

10. COMMUNITY IMPACT

This section aims to articulate and examine the unique qualities and the impact the Croc Festival™ has on local Indigenous communities. It outlines the dimensions of social capital and community resilience and how these come together to contribute to an understanding of the relationships and links with the goals of Croc Festival™. The constructs of social capital and community resilience are not, yet, fully supported by research. This evaluation contributes to the development of reliable measures of social capital and community resilience, and to improving knowledge of ways to enhance the educational and health outcomes of young people, in particular.

10.1 SOCIAL CAPITAL

The concept of social capital has been developed by different disciplines to explain social interaction and organisation, and to link these to desirable social goals – economic development, social cohesion, and more recently, to the health of populations. Although it has been defined differently by different disciplines and used differently to explain different outcomes there is growing evidence of its value in describing some of the complex pathways between social phenomena, and the education and health outcomes achieved by individuals and communities or populations. It is important to note that the evidence is of an **association** between these phenomena and educational or health outcomes – with some evidence that communities that have higher levels of social capital having higher rates of educational attainment and better health status than communities that have lower levels of social capital. However it is not, yet, clear which comes first – more research is needed. Despite this lack of ‘proof’ of the relationship between social capital and educational and health outcomes, there is evidence that children and young people who live in families and communities that are cohesive, connected (within and to wider society), and that share norms of respect, support, and tolerance are more likely to ‘stay at school’ and to be healthier throughout their lives.

In this project, given the specific focus of the Croc Festival™ on Indigenous young people and communities, the description and definition of social capital developed by Mignone et al with First Nations communities in Canada were used. There has been no equivalent research conducted to define Indigenous social capital in Australia.

“Social capital is a concept that tries to capture the essence of community life.^{xvii}” It is a collective construct that combines several elements – identified by Mignone and First Nations communities (and others) as:

- Social relationships (e.g. how do people get along?)
- Social networks (e.g. do people find it easy to connect with others?)
- Social norms and values (e.g. do people show respect towards others?)
- Trust (e.g. do people, in general, trust others?)
- Resources (e.g. do people tend to share resources?)

Each of these elements was incorporated into the design and evaluation of the Croc Festival™ conducted in 2004. The evaluation identified participants' perspectives on the ways in which the Croc Festival™ contributed to increases in the social capital available to the participating communities (and to individual participants) and these have been reported below.

10.1.1 Community Resilience

Although there has been no definitive study of the relationship between social capital and community resilience, again there is a defensible logic linking the two. It is likely that communities with access to high levels of social capital are more likely to be resilient.^{xvi}

Community resilience looks at the ability of a community to respond effectively to shocks and stresses, including the collective and personal capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to and influence economic and social change.^{xvii}

A resilient community has been found to have the following characteristics:

Leadership

1. leadership, both formal elected and informal organisational, is diversified and representative of age, gender, and cultural composition of the community;
2. elected community leadership is visionary, shares power and builds consensus.

Participation/Collaboration

3. community members are involved in significant community decisions;
4. there is a spirit of mutual assistance and cooperation in the community;
5. organisations in the community have developed partnerships and collaborative relationships;
6. citizens are involved in the creation and implementation of the community vision and goals.

Unity/Pride

7. the community feels a sense of pride;
8. people feel a sense of attachment to their community;
9. the community adopts a development approach that encompasses all segments of the population.

Self-reliance

10. the community is self reliant and looks to itself and its own resources to address major issues;
11. the community has a strategy for increasing independent local ownership;
12. the community looks outside itself to seek and secure resources (skills, expertise, finance) that will address areas of identified weakness.

Economy

13. there is a variety of community economic development organisations in the community such that the key community economic development functions are well served;
14. the community is aware of its competitive position in the broader economy;
15. the community has an economic plan that guides its development;
16. there is on-going action towards achieving community economic development goals.

Employment

17. employment in the community is diversified beyond a single large employer;
18. major employers in the community are locally owned;
19. there is an openness to alternative ways of earning a living and economic activity.

Confident optimism/vision

20. people feel optimistic about the future of the community;
21. there is a strong belief in and support for education at all levels;
22. there is regular evaluation of progress towards the community's strategic goals;
23. organisations use the community economic development plan to guide their actions.

A project such as the Croc Festivals™ cannot hope to contribute to each of these dimensions of a resilient community. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some characteristics to which the Croc Festivals™ might reasonably be expected to contribute and some of these were included in the evaluation.

10.2 LOCAL IDENTITY

Strong communities provide people with personal support for each other through bonds of friendship or family. They are also communities in which individuals and groups participate actively in community decision-making – through membership of committees, local government, sporting and social clubs, and all mechanisms through which people connect with one another and with society .

Participants saw the Croc Festival™ as strengthening the communities in which they were held. Participants said that they found the Festivals had increased the supportiveness of the community and contributed to the community's positive self-image. Several people in Moree and Port Augusta felt that their community had a negative image and that the self-esteem within the community was generally low.

Many felt that the Croc Festival™ had contributed to improved community pride by bringing other people into the town, offering opportunities to showcase their community and to improve the perceptions of the community among others.

“It brings the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community together. It brings kids together. Moree has a bad name and the Festival breaks the negativity of the town, as people go away and talk positively about Moree. It’s the best thing for Moree.”

There were several examples of how Croc Festival™ was linked to improved community identity in the host community:

- It was seen to “put our community on the map.” As well, it was felt the Croc Festival™ provided an opportunity to bring people together, as “no event pulls the community together like Croc”. It was seen to lift people’s spirits, both for young people and the wider community;
- Some people felt very proud that they had hosted the Croc Festival™, a sense that “we did all that work”;
- The Festival creates a good atmosphere and a regional feel that brings communities closer together. For example, in Weipa community members do not see the Festival as a Weipa Festival but rather a Western Cape Festival;
- On Thursday Island they ran a competition for students to design the logo for the Croc Festival™. This was made into posters and calendars and these were displayed throughout the community in hotels, offices and shops.
- The majority of respondents felt that Croc Festival™ is well supported by the community and well attended.

“Croc’s fun and we felt special as hosts. It’s exciting to meet other students from other areas”.

10.3 TRUST

The role of trust as an integrative force that bonds people, that enables people to cooperate, and that reduces the complexity of social interactions (between individuals, and between individuals and society’s institutions) is well documented.^{xviii} Strong communities are those in which people trust that other people, organisations and government institutions will act in accordance with social rules and norms and will take into account the interests and needs of others. High levels of trust in communities have been shown to enhance cooperation, interaction and engagement in community activities, and is associated with attitudes of altruism and reciprocity.

There were several examples of how the Festival promoted and strengthened trusting relationships between members of the community. Many spoke of the lines of communication having been opened between organisations, as well as business related interactions made easier.

For example, in Port Augusta, the Pika Wiya Health Service said that the Croc Festival™ has made many students feel more comfortable approaching the health centre. A number of students have completed work experience or placements with Pika Wiya as a consequence of their presence at the Croc Festival™.

10.4 SOCIAL NETWORKS

10.4.1 *Interaction between different sectors*

Educational outcomes and health outcomes are determined not only by personal decisions made by individuals, but by the physical, social and economic environments within which people live, work, and play. When environments are supportive it is easier for children and young people to make positive choices about education, career and health. When environments are not supportive it is harder for children and young people to make such positive choices. For this reason it is vital that all sectors (government, non-government and the private sector) and within government (housing, transport, education, health, family services, employment, etc.) work together to improve children and young people's life chances.

The organisation of the Croc Festivals™ provides opportunities for all relevant organisations and sectors to join in and work together, even if only for a defined period. Building good working relationships among different groups and organisations is a necessary first step in developing effective longer-term partnerships – and the Croc Festivals™ appear to have been a useful platform for such relationships.

Some people felt that in their general work environment they have links with other organisations that do similar work to their own, or work with similar target groups, but that they often do not make links with organisations outside this speciality. It was felt that Croc Festival™ broadened the relationships that organisations develop, which can be beneficial personally and professionally. A range of examples of this interaction were identified:

- People involved in activities often go around and introduce themselves to other activity supervisors and gather information about their organisation.
- Once the Festival is over, organisations and individuals have strengthened relationships creating more opportunity for interaction and future collaborations. In Port Augusta and Alice Springs activity supervisors discussed getting to know people from other organisations and this has opened up lines of communication both socially as well as for business opportunities. This was more limited in Thursday Island because the community is already very tightly knit, with organisations already working together quite regularly.
- Relationships that developed as part of the Croc Festival™ have lead to long-term collaborations in Queensland between Queensland health and other local health services who collaborate throughout the year.

- Others have said it provides contacts of “who to talk to” and has “oiled the wheels a bit” when it comes to conducting other business.
- Running sports activities for the Croc Festival™ has led to follow-up visits from QLD Hockey, QLD Athletics and QLD Softball in Weipa.
- As mentioned in section 6.1.5, in Alice Springs, where the event was held for the second time, members of the Croc Committee felt that the Festival enabled the most extensive networking opportunities of all local community events. In particular, the Alice Springs Local Council felt the Festival was significant as it enabled them to engage with a number of important areas such as venue organisation, sporting activities and associations and the environmental health activity.
- It appears the interaction and networking opportunities offered by Croc Festival™ are quite different to other opportunities during the year. Generally other opportunities are limited to groups with similar focus (eg youth services), rather than offering broader exposure to a range of organisations and individuals across a range of sectors. It was recognised by a number of people that if the Festival was not held in their community, networking opportunities would be reduced.

10.4.2 Use of local facilities: sharing resources

There were numerous examples of how local facilities were used in the staging of the Croc Festival™.

- CDEP workers in Alice Springs helped with some of the catering. In Port Augusta and Alice Springs CDEP workers also helped in the erection of the tents in the Croc Village.
- In Alice Springs the prison truck was used to transport supplies and equipment, and prison workers helped to set up tents in the Croc Village.
- In Thursday Island local buses were used to transport students between activities. Local facilities such as the public pool, oval, sports centre, bowling club were all used to house activities.
- Other local services used TAFE, plumbers, community catering and local businesses. Comalco, in Weipa said this of the Croc Festival and their contribution of in-kind support (cranes, trucks, etc):

“We (Camalco) support programs that create social cohesion – albeit for a couple of nights. Croc helps to break down stereotypes ... it is also a good chance to talk to people. I now stop and have a yarn with the AQIS person in Weipa, with QLD Health. It improves relationships between ourselves and Police as now we know who to talk to. It has oiled the wheels a bit.”

Ownership issues

Within any partnership there are likely to be tensions arising when organisations have different goals, or when people have differing expectations of the roles to be played by each of the partners and of the intended benefits. These tensions are common in inter-sectoral partnerships when the initial relationships are negotiated without specific attention being given to defining the needs, goals, and expected benefits for each

partner. Such tensions can be worked out – the Croc Festivals™ experienced such tensions as discussed by respondents below.

There was some criticism related to a perceived limited level of interaction between organisations in Moree because it was felt that the Croc Festival™ (by this they were referring to IFA and the AES) “divorced itself from other organisations” and “split the community”, and that this limited the interaction that was possible. It should be kept in mind that a few participants who were not involved in organising the Croc Festival expressed this perception™, but this was not unanimously shared by others who were not involved in the organising of the Croc Festival™.

Thursday Island and to a lesser extent Weipa, also felt critical of the level of ownership they have of the event, and expected more community control and recognition of the time, energy and resources devoted by the community. In particular, a number of community members from both Weipa and Thursday Island felt that they did not see enough of the funded money being put to use at the Festival as most workers are volunteers and the community provides many in-kind resources. This feeling was fuelled by the fact that local businesses also contributed in-kind to the event. There was some sense of “where does all the money go?” In all locations a number of people felt that while they did all the preparation work, “IFA completely took over during the Festival” and a few felt resentment at the perceived lack of recognition that was shown to the community for their efforts. One member of the Croc Committee in Weipa expressed disappointment that very few IFA workers helped with the clean up after the Festival and that the majority of the clean up was performed by community members themselves, again on a voluntary basis.

Despite this, there was a sense across the research that the community was prepared to put these gripes aside “for the sake of the kids”.

Others appeared to be very happy with the current level of ownership and a number recognised the difficulty of organising the event without the assistance of IFA.

10.4.3 Building relationships among people and organisations

The quality of social networks can have an impact on health. Social isolation or exclusion can have an impact on individuals’ self-esteem and hence, on the likelihood of their completing school education. Such exclusion (of whole communities as well as individuals) can also mean that some groups are denied access to the resources they need to participate fully in education and to become and stay healthy. For individuals, social networks can help people to obtain the social and material resources they need (love and care, food, books, clothing, transport) while for communities, social networks are necessary to ensure that they have high quality schools and health care facilities, representation on the bodies responsible for social decision-making, and avenues through which to advocate for changes where problems have arisen.

Section 9 discusses in detail how the Croc Festivals™ support the expansion of social networks between parents and children, between parents and teachers, and between schools and the wider community, for example:

- Families and community support the school through their involvement in the organising and execution of the Croc Festival™. In Port Augusta the parents involved in the community catering during the Croc Festival™ raised enough money to buy five fridges for a local high school.
- The Pika Wiya Health Service in Port Augusta through their involvement at the Croc Festival™ now have stronger relationships with the schools, and students visit the centre and learn about careers in health. High school students also do placements and work experience at the health service.

“From Pika Wiya’s perspective it has strengthened relations with other organisations and has had positive spin-offs. This means that we have a greater capacity to do more with each Festival and outside the Festival as well.”

- University students studying allied health got involved in the health expo organised by Pika Wiya in Port Augusta.
- The Festival shows young people there is unity in putting together an event (unity with Aboriginal organisations, government, schools and wider community ... “all working together to make the event happen”).
- The Croc Festival™ increases the organisations’ and community’s awareness of community service and youth organisations, particularly through the health and careers markets.
- A number of Croc trainees in Moree have subsequently taken on work with local community organisations as a result of their involvement with the Festival.

10.5 CULTURAL CONTEXT, SOCIAL NORMS AND VALUES

Communities in which prevailing social norms and values support dialogue among people from different cultures and in which difference is not only tolerated but valued are more cohesive, and provide all their members with the confidence and support they need to grow and flourish – physically, psychologically and socially.

Creating opportunities for dialogue, for creating partnerships and working together, and for modifying the social norms and values of people and organisations were also outcomes of the Croc Festivals™. Participants reported that that the Festival promotes reconciliation as it brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous people closer together:

“There is no other time in the year when you see that audience together”.

You see “black and white students performing and see black and white parents sitting together”;

10.6 EMPLOYMENT

In Weipa the Napranum Community (an Aboriginal community just outside of Weipa) ran the security for the Croc Festival. Since that time Camalco have employed their security services with a contract of \$20,000.

In other communities:

“CDEP workers were given some responsibility with labour and catering so the Festival has provided some employment opportunities.”

As with the health exhibitions, the careers market was seen as one of many education platforms targeting students. In Weipa members of the local Shire Council identified the link between the Croc Festival messages around employment and education and their strategy “got to be earning or learning in 2005” which targets 16 year olds, as mentioned in section 8.2. This representative said “the journey of 1000 miles starts with a single step” and felt the Croc Festival™ was a useful complement to other strategies.

“If you can get a few kids saying ‘I can do that’, this is useful for planting seeds”.

Also mentioned in section 8 was that businesses were positive toward the careers market as some felt their involvement was an investment, as they are committed to increasing Indigenous employment, and the careers market was seen as a good opportunity for local businesses to sell themselves as a career option. However, some businesses and organisations felt the careers market had less relevance as it was perceived to be a ‘snatch and grab’ and therefore students were not engaged with the information. Several people also suggested that the representation of local businesses could be improved.