

Case study:

Monitoring and Evaluation in Minyerri Community Families Learning Together, 2015-2017



In 2015, ELP received funding from the Communities for Children initiative to deliver 'Families Learning Together' in Minyerri Community over two years. The project worked alongside parents and caregivers to develop the parenting skills, knowledge and confidence they require to support their children's wellbeing at home and in the community.

An impact measurement framework was co-developed in the early stages of the project by members of the community, ELP and CommunityWorks consultant Steve Fisher. The framework was designed to bring everyone along in the journey to monitor and evaluate the project together. This case study explores that journey...

In the Beginning: Setting the Impact Framework

In August 2015, a group of Minyerri women sat down with Steve, Lil and Sarah to share their vision for how 'Families Learning Together' (FLT) could be established in their community. Discussion centred around what positive differences the women wanted to bring about in the community through FLT activities.

The outcomes did not take long to define and later in the week we spent time working out what the indicators should aim to achieve as well as the means of measurement. Little did we all know then that most of the women present on this day were to become central to the organisation and delivery of FLT over the next two years.

The final version of the impact framework is to the left including Kriol translations:

Table 1. Impact Framework

Outcomes <i>(the differences that the project will make)</i>	Indicators <i>(how do we tell that we've made a difference?)</i>	Method of measurement <i>(how we collect information to measure the difference)</i>
Biginnini fil gud en jidan strong bala blanga olabat history en kultur blanga olabat femili en komyuniti. Children will feel a stronger connection to the history and culture of their family and community	30-40% of Children will say they have a better connection to the history and culture of Minyerri.	Survey of a group of regular child participants in the activities and a group who do not participate
Biginnini jidan gud bala en gud binji blanga olabat ron selp. Children will have greater confidence and self-esteem	30 – 40% of Children will say they have better confidence and self-esteem	Survey of a group of regular child participants in the activities and a group who do not participate
Mami an Dedi sabi ola biginnini gin dum gud bala ting iya la Art Centre blanga album olabat wuligim dei gin gro en len gudwei. The community, especially parents, will know about the good things kids can do at the Art Centre, that will help them grow up well.	40% of Parents will know that children can come to the Centre to do good activities, instead of gambling or fighting, etc.	Survey of a random group of parents in Minyerri
Pipul sabi olabat blakfela wei, hau bla titjim dei biginnini bla sabi en lenim mowa. People who know traditional skills will teach and share their knowledge with younger people	40% of Parents will know that children can come to the Centre to do good activities, instead of gambling or fighting, etc.	Records and reports of the work of the Centre
Femili jidan gud binji blanga olabat komyuniti. Families will feel better connected to their community.	30-40% of Families will say they feel better connected to their community	Survey of a random group of adults (could be the same group as above)

For a more in-depth discussion of the impact framework, refer to 'Sabi weya wi garra gu- knowing where we are going' by Fisher and Tait, 2016



Over the next 6 months, Families Learning Together ran a series of activities working towards these outcomes. Activities centred around Alawa Culture, local bush foods, marketplace activities for kids and healthy lifestyle workshops with Sunrise Health Services.

February 2016: Collecting Baseline Data

Lil and Steve returned to Minyerri Community six months later to begin the project of gathering baseline data. The same committed women; Agnes Wilfred, Esther Wilfred, Samara Billy and Phelecia Daylight, had been managing the space and running activities over the past 6 months and were keen to take on this new project of Monitoring and Evaluation Research. The group decided on the title of 'Aboriginal Community Researchers' to establish their role in this next phase. We discussed the steps that we were going to take in gathering the baseline data and wrote these on the whiteboard so everyone could track our daily progress.

Timeline

The first step, to get everybody speaking easy and relaxed, was to draw a giant timeline on pieces of butchers' paper laid out across a long table. The timeline is a practical hands-on storytelling tool that draws on the expertise of local



community members and gets the group to reflect on changes over time ending at where they are today.

In this exercise, ACRs traced the journey of the 'art centre' from a residential house, to partial art centre, to derelict building and on to the vibrant community centre it is today, including the list of activities currently taking place under FLT. The

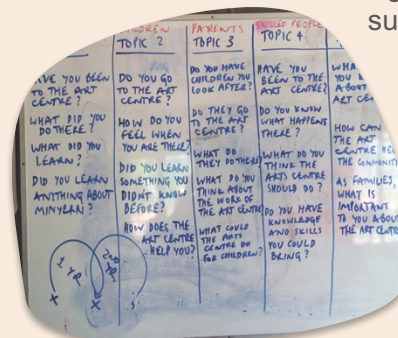
result was a clear path filled with different actors and organisations, lots of discussion, laughter and the easing into the task ahead.

Everyone could see the progress that had been made. Discussion focused around what the next sheet would say? In other words, looking ahead, what do we want to achieve and how will we know we have done so?

The answer to this is given by the impact framework (table 1). We discussed whether everyone thought the outcomes were still relevant. After agreeing unanimously that they were, it was time to move on to figuring out how we were going to collect information.

Defining Survey topics

To break up the task of collecting data against all the indicators, each indicator became its own topic area. The purpose of this was to encourage conversation around the topic rather than a straight question-answer survey.



We prepared a set of sample questions under each topic based on their target audience. For example, to gain an understanding of

whether children have a better connection to the history and culture of Minyerri (topic 1), a question to a child could be "What have you learned about Minyerri?"

Four – five guiding questions were developed for each topic and ACR's were taught about the art of interviewing, including for example how to start the interview, how to use open-ended and non-guiding questions and how to draw more information out of people's responses.



Interviewing the community

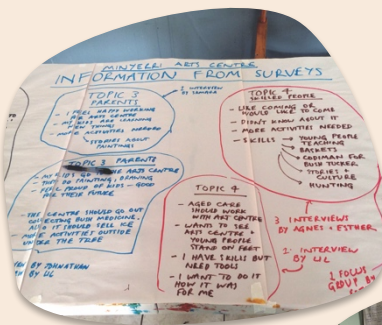
The Aboriginal Community Researcher's decided to focus on one topic area each and went out into the community to begin. After every interview,

ACR's came back to the

centre to report back. Steve and Lil wrote the answers on butchers' paper in clusters of topic area.



At 20 interviews, we thought we had a reasonable sample size for the baseline study. It was then time to work out what the information was telling us.



Analysis

Once we had all the interview responses laid out in front of us, we started to notice patterns in what people were telling us. We took four more pieces of butchers' paper to start writing down what we could see were the *trends*, *key messages*, *new ideas*, and *exceptions*.

Results

Key Messages:

- Parents are happy kids are coming
- Kids are learning
- Skilled people

Trends:

- Lots of activities are happening
- Kids are busy
- Skills need tools
- Learning about Minyerri
- Old people don't know about the Arts Centre
- Parents and kids happy
- Keeping kids safe
- People want more activities

Exceptions:

- Art Centre openings
- The directors
- Art Centre mob as teachers
- Kids treated equally
- Trust

New Ideas:

- Hold activities under the tree
- More activities for men and boys
- Teach story telling
- Celebrations and events
- Get RJCP involved
- Aged Care involved
- More bush trips
- Teach Alawa

Statements of Impact

- Art Centre is making a difference
- Progress towards all aims
- It's clear what work needs to be done
- We made a good start



Year in-between

The baseline data gave us a good indication of where the community wanted FLT to focus its efforts on for the following year. Along with holding more activities outdoors, Families Learning Together needed to engage more Elders, men and boys and CDP workers to have a greater impact on the wellbeing of children and families in Minyerri, from the community's perspective. Community members also suggested activities such as storytelling, teaching Alawa language, community celebrations, outdoor activities / bush trips as strategies for working towards the agreed outcomes. Table 2 is a summary of the activities facilitated in the year following the initial data collection.

Table 2. Activity focus areas February 2016 – February 2017

Focus	No. of activities	Project outcome
Elders and Storytelling: Working with Elders in the community to facilitate yarning circles; storytelling through skill-share activities (such as bush dying, weaving, painting and lino print)	8	1, 2, 3 & 4
Wellbeing Bush Trips	5	1 & 2
Men/boys; activities included a boys-only cook-up and painting session and a cultural picnic and talk led by respected male role model in community	2	4
Community celebrations; involving exhibiting the community's latest art & cultural projects, collaborative cooking workshops and speeches	5	1, 2, 3, 5
Alawa Language; involving launching (and using resources from) the Alawa Colouring-in book of Alawa animals and learning Alawa translations of songs	2	1, 4, 5
Parenting and Life Skills; involving focus groups, parent/teacher picnics, art and cultural-based activities that enable peer learning and support, cooking, nutrition and budgeting workshops	13	3
Children: Art based play; activities that engage children's creative thinking, decision making skills and fine-motor skills	12	1, 2 & 3
Health and life skills; cooking workshops with focus on nutrition and hygiene, girls' menstrual health focus groups led by mothers from the community, supported by Sunrise Health, kids marketplace activities teaching basic economic literacy skills	9	1, 2 & 3





March 2017: Secondary data collection

We came together again in March 2017 to begin the process to find out how the project was tracking against the outcomes. Our team of Aboriginal Community Researchers re-formed, with Agnes and Phelecia from last time and new members Kirsten Wilfred, Edith Farrer and Louise Wunta.



Revisiting the baseline data collection

We started by doing another timeline, retracing the history of change as well as focusing on what had been happening in the past year.



Agnes and Phelecia took turns recounting the research process from last year, teaching the others in Kriol. We revisited the outcomes and indicators and found they continued to be relevant for the community.

We wrote up the topic areas on the board, along with the guiding questions and ran through the hot tips we remembered for doing good interviews.

Increasing sample size

We wanted to increase the sample size of people interviewed to get a broader sense of what impact FLT was having on Minyerri Community. Over the week, we managed to get 50 interviews without giving the ACR's too much "bustemup brains". Effort was put into getting interviews from a range of people from around the community. Facilitators drove ACR's to different localities to extend the reach to those who didn't live next door to the art centre.



Results

Key Messages

- Positive space where parents and kids are happy
- Centre recognised as a learning space
- People want regular activities with a cultural focus

Trends

- Lots of activities happening, kids are busy
- People are learning here, teaching going on
- People want more teaching and learning
- People like
 - o The variety of things going on
 - o How activities bring people together
 - o Encouragement
 - o Something interesting to do
- Not everyone comes, mostly only people who live close
- People enjoy cultural activities and want more
- Elders teaching respect
- People who didn't come still know what's going on

Exceptions

- People aren't offering their skills or help to support what's going on
- Safety
- Teenagers don't come 14-23yr olds, not mentioned in surveys
- Parents don't realise they are needed for activities – to manage the kids

New Ideas

- Movie night
- Cultural outdoors activities like camping, corroboree, dancing, carving, hunting, traditional cooking, language
- Bring art centre to life
- Teach more skills

Statements of Impact

- Continued progress towards all aims
- More kids are coming
- There's more work to do in engaging the rest of the community, particularly adults



What does it all mean?

Similarities

- People recognise lots of activities are going on and that kids were kept busy doing positive activities
- Both parents and children continue to learn new things
- Everyone continues to enjoy and want more cultural activities
- People wanted more outdoors activities and bush trips

Differences

- In the baseline data, Elders didn't know what was happening at the Art Centre but in the secondary data collection they reported knowing what was happening, even if they didn't go themselves.
- In the baseline data, ACR's noted that their role as teachers was not mentioned from interview responses however in the secondary data collection there was a clear appreciation for the education they were teaching the kids
- More emphasis on parents' absence in the secondary data collection. This is interesting because when you look at the data, there had not been a decrease in parents' participation. Rather it could reflect the significant increase in children attending events, making it difficult for community-based facilitators to manage the large groups without their parents' support.



Major Findings

- Cultural activities were the most popular
- Activities were viewed as positive, interesting and good for children
- Both parents and children learned new knowledge and skills
- Activities were becoming more recognized within community as time went on, evidenced by higher participation numbers
- The process of doing participatory Monitoring and Evaluation with Aboriginal Community Researchers was a fun and interactive way of enabling community members to better understand and take ownership over the project

Numbers

Number of children involved in the FLT activities:	111	Number of Adults:	49
Number of girls and Women:	81	Number of Boys and Men:	79
Total number of people involved in the activities	160	Population of Minyerri	441



Post Research:

After the research was completed in February, Families Learning Together continued for another 4 months. During this time, activities focused on the ideas and recommendations that emerged in the latest round of data collection seen in table 3.

Table 3. Activity focus areas March – June 2017

Focus	No. of activities	Project outcome
Cultural Activities: Including the launch of the 'Young Makers Project' a series of activities led by local Elders and master crafts people that involved the revival of traditional carving in Minyerri, as well as weaving and bush medicine workshops, based in Minyerri and on Country. These activities were hugely successful in engaging men from around the community who hadn't previously attended activities.	8	1, 2, 3 & 4
Parenting and Life Skills; involving working with Families as First Teachers to develop care packs for new mothers using donated goods and focus group on how to continue family and child activities post FLT	2	3
Community celebrations; including movie nights, cook-ups and photo-book exhibitions	3	1, 2, 3, 5
Children: Art based play; activities that engage children's creative thinking, decision making skills and fine-motor skills	1	1, 2 & 3
Health and life skills; cooking workshops with focus on skill development, nutrition and hygiene, Minyerri's got Talent themed school holiday program with fashion shows, tightrope walking and games aimed at building confidence, encouraging peer support and teamwork	4	1, 2 & 3

While Families Learning Together has ended, the community plans to continue running cultural activities for parents and children in Minyerri, with the support of local service providers.

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To find out more about the project, contact Laura Egan on 0406 351 508 or laura@elp.org.au

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