

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Croc Festivals™ are a vehicle for promoting positive health, education, social justice and reconciliation messages and an avenue for students, both primary and secondary, to present dance performances. The majority of students who participate are Indigenous. In 2004 the Croc Festivals™ were conducted in eight communities across Australia. Several of the communities had previously hosted Festivals. These were:

- Weipa (QLD)
- Derby (WA)
- Port Augusta (SA)
- Swan Hill (VIC)
- Moree (NSW)
- Alice Springs (NT)

Croc Festivals™ were held for the first time in the following two locations:

- Geraldton (WA)
- Katherine (NT)

### 2.1 PAST RESEARCH

Since 2000, DoHA and DEST have jointly funded evaluations of the Croc Festivals™ with other Australian Government Departments to assess the degree to which social, health and education-related objectives are achieved through their involvement in the Croc Festivals™. Research was conducted with students, teachers and stakeholders.

In 2000, the evaluation employed a two stage research design, involving interviews during the Festival and a three (3) month follow-up. In 2002 and 2003, the research design included an additional stage where benchmark measures were identified prior to the Festival and tracked during the follow-up stage.

Over the years findings have been consistent and include the following:

- Festivals motivate students, teachers and community members alike and provided a platform for information to be imparted in a fun and exciting way, resulting in a level of receptivity to health messages not usually associated with health messages;
- There was a very high reported intention of participating in future Festivals;

- It was perceived that Croc Festivals™ allowed a first-hand experience of the benefits of a healthy, alcohol and drug free environment. There were high levels of health message recall, as well as the self-reported impact of the Festival on student attitudes towards using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and their impact on restricting future life choices;
- Teachers believed that the concept of the Croc Festivals™ demonstrated potential to increase students' awareness of the negative consequences of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and their impact on restricting future life choices, and the availability of different career opportunities and the importance of school;
- Teachers highlighted the importance of providing teachers' resources to be used both prior to, and after, the Festivals to connect and follow up Festival messages. Teachers also suggested incorporating 'real' community role models, and providing more opportunity for interaction between students and teachers from different schools;
- Community members expressed the importance of retaining an Indigenous focus and community involvement as the Festivals gain momentum and increase in student participation. The inclusion of an Indigenous person in the role of Community Liaison Officer was also considered an important element;
- The vast majority of respondents felt the tagline "Respect Yourself, Respect Your Culture" resonated strongly with cultural maintenance, cultural pride and reconciliation and was an all encompassing message which covered various aspects of the Festival including health, education and social issues. This finding informed the whole-of-government branding strategy for 2003;
- Teachers and community members highlighted self-esteem and confidence building, and the associated flow-on effects in terms of better education outcomes, as benefits associated with the Festival. Linked to this was the perceived impact that the Festival had on fostering improved community relations. The Festival was seen as a vehicle for Indigenous peoples to showcase their abilities and achievements. Some also saw it as an important forum for the development of community partnerships. The Festivals were seen as a forum that provided positive role-modelling for students, particularly Indigenous students.

Given the consistency of evaluation results between 2000 and 2003 it was felt that there was value in future evaluations moving away from the current format and concentrating on the following:

- the development of health enhancing social capital within the 'Croc Community';
- the development of health and education enhancing social capital within the 'Croc Community'; and
- the creation and maintenance of protective factors in the community necessary for health promotion, prevention and education efforts to be effective.

The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) managed the research process on behalf of the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), and commissioned Cultural Perspectives in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Health Promotion, University of Sydney to undertake a case study research to evaluate each Department's sponsorship of the 2004 Croc Festivals™.