

# Akurra Trail

Leigh Creek Multi-Use Trail Upgrade and Healthy Lifestyles Program

## SHORT PROJECT SUMMARY

This project aims to promote healthy outcomes for Aboriginal youth and community members in Leigh Creek through the development of a multi-use trail linking the town and nearby Aroona Dam. Signage will be installed at key points of interest on the currently disused access trail, highlighting the activities of Creation Time Ancestors and the endangered Adnyamathanha language. A Healthy Lifestyles Program will be delivered at the Leigh Creek Area School to encourage Aboriginal students and town residents to explore the trail, experience its associated dreaming stories in traditional language, and engage in a healthy outdoors lifestyle.

## PROJECT GOAL AND ACTIVITIES

The primary goal is to provide opportunities for Leigh Creek Aboriginal youth and community to engage in culturally engaging and physically stimulating recreational activities. The infrastructural development and accompanying healthy lifestyles programme will contribute significantly to better wellbeing outcomes by promoting and strengthening cultural identity for individuals and families, promoting the use of heritage language, and promoting outdoor physical activities.

Leigh Creek is a town in transition. The closure of local coal mining has seen a massive decline in population and an exodus of services. The Leigh Creek Area School, for example, has reduced from 600 students to 60, nearly all of whom are Aboriginal. Crucially, the massive decline in overall population has created the unfavourable outcome that there are currently no organised sporting and recreation opportunities within Leigh Creek and there is a great need to build infrastructure that can support and encourage independent sporting and recreation activities. The Leigh Creek Community Progress Association in consultation with external partners has identified the great potential for a (re)developed multi-use trail that links the town to Aroona Dam to fill this gap and to deliver a range of benefits. The trail can be used for a range of outdoor activities, such as hiking, cycling and horse riding (see <http://learning.mobilelanguageteam.com.au/akura/>).

The trail can also play an important secondary role in creating a tourist attraction in the town. The healthy future of Leigh Creek resides in the intersection between cultural heritage, outdoor community activities and tourism.

(see: <http://www.leighcreeksa.com.au/about/> and the recent SA Government report on Leigh Creek futures: <http://leighcreekfutures.sa.gov.au/>).

One recommendation of the latter report is for the SA Tourism Commission to 'continue to develop a trail of Aboriginal cultural products with Leigh Creek serving as a Hub to encourage travellers to explore locations locally and into the Northern Territory'.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The primary objective is to address a lack of outdoor sporting and recreation opportunities in Leigh Creek and promote the use of a multi-use trail to improve health and social wellbeing outcomes. Associated risk factors attendant to this lack include childhood obesity, feelings of disconnection to the natural environment and drift of teenage cohort to larger urban centres. Leigh Creek parents and carers are very keen for their children to have outdoor recreational options to replace the currently ubiquitous screen time. The combination of promoting and strengthening local Adnyamathanha cultural identity and language use and building infrastructure that supports independent sporting and recreation activities promises to deliver positive outcomes.

Leigh Creek Area School currently has a healthy breakfast program, which is well utilised by students and is producing healthier bodies and minds. The school is strongly supportive of this proposed next step in producing a robust generation of learners and future civic leaders. The secondary objective is to promote tourist activity that will deliver economic benefits to the town as the local economy transitions away from mining towards tourism. This project could lead to the development of aquatic activities at Aroona Dam in the near future. Remote area water bodies are rare in SA, and those that exist (e.g. Innamingka, Dalhousie Springs, Coward Springs) enjoy significant visitation from tourists. The location of Leigh Creek near to the forking Birdsville and Oodnadatta Tracks to the north and the Wilpena/Flinders region to the south suggests tourism can only grow given the development of attractions.

One recommendation of the Leigh Creek Future Report is for the SA Tourism Commission to investigate 'changing the Airport name [at Leigh Creek] and linking it with international gateway

airports to connect local Aboriginal, pastoral, and fossil tourism operators with international inbound flights' (<http://leighcreekfutures.sa.gov.au/>).

## PROJECT STRATEGIES

The strategies the Leigh Creek Community Progress Association (LCCPA) have put in place for this project are the following.

### **Engage with community stakeholders**

We have engaged with Adnyamathanha Elders on the culturally appropriate and safe ways to develop the Aroona Dam access trail for multi-use recreational and cultural learning activities. The success of this project is predicated upon Aboriginal direction and advice and in doing so takes an assets-based approach to community development. The Leigh Creek Elders stressed the need for independent activities that individuals or families can engage in that build/support healthy cultural wellbeing as well as active lifestyle choices (healthy eating, regular exercise, social group activities). In response to these consultations the LCCPA identified the following external partners and sought their expert advice and assistance.

### **Engage with the Mobile Language Team**

The Mobile Language Team (MLT) will play a key role in translating the Adnyamathanha cultural content into signage for the trail as well as associated promotional materials (primarily web-based). Upgrading the Access Trail involves building language and cultural signage that highlights the track and builds up the linguistic landscape surrounding the trail. Adnyamathanha language will be used on the signage along with English and highlight the cultural significance of the region. This part of the project will be primarily managed by the Mobile Language Team. The MLT are the peak body in SA for negotiating these aspects of the project. The MLT will also support the delivery of the schools workshop run by Bikes Palya and other heritage language-based activities in the Leigh Creek Area School. The MLT will help us to encourage outdoors active lifestyles while raising awareness of the Indigenous language and culture of the region.

### **Engage with Bikes Palya**

Bikes Palya will deliver a one-week Healthy Lifestyles Program at Leigh Creek Area School. Bikes Palya is an energetic hub of bike-focused creative, mechanical, physical, and community activities. In-school activities run by Bikes Palya involve students learning safety and skills, starring in their own learning

videos, playing bike games, and going on adventures rides through the community and bush. After-school sessions are also run and involve bike maintenance and a silk screening workshops that bring the community together to learn more about bikes while having fun.

## EVALUATION

The LCCPA will also evaluate these activities and develop further strategies for developing and integrating the Aboriginal language and culture of Leigh Creek into outdoor activities that appeal to town residents and visitors.

## TARGET POPULATION

The primary target for this project is the school-age Aboriginal population of Leigh Creek (and surrounding towns such as Copley and Nepabunna who travel to the school). There are approximately 60 students at the Leigh Creek Area School at the present time, nearly all of whom are Aboriginal. It is expected that very close to 100% of these children will be involved in the Bikes Palya programme at the school and in the regular follow-up activities that will be delivered to the school by the Mobile Language Team. The general population of Leigh Creek will also be encouraged to participate in trail activities. The wider community will be invited to the launch of the trail, which will involve a BBQ and guided tour of the trail.

## IDENTIFYING HEALTH AND WELLBEING ISSUES

Rosalie Richards, the *Learning and Wellbeing Coordinator* at Leigh Creek Area School, initially invited the MLT to conduct a local assessment of the town and its health and wellbeing needs over two separate trips. While engaging with Adnyamathanha elders, Leigh Creek Area School Leaders and active community representatives two major goals were identified:

- Create more infrastructure for people to independently engage in a healthy outdoors lifestyle
- Create more cultural and language information for teachers and elders to use with younger Leigh Creek students

Further to this, the Leigh Creek Futures Report (2016) also identified the following recommendations:

- Improve current poor signage
- Improve inward facing facilities that currently do not encourage visitors
- Build more social capacity to attract residents back to the town.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The Leigh Creek Area School is focussing on an Adnyamathanha language revival programme. In 2019 the school received special funding to trial innovative ways of teaching a language other than English in the state education sector. A key rationale in the design of the Adnyamathanha programme at LCAS was to focus on language use in traditional or cultural settings. This means taking heritage language outside of the classroom and for children to experience the language in its natural ecology – among the hills, rocks and plants of the traditional Adnyamathanha country.

The benefits of this approach towards enhancing cultural autonomy and building a sustainable language ecology is demonstrated in Monaghan & Muhlhauser (2015)\* for the Wirangu community of the Ceduna region (SA). Bikes Palya will deliver a workshop on using the trail but will also deliver a fleet of 10 bikes to remain at Leigh Creek for community use.

The potential for the multi-use trail to attract tourists is high given the widespread interest in the Flinders Ranges as an outdoor activity destination within the broader Australian and international communities. The flow on from these visitors will encourage the use of the trail and the further development of the Aroona Dam as a site for aquatic activities. Sustainability will be enhanced through MLT 3 follow up workshops --- The Akurra Trail will be incorporated into the school curricula, particularly in the areas of language revival, bilingual education, physical education.

\*State versus community approaches to language revival The case of Wirangu at the Scotdesco community (South Australia). In Craig Alan Volker and Fred E. Anderson (eds) Education in Languages of Lesser Power: Asia Pacific Perspectives. John Benjamins.

## IMPACT

The impact of this project will be measured and compiled through a qualitative report at the end of the project period. This report will focus on:

- Students' perspectives on the usefulness of the Bikes Palya workshop
- Teachers' perspectives on the Bikes Palya workshop (specifically relating to any uptake of outdoor activities)
- Community's perspectives on the importance and usefulness of the Akurra Trail (specifically relating to strong and healthy cultural and language attitudes)

- Community's perspectives on people using the Akurra Trail and healthy lifestyle benefits of using the Akurra Trail.

Methods used for this report will include informal interviews, quotes and anecdotal impressions of Leigh Creek community members and partner organisations working on the project.