

Case Study

Mt DrUITT Local Aboriginal Drug Action Team.

Activity aim: To 'support local workers and volunteers to participate in the training program developed by the Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center' as part of a larger program of 'adopting, adapting and developing appropriate programs for use within the Mt DrUITT Aboriginal community'.



Dates of the project:

November 2018 and ongoing

Target audience:

Adult Aboriginal residents from Mt DrUITT area (Western Sydney)

Issue being targeted

This project seeks to reduce AOD harm by enhancing protective factors associated with culture, art, dance, belonging, traditional and contemporary healing, transgenerational resilience, and ritual. The unifying focus is support for the development of a healing and belonging hub in Mt DrUITT.

Drivers for the activity

Transgenerational trauma corrodes community and increases the prevalence of alcohol and other drug (AOD) harm throughout the community. The Gathering of Native Americans (GONA) was developed in 1992 and has been successfully applied since. Given the success of the program it was considered a good prospect to test the model under Australian conditions to see if comparable results could be achieved.

The Australian activity became known as a Gathering of Traditional Owners (GOTO).

Key processes used

A GONA/GOTO workshop was run by two experienced Native Indian facilitators for adult Aboriginal residents and community workers of Mt DrUITT. The workshop consisted of the following activities:

- Smoking welcome ceremony
- Facilitated games and exercises to simulate challenges and capacities of participants
- Story telling
- Dance and art
- Development of a community vision.

The methods used were a blend of contemporary group facilitation, traditional ritual, reflections on community history and encounter with culturally significant objects, songs, dances and practices from both Native American and Australian Aboriginal traditions.

“A GONA is a culture-based planning process where community members gather to address community-identified issues... The GONA approach reflects Indigenous cultural values, traditions, and spiritual practices.”

For more information on GONA, visit: store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma16-4994.pdf

Description of activity

The four objectives of the GONA/GOTO were:

- **Belonging** — everyone feels welcomed in an inclusive, open, safe, and trusting environment
- **Mastery** — participants take stock of how historical trauma impacts their communities and what fosters their resilience and holds them together
- **Interdependence** — initiate a planning process to assess resources and relationships, and to experience and strengthen interconnectedness
- **Generosity** — strengthens each participant's larger gift to their families and communities in helping to address and prevent mental and substance use disorders.

The specific activity that was completed by this LDAT was to host a GOTO within the Mt DrUITT area.



Impacts

About 25 local residents and workers participated in the two-day workshop (November 23–25, 2018) at Yarramundi. The objectives relating to belonging, mastery, interdependence and generosity were met as evidenced by the group commitment to explore ways that the model could be developed for Australian Aboriginal communities. Participants already knew their predicament was not unique, but were motivated to share the benefits.

Individual participants reported significant strengthening in their willingness to tackle community problems including AOD harm. It was decided that follow up narrative resilience building workshops would be organised as a result of the success of this initial GOTO.

Actions to redesign the program to reflect local Australian Aboriginal conditions commenced at the GOTO. There was good progress towards all objectives.

Following from the GOTO, three follow-up narrative resilience building workshops have been run to:

- 1. Reflect** on and record the impact of the program at the individual level
- 2. Ensure** that the benefits of individual participation in the GOTO are not dissipated but sustained
- 3. Implement** decisions taken at the workshop and develop plans for further initiatives
- 4. Adapt** program features for use amongst local Aboriginal communities and keep building the evidence-base for future funding applications for GOTO activities.

Were there any unintended consequences?

From the experience of the Mt Druitt participants it became obvious that there were many similarities between their experience and that of Indigenous communities in North America.

Strengths in the approach

The program facilitators were very experienced and reminded participants that they would not learn anything new, rather they would be reminded of what they already knew. This was demonstrated throughout the workshop. The power of solidarity of knowing that the AOD problems in Mt Druitt are similar to those experienced around the world wherever Indigenous cultures have been dispossessed and marginalised was identified. Painful experiences were raised and responded to sensitively; people felt safe from early in the event.

The GOTO participants all agreed that the model translated well to Australian conditions and evaluated the program positively against the four themes.

Lessons learned

The process was powerful as it was run with a high degree of cultural sensitivity with the result that participants were able to share difficult material. The Elders at Baabayn and their Local Drug Action Team partners have been reviewing and monitoring programs from around the world to locate programs that hold the promise of assisting communities deal with transgenerational trauma. The decision to invite trainers from GONA was not a rushed decision. Being able to share Native American stories that were comparable to Aboriginal experiences gave the event credibility with participants.

Reflections from community

- Trauma is a disruptor. It seems to be the only thing in the sufferer's life. It sticks in the brain and disrupts other circuits. But our mob also brings in the resilience through culture, through connecting yourself to an ancient history from before the trauma, the genetic material from the depths of ancestral history. We also connect with modern identity, with Mount Druitt, with what happens at Baabayn. The fire is still alive at Baabayn.⁹
- There is a deficit language in schools, community, media, and even our own homes. But we didn't hear it at the GOTO. That was one of the good things about GOTO. Mutual esteem was evident at the GOTO. Members of the group are building capacity in the way you share your stories to target the hearts of youth.⁹

– Baabayn Healing Circle

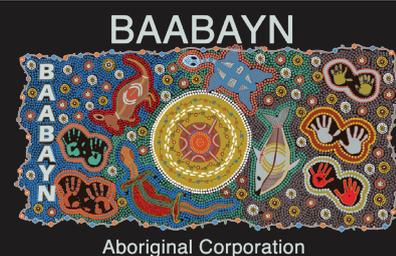
With thanks to:

Lead organisation

- Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation

Partners

- Murama Youth Summit
Lead partner, organiser, intermediary between Baabayn and other partners
- Sydney Olympic Park Authority
Sponsorship role
- Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center (USA)
Provided trainer–healers, developed methodology



Aboriginal Corporation