

# Dream the Pathways

inspiring rural young people to make dreams happen

Getting yourself off to a good start in life can be tough if your life experience has involved trouble at home, lack of role models, limited education, poor literacy and numeracy skills, racial discrimination and generational unemployment. The additional challenges of living in a remote community - geographic isolation, no access to public transport and limited local resources – only make matters worse.

Facing just one of these issues can be hard enough. But when most of them are woven into the fabric of your life from birth, and no other prospects present themselves, the future must look grim. How could you even begin to answer the simple question: ‘What would you like to do with your life?’ Dream the Pathways aims to inspire the dream of life’s possibilities in young people in central and far west NSW.

Dream the Pathways is designed to expose young people to life opportunities beyond their immediate horizons. Each year, Dream the Pathways engages about 600 at-risk young people (the majority of whom are Indigenous) in rural and remote towns in educational and vocational opportunities.

Overall Dream the Pathways seeks to bolster feelings of personal significance, connectedness and engagement in enterprise by helping participants to:

- Develop self confidence, life-skills and motivation.
- Become positively engaged in mainstream schooling.
- Engage in alternative learning towards Year 10 and/or pursue vocational accreditation.

- Develop job-readiness skills.
- Expand their awareness of training and employment opportunities.
- Increase engagement in traineeships and employment.

One of the Dream the Pathways programs in Bourke and Lake Cargelligo, *Strong Young Mums*, works with about 50 young indigenous mothers who left school early due to their pregnancies. The *Strong Young Mums* program has an early intervention focus and aims to provide young mothers aged 12-22 years with the opportunity to achieve their Year 10 accreditation (for some, Year 11 and 12). The program also aims to educate the mothers about their child’s developmental needs and to assist them in fostering sound parenting skills.

The key objectives of the program are to assist these young mothers to:

- Gain their Year 10 accreditation.
- Engage in vocational training.
- Benefit from the support of a strong support network.
- Develop information and skills for confident and positive parenting.
- Provide positive developmental opportunities for their children.

Dream the Pathways recently engaged a resident artist to run workshops with local young people in an effort to help them claim their tradition with pride, build an interest in art and link them more strongly to their culture.

## WHY SVA BACKS DREAM THE PATHWAYS

Dream the Pathways is a youth-focused service within Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes, a social welfare agency formed in 1996 in response to the devastating effects of drought in the region at the time. It is the only non-government organisation west of NSW's major centres of Dubbo, Orange and Wagga, and its services now extend across rural and remote communities in more than 50 per cent of the state.

SVA supports this venture because of its proven engagement with the vast regional and rural community, employing and training local, particularly indigenous people, to work in the organisation. In 2007, the *Strong Young Mums* program won the Catholic Social Services Australia Award for most innovative program and was one of six programs presented to the then Federal Minister of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs as an exemplary service.

## GROWTH

Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes has grown to 55 people, including 18 from the local indigenous community. Dream the Pathways has a team of 18 dedicated youth workers spread across Central and Far West NSW.

Since 2004, SVA has provided Dream the Pathways with mentoring, funding, strategic planning support, consulting services, financial management support and links to the business community.

## PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Dream the Pathways is performing extremely well, having exceeded outcome targets and reaching near-capacity placements based on regular, intensive one-on-one support. The results show that 100 per cent of participants have their career horizons broadened, with 80 per cent citing improved work skills and employability.

Of the 50 young indigenous mothers involved in the *Strong Young Mums* program, 18 are now active participants in TAFE and are on their way to achieving Year 10 accreditation.

## WHAT'S AHEAD

In the next year, Dream the Pathways aims to:

- Establish 'alternate schools' within two local High Schools to capture students at risk of dropping out of school. This will involve bringing identified students together for one day each week in a dedicated classroom where youth workers offer general mentoring, support with school work or assignments and other activities that build connectivity to culture and the arts.
- Gain stronger commitment from local employers to provide workplace opportunities for local young people.
- Expand the highly successful award-winning *Strong Young Mums* program into more indigenous communities.
- Build on the artist workshops to form an enterprise to which local young people may contribute.