



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison

FINAL REPORT

Suzanne Carrington

Beth Siggers

Keely Harper-Hill

July 2020



Australian Government
Department of Industry, Science,
Energy and Resources

Business
Cooperative Research
Centres Program

autismcrc.com.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community

Liaison

Final Report

Professor Suzanne Carrington

Queensland University of Technology | Autism CRC

Associate Professor Beth Sagers

Queensland University of Technology | Autism CRC

Dr. Keely Harper-Hill

Queensland University of Technology | Autism CRC

Project number: 2.051RS_PP

ISBN: 978-1-922365-16-3

Citation: Carrington, S., Sagers, B. & Harper-Hill, K. (2020) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison: Final Report. Brisbane. Autism CRC

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Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the financial support of Positive Partnerships and the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), established and supported under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centre Program.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole-of-life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people on the autism spectrum.

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A note on terminology

We recognise that when referring to individuals on the autism spectrum, there is no one term that suits all people. In our published material and other work, when speaking of adults, we use the terms 'autistic person', 'person on the autism spectrum' or 'person on the spectrum'. The term 'autistic person' uses identity first language, which reflects the belief that being autistic is a core part of a person's identity.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is diagnostic terminology used by the healthcare sector, and is used in the context of a person being 'diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder'.

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1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison Research Assistant

1.1 Description of position

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison Research Assistant (RA) was appointed at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) from 26 July 2017 to 10 July 2019. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA worked with the School Years Program Director, the Research Associate and the Program researchers across various projects. The primary responsibility of the role was to act as liaison with community elders, leaders and members of school communities. This included working with students and staff on the QUT Indigenous Vacation Research Experience Scheme (IndigiVRES); with students at Autism CRC project schools, and facilitating communications with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team at Positive Partnerships and community organisations.

1.2 Project objectives

Objective 1: Facilitate discussion to co-design project materials and methods

Facilitate discussion between research teams and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to co-design culturally appropriate project materials and methods.

Objective 2: Work with communities in development of training

Work with communities, project leaders, and the Program 2 Director and Research Associate, in the development of training and school resources which are culturally sensitive (Knowledge Translation).

Objective 3: Involvement in the presentation and publishing research outcomes

Involvement in the presentation and publishing of research outcomes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as co-presenting workshops and school resources to schools.

Objective 4: Participate in personal development

Participate in appropriate personal development as required.

Objective 5: Undertake research activities

Undertake research activities under the supervision of project leaders. These activities may include data collection, analysis, and preparation of manuscripts for publication.

Objective 6: Compliance with Health and Safety Policies

Compliance with health and safety policies, procedures, hazard reporting and safe work practices.

1.3 Project objective outcomes

1.3.1 Outcome of objective 1: Facilitate discussion to co-design project materials and methods

1.3.1.1 Liaison with members of the Autism CRC Scholl Years Program:

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA attended Autism CRC School Years Program meetings (four-five times a year) and met weekly with the School Years Director. These meetings facilitated discussion and learning about how the needs of Indigenous students and families could be met within the context of the Autism CRC research projects and how partnerships with Indigenous groups could be established and consolidated. In addition the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA supported production of culturally appropriate project materials and approaches to research and recruitment.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA consulted with Autism CRC research project teams and outcomes included:

- *Secret Agent Society- Whole of Class:* The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA provided feedback on resources to assist researchers to understand factors which influenced their appropriateness to Indigenous culture. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA also provided advice on engaging Indigenous families through culturally appropriate recruitment approaches. This directly resulted in parental consent to include the data from two Indigenous participants in analysis. Prior, consent had been restricted to student's participation in the whole-of-class activities but not as active research participants.
- *Structured Teaching project:* The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA provided feedback on resources to ensure that they were culturally appropriate. Using the literature, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA developed 1-page

summaries on each component of the Structured Teaching approach for the inclusionED on-line platform.

- *Early Years Behaviour Support Program:* The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA supported connections with Indigenous communities in Queensland that were recruited to be involved in this project. As part of their role the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA visited an Indigenous community that was interested in being involved in the project and met with relevant elders, families and school staff to discuss the project and their role in the project. They also advised the team on culturally appropriate approaches to conducting research in Indigenous settings. In addition to this, they contributed to the case studies in this project which focused on supporting schools in rural, remote and Indigenous regions to meet the needs of early years learners on the spectrum. This involvement included planning and engaging in visits to the school sites, planning for ethics and data collection.
- *School Connectedness:* The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA attended research project meetings and advised the team on 1) planning and 2) conducting research in Indigenous Communities. An Indigenous perspective was provided, relative to frames of reference relative to context, family history and contemporary Indigenous knowledge or advice on the ethics of research and expectations more generally. The following phases of conducting research in communities provided a framework for engagement (Bharadwaj, 2014):
 - i) pre-research discussions;
 - ii) community consultation;
 - iii) community entry;
 - iv) conducting research; and
 - v) research dissemination

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA contributed to a number of case studies in Phase Two which focused on developing a whole school approach to school connectedness. The RA engaged in inclusive research methodology and was mindful of the Autism CRC Inclusive research principles. The work included planning and engaging in visits to the school sites; planning and conducting data collection; along with data analysis.

One case study school was visited a number of times by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA and a project leader. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA was able to make positive contributions to discussions with school staff who were particularly focused on providing alternative and creative programs promoting student equity,

diversity, inclusive learning and parent & community engagement embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural educational initiatives. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA's Indigenous perspectives and input were presented and appreciated. This resulted in an invitation from the Equity & Diversity officer at the school to meet with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison Officer (a mentor coordinator of their school's Indigenous support group). The positive result reflects the purposeful and positive partnerships developing within this School Connectedness project particularly with Indigenous input.

In addition, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA funding has supported the following outputs from this project:

- development of culturally sensitive resources for inclusionED;
- transcription of interviews from School Connectedness Focus 1 with a rural/remote/ Indigenous emphasis and data analysis from school connectedness project, cycle 1.

They also worked in consultation with the team to advise on cultural considerations when developing resources and constructing the Autism CRC/Positive Partnerships Autism teen wellbeing site (<https://autismteenwellbeing.com.au/>)

Middle Years Behaviour Support Project: This project extends the work in the Early Years Behaviour Support Project and focuses on supporting schools in rural, remote and Indigenous regions to support learners on the spectrum the middle years of schooling. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA contributed and supported culturally sensitive elements in the development of this project and planning the culturally sensitive element of the high-risk ethics.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA supported the research team through the ethic approval process for this project and provided advice on Indigenous ethical considerations.

1.3.1.2 Liaison with Positive Partnerships, Autism CRC participant

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA engaged with members of the Positive Partnership (PP) team. This engagement was characterised by regular communication and face-to-face meetings. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA regularly accessed resources such as "Autism: Our Kids, Our Stories – Voices of Aboriginal Parents across Australia". They also attended the PP book launch at the State Library in Sydney.

The opportunity to liaise with all Indigenous participants, including the book's author/s was fully realised.

The PP resources and ongoing communication with the team of staff working to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait family provided excellent support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison role in the Autism CRC. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA shared the various resources and information from the Positive Partnerships_ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples <https://www.positivepartnerships.com.au/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples> with Indigenous community organisations both inside and outside QUT.

1.3.1.3 Connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison Community at QUT, Autism CRC participant

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA was based at QUT in the Faculty of Education and was supported by the School Years Program Director to meet and connect with staff in the Indigenous Research and Engagement Unit (IREU). This is a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary network of Indigenous researchers, affiliates and post-graduate students at QUT. In addition, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA connected and consulted with QUT Indigenous staff and students through the Oodgeroo Unit. This unit provides support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by:

- assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to enter University
- providing our student's academic, personal and cultural support throughout their degree
- providing a visible cultural presence at QUT
- engaging in community events, representing QUT
- promoting real world opportunities for our students

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA had regular meetings with staff in the Oodgeroo Unit at QUT to discuss protocols of ethics in research as well as acknowledgement of collaboration between the Indigenous unit and seeking affirmation and support from the Indigenous community at QUT. A communicative network with a Team Leader especially for discussions relative to cultural issue and access of information relative to Indigenous engagement was established. This connection with the QUT Indigenous community supported contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and helped to maintain relationships with community members.

1.3.2 Outcome of objective 2: Work with communities in the development of training

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA was a leader in the Faculty of Education, QUT Indigenous Vacation Research Experience Scheme (IndigiVRES) program. The Vacation Research Experience Scheme (VRES) gives undergraduate students an opportunity to participate in research projects during the summer holidays and for the 2017-2018 break, the Faculty of Education launched IndigiVRES as a separate initiative. The Autism CRC Educational Needs Analysis and Early Years Behaviour Support projects were included as research projects. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA supervised two female Indigenous students over the scheme period to conduct a literature review about the resources that were available to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with children with autism. In addition, the two Indigenous students developed an educational resource to embed culturally inclusive classroom practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on the autism spectrum.

The Indigenous students were mentored within an atmosphere focused on amiable access of academic support and guidance required of Indigenous inclusive educative engagement. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA worked with the IndigiVRES team under the direction of the Supervisors. The combined efforts of all parties, ensured engaging in a collaborative and culturally inclusive support group, within an extended family atmosphere, focused support justified and reflected the students' sense of purpose and their determined efforts. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA contributed to the enabling practices in supporting the Indigenous students overall and coordinated the engagement in cross collaboration with the Oodgeroo Unit academics and Office of Research support staff members. This work was pivotal to the success of the program. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA made herself available consistently throughout the IndigiVRES program to provide ongoing advice and support to the students. This was an important component of the success of the program. The quality of supervision and support was recognised by the awarding of an Equity award for the following:

- 1) launching the Faculty of Education IndigiVRES in 2017
- 2) the successful development and management of this scheme with exceptional outcomes
- 3) for successfully encouraging Indigenous students to engage in research with confidence and promoting a future research pathway for the student

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA supported the Indigenous students in the following areas:

- Collaboration with Positive Partnerships
- Development of classroom educational resource for publication
https://autismteenwellbeing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Deadly_History.pdf
- Supervised student analysis of data from a case study in the Autism CRC School Connectedness project and shared the findings from the student data analysis focus group to the School Connectedness Committee at the case study school
- Co-facilitated research engagement and productive discussions over an extensive period which ensured insightful feedback and influenced a robust, engaging and a trustworthy partnership between case study schools and the research team.

1.3.3 Outcome of objective 3: Involvement in the presentation and publishing of research outcomes

The IndigiVRES 2017-2018 program was the first program to focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Faculty of Education students in a research experience. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA co-supervising the two Indigenous students in the scheme contributed to a creative response of promoting resources available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families. The theoretical model for the research was developed with a contemporary and culturally familiar and relevant focus on autism in which the difference in people on the spectrum was considered in culturally inclusive ways. Indigenous discourse and definitions were highlighted as cultural knowledge with a focus on creativity. It was important that the research was to be inclusive, productive and engaging for the benefit of Indigenous children family's teachers' educators and staff. The research projects and reports were specifically connected to the Autism CRC. They focused on the development of culturally-appropriate resources arising from the EYBSP and School Connectedness projects and have been shared with schools nationwide.

The main outcomes were a literature review and an educational resource. The educational resources developed in the IndigiVRES program were a response to findings from the Autism CRC Educational Needs Analysis and Early Years Behaviour Support project and reflected Indigenous knowledge and versatility. The resources were utilised by the Positive Partnerships in 2019 with teachers who support Indigenous students on the autism spectrum and their families. They are available through both the Positive Partnerships website and Autism Wellbeing website.

Three main outcomes:



- Literature Review 1 – A social model and nation-building approach: Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on the Autism spectrum – D. Beetson
- Literature Review 2 – On-line resources: Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in understanding Autism and disability – S. Schloss-Waters
- Beetson, D. & Schloss-Waters, S. (2018). Deadly History: A teacher resource to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on the autism spectrum. Positive Partnerships. Retrieved from: https://autismteenwellbeing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Deadly_History.pdf

Dr Scott Avery, recognised for his leadership in disability from the First Peoples Disability Network visited QUT, Faculty of Education in July 2019 to speak about his work, Culture is Inclusion. <https://fpdn.org.au/product/cultureisinclusion/> His published Culture is Inclusion research is a remarkable and compelling story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability presented in a unique way that combines traditional research methods and the concept of 'yarning'. Dr Avery gave a public lecture attended by 160 people as part of the Research and Publication (RAP) Week programme and was able to share the inspiring personal stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and how they continue to embrace their inclusive traditional culture against overwhelming odds. Dr Scott Avery met with the School Years research leaders at QUT and at the Autism CRC to discuss future priorities in our research.

Additional Outcomes:

The journal article: *"Psychosocial resources developed and trialled for Indigenous people with autism spectrum disorder and their caregivers: a systematic review and catalogue* is currently under review with the International Journal for Equity in Health.

Analysis of data from Focus 1 and Focus 2 of the school connectedness project will be reported in future journal papers:

- Development of paper looking at Mother's roles in support their child's school connectedness to be submitted for review to "Family Process journal"
- Other papers currently being developed that disseminate results of Focus 1 of School Connectedness project around perceptions of school connectedness in rural, remote and Indigenous communities that will support inclusive practices.
- Development of paper considering factors influencing truancy in schools and a whole of school case study to support attendance and participation and promote school connectedness and a sense of belonging.

Support has also been provided for the development of content and materials for *inclusionED* from EYBSP.

1.3.4 Outcome of objective 4: Participate in personal development

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA was supported to attend meetings and research training at the Indigenous Research Engagement Unit (IREU) at QUT.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA attended meetings and research training at the Indigenous Research Engagement Unit's (IREU) at QUT. One discussion focussed on 'Closing the Gap Refresh'. The discussion aimed at a transdisciplinary initiative, across QUT faculties, for future engagement of projects aimed at promoting Indigenous equity/equality towards improving educational outcomes. Early discussions focused on Indigenous & non-Indigenous networks relative to funding proposals and their programs for future projects across Faculties. Advice and engagement with an Indigenous Elder Research colleague, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty staff broadened the discussions to provide a platform for Indigenous perspectives from discussion group members. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA area of focus was on 'discourse' and the discussions around objective terms such as 'community' relative to discussing Indigenous contexts and persons. She promoted the notion of positive face-to-face engagement with 'communities' in broadening personal knowledge, and cross-cultural communication.

1.3.5 Outcome of objective 5: Undertake research activities

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA engaged in research activities under the supervision of project leaders, including data collection, analysis, and preparation of manuscripts for publication. Specific examples include:

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- Written summaries of school demographics, including data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for case-study schools across EYBSP and School Connectedness projects.
 - In Focus 2 (whole school approach) of the School Connectedness project, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA undertook analysis of student data to investigate student perspectives on factors influencing truancy and school connectedness.

Further research activities that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA contributed to include:

- transcription of interviews from WA cycle 1 school connectedness project
- data analysis from school connectedness project, cycle 1.

These activities will contribute to a number of papers that are in development (see details in 1.3.3)

1.3.6 Outcome of objective 6: Compliance with health and safety policies

As an employee of QUT and in accordance with QUT program of mandatory training, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA was required to complete the following training modules:

- General evacuation training
- HSE induction
- Code of conduct
- Information privacy awareness
- Corruption and fraud
- EI online: fair play on campus
- Information security awareness

As a member of research teams, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Liaison RA considered the health, safety and environmental implications of research from an Indigenous perspective and made recommendations accordingly.

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AutismCRC

Autism CRC

The University of Queensland
Long Pocket Precinct
Level 3, Foxtail Building
80 Meiers Road
Indooroopilly Qld 4068
T +61 7 3377 0600
E info@autismcrc.com.au
W autismcrc.com.au



@autismcrc

Our values



Inclusion

Working together with those with the lived experience of autism in all we do



Innovation

New solutions for long term challenges



Independence

Guided by evidence based research, integrity and peer review



Cooperation

Bringing benefits to our partners; capturing opportunities they cannot capture alone



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