

Empowering young people through connection – a culturally tailored LDAT Program in a remote community

Authors: Andrea Tuch¹, Hera Napijalo², Dragana Polimac¹, Nataly Bovopoulos¹ & Eleanor Costello¹

¹ Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF), Melbourne, Australia, ²Shire of Wiluna, Wiluna, Australia

Presenter's email: eleanor.costello@adf.org.au

Background: The Shire of Wiluna is a remote Western Australian community where over 80% of the population identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Wiluna faces significant challenges related to risky alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, particularly alcohol and cannabis. To address these issues in a culturally safe and proactive manner, the Shire partnered with the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to implement an initiative targeting at-risk youth aged 6–17 via the Local Drug Action Team (LDAT) Program.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: Over six months, 12 community-led events aimed to re-engage youth, strengthen protective factors and reduce AOD-related harm. Activities were co-designed with local stakeholders, including the school, medical centre and police to ensure cultural relevance and local alignment. Highlights included Girls Pampering Night (focus on hygiene self-care and self-esteem), Art Nights (promoting emotional expression and exploring coping strategies), Boys Nights (building trust and positive relationships between boys and police through games and conversations) and Healthy Cooking Classes (teaching nutrition and budgeting skills).

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: The program experienced high engagement, with strong attendance and positive feedback. Post-program surveys revealed reduced intentions to engage in risky AOD behaviour. Trust in service providers and social and emotional wellbeing improved among participants. Several previously disengaged teenagers returned to school and reconnected with the community. The initiative also strengthened service pathways between youth and local support agencies.

Conclusion and Next Steps: This tailored, strengths-based LDAT initiative demonstrated how culturally informed, community-led programming can build resilience and shift AOD attitudes in remote Aboriginal communities. The next Community Action Plan will build on this success focusing on anti-peer pressure strategies, sports engagement, and job opportunities.

Implications for Practice or Policy: This program reinforces the value of sustained, collaborative partnerships and culturally responsive place-based prevention approaches to reduce AOD harms in regional and remote communities.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This project was funded through the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Local Drug Action Team (LDAT) program, an initiative funded through the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.