



## YOUNG DOCTORS

May 2015

The gap in health equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians just keeps getting wider and wider. Something new was urgently needed and strangely it has come from something very old.

A method that is older than the pyramids was used by Aboriginal people to deliver strong, healthy lives. The traditional healers, the Ngangkari – would look out for young children, as young as four years old, who had the right attitude and aptitude to learn about medicine and then become doctors to their community.

This same idea propels The Malpa Project's "Young Doctors" concept. Across Australia young Indigenous and non-Indigenous nine and ten year olds are learning the traditional ways of health and the modern ways as well. The children learn health leadership, nutrition, environmental health, health literacy and hygiene. After a fifteen week course devised and delivered by local people graduate as Young Doctors – or *Ngargin* Doctors, *Dhalayi* Doctors or *Boorai* Doctors according to where they live. And they are changing not only their own life choices but those of their families and community.

Usually school attendance rises to 100% when the projects run and although the program is designed to have fifteen children in each course as many as forty five are turning up in some places. You can find Young Doctors in South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria, NSW and Queensland. About 450 of them all working actively to help communities work toward long and healthy lives.

The Young Doctors are trained by local traditional knowledge keepers, Elders, community health workers, doctors and dentists. Most importantly they become health ambassadors and are encouraged to take career pathways into health and medicine.

In a new initiative designed to counter government withdrawal of funding for hearing tests in schools – even though as many as eighty percent of Aboriginal children under the age of eleven are functionally deaf – graduate Young Doctors will be trained to conduct hearing tests and make medical referrals.

This will be done under clinical supervision and has the potential for helping their peers to get a thirst for education and the chance of getting a job. This is an Australian first.

The Malpa Project's CEO, Don Palmer, says "If it takes a village to raise a child, then it can be children who can heal a community."



## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Aboriginal approach to delivering holistic health was for the traditional healers (called *Ngangkari* in Central Australia) to select young people with the right attitude and aptitude to become “Young Doctors”. Our Young Doctors - *Dhalayi Doctors* – Dunghutti, *Umbarkalya Doctors* – Alywarr etc - are trained by a combination of local Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders working with Elders, traditional healers (if available) and community health workers to become health leaders with knowledge of hygiene, nutrition, environmental health and health literacy. The Young Doctors are then supported as they engage with other children in their community encouraging others kids to take on good health habits. The Projects run within primary school communities for fifteen weeks with fifteen young people. At the insistence of Elders the groups comprise Indigenous and non-Indigenous Young Doctors.

The success has been remarkable with young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children taking a pro-active part in improving the health of their peers and their communities. Usually school attendance not only is 100% but Principals report that it also lifts attendance by the entire school community. Young Doctors are being trained in Queensland, South Australia, NSW and Victoria and has attracted the interest of SBS/NITV television. By the end of 2015 there will be over 450 Young Doctors Australia wide.

## **SUCCESS**

All projects are the result of communities inviting us to help them devise and deliver their own projects. Currently requests exceed our capacity to commit to projects. Projects have been run, or are running, in SA, NSW, Qld, Victoria and the NT.

## **PROJECT BENEFITS**

- Puts young Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in control of their health
- Improves basic health by breaking the cycle of poor primary health
- Creates authentic relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- Empowers Indigenous people to consider health as a career path
- Builds cultural resilience
- Brings pride to local communities
- Replicable, adaptable and scale-able

## **BEST PRACTICE**

The Projects are described as “best practice” by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and *Dhalayi Doctors* received a “NAIDOC Week Best Practice” Award from the Australian Red Cross.

## **SUPPORT**

Our Projects enjoy the support and clinical advice of Johnson and Johnson, Aspen Medical, Symbion, Medibank, the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children and prominent medical advisors.

## **FUNDING**

All our funding comes from private individuals and corporations including Deutsche Bank, Macquarie Bank, McKinnon Family Trust, CRM Foundation, Johnson and Johnson, the Aspen Medical Foundation, EBOS and Medibank and SBS Foundation.

**malpa**



Traditional Knowledge Keeper Anthony Moore introduces Ngarin Doctors to the power of traditional medicine



Troy Tungai shares his knowledge of hygiene



Ngarin Doctors and some of their leaders and community