

Speaking With One Voice: A Partnerships Approach in RMIT's 'I Belong' Program

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Introduction

RMIT University is committed to increasing and improving the academic outcomes and access of all students in Victoria regardless of their circumstances and backgrounds. In 2001 RMIT invested in a program which would provide students with opportunities to grow their tertiary access and participation for equity groups. Initially the Schools Network Access Program (SNAP) was made available to seven under-represented Melbourne secondary schools. Since 2001 SNAP has increased to include over 170 Victorian secondary schools with further expansion scheduled in 2016. Students who complete year 12 at these schools are eligible to apply as a SNAP student, and as part of this access scheme they can have their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) increased by up to twenty points. This access for the students has been informed by the research conducted which found that students from non-selective government schools performed more highly than students from independent schools who achieved the same ATAR score (Dobson & Skuja, 2005). Given that a disproportionate number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds attend government schools (Gonski, Boston, Greiner, Lawrence, Scales, & Tannock, 2011); this suggests that low socio-economic status students with ATAR scores lower than the course cut-off who gain access through equity schemes will succeed at university provided that their scores are close to the cut-off level (QUT Equity Services, 2012). A key component of SNAP is the I Belong outreach program. I Belong commenced in 2011 and was designed to give students an authentic university experience and build aspirations to embark on a tertiary qualification. In 2014 RMIT hosted over 3500 secondary students on campus through the *I Belong* program.

I Belong was shaped in response to the *Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education* (2008). The report established targets for the higher education sector to increase the number of 25-34 year olds holding at least a bachelor-level qualification to 40%, and for the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled in bachelor-level qualifications to increase to 20%, by 2020 (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. xiv). In 2012 the Behrendt Review was completed and it detailed the challenges for Indigenous students accessing higher education and made recommendations on how to overcome these challenges (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012). The report highlighted that there were significant:

“personal and community factors such as a lack of encouragement from educators, lack of aspiration and lack of community understanding and support to take on higher education that can act as disincentives to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choosing to enrol in university” (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012, p. 17).

The report also listed a series of recommendations of which recommendation five was most relevant to the outcomes and goals of the *I Belong* program. This recommendation stated that the outreach programs for Indigenous students needed to focus on ‘building aspirations to go to university’, to ‘provide relevant information to students in Years 10 to 12, their families and communities about the transition to university for graduating secondary students.’ These were the most applicable components of this recommendation and as discussed below, have been at the forefront of the design of the Indigenous specific *I Belong* programs.

In the 2013-15 HEPP funding round RMIT, through the Equity and Diversity Unit, proposed an extension of *I Belong* to include a stronger focus on working with senior secondary students (years 11 and 12) and to increase the participation of Indigenous students at all levels. To increase the participation of Indigenous students in *I Belong*, the identified position of Coordinator Indigenous Participation, *I Belong* was created. The data capture system was modified to record the numbers of Indigenous students participating. Important partnerships were established and expanded with stakeholders including the Ngarara Willim Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (NWC), the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience as well as many others around Victoria, and a new co-delivery model to improve the effectiveness of the different programs was developed. *I Belong in the City* was developed as an Indigenous specific program, and all of these developments have begun to increase the participation of Indigenous students in the *I Belong* programs.

The Coordinator Indigenous Participation *I Belong* position would need to work collaboratively with the NWC, and the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME), as well as the middle years (years 9 and 10) team and the senior years (years 11 and 12) team within the Equity and Diversity Unit. In addition, the position would be required to develop a specific program for Indigenous students and modify existing programs to be more inclusive and culturally appropriate. Furthermore, this role would need to use appropriate strategies and approaches to engage with Indigenous students, families and communities to encourage them to participate in *I Belong* programs. By focusing on these aspects it was predicted that the numbers of Indigenous students participating in these programs would increase.

Following the recruitment of this dedicated role, an early priority was to develop a systems approach to track the numbers of Indigenous students currently participating in *I Belong* programs in order to establish a baseline. This required the modification of the unit’s existing Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) to enable it to capture this information. This posed a significant challenge, as the acquisition of the data would rely on secondary schools sharing students’ names, cultural status and dates of birth.

There were significant discussions around the best way to acquire and use the data of the Indigenous students participating in the *I Belong* programs. The data is collected in order to be able to identify the Indigenous students attending the programs, as well as being able to track the students from when they first attend a program to when they enrol at RMIT. Further discussion focused on how best to communicate this change in process of gathering this data to partner secondary schools; this was a requirement because up to this point, the data of their Indigenous students had not been collected and the privacy of the students was a significant consideration.

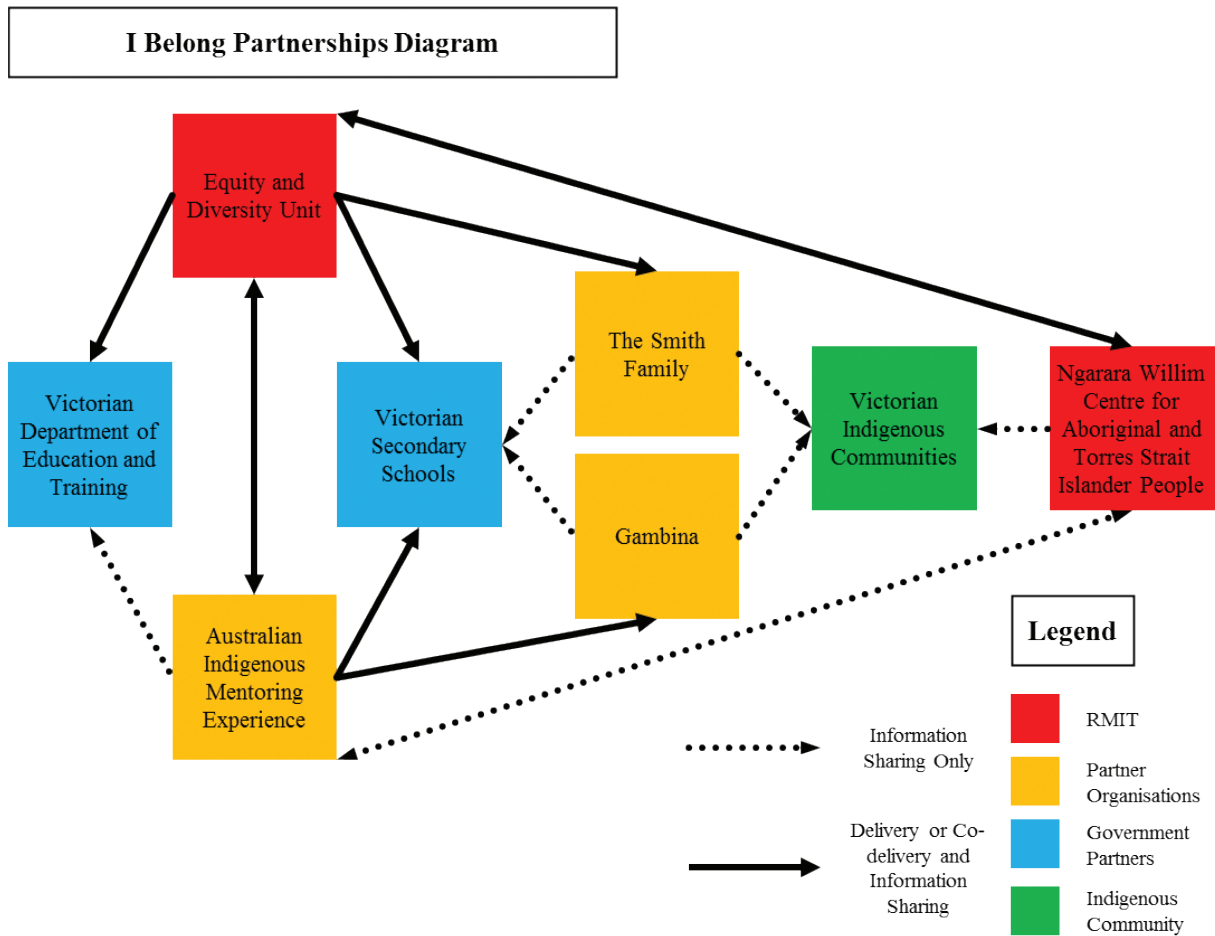
The data was used to report on the numbers of Indigenous students participating in *I Belong* programs, and used to identify and approach the students during programs to link them with the staff from the NWC. This process involved being explicit about how the data would be used and asking the school to discuss this with their Indigenous students prior to their participation. This was to ensure that the students would have every opportunity to identify as Indigenous if they wanted, and at the same time have measures to protect the privacy of the students should they have requested it. Furthermore, this process was operationalised through the use

of template emails for communication, additional discussions and cultural training for the staff in the Equity and Diversity Unit, and information sharing with the staff from the NWC. From August 2014, the data capture system was modified to record Indigenous students, and the total number of recorded Indigenous students who attended *I Belong* programs from August that year was 24.¹

Partnership with NWC

With the successful establishment of a mechanism to measure a baseline for current Indigenous participation within *I Belong*, the next priority was to develop strategies to increase the rate of participation of Indigenous students which required the establishment of meaningful partnerships with both the internal partner NWC and external partners. To ensure that students have a positive cultural experience at RMIT, the NWC staff have been extensively consulted on all the decisions made with regard to Indigenous students attending *I Belong* programs. This advice included how to identify the students, cultural awareness around the concept of ‘shame’ and advice around how to communicate to Indigenous students, families and communities. In addition to providing specialist advice and strategies for helping students feel welcome on campus, NWC has facilitated significant relationships between the Equity and Diversity Unit and various community stakeholders.

Figure 1: Diagram of the partnerships and their nature between the Equity and Diversity Unit and Indigenous stakeholders.



1. This data was from only 5 months of 2014 and is not an accurate representation of the actual number of Indigenous Students participating in *I Belong* programs during that year.

This process has been formalised by creating an environment where staff from the Equity and Diversity Unit have an understanding of how the staff operate within the NWC, as well as being able to use knowledge from the Coordinator Indigenous Participation, who has been working closely with NWC, when making decisions related to Indigenous students. When additional advice is required, the NWC is a key resource to enable the Equity and Diversity Unit to gain and apply that knowledge in an effective and consistent manner.

The most significant aspect of the partnership is the willingness of the staff at the NWC in allowing the Indigenous students from the *I Belong* programs to access their new facilities and culturally safe spaces on campus. Through sharing these spaces with the students, they are able to gain an authentic university experience and demonstrate that regardless of their circumstances, if they choose to study at RMIT, they will have an opportunity to engage with an active and connected Indigenous student and staff community on campus. In addition, by linking the students with the staff from the NWC, the students are able to learn more about the Indigenous Access Scheme, scholarship opportunities, support services for Indigenous students at RMIT and receive the relevant communication materials from the NWC. This process has been formalised through shared documentation relating to timelines, expectations and standard operating procedures as well as document templates which ensure that stakeholders have all the relevant information. To date, we have been able to follow this process with every identified Indigenous student who has participated in *I Belong* programs in 2015.

Co-delivery with AIME

The partnership with AIME differs significantly from that with NWC. This is largely due to the fact that AIME, like the Equity and Diversity Unit, runs and operates outreach programs for Indigenous students from their partner schools (almost all of which happen to be SNAP schools). The similarities between our program development models allow for valuable exchanges of knowledge about best practice, and a highly successful co-delivery model; allowing both organisations to create programs which are complementary and have far more depth. AIME's case management of Indigenous students in their final year of high school – a key difference between their service provision model and that of the Equity and Diversity Unit - is also important, as AIME are able to directly promote to students our 'opt in' *I Belong* programs, consisting of revision lectures, folio workshops and various information sessions.

Moving to a co-delivery model between the Equity and Diversity Unit and AIME has been beneficial to both the outreach programs at RMIT. This delivery model includes the co-delivery of *I Belong* modules within AIME and Department of Education programs, as well as providing support for the programs coordinated by the NWC, and the inclusion of AIME modules within *I Belong* programs. This process has enabled the observation and understanding of how closely the aims and goals of each program are, the key points of difference, and how these points of difference can add depth to the various programs. Co-delivery with AIME has been a great learning experience through better understanding of their operational and pedagogical processes, and from a content perspective of the strong cultural focus and personal development activities for the students. The development of the co-delivery model began with observations of each program by staff from AIME and Equity and Diversity. Once this process was completed, the staff from the two organisations were able to come together and identify where the differences were, and how these could be capitalised to build complimentary modules which would suit the different programs.

In this case the point of difference between AIME and the *I Belong* programs was the distinct focus of the learning modules of each. AIME modules are focused on building aspirations to enter higher education through the strong opportunities to get connected and celebrate

Indigenous culture. This is valuable for the students to be able to identify and succeed as young Indigenous people. I Belong focuses on building aspirations through the exploration, de-mystification and experience of university. With this distinction in mind, it was decided that the best way to increase the depth of the AIME outreach program was to incorporate a discipline specific workshop. In this case, an engineering workshop where students were able to experience what it is like to learn in a university environment, the workshop also included a strong emphasis on the nature and the types of courses available, career pathways and future opportunities. Overall the students were able to receive the prominent messages of both AIME and *I Belong* through the different workshops with little duplication or obsolescence.

Another partnership, which has proven to be critical to the success of increasing the participation of Indigenous students, is between the Equity and Diversity Unit and The Smith Family, through their regional offices in East Gippsland in Victoria. This partnership has provided access to Indigenous students, families and communities across this region. The Smith Family provides critical support to 'at risk' families and students through their school-community hub framework in the Gippsland region. They are very active; providing case management and support to many Indigenous families. The value in this partnership comes from the fact that The Smith Family has direct access to students and families without relying on their relationships with the schools.² Being able to provide information directly to Indigenous students, families and communities is crucial when building the levels of trust and 'buy-in' from the communities. This was clear when we were able to travel to the partner schools and present an information session to the students and families about the *I Belong in the City* program.

The I Belong in the City Program

In June 2015 the *I Belong in the City* program was piloted. As part of this program 14 Aboriginal students from three schools in the East Gippsland region were hosted for three days and two nights by RMIT. The students attended a middle years (years 9 and 10) discipline specific program exploring the discipline of Urban Planning. This program was designed to be culturally relevant by capitalising on the importance of place, space and connection to country; strong themes in both Urban Planning and Indigenous culture. Partnerships played an important role in this program, both through operational support with The Smith Family and their ability to facilitate introductions to the students and families, mobilising of the students on the morning of the program to ensure they were on the bus, and through content support supplied by AIME, the Koorie Heritage Trust and the Melbourne Museum. These partnerships meant that not only was the program close to capacity; it was an opportunity for students to be exposed to strong Indigenous role models.

These role models consisted of individuals who were considered 'uncles' and 'aunties'. They included the Koorie Heritage Trust guide Uncle Len, and Uncle Eric who accompanied the students in his capacity as a Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) from Lakes Entrance. The students also had access to young Indigenous role models through the AIME workshops including Douglas Brigs who was the 2014 Victorian Mr NAIDOC, and Alan Murray, a former AFL footballer, currently working for the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. These role models were able to provide knowledge and Indigenous history about the city of Melbourne. This was a strand of the program which was present across many of the different workshops facilitated by the external organisations.

2. This has been a part of The Smith Family's implementation of School-Community Hubs at a variety of sites across Victoria. This structure has allowed The Smith Family to better target communities, families and students with educational support resources and funding. For more information please see: <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/what-we-do/our-work/supporting-communities-in-need/school-community-partnerships>.

The goals of the program were to provide an opportunity for the students to gain an insight into Urban Planning as a discipline to study, as well as future career opportunities as Urban Planners. Students would also have an opportunity to explore Melbourne and discover more about the Indigenous and non-Indigenous history of the development of the city. The aim was to achieve all of this in an environment where the students were in a culturally safe space, able to acknowledge and celebrate their culture, and not encounter any cultural barriers to accessing any of the content or activities.

Initial feedback from the students and the accompanying staff has been positive. This feedback consisted of an evaluation questionnaire and conversations with the students during the program. The feedback was largely positive with 64% of the students indicating that they would consider university as a destination after secondary school. In the evaluation 57% of the students also indicated that they would also consider RMIT as a destination after secondary school, and over 70% responded that they were motivated to do better at school, and motivated to learn more.³

Figure 2: Table of selected responses from the student evaluation of the *I Belong in the City* program.

Questions	Answers		
	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree
I received Information about a range of study options in a way I could understand	64.29%	35.71%	0.00%
My understanding of what it would be like to study at RMIT has increased	64.29%	35.71%	0.00%
I am motivated to do better at school	71.43%	21.43%	7.14%
I am motivated to learn more	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%
Going to University will help my ideas about the future come true	57.14%	35.71%	7.14%
The program has helped me think about plans and ideas for my future	42.86%	57.14%	0.00%

From this table of evaluation responses it is clear that the program was able to make an impact in the two areas of motivating the students to do better at school and motivating them to learn more. This is a positive result for the pilot of the program and indicates that the impact this program has had will have the potential to impact the students and their studies. The areas where improvement is needed are better linking *I Belong in the City* to studying at university and linking this to their future prospects, as well as, packing the information about studying at university in a way which is more relevant and meaningful for the students.

The comments the students had about the program in the evaluation were encouraging. They stated that they had a positive experience overall and also provided insights into what could be improved for the next delivery. The students observed that “it was a great experience and it was a good thing to get to go around Melbourne and visit different places.” Another stated

3. For a complete breakdown of student evaluation feedback, see appendix 1.

that they had, “great learning, at RMIT I can see how many career opportunities there are.” A student commented that parts of the program did not interest them as much as they could have, “I liked going to RMIT, it was alright, some activities went on too long and didn’t interest me but it was okay. The urban sustainability got a bit too boring. I would like to come here again. It was a great experience. Thanks.” Importantly, a student did comment on the nature of the current RMIT students we had employed within the program in their capacity as student guides called SNAP Champions, and stated that, “it has been helpful and interesting. Learning about other people’s stories has helped.” These comments reflect what the program was trying to achieve and these comments will also help to continue to improve the program.

The ethical considerations of the program have been prioritised when using the evaluation data and the personal details of the students. The Equity and Diversity Unit is transparent and communicates with the students and families to ensure that they understand why the data is being collected and where it will be used. In addition, the only personal information the students are required to submit as part of the evaluation is their school name and their year level. By doing this, the students and families have a better understanding that their identities for the evaluations are anonymous. The data collected for reporting requires the students to submit more personal information. In this case students and schools are briefed as to how the data will be used and stored. The data specific to the Indigenous status of the students are used to identify them during the programs and link them with the staff at the NWC. The data is also used in the HEPPP reporting process to record the numbers of students attending the I Belong programs. Importantly, once the students complete secondary school and apply through the SNAP access mechanism for the purposes of all other internal RMIT data systems, their data does not reference SNAP in any way and thus this removes the possible stigmas attached to their entry to RMIT University.

The feedback from the students is indicative of the research into effective equity outreach design that underpins the *I Belong* program. This design has been influenced by the research into the aspirations of secondary students conducted by Appadurai (2004), Bernard and Taffesse (2014) and Ball, Davies, David and Reay (2002). The *I Belong* program is designed to support students from low socio-economic backgrounds to navigate the “dense combination of nodes and pathways” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) that lie between their secondary school level and future academic opportunities.

Furthermore, the *I Belong* and SNAP program has been designed in order to address the four A’s of an effective outreach framework - Awareness, Aspiration, Achievement and Access (Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983). The *I Belong* program incorporates a focus on awareness, aspiration and achievement through the workshops and activities the students undertake while they are on campus. The SNAP access scheme incorporates the access aspect of the framework through the mechanism of providing a boost of 20 points to the ATAR scores of SNAP students. The feedback from the students who attended the I Belong in the City program indicates that aspirations and awareness of university and higher education is increasing in these students.

Beyond the framework of the four A’s, *I Belong* was also developed in order to include many of the ten characteristics of an effective outreach program outlined in *Interventions Early in School as a Means to Improve Higher Education Outcomes for Disadvantaged (particularly low SES) Students* (Gale, et al., 2010). The ten characteristics informing the design of I Belong programs consist of: (1). people rich; (2). financial support and/or incentives; (3). early, long-term, sustained; (4). recognition of difference; (5). enhanced academic curriculum; (6). research-driven interventions; (7). collaboration; (8). cohort-based; (9). communication and information; (10). familiarisation/site experiences (Gale, et al., 2010 p. 6). In this case, the

I Belong in the City program attempted to include as many of these aspects as possible. These characteristics include, providing financial support to the students attending through being completely funded, a recognition of difference through the students being actively involved in the activities and having an opportunity to share their perspectives, and collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders.

The *I Belong* program as a whole has been designed to also include communication and information with targeted and appropriate communications to communities, schools, parents and students; cohort based, through hosting entire school year levels for specific programs, and enhanced curriculum through the transition and skills based workshops in the senior years programs which can impact on the future learning of the students.

The staff who accompanied the students remarked about the opportunities that this program allowed the students to have access to, and also commented, “it is so valuable for the students to have access to tertiary experiences like this, and to also have access to Melbourne where a lot of the opportunities are located.” This feedback added to the learning from the program and will ensure that in the coming years it remains a relevant and powerful tool to support Indigenous students in transitioning from secondary school to tertiary education.

The Smith Family’s case management of, and relationship with, their students was crucial to the success of the *I Belong in the City* program. In the lead up to the program they were able to successfully liaise with the schools, families and students to ensure that they received all the relevant information and that they would attend the program. A Smith Family support worker from the Lakes Entrance School Community Hub visited the homes of the students attending the program, and in one case even assisted the family to get the student ready and prepared on the morning of the program. Without this intervention, the student would have remained at home and missed the bus to Melbourne. The Smith Family support staff also assisted one student to get to Melbourne on day two of the program and this directly resulted in the program having 14 out of the 15 places filled. There is no doubt that without this close support, the program would not have been as successful as it was.

This partnership has been supported by effective communication at all levels in both organisations. At a higher level there has been work completed in order to design and implement a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the working partnership between both organisations. At more operational levels there has been a significant investment in the creation of a project briefing document as well as consultative and planning meetings in order to inform all the key stakeholders on the status of the various tasks assigned to be completed by each organisation. This systematic approach at all levels has meant that the understanding and communication between staff from both organisations has been effective and supportive. This has aided the efficiency of the partnership and has had a positive impact on our collaborative programs. Staff from The Smith Family has made it clear that without the investment in the program from RMIT, there is no doubt that it would not have occurred.

Partnership the Victorian Department of Education

Partnerships with the Koorie Education Coordinators (KEC) and Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESO) in the Victorian Department of Education and Training are both varied and important. The Equity and Diversity Unit’s working relationships with KECs and KESOs are still developing, and will continue to develop as we move forward to gaining a far more integrated partnership with the various Indigenous communities and organisations in Victoria. As it is, the partnerships with the KECs and the KESOs have developed to focus on a co-delivery and sustainable funding models to support pre-existing or new programs for Indigenous students

from both SNAP and non-SNAP schools. We are currently working towards accessing the communication networks established by the KECs and KESOs to better target our messages to Indigenous students they support across Victoria. This has been a challenge, owing to the inconsistencies around how the KESOs work within schools and regions. This is an ongoing process of understanding how the KESOs operate across the different regions in Victoria, and how we can best adjust our systems to have the greatest impact.

There is no doubt that there are benefits in being able to target Indigenous students through existing communication channels. The standard procedure when engaging and mobilising students to participate in *I Belong* programs is to communicate directly to school careers coordinators, who in turn campaign for, and support the students to come to the RMIT campus as a school excursion. In these cases, schools may also benefit from the established connections and case management relationships the KECs, KESOs and other third party organisations have with their Indigenous students. In many cases, these organisations have a more positive relationship with the students and families beyond what the school has been able to establish, meaning that a student may be more likely to attend an *I Belong* program having received the invitation from a contact they trust. In turn, SNAP and *I Belong* messages are less likely to be limited by the relationships between the school, students and their families, and can benefit from having people in a place of trust of the students and families vouch for the programs and encourage their participation. This was made clear through the comments of a student attending where they stated that, 'if the staff from the Smith Family had not helped me, I would not have come.' It is clear that the case management and social and community support provided by The Smith Family does have a significant impact on the outcomes of the program.

The importance of the partnerships, which have been developed and grown over the past twelve months, cannot be underestimated. This, however, is not going to be enough to sustain a long-term growth of Indigenous participation. To ensure that students have culturally positive experiences and want to come back to RMIT, and to gain the trust and acceptance of the Indigenous communities across Victoria, we must create culturally relevant and positive programs that give Indigenous students the best opportunity to succeed. As part of this process, the Equity and Diversity Unit has been working to focus on three key areas for development and improvement. These are: the employment of more Indigenous university students as staff in the capacity of SNAP Champions working within the *I Belong* programs, the creation of *I Belong in the City* as a program specifically for Indigenous students, and the inclusion of Indigenous content and perspectives in existing programs.

Almost all *I Belong* programs include contribution from our SNAP Champions, a team of current tertiary students who applied successfully through the SNAP priority access scheme. SNAP Champions are paid employees of RMIT and contribute to *I Belong* through the delivery of interactive presentations focusing on demystifying the transition from high school to university and Vocational Education, and dispelling myths and misconceptions about tertiary education. SNAP Champions help attending secondary students to navigate RMIT campuses, and share their own story of aspiring and transition to higher education. The pool of SNAP Champions employed at any one time is around 30. Since the start of 2015 we have hired three Indigenous SNAP Champions, and already they have had a significant impact in adding a layer of cultural relevance to Indigenous secondary students attending the programs they are working within, which otherwise would not have been present.

Future Plans

The *I Belong in the City* program is currently the only Indigenous-specific *I Belong* program which has been piloted, and there is a view to increasing the Indigenous specific programs in 2016. The aim is to have additional regionally focused programs piloted and implemented by the end of 2016, and to increase the visibility of RMIT and tertiary education in general in these regional and rural areas. There is an ongoing project to audit and update existing *I Belong* programs to more visibly incorporate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. Proposed measures include ensuring that every program begins with an Acknowledgement of Country during the official welcome, and that the programs have Indigenous images and symbols present; for example, staff wearing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flag badges. One of the more complex aspects of the project is the redesign and adjustment of the discipline-specific content of the existing programs to be more culturally inclusive. This is an ongoing project and will require liaison and input from academic staff and the NWC.

It is clear that over the past year, the work in this space has grown and developed into a valuable and important aspect of the *I Belong* program. It is also very clear that there is still a long way to go until the percentage of Indigenous students participating in *I Belong* programs reaches population parity. One of the largest challenges is the scattered nature of Indigenous students in Victorian schools. Enrolments of Indigenous students within SNAP schools are generally low and this adds to the complexities around engaging with the Indigenous students through the school or another community organisation. It is an ongoing aim to be able to create a database of Indigenous support contacts associated with each of our SNAP secondary schools, and through this database, have access to the communication channels to allow our messages to have maximum effect on the students to encourage them to participate in our programs.

The Equity and Diversity Unit is also focussed on creating closer working relationships with other tertiary institutions and their Indigenous support units in Victoria through their existing partnerships with the NWC, and RMIT's commitment to the Toorong Marnong Accord and the improvement of tertiary education outcomes for Indigenous students. Through this process it is hoped that the institutions in Victoria can also benefit from more consistent messaging and attract more Indigenous students to further study.

Conclusion

Having had an opportunity to establish many and varied partnerships with organisations working to improve the outcomes of Indigenous students across Victoria, it has become clear that this is an incredibly active and vibrant space to operate within. It has also become clear that if any sustained impact is to be achieved, more organisations will need to become aware of what support and programs are available for Indigenous students. This will improve the outcomes and the practice of these programs in two major ways. The first is funding. This is a key factor in whether a program is sustainable, and through being able to share the costs of the programs with partner organisations, there is an opportunity, not only to increase the volume of activities within the programs, but also to allow for the occasional funding shortfall an organisation might suffer from the competitive funding application process. The second way is being able to better understand the offerings of various outreach organisations to limit the redundancy of student workshops and incorporate more variation of student workshops within a program. The extra depth and breadth this creates is necessary to continue to create relevant and effective programs to support Indigenous student transitions to university.

Through the hard work of the staff in the Equity and Diversity Unit, as well as the staff from the partner organisations, it is hoped that over time *I Belong*, SNAP, RMIT and the tertiary sector in Victoria will be able to achieve population parity within the Indigenous tertiary student body, and through this process, remove the educational gap for the generations of Indigenous students yet to come. Overall, adopting a partnership approach has created an environment where the Equity and Diversity Unit has been able to record and begin the process of measuring a benchmark of the participation of Indigenous students in the *I Belong* program. Through the development of consistent data collection systems, the establishment, maintenance and growth of internal and external partnerships, and the development of the Indigenous focused *I Belong in the City* program and a working co-delivery model we have seen the numbers of Indigenous students steadily increase in 2015. The partnerships RMIT has established and grown in 2014 have allowed for the alignment of the communications from RMIT and our partner organisations to students, parents, schools and families, and allowed us all to speak with one voice.

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Appendix 1. Evaluation Data.**Student Feedback – IB MY City 17-19 June 2015****1. Event date***Text Response*

17-19 June 2015

*Statistic**Value*

Total Responses

14

2. Question 2 has been removed for privacy reasons.**3. What Year Level are you in at school?**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Year 7	0	0%
2	Year 8	0	0%
3	Year 9	4	29%
4	Year 10	8	57%
5	Year 11	2	14%
6	Year 12	0	0%
	Total	14	100%

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the I Belong program?

#	Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Total Responses	Mean
1	I received Information about a range of study options in a way I could understand	64.29%	35.71%	0.00%	14	1.36
2	I was able to experience the City and now I am more familiar with it	92.86%	0.00%	7.14%	14	1.14
3	I was able to experience a University campus and now I am more confident in visiting a university	42.86%	57.14%	0.00%	14	1.57
4	My understanding of what it would be like to study at RMIT has increased	64.29%	35.71%	0.00%	14	1.36
5	My knowledge of Urban Planning has increased	53.85%	46.15%	0.00%	13	1.46
6	It was helpful to hear RMIT students speak about their University experience.	78.57%	21.43%	0.00%	14	1.21

5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the I Belong program

#	Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Total Responses	Mean
1	It has Inspired me to think about Urban Planning as a future career or study option?	21.43%	42.86%	35.71%	14	2.14
2	My interest in the study options available at University has increased	50.00%	35.71%	14.29%	14	1.64
3	I am confident with the idea of going to University	46.15%	30.77%	23.08%	13	1.77
4	I am motivated to do better at school	71.43%	21.43%	7.14%	14	1.36
5	I am motivated to learn more	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	11	1.27

6. Rate how you feel about the following questions

#	Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Total Responses	Mean
1	Going to University will help my ideas about the future come true	57.14%	35.71%	7.14%	14	1.50
2	The program has helped me think about plans and ideas for my future	42.86%	57.14%	0.00%	14	1.57

7. Would you consider going to University in the future?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	9	64%
2	No	1	7%
3	Don't know	4	29%
	Total	14	100%

8. Would you consider applying to RMIT University in the future?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	8	57%
2	No	1	7%
3	Don't know	5	36%
	Total	14	100%

9. Please describe your experience at RMIT in a few words or sentences

Great learning, at RMIT I can see how many career opportunities there are.

It was a great experience and it was a good thing to get to go around Melbourne and visit different places.

My experience at RMIT was awesome. It has given me a lot more knowledge about the uni and what options I have if I ever go.

It has been helpful and interesting. Learning about other people's stories has helped.

I liked going to RMIT, it was alright, some activities went too long and didn't interest me but it was okay. The urban sustainability got a bit too boring. I would like to come here again. It was a great experience. Thanks.