13.　CONCLUSIONS

Overall, perceptions of the Croc Festivals™ were positive, with students, teachers and community members identifying clear benefits from their involvement, and few suggestions for alternative funding strategies that could meet the range of objectives and offer the variety of benefits that Croc Festival™ offers. The research provided evidence of strong levels of community support, of students receiving messages about the importance of school and a healthy lifestyle, of teachers gathering ideas and resources for the classroom, and of community members developing trusting relationships. As the research was qualitative, it is not possible to assess the extent to which these outcomes were realised, but it does provide guidance on how these positive benefits can be further developed.

13.1　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. There were some suggestions, however, for enhancing community ownership and participation, and improving the level of recognition volunteers receive. In this regard, thought needs to be given to improving the level of recognition given to community volunteers (eg. through the performance nights), and to ensuring initial consultations reach a wide cross-section of the community.

The research suggests that for many communities hosting the event, success depends on a few key individuals. It is therefore important to consider the risks this poses to future events, and ideally develop strategies to minimise these risks.

There is a need to expand the level of community involvement, so that there is a broader base directly involved in the organisation of the Festivals. Widespread promotion of the events is necessary to increase awareness and encourage participation. As well, it may be possible to ask those who are currently heavily involved in the organisation to nominate other individuals who may be interested in being involved, and directly invite them to participate. The community representatives are clearly in a good position to nominate individuals and organisations that would benefit from their involvement, and that could bring their expertise and knowledge to the events (such as youth groups and other community organisations). This would also increase the presence of local role models, which is an important component for the success of the Festivals.

Another option is to develop resources for each community that can be used in the organisation of the events. A "how-to" manual for the host communities could include a list of the contacts, timelines, information on how to arrange a press release, and 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, and this could be used to develop a broader community manual.

The research also suggested that there are opportunities for improving the level of awareness of the Festivals for families, especially with regards to travelling schools. Thought should be given to developing resources, or encouraging the development of resources by the schools, that demonstrates the students' involvement. Suggestions were given for videos showing students involvement in the activities, and it was thought this could help parents understand the type of activities students are participating in, and the importance of these activities and messages. Other options include developing student diaries with photos and posters that could be displayed in the community. It may be possible to provide resources to encourage the development of these materials after the Festivals.

There are also several opportunities for improvement with regards to the facilities at the Croc Festival™, all of which are consistent with previous research. These include:

- 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.

13.2   ACTIVITIES / WORKSHOPS

Overall, feedback on the activities was very positive. However, a few of the activities were criticised for not being engaging and interactive enough, and there are clearly opportunities to enhance this component of the Festivals. This could be done by improving the skills of activity facilitators prior to the Festivals, encouraging the development of activities that are interactive and not solely reliant on written material. This should focus on the range of students in terms of age and English language skills. The need for greater engagement was mentioned more often with regards to the careers market, and we suggest that this is the higher priority at this stage. It may be possible to introduce a stamp collection system or other options that link the activities and encourage students to engage with the facilitators (although care needs to be taken so that these options are not dependent on good literacy in English).

The research also suggests that there are opportunities to enhance the involvement of local role models in the activities, and that this should be further encouraged. Consideration also needs to be given to ensuring there is a strong presence of local Indigenous role models.

Finally, we also suggest that there is a need to ensure that the program provides an adequate amount of Indigenous cultural activities, as this is a clear attraction for many attending the Festivals. While most felt that the current Indigenous focus was adequate, as students only go to a selection of the activities because of programming, it is necessary to offer a variety of these activities so that the majority of schools attend an activity relating to Indigenous culture. This also offers opportunities for greater community involvement, and addresses concerns that as the Festivals grow the emphasis on Indigenous culture may be diminished.

13.3   HEALTH OUTCOMES

The research found that many students participating in the Festivals receive messages about the positive benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and the negative consequences of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. It appears that these messages are delivered clearly across the Festivals, and that students are 'listening.' The sponsorship objectives of the Department of Health and Ageing also include attitudinal and behavioural objectives with regards to students making positive life choices in relation to healthy living and the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and the research could not determine whether these objectives are being met through the Festivals. Participants were hesitant to make any links between behaviour and participation in an annual event. We therefore suggest that the Festivals build on and reinforce messages that are already being delivered through schools and communities, and that the Festivals' enhance the acceptance of these messages due to the interactive way they are being delivered. As well, the broader impact of the Festivals on resilience and social capital offer opportunities for positively influencing health outcomes.

13.4   EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The research suggested that for many students messages about careers and the importance of school are delivered successfully through Croc Festivals™, although there are limitations in that not all students attend activities in relation to these objectives. As well, the success of these activities is influenced by the interest of the students themselves, and we believe the limited engagement of the careers market means that students who are not already contemplating their opportunities are unlikely to receive strong messages about different career options and what is required to realise these opportunities.

Research respondents were reluctant to comment on the impact of student participation in the Festivals on school attendance and performance, although there were many examples of school attendance increasing prior to the Festivals. The conclusion therefore is that messages about the importance of school are being heard by many of the students, but that it is not possible to link this with long-term educational outcomes with regard to school attendance and retention. However, there are opportunities to enhance the potential impact

on these long-term behavioural outcomes by extending the reach of the Festivals beyond the three-day event, and encouraging schools to incorporate messages before and after the Festivals.

13.4.1 Encouraging schools to incorporate messages before and after the events

The research provides several suggestions of ways to help schools extend the life of Croc Festival™ by integrating some of the activities and messages of the Festival into the curriculum. 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.

There is a clear need for students to be exposed to messages and concepts prior to the Festival, and this is especially useful for students from remote communities or students that speak a language other than English at home. IFA could provide resources and examples of activities that can be conducted in the classroom to prepare students for the Festival.

Of more significance to DEST's objectives though is incorporating the Festival in the school curriculum after the Festival. Exposure to messages around the importance of school for your future (and also health messages) needs to be sustained over a longer period of time than the Festival can offer in order to be effective. While there were many examples of this happening already, this appeared to be very dependent on the individual teachers and schools. Consideration needs to be given to how this approach can be further encouraged. There appeared to be limited use of the teacher resource provided by IFA, so there is a need to develop these options further. One opportunity is to include a briefing for teachers during the Festival that provides suggestions and resources for teachers for extending the life and learning of the Festival.

13.5   ENHANCING RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS

The results of the research suggest there are a number of protective factors for resiliency for which the Croc Festival™ has influence. With regards to internal protective factors, the Festivals were seen to have an impact on self-esteem, respect, motivation, social and communication skills, and pride and school bonding. With regards to external protective factors, there was also evidence of the Festivals influencing a number of these including the family, peer, school and community environments, although the influence on family was limited, as families are less involved in the Festivals.

While there were several examples of the Festivals influencing each of these internal and external protective factors, it is difficult to assess the extent to which this occurred, and the impact this has on health and educational outcomes. The research however does suggest that this is an important outcome of students' involvement, and that consideration should be given to how this can be enhanced further.

13.6   COMMUNITY IMPACT

The research explored the impact of the Croc Festivals™ on social capital. Literature on this suggests that there is an association between social capital and educational and health outcomes, in that children and young people who are surrounded by families and communities that are cohesive, connected and that share norms of respect, support and tolerance are more likely to stay at school and to be healthier throughout their lives. The research demonstrates a number of ways in which the Festivals strengthen community relations and resources through greater interaction between different sectors, helping to create a more supportive community environment. In particular, the examples identified in this research suggest that the Festivals:

- Enhance local identity, community self-image and a sense of unity

- Build trusting relationships by opening up lines of communication between organisations and different sectors

- Develop good working relationships and improve social networks by linking a range of organisations and sectors together in the hosting of the Festivals

- Support dialogue among people from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds

While examples of enhancing social capital are present, the research does not provide information on the extent to which this is happening within communities, and whether these benefits are evident in the long-term. We believe there is an opportunity to improve the impact that the Festivals have on social capital by increasing awareness among community members of the benefits that this interaction and networking offers individuals, organisations and the community overall, and by providing guidance on how these benefits can be realised. Examples identified in this research can be used in the implementation of this strategy. While we acknowledge that the outcomes in this regard depend heavily on the community themselves, IFA, through their engagement with community representatives, has an opportunity to enhance the capacity of communities to develop social capital and therefore extend the long-term impact of the Festivals on communities.

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