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OCHRE

The Continuing Conversation

Evaluation | Stage 1:
Implementation and early outcomes

Tamworth Opportunity Hub

Stage 1 Final Report

Prepared for the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council and
members of Tamworth Aboriginal Communities

June 2018

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This report belongs to members of the Tamworth Aboriginal Community and the
Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council.

SPRC
Social Policy Research Centre

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub operates on and in Kamilaroi Country.

The evaluation team from the Social Policy Research Centre acknowledges the Kamilaroi people as the traditional custodians of the land we are working on and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and all Aboriginal peoples in the region.

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Contents

The <i>OCHRE</i> Tamworth Opportunity Hub: What we have found.....	e
About the <i>Continuing Conversations</i>	f
Summary of the <i>Continuing Conversation: OCHRE</i> Tamworth Opportunity Hub.....	h
Part A: The <i>Continuing Conversations</i>	1
1 The <i>Continuing Conversations</i>	2
1.1 Summary of the evaluation process.....	2
1.2 Measures of success.....	5
1.3 Conducting the evaluation.....	5
2 Findings.....	7
2.1 The Tamworth Opportunity Hub - implementation.....	8
2.2 Participants' views of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.....	10
2.3 Improvements for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.....	19
3 Discussion and recommendations.....	22
3.1 Is the Tamworth Opportunity Hub being implemented as intended? What is working well? What could be improved?.....	22
3.2 Do outcomes continue to reflect what the community wants to achieve?.....	23
3.3 Are <i>OCHRE</i> policies and practices responding to evidence?.....	23
3.4 Recommendations.....	24
4 Future focus – next steps.....	27
4.1 Stage 1 of the <i>OCHRE</i> Evaluation.....	27
4.2 Direction of next conversations – Stage 2.....	27
Part B: About <i>OCHRE</i> and the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.....	28
5 <i>OCHRE</i> Opportunity Hubs.....	29
5.1 About <i>OCHRE</i>	29
5.2 What is an <i>OCHRE</i> Opportunity Hub?.....	30
5.3 How Opportunity Hubs were established.....	31
6 The Tamworth Opportunity Hub.....	35
6.1 How is the Tamworth Opportunity Hub organised?.....	35
6.2 How is the Opportunity Hub resourced?.....	35
6.3 How is the Opportunity Hub being used?.....	36
7 About the conversations.....	38
7.1 Who did we have conversations with?.....	38
7.2 What sorts of information did we collect.....	38
7.3 How did we come up with these findings?.....	38
7.4 Checking and confirming findings.....	38
8 References.....	39
Appendix A Summary of report validation process.....	40
Appendix B Examples of Opportunity Hub programs.....	41
Appendix C Case studies.....	43

Figures

Figure 1 Summary of the Continuing Conversation	4
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Glossary

LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
NCARA	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
<i>OCHRE</i>	Opportunity Choice Healing Responsibility Empowerment
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
TLALC	Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council
UNSW	University of New South Wales

The OCHRE Tamworth Opportunity Hub: What we have found

What is working?	What needs further work?
<p>The Tamworth Opportunity Hub:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• has the respect and trust of members of the Tamworth Aboriginal community, other service providers and participating schools.• facilitates and develops relationships with services, organisations and the wider community with a focus on supporting Aboriginal young people.• provides opportunities for young people and the wider Aboriginal community (through volunteering).• facilitates connection to culture, through cultural, sporting and other activities inside and outside school.• has committed and highly motivated staff.• is flexible in providing services and support to help Aboriginal young people engage with school and transition from school to employment or further education. <p>Important messages to NSW Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Opportunity Hub has been successfully implemented in Tamworth and the model has worked well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The current short-term funding cycle means that it is difficult for the Opportunity Hub to plan in the long-term. This is a source of concern for communities as there is a history of successful programs being de-funded.• Some key agencies involved in service delivery to Aboriginal children and families are not engaged with the Opportunity Hub.• Participation in the Hub relies on Principals' approval and school staff to allow students to attend.• Demand is exceeding supply – this is likely to continue as the Hub continues to grow its reputation in the community.• The burden on staff and volunteers is considerable and staff work way beyond their contracted hours.• Data collected by the Opportunity Hub does not reflect the full range of activities undertaken by staff and volunteers.• The Hub would like to access some schools outside the Tamworth area. <p>Important messages to NSW Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Secure and long-term funding is important for Aboriginal communities to trust that NSW Government is serious about supporting young Aboriginal people.• Improved resources can support more staff to provide services for the region.

About the *Continuing Conversations*

The *OCHRE* Evaluation adopts the approach of ‘continuing conversations’. Over the past two years, SPRC evaluators have continued the conversations with members of Tamworth Aboriginal communities about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub – part of the *OCHRE* plan. The evaluation team have used culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the evaluation.

Community-controlled research involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research *with* and *not on* communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program’s success, who the team should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the evaluation. We trained local community members to be researchers to have conversations. As part of co-design we also returned a draft report to research participants in communities and asked for their feedback, (validation of findings – see Appendix A) which has been added to this final report.

The evaluation team have sought to address any concerns about the draft report to ensure participants are comfortable with what has been written, without compromising the independent findings of the report. This final report has been approved by Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council. The report will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (30 June 2018) and will then be presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

The evaluation team have drawn lessons from all *OCHRE* sites evaluated and presented a Synthesis Report to the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA).

Opportunity Hubs are funded by the NSW Government; they were established under *OCHRE* by Aboriginal Affairs NSW and State Training Services (now Training Services NSW) and are managed by Training Services NSW (NSW Department of Industry). The Opportunity Hub model was developed in consultation with community members specifically for *OCHRE*, drawing on experience of career education and vocational education placement programs funded by both Commonwealth and State agencies.

Opportunity Hubs aim to provide Aboriginal young people with the confidence and knowledge to follow a supported pathway between secondary school and further education and/or employment. To achieve this outcome, Opportunity Hubs are building partnerships between schools, employers, education and training providers and the local community to coordinate and match employment, training and further education opportunities to individual students’ aspirations.

Non-government Opportunity Hub service providers have been contracted to coordinate and broker links with schools, employers, training providers, support services and Aboriginal communities, to deliver improved outcomes for Aboriginal young people, including increased:

This report belongs to the Aboriginal Communities of Tamworth.

- Participation and retention at school
- Aspiration and expectation of career pathways for Aboriginal students
- Post-school enrolment in further education and training, and
- Placement in sustainable jobs.(see *Bringing Aboriginal voices into policy*) (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, n.d. a)

Further information about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub can be found in [Section 6](#).

Summary of the *Continuing Conversation*: OCHRE Tamworth Opportunity Hub

This is a summary of what we heard about OCHRE and the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. We had conversations with members of Aboriginal communities in Tamworth region, including, young Aboriginal students, parents and carers of Aboriginal children, Principals, teachers, Aboriginal Education Officers, local partners and service providers, Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives, Opportunity Hub coordinators and case workers. Additional conversations were held with NSW Government staff to understand how the Opportunity Hub model was established and discuss the oversight process.

 Direct quotes from what we heard from participants in the research highlighted.

What people told us about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

- We heard broad support for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. Most participants, including members of the Tamworth Aboriginal communities and NSW Government representatives, view the Opportunity Hub as very successful.
- The Hub is Aboriginal community-controlled and is part of the work of the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, which has priorities to benefit, support and provide outcomes for the local Aboriginal communities.
- The Hub has the respect and trust of members of the Tamworth Aboriginal communities, other service providers and participating schools.
- The Hub facilitates connection to culture, through cultural, sporting and other activities inside and outside school.

What is working well?

- The Hub facilitates and develops relationships with services, organisations and the wider community with a focus on supporting young Aboriginal people.
- Participants in Opportunity Hub activities felt it was a positive influence in their lives and provided them with support and opportunities for education and employment.
- The Opportunity Hub offers opportunities for mentoring and for young Aboriginal people to volunteer at the Hub. Members of Aboriginal communities also volunteer and work with their communities, parents and children.
- The staff at the Hub are highly committed and motivated to provide the best services for young people, often volunteering their time.
- The Hub is flexible in providing services and support to help Aboriginal young people engage with school and transition from school to employment or further education. This is important in meeting the diverse needs of Aboriginal young people.

Implementation

- The tender process required collaboration and formalised agreements with other services up front. In this respect it was positive for the Hub. However, there was some dissatisfaction with the tendering process.
- Formalised agreements and other local partnerships support the Hub in delivering services.
- The implementation was well-supported by being managed by a community-based organisation.
- Demand for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub services continues to grow.

Challenges and improvements to implementation of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

We heard about several **challenges** to the implementation and success of the Hub:

- It requires considerable effort for a non-school based organisation to access the structured school environment and keep schools engaged with the program.
- Some key agencies involved in service delivery to Aboriginal children and families are not engaged with the Opportunity Hub.
- Participation in the Hub relies on Principals' approval to access schools and school staff to allow students to attend.
- Demand is exceeding supply – this is likely to continue as Hub continues to grow its reputation in the community. More resources are needed to ensure the Hub can service this demand.
- Burden on staff and volunteers is considerable and staff all work way beyond their contracted hours.
- The tendering process and short funding timescales mean that it is difficult for the Opportunity Hub to plan in the long-term and is a source of concern for members of the Tamworth Aboriginal community as there is a history of successful programs being de-funded.

Improvements

- Increase participation through encouraging local schools and Principals to access the Hub activities. The Tamworth Opportunity Hub would like to access schools in the surrounding areas that have indicated an interest in their programs.
- Provide more activities in the community and share information about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub more widely.
- Establish stability of the Hub through long-term government commitment to funding.
- Increase staff support – through training and resources.
- Providing ideas for how the Hub can be even more successful.

- Improving engagement with all levels of government departments, agencies (Local, State and Commonwealth), and service providers (both government and NGO) – apart from Aboriginal Affairs NSW.
- Support a holistic approach to young Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing.
- NSW Government departments (Housing NSW, NSW Health, NSW FACS, and NSW Justice) to work more closely with the Opportunity Hub and their programs.
- Develop reporting and evaluation mechanisms that reflect communities' views of what is important.

Community views of success for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub is a **success** through:

- **Student engagement** (Aboriginal and other than Aboriginal students).
- **Aboriginal community involvement and connections to Culture.**
- **Building relationships, self-esteem and cultural identity**
- The Hub staff wants to capture information that illustrates young people are participating in activities, and the value of casual conversations or interactions in supporting and building confidence. For example, engaging with a student at risk of leaving school, or building the self-esteem, confidence and cultural identity of young Aboriginal people.
- **Community building** through volunteering - Community members, Hub workers and students play an important role in the activities at the Hub. It is valuable to capture the broader communities' engagement with the Hub. During co-design, we heard volunteers are important to the success of the program and that needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation.

Some achievements of the Hub may be unknown for some time and difficult to measure. As one stakeholder explained to us:

□ The success – is some of the stories from some of the kids that we've impacted. We've covered some of that in our reporting; we do some case studies, and we sort of highlight some good stuff in our newsletters; but I think that, and sometimes I don't know whether an impact – because I know I've been involved with other programs at times – and it's not until the people are older that they realise that they had – that you had an impact.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on what we heard was working well and what could be improved.

Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resource provision from NSW Government. • Resource sustainable and effective staffing levels for the Hub. Staff changes can be very disruptive to the program and to the progress and support of individual students at the Hub. • Identify corporate/business partnerships that could support expanded range of Hub programs.
Role and value of community volunteers to the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers are important to the success of Hub programs and their contribution needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation. • Give official recognition to volunteers and provide more resources to support and train them.
Professional career and training support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Services NSW and NSW Department of Industry to increase training and professional development of Opportunity Hub employees. • Aboriginal Affairs NSW to provide more support and skill development for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal school staff.
Stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government to engage and work more with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal organisations to respond to their identified needs.
Engagement with NSW Government and NSW Government agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve, expand and require engagement with the Hub from NSW Government departments other than Aboriginal Affairs NSW – for example, FACS, Juvenile Justice, Local Health Districts (LHDs), Primary Health providers and networks, NSW Department of Education – to support young Aboriginal people.

Theme	Recommendation
Access to Tamworth Opportunity Hub programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the Regional Director of Education in the Steering Group to facilitate the engagement of more schools in the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. • Increase access to programs by including more schools in the area surrounding Tamworth. • Identify opportunities and mechanisms to increase the number of local schools involved in the program. • Expand the capacity of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub to work with more local schools. • Include young people who have left school and young people who are disengaged from school as eligible participants in Hub programs.
Range of activities conducted by the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support increased staff numbers to provide more activities in the community, including one-to-one time with Hub staff.
Promotion of the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about the Opportunity Hub more widely across the Tamworth region, and with services working with young people.
Data collection and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve data collection (without placing additional administrative burden on Opportunity Hub staff). • Record peoples' stories in visual formats to present to others. • Start capturing individual data earlier, not just from Year 9 but from Year 5 or the moment of first engagement. • Track outcomes over the long-term. • Capture wider Hub activity data and demonstrate student engagement, community involvement and connection to culture. • Improve reporting mechanisms to capture the relationships and conversations. • Improve the reporting and evaluation mechanisms to adequately and meaningfully describe what happens at

Theme	Recommendation
	the Hub and include individual and community capacity outcomes.
Community determined measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change reporting to reflect community measures for the success of the Hub. • Measure to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and type of Aboriginal community involvement. • Level and number of students engagements – identify cohorts. • Connection to Culture. • Specifically identify and include wellbeing indicator outcomes such as building self-esteem and cultural identity into reporting and evaluations.
Tendering process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change and improve the tendering process to provide long-term security to the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and Tamworth Aboriginal community members. • Make tendering more collaborative between government and Aboriginal community members and organisations, focusing on developmental and capacity support for Aboriginal inclusion.

Direction for next conversations

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021 will identify changes experienced by the participating communities, including a focus on identifying Aboriginal determined long and short-term outcomes and recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024 will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and outcomes and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

Based on the conversations to date (including co-design), we propose the next conversations include and discuss:

- What long-term data should be captured and how.

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- Aboriginal measures of success for the monitoring and evaluation of the initiative during the next Stage.
- How the initiative can be more accessible for young Aboriginal peoples in the Tamworth region.
- How best to respond to the training and education needs of school staff and Aboriginal community members and organisations for the long-term development and sustainability of the initiative. Methods for capturing different kinds of information – including volunteer hours, impact of volunteering on young people, and impact of program on student wellbeing, Aboriginal cultural outcomes – not just academic outcomes.

Part A:

The Continuing Conversations

1 The Continuing Conversations

University researchers from UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) have been employed by the NSW Government to continue the conversations that commenced with the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs to see how *OCHRE* – the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs – is working. The Tamworth Opportunity Hub is part of *OCHRE* and has been selected as a site for the evaluation.

The NSW Government wants to know:

- Is the Opportunity Hub being implemented as intended? What aspects are working well, and which could be improved?
- Do the outcomes from the Opportunity Hub continue to reflect what the community wants to achieve?
- What improvements to the design of the Opportunity Hub could be made to better meet outcomes in the Aboriginal community, and for the future development of *OCHRE*?

It will also contribute to the later goal of answering the question about the overall *OCHRE* plan:

- Do the *OCHRE* policies and practices respond to emerging evidence and practice learnings? Is change to policy and practice timely?

1.1 Summary of the evaluation process

The evaluation team have used Aboriginal culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the evaluation.

Community-controlled research involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research *with* and *not on* communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program's success, who the team should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the evaluation. We trained local community members to be researchers to have conversations. As part of co-design we also returned a draft report to research participants in communities and asked for their feedback, (validation of findings – see Appendix A) which has been added to this final report.

In keeping with the ethics approval provided by the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) ethics committee for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council provided permission to have a continuing conversation on Country.

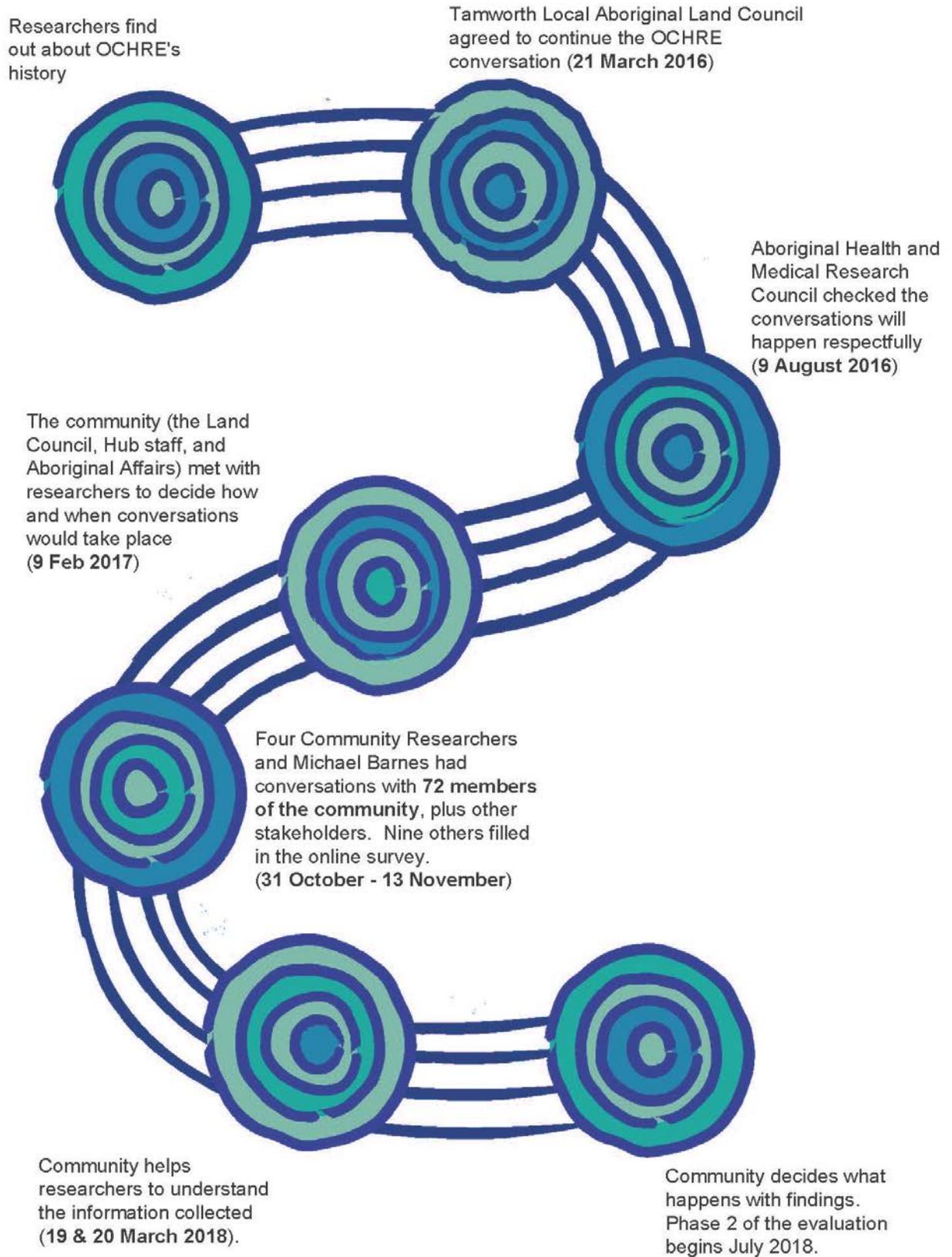
- The evaluation team worked with a group from the Tamworth Local Aboriginal community to co-design what the evaluation would look at and how it would be carried out.
- The evaluation team trained local Aboriginal people to be Aboriginal community-based researchers to have conversations with local Aboriginal peoples.
- We (the evaluation team, including community researchers) listened to people in the community about their experiences with the Opportunity Hub. We listened to Aboriginal students, parents and carers of Aboriginal children, Principals, teachers, Aboriginal Education Officers, local partners and service providers, Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives, Opportunity Hub coordinators and case workers. Additional conversations were held with NSW Government staff to understand how the Opportunity Hub model was established and discuss the oversight process.
- We analysed administrative data from the Opportunity Hub.
- The evaluation team returned to the Tamworth Aboriginal community (19-20 March) to check the findings and recommendations. Feedback from these conversations has been incorporated into the final report.
- Members of the Tamworth Aboriginal community own the report and the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council will decide what to do with the report.

The conversations were led by an Aboriginal researcher – Michael Barnes, a Ngunnawal man from the Canberra region, working with four local Aboriginal community-based researchers.

During the evaluation the role of NSW Government has been to provide information, resources and support as needed.

See Figure 1 below for a summary of the conversation process.

Figure 1 Summary of the Continuing Conversation



1.2 Measures of success

In the co-design workshop we heard that success of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub is through:

- **Student engagement** (Aboriginal and other than Aboriginal students).
- **Aboriginal community involvement and connections to Culture.**
- **Building relationships, self-esteem and cultural identity** – want to capture situations where young people are participating in activities, and the value of casual conversations or interactions in supporting and building confidence. For example, engaging with a student at risk of leaving school, or building the self-esteem, confidence and cultural identity of young Aboriginal people.
- **Community building** through volunteering - Community members, Hub workers and students play an important role in the activities at the Hub. It is valuable to capture the broader communities' engagement with the Hub. During co-design, we heard volunteers are important to the success of the program and that needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation.

We also heard that some Hub achievements may be unknown for some time or are difficult to measure. As one stakeholder explained to us:

□ The success – is some of the stories from some of the kids that we've impacted. We've covered some of that in our reporting; we do some case studies, and we sort of highlight some good stuff in our newsletters; but I think that, and sometimes I don't know whether an impact – because I know I've been involved with other programs at times – and it's not until the people are older that they realise that they had – that you had an impact.

1.3 Conducting the evaluation

Along with conducting conversations outlined above, participants of the co-design workshop suggested the evaluation include:

- Collect information about other aspects of the program, the things that are not counted in the current reporting requirements.
- Collect statistical data over a long time.
- Recording people's stories on video to present to others.

Note that time restrictions at this stage have meant these approaches can be incorporated into the next stage of the evaluation.

Further detail about who we listened to, the information we collected, and how we came up with our findings are in Section 7.

1.3.1 Strengths and limitations to the evaluation methods

There are a number of **strengths** to the evaluation:

- Aboriginal community-control of the evaluation through co-design workshop, community validation and consent.
- Measures of success of Opportunity Hubs being determined by community members.
- Listening to the community members including parents, carers, students, teachers and others.
- Going back to community to validate our findings.
- The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, on behalf of the Tamworth Aboriginal Communities, having control of the final report. For example, whether the report is presented to NSW Government or published, or just retained by the Aboriginal Community.

There are some **limitations**:

- The evaluation team had difficulties accessing students in schools.
- The resources available for the evaluation limited the time we had to listen to people in community.
- There are other activities going on with young people in the Tamworth area; attribution of findings to the Opportunity Hub alone will be difficult.
- Although we tried to speak to a diversity of people in the community, most of those we spoke to had been involved with the Opportunity Hub and were very positive about it. People we did not hear from could have other views.
- Program data provided to the evaluation from the Opportunity Hub did not measure or describe outcomes, nor did it measure or describe some of the success measures identified by the community.

2 Findings

This report is focused on the implementation and early outcomes of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. Participants told us about the positive effects of being involved in the Opportunity Hub. However, it is too early to tell if there have been community-wide or long-term impacts. The next stage of the evaluation we will look at these impacts.

From what we heard, members of the Tamworth community and NSW Government representatives view the Tamworth Opportunity Hub as being very successful – they were supportive and protective of the program, and positive about the hard work of the staff. The Tamworth Opportunity Hub facilitates relationships with services, organisations and the wider community while supporting Aboriginal young people. Overall, we heard that the Tamworth Opportunity Hub has the respect and trust of members of the Aboriginal community, other service providers and participating schools. One Principal described the Tamworth Opportunity Hub as ‘a *great resource*’.

Young Aboriginal people, parents or carers of Aboriginal children, and **stakeholders**, including: **Principals**, the **Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council** and other **research participants** are very positive about the Opportunity Hub. In particular, through:

- Student engagement – Aboriginal students are attending Hub activities, in school and outside of school. Some non-Aboriginal students take part in Hub activities.
- Employment and further training – supporting transition from primary school to high school and from high school to work.
- Aboriginal Communities’ involvement – the Hub provides opportunities for young Aboriginal people, and also for Aboriginal community members to volunteer.
- Connection to culture – programs had been conducted to support young Aboriginal peoples’ connection to culture, sport and other events.
- The Opportunity Hub has become a central source of Aboriginal community support that works across services. Good relationships between the Opportunity Hub and other services help to support Aboriginal students.
- Assistance for young people with a range of issues to enable them to continue engaging with education and employment.
- Hub workers have developed trusting relationships and supported Aboriginal students and their parents.
- The Opportunity Hub offers opportunities for mentoring and for young Aboriginal people to volunteer at the Hub. Members of Aboriginal communities also volunteer and work with their communities, parents and their children.

2.1 The Tamworth Opportunity Hub - implementation

The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council has been appointed to manage the implementation of Tamworth Opportunity Hub after a tender process (see Section 6.3). The initial Hub contract began in 2015.

This process of **implementation** was considered **positive** by participants in this evaluation because:

- The Hub is Aboriginal community-controlled and culturally safe. There is strong community trust. Participants told us that local Aboriginal community needs are best understood by a local Aboriginal community-based organisation, such as the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council.
- The Opportunity Hub is part of the work of the Tamworth Land Aboriginal Land Council and their priorities are to benefit, support and provide outcomes for the community.
- The tender process required collaboration and formalised agreements with other services up front, which built on existing relationships. In this respect it was positive for the Hub. However, there was some dissatisfaction with the tendering process.
- Formalised agreements and other local partnerships support the Hub in delivering services.

Key **challenges** for implementation relate to:

- Ensuring school participation in the Hub.
- Longer-term planning and development of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub, given the short-term nature of the funding agreements.

2.1.1 Local knowledge, community focused and culturally safe

A key strength of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub is that it has been developed by the community to address community needs. People who work in the Hub, children who participate in the activities, and the managing organisation, are founded in relationships of responsibility to and for each other. Cultural ties and connections contribute to the success of the Hub. A **community member** told us:

☞ The Hub could not get any more culturally safe. The fact it sits within an Aboriginal community owned and controlled organisation is a huge credit to this. The staff employed are confident in their culture and are true community people. Only an Aboriginal organisation on the ground could possibly achieve this – using the connections they have built over decades in the community. They know who to engage and how to engage in terms of culture, and there is no other service in town that offers this for our children.

Aboriginal Community control in setting up the program, and employing Aboriginal people to work within the Hub, also contribute to its success. One **community member** involved in the Hub said:

□ The innovation used in the tender process and the containing collaboration and engagement of the services who were initially involved in tendering and establishing the Hub. The people employed by the Opportunity Hub as individuals are a true credit to its development. Young, local Aboriginal people have always been employed and I believe it has worked great as they are part of the community, know the community, understand what the community needs and wants are, and they are fresh out of the process they are assisting other community members to now go through in their roles with the Hub.

2.1.2 Collaboration and formal agreements

We heard that the tender process was regarded as positive. In the tender application the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council formalised already existing relationships with other organisations – this was felt to be a positive experience.

Relationships with services in the community were strengthened through the process to form the consortium the Opportunity Hub. Additionally, with the shared focus being outcomes for the community, the Hub can support other services to access funding; organisations are not competing for the same funding, meaning that they are:

□ Working smarter – no overlapping of services.

One Aboriginal **community member** discussed how formalising relationships across service organisations had been an important positive outcome of the tender process.

□ ...one of the things that I noticed in the preparation for the OpHub submission and development was the consolidation of those relationships that through the formation of the consortium, that was a proactive step that the lands council took. It wasn't, oh we need to do this to get over the line with our application. It was something that was already bubbling around those networks. And we said, oh well let's formalise them. So, there's some acknowledgement that needs to be put on having those established relationships prior to starting an OpHub, rather than starting the OpHub and trying to create those relationships as you go along.

The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council has existing relationships with other organisations and the tender process strengthened those. One participant involved with the Hub told us the tender process:

□ ... was a positive that the Tamworth Lands Council was already working with those partners and then said well let's consolidate it for the benefit of the community. Once again for the community, not to please government. It was not about getting dollars, it was about this is a community need. And we've got to work together with these other service providers to address our community. The OpHub is just a vehicle to address community needs as opposed to a government program that is a source of funds, just to say - 'Oh you know we've got this'.

2.1.3 Local partnerships, consortium and other services

The implementation strengthened and developed existing relationships. The consortium developed for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub includes agreements with seven organisations in Tamworth: the Tamworth Regional Council through the youth centre, Headspace, Centacare, Carers Network, the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, and Job Link Plus. Relationships with other organisations include, Memorandums of Understanding with TAFE and 14 Local Aboriginal Land Councils. Also, partnerships have been established with some businesses including, McDonalds and Nestlé, and the Hub has been approached by Woolworths to support employment of Aboriginal people. Partnerships open out opportunities for support.

34 businesses in town that said we've got a young person or they've got a job and that sort of stuff that they would help.

Members of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub Management Committee are also active in other local organisations. This improves capacity, communication and support between organisations and reduces the duplication of services.

2.1.4 School participation

Implementation of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub relies on local schools agreeing to participate. We heard that this was one of the key challenges. Schools already have existing and, at times, competing curriculum priorities. The Hub was another program that Principals had to accommodate. However, schools that are participating are very positive about the Opportunity Hub programs and staff. Some schools have similar programs and did not feel the need for the Opportunity Hub.

We heard there are good relationships between the Connected Community school and the Opportunity Hub.

2.2 Participants' views of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

We heard many **positive views** about the Hub. Individual responses and observations by participants told us about some early impacts for young people accessing the Opportunity Hub. At this stage it is not possible to look at broader community-wide or long-term impacts. Most importantly, individual responses to the success of the program clearly outline positive experiences.

Young people, parents and caregivers, Tamworth Opportunity Hub staff, NSW Government representatives and community members, as well as participants in the co-design workshop, identified **key strengths** of the Hub. The Hub:

- Provides opportunities to participate in community activities for young people and the wider Aboriginal community.
- Develops relationships within the local community.

- Facilitates connection to Aboriginal culture, through cultural, sporting and other activities inside and outside school.
- Liaises with schools and other service providers with a focus on supporting young Aboriginal people and helping them engage with school.
- Has committed and highly motivated staff.
- Has flexibility in providing services and support.

Tamworth Opportunity **Hub staff** provide a holistic service to young Aboriginal people and their families by directly supporting their progress through school. We heard in co-design:

□ We sort of help with – whether it be housing, whether it be a funeral, or whether it be whatever other events that we’ve contacted – so there’s sort of that bit of familiarity and the comfort being inside an Aboriginal-controlled group where they sort of feel like they’ve got a bit of a voice.

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub links Aboriginal children and their families to other services so that they can access an increased range of supports through school and during the transition from school to employment or further education.

Young people said they enjoyed Aboriginal cultural activities, sporting activities, including boxing, bus transport for Bounce Back (midnight basketball)¹, the bullying program, and Aboriginal Studies in schools.

All students we heard from said the Hub is a positive and important part of their lives. The Hub offers support, positive role models, opportunities to develop skills, encourages them at school. Aboriginal students have positive things to say about the staff and the activities of the Hub. They feel encouraged to go to school, so they can go on trips, they enjoy taking part in workshops (bullying and respect) and learning new skills (fencing). They told us that the Hub is helping them to write resumés, and it was good to have someone to talk to.

- They help us, and they believe in us.
- They help through the rough times.
- Helped me get my licence for driving and work.

Schools told us the Hub has been successful in engaging Aboriginal students. One Principal said the Hub:

□ Has given our kids opportunities, so to us that means it has been successful.

¹ Note that Midnight Basketball is a program supported by the Opportunity Hub and the Land Council but funded and provided separately.

One school representative explained the success of the Hub:

Students vote with their feet. It is not compulsory to attend. Many other students (including non-Aboriginal) would like to attend.

2.2.1 Participation and relationships

People across the community participate in programs at the Opportunity Hub. Key strengths of the Hub are the relationships between staff and students, community members and others. There are strong relationships between Hub management and workers with young people, consortium and the community. The Hub works with students, schools and other services to support young people. When needed, staff from the Hub have helped parents relate with schools. In some cases, the Hub can help students by referring them to other services. Strong relationships make it possible for Hub workers to support community members to negotiate with other support organisations.

Relationships

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub has a whole of community approach to supporting the child. It works through cultural connection, supporting the child and their family, engaging with schools, and linking with employers.

There are strong relationships between Hub management and workers with young people, the consortium and Aboriginal communities. The Hub works with students, schools and other services to support young people. When needed, staff from the Hub have helped parents relate with schools. In some cases, the Hub can help students by referring them to other services and supporting community members to negotiate with other support organisations.

The Hub is successful because of the commitment, responsibility and obligations of these relationships.

One **Elder** described how the Hub offers parents a place to:

... go to discuss problems their kids are having.

They said the workers give their full attention and work with the child. They described how in previous generations parents would not come to the school, and although the stigma is still there, the Hub was -

slowly but thoroughly closing that gap.

In the co-design workshop participants described what he observed as a direct positive outcome from the Opportunity Hub that filled a gap between families and schools. Where schools had failed to engage with families, the Hub was able to bridge that gap.

There's an immediate outcome, you know, rather than – the parents and the community who have had lack of engagement probably from the education

system – I will say that – someone who works with them. That’s – and I see that is a question you’ve got in here, that’s why I’m sort of half talking about that – that’s one of the things. That’s the obvious gap that in this community that the OpHub fulfils.

☞ The other successful thing I see with it is – now we all know our parents would never ever come to school – some reason that they never mingle with us. My parents didn’t. School was a no-no. And I think that was the – they didn’t encourage that generation into the schools like a lot are starting to do now. And that stigma’s still there.

☞ But with the Opportunity Hub, they’re closing that gap, slowly but very thoroughly, where the parents can’t go to the school but they’ll go to the Opportunity Hub – to LALC or wherever it’s run through, and sit and have a talk, and be able to discuss the problems their kid’s having, because they’ve got that person’s full attention and they’re working with that child, and not only there but within the school as well, but like your son, with my son, my grandson with *Heading Home* – there’s other involvement that gets them interested and gets them out and about and knowing.

The Hub has the flexibility and the network of contacts to support community member needs. Relationships with other service providers support the Hub and these are a key source of support for working together for the community. Several **stakeholders** described how the Hub acts as a bridge for Aboriginal children.

☞ I believe they are pivotal in non-Aboriginal community organisation service engagement with Aboriginal young people and often provide the answers to the tough questions, or provide the link to people and places, that previously were hard to engage.

A **staff member** commented how they are able to work flexibly:

☞ ...But you know if we can't fix a problem, we refer it on to our partners, whether it be Tamworth Family Support, or even if they're not our partners, we can ring – get others to help.

It was also noted that the Hub consortium did not include government services, which could have some interest in supporting Aboriginal children in the community. The only relationship with government was reported to be with Aboriginal Affairs NSW. One participant said:

☞ and [AA representative] and Aboriginal Affairs [NSW] would be the exception to the rule, because they are the funding body², so of course there's an immediate relationship. But that was already there.

☞ Have we got education really on board with this? I doubt it and I'm saying that as the [person's position]-as well. Have we got Health or Juvenile Justice or what other? Police, FACS, have we got them on board? That's the reality.

² Training Services NSW (NSW Department of Industry) manages the funding of Opportunity Hubs.

Community stakeholders recommended that the Director, Public Schools for the Tamworth area should be involved in the Opportunity Hub consortium, to encourage more schools to fully engage with the Hub.

Participation

Community participation in the Hub extended beyond being involved in programs. Many people volunteered to work at the Hub. Hub workers, community members and students could volunteer. Many Hub workers also volunteered in their time-off. In the co-design workshop we heard how Hub staff and community members worked together.

- The service providers will knock off at five o'clock, they go home. But we're still here ...
- Who's going to clean up, who's going to put the chairs out. Little jobs, but they're the essential things to making community things happen.
- Exactly or Midnight Basketball, [volunteer's name] out there or [volunteer's name] who is 71 and stuff like community members.

2.2.2 Impacts and outcomes of the Hub

We heard there were positive impacts for **students** and **community members** from participating in Hub activities. A broad range of **participants** told us these included:

- Students' positive cultural identity and increased confidence.
- Benefits for students at school.
- Benefits to young people leaving school and engaging in employment, training or further education.
- Helped students become more engaged, develop their skills and gain Aboriginal cultural knowledge, through cultural programs such as the Coolamon project.
- Benefits to the wider community.

One parent viewed the importance of the Hub as a place where people develop and sustain relationships with their community. **Another parent** explained their child had been involved in Hub activities and then began volunteering:

- The Hub helped him gain knowledge and experience needed to be successful in any field of work.

Another **parent** said:

- I've seen his confidence and everything – and his sense of identity – come from doing these cultural activities and mixing with community, which then transfers into confidence in the classroom.

Community members told us that the Hub works well because organisations are working together and there are better services supporting young people in and outside school. Schools themselves are more sensitive to Aboriginal students.

We heard of some **positive outcomes** from the Opportunity Hub:

- ☐ There is a higher rate of Aboriginal students graduating due to cultural sensitivity from school staff.
- ☐ I just know that the Opportunity Hub is there to assist younger people to access opportunities to gain further education and employment.
- ☐ Yes, as a member of a school community I have worked closely with staff from the Opportunity Hub to assist with the programs they provide in our school. A very supportive service for our Aboriginal students.
- ☐ The success of the Hub had meant that Board has been able to open a trainee position targeted for a Hub participant.

We heard that many people valued the opportunity to develop their cultural identity, education and confidence. We heard:

- ☐ First there's our culture and there's the other. We need both of them together to get anything going, because they've got to have that recognition that came from country.
- ☐ ...the child who is only educated in a school classroom is not an educated child really.

Another parent told us:

- ☐ my son's happier/ I'm happier.

One Elder explained that the Hub:

- ☐ Gives them life skills, what it's like to be out doing what we do. And we've got [a volunteer] here that takes them out on the sites and different things – and that's what they need.

Being involved in the Hub:

- ☐ has made many students start a conversation with their parents and community members about their Aboriginality.

Hub **staff member** told us:

- ☐ I can now say that there are at least 5 to 10 young people who are employed and fully engaged in community programs and events purely from the assistance of the Hub – through Bounce Back, Nestlé programs, traineeships with the LALC and the Hub, and job opportunities with partner organisations.
- ☐ I am now working with young people on projects that they were previously a part of through JSA's (Job Seekers Australia) and the Hub.

Another person told us:

I have personally seen the growth of many young people at the Hub – young people who are now working with me in my role in community, joining committees and engaging in community is what I see the Hub being all about.

School and education

We heard from some **young people** that their experiences at the Hub changed their attitude or helped to support their participation in education.

It changed. Since participating in the OpHub, it encouraged me to stay in school to become what I wanted to be when I wanted to leave in Year 10.

I was getting in trouble and suspended heaps. I'm not now.

Many other students said The Hub had not changed how they about school.

Representatives from schools involved with the Hub were highly supportive. One **Principal** reported that students had '*meaningful learning experiences*' through their engagement with the programs. He said students looked forward to working with the Hub staff.

Another **school staff member** explained:

As a support staff for students attending programs delivered by the Opportunity Hub I believe that the students have come away from the lessons with a better understanding of themselves and their culture. Our students have really engaged in the content being delivered by the Opportunity Hub staff who have been excellent role models for our students. With this in mind, engagement has improved within these lessons and hopefully across all key learning areas.

Benefits to community

People we listened to explained that the Tamworth Opportunity Hub in school does not just supports students – these programs support staff to learn '*how to work within community*'. We heard that the accessibility, flexibility and resources of the Hub have been valuable for schools. School collaboration with the Hub program has been identified as a strength by both staff and students. One Aboriginal Education Officer said the program was successful because it offered a service of culture and confidence that could not be duplicated.

2.2.3 Staff and resources

Staff at the Tamworth Opportunity Hub are highly valued. They are trusted and many volunteer their time beyond their paid hours. As community members, they have wide support among the students, parents and other community members.

We heard repeatedly, from **community members**, the **Hub consortium and government representatives** that the staff are valued and vital to the success of the Hub; as summed up here by a **community member**:

☞ The staff at the Hub make it a success. They are passionate, work together and have ownership over the program. They operate with trust, share information and training, and work with cultural protocols. The staff are good role models.

School representatives also supported and respected the programs being brought into schools, especially the opportunities for young Aboriginal people to connect to Aboriginal culture.

One coordinator of Aboriginal programs at a school said about the Hub staff:

☞ [They are] Good presenters. Highly organised. Flexible. Excellent contacts with other agencies. Willing to support those students most in need. Very good resilience program.

☞ It's the Aboriginal staff that are the champions of the Hub and that connection.

2.2.4 Reporting

We heard from the Hub management committee that the activities of the Hub are reported to the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Council Board (made up of 10 people from across the community), the local community, and to Aboriginal Affairs NSW.³ They felt that the reporting mechanism to NSW Government could be improved and streamlined.

The Opportunity Hub reports to the Board monthly. In addition, the Hub sends out a newsletter to community members and has bimonthly community meetings.

From the Hub's perspective, reporting to NSW Government was not straightforward. They felt that their work did not fit the reporting mechanism. One participant reflected:

☞ What we are doing there [at the Hub] does not fit into any of the boxes that they want us to dropdown with a personal learning plan. But there is some real benefit in ... working with those young people to get them back on track.

We were also told by one **government representative** overseeing the Opportunity Hubs that the reporting mechanism did not adequately describe what was happening. One told us they approached the quarterly reports with the view that the Hub has '*peaks and troughs*' in activity. Primarily they looked for ongoing levels of engagement with community, asking: '*Do they [the Hub] have "buy-in" from the community?*'

³ Reports go to NSW State Training.

Collecting data

People at the co-design workshop discussed reporting and record keeping extensively. Questions were raised about the kind of data to collect and whether record-keeping needs to be the same across all Opportunity Hubs.

We heard in the co-design workshop that the stakeholders wanted the data and reports to really show what was happening at the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. Internal reporting and external reported required different information. As one participant noted:

At the moment we're doing two spreadsheets – theirs and ours.

Reporting should include:

Two bodies of evidence. The hardcore stats... and the sort of stuff ... that is not captured anywhere.

The example we heard was:

Participant One: I think probably a good example of not being able to capture a lot of it, is Midnight Basketball which is run on a Saturday night; and we do that, and the Hub staff are out there, the LALC staff are out there sort of on a rotational basis and ...

[Volunteer 1] will be driving the bus, [Volunteer2] there every week, [Volunteer 3]'s done workshops – there's a whole lot of things, and okay you can count that number as an event – there's X amount of kids in an event; but we're not capturing the conversations that [Volunteer2]'s had with the young person, or there's kids that have left there because they've got issues at home, we've had to go and grab – those type of things.

That's sort of not recorded anywhere, and there's a lot of connection – because we can see it ourselves, now – because I go out and then I feel really old and stuff, but you know – the way they high five you and that sort of stuff – and they're sort of familiar with ...

Participant two: Or they give you a hug, or ...

Participant one: That sort of stuff. So that sort of stuff is not captured anywhere. So, the very clinical side of Midnight Basketball is captured, but not the conversations and the shoot-offs of what we've picked up there and how do you capture that in a report.

Participant three It's that stuff that keeps bringing them back ... How do you capture it?

Tamworth Opportunity Hub provided a number of case studies to the evaluation team. A selection are included in this report in Appendix B.

We heard that the Hub is now keeping their own database to collect information they think is valuable:

- So, we've started our own database; so we capture that, so we know that we've seen Joe Bloggs from Year 5 and this is how many times we saw him each year.
- So, we've sort of started to do that to get some real data around that. We sort of thought that was more important, rather than having stuff just in that last little bit. Because when somebody's in Year 11 and 12 when the Hub started or even now, there's an impact that we can make on those people, but the biggest impact is going to be at this level.
- When did the Hub pick them up – because there's a good – if we only start to report on them on an individual basis in Year 9, they look like they've done a lot; but there's a whole lot of work that the Hub's done with that individual before we actually, start to report on the individual.

2.3 Improvements for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

The strengths of the Opportunity Hub are highlighted in the feedback data we collected from the conversations and the co-design workshop. Through these conversations we also heard about areas where the Tamworth Opportunity Hub can be improved.

- Increase participation through encouraging local schools and Principals to access the Hub activities. The Tamworth Opportunity Hub would like to access schools in the surrounding areas that have indicated an interest in their programs.
- Provide more activities in the community and share information about the Tamworth Opportunity Hub more widely.
- Establish stability of the Hub through long-term government commitment to funding.
- Increase staff support – through training and resources.
- Provide ideas for how the Hub can be even more successful.
- Improve engagement with all levels of government departments, agencies (Local, State and Commonwealth), and service providers (both government and NGO) – apart from Aboriginal Affairs NSW. NSW Government departments (Housing NSW, NSW Health, NSW FACS, and NSW Justice) work more closely with the Opportunity Hub and their programs.
- Support a holistic approach to young Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing.
- Develop reporting and evaluation mechanisms that reflect communities' views of what is important.

2.3.1 Support for participation in the Opportunity Hub

We heard that there were some ways the Hub might be improved. There were some challenges to how the Hub functioned within the school environment.

Building the relationship between the Opportunity Hub and the school is critical to the success of the Hub. Principals decide if students can access the Hub at school. One **government stakeholder** also noted, in relation to all Opportunity Hubs:

Because that's really, I think where the big challenge is.... the willingness of schools. Because from the school's point of view, it's about letting people come into the schools. It's about being flexible around their timetabling or whatever. Releasing kids to go off and do stuff. And wanting to ensure that what they do and what the Opportunity Hub does is complementary.

Regular student attendance and consistency in staff were the two other areas which might be improved. One **school representative** told us that staff changes can be disruptive to the program, and it was important to maintain stability. This is particularly important for transitions; from Primary to High School and from school to employment or higher education. Also, student participation can be affected by school activities. One Hub staff member commented that:

Students self-select when they will attend [the OpHub]. They do not attend if they have a test on, assignment due, double prac (two practical lessons for a school subject), or it's the beginning of a new topic.

One **school representative** was very positive and wanted more access to the Hub for their students, saying:

We could have our OpHub contact here a lot more!!

This view was echoed by the **students** who suggested there could be **more activities** inside and outside school. They also wanted more one-to-one time with Hub staff.

Most parents wanted more knowledge about the Hub and what it was doing. Some thought the activities might be better advertised.

2.3.2 Increase resources and support for staff

We heard that several factors have impacted on the implementation of the Hub and its success. **One stakeholder** told us that improvements to the running and sustainability of the Hub could be addressed through:

Resourcing, eligibility and boundaries.

This was in reference to the stability of funding, staff and program security, facilitating opportunities for all young people and allowing the Hub to work where there is an identified need. Another stakeholder explained:

Funding reallocation at a state/Commonwealth level would be better spent in a Hub style service for Aboriginal communities that is community owned and operated.

The Tamworth Hub is going far and beyond their responsibilities to deliver on other programs that do not meet their intended needs and provide a service that other organisations purely do not understand how to deliver.

We heard many times that Hub staff volunteer hours after work. As members of the community Hub staff fulfil their role after hours, unlike other service providers. There was some discussion about this and that there should be recognition of staff obligations

to their community – and how this can be supported through recognition and additional resources.

2.3.3 Improve reporting and data collection

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub **management committee** said that it was important to set up and establish more appropriate reporting. One person said:

I was – we were thinking about doing a longitudinal study of us engaging with the schools now, and like [another speaker] said, you're not going to see results until the end – like from the Year 5s, you're not going to see results until you keep working with them.

They explained that sharing information gave a better understanding of the Hub and the Hub activities. Information was collected but not passed on to government, as reflected in the following comment from a **Hub participant**:

We capture it, but we don't sort of really feed it up. We give them numbers, now, but of non-Aboriginal kids, or we'll report on – we've started to stick in there because we believe it's relevant to – but that's not what they're asking for. So if you look at it through a straw in isolation, and just give them what the department's asking for, there's a lot of stuff not being captured.

3 Discussion and recommendations

3.1 Is the Tamworth Opportunity Hub being implemented as intended? What is working well? What could be improved?

Community members told us they thought the implementation of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub was a success. The management of the Hub by an Aboriginal organisation with existing relationships with other services was a contributing factor to that success. Additionally, we heard that the commitment of the Aboriginal staff helped the implementation, because they had the trust of the community.

The Hub has successfully implemented opportunities for cultural, employment and educational activities, working toward the long-term goals.

3.1.1 What is working well?

We heard from a range of people that the Opportunity Hub in Tamworth is operating well. Students, parents and schools involved said the program is *great*. The students enjoyed taking part in different activities and felt more connected to their Aboriginal culture and community. The schools involved are very positive about how the program is run and the value for their students and wider school community.

The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, management committee and staff, and government representatives, also view the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and their activities as a success.

Much of the success of the Hub is attributed to the commitment and skills of the staff.

3.1.2 What could be improved?

There are several challenges to the operations of the Hub. In Tamworth, the successful reputation of the Hub has meant demand exceeds supply. More people would like to access the activities of the Hub. This places a considerable burden on staff and volunteers and they work beyond their contracted hours, creating a risk of 'burnout'.

Other factors that could be improved are the tender process and short-term funding cycle. This cycle makes it difficult for the Opportunity Hub to plan in the long-term and is a source of concern for community as there is a history of successful programs being de-funded.

Challenges to the implementation and ongoing success of the Hub include access to schools, and liaison with key service agencies. As an external organisation delivering a program within a structured school environment, the Hub relies on school staff to allow student participation. School-Hub relationships are key to the success of the program.

Currently another area for improvement is getting key agencies involved in service delivery to Aboriginal children and families to engage with the Opportunity Hub.

3.2 Do outcomes continue to reflect what the community wants to achieve?

Young people, parents and stakeholders, including Principals, the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council and other community members are very positive about the Opportunity Hub. The Hub was addressing key concerns of Aboriginal communities, parents, carers, teachers and others involved with young Aboriginal people.

Young Aboriginal people are engaging and attending Hub activities, in school and outside of school. Activities support their Connection to Culture, and other training and sporting opportunities. The Hub continues to successfully support students' transition from Primary to High School, and into further training, education or employment.

Importantly the Hub is providing opportunities for community involvement for young Aboriginal people and others in the community, supporting young people in the region.

The ongoing conversation with communities through the *OCHRE* Evaluation can support community participation and involvement in the Opportunity Hub. For example, through the co-design, conversations and feedback processes, there are opportunities for communities to express their views and to 'talk back' to policy makers (Walden et al, 2014).

3.3 Are *OCHRE* policies and practices responding to evidence?

There have been minor changes to the reports submitted to the Government in terms of students reached and programs delivered. The evaluation found that data collected to date is being used for contract compliance. However, the data captured had limited use for the evaluation.

Government has indicated that it will wait for the results of the evaluation to inform future Opportunity Hub policy. In 2016, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs approved the extension of the agreement for Opportunity Hubs until 31 March 2019. This extension was given to align with the first stage of the *OCHRE* Evaluation, allowing for evidence to be reviewed before any decisions are made and to allow time for consultation with Aboriginal communities on implementing evaluation recommendations.⁴

At an operational level, the evaluation found that the programs and services were being adjusted to individual, school and community needs based on feedback from clients, schools and the Consortium.

⁴ Source: correspondence with Training Services NSW

3.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on what we heard was working well and what could be improved.

Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resource provision from NSW Government. • Resource sustainable and effective staffing levels for the Hub. Staff changes can be very disruptive to the program and to the progress and support of individual students at the Hub. • Identify corporate/business partnerships that could support expanded range of Hub programs.
Role and value of community volunteers to the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers are important to the success of Hub programs and their contribution needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation. • Give official recognition to volunteers and provide more resources to support and train them.
Professional career and training support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Services NSW and NSW Department of Industry to increase training and professional development of Opportunity Hub employees. • Aboriginal Affairs NSW to provide more support and skill development for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal school staff.
Stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government to engage and work more with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal organisations to respond to their identified needs.
Engagement with NSW Government and NSW Government agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve, expand and require engagement with the Hub from NSW Government departments other than Aboriginal Affairs NSW – for example, FACS, Juvenile Justice, Local Health Districts (LHDs), Primary Health providers and networks, NSW Department of Education – to support young Aboriginal people.

Theme	Recommendation
Access to Tamworth Opportunity Hub programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the Regional Director of Education in the Steering Group to facilitate the engagement of more schools in the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. • Increase access to programs by including more schools in the area surrounding Tamworth. • Identify opportunities and mechanisms to increase the number of local schools involved in the program. • Expand the capacity of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub to work with more local schools. • Include young people who have left school and young people who are disengaged from school as eligible participants in Hub programs.
Range of activities conducted by the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support increased staff numbers to provide more activities in the community, including one-to-one time with Hub staff.
Promotion of the Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about the Opportunity Hub more widely across the Tamworth region, and with services working with young people.
Data collection and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve data collection (without placing additional administrative burden on Opportunity Hub staff). • Record peoples' stories in visual formats to present to others. • Start capturing individual data earlier, not just from Year 9 but from Year 5 or the moment of first engagement. • Track outcomes over the long-term. • Capture wider Hub activity data and demonstrate student engagement, community involvement and connection to culture. • Improve reporting mechanisms to capture the relationships and conversations. • Improve the reporting and evaluation mechanisms to adequately and meaningfully describe what happens at

Theme	Recommendation
	the Hub and include individual and community capacity outcomes.
Community determined measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change reporting to reflect community measures for the success of the Hub. • Measure to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and type of Aboriginal community involvement. • Level and number of students engagements – identify cohorts. • Connection to Culture. • Specifically identify and include wellbeing indicator outcomes such as building self-esteem and cultural identity into reporting and evaluations.
Tendering process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change and improve the tendering process to provide long-term security to the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and Tamworth Aboriginal community members. • Make tendering more collaborative between government and Aboriginal community members and organisations, focusing on developmental and capacity support for Aboriginal inclusion.

4 Future focus – next steps

4.1 Stage 1 of the *OCHRE* Evaluation

This is community-controlled research. The evaluation team listened to community feedback on the draft report and amended it, without compromising the independent findings.

This is the final report for Stage 1 of the *OCHRE* Evaluation for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.

The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council has accepted this report. The report will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (on 30 June 2018) and will then be presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

The evaluation team have drawn lessons from all *OCHRE* sites evaluated and will present a Synthesis Report to NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA), with recommendations for the NSW Government. The evaluation team has conducted the same process of validation with NCARA about the synthesis report.

4.2 Direction of next conversations – Stage 2

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021 will identify changes experienced by the participating communities, including a focus on identifying Aboriginal determined long and short-term outcomes and a process for refining, contextualising and prioritising community determined recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024 will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and outcomes and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

Part B:

About *OCHRE* and the Tamworth Opportunity Hub

5 OCHRE Opportunity Hubs

5.1 About OCHRE

POCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) is a community-focused plan for Aboriginal people in NSW. *POCHRE* was developed by the NSW Government in response to conversations with over 2,700 Aboriginal people in NSW who identified Aboriginal language and culture, education and employment, and accountability as priorities for Aboriginal communities.

POCHRE includes several different programs and supports:

- **Connected Communities** where schools work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders in the local community to improve education outcomes for young Aboriginal people.
- **Opportunity Hubs** which provide young Aboriginal people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education.
- **Industry Based Agreements** with industry to support Aboriginal employment and enterprise.
- **Language and Culture Nests** to revitalise and maintain languages as an integral part of culture and identity.
- **Local Decision Making** where Aboriginal communities are given a progressively bigger say in what services are delivered in their communities, and how they are delivered.
- An **Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework** that drives the long-term and sustainable economic prosperity of Aboriginal people and their communities across NSW.
- A **Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs)** to improve transparency and accountability in the provision of services to Aboriginal communities and the outcomes they deliver.

The overall objective of *POCHRE* is to transform the NSW Government's relationship with Aboriginal communities in NSW, allowing Aboriginal communities to increase ownership of the policies and programs that affect them, and to ensure that government services are coordinated and effective.

The aims of *POCHRE* are to:

- Teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people's pride and identity.
- Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school.
- Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs.

- Grow local Aboriginal leaders' and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions.
- Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment.
- Make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend (*OCHRE*, April 2013, p.3).

Evaluation is a key component of *OCHRE*, providing ongoing evidence to improve the effectiveness of *OCHRE* projects and outcomes into the future, and informing the NSW Government about the future expansion of *OCHRE*. This evaluation includes Opportunity Hubs, Local Decision Making (including Regional Industry Based Agreements), and Language and Culture Nests. Two sites for each program are part of the evaluation.

5.2 What is an *OCHRE* Opportunity Hub?

As stated above, Opportunity Hubs provide young Aboriginal people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education.

Opportunity Hubs aim to provide Aboriginal young people with the confidence and knowledge to follow a supported pathway between secondary school and further education and/or employment. To achieve this outcome, Opportunity Hubs are building partnerships between schools, employers, education and training providers and the local community to coordinate and match employment, training and further education opportunities to individual students' aspirations.

Non-government Opportunity Hub service providers have been contracted to coordinate and broker links with schools, employers, training providers, support services and Aboriginal communities, to deliver improved outcomes for Aboriginal young people, including increased:

- participation and retention at school
- aspiration and expectation of career pathways for Aboriginal students
- post-school enrolment in further education and training, and
- placement in sustainable jobs.⁵

Opportunity Hubs are funded by the NSW Government; they were established under *OCHRE* by Aboriginal Affairs NSW and State Training Services (now Training Services NSW). Opportunity Hubs are managed by Training Services NSW (part of NSW Department of Industry) due to their experience in delivering similar pathway programs across the state and their work in Aboriginal employment and training. While other pathway programs look at re-engaging young people in education or employment,

⁵ Aboriginal Affairs NSW *Bringing Aboriginal voices into policy making*
<https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/policy-reform/economic-prosperity/opportunity-hubs>
Accessed May 29,, 2018

Opportunity Hubs focus on retaining young people in school and directing them towards further education or employment through clear pathways. The Opportunity Hub model was developed in consultation with community members specifically for *OCHRE*, drawing on experience of career education and vocational education placement programs funded by both Commonwealth and State agencies.

The four pilot areas (Upper Hunter, Campbelltown, Dubbo and Tamworth) were established to fit within the allocated funding.

While the initiative has overall objectives, and there are expectations of basic activities the Opportunity Hub delivers, how each Hub meets the objectives is not prescribed and is determined locally based on need. The program was conceived as something where *'the organisations managing it would be outside the school reaching in'* where the organisation *'had the relationships with the community and with industry and were reaching into the schools'*. The program is available to students in government, Catholic and independent schools. However, as one government stakeholder noted: *'It became a challenge for each of the service providers to get out, identify the schools they need to work with, and to ensure their active participation'*.

In March 2018, the Australian and NSW Governments announced the expansion of Opportunity Hub model as part of the Western Sydney City Deal (Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, 2018) – establishing a new Opportunity Hub in Liverpool and an expansion of the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub. It is important to note that whilst the Western Sydney City Deal refers specially to an expansion of the Campbelltown Hub, this expansion relates to all four existing Opportunity Hubs including Tamworth, Dubbo and Upper Hunter.⁶

5.3 How Opportunity Hubs were established

The information in this section was sourced from information provided by Training Services NSW, conversations with government staff, as well as publicly available reports on the consultation and reporting process related to *OCHRE*.

5.3.1 Tender process

The NSW Government had a two-stage tender process to contract a suitable Opportunity Hub provider. The first stage was to seek expressions of interest (for Tamworth, completed end 2013); suitable applicants were then invited to submit a detailed proposal which was then assessed against a number of criteria (for Tamworth, completed March 2014).

⁶ Source: Correspondence with Training Services NSW

5.3.2 Selection of sites

Opportunity Hub sites were identified and selected because they have strong Aboriginal leadership, a significant number of Aboriginal students, employment opportunities, non-government and business sector support, career champions and mentors, as well as Vocational Educational Training or tertiary education providers. Community members were consulted to ensure they wanted an Opportunity Hub.

5.3.3 Duration and nature of the agreement

The '*commitment to Opportunity Hubs is ongoing for the period of the pilot with a renewal on an annual basis*'. That is, Opportunity Hub contracts last three years, with annual funding; however, the contracts from March 2015 to March 2017 were renewed in 2016 by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs until end of March 2019 – well ahead of the contract expiry. This extension was given to align with the first stage of the OCHRE evaluation, allowing for evidence to be reviewed before any decisions are made and to allow time for consultation with Aboriginal communities on implementing evaluation recommendations.

5.3.4 Monitoring, evaluating and reporting

All Opportunity Hubs provide quarterly reports to Training Services NSW, and additional reports as required. Reporting requirements were developed based on the conversations had with communities in each of the Opportunity Hub locations. This information is reported as a whole in the *CHRE* annual reports.⁷

Quarterly reports are provided to Training Services NSW on progress with service implementation (a written report against the plan) and against six performance indicators (numerical data):

1. Establish and enhance close and productive working relationships with schools supporting growing participation by Aboriginal students.
2. Establish and enhance productive partnerships with relevant employers, universities and other post-school education and training providers, government agencies, and community groups and other non-government organisations.
3. Develop, co-ordinate and broker programs and opportunities to raise the motivation, aspiration and participation of Aboriginal school students in the later years of primary school and the early years of high school.

⁷ Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *CHRE* Annual Reports available at:
<https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/our-agency/staying-accountable/ochre/ochre-annual-reports>

4. Develop, coordinate and broker sound individualised career planning, work experience and mentoring for Aboriginal students and integration within the students' learning plans.
5. Accurately monitor and track young people in Years 9-12 and following the completion of secondary school.
6. Provide frank and accurate reports in accordance with the contract requirements.

Quarterly reports are made on templates provided by Training Services NSW. The data is used to monitor activity to ensure the Opportunity Hub is delivering on the range of activities under the agreement. They enable Training Services NSW to seek clarification if needed before making payments. Data is also reported back to Aboriginal Affairs NSW as part of overall reporting for *OCHRE*. The Opportunity Hub produces other information to Training Services NSW as required.

One government stakeholder commented that while the reporting had been simplified from the original requirements, it is still input driven. They noted – *'there may be some limits to the extent to which the good outcomes that are being achieved are being seen'*.

Opportunity Hubs provide information to Training Services NSW on both the programs delivered, as well as detail of intensive one-to-one support provided to students. This is captured in an Excel spreadsheet. Students engaged intensively by the Opportunity Hub are tracked using their NSW Government student number. Information collated includes:

- School attended and current year of enrolment (updated each year) and their current educational status.
- Whether the student has participated in any Opportunity Hub coordinated activities.
- Whether there is any career transition planning in place.
- Whether there is an Opportunity Hub Career Plan in place and whether this is linked to a learning plan (responsibility of the school).
- How involved their parent or carer is in their career and learning planning.
- Whether they Opportunity Hub provides mentor support, and who it is provided by.
- Whether they receive additional academic support.
- Whether they have received work readiness preparation (from the school or the Opportunity Hub).
- Whether they have had work experience.
- Whether any employment, apprenticeship or training has been secured independently or through the Opportunity Hub.

- Whether students have been referred to wrap-around services.
- Any comments on the students' progress.

Note that information is not captured about the intensity or frequency of support, when the student joined or left the Opportunity Hub services, or any characteristics that would identify impact the program has had.

The information captured currently, and the way that it is captured, is not able to identify or attribute outcomes for students. Therefore, this evaluation has relied on conversations with students, families, school and Opportunity Hub staff to identify the impact the program has had to date. We understand that Opportunity Hubs have regular conversations with Training Services NSW about the data that is and isn't captured and we would recommend a process of co-design to ensure that the data captured meets the needs of the community, the Opportunity Hub team, and the NSW Government.

5.3.5 Governance of Opportunity Hubs

Opportunity Hubs operate within the *OCHRE* Accountability Structure. Twice a year, Training Services NSW convenes a meeting attended by staff from all four Hubs. Training Services NSW manages the contracts of Opportunity Hubs.

Each Hub has a slightly different governance structure depending on their individual circumstances.

6 The Tamworth Opportunity Hub

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub opened its doors in March 2014 and is run by the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council. Based at 123 Marius St, Tamworth the Opportunity Hub coordinates and matches training and career opportunities with Aboriginal students, providing incentives to finish school and transition into tertiary study and sustainable jobs. The Opportunity Hub works closely with community, schools, industry and employers, tertiary institutions and other NGOs to deliver cultural; career aspiration, education and planning; resilience and confidence building; and life skills programs and activities. As at August 2017 there are 35 schools participating in the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.

6.1 How is the Tamworth Opportunity Hub organised?

The overall design of the Opportunity Hubs was part of a broader community consultation in 2012 (see *Getting it Right*; Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2012). Local adjustments are made through local governance structures – each of which is tailored to the local community and environment. In Tamworth:

- The Tamworth Opportunity Hub currently has four employees, three of the team (and two trainees) were previously supported by the Opportunity Hub when they were students.
- The Opportunity Hub Consortium (a governance group), made up of key stakeholders in the local community (schools, government and non-government organisations), meets every two months.
- The Tamworth Opportunity Hub reports to the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council every month and the local community every two months.
- The Tamworth Opportunity Hub provides a bi-monthly newsletter.

6.2 How is the Opportunity Hub resourced?

The Opportunity Hub is resourced under the contract on an annual basis, increases are based on indexed costs advised by NSW Treasury. The funding is managed by Training Services NSW.

The contract funding does not include in-kind support from volunteers or staff working more hours than they are paid, or contributions made by other stakeholders in terms of either time, resources or other financial assistance (for example, the Midnight Basketball program, now called Bounceback, is funded by the Commonwealth Government).

6.3 How is the Opportunity Hub being used?

6.3.1 Tamworth community profile

A *Community Portrait for the Tamworth Opportunity Hub* has been prepared by Aboriginal Affairs NSW, including the most recent 2016 Census data (see Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2018). This provides an overview of the local population, households, income, education (participation in school by age), and disability for the Tamworth area. Just over 10% of residents in Tamworth Opportunity Hub area identify as having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origins, with unemployment higher for the Aboriginal workforce (16%) than the non-Aboriginal workforce (5%). Of 2,700 Aboriginal residents, 14% (825) are under five years old, 17% (1,049) aged between 5-11, and 14% (826) aged 12-17. School attendance is slightly lower for Aboriginal children between the age of 5-14 (92%) than for non-Aboriginal children of that age (96%).

7.3.2 Schools participating in the Opportunity Hub

In terms of the number of schools participating in the Opportunity Hub since 2014, the quarterly reports show:

- An increase in Government schools participating (from 12 to 18 government schools), with an increase in engagement from mid-2016.
- A decrease in Catholic schools participating (from 4 to 2 Catholic schools)
- An increase in Independent schools participating (from 2 to 3 Independent schools).

7.3.3 Students participating in the Opportunity Hub

The number of students participating, and the way they participate, varies by school Year.

- In Government schools, this varies between 7 and 678 Year 5-8 students per quarter, 4 and 483 Year 9-10 students per quarter, and 4 and 84 Year 11-12 students per quarter. However, in each period of reporting, there is some engagement across each age group in Government schools.
- For both Catholic and Independent schools, in some reporting periods all age groups are engaged, in other periods only one or two. For Catholic schools, engagement is 0 to 45 students per quarter for Year 5-8 students, 0 to 35 for Year 9-10, and 0 to 13 for Year 11-12. For Independent schools, engagement is 0 to 35 students per quarter for Year 5-8 students, 0 to 23 for Year 9-10, and 0 to 4 for Year 11-12.

There are large number and variety of programs offered by the Tamworth Opportunity Hub which affects the age group of students engaged over the period. Appendix A provides an example of programs delivered in Tamworth, and their reach, extracted from their June 2017 Opportunity Hub quarterly report.

This report belongs to the Aboriginal Communities of Tamworth.

As noted in Section 6.3.4 above, reporting is largely input based and fails to capture the value of the Opportunity Hub to individuals involved in terms of increasing confidence, cultural identity and participation. Reporting also does not account for the significant additional contribution of staff and volunteers. This is described in detail in Section 3 of this report.

7 About the conversations

7.1 Who did we have conversations with?

Michael Barnes and four Community Researchers had conversations in community between 31 October and 13 November 2017. The online survey, which replicated the conversation guide, was left open until end of January 2018 to ensure everyone who wanted to could tell us what they think.

- Community researchers yarned with 72 community members, including 23 students, 45 parents and community members, and 11 non-government stakeholders.
- Michael Barnes had conversations with the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Opportunity Hub Consortium and staff, government stakeholders and School Principals.
- In addition, 2 parents/community members and 7 stakeholders completed the online survey.
- SPRC evaluation team held a co-design workshop.

7.2 What sorts of information did we collect

The evaluation team collected different sorts of information:

- What people told us in conversations either face to face, by telephone, or anonymously through an online survey.
- Information (data) about how the Opportunity Hub is used (reported to Training Services NSW).
- Other publicly available information about the community (ABS data).

This gives us the most up-to-date information about what the Opportunity Hub.

7.3 How did we come up with these findings?

The evaluation team collected community views to answer the research questions. This involved looking at each conversation and identifying common themes and, in some cases, unique differences. The themes, and examples of what people told us, are presented in the findings – in text in italics, or as indented text (highlighted orange).

7.4 Checking and confirming findings

SPRC evaluation team returned to community (19-20 March 2018) to check our findings and recommendations reflect what the community told us. The draft report was circulated prior to meeting. It was an opportunity for community representatives to tell us if we misunderstood anything, or if they agreed with what we had written. Feedback from the meetings has been incorporated into the final report.

8 References

- Aboriginal Affairs NSW (2012) Getting it Right: The Findings of the Round Two Consultations for the NSW Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/pdfs/OCHRE/Getting-it-Right.pdf> Accessed May 2018.
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- Aboriginal Affairs NSW (n.d. a) Bringing Aboriginal voices into policy, Opportunity Hubs <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/policy-reform/economic-prosperity/opportunity-hubs> Accessed May 29, 2018.
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- Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (2018) Western Sydney, City Deal <https://cities.infrastructure.gov.au/22446/documents/72483> Accessed June 6, 2018.
- Walden I, Dennis B & Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party (2014) Aboriginal people 'talking back' to policy in rural Australia *Journal of Indigenous Social Development* 3:2.

Appendix A Summary of report validation process

Date	Action	Comments
28 March 2018	Draft report and draft summary sent to Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council	N/A
19/20 March 2018	Draft presented to Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council (TLALC) and Consortium Partners	
5 April 2018	TLALC	Approval for the final report to be presented to NSW Government
April/May 2018	Revision to report (content)	
April/May 2018	Revision to report (format)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of a one-page table summarising findings • Addition of one page prior to summary about what is community controlled research • Addition to summary of what the <i>OCHRE</i> program is • Change of recommendations in the summary to table form • Change of format to quotes from participants into orange highlight and call out sign • Other minor changes to identify who is speaking (bolding of community members and students, parents and carers) • Small editing to reduce repetition and ensure consistency within the report and across the reports
June 2018	Revised report to communities	Purpose to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm changes requested • Final sign off
15 June 2018	Approval for publication	
30 June 2018	Report to Aboriginal Affairs NSW	
15 August 2018	Presentation to the Minister	

Appendix B Examples of Opportunity Hub programs

Examples of programs delivered by the Tamworth Opportunity Hub, reported to Training Services NSW as part of contract compliance for Quarter end June 2017. Note this is a snapshot of activity and does not show participation in the entire program – only for the 3-month reporting period. This extract shows the number and diversity of programs run by the Opportunity Hub.

Table 1 Tamworth Opportunity Hub programs

Program	Schools participating	Students Years 5-8	Students Years 9-10	Students Years 11-12
1. Gomeroi gyaangaal - Art canvas for NAIDOC	3 government	25	16	
2. Skills Analysis	2 government	11	1	
3. Coaching young people for success	1 government		6	
4. Art Mural	3 government	27		
5. Revision and Yarn Up	4 government		26	1
6. Bro Speak - Managing the Bull	2 government	11		
7. Revision and bullying survey	2 government	4	3	
8. Deadly Tucker	1 government	1		
9. Finding and responding to a job ad	2 government	3	8	
10. Connecting to culture	3 government	19	5	
11. Identity	1 government		5	
12. Crime prevention	3 government	3	1	
13. Intensive cover letter and resumé	7 government	9	22	3
14. Cultural connection – Dancing the story	1 government, 1 catholic	20 gov 40 Catholic		
15. Bro speak – Code of conduct	2 government		6	2
16. Communication	1 government	14		

Program	Schools participating	Students Years 5-8	Students Years 9-10	Students Years 11-12
17. Gamilaraay Language sharing	1 government	10		
18. Team building activities	1 government	10		
19. Healthy relationships	3 government	11	4	
20. Traditional Aboriginal games	1 government	11		
21. Nail the interview/portfolio checklist, interview role play	3 government	10	19	
22. Aboriginal dance	1 government	11		
23. Language – Winambuu card game	2 government	16		
24. Setting boundaries	1 government	10		
25. Coaching young people for success	2 government	16		1
26. Feeling deadly, not shame – self-confidence and esteem	1 government	10		
27. Drug and alcohol awareness	3 government	9	14	
28. Time management	1 government	13		
29. Aboriginal business focus	1 government		6	
30. Portfolios	2 government	5	2	
31. NAIDOC theme – our languages matter	1 government	10		

Appendix C Case studies

The following case studies have been provided by Tamworth Opportunity Hub.

Case Study: Work experience

The Tamworth Opportunity Hub arranged a week of work experience for STUDENT A at the ABORIGINAL ORGANISATION in late August. STUDENT A's interest in Aboriginal Health was identified through her aspirations interview with Hub staff and she was linked with the ABORIGINAL ORGANISATION.

STUDENT A's week involved assisting staff facilitate and make recordings of an arts workshop with community members and Elders; learning about pathology collection; assisting with community recruitment to the ABORIGINAL ORGANISATION program through ante-natal clinic visits and presentations; taking blood pressures; learning about data and sample collection and record keeping processes; and taking part in the Ultrasound clinic and nutrition interviews.

STUDENT A received some very positive feedback from the ABORIGINAL ORGANISATION staff who said, "what a pleasure it was working with such an enthusiastic young person who showed so much interest in what we do at our centre", and that "she would be an asset to any working team and shows a real interest in Indigenous health". The feedback was a confirmation of the validity of the Opportunity Hub's aspirations interview as a tool in pinpointing students' interest areas.

Case Study: Volunteering

STUDENT G, a year 9 student, actively participated as a volunteer in our School Holiday Program. STUDENT G started the week as quite a reserved student, but throughout his volunteer role with the holiday program he has blossomed, coming out of his shell and boosting his self-esteem quite significantly. From a young man who preferred to stick with his younger brother and sister at the outset, we have seen him become more confident, engaging well with a wider group of children and the SPONSOR ORGANISATION team.

Case Study: Traineeships

STUDENT K had been using the assistance of the Opportunity Hub to apply for a school-based traineeship in her area of interest. STUDENT K long-term goal is to either work for a local health service or to join the Army as a nurse. STUDENT K is currently finishing Year 10.

While applying for the school-based traineeship we were pleased to support STUDENT K as she applied for and was successful in gaining some part-time work as a pharmacy assistant at a local pharmacy. The first step towards her future career.

Post script: STUDENT K has subsequently successful in gaining her school-based traineeship with HEALTH SERVICE. As part of the school-based traineeship she is working towards a Cert III in Business Administration – Medical. We are so proud of STUDENT K.

Case Study: Industry/Tertiary Pathways

STUDENT N is a student with significant literacy and numeracy problems who has been receiving support from the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. After undertaking career planning with STUDENT N we identified his strong interest and aptitude in mechanics.

Through our partnership with TAFE New England's Aboriginal Education and Training Unit, STUDENT N was placed in a Certificate II Autobody course this term and is receiving one-to-one numeracy and literacy support. It is expected that STUDENT N will successfully transition to the Certificate in Mechanics course next year. Most importantly, STUDENT N reports how much he enjoys his course and the experience of attending TAFE and is fully engaged in his educational pathway again.

Case Study: Troubleshooting

The Opportunity Hub has been working at a local Public School for two months with a focus on sportsmanship. To teach respect through good sportsmanship Hub staff have been coaching team sports. Before the Hub started the school were having difficulty with student behaviour during team games as the same captains always got chosen and then when teams were picked it was singling out the best and the "worst" students.

The Opportunity Hub's program has set firm boundaries regarding the rotating of captains regardless of skill level and ensuring equally able teams, and team games have become much more enjoyable and regularly end in a draw. When the Hub used to arrive, they would assist the students to get the games ready, but now the students have the games set up when we arrive, and they are showing a strong awareness of fair play by nominating captains who haven't already had a turn.

Feedback from the school's AEO has been excellent. She says that the interpersonal displays of sportsmanship and fair play are also spilling over to the classroom and the playground.

Case Study: Intensive support

STUDENT T is a Year 12 student who is living out of home in a share house with his friend and his friend's older brother. STUDENT T began attending the Opportunity Hub through his association with his friend and now drops in many afternoons a week after school.

Whilst being a likeable young man, STUDENT T presents with very poor diction and is difficult to understand. He hasn't confided his whole back-story to Opportunity Hub staff, but we are aware through his friend that STUDENT T has been "kicked out" of home while other siblings of his remain living at home, and that he displays few household living skills in his share arrangement, who say that they feel like he treats them like his parents, picking up after him and doing most of the household tasks.

The Opportunity Hub are taking the opportunity to work with him on achievable steps and have made arrangements for him to assist as a student volunteer with the next School Holiday program in July under the guidance of the SPONSOR ORGANISATION volunteers. Relevant SPONSOR ORGANISATION staff have been briefed on STUDENT T's situation and will not only provide mentorship during the school holiday program but will attempt to provide STUDENT T with some more general guidance and feedback on his goals, aspirations, strengths and weaknesses.

The Opportunity Hub has also provided STUDENT T with help to attain his birth certificate, a tax file number and membership of the Tamworth LALC, which will be important identification for his future. Meanwhile intensive weekly support is focused on trying to provide STUDENT T with the parental support and guidance that he is missing out on due to his family situation.

Case Study: Employment support

STUDENT X completed Year 12 last year and has been receiving assistance from the Opportunity Hub to apply for numerous jobs within the local industry and business sectors. STUDENT X has applied for quite a number of positions and been knocked back to date but has earned the respect of the Opportunity Hub team for her attitude in applying over and over again and not letting the knock-backs get her down.

This month, STUDENT X managed to set an unofficial Opportunity Hub student record by attending three interviews in one day. On this day STUDENT X attended an interview for the AGRICULTURAL SECTOR at 11am, an interview for a Trainee Business Support position at LOCAL GOVT at 11:40am and another interview at RETAIL STORE at 2pm. She has also applied for a Business Traineeship this month. At the time of writing STUDENT X has been successful in gaining employment in the AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. We wish her well.

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