Gift of Gallang: Evaluation

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MISSION AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgments

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
CfC	Communities for Children: Ipswich to Inala
CoH	Committee of Hope
COAG	The Council of Australian Governments
CoAPMC	Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
DET	Department of Education and Training
DOHA	Department of Health and Ageing
GoG	Gift of Gallang
IW	Inala Wangarra
MA	Mission Australia
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan

Executive Summary

In 2018 the Gift of Gallang was implemented in a local primary school in Inala for the first time. This represented the culmination of a three-year journey of ongoing community engagement and collaboration, which included the formation of the Committee of Hope and the development of community engagement activities such as cultural nights. The need for creating hope, resilience and wellbeing in the community of Inala was evident after a cluster of youth suicides occurred in 2016. Creating a community where children had a strong sense of culture and connection framed the Gift of Gallang activities with the long-term aim of reducing risk of suicide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

This work was supported by partnership between Mission Australia, and several other key stakeholders, including Inala Wangarra, local Elders, other Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander community and health organisations, and a local primary school. Mission Australia also funded evaluation of the processes involved throughout this work in order to document key learnings. Data was collected from members of the Committee of Hope, facilitators, educators, parents and carers. Before data collection Ethics approval was obtained through the Mission Australia research team as well as the Queensland Department of Education for data relating to school staff, children and families.

Findings

The evaluation findings focused on three key areas of partnerships, community engagement and ownership, the implementation of the school-based program and program outcomes. A summary of some of the key findings are provided below. A comprehensive outline of key findings is provided in Section 4 of this report.

Partnerships

- Many of the involved stakeholders had pre-existing partnerships, connections or awareness of other stakeholders, in particular with the program coordinator as well as with Mission Australia Communities for Children (CfC) staff.
- The strength of the relationships the program coordinator built with stakeholders was seen as a fundamental reason for the successful collaboration between the community organisations and school involved.

- Committee of Hope members felt that all relevant services had been invited to be part of the Gift of Gallang. Organisations with stronger connections to the local community were more likely to dedicate time and resources to be involved.

- Committee of Hope members also indicated that they felt they had ample opportunity to participate in development of the Gift of Gallang through regular contact (meetings, emails, phone calls) enabling them to provide suggestions and feedback.

- Measures were taken to ensure the content developed for the school-based program was culturally appropriate and informed either by experts, Elders or evidence on what is regarded as best practice.

- The upskilling of facilitators of the school-based program was seen as a strength as this resulted in capacity building of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members currently employed in local services.

Suggestions for improvements on partnerships recognised that this had been a pilot program, that emerged in response to community need and had been a learning process. Feedback for improvement focused on having clear documentation of roles, responsibilities and expected resource investment for any organisations wanting to engage in future.

Community Engagement and Ownership

- Community consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families impacted by youth suicide were conducted prior to establishing the Committee of Hope and the Gift of Gallang program.

- The majority of Committee of Hope members and all of the Gift of Gallang school-based program facilitators were local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

- Regular cultural nights were established to facilitate community engagement and provide opportunities to provide information and obtain input and feedback from community members.

To maintain this as an ongoing process, the continuation of the Gift of Gallang and the cultural nights were viewed as paramount by Committee of Hope members, however, it was also acknowledged that this will require ongoing funding and a continued position for a program coordinator.

School-based Program Implementation

School Staff Perspectives

- Several accommodations were made by the school in order to ensure the Gift of Gallang program could be implemented during school time. This included engagement of staff and

families, making links to curriculum and modifying assessment tasks to align with the Gift of Gallang content, and co-ordinating classes across three different grade levels amongst others, and scheduling facilities for Gift of Gallang use.

- Significant resource investment was provided by the school, including administration support, staff time to develop the curriculum and assessment resources and the provision of two staff members to support the Gift of Gallang facilitators. Classroom facilities were made available for the weekly sessions and the hall was provided for the final showcase of student learning.

- The local connections, knowledge and skills held by the Gift of Gallang program co-ordinator and facilitators, as well as the commitment and reliability demonstrated, were viewed as being important factors for the success of the pilot.

- Challenges were expected given Gift of Gallang was a pilot program, and included the short notice of the start date of the program and some changes to the week by week planned structure. Additionally, short time frames to follow Department policy around obtaining permission slips for excursions was also reported as an implementation issue.

- School staff reported that students demonstrated high levels of engagement in the Gift of Gallang sessions, as well as the final showcase, as demonstrated by attendance, lack of behaviour referrals, as well as comments made to staff by students.

Parent and Carer Perspectives

- Parents/carers expressed having little knowledge about the Gift of Gallang prior to commencement, apart from a letter which was received from the school which provided some information and a consent form to enable children to participate.

- Not all parents/carers were aware of the cultural nights that were being held in addition to the school-based program, despite feeling well connected to the Inala community.

- A lack of parental support for events held throughout the school-based program, such as a smoking ceremony, was noted with the suggestion made that more information about the program and what it was trying to achieve at the start, along with key dates, may have encouraged more parents/carers to attend as well as provided them with adequate time to take leave from work if required.

Program Outcomes and Opportunities for Future Directions

Gift of Gallang Facilitator and School Staff Perspectives

- Gift of Gallang facilitators noted a sense of students being embedded with a stronger cultural identity, a sense of belonging, and awareness that they were cared about by community members as a result of the program.

- Both facilitators and school staff were able to provide examples of where they either directly observed or were informed about instances where students had recalled knowledge or skills learnt throughout the program.

- Other impacts noted by school staff included a sense of improved student self-esteem, embracing of culture, strengthened relationships between students, staff and families, and the pride at an individual, family and broader school level.

- An unexpected outcome was the higher rates of school attendance, including from students with typically high absentee rates.

- Suggestions made by school staff included ensuring sustainability of the program and broadening the scope so that students receive it multiple times, refining timelines to avoid changes during implementation and providing all required consent forms in an initial information pack to parents/carers.

- Future considerations noted by school staff included wanting to ensure students transferred knowledge into their everyday lives, wanting to maintain the stronger connections made with parents/carers moving forward, and incorporating measurement of longitudinal impact by tracking social-emotional outcomes over time using tools available to state schools.

Parent and Carer Perspectives

- Parents/carers generally viewed the Gift of Gallang as aligning with their beliefs around the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children having strong connections to culture and community and the role these play in fostering wellbeing and resilience.

- The Gift of Gallang was seen as providing an opportunity for children to either be more aware of and strengthen their connection to culture or as an opportunity to express and confirm their prior knowledge and experiences of culture.

- All parents/carers felt building wellbeing in their children was important and had strategies that they used for this including discussing values, ensuring children know cultural knowledge, spending time together as a family, and modelling wellbeing behaviours. Because of these pre-existing strategies, parents/carers did not feel children's discussion of wellbeing increased as a result of Gift of Gallang participation.

- Positive impacts were noted, however, including increased confidence and help seeking behaviour, increased school enjoyment and relationships with school staff, and use of wellbeing strategies learnt throughout the program.
- Suggestions moving forward, included improving transparency of the program content and staff involved so that families can make informed decisions about the cultural fit of the program, including more parents/carers from the school community in initial consultations, and having further involvement of the Yuggera Elders to distinguish between customs and protocols of the traditional land custodians of Inala and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The importance of embedding culture and wellbeing into daily life and actions was also noted.

Common themes emerged across interviews with Committee of Hope members, school staff and parents and carers. Overall, the program was viewed as being successful in strengthening cultural identity, pride and a sense of connection for families that attended cultural nights and students who participated in the school-based program. Perceptions that the program needs to stay within ownership of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to continue to be successfully embraced by community were also strong. Concerns were held across about funding sustainability of the program with recognition that long-term impact requires a broader scope than a one off program in a singular primary school.

Recommendations

Recommendations based on the findings inform areas relating to processes involved in the development of partnerships, community engagement and ownership, the implementation of school-based programs, as well as providing considerations for future evaluation. A summary of the recommendations is provided below, however, more detailed recommendations are provided in Section 5.

Partnerships, community engagement and ownership

1. Adopt co-design approaches to community consultations, program development, implementation and evaluation, with ongoing governance and ownership of programs being placed within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.
2. Include provision of support to developing a planned approach to acquiring ongoing funding to increase the likelihood of sustainability.

3. Plan for flexible timeframes which enable the building of trusting relationships, connections and genuine collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, as well as ensuring the involvement of appropriate staff.

4. When initial collaboration results in a plan to develop school-based programs, additional community consultation should occur which specifically targets the families, parents and carers of students attending participating schools.

Program Implementation of School-Based Programs

5. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be developed for use between partnering organisations and schools involved in the delivery of the GoG, or similar school-based programs, outlining timeframes, roles, responsibilities and contributions.

6. Preparation of facilitators and school staff involved in the delivery of GoG, or similar school-based programs, should include cultural sensitivity awareness to ensure cultural safety for all participants.

7. Comprehensive information should be provided to parents and carers of students invited to participate in GoG, or similar school-based programs, which provides transparency of key dates, program content and who will deliver it, to increase family engagement and ensure cultural safety.

Future Evaluations of School-Based Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

8. Establishing partnerships between Mission Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers along with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop and implement evaluation on GoG, or similar programs, to ensure methodology is culturally appropriate and follows local protocols will strengthen future work and contribute towards building the evidence base on effective suicide prevention programs.

9. Establish timeframes for pilot program implementation and evaluation that allow adequate time for any external ethics approvals required, which also enable appropriate engagement strategies and relationship building with potential participants.

10. Explore partnerships with the Department of Education and Queensland based state schools for longitudinal tracking of student social-emotional wellbeing after participation in school-based prevention/intervention programs.

These recommendations provide an opportunity to build upon and strengthen the framework and strategies used to establish partnerships, community engagement and ownership for Gift of Gallang moving forward as well as providing points of consideration for refinement of implementation and

evaluation processes. These recommendations may also have application to any similar bodies of work undertaken by Mission Australia in the future.

The risk of suicide nationally for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people currently remains much higher than the broader population, with estimates for children aged 14 years and younger being 8 times more likely to suicide than non-Aboriginal peers (Beyond Blue, 2016). While the risk of suicide remains so high, the importance of dedicating further funds towards implementing programs such as the Gift of Gallang and evaluating them in order to determine what is effective in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing should remain a national priority.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the development and implementation of the Gift of Gallang (GoG). Establishing and/or strengthening genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and organisations in Inala was a critical component of the process involved in conceptualisation and development of GoG. This is also in alignment with the Mission Australia reconciliation action plan (2017). As a result, the process evaluation focuses on the ongoing development of these partnerships in addition to the successes and challenges encountered in the process of conceptualising, developing and implementing the GoG. The evaluation will also provide some preliminary insight into whether the outcomes of the program were met and where there are opportunities for strengthening the program and measurement of outcomes further moving forward.

2. The Gift of Gallang Program

2.1. Background

The Gift of Gallang (GoG) emerged in response to Communities for Children – Inala to Ipswich, Mission Australia and other key community groups identifying a need in Inala for a prevention program to foster resilience and wellbeing and reduce risk of suicide within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The wellbeing of individuals and families had been significantly impacted in the Inala region as a result of several deaths by suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. There was concern held within the community that additional suicide attempts may occur, with children as young as 8-11 years of age having expressed suicide ideation.

Communities for Children – Inala to Ipswich (CfC, Mission Australia) committed to fund the development of a program that would respond to this community need. A best practice framework was developed by the Mission Australia research team in order to guide the work and ensure cultural appropriate approaches and strategies were embedded. The CfC Cultural worker began consultation with key local based organisations and community members in late 2015. This consultation was considered critical for the initial identification and engagement of key stakeholders. A co-design of the program with key community stakeholders was required to ensure the approach was culturally appropriate and to increase the likelihood of positive, sustainable long-term outcomes of improved wellbeing for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The initial consultation led by the CfC Cultural worker resulted in the development of the Committee of Hope. The Committee of Hope consisted of several key stakeholders (see Figure 1) who oversaw the initial development of the GoG. The CfC Cultural worker was an integral part of the co-ordination between stakeholders, and in the development of the GoG program. During the development of the GoG, the CfC Cultural worker began working at Inala Wangarra, a local not for profit community organisation that is owned managed and staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is a key stakeholder in the local community. Inala Wangarra aims at enhancing and strengthening community capacity through delivery of a range of programs, including education, sport, health, cultural and arts programs amongst others. They were already active as members of the Committee of Hope before the CfC Cultural worker began working there.

Figure 1: The Committee of Hope Stakeholders

Given the importance of her role, CfC saw the continuation of this as critical and recognised the opportunity for the GoG to sit firmly within an Indigenous organisation. The staff member was well recognised as the program co-ordinator for the GoG and this role continued across the change of employment between organisations. This resulted in two main backbone support organisations for the GoG – Mission Australia, who continued to provide funding, facilitation and guidance through

CfC as well as the Mission Australia research team; and the local Indigenous organisation Inala Wangarra.

The Committee of Hope worked in consultation with the program co-ordinator (former Cultural Connect worker at CfC) via regular meetings and frequent email or phone communication. Mission Australia research team members were involved in a consultative role, including the production of a best practice document which outlined risk and resilience factors identified in research for the use of the Committee of Hope. This process led to developing the overarching purpose and aim of the program, being to develop a prevention strategy that would prevent suicide and suicide ideation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the community though healing the mind, body and spirit of children and their families.

2.2 Program Components and Program Delivery

To achieve this aim, two main components of the Gift of Gallang were established (see Figure 2), one being ongoing community engagement via cultural nights and the other a school-based prevention program targeted at primary school aged children (Years 4-6). Cultural nights were selected as a mechanism to ensure ongoing community engagement, allowing for ongoing relationships to be built between the Committee of Hope and the community. It was envisioned that these cultural nights could be used for communication between the Committee of Hope and community members, as well as to build community capacity and relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children and community organisations. It was also expected that collaboration between attending Committee of Hope members on the cultural nights would help strengthen partnerships between community organisations, and that referral networks would be strengthened.

Figure 2: Core Components of Gift of Gallang
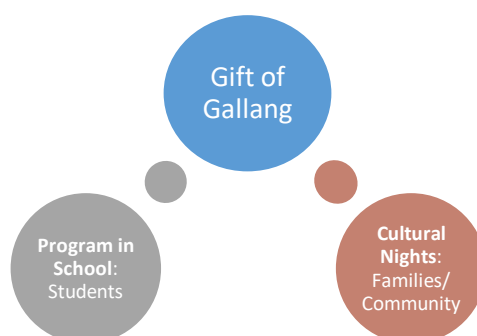
The Committee of Hope also sought to identify effective evidence-based strategies that could be incorporated into a school-based wellbeing program. Early prevention was considered key, hence the

decision was made to target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Grades 4-6 with an expected age range of 9-11 years. Given the potential age of children and the school-based context, it was decided that no reference to suicide or suicide ideation would be made, as this is not considered best practice or age appropriate. Instead, the program was framed around a strengths-based approach, with a focus on healing mind, body and spirit through cultural connection and self-determination.

The Committee of Hope contributed to the content and format of the program, which ran for the first time in Term 2 of 2018 in a local primary school. This primary school was an active member of the Committee of Hope. The program duration was initially planned for one hour across ten weeks, however, this was adjusted to fit across nine weeks due to a conflict with a previously planned school excursion. The start date for GoG was not set until the final week of school holidays between Term 1 and Term 2 which contributed to the conflicting schedules.

The school made accommodations so that the program could run during class time and ensured it also backed onto a lunch break, to allow for additional flexibility. Other accommodations included making space available and providing the significant investment of a staff member developing links from the GoG to curriculum across each grade level. This was to ensure students were still provided opportunities to demonstrate learning across key learning areas and were not disadvantaged academically.

The facilitators that delivered the sessions were local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, purposefully selected by the Committee of Hope. Some of the facilitators received additional training to build their capacity and ensure appropriate delivery of evidence-based content. This was provided by an organisation called Pathways to Resilience who deliver training and/or programs which foster social and emotional wellbeing and resilience of children and families. The training provided by Pathways to Resilience focused on how the brain works, identifying emotions, self-awareness, self-regulation and emotional resilience.

A summary of the content delivered each week is presented in Table 1. Overall, content aimed to provide students with strategies to foster social and emotional wellbeing, as well as a strong connection to community and culture, and confidence in their self-determination. Activities were embedded in the program which would allow the students to create and develop objects that had cultural significance to them which they could keep as a reminder of the experiences after the completion of the program. These included designing and painting a pair of shoes and a set of clap sticks. Students were also involved in developing a rap by recalling words with significance to them

from throughout the program. An artistic facilitator then helped students to shape these words into a song, which formed part of a final showcase.

Table 1: Weekly Topic for Gift of Gallang – School-based Program

Week 1	Cleansing and healing ceremony
Week 2-4	Emotional regulation; understanding the brain
Week 5-7	Identity, spirituality and connection to land
Week 8	Grief and loss
Week 9-11	Strong community: review of program content and working towards the Showcase

In addition to the scheduled weekly program, some facilitators returned for a few weeks in Term 3 to work with students during lunch breaks to finalise preparation for the GoG showcase which was held on the 2nd August at the school hall. This event invited the families of students who participated in the GoG to celebrate the learnings and experiences they had as a result of the program. As part of the showcase, students performed a dance and the rap which they had created throughout the duration of the program while wearing the shoes and using clapsticks they had painted.

Acknowledgements were also made at the showcase to Mission Australia, and the work of the project co-ordinator in conjunction with Inala Wangarra, the primary school and other key stakeholders. As an additional follow up activity, a GoG camp was planned for the end of 2018, however, this unfortunately needed to be postponed due to adverse weather conditions.

2.3 Program Documentation and Logic Model

The GoG school-based program was run for the first in a school as a pilot in 2018 and had not yet been formally documented. A basic outline (summary as previously noted in Table 1) was available and more comprehensive documentation was held by facilitators relating to their specific roles and content delivery. This had not been collated into a detailed program/facilitator guide however nor had a logic model been developed. Given this was a pilot and that stakeholders, including the program coordinator, typically held other part time or full-time employment, this type of documentation will take an additional investment of time and funding. Having implemented the pilot GoG school-based program in 2018 allows for the opportunity for reflection, evaluation and refinement of the program moving forward.

There are several potential benefits to establishing this type of documentation:

- Clear expectations of time investment, content, roles and responsibilities for a program coordinator, facilitators, schools, and involved NGOs

- Increased likelihood of program fidelity for subsequent implementations

- Establishing clear links between program content, theory and evidence-based approaches

- Outlining program processes and outcomes, which provides a framework and focus for subsequent evaluations.

This type of documentation is important if the intention is to implement the program in other school settings across the region and may also be relevant for ongoing funding opportunities.

Within a CfC context, there is a requirement to have 50% of funding programs considered evidence-based by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). This process requires extensive evaluation of a program, but also program documentation that clearly outlines the fundamental elements of the program. Examples of documentation provided by AIFS include a full program manual, training manuals, practice guidelines, or session outlines, worksheets or handouts (AIFS, 2019). In addition, for a program to be considered as evidence-based, clear links to theory and/or research are needed. AIFS (2019) notes this may consist of drawing on a theoretical framework or reflecting a broad evidence base about effective approaches for a given target group.

The GoG school-based program is not currently required to submit to AIFS to meet evidence base criteria, however, as previously noted establishing program documentation will be beneficial and worthwhile. AIFS (2019) provides strong guidance on what elements to include. This could be built on to develop program specific evaluation if the Committee of Hope, or organisation leading GoG, required this at a later stage.

Based on observations and data collected during this initial evaluation, a draft logic model has been developed (see Appendix 6). An example of a theoretical framework based on an ecological model is also provided below along with a brief explanation. These should be reviewed and refined as needed by the key stakeholders of GoG.

Figure 3: Ecological Model for Gift of Gallang Suicide Prevention Approach
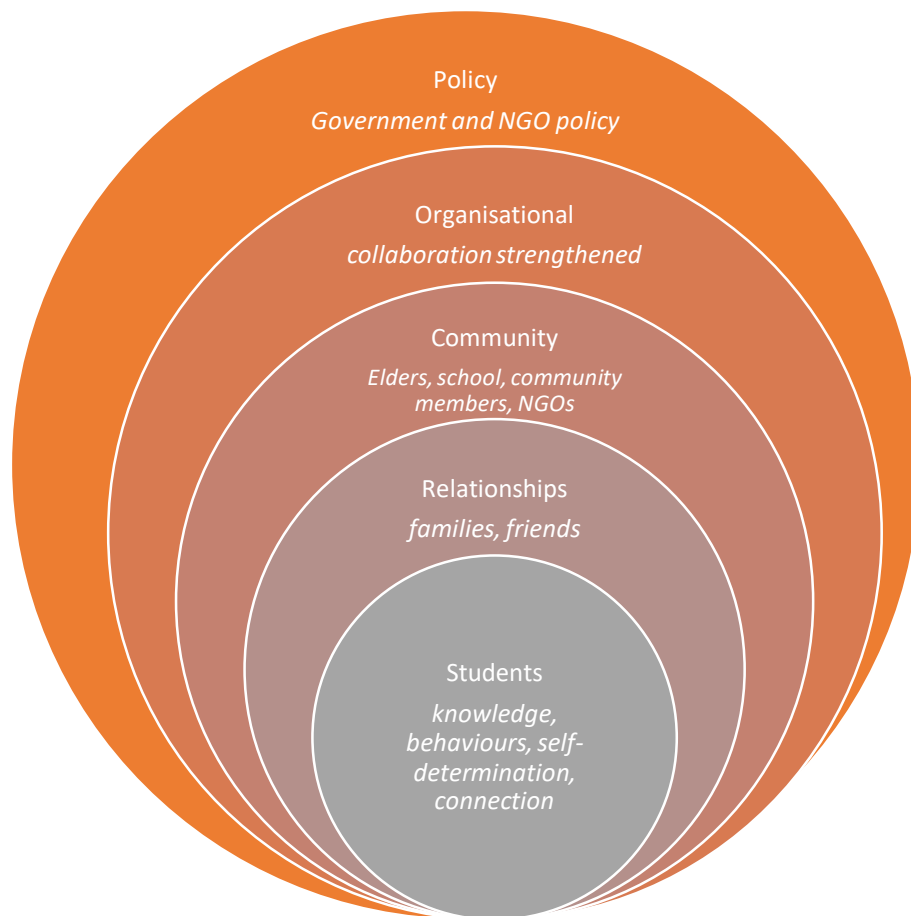
This five-level ecological model represents the complex interaction between individuals (students), relationships, community, organisational and societal factors such as policy. The approach used in the development and implementation of GoG could be targeted at strengthening protective factors across each context. Many of these elements are already implicit in the GoG work and evident through observation of or communication with people involved directly with GoG. Detailed documentation and further evaluation would enable the strengths of the approach to become explicit to all stakeholders, as well as identify which factors need additional focus.

Examples of relevant factors across each context include:

Students

Sense of belonging, sense of self-worth, strategies for social/emotional wellbeing, self-determination, connection to community and culture.

Relationships

Strengthen interpersonal connectedness and intergenerational support, increase parent/carer awareness of social/emotional wellbeing strategies and organisational/community supports.

Strengthen relationships and collaboration between Elders, schools, community members and relevant NGOs. Strengthen relationship of families and students with school setting and staff.

Organisational

Strengthened collaboration and coordinated community support systems and referral pathways; promotion of help-seeking and support; building awareness and trust within the community of services.

Policy

There are several important links to policy, frameworks and guidelines that are relevant to the work undertaken in GoG:

- ***Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan July 2017-June 2019 [RAP]:* Mission Australia**
  - Action Point 3: Mission Australia will develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisation to support positive outcomes
    - Follow community protocols and seek to develop partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
    - Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations we partner with to support the delivery of these programs and services (Mission Australia, 2017, p.9).
- ***Closing the Gap:* The Council of Australian Governments (COAG)**
  - Education
    - Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet [CoAPMC], 2018, p.51)
  - Healthy Lives
    - Close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with a generation (CoAPMC, 2018, p.104).
- ***National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-23*: Commonwealth of Australia (CoA)**
  - Action Area 2: Promote Wellness
    - Outcome 2.1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures are strong and support social and emotional wellbeing

- Outcome 2.2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are strong and supported

- Outcome 2.4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people get the services and support they need to thrive and grow into mentally healthy adults

  - Action Area 3: Build Capacity and Resilience in People and Groups at Risk
    - Outcome 3.1: Access to traditional and contemporary healing practices
    - Outcome 3.3: Mental health and related problems are detected at early stages and their progression prevented (p.16)

- ***National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy*: Department of Health and Ageing (DOHA)**

  - Action Area 1: Building strengths and capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
    - Outcome 1.1: Communities have the capacity to initiate, plan, lead and sustain strategies to promote community awareness and to develop and implement community suicide prevention plans
    - Outcome 1.2: Materials and resources are available that are appropriate for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in diverse community settings
    - Outcome 1.5 Communities are assisted to plan and implement a comprehensive response to suicide and self-harm that includes both short–term and long-term early intervention and prevention activity (DOHA, 2013, p. 26-28)

  - Action area 2: Building strengths and resilience in individuals and families
    - Outcome 2.1 There are culturally appropriate community activities to engage youth, build cultural strengths, leadership, life skills and social competencies
    - Outcome 2.3 Long-term, sustainable prevention strategies that build resilience and promote social and emotional wellbeing are specifically developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children (DOHA, 2013, p. 29-31)

- o Action area 4: Coordinating approaches to prevention
  - Outcome 4.4 Coordinated suicide prevention strategies are supported by improved community sector capacity, based on partnerships between services, agencies and communities (DOHA, 2013, p. 36-38)
- *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*: **Education Council**
  - o Priority areas of Culture and Identity; Partnerships; School Attendance and engagement.
- *Every Student Succeeding: State Schools Strategy 2018-2022*: **Queensland Government Department of Education**
  - o Close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (p.1)
  - o Create inclusive opportunities for all students to reach their potential as successful people (p.2)
  - o Implement the Parent and Community Engagement Framework, as well as engage students, community, business and industry in decision-making (p.2)
  - o Establish strong, innovative and strategic partnerships that expand opportunities and contribute directly to greater student success (p.2)
- *Australian Curriculum*: **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)**
  - o *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages F-10*
  - o *Humanities and Social Sciences F-10*
  - o *Health and Physical Education F-10*
  - o *The Arts F-10* (ACARA, 2018).

By making links to these policies and frameworks explicit, the significance of the work undertaken in the GoG at a state and national level relating to reconciliation, health and education becomes evident.

3. Evaluation Methodology

3.1 Purpose and Approach

Mission Australia and CfC were committed to developing an evaluation framework for GoG, to provide an initial process and outcomes evaluation of the work complemented during the development and implementation of the program. A key component of this is to determine if the partnership approach taken in the community engagement strategy was developed and implemented in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and organisations in Inala. As noted earlier, this approach aligns with Mission Australia's reconciliation action plan (RAP) and is considered a key component for the GoG program to be successful.

Overall, the purpose of the evaluation was to determine any successes and challenges in developing and implementing the pilot program and to identify if outcomes of the program were met. A mixed-methods approach was used. Data collection predominately utilised qualitative methods including interviews and observation, while quantitative methods included surveys and a measure of child social and emotional wellbeing.

3.2 Core Evaluation Questions

Three core evaluation questions underpinned the GoG evaluation:

- Has GoG developed an effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community partnership which facilitates genuine ownership, engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and organisations?

- Has GoG improved the wellbeing of participants and skilled participating children and their families with the confidence and capacity to recognise and support protective factors against suicidal ideation?

- Has GoG increased the knowledge and understanding of mental health (positive and negative) in participating children and families, reducing stigma and improving help seeking behaviour in a sustainable manner?

Factors that facilitated success or created barriers and challenges to obtaining these outcomes were also considered.

3.3 Data Collection

Key stakeholders from partner organisations and members of the Committee of Hope were invited to provide input into the evaluation materials. Once these were finalised, these key stakeholders, including facilitators of the school-based component of GoG, were provided with information sheets and consent forms inviting them to participate in the GoG evaluation. This initially included the completion of a partnership survey at two time points and a focus group towards the end of the program. This approach was refined throughout data collection due to changing timeframes and availability of key stakeholders to one partnership survey, and the opportunity to take part in smaller focus groups or an individual interview. This was to provide flexibility and increase opportunities for people to participate.

The principal at the local state school that the school-based GoG program was implemented in was also provided a letter introducing the evaluation and requesting permission for teachers to complete the SDQ and the evaluator to attend GoG sessions. Information letters and consent forms were also provided for educators of the students involved in the GoG school-based program. It was anticipated that this would occur before the program commenced, however, a significant delay occurred as a result of the program beginning before ethics approval for the evaluation had been granted. As a result, only the final few GoG sessions were able to be attended by the evaluator and a measure that was intended as pre-post data was only able to be collected at one-time point. An additional refinement was made throughout the evaluation so that select school staff were also able to participate in interviews as key stakeholders to ensure that their experience in the process of implementation and outcomes data was collected.

An information night for parents and carers was initially planned to be held prior to Term 2, with the purpose of introducing the GoG school-based program and the evaluation. Parents and carers would have been provided with an information sheet and consent from to read over, as well as have had the opportunity to ask questions before deciding if they wanted to participate in the evaluation. As a result of the program being implemented before ethics approval for the evaluation was granted, this was not able to occur. An opportunity to engage directly with parents and carers about the evaluation did not present until the GoG showcase which was held at the end of the program implementation. The evaluation was not formally mentioned to all the attendees during the showcase, instead some introductions were made to a select number of parents and carers before and after the showcase occurred via facilitators known to them. This resulted in six of the 21 families providing consent on the showcase night, however, the final number of parents and carers that participated was three. This is a major limitation of the current evaluation and may be indicative of

the ad hoc engagement strategy used as this did not allow for ongoing engagement or relationship building with families.

3.4 Measurement

The measurement tools used in the evaluation are listed below along with a brief description:

- Focus groups with key stakeholders (partner organisations) (see Appendix 1). Two focus groups were run, as well as individual interviews for stakeholders requiring this option. The topics covered included:
  - Partnerships
  - Community ownership and engagement
  - Opportunity for additional comments/observations/feedback
- Interviews with select school staff (see Appendix 2). Two interviews were conducted with school staff. Topics covered included:
  - GoG implementation
  - Student engagement and understanding
  - Impact of GoG
  - GoG feedback
- Facilitator Session Reflection (see Appendix 3). This provided facilitators with the opportunity to reflect on the sessions they delivered to help with the evaluation of the program. Areas covered included:
  - Topics covered during session and delivery mode
  - Student social and emotional engagement
  - Student engagement with the session and content
  - Student understanding of sessions
  - Reflection on what worked well or suggestions for improvement
- Mission Australia's partnership survey (see Appendix 4). This brief survey is designed to capture key indicators of effective, positive partnerships between organisations working to a common purpose.
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This is an internationally validated measure of emotional and psychological wellbeing of children within the target age range.

Table 2: Data Available Across Measures

Measure	Number
Stakeholder Interview/Focus Group	6
Semi-structured Interview – Educators	2
Facilitator Session Reflection	1
Stakeholder Survey	3
Parent Interview -Qualitative	3
SDQ - Educator	20

3.5 Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was utilised for the qualitative data obtained from key stakeholders, facilitators, educators and parents and carers. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was taken to allow for the themes to emerge from identified patterns within the data. Given the small number of participants, themes that emerged across data sources have been collated where necessary to ensure confidentiality.

The number of responses and frequencies are provided for the quantitative data collected for the SDQ for this evaluation. As no pre-post data is available for the SDQ data, comparisons are made previously established norms. Involvement in interviews or focus groups was a better fit for participants with smaller numbers completing surveys or reflection forms. Given the small sample size, potential response bias should be kept in mind when considering these results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research methods used for this evaluation were developed and approved by the Mission Australia research team, with additional approval obtained by the Department of Education for the data collection relating to school settings, educators, or students and parents. Part of this process required obtaining signatures of the Committee of Hope members to demonstrate that the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community approved of the research. Informed consent was obtained with all participants being provided information on the research activities involved, that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence to their ongoing relationship with any of the stakeholder organisations. All data has been de-identified and reported anonymously. Given the small sample size involved, identifying details such as age or gender have also been removed where necessary.

3.7 Limitations and Strengths

The focus of this evaluation is on the processes used in the development and implementation of a pilot program. The school-based component of this program was implemented in a school to one composite class group. The sample size is therefore small, and the data obtained is primarily qualitative. Response rates from stakeholders involved such as NGOs, health and education organisations were good for focus groups or interviews, although response was lower for completion of written data collection methods such as surveys. The response rate of parents or care givers to participate in an interview was low with only three interviews completed. This may be a reflection of the timing of the evaluation and/or the methods used, as well as engagement of parents or carers in the initial consultation period and implementation of the program.

This evaluation does not provide any quantitative measures of program effectiveness or program outcomes. While the research plan initially allowed for the collection of pre and post SDQ data, this was unable to be collected due to the timing of the program implementation which began before all necessary ethical clearances were obtained. This resulted in a significant delay in data collection. Despite this, the SDQ data collected still provides some indication of student wellbeing after the program completion and may prove useful if follow up data is obtained at a later time point.

The evaluation methodology was developed in consultation with the Committee of Hope (which consisted of community Elders, and members of local Indigenous organisations). A steering committee was also formed for the evaluation to allow for additional opportunities for input and feedback. It is however a limitation that none of the involved members of the Mission Australia research team or the evaluation consultant identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as this may have ensured additional cultural appropriateness of methods.

Despite these limitations, the current evaluation still provides for insight into the process used in the development and implementation of the Gift of Gallang, as well as some of the facilitators and barriers that were encountered by different stakeholders. It also provides important feedback from parents and caregivers relating to the implementation of the program, perceived benefits and suggestions for improvement.

Given this is an initial trial of a program which was developed in response to community need, the findings of this evaluation provide important insight into areas of strength and opportunities for refinement for the processes utilised in initial engagement, as well as for the current Gift of Gallang program moving forward.

Section 4: Key Findings

This section outlines the key findings of the evaluation. Findings relating to the establishment of partnerships, community engagement and ownership are outlined first, drawing on interview data from members of the Committee of Hope. This is followed by findings relating to the school-based implementation of GoG, which utilises data from involved facilitators, school-based staff and parents. These participants also inform the final section which covers the observed impacts of GoG and suggestions for refinement of the pilot program. The SDQ results conclude this section.

4.1 Partnerships, Community Engagement and Ownership

4.1.1 Partnerships

Many of the members of the Committee of Hope (CoH) and the organisations that provided facilitators to the GoG indicated that they already had pre-existing partnerships or connections with Mission Australia. A key factor for the involvement of all stakeholders interviewed from the CoH was their relationship with the program coordinator, who was the cultural connect work for MA when the GoG consultations first began. This was commonly reported by all stakeholders that participated in interviews or focus groups. This highlights the importance of identifying and selecting the right staff to be involved in engaging in community engagement work, as strong relationships and respect within the community are critical.

The majority of CoH members interviewed had been involved in GoG since their organisation was first invited to become involved. Key points regarding initial engagement raised were:

- Consultation of community families to determine the need for a response such as GoG occurred before organisational invites were extended
- All CoH members interviewed agreed that the relevant community support services were invited to take part into the planning of GoG
- It was noted that not all invited organisations opted to participate
- It was clear that employees of any organisation needed to check with employers to determine the capacity of being involved
- Organisations with a strong commitment and strong connections to Inala, including staff that were locals of the community, generally opted to participate
- The CoH formed by local organisations and Elders consists of the stakeholders that invested from the start, which was almost three years by the time the school-based pilot was completed

- The strong commitment and connection to Inala and desire to create change contributed to stakeholders staying involved across this length of time
- Everything planned out was respectful and culturally appropriate
- While not members of the CoH, experts in the field were also consulted to ensure the program was built on best practice and could meet the needs of students, for example, university professors with expertise in trauma informed practice.

From the organisations that were involved, the interviewed CoH members felt that there had been adequate opportunity for them to have input into the planning process. The first 12-18 months involved initial consultations which got input from all stakeholders on how critical they saw the work and to were able to identify any obstacles and challenges. The project coordinator kept stakeholders informed and involved via scheduling group meetings, emails and phone calls or one-on-one meetings. This enabled them to be updated and to provide suggestions and feedback.

Overall, this process was viewed positively with recognition that the CoH and the GoG program emerged from a response to community need as a pilot program. As a result, members felt that it had been a learning process. Suggested feedback on how this process could be improved moving forward included:

- Being more aware of individual strengths and weaknesses
- Having stronger documentation of roles, responsibilities and timeframes
- Having clear expectations of what investment is required to be part of the CoH to avoid membership of groups that are not fully invested
- Having people from organisations in positions that enables them to be decision makers
- Further involvement of local Indigenous research expertise through Inala Indigenous Health Service and the Community Jury.

While roles and responsibilities were not always clear, this was seen as part of the learning process with it noted that MA, Inala Indigenous Health and Inala Elders had tended to lead the way initially with IW involvement growing once the program coordinator was employed there. The need to develop terms of reference and mutual agreements of understanding was viewed as important, and as something that would support the program coordinator by providing boundaries and protecting relationships.

Two members expressed disappointment that the Inala Indigenous Health and the Community Jury had not been heavily involved with evaluation research. Given their local Indigenous focus, their expertise was seen as valuable and a good fit to provide guidance on research relating to GoG. It was

suggested that they had been approached but because their focus is clinical research, GoG related research was considered outside the scope of the community jury.

CoH members interviewed viewed their involvement with the GoG program positively and had experienced a sense of success with the program. Areas that were considered successes included:

- Upskilling facilitators with local community connections, including trauma informed practice and/or brain development training
- Having a range of partners as part of the CoH resulting in diversity of skills and strengths
- Being able to draw on the strength of a big organisation like MA, for example, corporate governance, research guidance
- Being able to involve the community in consultation and program development
- Being able to position the program within community, with IW when it was time for delivery
- The community being connected across organisations, residents and a local school
- Cultural nights were well attended giving community an opportunity to share culture
- Students were embedded with a stronger cultural identity and sense of belonging to Inala
- Being part of something important.

> "The skilling up of the community people was really important to the program as well. We didn't just want to get people to come in and deliver this. We wanted community people to be able to have the opportunity to build their skills and different areas as well as presenting the sessions. That was a part of the idea as well to have community people in those roles as well. There was a lot of planning." *CoH Member Perspective.*

Some challenges were also described, including:

- Organisations that were under-committed to the CoH and/or GoG
- Transport for families to attend cultural nights, with those who would most benefit often missing out due to a lack of transport
- Trying to work within school structures for the school-based part of the program; reliance on schools to distribute flyers for cultural nights
- Funding uncertainty for the school-based program pilot [MA provided] and concerns about how to continue obtaining additional funding [MA unable to refund at time of interviews].

> "For us, it's scored really well in terms of our relationship with some of our funding bodies. I just wish people would grasp the magnitude of how hard it is to bring a community together, like, no-one does that in any other thing that they do, and Gift did that. Brought the community in it, front and centre, y'know?" *CoH Member Perspective.*

Two of the key factors noted for overcoming these challenges included the strong relationships established by the program coordinator and the influence of CfC MA manager with their connections and influence in the region.

> "[In relation to MA] I'm grateful more than anything that somebody actually believed, in higher places than me, and had a vision or saw what I saw, because if I didn't get the green light in my work time for someone to say 'yes I believe enough that this is something that can work' then this program wouldn't exist". *CoH Member Perspective.*

Community engagement and ownership

Initial conversations and consultations with families impacted by youth suicide were conducted before establishing the CoH, which was named to signify the aim of fostering hope within the community. Additional activities undertaken were centred around cultural nights, which were used to engage with the community and provide them opportunities to be part of the GoG through:

- Building relationships and establishing trust with families and organisations
- Growing community awareness of the GoG
- Providing opportunities for feedback through conversations, and written comments via a 'feelings tree'
- Having community volunteers involved in the night
- Incorporating community member's ideas for the nights
- Showcasing and sharing of culture, including singing, dancing, traditional games.

"It was really beautiful how we just had a cultural night, bringing the community together and just gently saying 'hey…' look, we didn't even have flyers or anything, just bringing everybody together when we're about to serve the food or after the food or whatnot, and just saying that you know 'these nights are leading up to something bigger….'. So it was nice. I think that was just so perfect. … I think they worked well because all the key stakeholders that were involved had turns at sort of facilitating the nights as well. So like each organisation did the catering, it was lovely." *CoH Member Perspective.*

"It's [cultural nights] about the idea of explaining to the community what it's about. It's sort of in a non-threatening friendly way, a bbq, kids can play sports on the oval as well, and then just speaking in a casual non-threatening way what it is, and then they had opportunity to ask questions as well…" *CoH Member Perspective.*

Suggestions put forward by community members were always acknowledged and the project coordinator helped to facilitate these. This was acknowledged by all interviewed CoH members.

"If you're on the ground working in the community, and listening to people, then yeah, that has happened. Like you can see the different elements of what people like. Even going in the last day, the last ceremony, you could see all of that stuff what is important to our community because you had culture, you had identity, and connection to land. There's a whole theses about Inala, the place of belonging, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to this land here, even if they're not from this, aren't Jaggera, you know their connection…I think it was really well embedded in everything."*CoH Member Perspective.*

Consideration on what needed to be in place within the community to ensure that community members and local organisations continue to engage with the appropriateness and relevancy of the Gift of Gallang was evident. Key points focused around:

- Having ongoing continuation of cultural nights

- Continued community connection and GoG awareness building across community, organisations and schools
- Continuing to listen to the needs of the families connecting with support services
- Continuing to ensure that the GoG belongs to the community, not to one organisation
  - GoG materials to represent the community, not to promote organisations
  - This increases community involvement and keeps programs moving forward
- That there is a need for a continued position for a project coordinator.

It was noted that another key factor for successful governance and ensuring the program remained belonging to the community involved careful interviewing processes for the selection of GoG facilitators, and making sure the CoH continued to consist of stakeholders that have shared values in wanting to support community in strengthening culture and wellbeing.

"I know that there are other programmes elsewhere, but this programme very much has Wangarra's values in it…what I love about this programme is that we don't just talk about strengths-based, we practice it every day. We don't just talk about community ownership, we actually practice it every day. It's not throw away comments to write a glossy grant for. It's actually, we respect culture, we go to the Elders, it's embedded in every step of the way. And I think that's what will make us stand apart from the stuff that's funded very narrowly 'go into schools and deliver this'. There's a lot of power in this and I'm just proud that Wangarra can be a part of something so good and something that promotes our community in a whole different way…some of those protective strategies are beautiful done in a really culturally safe way, that's all Wangarra could ever dream for." *CoH Member Perspective.*

4.1.2   Partnership Survey Gift of Gallang

There were three responses to the Mission Australia partnership survey. Future evaluation on similar programs could consider revising methodology to include these questions in interviews. Overall, results were positive with most responses being Agree or Highly Agree, and no responses being Disagree or Highly Disagree. Results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Partnership Survey Results

	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Current Partnerships				
I am very clear about what GoG's vision and goals are			3	
There are strategies for relationship building among GoG partners			3	
There is strategic leadership for GoG		1	2	
Governance				
I have a clear sense of my own roles and responsibilities within GoG			1	
There is a clear process for shared decision making within GoG		1	2	1
There is an effective process within GoG for monitoring progress		1	2	
Resource Allocation				
Adequate financial resources are available	1	1		1
Adequate staff time is allocated to GoG and the partnership		2		1
Resources are allocated for effective communication		2		1
Collaboration				
The actions of my organisation are well-coordinated with those of other organisations		1	2	
There are new and strengthened working relationships among partners within GoG		1	2	
Experience of Partnership				
I feel that I have a voice and can influence decisions related to GoG			3	
I understand how my work contributes to the overall goals of GoG and why I am needed			3	
GoG includes the views of people who live in this community			3	

4.2 School-Based Program Implementation

4.2.1 GoG Facilitator Perspectives

Facilitators and Challenges: GoG Facilitator Perspectives

Interviews with CoH/GoG facilitator members indicated that there was a great appreciation for the support of the school where GoG was piloted, and an acknowledgement of the opportunity they had provided in having a pilot program implemented there. It was also noted that it was challenging adapting to work within school structures and having classroom space change. Relying on the school to provide flyers to parents/carers was also challenging as it was difficult to know if all parent/carers received them.

Student Engagement and Understanding: GoG Facilitator Perspectives

A GoG facilitator also provided reflection about two of the sessions they had co-facilitated, relating to identifying emotions, how the brain works, and how to tame emotions. Culturally appropriate delivery methods were used including the use of a yarning circle and a talking stick. It was reported, that students were highly excited, engaged and enthusiastic to participate in the session, demonstrating respect to the facilitators and their peers. Many had cultural and community

connections already established with the GoG facilitators. Students engaged with the content and were observed to really think about it and relate it their everyday life, as well as identify emotions and different stages of emotional regulation. Students seemed to really enjoy sharing who they are, where they came from and their understanding about different emotions. This seemed to be effective in strengthening the connection between students and facilitators and between students and their peers.

4.2.2 School Perspectives

Facilitators and Challenges: School Perspectives

A key factor of the successful implementation of the pilot school-based component of the GoG was the level of partnership provided by the school. Implementing GoG within the school environment required careful planning, a significant time investment, dedication of resources and a willingness to work through any obstacles that emerged which were expected given this was a pilot program. School involvement, support and accommodations included:

Before implementation

- Attending pre-planning meetings to gain an understanding of how the program had developed as a community response to suicide rates
- Initial consultations and negotiations with community organisations, including Mission Australia, to determine how the program would meet the community needs and how it would work within the context of the school environment
- Identifying the resources and people that were within the school that would ensure the project would be a success, including rooms and staff
- Engagement of staff through a guest speaker to school to discuss impact of suicide on families
- Accommodations to meet the needs of the school and the needs of the project and the outcomes that the community wanted which included, for example, the CoH wanted the program to be run during class time. This resulted in:
  - Curriculum planning made by a registered teacher who documented links between health curriculum and GoG. This was to enable students to attend the program during class time across the three different grade levels This was also developed by the school with the intention that it could be transferable to other Queensland Education schools to support the sustainability and transferability of the program
  - Modification of an assessment task that aligned with the content/topics covered in the GoG and the Health curriculum

        o   Liaising with year level coordinators individual classroom teachers across three grade levels (six classrooms) to gain teacher support in students being withdrawn from class and to co-ordinate timetables with Health curriculum

- Engagement of parents/carers which included an information night, so they were aware of the opportunity GoG would bring for their children and could raise any questions/concerns.

During implementation

- As students needed to be withdrawn from class in order to participate, classroom teachers covered health curriculum during this time so that students did not need to complete 'catch up' work
- A registered teacher and teacher aide were provided to support the GoG sessions both of whom were either Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- A work portfolio was collected for each participating child as evidence of learning of curriculum by the registered teacher
- Administration support with the development of permission notes for excursions, and follow up (with phone calls) due to short time frame for return of signed consent forms
- Classroom facilities were made available as a space for GoG to run
- Hall facilities were made available for the GoG showcase
- Additional modifications were made with class time provided in Term 3 (3x30 mins) to provide additional rehearsal time for the Showcase.

"We looked at all the roadblocks that could possibly be along the way, and one of the roadblocks was going to be taking kids out of curriculum time and justifying the time that they came out… we're closing the gap, so we don't want to take kids out of reading, writing, maths time…so we looked at all those roadblocks and we tried to navigate those before we got there, and to make it transferable and sustainable because we believe in it". *School Staff Perspectives.*

Factors that facilitated the implementation of the GoG from a school perspective included:

- The connections the GoG program coordinator had across both MA and IW, as well as her connections with the GoG facilitators and community
- The local connections and knowledge held by the GoG facilitators
- The resources and experiences that came with the GoG facilitators
- The commitment and reliability of the participating students and GoG facilitators
- Being able to make links to the curriculum so the program could run in class time

- The principal and school staff being open to a pilot project, believing in the importance of the program and providing school resources as part of the partnership.

> "Every one of those facilitators has knowledge, has worked and lived in this community. Some of the students already had connections with them and I think that has to be part of the planning in other regions across the state, that it is local community members that drive and lead and are facilitating and working with our young people and that's one of the reasons why this project was so successful". *School Staff Perspectives.*

There were also some challenges that presented throughout the implementation of GoG. Being a pilot program, the school expected that some obstacles may occur and worked hard to support the program in overcoming these:

- Short notice of when the GoG committee wanted the program to start which placed time pressures on developing curriculum links, coordinating classes and finding allocated space. This resulted in the GoG allocated class space needing to change several times as it had been pre-booked in the previous term.
- A week by week structure was planned for the GoG although there were some deviations from the planned structure, sometimes with short notice of a few days
- Permission slips for excursions were not provided before the program started and there was a significant time pressure to get these returned and risk assessments developed in a short timeframe. This resulted in follow up calls being made to parents/carers. The school ensured proper Department policy, procedures and processes in relation to excursions and gaining informed consent were followed.

Student Engagement and Understanding: School Perspectives

School staff reported high levels of engagement from students during the GoG sessions and subsequent showcase. During the GoG program sessions, no behaviour referrals were received, students arrived on time, and on days where sessions were scheduled **school attendance rates increased for participating students**. Most students would also stay after the session during break time to continue activities and engagement with facilitators. A range of factors were suggested as reasons why there were such consistently high levels of engagement:

- Students chose to participate in the GoG program as it was an opt-in program
- The planned activities were enjoyable and engaging for students, such as painting shoes and clapsticks

- Students enjoyed the GoG facilitators who created a positive, supportive learning space
- The use of culture within the teaching, for example, having a yarning circle, following protocols when you have the talking stick, being respectful to their Elders and facilitators that were working with them
- The work facilitators did each week to make sure there were Indigenous artefacts that students could connect with and were able to touch
- The use of aural learning, the arts, and opportunities for students to share ideas.

School staff also noted that based on student interactions and responses, a good level of understanding of the knowledge being shared in the sessions seemed evident, especially for session content that was scaffolded.

4.2.3 Parent Perspectives

Participating parents/carers were asked about their knowledge of the Gift of Gallang program, any information sessions and the cultural nights held in Inala, as well as their connection to community and knowledge of Mission Australia and Inala Wangarra. Responses were mixed, but tended to indicate a lack of full information on the range of activities that had occurred with GoG despite having long held connections in the community.

- **Knowledge of GoG**
  - Parent/carers noted that they found out about GoG when a letter was received at home from the school. The letter was also sent to obtain consent for child participation and informed that the school could be contacted about any questions or concerns
  - There was generally little knowledge of GoG beyond receiving a letter, although one parent/carer noted that they had heard about GoG through family members as well at the school. Another noted that their understanding of GoG was that it was around "building the resilience of the young kids in the program"
  - Parents/carers seemed unaware of any information nights being offered
  - One parent/carer noted they were not informed about the smoking ceremony
  - One noted there seemed to be a lack of support from other parents when there were opportunities for them to attend (for example the smoking ceremony), although they also acknowledged that people may have needed to work, or that there was a lack of understanding of what the program was about or what was coming up for the program and what it was trying to achieve

- All participating parents/carers were aware of the final showcase, after receiving another letter from the school as well as being informed by their participating children.

- **Attendance of cultural nights**
  - There were mixed responses about the level of knowledge of the cultural nights that had been occurring. Two parent/carers noted they had not been aware of these, while one parent/carer had attended some of these
  - One parent/carer noted that it was disappointing that they had not heard much about the cultural nights especially given they were an Aboriginal person who grew up in Inala.

> "I still have a lot of people I know and am connected to, you don't hear enough about that sort of stuff, it seems to be pretty contained, maybe only generally certain family groups always hear about them, but not everybody in the community hears about them". *Parent/carer Voice.*

- **Community connections**
  - Two of the parent/carers felt well connected to the Inala community, having lived in the region as children or still residing there, as well as having family connections some of which included belonging to the traditional tribe of Inala, the Yuggera people
  - One parent/carer that grew up in community had noticed a shift in the community over time as "a lot of fellas look after their own instead of everyone"
  - One noted they felt semi-connected growing up in the region but that they were now working elsewhere which meant they feel out of the loop with local organisations and some disconnection with not hearing about events. They were still connected with friends and family
  - None of the parents/carers felt sure of any awareness of Gift of Gallang amongst the broader community.

- **Knowledge of Mission Australia and Inala Wangarra**
  - Some awareness of Mission Australia (MA) and Inala Wangarra (IW) was evident
  - One parent/carer described MA as the 'charity mob' and hadn't heard much about IW
  - One was aware of IW and felt aware of the surface level of what both organisations do, for example, employment and disability work for MA and supporting elders in the community and community programs to help with wellbeing in the community for IW

- One parent/carer noted that their perception of these organisations made them hesitant to allow their child to participate as they were unsure of an alignment of values. They still allowed participation due to reassurance and prior relationships with facilitators.

4.3 Program Outcomes and Opportunities for Future Directions

4.3.1 GoG Facilitators and School Perspectives

Impact of GoG and Suggestions: GoG Facilitator Perspectives

While not a main focus point in interviews with CoH/GoG facilitator members, comments indicated that a major outcome of the school-based program was the sense that students had been embedded with a stronger cultural identity, and a sense of belonging to Inala and knowing they were cared about through their connections to community and the GoG facilitators.

> The Gift of Gallang mantra of "I matter, You matter, We matter" was drummed into students through repetition throughout the program. Facilitators saw the shift towards students believing what they were saying. Students would tell each other and GoG facilitators "You matter". There was high engagement, excitement, eagerness to come to the sessions and respect shown. They felt at home being surrounded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults. They were reassured during the program that the team really cared about them. ***CoH/Facilitator Perspectives.***

The written reflection provided by a GoG facilitator indicated that content covered in sessions was understood and the knowledge and skills learnt by students were transferred to other contexts. During subsequent sessions, students would discuss their feelings and emotions and were able to go into detail about why they were feeling a particular way, relating it to the brain models they had learnt. A teacher aide had also informed the GoG facilitator that students had been utilising the hand model of the brain to explain their feelings and what stage they were at (for example, 'about to flip my lid'). The GoG facilitator noted that additional interactive tools for students to engage with, for example, a model of the brain and/or large posters, could strengthen student learning further.

Impact of GoG and Suggestions: School Perspectives

School staff noted that there was evidence of students remembering and discussing content from the GoG sessions. Students wanted to share what they had been doing with classroom teachers and their classes. This resulted in one student bringing a digeridoo and playing it for their class. The teacher aide who attended also used language and strategies learnt through the GoG sessions in mainstream classes providing modelling of this content to classroom teachers.

> "GoG gives students the opportunity then to go back and have conversations about their learning, then sharing their culture back with the classmates and their teacher, how valuable is that both sides, for making the student feeling very proud of their culture and actually other people do want to know about it and hear and listen, so a beautiful journey". *School Staff Perspectives.*

School staff were also aware of the impact that participating on the program had on student wellbeing, but also noted that it is too soon to know if this will translate into long term wellbeing outcomes relating to resilience. Known impacts on various students included:

- Improved self-esteem, in how they see themselves and how others see them including educators and peers
- Breathing strategies for calming had been used
- All participants embraced culture on the night of their Showcase
- Significance was placed on totems embedded in the program, for example, clapping sticks, emu feathers, mantra of "I matter, You matter, We matter", which may serve as prompts for wellbeing strategies over time.

Broader impacts were also seen across the school community including:

- A stronger focus on cultural identity
- Additional strength to creating a cultural safe space, which complimented the work school already does to create this for all cultures
- Strengthened relationships between students and teachers, with students being confident to share, and teachers learning more about students' culture and seeing the high levels of engagement and achievement of students
- Strengthened relationships between parents/carers and the school
- Sense of pride from students, parents/carers, educators and the broader school community.

There were some unexpected outcomes resulting from the GoG program. These included the higher school attendance rates which included student/s with a high absentee rate participating in the showcase. Having students across year levels working vertically together also formed a bond and buddy system with Year 4s looking to Year 6s as leaders. These strong connections between students may not have formed otherwise given the different year levels.

Overwhelmingly positive feedback had been evident from both students and educators about GoG.

Students

Positive comments made by students to educators had centred around their excitement of the program, for example, asking if sessions were running and which facilitators would be attending, and general talking about the program. Parents/carers also commented to school staff that students were coming home talking about what they were doing. The sense of pride of their achievements and learning was also evident from students.

School staff

School staff had also shared positive feedback including:

- Great opportunity to connect and build good strong relationships with parents
- Additional services were able to be offered to a parent/carer due to the trust and relationship built during GoG
- The showcase was a positive, beautiful community night which provided a great template to have more parent/carer nights that are culturally safe
- Classroom teachers had noted that students really enjoyed going to GoG
- GoG created culture building and a sense of belonging for students
- Students gained in confidence, found their voice and demonstrated leadership
- GoG allowed for positive connections with community to be made.

Suggestions and recommendations for the GoG program and community organisation involvement were also made by school staff. These included:

- Sustainability and widening the scope of students
  - GoG should not be a one-off program
  - Repetition and reinforcement of the program to upper primary students would be ideal. For example, having three versions of the program which are rotated across Year 4-6, so students experience a version of GoG three times
  - A program aimed at lower primary grades would be beneficial
  - Extending the program or an element of the program to the whole school community could also be beneficial
  - Stronger links to curriculum should be made now that content of GoG is no longer in a pilot stage.

- Operational considerations for replication
  - As with the pilot program, ensure facilitators invited in subsequent versions follow through with activities (for example, clapsticks, lunch time rehearsals) as this sends an important message to students – the original GoG facilitators did this well
  - Ensure all required consent forms (including for excursions) are provided in the initial information packs to parents/carers as opposed to throughout the program
  - Try to avoid last minute changes to the planned schedule so that classroom teachers have time to plan for any adjustments they will need to make
  - Plan rehearsals into the program so that this does not become time that students are missing out on class work (across the next term)
  - Different challenges may be faced in new schools including:
    - The number of Indigenous students – the size of 21 students worked well for discussion and student engagement in the current school context, however, future consideration of the optimal group size may be needed. Schools with lower numbers of Indigenous students may need to collaborate with other local schools, whereas schools with higher numbers may need to run multiple GoG groups.
- Next steps towards maintaining wellbeing and community connections
  - Consideration of how to transfer the knowledge, learning and confidence building students have experienced to applying this into their everyday lives
  - Keeping the connections with parents/carers that were established throughout the GoG program moving forward within the school community
  - Exploring ways to measure the social/emotional impact on students over time. While base line data is not available for this cohort, a new nationally recognised tool has become available to state schools which may allow for this in future.

"[We're] so happy that we've been part of such a unique opportunity to make a significant difference for kids in our community". **School Perspectives.**

4.3.2 Parent Perspectives

Parent/carer perspectives of the impact of the GoG school-based program were generally positive, although there were some concerns raised and suggestions made. Overall GoG was viewed as being complementary to beliefs held around supportive family, community and having a strong culture.

Views on what being a supportive family included:

- Coming together as a family
    - Through dinners, meetings, gathering in parks
    - To share food, stories and culture
    - To keep families close
- Looking after each other
    - Having respect and care for Elders
    - Looking after children
    - Looking after family
    - Bringing children up to make themselves better through good education and opportunities
- Strengthening relationships and sense of togetherness as a protective factor
    - dealing with negative impacts (e.g. substance abuse, physical abuse, bullying) as a family group
    - Grandparent/kinship carers raising children when parents need support
    - Setting standards for children and family members by modelling positive behaviours for wellbeing.

Views on what a supportive community means included:

- Having culturally appropriate support available and provided through government structures, NGOs, and community events
    - Children getting help in schools
    - Having women's groups/Baby ceremonies/Welcome to country events
    - Gatherings on land with cultural significance
    - Access to services across areas of need including housing and health
    - Programs like GoG being offered.

Views on what strong culture means included:

- Strong sense of identity
    - Having an understanding of who you are

- - Knowing where you came from and/or who you belong to
- Sense of belonging
  - Having an understanding of where you fit in the word
  - Having a connection to land, family and community
- Cultural knowledge
  - Learning about your ancestors
  - Learning about what impacted on your family and community
  - Learning cultural traditions.

"Things like this program [Gift of Gallang] are certainly well on the way to what that should be [a supportive community] … particularly with young kids these days when you see a lack of identity with a lot of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders especially when you compare them to kids … from refugee or immigrant backgrounds, like our Kiwi brothers and sisters, you can see the strength in their own culture and their own awareness of that, but our young Indigenous kids don't have that same cultural identity and that's obviously a record of the history of Australia and how that's come about but we don't do enough to empower their knowledge in that space, so programs like Gift of Gallang are really great in that. Especially in the way I think the great thing was set up utilising Uncle Sammy* in the program to say *'Your family group may not be from this country, but you're living here, you're growing here, you're playing here, so we want you to be part of this place. We want you to grow'* and I think that's a really powerful statement especially for kids that know their black but don't really know their background. To find that sense of belonging *'well I belong to Inala, I may not be from Inala but I belong to it so I'm going to be a part of this community'* and that's really empowering. To get that at a young age I think is fantastic, before they make that transition to high school and everything that comes with the struggles with puberty. I think there needs to be more of this stuff, and not just here, right across the state." *Parent/carer Voice.*

*Name changed to protect privacy of facilitator

There were mixed responses from parents/carers as to if participating in GoG had resulted in any changes in their child's understanding of family, community or culture. Responses included:

- No change as the child has always had this connection, but GoG gave them the opportunity to share what they know and make sense of what GoG was trying to achieve
- Some change as the child was now more aware of Aboriginal cultures with GoG building on their previous knowledge and experiences.

Parents/carers were asked to define what wellbeing looked like for them. Responses for positive wellbeing included:

- Having supportive family that you can rely on
- Have a strong spirit and/or strong identity, knowing who you are, looking after yourself
- Being happy with yourself and where you are in life
- Feeling confident to strive for more; thinking positive thoughts, for example "I will try"
- Asking for help when needed.

Negative wellbeing was described as:

- An absence of positive wellbeing factors, or the opposite to these
- Starting out without solid foundations
- Having complexities around identity
- Negative or bad thoughts or being down on yourself
- Feeling that no matter what you do, you can't solve or change things.

Parents/carers indicated that they actively discuss and/or model wellbeing and factors that build or weaken it. Parent/carers tried to build wellbeing by:

- Discussing values like respect, listening to Elders, the importance of actions and responsibilities
- Making sure children know connections of names to land, region and family history so this knowledge is passed on
- Modelling/discussing wellbeing behaviours, for example, the importance of exercise and making time for yourself to be healthy; and positive interactions with partner so children see positive relationships
- Showing children how to remove themselves from negative influences, for example, violence/substance abuse
- Spending time together as a family, for example, camping, sport
- Asking children about their day; helping them process feelings/emotions.

Parents/carers noted that there had been negativity or fractions in the community (including the deaths of youth in more recent years), and all saw building positive wellbeing as important.

No real differences were noticed in how children spoke about wellbeing after attending the GoG, although one parent/carer noted that they had made a point of asking the child about the program as part of family discussion over dinner as they were keen on understanding what the children were learning about resilience and how to manage their emotional responses.

> "Being able to build that strength in identity and strength in positive behaviours and being confident enough for these kids to make their own personal choice to go 'no, I don't want to be a part of that...I'm going to remove myself whatever way I can and find support elsewhere' those sorts of things I think is really needed, so it's great to see a lot of the young kids who may not have the conversations that we have with our child around their table but to see them involved [in GoG] and see them growing as people as well I think that's really fantastic for the community as a whole".
> *Parent/carer Voice*.

Parents/carers did not consider wellbeing to be a common topic spoken about the broader community around Inala and places for suitable support were not considered well known. Issues around this included:

- Finding reliable support agencies that did not cancel meetings
- Having suitable help available when needing to access it, for example, long waiting times to see a psychologist
- Difficulty knowing what steps to take to access relevant supports
- People becoming aware of support too late instead of at the preventative stages
- Support providers not having culturally appropriate approaches
- Support not being holistic and only addressing one aspect, instead of all influencing factors.

Parents/carers were asked if participating in the GoG had helped their child build their wellbeing. Changes noticed by parents/carers that occurred during and/or after participating in the program included:

- Increased school enjoyment
- Improved relationships with school staff
- Improved help seeking behaviour
- Increased confidence
- Implementing wellbeing strategies taught during GoG
  - Using stress ball, doing calming exercises, knowing what made their 'mind flip', putting what had been taught into practice
- Increased maturity
  - Including apologising for behaviour after self-calming using GoG strategies

o   Reinforced to make choices about their own life and that it doesn't matter what others do.

> A parent/carer has noticed an improvement in their child's relationships with school staff and their learning and believes participating in the Gift of Gallang program was a contributing factor. They had moved from another location and the child had commented about wanting help at their new school. The parent/carer had said to ask for help but the child didn't know how to approach staff until after they started participating in programs including Gift of Gallang. Being able to talk to staff and talk about feelings has helped the child and their learning has improved as a result. *Parent/carer Voice*.

Parents/carers were asked what they would like to see offered by organisations like Mission Australia or Inala Wangara to help build children's wellbeing and community strengths, and if they had any other comments or suggestions. Responses included:

- Ensure sustainability and funding
    - o   through provision of long-term funding for programs like GoG and,
    - o   through involving people within the community
    - o   through funding partnerships with relevant government departments, including the Department of Education and/or Health
    - o   allow flexibility with funding for the community to make 'mistakes' to find out what works
- Improve community awareness of supports available
    - o   through engagement with the school and programs like GoG
    - o   through using different channels of communication including text messages
    - o   through engaging with different groups within the community
- Provide adequate time and funds for relationship and trust building
    - o   funding needs to allow for this process
    - o   expect that initial attempts may be poorly attended by community members
    - o   building relationships and trust takes time and consistency
- Strengthen community involvement in consultation strategies
    - o   Ensure parents/carers in schools are also included in initial community consultations
    - o   Avoid consultation being too top-heavy with organisational involvement

- o Make sure community consultation includes people residing and involved in the community, not just those employed there
- Use collaborative approaches with other NGOS, and Government departments
  - o In the provision of programs like GoG
  - o In the links and supports made to families
  - o Map out all relevant supports and have them involved including those covering issues such as family violence or substance abuse, as well as QLD health, housing and education departments
  - o Use programs like GoG to build rapport and trust with families then link to relevant support services
  - o Ensure people working for organisations are seen within the community, especially during times of Sorry business.

"It's funny, you think one small program that's operating in the schools for year 5 and 6 kids could really grow and have such a broader impact on the entire community if you get the right people and the right groups involved in how those programs develop. I think as a starting point this program is fantastic. I just think there needs to be more of it. The big question of course comes down to pay [funding], but that community support, it's integral to this whole thing but to do that you need to involve the community and all those organisations are part of this community and service this community but you need it to be driven by the community…[get] those that do live and work and belong to the community to have their say, so it's not government or NGO driven, but community driven and those organisations just support it". *Parent/carer Voice.*

Some concerns and suggestions were raised about the school-based program of GoG. Concerns were predominately focused on cultural fit, communication and consultation.

Concerns included:

- A self-appointed Elder was involved in the program as opposed to the other Elders involved who held community recognition
- A lack of transparency about which cultural values would be shared and if proper respect would be shown to differing cultural values and traditions

- More transparency needed over who is involved and what they will be leading. This should include an outline of weekly content and who would facilitate it to ensure parents/carers were comfortable with the alignment to their cultural values, including reassurance of how any women's or men's business would be delivered
- That it is important to distinguish between customs and protocol of Yuggera people and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are local Yuggera people who could tell dreaming stories of the land – to not include these is taking away their responsibility and right to do that as the traditional land custodians of Inala
- There are families in the community with cultural knowledge and students with historical blood ties. There are some fractions within the community and there has been a missed opportunity to bring these families together
- Cultural connection needs to be developed as children living and breathing it as part of their identity, not just a part of one-off programs.

Suggestions included:

- That the teaching of more traditional cultural ceremonies would strengthen the program, for example, the showcase performance was very contemporary whereas the original purpose of song and dance is to tell a story, life lessons, rites of passage or to teach right from wrong
- That it's important to ensure culture is embedded in day to day life, not just taught as cultural knowledge as part of a program. It needs to be respected within the community
- Involving school parent/carers in the initial community consultation, for example, providing opportunities to be involved in open forums so that people form the community (including parents/carers) can gather to provide input
- Strengthening the links to and involvement of parents/carers in the program and to relevant NGOs, and other support services
- Avoid programs such as GoG residing within one organisation so that organisations can't use it as a marketing tool for self-promotion instead of as a genuine community interest
- Consider if using a community space with more community involvement is a better fit as there would be more flexibility and opportunity to connect with local significant sites including sacred grounds
- Ensure cultural connection is sustainable and not dependent on one off programs; make links to community cultural driven events

- Teach that wellbeing shows in actions rather than words, for example, teaching children to "*make sure Aunty is right across the road";* embedding care and connection to family and community members to ensure sustainability
- Teach about the original inhabitants and Elders that have shaped Inala.

"Hopefully Education continue to sponser GoG, push it forward and even grow it… you've got kids as captive audience through the school, how do we make the link to the parents? How do we get all these other orgs involved to start supporting the parents in different aspects that they need? Whether they need assistance with housing or mental health, justice issues, there would be a whole range of issues there that are impacting on these kids right now that GoG can't deal with… but when you're looking after the kids you have to be mindful of all the different impacts that are coming in and if there's a mechanism that can link their parents or grandparents whoever their carers are with support networks on the different issues that are affecting them as people and make that easily accessible I think that's the big thing…. You will probably find that people's pride in their community grows… pride that we look after each other and we take care of each other and we're building a community that is actually strong and healthy. That changes attitudes completely that changes behaviours. It starts with basic programs like these, right back at this base level with the kids. You've got to be in it for the long haul." *Parent/carer Voice*

4.3.3 SDQ Measure

The scores from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) are presented in Table 3. The table also shows the total score possible for each scale and the score range cut offs considered to be normal, borderline or abnormal. These norms are based on a UK sample, however, comprehensive Australian norms which provide gender and age differences are also available which established similar results (Mellor, 2005). As noted by Kikkwa (2015) using norms that have not been based on Australian Indigenous populations may not accurately indicate Indigenous experiences. The reliability of the parent/carer reported SDQ subscales and total difficulties scale has been tested for a Western Australian sample of Aboriginal children and results found the scales were well measured with the exception of peer problems, with the recommendation being to use the total difficulties score (De Maio et al., 2005). Cut offs used in this report for the total score included: the normal range (0–13), borderline range (14–16) and abnormal range (17–40). Similar results for the peer problems scale for the construct validity of the SDQ were found by Williamson et al. (2014) who also recommended focusing on the SDQ total difficulties score. These results are based on teacher-reported data.

SDQ data was provided for 20 students, 10 females, 9 males and 1 unknown gender, ranging in ages from 9 to 12 years. Given the small sample, the average scores are provided for the whole sample. Higher scores indicate higher rates of difficulties, except for the prosocial behaviour score where higher scores indicate higher rates of positive social behaviours. All of the average scores obtained for each scale for the Gift of Gallang cohort were within the normal range. Direct comparisons to other data from Australian studies cannot be made given the small sample and mixed ages of the students. Given SDQ data was unable to be collected before the Gift of Gallang program commenced, it is also not possible to determine any change in scores that occurred after students attending the sessions.

Table 4 SDQ results

Scales	Total Possible Score	Score Range*			Gift of Gallang Average Score
		Normal	Borderline	Abnormal	
Emotional symptoms	10	**0-4**	5	6-10	**2.2**
Conduct problems	10	**0-2**	3	4-10	**2.35**
Peer problems	10	**0-3**	4	5-10	**2**
Hyperactivity	10	**0-5**	6	7-10	**4.2**
Total difficulties	40	**0-11**	12-15	16-40	**10.75**
Prosocial behaviour	10	**6-10**	5	0-4	**7.5**

* Cut-offs provided by Youth in Mind (2015).

Section 5: Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of the evaluation, several recommendations are proposed across the areas of Partnerships, Community Ownership and Engagement, Program Implementation and Future Evaluation.

5.1 Partnerships, Community Ownership and Engagement

Future partnerships and engagement between Mission Australia and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities should consider the following recommendations:

1. **Adopt co-design approaches to community consultations, program development, implementation and evaluation, with ongoing governance and ownership of programs being placed within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.**

To align with the principles of self-determination and reconciliation it is essential that Mission Australia establishes meaningful partnerships which enable and assist coordinated approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to develop, lead and sustain culturally appropriate programs. This approach also aligns with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (DOHA, 2013), and the Mission Australia RAP (MA, 2017).

Factors which have been shown to be key elements in supporting effective Indigenous community managed programs were evident in the GoG work, including using community development approaches, facilitating community ownership and control, utilising local Indigenous staff and existing community capacity and leaders (Morley, 2015). The current program GoG was viewed by many stakeholders as being successful because it grew from genuine community need and consultation and was sustained to completion by the passion and dedication of those involved that lived and worked within the community. Placing ownerships of projects to within the community can also help ensure sustainability where funds are available.

2. **Include provision of support to developing a planned approach to acquiring ongoing funding to increase the likelihood of sustainability.**

It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not used as trial sites, and approaches that will contribute to lasting long term positive outcomes are adopted. To achieve this, promising pilot programs that have emerged from community need and consultation should be provided the opportunity to thrive and grow. A lack of long-term funding

commitment from external agencies can be a barrier to successful community programs (AIFS, 2015).

In the case of the current program GoG, long term funding will be required to maintain the community cultural nights and to implement the school-based program across the region. Mission Australia could strengthen partnerships by offering assistance and support to smaller locally based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, such as Inala Wangarra, around building strategic alliances to secure ongoing funding which increase likelihood of program sustainability.

Acquiring additional funding to enable longer term implementation of programs may be especially important in some communities given the time investment that could be required to build relationships and strengthen trust and collaboration between organisations and community members.

3. **Plan for flexible timeframes which enable the building of trusting relationships, connections and genuine collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, as well as ensuring the involvement of appropriate staff.**

The process of the GoG from initial consultation through to the completion of the school-based pilot program took almost three years. It was reported by all NGO, Education and Health stakeholders involved in the evaluation that a significant contributing factor in the formation of the Committee of Hope and the resulting GoG program was the program coordinator (formerly the Cultural Connect Worker for CfC MA) and her long-standing connections in the community, including Mission Australia, Inala Wangarra, the school, and with community members and other organisational staff. It was suggested that without her previously established relationships and trust within the community it is likely that the program would not have gone ahead.

This supports previous findings that strong, trusting relationships take time to establish and that these relationships between community organisations and government agencies strengthen programs (AIFS, 2015). For similar future programs to have success in other regions, it is recommended that adequate time is provided to allow for this process.

4. **When initial collaboration results in a plan to develop school-based programs, additional community consultation should occur which specifically targets the families, parents and carers of students attending participating schools.**

While the consultation process used in the development of GoG was extensive, parents/carers that provided feedback were either not aware of the cultural nights and opportunities to provide

feedback there or expressed desire to be involved in community consultations that related to content/programs being developed for their children. The importance of having community members involved in consultations whom resided in the area, as opposed to being paid to attend, was also raised. Earlier engagement strategies of parents and carers of participating schools will provide them an opportunity to be a part of the consultation process as well as begin relationship building and linking to cultural nights. While letters were sent via the school, these were not always received so other engagement strategies should be considered. Only a small number of parents/carers participated in the evaluation, however, this is still a significant learning for moving forward.

5.2 Program Implementation

Future implementation of GoG or similar school-based programs should consider the following recommendations:

5. **A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be developed for use between partnering organisations and schools involved in the delivery of the GoG, or similar school-based programs, outlining timeframes, roles, responsibilities and contributions.**

Recommended information to be outlined in the MoU includes the following:

- Dates: Including timeframes for the start and end date of delivery as well as any excursions or events included in the program (for example, a showcase). These dates should also include timeframes for when information to parents/carers needs to be distributed.
- Timeframes: Suitable times for delivery will need to be negotiated depending on facilitator availability, and school resources. For example, some schools may not have resource capacity to run sessions during class time.
- Communication strategy: contact information, preferred methods of contact and frequency of scheduled meetings.
- Contributions: an outline of the roles and responsibilities of each party and what they will contribute. This may include training, staff time, room access, resource development, distribution of information to parents/carers or other financial, material or labour resources. Organisations volunteering staff time should be informed with an estimation of what the time commitment is to be involved in the GoG, including training, planning, and delivery.
- Ideally a MoU would be established with a school at least one term before the implementation of GoG to ensure adequate planning time for room allocation, program promotion and resource development including excursion permission notes.

6. **Preparation of facilitators and school staff involved in the delivery of GoG, or similar school-based programs, should include cultural sensitivity awareness to ensure cultural safety for all participants.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples belong to two distinct cultural groups, however, it is important to recognise that there is great diversity within these (AIATSIS, 2018). Awareness of this is needed so that cultural pride and connection to lands and communities can be fostered through recognition of the traditional land custodians and customs, as well as being respectful and inclusive of diversity in cultural practices, beliefs and views across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

7. **Comprehensive information should be provided to parents and carers of students invited to participate in GoG, or similar school-based programs, which provides transparency of key dates, program content and who will deliver it, to increase family engagement and ensure cultural safety.**

By providing parents/carers with a detailed outline of the weekly content covered in a school-based program with a cultural focus, and an indication of who will deliver the content, they are able to make fully informed decisions about if the program and/or facilitators will be a cultural fit for their child. This may be especially important for programs that are covering content relating to Men's Business, Women's Business, Sorry Business, sacred knowledge or ceremonies, or the Dreaming. Provision of key dates and program content in advance may also increase opportunities for engaging with families. For example, parents/carers may be more likely to attend events such as the smoking ceremony during school time if provided with the significance of the content, and those that are working would have adequate time to request leave.

5.3 Future Evaluation

Future evaluation of GoG, or similar programs which have a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and/or are school-based, should consider the following recommendations:

8. **Establishing partnerships between Mission Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers along with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop and implement evaluation on GoG, or similar programs, to ensure methodology is culturally appropriate and follows local protocols will strengthen future work and contribute towards building the evidence base on effective suicide prevention programs.**

Developing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to be involved in evaluation work which contributes to developing an evidence base on effective practices in

reducing risk factors for suicide is in alignment with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy action area five (DoHA, 2013) as well as Mission Australia's RAP (Mission Australia, 2017). There is an identified need to build an evidence base and obtain community level data on risk and protective factors relating to suicide prevention and the effectiveness of programs developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (DoHA, 2013). Developing research partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers with local connections will also help ensure that methodological approaches are culturally appropriate.

Consultation was undertaken in this evaluation with the Committee of Hope, and a research steering committee. This work could be strengthened however by utilising the opportunity to have Indigenous researchers involved or capacity building interested stakeholders to be involved in evaluation design and completion. Developing research partnerships with Indigenous researchers or staff that have local knowledge and connections should be considered for future work. This will also help ensure that local cultural protocols are followed, for example, consultation with Elders or other established review groups.

9. **Establish timeframes for pilot program implementation and evaluation that allow adequate time for any external ethics approvals required, which also enable appropriate engagement strategies and relationship building with potential participants.**

A key learning from this evaluation was the importance of having alignment between timeframes for program implementation and evaluation methodology. The process of gaining appropriate ethical consent may take additional time to internal MA ethics reviews. This will be dependent on the local requirements (for example, gaining approval from Elders) and any government department requirements if research is occurring within settings such as schools.

In the case of GoG, approval had been obtained by the Committee of Hope however the Department of Education ethics application required signatures from each of the Committee members. This created a significant time delay as the timeframe fell outside of standard meeting dates for the Committee of Hope. This impacted on methodology as baseline data (for pre-post surveys) was unable to be collected, and the GoG sessions that covered content were unable to be observed.

This also had significant impact on engagement strategies as the research/researcher was not introduced to any parents/carers until the Showcase. This may have had a significant impact on the number of parents/carers who opted to participate. This example highlights that unexpected delays may occur with major impacts on evaluation methodology and engagement of

participants. Timeframes should therefore plan for this, working in conjunction with other critical dates impacting on involved stakeholders.

10. **Explore partnerships with the Department of Education and Queensland based state schools for longitudinal tracking of student social-emotional wellbeing after participation in school-based prevention/intervention programs.**

The Queensland Department of Education has recently developed a standardised measure of student wellbeing. This will provide data on students across Queensland state schools. Access to this data would involve negotiation with the DoE and any participating schools in order to obtain appropriate ethical approvals and consents. This data would provide a cost-effective longitudinal measure of student social-emotional wellbeing, enabling Mission Australia to establish long term impacts on wellbeing for students that have participated in school-based prevention programs, such as GoG.

5.4 Concluding Comments

This research provides Mission Australia and Communities for Children – Inala to Ipswich with insights into the framework used to establish partnerships, community ownership and engagement with the Gift of Gallang program, as well as the implementation and short-term outcomes that occurred as the result of the school-based program. The Gift of Gallang emerged as a response to identified community need and as such was a pilot program. It is timely to now refine and formally document the approaches utilised.

Overall, the findings of the evaluation are promising with the Gift of Gallang representing a significant piece of work which demonstrates the strength in engaging in genuine community collaboration and partnerships across non-government organisations, and government departments including Education and Health in response to community need. The recommendations of this evaluation will provide the opportunity to revise and strengthen the approaches taken within Gift of Gallang, as well as improving on future partnership, community ownership and engagement strategies utilised for similar programs moving forward.

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Section 7: Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus group/Interview for key stakeholders (partner organisations)

Gift of Gallang partner focus group – topic guide

Introduction

My name is _____. I am a researcher for Gift of Gallang, involved in the evaluation of this program.

Thank you for agreeing to take part. Before we begin, I will explain what will be happening today.

The focus group today should not take more than about one hour. The main purpose of the research is to find out some information about how well the program is facilitating community partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and local organisations in Inala. First, we will be talking about how well the program has encouraged ownership and engagement from the local community, then we will be talking about the quality of partnerships between the organisations involved.

I want to emphasise that we are evaluating Gift of Gallang, not you or your organisation's role in the program. You don't have to answer all questions. If you would like a break at any time, just let me know. There will also be an opportunity for you to make comments.

The research has ethical approval from Education Queensland and Mission Australia research team. All the information you give me is strictly confidential. If you agree, I would like to record the discussion so that I can get a full and accurate record of what you have to say, but the recording and transcript will be stored securely and remain confidential. Only the researchers will have access to them. General feedback from the discussion today will be given to Mission Australia to enable them to review their services, but this is done on a confidential basis. The discussion today will be part of an evaluation of the Gift of Gallang which will be made available to you on request.

Topic guide

8. **Partnerships**

How have you or your organisation been involved in Gift of Gallang?

Do you think all the relevant community support services were invited to take part into the planning of GoG?

Did all the relevant support services and organisations have input into the planning process? How might this be improved in the future?

Have the roles and responsibilities of all organisations involved been clear and appropriate? If yes, in what ways? If no, how might this be improved in future? Prompts: leadership, governance, communication and implementation.

Can you describe some of the challenges and successes experienced during your involvement within the program?

If you have faced any challenges, how might (or were) these be overcome – either through the course of this program or in future programs?

9. **Community ownership and engagement**

What activities has Gift of Gallang undertaken to ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Inala has ownership over the program?

How successful are these activities?

Have the community's wishes been integrated into the activity planning process?

What activities have taken place to encourage engagement from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Inala?

How successful are these activities?

What types of governance are in place within the community to ensure that community members and local organisations continue to engage with the appropriateness and relevancy of the Gift of Gallang?

How successful are these forms of governance?

10. **Concluding remarks**

Is there anything further anyone would like to add before we conclude?

Thank you for your time, we appreciate all the feedback you have provided today.

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview for School Staff

Gift of Gallang Program Evaluation: Semi-Structured Interview School Staff

Gift of Gallang (GoG) Implementation

- What was your involvement with the implementation GoG?

- What accommodations needed to be made within the school environment? *

- What were the facilitators that helped with implementing GoG? What worked well? *

- What were the challenges involved with implementing GoG? How were these overcome? *

* prompts may include: curriculum, timetabling, communication/negotiation with stakeholders, engagement.

Student Engagement and Understanding

6   Which GoG sessions were you involved with? (Actively or as an observer/guest).
7   How engaged were students during the session/s? Why do you think this is?
8   How well do you think the students understood the content of the session?
9   Do students remember or discuss knowledge/skills learnt from previous sessions? Any examples?

Impact of GoG

- What impact do you feel the program has had on student wellbeing? *

- What impact has it had within the broader school culture? *

- Have any unexpected outcomes occurred?

- What follow up do you think will be required or would you recommend?

* prompts may include: cultural knowledge/pride, social connectedness, sense of belonging, connection to community/culture, self-determination.

GoG Feedback

- Any positive or negative feedback received from the students, parents or teachers involved?

10   Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the GoG program or any other feedback you would like to provide?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 3: Facilitator Reflections of Session

Name:	Organisation:
Date:	Location:
Session Title:	
Date of Session:	Location:
Number of Facilitators Involved:	
Number of Students Attending:	Age range:
Approximate Number of: Boys	Girls Other

Describe physical set up of learning environment:

Topics Covered During Session

What was the overall purpose of the session?

What were the main topics covered?

How was this delivered?

Did any unexpected or unplanned topics come up during the session? If so, what were they?

Student Social and Emotional Engagement

Describe the general mood of students during the session. E.g calm, happy, excited, unsure, distracted, nervous etc.

What contributing factors may have triggered these emotions?

Did the general mood or behaviour of students change during the session? If so, why?

Student Session Engagement

How engaged were students during the session? Why do you think this is?

How did students respond when they were asked to participate?

Which activities did students seem to enjoy or like most?

Which activities did students seem to enjoy least?

Did any students leave the room or disengage with the facilitators?

Understanding of Sessions

How well do you think the students understood the content of the session?

Any examples of 'a-ha' moments where you could see students understanding the content?

Do students remember or discuss knowledge/skills learnt from previous sessions? Any examples?

Overall Reflections

What worked well about the session? Why?

What would you do differently? Why?

Do you have any suggestions on changes that would improve the session if it was run again?

Appendix 4: Mission Australia Partnership Survey for GoG

The aim of this survey is to assess how partnerships within Gift of Gallang (GoG) are tracking over time, including areas that might need improvement and those that are working well. There are no right answers and we value your honest feedback about your experience in the partnership. No identifying information will be collected or reported on and your response to the survey will be anonymous. This questionnaire should take approximately 5 mins to complete and will be administered twice throughout implementation of the GoG pilot program – once at the beginning and again towards the end. A final evaluation report will be available after the pilot program has concluded. Thank you for taking the time to respond.

Your role
1.   What is your role:
2.   Name of your organisation (if relevant):

Current partnership
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the partnership, as it is currently? *Please tick one per row*

(1 of 5) Leadership (strategic direction and leadership of GoG)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I am very clear about what GoG's vision and goals are	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There are strategies for relationship building among GoG partners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is strategic leadership for GoG	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(2 of 5) Governance (guidelines and processes for implementation of GoG)						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I have a clear sense of my own roles and responsibilities within GoG	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is a clear process for shared decision making within GoG	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is an effective process within GoG for monitoring progress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(3 of 5) Resource allocation (financial, human resources, time, facilities dedicated to GoG)						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Adequate financial resources are available	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adequate staff time is allocated to GoG and the partnership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Resources are allocated for effective communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(4 of 5) Collaboration (how partners and stakeholders work together)						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
The actions of my organisation are well-coordinated with those of other organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There are new and strengthened working relationships among partners within GoG	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(5 of 5) Experience of partnership (your personal experience of GoG partnership)						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I feel that I have a voice and can influence decisions related to GoG	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I understand how my work contributes to the overall goals of GoG and why I am needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
GoG includes the views of people who live in this community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

End of survey.

Thank you for your participation.

Topic guide

We are going to begin the interview now; I will make notes as we go along which you can see at the end of the interview.

11. Knowledge of program and connection to community

First, I am just going to tell you a little bit about Gift of Gallang, in case you have not yet heard very much about it. Gift of Gallang is a school-based resilience and healing program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 9-11 years designed to heal mind, body and spirit. Gift of Gallang has been designed with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Inala and is supported by Mission Australia and Inala Wangarra. This program ran for one hour sessions each week of term 2 during school hours.

- Had you heard about Gift of Gallang before today? Did you attend the information night? Did you attend any of the cultural nights held in Inala?

A big part of Gift of Gallang is working with the community around Inala.

- Do you live around Inala? How connected are you to the community in Inala? (do you hear about community events? do you have friends or family living in the area?)

Mission Australia and Inala Wangarra are helping to manage Gift of Gallang.

- Have you heard of Mission Australia? What do you know that they do in Inala? Have you heard about Inala Wangarra? What you know that they do in Inala?

12. Protective factors

Gift of Gallang is about healing. A big part of healing is having a supportive family and community and a strong culture. We all have different ideas about what these mean for us.

- What does a supportive family mean for you? What does it look like?
- What does a supportive community mean for you? What does it look like?
- What does a strong culture mean for you? What does it look like?

Thinking about your idea of supportive families, supportive communities and strong culture:

- what do you think people can do to make sure children in Inala are more connected to these supports?
- Do you think that as a result of your child participating in Gift of Gallang there has been any changes in their understanding of family, community or culture?,

13. Mental health literacy and help seeking

Gift of Gallang is also about building wellbeing and teaching children about positive and negative wellbeing. Before we talk more about wellbeing I'd like to ask you what wellbeing means to you.

- What does positive wellbeing look like? What does negative wellbeing look like?
- How much do you talk about wellbeing, or things that build or weaken wellbeing, at home within your family? Has Gift of Gallang increased how much you talk about these things?
- Do you hear your child/children talking about this? (what do they say?)   Is this different after they've been in the GoG program?

- How much do you hear wellbeing, or things that build or weaken wellbeing, spoken about in the community around Inala – among your friends, the people you spend time with or people you meet around town?
- How do you build wellbeing for you and your family? (is it easy or hard, what makes it easy or hard?)
- If someone is having trouble building or keeping up their wellbeing is there anyone you would speak to or any place you would go to for help? (who or where?) Do you know people or places in Inala that could help someone build up their wellbeing?
- Do you think your child being part of Gift of Gallang helped build their wellbeing? In what ways?
- What would you like to see offered by organisations like MA or IW to help build children's wellbeing and community strengths?

14. Concluding remarks

Do you have anything you would like to add before we finish?

Thank you for your time, we really appreciate the comments you've provided today.

Developed by Mission Australia research staff

Appendix 6: Program Logic

Situation → Inputs → Activities → Short Term Outcomes → Medium Term Outcomes → Long Term Outcomes

Situation	Inputs	Activities	Short Term Outcomes	Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
The need for a suicide prevention program in the Inala region for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was identified in response to community concerns

To increase effectiveness, this requires genuine partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, other NGOS, health and schools as well as Elders and other commuity members | Collaboration, relationship building and staff time investment from:

CfC (funding)

Inala Wangarra

Inala Elders

Southern QLD Centre of Excellence

Insitute for Urban Indigenous Health

Inala Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations

Headspace Inala

Kids in Mind

Mission Australia Research Team

Local Primary School | Community consultations

Formation and consultation with the Committee of Hope

Training of facilitators

Community Cultural nights

Gift of Gallang School-Based program

Links made to school curriculum

Gift of Gallang school showcase | Increased community cultural connection

Increased student sense of belonging, self worth, connection to culture; knowledge and use of strategies for social/emotional wellbeing; engagement and school attendance

Strengthened relationships between student, school and parents

Increased cultural awareness within school community

Increased awareness of supports and reduced stigma around help seeking | Increased use of strategies to maintain social/emotional wellbeing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children/young people

Increased help seeking behaviours accessing communitiy support and local services

Increased awareness throughout broader community of protective factors for social/emotional wellbeing

Strengthened collaboration and coordinated community support sytems | Improved individual resilience and social/emotional wellbeing

Decreased incidence of suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and young people living within the Inala region. |

Assumptions: - The Committee of Hope, and involved organisations are able to continue overseeing and implementing GoG through ongoing funding.
- Schools in the region provide time and space for the school based program to run and students are able to participate.
- Parents/families engage in cultural nights and any other GoG related activities available.