

Updated Action Statement on Aboriginal adult English LLN in the Northern Territory

12 September 2017

The Action Network on Aboriginal adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN)¹ met at a workshop at Charles Darwin University in November 2016, and 12 September 2017. This Statement is supported by a group of around 100 individuals and organisations committed to collective action for improved English LLN for Aboriginal adults in the Northern Territory (NT). Many Aboriginal people have aspirations for work, education and life which require English literacy and numeracy. The network suggests that no real progress can be made in this area without long-term government commitment, Aboriginal leadership, bi-partisan support and a collective approach. This entails government and non-government, community, business, and voluntary sectors working together (and separately) towards the same long-term vision with measurable goals. Literacy is everyone's business. In the Northern Territory however, no government department has responsibility for adult education or adult language, literacy and numeracy. Also there are no 'Closing the Gap' (COAG) Indicators addressing adult education or LLN – a significant policy gap given the scale of the issue, and the flow on effects to the NT and the nation as a whole.

The Action Network agrees that literacy is a fundamental human right, essential to social inclusion, and peoples' ability to fully develop their knowledge and skills and realise their potential. English language LLN capability enables participation and progression along education and career pathways and is essential for interaction within business, the economy, social systems (like health, community services, the law) and broader society.

Census data from 2011 identifies that more than half of NT Aboriginal adults speak an Aboriginal language as their main language (54%). This figure increases to over 80% in very remote areas. During Whole of Community Engagement (WCE)² initiative community consultations Aboriginal people reiterated the centrality of their own languages to their cultural practice, identity and connection to country, however many understood the importance of supporting their children to learn English and wanted to improve their own. Level 3 Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)³ skills are required to fully engage in English speaking society and work. The statistical overview report (Shalley and Stewart 2017, Appendix 1) shows that most adults included in the research were assessed at below Level 3 (ranging from 86% in skills for listening to English to 94% in numeracy). Improved adult LLN in the general population has proven flow on effects for children, parents, families, and society as a whole. Improved parental literacy benefits their children.

The LLN Action Network would welcome the opportunity to work closely with all tiers of government and others on this critical issue, and is pleased to make the following recommendations:

¹ **Although we use the term 'LLN' throughout this document we are also referring to the range of Foundation skills required in order to establish, apply and maintain LLN in life, on-line and in the workplace.**

² Funded through the Australian government's *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* (HEPPP) and implemented with six remote and very remote NT communities.

³ The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) is a tool which assists both specialist and non-specialist English language, literacy and numeracy practitioners describe an individual's performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy.

1. Responsibility and policy

- 1.1 That all tiers of government acknowledge the extent and impact of low levels of English LLN in the Aboriginal adult population of the Northern Territory (NT), and prioritise coordinated and sustained, bi-partisan commitment that endures beyond changes in government.
- 1.2 At present no Government department has primary leadership and implementation responsibility for adult education and adult English language, literacy and numeracy in the NT. It is therefore imperative that responsibility and leadership be clarified and actioned.
- 1.3 It is to be noted that the 'Closing the Gap' policy contains no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for adult education or adult LLN. This is considered to be a significant policy gap with multiple flow on effects. COAG is encouraged to take action in this regard.
- 1.4 Develop an evidence-based, Indigenous-led, Aboriginal adult English LLN policy/ strategy for the NT informed by a broadly composed consultative group with significant involvement from sectors including: LLN specialists, education and training, legal, health, employment, business, voluntary, community services and media.
- 1.5 That government financially supports consolidation of the Action Network and information clearinghouse and recognise the leadership group and members (as a potential source of specialist knowledge, skills and experience) and a necessary force and resource at this time.
- 1.6 That the Aboriginal adult LLN policy (and any implementation plan/s) link with, and further the aims of, aligned Northern Territory, national and international policy and statements.

2 Long term funding commitment

- 2.1 Commitment is required to long-term, secure and flexible funding for accredited as well as non-accredited English LLN education and training for adults at all levels of the ACSF.
- 2.2 Develop contemporary funding models to enable increased access to unaccredited, informal and real-time learning opportunities for Aboriginal adults at the lower levels of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)⁴ (those at pre-level, Level 1 and Level 2).
- 2.3 Acknowledging the aging LLN workforce, the need for more qualified practitioners and the cost of educational qualifications, commit to creating an enabling environment for maintaining a qualified, well-resourced and supported adult literacy workforce in the NT. This workforce should include a high proportion of Aboriginal people and local language speakers.
- 2.4 Reinstitution or re-invigoration of community/adult learning centres/spaces in Aboriginal communities as a matter of priority.

⁴ Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) – the Australian Government's tool for measuring competency in reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning skills.

3.0 Innovative and culturally appropriate delivery

- 3.1 Expand and consolidate the evidence-base related to the design, implementation and evaluation of effective LLN service delivery models. This includes, but is not limited to:
- a) Community-wide and community-campaign models
 - b) Community/adult learning centre models
 - c) Organisational development models: workplace LLN capacity building and workforce development
 - d) State-wide and national delivery models e.g. Tasmania and New Zealand
 - e) English as an additional language (EAL) delivery for Aboriginal adults
 - f) Bilingual programs
 - g) Delivery to Pre-level, level 1 and Level 2 learners (specific)
- 3.2 Respect for Aboriginal language, history and culture, and the preference and need for establishment of Aboriginal language and literacy first in many parts of the NT should be reflected in the design and delivery of English LLN education and training for those populations, and in the qualifications and experience of those practitioners who deliver it. (e.g EAL, TESOL)
- 3.3 Ensure that policy statements include Aboriginal leadership in the design of: local programs (what is delivered, how and by whom); and, education and training resources with Aboriginal pedagogies and content.
- 3.4 Provide targeted training for Aboriginal staff and supervisors who wish to improve their English LLN and foundational skills in workplaces within communities to enable career progression.

4 Building a stronger evidence base

- 4.1 Investigate feasibility of conducting an NT-wide survey on ACSF levels of Aboriginal adults, including urban, regional, remote areas and correctional service settings.
- 4.3 Commit to a communication and education process to support NT Aboriginal leaders, urban and remote and communities, and organisations to understand the data contained in the Statistical overview Report (Shalley and Stewart, 2017) and to consult together on meanings for their people, lives and organisations.
- 4.4 Undertake a study of the economic costs of low levels of English LLN, and the economic benefits of improved levels in the Aboriginal adult population of the NT.
- 4.5 Establish an LLN clearinghouse which includes a comprehensive database of research evidence and for collection and distribution of free, culturally appropriate, LLN teaching and learning resources (including past and present and digital resources).
- 4.6 Consider funding arrangements to enable ACSF assessments and encourage organisations and agencies that regularly undertake adult ACSF assessments to collect and compile the results⁵ and share (de-identified) data centrally so the issue of low English LLN can be monitored over time.

⁵ In accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles of the, Privacy Act 1988

- 5 Resource and embed evaluation and use a 'collective impact' approach in NT LLN policy implementation and foundational work in order to enable:
 - a) Monitoring of a strategic multi-partisan, inter-sectoral collaborative approaches
 - b) Development of organisational and collective goals and KPIs
 - c) Ongoing policy and service refinement
 - d) Comparison of different implementation models, tools and methods
 - e) Sharing of findings, resources and approaches
 - f) Identification of factors contributing to success; and
 - g) Ongoing analysis of impact and outcomes (individual, family, social, economic etc.)

The LLN Action Network

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Whole of Community Engagement initiative - Strategic Priority Project on Indigenous adult LLN

Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor, Charles Darwin University

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This document is to be read in conjunction with *Appendix one* which provides essential background reading: *A statistical overview: Aboriginal adult LLN in the Northern Territory*, Shalley F. and Stewart A., Whole of Community Engagement initiative, Office of the PVC of Indigenous Leadership, Charles Darwin University, September 2017.

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