

## 11. OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

The previous sections have explored the benefits offered by the Croc Festivals™ for students and the broader community. This section provides a summary of the suggestions made by participants for opportunities to build on the success of the Festivals.

### 11.1 ORGANISATION, PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Most people included in the research spoke positively about the organisation of the Festivals, and the level of community involvement. Others also highlighted the limitations of what can be expected from a three-day event.

**“If you are trying to plant a seed in the kids mind, then you won’t do too badly, but if you are trying to change a community you are doomed to failure”**

There were some suggestions, however for enhancing community ownership and participation, and improving the level of recognition volunteers receive. While many of these suggestions may need to be orchestrated by the communities themselves, advice and assistance could be provided by IFA.

- There is a potential to improve community involvement, especially from small community groups, as it would be helpful to raise their profile in the community, and to develop their skills by running activities. Youth organisations were specifically mentioned, as there are clearly advantages in linking the Festival with community organisations that run youth programs, as this may encourage students to be involved in other youth events. Other suggestions for improving community involvement included offering employment options, promoting arts and crafts, having market stalls and entertainment for adults.
- This suggestion for increasing community involvement was also raised due to concerns that the success of the committee was dependent on one or two people, and that if they left *“the whole thing might fail”*. This was particularly the case in Weipa where a very small group of people were responsible for things running smoothly in the lead-up to the Festival.
- A number of community members were interested in gaining greater community ownership and responsibility over the Festival. A few suggested the funding should go to the communities and this can then be channelled back into local organisations and businesses and employment.

**“Are we (Thursday Island) receiving adequate financial benefits from the Croc Festival? It seems that IFA gets all the profits.”**

- At Thursday Island it was suggested that local people become involved in the scripting of the performance nights to make it more relevant to the community. For example, there were numerous references to Commonwealth government departments but very few (if any), to local businesses and

local people who helped make the Festival possible. It was felt that more community involvement within the scripting would give the performances more of a community feel.

- A few suggested the development of a “how-to” manual for the host communities. This could include a list of the contacts, timelines, information on how to arrange a press release, logistical issues with setting up the activities (eg a map of the careers market venue with power points indicated). Pika Wiya Health Service in Port Augusta has started to develop a “how-to” manual for their organisation, which could be used to develop a broader community manual.
- It was also felt that there should be greater promotion in the communities of the Croc Festival™ including banners and posters in the main street. In addition to this all advertisements should make it clear that the performances as part of the Festival are for the whole community, as there was some confusion that the Festival was just for the Indigenous community or just for schools. As well, some participants thought that advertising material for the Croc Festival™ should mention the health and education workshops and not just the performances. A number of participants requested information on the history of the Croc Festival™ and it was suggested that summary materials on the Croc Festival™ be developed that can be used to increase awareness in the community (there was a perception that the current material is too wordy). There was a request for information that briefly says:

**“Why it is here, what it’s about and what benefits it brings to the community.”**

- A few suggested it would be good to have a “main act” at the end of the performances to encourage people from the community to attend. This was most relevant in Alice Springs as it was only the second time the Festival had been held there.

There was also a range of suggestions related to improving the engagement of families with the student’s involvement in the Croc Festival™:

- One teacher suggested creating a video that showed children from their community interacting with some of the activities of the Festival, and not just the students’ performances, which is currently the case. It is hoped that this would help to relate to parents the importance of the Festival and give an understanding of the type of activities students are participating in. This may lead to further encouragement of parents for their children’s involvement in the Festival, as well as those interests developed as part of the Festival.
- Another teacher suggested that students compile follow up diaries including photos or big posters that they can put up around the community to show what they participated in at the Festival.
- It was also seen as important that children see “fathers, uncles and family members” as role models, and a few felt that this was not encouraged enough by Croc Festival™ as many activities relied on “out-of-towners”. Enhancing the local involvement in the activities provides an opportunity to reinforce local role models.

## 11.2 ACTIVITIES / WORKSHOPS

A few of the activities were criticised for not being engaging and interactive enough. The suggestion was made to skill up activity facilitators so that they develop activities that are interactive and don't solely rely on written material. This was felt to be particularly relevant with regard to students in Alice Springs who spoke English as a second (or sometimes third or fourth) language.

The careers market in particular was criticised for not engaging enough with students and once again it was suggested that facilitators were skilled up to overcome this barrier. It was also suggested that the careers market have more information and stalls relating specifically to Indigenous employment opportunities.

**“There needs to be a greater focus on organisations getting together – they need to network and provide services in concentrated partnerships. There shouldn't be giveaways for students at careers markets – it just leads to a lot of rubbish. Instead facilitators should engage with kids, letting them know employment opportunities. If you don't engage with kids specifically about careers it is pointless. They need to facilitate interactive engaging activities and be able to talk about careers in an interesting way.”**

The Croc Festival™ was seen as an important avenue for encouraging the interaction between students and role models, including both famous and local role models. Many commented on the impact made by famous role models such as Evonne Goolagong-Cawley and other sports stars upon students. Many participants felt that the interaction with local role models and community leaders was equally important, if not more important, as students' interaction with famous role models.

Many felt that Croc Festival™ did offer an opportunity for students to see local role models, although there were a few who felt this could be improved. Participants spoke of the importance for children to see parents, uncles, aunts and family members as role models, and a few felt that this was not encouraged by Croc Festival™ as many activities relied on “out-of-towners”. Enhancing the local involvement in the activities provides an opportunity to reinforce local role models.

**“Role models are very important for these kids. To see their own people in leadership capacities is good and needs to be continually built on. There is a lot of negativity out there and to change that is a positive thing but it is a long term thing.”**

As well, some suggested that Indigenous staff and organisations should be utilised more often. As most organisations have Indigenous staff, these should be more involved in the activities, as it is important to see Indigenous faces in mainstream positions to promote the message that *“Indigenous kids can do anything.”*

A few said that they would like to see more cultural activities as part of the Festival such as weaving, carving and traditional dancing. Primary school students in Moree suggested the following:

**“There should be more Indigenous famous people as role models, more sport activities and more Aboriginal culture”**

This was also seen as an important avenue for involving families in the Croc Festivals™.

A few students suggested an activity that involved making their own healthy food and one community member suggested displaying examples of nutritional supermarket food to make nutrition more relevant to students.

### **11.3 INDIGENOUS FESTIVALS AUSTRALIA**

There was a request made by many community members for IFA to increase the level of recognition given to community volunteers, as everyone felt the success of the Croc Festival™ depended on these volunteers, but that they did not receive enough recognition and praise:

**“It is dependent on volunteers, and if they’re not looked after they won’t come back.”**

In Port Augusta one community member discussed how volunteers involved in one of the workshops were paid, and that this was important as it *“gave recognition of their expertise”*. While it is not expected that this could be achieved for all the volunteers it highlights the importance of recognising the efforts of the Festival volunteers.

In Thursday Island community members reflected on the Croc Festival held on Thursday Island in 2003. In relation to this event, they felt that students were “rushed off stage” in order for the organisers to keep to time restrictions. One community member said that one of the performances was stopped before the end, as organisers were concerned with finishing on time. Students and community members were disappointed about this as the students had put a lot of preparation time into their performances and no-one would have really minded if the performances ran over time.

Several criticisms were made about the facilities at the Croc Festival™, all of which were consistent with previous research. Criticisms of the facilities were as follows:

- The quality and quantity of food was mentioned as an issue, particularly in Alice Springs where no additional food sources were made available at the Festival grounds.
- The toilets and showers were criticised for their poor quality.
- A number of students felt there was not enough shade at the Festival and this was particularly relevant in Alice Springs.

- There was criticism that the 'I want to be' workshop did not cater for disabled students, as there was no wheelchair ramp.
- There was some criticism of the sleeping arrangements in the Croc Village, mainly that the mattresses were too thin and uncomfortable.

## 11.4 ENCOURAGING SCHOOLS TO INCORPORATE MESSAGES BEFORE AND AFTER THE EVENTS

A number of suggestions were made to help schools extend the life of Croc Festival™ by integrating some of the activities and messages of the Festival into the curriculum. A number of teachers and community members stressed the need to link the Croc Festival™ into school subjects to ensure the development of the messages and information derived from the Festival. While it is acknowledged that much of this responsibility lies with the schools themselves, there is an opportunity for IFA to establish networks or provide information or examples on how this could be achieved. For example, the literacy programs in Moree, Thursday Island and Port Augusta are an example to all schools of how the Festival can be linked to classroom learning. These programs involve after-school classes that are held both before and after the Festivals that concentrate on activities aimed to increase literacy and numeracy skills such as basic maths, reading and writing. In many cases teachers used the activities in the Croc Festivals™ booklet 'Solid and Deadly' as part of the program. Students also wrote and read out stories of their experiences at the Festival.

A number of teachers mentioned the importance of lead-up information or activities as part of the students' involvement with the Festival:

**"It is important to come here with some preparation under the belt. Then the students can come with some expectation."**

As mentioned in Section 6.1.3, Queensland Health, who are responsible for the Health Expo at the Weipa and Thursday Island Festivals, have successfully extended the life of the Croc Festival™ through visits to schools in Far North Queensland as part of their health promotion strategy targeting students. Similarly, in the post-Festival research in Moree a facilitator at the sexual health stall commented that numerous teachers approached the station for information about their service and this has already lead to the organisation visiting two schools outside of Moree since the Festival.

Information provided before the Festival would be useful to prepare students for some of the activities and concepts that they will be exposed to at the Festival. This is particularly relevant for students from remote communities or students that speak a language other than English at home, as the Festival introduces a range of topics to students, some of which they would not have encountered previously.

A few participants stressed the importance of the need to follow-up messages, especially with regard to drug and alcohol, education and career messages. It was felt that exposure to these messages needed to be sustained over a longer period of time than the Festival can offer in order to be effective. Once again, it was acknowledged that this might need to be addressed by schools and community organisations.

The suggestion was made to attempt to involve families in the lead-up to the event, as families would really like to know what their kids are doing as part of the Festival. However, it was recognised that it may be the committee and the schools who have to be pro-active in this regard.

## 11.5 OTHER PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The research asked participants to consider other funding opportunities that would achieve the same objectives as those of the Croc Festival™. The vast majority felt that the Croc Festival™ offered the best opportunity given the objectives, and only a few other suggestions were offered:

- Funding other community events such as the National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC), and putting the drug and education message in all community events.
- Funding other committees such as Parents and Citizens Association and the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) programs with the resources to be able to promote health, education and goal-setting messages.
- As mentioned in section 5.2 Moree East Primary School has a “mini-Croc” where they invite representatives from CDEP, Police SES and other organisations to do workshops with the students on A Day (Aboriginal Day).

In most cases, participants were unable to identify strategies that could meet the range of objectives and offer the variety of benefits that Croc Festival™ offers, and this demonstrates the relevance and importance of the Festivals to the students and communities who participate.

## 11.6 STRENGTHENING PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The majority of participants were overwhelmingly positive about the Croc Festival™, however a number of limitations were identified as part of the research.

While most participants could identify at least some link between the Croc Festival™ and social capital building within communities, many were hesitant to identify an enduring community impact - “[after the

*Festival] things go back to normal". Others commented that the Croc Festival™ is "efficient rather than effective".*

Not having secure funding limited the ability of towns to enhance their capacity to host the event. For example, Port Augusta would like to build a stage that could then be used for other events, but not knowing from year to year whether they will get the funding to host the Croc Festival™ makes this planning difficult.

In order to create stability it is important to have consistent community representatives who are involved in community committees and other community programs:

**"The co-ordinator position is very important as the central person who brings everyone together and helps to make decisions more easily"**

In relation to this it is important to keep in mind that hosting the Croc Festival™ puts a lot of pressure on the community, and can *"take it's toll on the organisers"*, particularly when this is a yearly event such as in Moree and Port Augusta. This makes recognition of the efforts of volunteers particularly important in order to avoid 'Festival fatigue'.

There was criticism that the Festivals are failing to reach young people in the community who have less of an opportunity and arguably more of a need to access the health and careers information. Croc Festivals™ target students, and clearly those who have dropped out of school (aged 15-16) are an important audience that is missing out on the messages of the Festival.

Also limitations were acknowledged by participants in regards to the Croc Festival's™ ability to increase motivation to stay at school as it was felt that this is determined by many factors, including the need for this to be developed at home/in the family.