



AFL Cape York House Cairns

Australian Football League

AFL Cape York House is a 48 bed residential facility in Cairns. It provides residential care to secondary school aged boys from remote Indigenous communities in Cape York, the Torres Strait and Gulf regions. The facility offers a small scale and innovative approach to boarding based on individual case management around the three pillars of education, careers and transitions, and welfare and wellbeing. Students are supported in the development of career and life pathways while attending partner schools in Cairns. There are currently 36 students in residence from the remote communities of Hope Vale, Coen, Lockhart River, Kowanyama, Coen, Aurukun, Pormpuraaw Bamaga/Injinoo, Mornington Island, Badu Island, Maubiag Island, Moa Island, Yam Island, and Coconut Island.



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Background

The project grew out of the game development and personal development and lifestyle programs run by AFL Cape York House in the remote communities of Cape York and the Torres Strait. Program staff saw many young Indigenous people who had participated successfully in a range of programs disengage prematurely from boarding schools and their secondary education. The project is closely aligned with the Australian Council of Governments 'Closing the Gap' agenda in education and is designed to give Indigenous students the best possible chance of finishing secondary school.

Innovation

AFL Cape York House is a stand-alone residential facility which operates in partnership with seven secondary schools from the government and independent sector. AFL Cape York House works with families and key partner agencies to provide the 'best-fit' for each young man in the program by selecting an appropriate secondary school and a range of activities including part-time work. All boys are actively involved in sport and fitness activities, especially AFL. The AFL Cape York House Eagles entered the Cairns Junior AFL competition in 2014 with an Under 15 and Under 17 team. Senior boys at the House run the Eagles club with support from a number of adult members. This arrangement is the first of its type in Australia.

"To provide educational, training and employment opportunities for young Indigenous men ... to ensure every young man reaches his potential."

Partnerships

Strong partnerships exist with government at all levels: Commonwealth, State and Local. Capital cost for the project was provided by the Commonwealth and significant operational costs are met through an agreement with the Australian Government Department of Human Services for the payment of Abstudy. An agreement also exists with Aboriginal Hostels Limited. The Queensland Government provides a full-time paid position as Education Manager and a range of education support services. Cairns City Council has provided the land upon which the project operates and offers a range of in-kind support activities. AFL nationally has been strongly supportive of the initiative and provides substantial financial support for daily operations. Members of government at all levels have visited the facility, most recently the Queensland Ministers for Housing and Education in May 2014.

Sustainability

The facility has strong links with the remote communities from which the boys come and there is strong support for places at AFL Cape York House for 2015. The project is strongly linked into the local

community and staff from partner schools regularly visit the House. There is significant interest from government about how the model operates and whether it can be replicated in other settings.

Impact

Early results around student retention are strong with all students from 2013 returning for the 2014 school year and all students who completed Term One 2014 return for the start of Term Two. However, there are still times when students disengage from the program and return to communities for a range of reasons. Levels of student attendance are above the state and national average for Indigenous secondary students and results at school continue to improve. Work remains to be done in terms of the development and implementation of support programs which prepare students for the transition from their remote home communities to life in Cairns. Assumptions made about the levels of student readiness for the transition have been found to be incorrect for a number of students who have struggled to adjust to life away from their home communities. AFL Cape York House has certainly made a significant impact on the lives of many of the boys who are a part of the program. Our first two Year 12 graduates from 2013 have successfully transitioned into their choice of post-school destinations and both maintain regular contact with the House.