the fundamental concept that literacy, while involving specific learned 'skills' and 'operations', is only built and consolidated to the point of becoming sustainable, through social practice (Reder, Gauly & Lechner, 2020; Durnan & Boughton, 2018). As mentioned earlier, the Post-Literacy curriculum design is a collaborative process between local Campaign staff, students and the wider community, represented by the Campaign Working Group. Sessions cover eight key literacy 'impact domains' which have been identified from previous evaluations. These domains are: language and culture, education, community, economy, politics, justice, health and housing.

Following a co-design process, the Intake 1 Post-literacy program focused on three main themes: Language and Culture; Economy (Work Skills) and Health. The program for Intakes 2 and 3 also focused on these themes with the addition of sessions on politics. This was a result of the local community wanting to be more informed about the issues of constitutional recognition ahead of the upcoming referendum on a Voice to Parliament.

Each of the three intakes' Post-literacy programs featured a wide range of topics and activities and all local staff were involved in delivering content and/or supporting students. One activity which was common to all three intakes was a creative writing course run by Stephanie Dale from *The Write Road*. The intention of these sessions is to show how writing can be a means of supporting mental health, particularly for rural and remote communities facing loss and trauma. Campaign students participated in a writing session called Writing on Country. For this activity, Stephanie asked the students to close their eyes and think about the surrounding area (the beach). They then wrote down sounds, smells, and sights, followed by memories of times spent at the beach. The results

were poetry-like pieces that Stephanie collated. The second part was done in the classroom and was about other aspects of Yarrabah, which the class brainstormed before writing. Below is an example of student writing:

*I can hear birds cheeping, something banging.
I can feel wind, breeze on my skin.
Dog, crab, horse, Dugong, cat, pig, crayfish, fish,
Turtle lives here.
I can see trees, leaf
water, mud
sand, shell
islands, rocks
boat, bird.
I feel warm sand under my feet, damp seaweed,
sharp shells.
When I was growing up my grandparent used to take
me and my sibling up the beach for the day. We sit
around on the beach,
play, yarns, laugh, build sandcastle, fishing and drag
for prawns.
We cook our catch up on the fire, then we go home.*

The Writing on Country sessions helped students see even more value in literate practice. Through this experience, students begin to see that literacy can be a pathway to healing as well as other more readily recognised outcomes such as employment or further study.

From my talks with participating students, local staff, and various community organisations, the Post-Literacy programs delivered as part of Intakes 1–3 are considered a success. The students talked about how they appreciated participating in the design of the program and activities and felt the learning was well tailored to their interests and aspirations. They also commented on how Post-Literacy related to the learning from Phase 2: YIC lessons.

However, two features of the Yarrabah Campaign's Post-literacy programs merit closer attention as they directly contributed to the results achieved. The first is the continuation of explicit foundation skills and critical literacy



Photo: Students Writing on Country. These sessions helped students see even more value in literate practice. Through this experience, students begin to see that literacy can be a pathway to healing as well as other more readily recognised outcomes such as employment or further study. Photo credit: Leanne Hardy

development. During Intakes 2 and 3 especially, the CPO planned daily consolidation sessions after most externally provided presentations. This allowed the Campaign team to elicit what the students had understood and retained and clarify understandings. These consolidation activities also required that the students apply what they had learned through writing, critical discussion, reading and other relevant tasks. There were also numerous sessions delivered in which the basic skills acquired during Phase 2 were extended through further literacy and numeracy instruction. For example, during the Work Skills component of the program, students were provided the opportunity to learn about employer expectations, work vocabulary, and examples of interview

questions. Students were asked to directly draw on their Phase 2 learning outcomes to read job advertisements and write resumes.

The second standout of the Yarrabah Campaign's Post-literacy programs was the high degree of involvement from the wider community. In my conversation with many of the participating organisations, they really appreciated that they were able to contribute towards the Campaign for the benefit of the students and the Yarrabah community.

4. GRADUATION

Graduation is an integral part of the Campaign model. This is the time for the community to recognise and celebrate the achievement of the Campaign participants and the staff. The Yarrabah Campaign graduations were no exception. Each ceremony provided the opportunity for the community to come together in celebration of personal and collective achievement. For the students, these events afforded an enormous sense of pride.

Despite COVID-19 still impacting the community, the three graduations were well attended. Several people gave speeches at the graduation, including representatives from the Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and Yarrabah Council. Local LFLF staff and students also gave brief speeches, for some, their first experience of public speaking. It is worth highlighting the address provided by

the General Manager of Wugu Nyambil. In his remarks, he complimented the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign for having the highest retention rate, higher than any course that Wugu Nyambil had put on in the past few years. These remarks sit alongside the funding uncertainty facing the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign and at the graduation ceremony for Intake 3, the local LFLF team voiced their concern to attendees and asked for support to continue lobbying efforts to gain funding for this 'much needed ongoing vital project' (Nadine Cannon, Coordinator).

Photo: Graduates of Intake 1 smile with their graduation certificates. Graduation is an integral time for the community to recognise and celebrate the achievement of the Campaign participants and the staff. Photo credit: Leanne Hardy





Photo: Graduates of Intake 2



Photo: Graduates of Intake 3

OUTCOMES

1. PARTICIPATION, ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION

Table 4 summarises participation and completion data for each intake as well as overall totals.

The number of EOIs shows a strong interest in the Campaign and the number of students who committed to the program (or 'starters') as well as those who completed the entire six months of

lessons ('completers') indicates the YIC curriculum and learning environment was well-received. The overall uptake rate for Yarrabah Intakes 1–3 is higher than the national Campaign average (at around 50%) reflecting that the local team did a good job targeting students whose literacy level was well suited to the Campaign. The overall retention rate is also excellent and higher than the national average of 58%. These two results demonstrate that the Campaign is a relevant, valued and well-supported initiative.

Table 4. Participation and completion data, Yarrabah Intakes 1–3

**Retention figure refers to the number of completers from a subset of starters.*

	EOIs	Starters	Uptake rate (%)	Completions	Retention rate (%)
Intake 1	52	25	48	18	72
Intake 2	25	22	88	15	68
Intake 3	21	19	90	17	90
Totals	98	66	67	50	76

Attendance patterns also support the view that the Campaign is relevant and meaningful for participants. Average attendance across both phases of the three intakes sat consistently between 12 to 15 students, representing a relatively stable weekly attendance of 55% to 68%. This level of attendance is only achievable if there is a strong commitment and dedication from the students and support provided by the local campaign staff. The CPO and Facilitators engaged in day-to-day discussion with the students about any issues impacting attendance such as transport, health, food, and personal learning styles. Staff attempted to resolve any issues identified in a timely manner. Overall, the good attendance reflects the success of this Campaign in every way.

2. LITERACY AND LEARNING PROGRESSION

As part of a commitment to rigour and transparency, participants in each LFLF Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign are assessed independently against the ACSF at entry and exit. In the case of the Yarrabah Campaign Intakes 1–3, this assessment took place in week 3 or 4 (entry) and again in the final week of Post-Literacy (exit). Apart from helping LFLF monitor its results and practice, this process is also used to tailor learning and support to each students' level. Figures 4–9 show the distribution of student levels at entry and exit by ACSF indicator.

Figure 4. Intake 1 entry levels by ACSF.

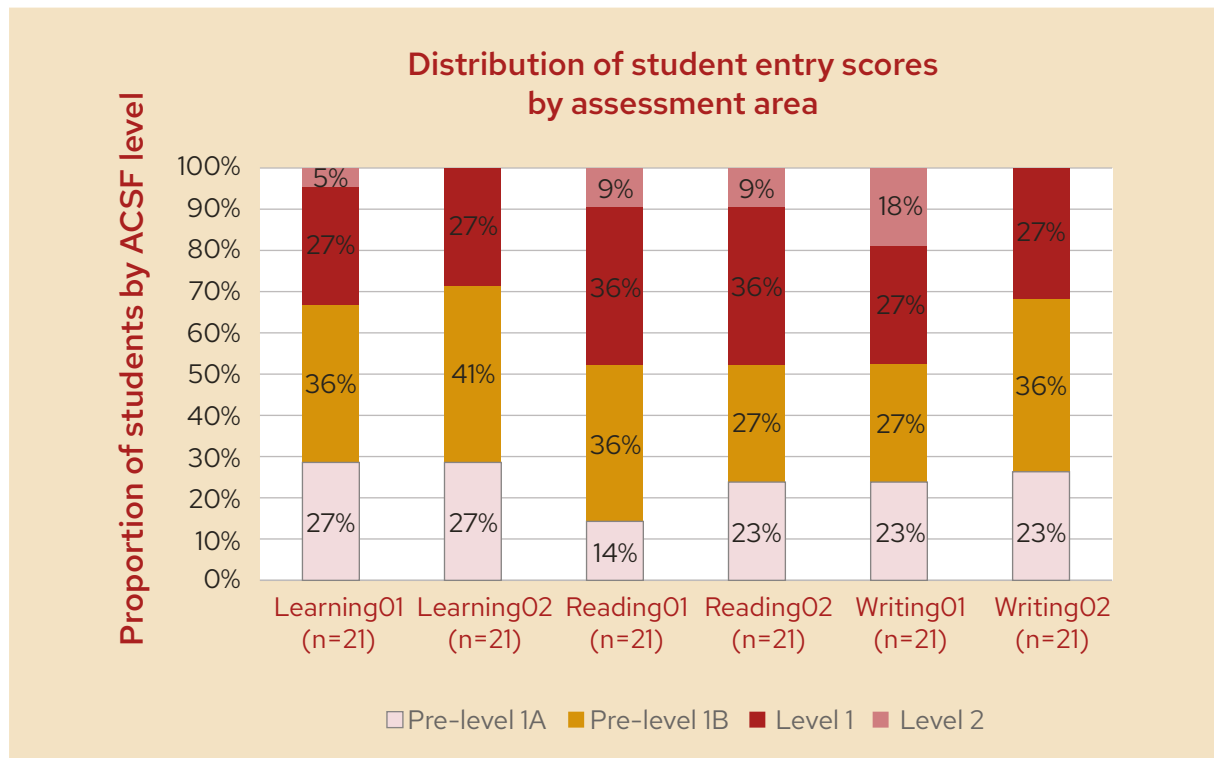


Figure 5. Intake 1 exit levels by ACSF.

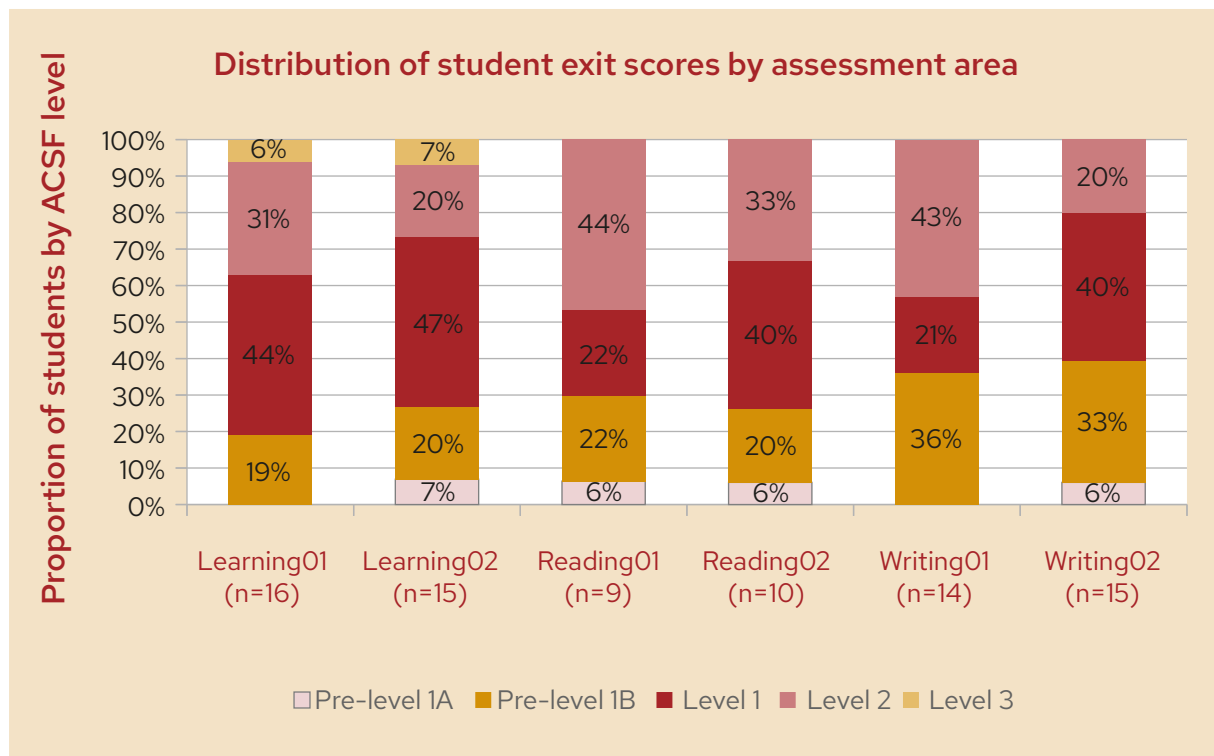


Figure 6. Intake 2 entry levels by ACSF.

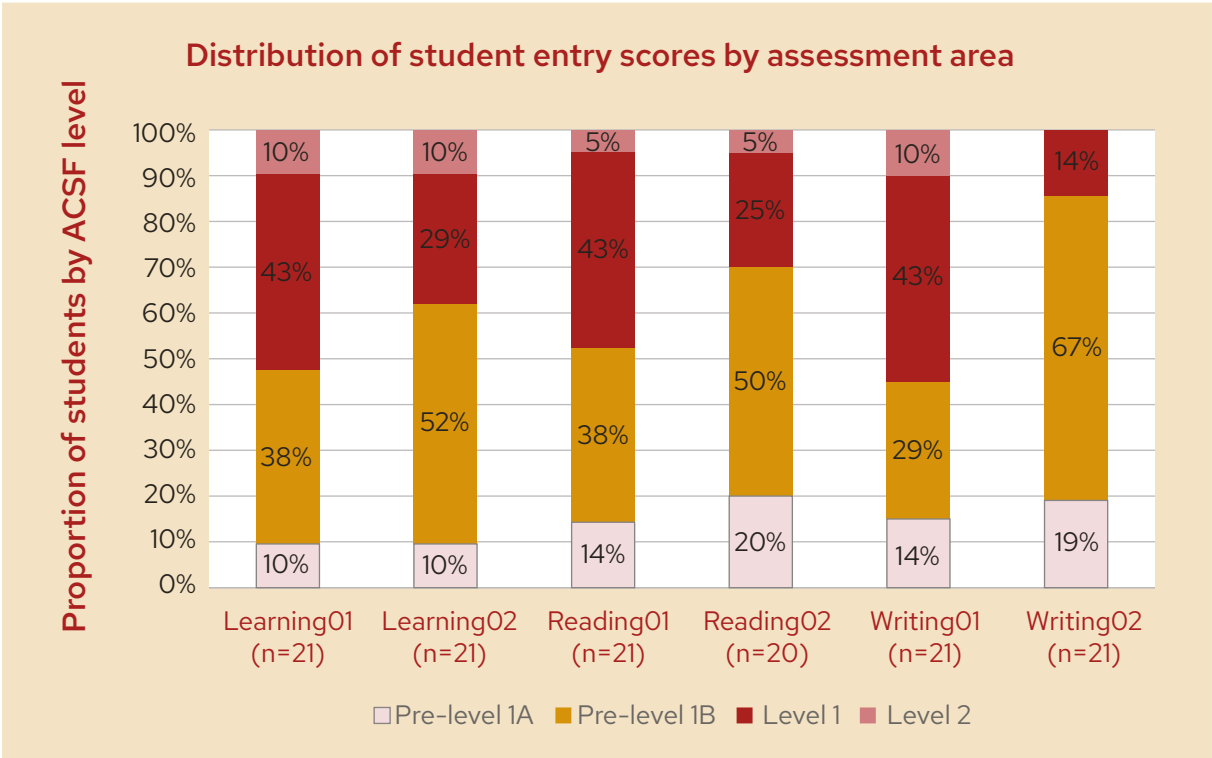


Figure 7. Intake 2 exit levels by ACSF.

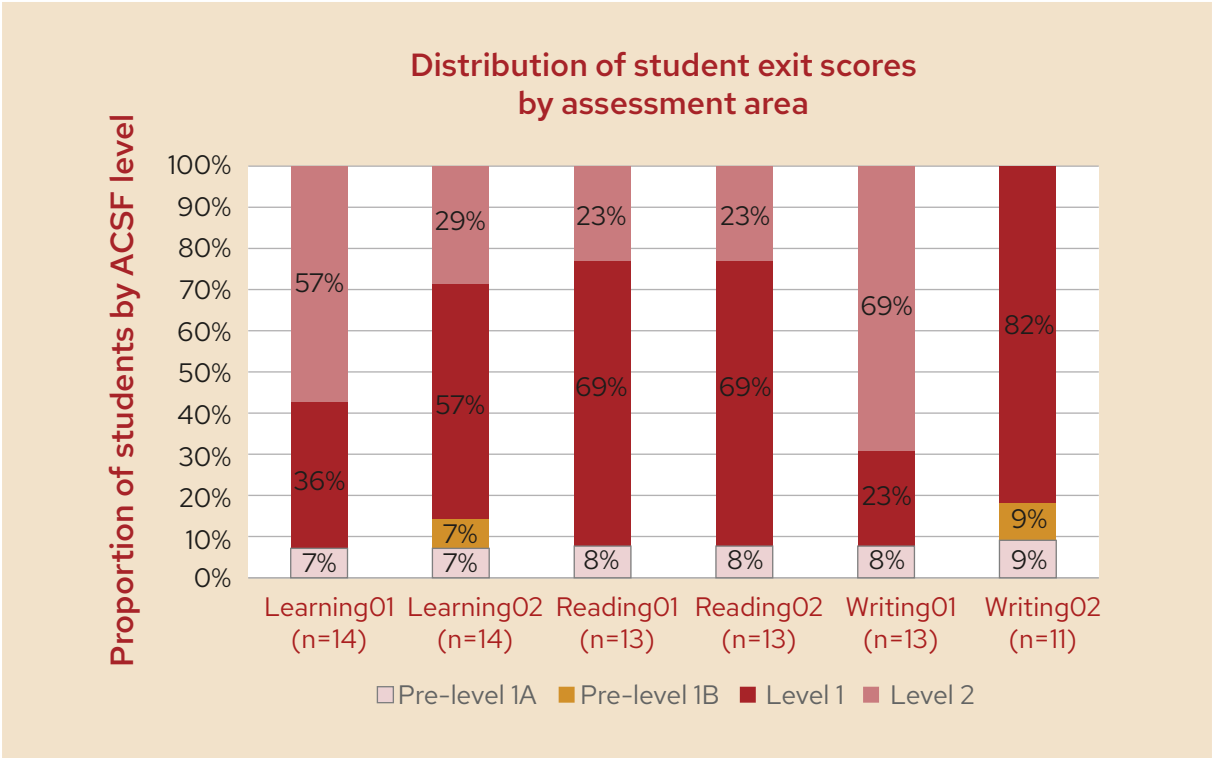


Figure 8. Intake 3 entry levels by ACSF.

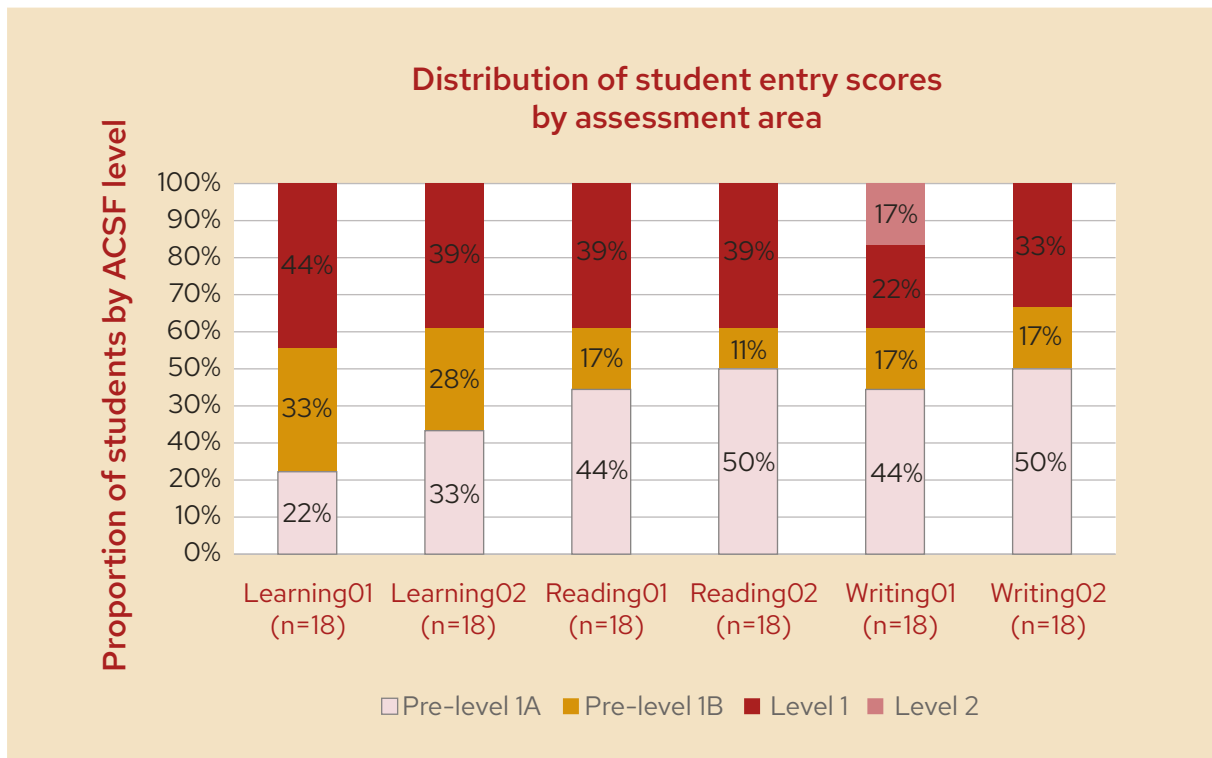
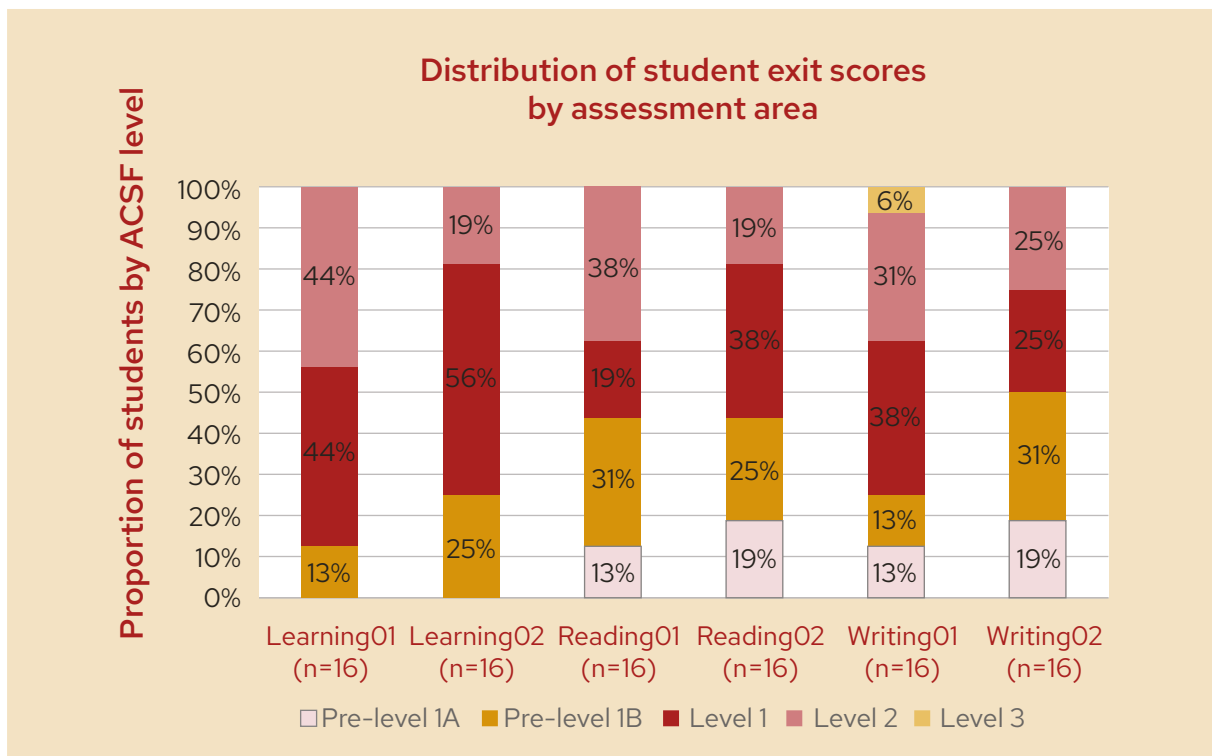


Figure 9. Intake 3 exit levels by ACSF.



In each intake, the high proportion of students operating at Pre-Level 1 (PLA or PLB) upon entry is clear (denoted by orange and blue colouring). At exit, most students moved to Level 1 or 2 (grey and yellow respectively), with the exception of Intake 3 in which a greater number of students began at

PLA (the lowest level on the ACSF). This indicates that at the aggregate level, the Campaign classes are effective in lifting learning, reading and writing levels.

Breaking these results down by domain, we can see the majority of students across the three intakes (48–68 %) commenced YIC below Level 1 in learning. This is typical of adults returning to learning after a long time. The two indicators in the learning domain on the ACSF describe people's awareness of themselves as learners, their use of learning strategies and their ability to set and make progress towards stated learning goals. At exit, this had reduced to 13–27%, showing the majority of students increased their confidence and knowledge of themselves as learners as a result of participating in the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign. This is significant as self-confidence and self-awareness underpin further success in learning.

Reading on the ACSF refers to a person's performance in making meaning from different text types, including their awareness of an author's purpose and intended audiences, of their own purposes for reading, and of the role they themselves play in the construction of meaning. Once again, the majority of students across the three intakes (50–70%) commenced with below Level 1 reading skills. Following completion of Phase 3: Post-literacy, this had reduced to a range of 8–46%, with most of these being in Intake 3.

The two indicators in the ACSF writing domain capture a person's knowledge of audience and purpose for writing, and their ability to convey ideas as well as the actual mechanics (grammar) of writing. This domain is often the hardest to make progress in as evidence suggests at least 100 hours of instruction and/or practice is required for measurable progress (Reder et al., 2020; Reder, 2015; Comings, 2008). As with the learning domain, the majority of students (43–86%) commenced YIC below Level 1 for writing. This means they are limited to being able to copy letters and/or highly familiar words and require full support to write a sentence. At the end of their intake, only 8–50% remained below level 1.

In terms of individual results, Figures 10–12 display the numbers of students who improved by each indicator with n being the size of the data set (i.e. the number of assessment results available per indicator). As can be seen, Intake 1 had the least number of improvements per indicator of the three intakes, with solid movement on the Learning domain but less improvement on Reading and Writing. By Intake 2, this result improved significantly, with 69–76% of students moving up at least one level in reading and 69–84% of students moving a level or more in writing. Strong results were also achieved in Intake 3; however, the relatively lower starting level (see Figure 8) meant that progress is a slower process. Between 50–75% participants improved in reading and 56–68% in writing.

Figure 10. Summary of Intake 1 student achievement by ACSF indicator.

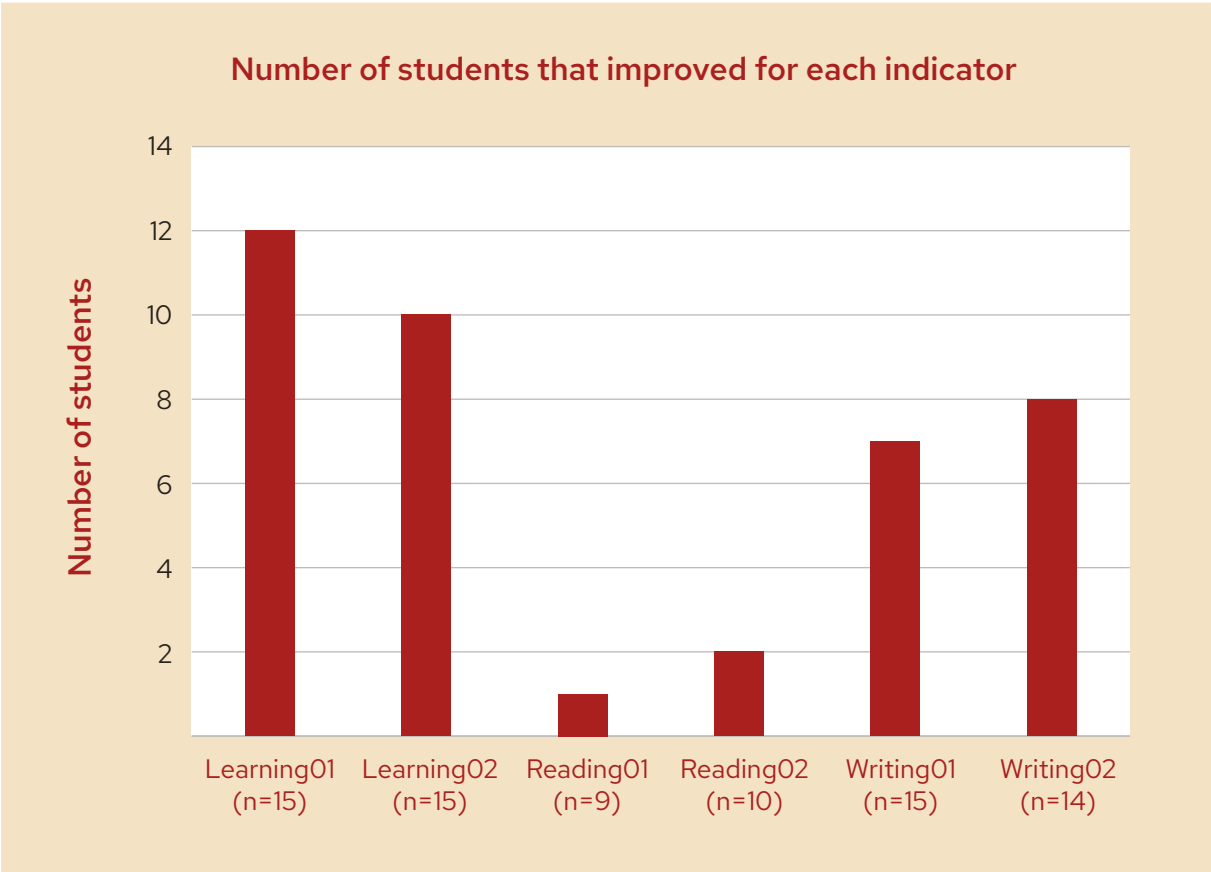


Figure 11. Summary of Intake 2 student achievement by ACSF indicator.

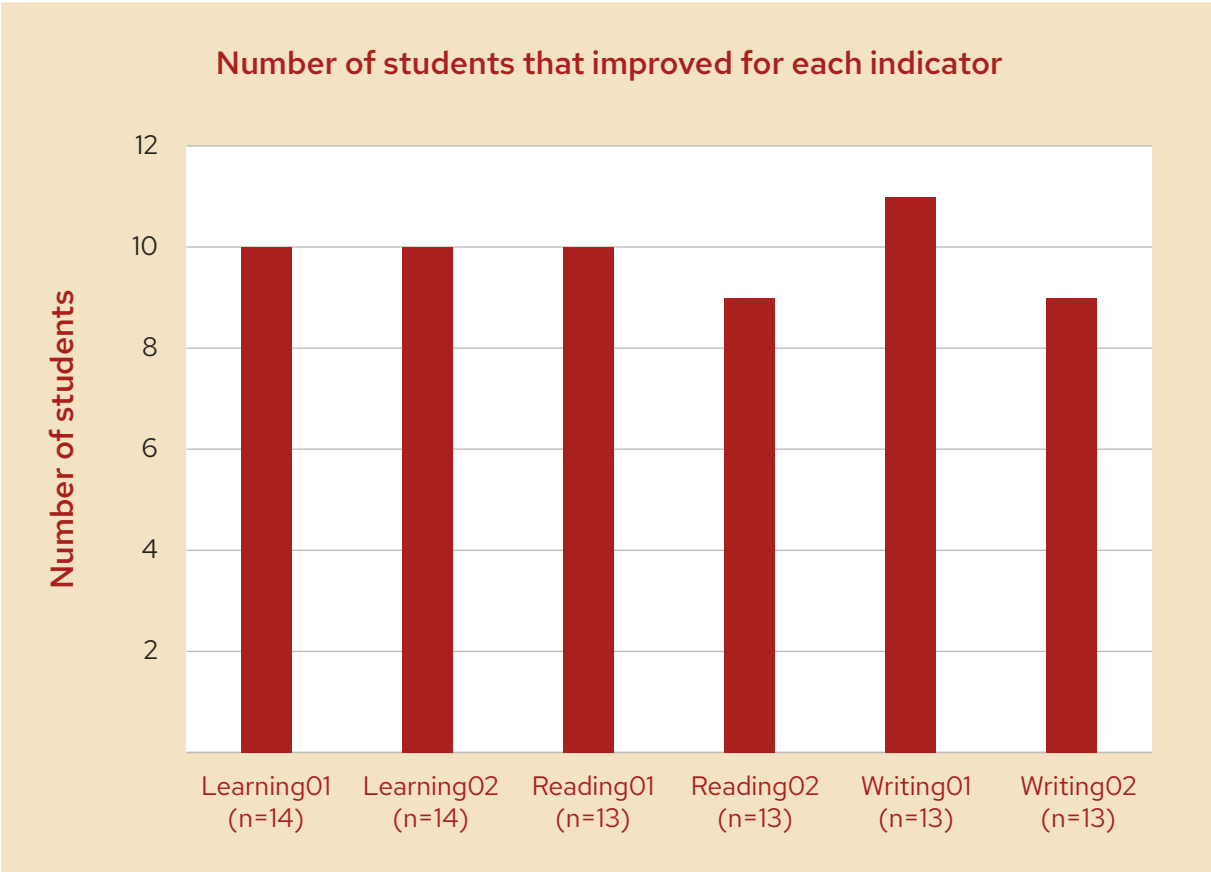
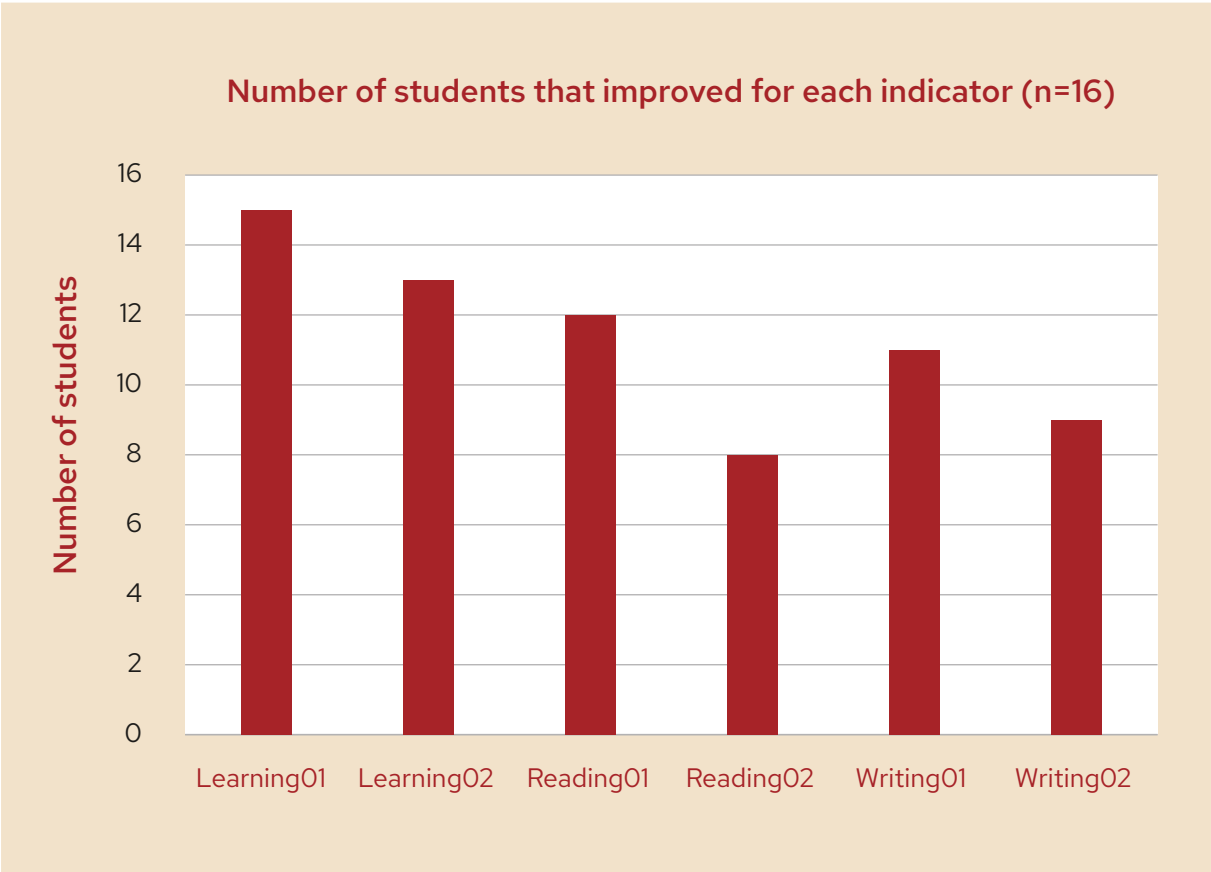


Figure 12. Summary of Intake 3 student achievement by ACSF indicator.



Overall, 100% of students in each intake made improvements on at least one indicator by at least one ACSF level. This is an impressive result. The ACSF consultant’s reports were unequivocal that the Campaign had impacted participant literacy positively. I echo this statement, and I believe the ACSF assessment clearly shows improvement for the bulk of the students. However, I would like to highlight that the assessment clearly shows that there are two groups of participants in this intake, which I noted in my visit to the classroom as well: there are students who are more robust in their literacy, and of course, they provide strength to the class; on the opposite end, we have students with very low-level skills, and some with learning disabilities.

3. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The ACSF results provide one important perspective on student progress. In this section, I provide another perspective – that of the students themselves. Through one-on-one Zoom

interviews, I asked some of the participants for their thoughts and feelings about the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign. Below are some of the student statements, which provide further testimony of the Campaign’s perceived value for the Yarrabah community:

Respondent 01:

I joined the class to upskill myself and get something to do rather than just sitting at home. Now I am able to use my phone to read and send messages. So far my experience in the Campaign is good, and I plan to take another computer course after this and get my car license test done. I would like to see more people coming to this Campaign from the community and participate you know.

Respondent 02:

The program is good so far, help me a lot and I am planning to look for a job next year.



Photo: Digital literacy in Yarrabah! Students Vera Wilson (far left), Ethel Wilson (front left), Ethel Noble (front right), Simone Hall/Wilson (back left), and Dwayne Street (back right) learning on laptops in Phase 3: Post-Literacy. Students appreciated participating in the design of the program and activities and felt the learning was well tailored to their interests and aspirations.



Photo: Graduate Geraldine Choikee with her father and Yidinji elder and dance group leader, David Mundraby. Photo credit: Leanne Hardy

Respondent 03:

I enjoy all the program but I more enjoy the Post-literacy activities.

Respondent 05:

Initially I was nervous in the class with all the big words you know. But later I enjoy it and I get lots of help and if I can, I will do it again.

Respondent 08:

I have learned a lot, able to read simple things like food containers when I go shopping, job advertisement and all.

Respondent 09:

I enjoy being here and I have learned a lot, improve my literacy and numeracy. I am planning to apply for a job in the hospital.

4. ADDITIONAL POST-TRAINING PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

For some students, improving their literacy is the main outcome they seek. Others aspire to use their strengthened literacy and other foundation skills to pursue further study, employment or other goals. Below are some post-training outcomes for students from Intakes 1–3:

- » AE completed the second intake and read his own poetry at graduation. He is keen to continue writing and perhaps publish a book of poems. I believe he has also joined the youth hub as a mentor.
- » ZS left the second intake as she gained employment. It was stated that she gained enough confidence during the course to apply for work. She is currently employed by Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service and Hospital as a receptionist.
- » SH has commenced employment with the NDIS in Yarrabah.
- » EW has applied to the local primary school to be a cleaner.

- » IL is currently working further up the Cape with the Rangers.
- » DC, NC, PE, and EG, from the second intake are currently searching for work in Yarrabah.

5. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Views shared by the Campaign community partner organisation, Wugu Nyambil, indicate that wider participant outcomes are attributed to the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign. These observations of impact were offered via email correspondence and are reproduced here verbatim.

A number of participants from the LFLF Campaign have been actively seeking employment both during and post the LFLF Campaigns. It would seem that the students get an immediate confidence boost that encourages and supports them to look for further training opportunities or employment.

There is definitely a long-term impact from the Campaign and definitely a short term-impact as well. We have a significantly higher rate of participation in other programs since the LFLF started in Yarrabah. The positive benefits have flowed across a number of different programs and assisted with participation particularly into the SEE Program (Skills for Education and Employment). We have had 50 participants regularly attending this over the past 12 months. SEE is also a literacy program that targets the group beyond the LFLF standard, so the LFLF program is essential to getting numbers into this program. The success of the LFLF amongst the students and community has also led to the success of the SEE program so far.

The students are looking for further training and now employment opportunities which is one of the outcomes that we are seeking for Wugu. Students are feeling more empowered, motivated and confident to seek further opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation has shown that the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign has been a highly successful Campaign with an overall retention rate of 76% and reaching as high as 90% in Intake 3. Hand in hand with the high engagement and retention goes the literacy results. 100% of participants progressed at least one level on the ACSF in one or more domains. This result is underscored by the views of participants themselves, who report greater confidence and ability in their literacy. Community feedback also indicates that participants are more engaged in services and willing to seek help and employment opportunities.

The Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, which funded Intakes 1–3, charged LFLF with establishing a learning hub, recruiting and training a male and female Facilitator and assisting 60 community members to improve their English literacy. With 66 adults commencing classes and 50 completing, a vibrant adult learning space and three local staff trained and employed in adult community education, the Yarrabah Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign has clearly achieved these indicators of success.

REFERENCES

- ABS (2021). Census QuickStats: Yarrabah. Access date: 31/01/2022. <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA37600>.
- Balatti, J., Black, S., Falk, I. (2007). Teaching for social capital outcomes: The case of adult literacy and numeracy courses. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 47(2), 245–263. <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/17225>.
- Boughton, B., Williamson, F., Lin, S., Taylor, R., Beetson, J., Bartlett, BB., Anderson, P & Morrell, P. (2022). Measuring adult English literacy improvements in First Nations communities in Australia, *International Journal of Training Research*. 20(3), 248–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2022.2032268>.
- Comings, J. P. (2008). Student Persistence in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programs. In S. Reder & J. Bynner (Eds.), *Tracking Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills: Findings from Longitudinal Research* (pp. 160–176). London: Taylor & Francis Group. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203888889-15/student-persistence-adult-literacy-numeracy-programs-john-comings>.
- Durnan, D., & Boughton, B. (2018). Making It Stick. The Post Literacy phase of the Literacy for Life Foundation Aboriginal adult literacy campaign. *Fine Print*, 41(3), 11–15. <https://hdl.handle.net/1959.11/27990>.
- LFLF (2021). Literacy for Life Foundation Handbook, Sydney. Australia.
- Lin, S., Williamson, F., Beetson, J., Bartlett, B., Boughton, B., & Taylor, R. (2021). Quantifying low English literacy in Australian Aboriginal communities: A correlational study. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 48, 267–280. https://yumi-sabe.aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/outputs/2024-04/Lin_et_al_2020_Quantifying_low_English_literacy_in_Australian_Aboriginal_communities_a_correlational_study.pdf.
- McCalman, J., Longbottom, M., Fagan, (2021). Leading with local solutions to keep Yarrabah safe: a grounded theory study of an Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation's response to COVID-19. *BMC Health Serv Res* 21, 732. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-06761-1>.
- McLean, P. (2021). ACSF Yarrabah Campaign 2021 Report. Melbourne, Australia.
- Reder, S. (2015). Longitudinal perspectives on adult literacy development and program impact. *Fine Print*, 38(2), 23–29. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.460480749119628>.
- Reder, S., Gauly, B., & Lechner, C. (2020). Practice makes perfect: Practice engagement theory and the development of adult literacy and numeracy proficiency. *International Review of Education*, 66(2), 267–288. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09830-5>.
- Wise, J., Harris, B., Nickson, R., Boughton, B., and Beetson, J. (2018). Impact of the 'Yes, I Can!' adult literacy campaign on interactions with the criminal justice system. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. Australian Institute of Criminology. No. 562, 1–16. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti105865>.
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council. (n.d.). *Community: Our people, our country, our history and future*. Retrieved 03 05, 2023, from Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council: <https://www.yarrabah.qld.gov.au/community/>.



E info@lflf.org.au

W www.lflf.org.au

ABN: 83 163 634 777