



# Aboriginal Innovation Schools Initiative

Progress Report 2012

## Balga Senior High School



Department of  
Education

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## 1. School context

Balga Senior High School (SHS) is an Independent Public School and an Aboriginal Innovation School. It is located 15km north of the Perth CBD in one of the city's lowest socio-economic and culturally diverse areas. The school population comprises 60 per cent migrant students, 25 per cent Aboriginal students and 15 per cent non-Aboriginal students who predominantly reside locally but also come from all areas of the North Metropolitan Region.

The educational history for many students upon enrolment at Balga SHS indicate many of our students face challenges, which include broad issues such as finding it difficult to fully engage and connect with the whole school experience. As a result, many of the students have attendance issues and many do not continue to fully explore their education experience or achieve to their potential.

The "Balga Way" provides a full service approach to students, focussing not only on the school day but also a student's community time. The full service for the 'whole student' approach provides a coordinated system of inter-agency servicing including Department of Child Protection (DCP), Police, Centrecare, AseTTs, Juvenile Justice, Employment and Job Link services as well as assorted mental and physical health services.

The school provides the following education programs:

- **Intensive English Centre (IEC)** - These students are predominantly refugees or asylum seekers through Humanitarian Entrance schemes. Many have had no prior schooling in any language – entering education for the first time as teenagers.
- **Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program (SNSEP)** - This program seeks to enrich the educational experiences and outcomes of selected Aboriginal students in the Swan region of Perth by using sport (Australian Rules Football [AFL] for boys, netball for girls) as the conduit to engagement and achievement. SNSEP offers a broad curriculum, complimented by a Nyungar language and culture program.
- The **Education Support Program** caters for nominated students across Years 8 to 12. All students have Individual Education Plans encompassing educational, social and behavioural objectives.
- The **Middle School Program (Years 8-10)** caters for a relatively small number of local area students; with the majority of students being graduates of the Balga SHS IEC or primary school-based IECs. There are also specialised transition classes for IEC graduates with limited schooling, allowing students to focus on literacy and numeracy with one teacher for most of each school day.
- The **Senior School Program** caters for students who have completed the Middle School, Education Support, IEC or SNSEP programs and it is flexible and differentiated to address the needs of particular groups of students. Flexibilities include the ability to complete senior schooling over three years, part time attendance for some students (such as young mothers), specialised English Second Language transition programs for limited schooling students and a direct entry University course (Aspirations) offered in partnership with Edith Cowan University. Many students access Workplace Learning, enabling them to have experience in a range of workplaces for one or two days per week. Traineeships and school apprenticeship links are also supported by the program.

In addition to these programs the school also accommodates Teen Parents, including an on-site childcare centre providing access for teenage parents to continue their education.

The school has a very strong focus on celebrating culture, embracing The Arts, specialising in drama and theatre, film, visual arts and media. There is also a very strong focus on sport with programs in AFL football, netball and soccer.

## 2. Rationale for innovation

An analysis of student attendance, achievement and behaviour as well as community and family profile data spanning back to 2007 indicated that although there have been quantifiable improvements over time, significant challenges remained. Attendance averages for Aboriginal students improved from 2007 to 2012 and some improvements were evident in students' literacy and numeracy performance as measured by National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data. It was recognised that to maintain these gains, successful strategies needed to be firmly embedded in the school.

Student health and wellbeing data collected through the Environmental Scan and an analysis of available family support for students also indicated major impediments to student learning existed. Issues included substance and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, parents or siblings who were incarcerated, family transiency, feuding or domestic violence, over-crowding in home and a lack of food. Eighty per cent of our Aboriginal student population were affected by at least one of these factors.

This prompted the school to focus on two major innovations in 2012 that will then be included in developing our School Community Aboriginal Agreement:

- Initiate a **multiple intelligences approach to the teaching and learning program**
- Develop a **structured model for extended services** addressing student and family health, wellbeing and learning needs. Our school community parent group had been successful in acquiring funding for a Parent and Community Engagement (PACE) capacity building program to assist parents to support their children's education. Whilst this program and our Extended Services Program have a natural and powerful link, the role and function of each is clearly different.

## 3. Learning program background

In 2007, a major innovation incorporating multi aged grouping for three hours per day was initiated in Balga SHS's SNSEP for all students in the program. The groupings were based on students' literacy levels and readiness for learning. This initiative aimed to improve participation, learning, self esteem and behaviour of students in the program.

This was highly successful for this cohort of students, with behaviour incidents reducing by 80 per cent in 2007 compared to 2005-06 and the average attendance rising by 16 per cent in 2008 following the trial. The curriculum embedded Nyungar language and culture as well as community issues and needs in a much more comprehensive way. Parents and carers were welcomed to the school and informed of the education of their children.

While 70 per cent of students improved their learning and attendance in the period from 2008 to 2011, issues in behaviour and readiness for learning remained in the group of students who attended less than 50 per cent of the time. This group was characterised by 15 students who attended almost no school and were very hard to locate or even engage and 10 students whose readiness for learning when they were at school was very low.

The success of the program varied from year to year depending on enrolment and student educational background.

In 2009, an alternative program called *Boost* was trialled to develop students' life skills, interaction with others and survival skills.

Although there was some success, it was clearly evident that the following needed further focus:

- strategies to get parents involved in their child's education
- learning strategies matching student's learning styles and needs
- connection of students to health services, positive recreational activities, part time work opportunities and involvement in sustained club sports on weekends
- celebration of success with the child's family.

#### **4. Innovation implementation 2012**

##### **4.1. Innovation 1: Multi Intelligences Program Moorditjabiny Kaadadjiny (Becoming Stronger Learners)**

The Multiple Intelligences Program (MIP) was developed in Term 2, 2012 as a strategy to improve engagement and performance levels of students in Years 8, 9 and 10 attending the SNSEP program at Balga SHS.

Initially, the school analysed student records on behaviour and performance to identify aspects of our Multi Aged Grouping (MAG) program that needed further refinement. The data was extracted from the individual daily behaviour and performance sheets completed each day for each student recording effort towards work, punctuality, tentativeness, following instructions, wearing of uniform and level of application.

This analysis demonstrated that many students were disengaged learners who were failing to achieve accepted classroom/program behaviour expectations. This resulted in multiple isolations and withdrawals from classrooms, further disrupting their learning progress. Such behaviours resulted in chaotic learning environments with consistent disruptions frustrating staff, peers, the students themselves and their parents/carers.

This data was then supplemented with student interviews that highlighted that students were not only disconnected from learning but thought that existing teaching methods and classroom structures were not conducive to effective learning for them. Students' interview responses claimed they were irritated due to boredom, frustrated with lack of understanding and the style of content being delivered, discouraged by not keeping up and angry with staff and administration responses to their poor behaviour through isolations and suspensions. They also claimed that they found it difficult to concentrate and sit still for long periods of time.

Such concerns led to the Aboriginal Curriculum Coordinator and School Psychologist encouraging teachers to apply the theory of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, highlighting the fact that students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn in different ways. Bloom's Taxonomy was also encouraged as it provides a structured questioning method that allows for students to engage in higher order thinking processes in a way that caters for students at varying academic levels.

In 2012, a trial period commenced with an alternative approach to learning for eight students who were demonstrating a high level of risk, being isolated from classes regularly. A learning matrix that included mindfulness and fitness as part of the students' morning routine was used. Parents were contacted and informed of the approach and this resulted in strong parental interest and support. This was confirmed and documented by parent and student contracts, highlighting their acceptance of the need for a high level of individual student engagement and personal responsibility for this new way of learning.

The learning environment was adjusted to reflect 'calmness' within the classroom which included the use of background meditation music and essential oil burners. This scene set the mood and tone for learning. The morning commenced with mindfulness during form lessons that included meditation, journal writing and reflection as well as a nutritional

fruit snack. There is increasingly convincing evidence that mindfulness improves health and well-being by reducing stress and anxiety. The practice of being aware of mindfulness allows students to strengthen innate capacities to self regulate both emotion and attention.

Journal writing for Aboriginal students proved to be significantly effective. By writing, they learn about themselves, understand different ways of looking at personal challenges and discover ways to solve personal problems. Journal writing has demonstrated an improvement in students' confidence to undertake written, visual, listening and speaking tasks.

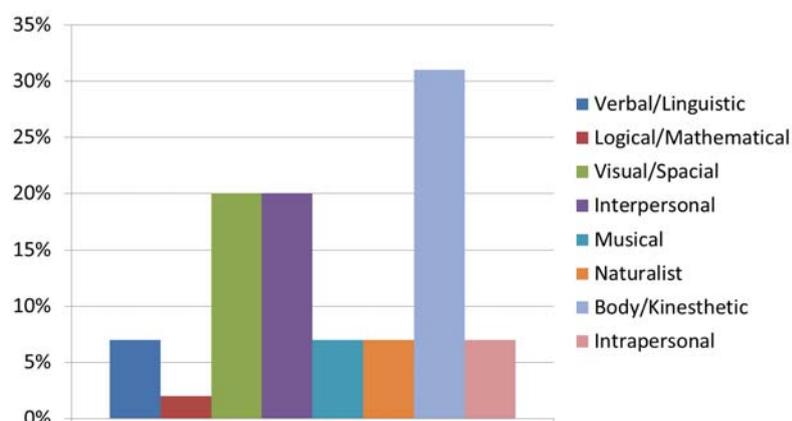
Teachers, like their students, need and deserve support to flourish professionally and personally. To counter the increase pressures of teaching, mindfulness is an intervention that also supports teachers' resilience and social/emotional competencies.

Students then commenced the Multiple Intelligence learning with a thematic matrix that was developed by Ralph Pirozzo. This was introduced to staff through a *"Differentiating the Curriculum"* workshop delivered through the Department of Education, Institute for Professional Learning. This matrix incorporates a choice of 48 tasks addressing both Howard Gardner's Learning Intelligences and Bloom's Taxonomy Levels of Thinking.

Students were given the opportunity to demonstrate responsibly to undertake tasks by either working independently or with other students while the teacher and support staff are available to assist and offer guidance.

This trial proved to be successful and led to the implementation of a Multiple Intelligences Survey across the whole SNSEP program involving all students. Analysis of the data for students' preferred learning style is displayed below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Overview of preferred learning styles of Year 8, 9 and 10 SNSEP students in 2012.**



Results showed that of the students surveyed, there were three dominant learning styles evident. These were Body/Kinaesthetic learners (31 per cent), Visual/Spatial learners (20 per cent) and Interpersonal learners (20 per cent).

After analysing these findings, staff attended additional professional learning in Ralph Pirozzo's Learning Contract Workshops. After much discussion, it was decided to implement an integrated thematic matrix across the whole SNSEP program including learning areas of English, Society and Environment, Science and Maths.

The school engaged consultant psychologist, Mr Russell Pitcher, to further enhance our MIP and to assist us in modifying the culture of learning environments and teaching pedagogy in response to student feedback. Russell's doctoral research identified that

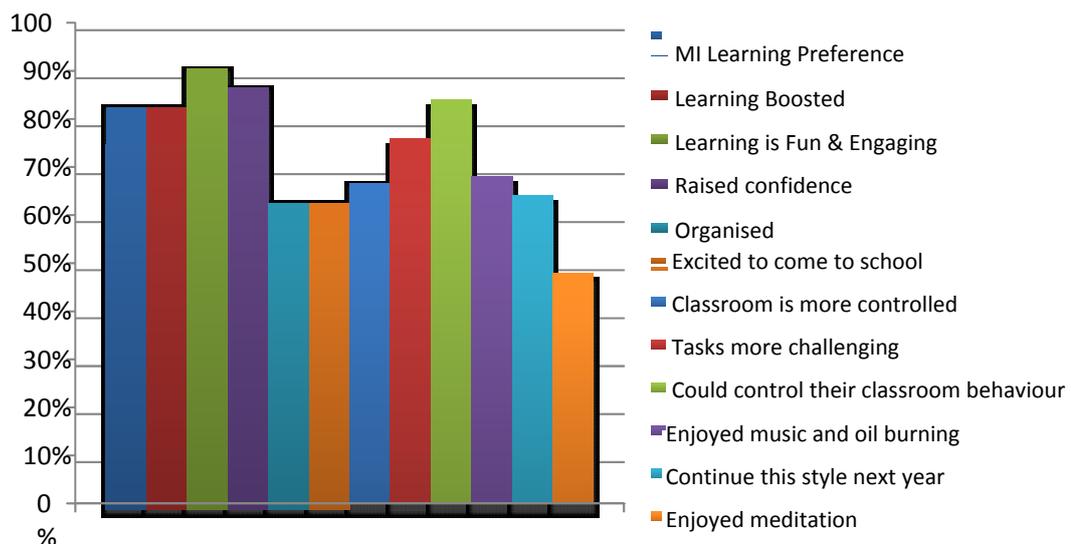
students appraise the suitability of schooling contexts through the perceived pupil-school match on three particular criteria - Standards, Care and Choice.

Russell's view is that many schools focus on raising standards whilst neglecting the child-centred elements of Care and Choice. This focus can result in students perceiving contemporary schooling contexts as authoritarian in style. While well suited for compliant learners with preferences for logical/mathematical intelligences, such approaches can result in higher disengagement and behavioural problems for more self-determining indigenous students.

Data from the online Student-School Suitability Survey ([www.hiscore.com.au](http://www.hiscore.com.au)) enabled staff to identify the preferred engagement styles of students as compliant, social, ambivalent, self-determined or avoidant learners. It also profiled the engagement culture of schools as to the extent that they were authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent or impersonal.

Evaluating pupil-school alignment using child-centred measures of satisfaction, motivation and wellbeing (each a prerequisite for effective engagement with schooling) enabled the profiling of individual pupil strengths and limitations. It also guided reflection and modifications to the learning environment and raised awareness of staff of the necessity to diversify teaching pedagogy to match students' needs.

**Figure 2: Student responses in MIP Survey December 2012**



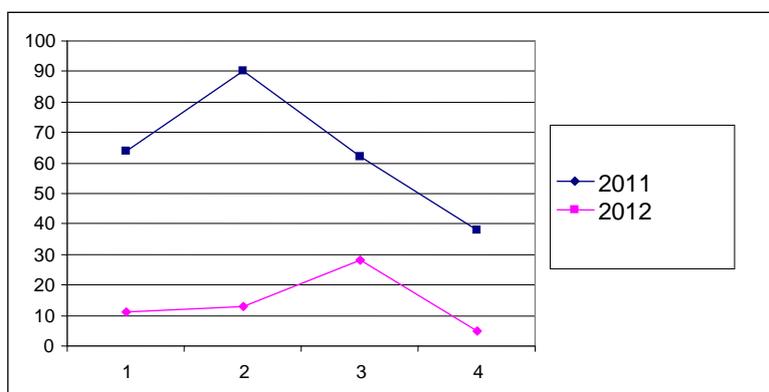
Students' responses to a survey conducted later in the year to find out their reactions to the MIP learning model are outlined in Figure 2. These survey results confirmed that the majority of students preferred this new approach to learning as it was more appealing to them and it boosted their engagement and confidence to learn. As a result, they could control their classroom behaviours more easily.

In addition, we trialled a MIP action learning program during Term 4 that included agencies and parents/carers attending, delivering and working together with students on a task. This further increased students' self-esteem, well-being and learning strengths within a community context.

Figure 3 below shows that overall we have achieved significant progress in areas of student engagement, motivation and behaviour for students within the classroom from 2011 to 2012. Student suspensions and isolation/withdrawals have also greatly reduced.

Staff feedback has also been positive with the majority preferring to use the MIP approach.

**Figure 3: Recorded negative behaviour incidents of students in Years 8, 9 and 10 at Balga SHS measured each Term in 2011 and 2012**



An analysis of different MAG groups yielded some interesting observations about the extent to which MIP approaches had been effective. MAG 1, containing a cohort of students with high academic levels, and MAG 3, containing a cohort of students at lower primary levels, did not connect with MIP as well as MAG 2. MAG 2 are the largest cohort of students who are performing at middle to upper primary levels and displaying the most behavioural problems.

This feedback has resulted in a review of delivery methodology for MAG 1 and 3 cohorts. It is evident that the majority of students within MAG 1 are compliant independent learners who prefer highly structured work focussed on improving academic standards. MAG 3 students are more avoidant and ambivalent learners who need lots of extra support and management with a need for high levels of structure and engagement.

#### **Recommendations to develop the Multiple Intelligence Program in 2013**

- Analyse HiScore data to identify further recommendations to MIP.
- Utilise HiScores survey to gain parent and staff perceptions of the school cultural styles.
- Identify strengths and teaching styles of teachers and support staff to enhance student performance and match student/staff/task compatibility.
- Refine Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) and student profiles to link with MIP.
- Produce student profiles to inform all contact staff, including those in mainstream.
- Increase staff awareness of Multiple Intelligences Learning - teaching and learning styles and types.
- Develop strategies to focus on mindfulness, journal writing, fitness and activity based learning.

## **4.2 Innovation 2: Coordination of Extended Services initiative**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

Due to the complexities of students' needs, a strong partnership approach has been developed with many services/agencies to assist in improving student educational outcomes and social behaviours.

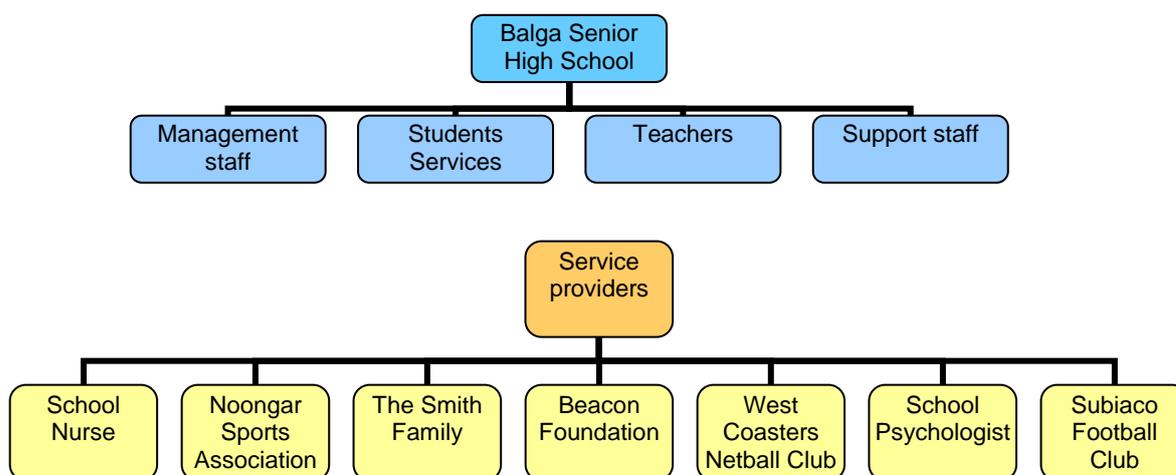
The Extended Services Coordinator is a new position funded and developed through the Aboriginal Innovation Schools initiative. This role enables the school to identify appropriate service providers and then link these relevant service providers to the student and family to maximise educational and recreational engagement.

#### 4.2.2 Service providers in 2011

Prior to the role of Extended Services Coordinator, Balga SHS had established connections with several culturally appropriate agencies that enhanced learning opportunities for our students. These can be seen in Figure 4.

However, this was done in a manner that was neither coordinated nor structured. Relationship strengthening was problematic due to time constraints on staff and potential new relationships were at times not developed in the timeliest manner. In addition to this, formalisation of these relationships through Memorandum of Understandings (MOU's) and agreements required significant development.

**Figure 4: Overview of service providers at Balga SHS in 2011**



#### 4.2.3 Progress through the Aboriginal Innovation School initiative in 2012

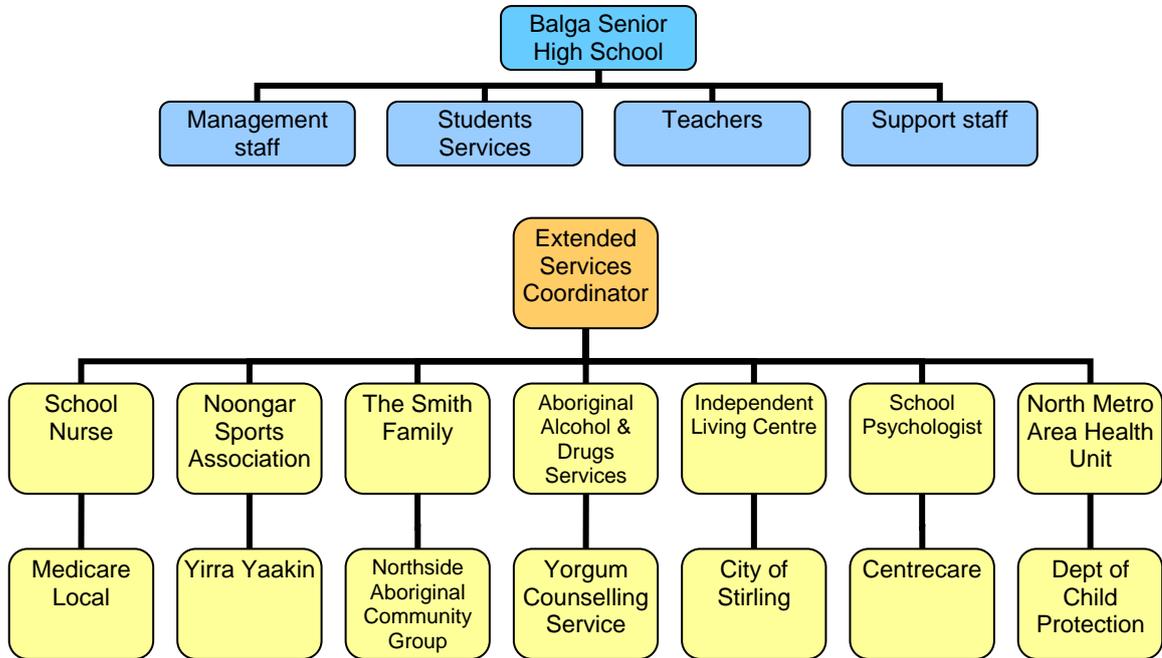
With improved coordination and streamlined school processes outlined in Table 1 below, finding and accessing services with the relevant criteria to best suit the clients' needs has been a lot more efficient.

**Table 1: Service coordination process introduced and used at Balga SHS in 2012**

Need	Contacts	Meeting	School connection	Implementation	Review and management
School strategy. Collaboration with school executive and senior management group. Liaison with staff. Connection with parent and community group.	Environmental scan of resources in community.	Determine suitability of resource in relation to identified need.	Meeting with school executive to have recommended strategy endorsed.  Collaborative meeting with curriculum leaders/Program Manager/Parent group.	Draft agreement - if appropriate endorse it.  Draft link to strategic plan - have ratified.  Enable project to commence.	Maintain high level relationships with all key stakeholders.  Maintain focus on agreed goals/outcomes.  Coordinate project review.

The services listed below in Figure 5 and Table 2 on page 8 have either been new developments or are now accessed on a more regular or frequent basis since the extended services coordination role began in 2012.

**Figure 5: Overview of service providers at Balga SHS in 2012**



**Table 2: An overview and analysis of particular extended service provision to Balga SHS in 2012**

Service provided to Balga SHS	Organisation delivering the service	Population served		Expected outcome	Actual outcome
<p>Provided all students with the opportunity to design a logo to promote agency's health campaign.</p>	<p><b>North Metro Area Health Service (Ngullak Koolbaang)</b> Aims to promote healthy lifestyles to Aboriginal people.</p>	<p>All SNSEP students</p>		<p>Students design a logo representing healthy lifestyles based around Aboriginality whilst learning healthy eating habits and the impact of western diets affecting Aboriginal people.</p>	<p>Students designed the logo and understood the positive effects of healthy eating as opposed to negative effects of an unhealthy diet. Project resulted in a high level of student participation with students artwork used as labels on tee shirts, aprons, bags etc and further promoted as the banner for the "Survival Concert" in Perth on Australia Day 2013.</p>
<p>Art Yo project provided a six week cultural based art program that increases youth self esteem, develop awareness and confidence whilst understanding different styles of Aboriginal art and developing/ expressing themselves through art.</p>	<p><b>Medicare Local - Art Yo Project</b> Aims to provide a network of medical service providers for the purpose of enhancing the delivery of primary care.</p>	<p>All SNSEP students</p>		<p>To provide students with a sense of identity and connection to heritage through art, dance and song.</p>	<p>Students' well-being was enhanced through the identity and expression of emotions during the creation of an Aboriginal/contemporary art design, which also increased cultural identity and interpretations.</p>
<p>Provide students with a three week program of hands on healthy cooking and nutrition awareness.</p>	<p><b>North Metro Area Health Service (Moorditj Lifestyles Program)</b> Aims to support Aboriginal community members to increase their capacity to practice healthy eating and physical activity.</p>	<p>All SNSEP students.</p>		<p>To provide students with healthy lunch.</p>	<p>Provided students with basic cooking skills to cook and prepare a healthy lunch and gained an understanding of freshly prepared healthy food nutritional value as opposed to fast foods.</p>
<p>"Ladies Night" event organised for all female staff, students and female parents/carers at Balga SHS that assisted agency interaction with school community.</p>	<p><b>Independent Living Centre</b> Provides people with a disability, mobility and accessibility issues with personalised assistance to find the best solution for their needs to maximise their quality of life.</p>	<p>Young Carers Program</p>	<p>All female students</p>	<p>A chance for agency to interact with students directly.</p>	<p>Interacted and met with students who identified themselves as needing the service and donated \$1000 towards the event.</p>

**Table 2 (cont)**

Service provided to Balga SHS	Organisation delivering the service	Population served		Expected outcome	Actual outcome
Provided students with a three day camp based around culture, leadership, counselling and mateship.		Mental Health Program	Eight male and eight female students from SNSEP	Provide students a camp with a focus of developing leadership skills, provided counselling and acknowledge other peers differences.	Students identified traditional Aboriginal ways of living and surviving. They were informally counselled through “yarn time” and developed leadership skills by facing some of their own fears.
Nil	<b>Yorgum - Aboriginal Counselling Service</b> Offers counselling to Aboriginal people affected by child sexual abuse and family violence.	Nil		Yorgum was approached as an Aboriginal specific service provider to counsel students who are directly linked to suicide/deaths.	Yorgum’s response was ineffective at this stage. (Unsuitable timing for agency, however aim to pursue contact in future).

As can be seen in Table 2, many of the actual outcomes are much greater than those expected. Many services act as catalysts for other new services and partnerships to be created.

#### **4.2.4 Key findings and future directions**

As a result of improved coordination in initiating contact and maintaining relationships with extended service providers, our collaboration between SNSEP and agencies is more streamlined and efficient. We have found that agencies are usually able to tailor programs to the needs of our students. Only one agency was unable to provide services due to lack of time and resources at that point.

We found that attending regular inclusion and community group meetings was the most helpful way to network and connect with service providers directly involved in the school community. We also recognised that agencies and services within the area were pleased with us approaching them as it gave them connections to the Aboriginal community which they often find challenging. A key factor here is that “the school is the best connector as we know the families and have their contacts”.

In future, we aim to partner with services that add value to education with connection to family-identified needs. This centres on health, nutrition, parenting support, counselling and career role model development.

Securing partnerships, MOUs and other agreements will need to be developed as a future plan.

## **5. Overall summary of innovation in 2012 and recommendations**

### **5.1 Multiple Intelligence Program (MIP)**

- The MIP is enhancing students' aspirations to learn, especially for those students who have had significant gaps in their learning or are having troubles in settling down to learning in a traditional classroom setting.
- Students capable of academic extension have varied perceptions of the rigour in the MIP and will be integrated into mainstream English, mathematics and science for 2013.
- The MIP approach has been embraced by many parents who enjoy seeing their children enjoying and embracing their learning.

### **5.2 Extended services**

- The Extended Services structure established to date is clearly showing many early benefits. Feedback from parents has been one of extreme appreciation in establishing connections for both themselves and their children to access essential services in situations of need- especially those that are delicate and emotionally impacting to the family.
- The collaborative work of the Extended Services Coordinator with school staff and the PACE coordinator has broadened everyone's knowledge of the services available, improved the assessment of need and made connection to the services in a more timely way.
- Further establishment of this model in 2013 into areas encompassing mental health and career and industry exposure are intended.