



**CLOSING THE GAP ONE
COMMUNITY AT A TIME:**

**2016 Aboriginal
Volunteer
Program**

OODNADATTA



Introduction

The Aboriginal Volunteer Program (AVP) works with the community of Oodnadatta – an Aboriginal community in remote South Australia. Made up of approximately 250 people, it is one of the most remote communities in South Australia, making it also one of the most vulnerable and susceptible to disadvantage. Oodnadatta, however, is also made up of a strong community of people, committed to improving opportunities among the challenges of limited employment prospects, literacy rates below national standards and higher incidents of poverty and poor health¹.

Our story

The AVP is a partnership between the community of Oodnadatta, the program's South Australia-based Aboriginal Reference Group, Volunteering SA & NT, and AVI. It has been working with the Oodnadatta community since 2012.

The AVP works towards clear, strategic goals which align with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap targets, in particular to improve Indigenous literacy levels and reduce inequality.

Overall AVP goals are:

- That volunteers gain the confidence and skills to participate and contribute to community life;
- The community participates with volunteers in carrying out locally identified community development programs;
- A complementary goal is to provide evidence and advocacy material to generate support for an ongoing Aboriginal youth volunteering program, i.e. Oodnadatta Pilot demonstrates the value of the model.

The AVP uses a community-based, youth-led volunteering model which is based on an international development approach with proven effectiveness over the long term. Tailored for use in the remote Aboriginal setting, the model represents best practice in culturally sensitive, respectful engagement with Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal volunteers, who understand the context, work with the community on projects which matter to them. And thus, aligned with the AVP's goals, the approach is all about supporting the Oodnadatta community to achieve what they want to achieve.



Photo: 2016 AVP volunteers - the journey begins

¹ Oodnadatta is listed as HIGH on the ABS Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas Advantage/Disadvantage. The town is isolated from services and employment opportunities are minimal.

Our approach

The AVP uses a participatory approach which is focused on ensuring Aboriginal cultural respect. A key to its success has been having Aboriginal volunteers work closely with community participants, together building stronger community cohesion and social values. The result is a positive impact on the whole community.

Community participation is essential to the process. Capitalising on the importance of role modelling, the Aboriginal volunteers encourage strong participation in activities across all age groups and abilities. The effect is clear at Oodnadatta Aboriginal School (OAS), where 100 per cent of secondary school students and 76 per cent of primary school students participated in four or more of the 2016 AVP extra-curricular activities.

In 2016, the formal involvement of an Oodnadatta Aboriginal local resident as a volunteer participant on the AVP was another step forward in the program's evolution and approach. Not only did this ensure a strong community-led, participatory approach, it also encouraged greater community ownership and focus on the longer term sustainability of the program.

"It's a really good idea having a local volunteer - they know the locals in the community, they understand the community and can share this with the volunteers."

Manager, Bungala Home and Community Care (Aged Care Facility)

"IT'S A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL THAT AT ITS CORE IS RESPECTFUL AND INCLUSIVE AND IS GENUINELY ABOUT BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES, TOGETHER."

BRUCE HAMMOND, CHAIR,
ABORIGINAL REFERENCE GROUP.

"THEY ROLE MODELLED THAT YOU CAN FINISH YEAR 12, GO TO UNI, (THAT) THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN SITTING IN A COMMUNITY."

SENIOR SCHOOL TEACHER,
OODNADATTA ABORIGINAL SCHOOL.

Our impact in 2016

A snapshot of sustainable outcomes achieved against the AVP program objectives

Four years on from when it began in 2012, the AVP has proven to have a positive and sustainable impact on a number of levels. For volunteers, it provides the opportunity for role modelling, confidence building and skill development. For participants, the benefits include improved participation in community activities, development of leadership skills, and improved literacy skills. For the community as a whole, increased empowerment as a result of the program's consultative and participatory processes has been a driver of change, encouraging a stronger sense of purpose, pride and community ownership.

Each year, the AVP provides renewed energy for the Oodnadatta community to achieve its goals. The AVP volunteers work with community members on their locally-identified projects, providing support as required to help fulfil community aspirations. In 2016, the support of the AVP helped to significantly improve literacy rates amongst school children and improve livelihood opportunities with a new project aimed at sustainable income generation.

At Oodnadatta Aboriginal School, AVP volunteers achieved remarkable results with their one-on-one literacy activities. **As a result, all primary school students tested showed improved literacy levels.**

In the Middle Primary Class, for example, all students except one improved by two or more reading levels over the term. **Four of the students (F-I in the chart) showed a dramatic improvement, not only increasing their reading levels but progressing two entire school 'Year' levels in one term.** Refer to the chart and table overleaf for details.

"HELPING A WHOLE COMMUNITY IS A MASSIVE THING. HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET TO BE INVOLVED IN AND LEARN ABOUT SUCH A VARIETY OF THINGS: WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN A SCHOOL, THE CEMETERY PROJECT, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY EVENTS."

MONTANA MCSTAY,
2016 AVP VOLUNTEER.

"WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE VOLUNTEERS COMING EVERY YEAR TO BE PART OF THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY. IT'S BENEFICIAL."

CHAIRPERSON,
DUNJIBA COMMUNITY COUNCIL.



CHART ONE:

Running Records Middle Primary Class 2016
(Levels 1-30)



Yr Level	Reception - Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Years 6-7
RR Level	Level 1-14	Level 15-20	Level 21-23	Level 24-25	Level 26-28	Level 29-30

Teachers acknowledged the valued role of the volunteers in contributing to these results:

“The volunteers got the kids excited about reading. They grabbed every opportunity to be with the volunteers.”

Junior Primary Teacher, Oodnadatta Aboriginal School

“The volunteers could deliver what needed to be done in a different way.”

Middle Primary Teacher, Oodnadatta Aboriginal School

Other key achievements and activities of 2016 included:

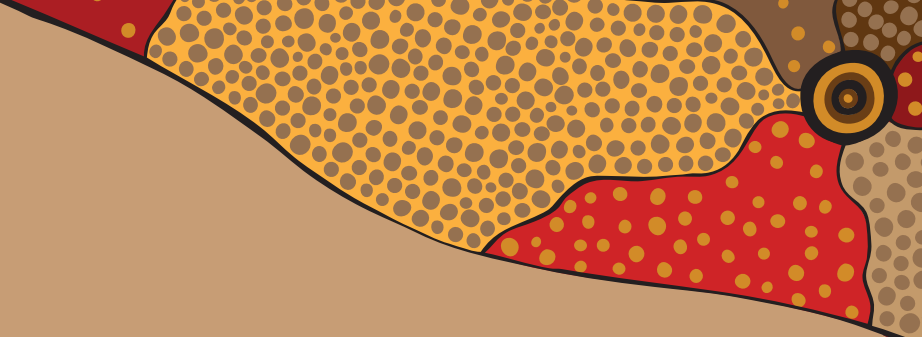
- Improved community cohesion and positive engagement amongst young people and different family groups through wide community engagement in social activities such as backyard campfires and movie nights.
- Increased confidence and community pride among Elders involved in AVP arts and crafts projects. A mural created at the entrance of the Women's Shed is an important representation of this for the community.
- Improved pathways to employment with two Learner's Licence workshops held for seven young Aboriginal people, using the Austroads Learning to Drive Kit developed by the SA Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI).
- Increased acceptance and breaking of taboos associated with mental health issues through a Mental Health and Substance Awareness session run in collaboration with an OAS secondary school teacher and the local Umoona Tjutagku Health Service Drug and Alcohol outreach worker. Ten senior school students attended the session and, with the presence and leadership of the Aboriginal volunteers, an open and honest environment was created for education on this important topic.
- Health improvement projects taught participants how to cook more nutritious meals and the importance of exercise for improved mental health.

"I WAS TRYING TO SHOW THAT IT WAS COOL TO BE HEALTHY. THE KIDS WOULD COME ROUND AND WE WOULD GO RUNNING ON A DAILY BASIS. I TOOK THE SPEAKERS AND WE WOULD RUN TO MUSIC. AT FIRST I WAS DOING THE WARM UP ROUTINE ALONE, BUT WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING THEY STARTED DOING IT TOO. AFTER THE RUNS, WE WOULD BE BACK TO THE HOUSE FOR OUR SPINACH SMOOTHIES."

CHARLES ROLLS,
2016 AVP VOLUNTEER



Photo: Local Aboriginal volunteer, Renee Marks, preparing seedlings for the Elders' gardens.



Community-led From strength to strength in 2016

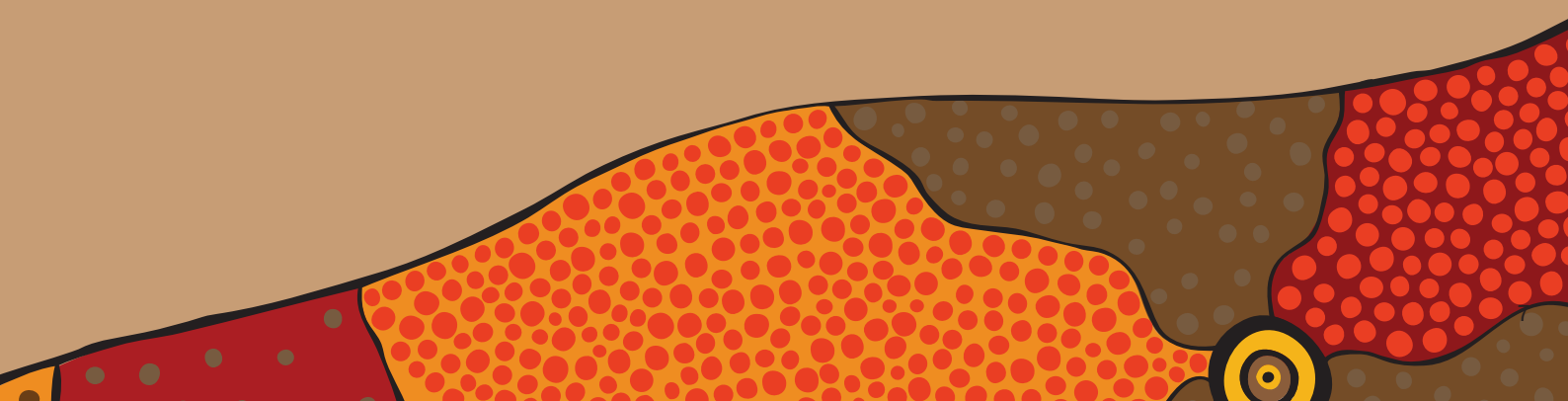
The AVP encourages community members to take the lead role in defining what they want to achieve for their community. Over the last few years, the AVP volunteers and community members have been working towards the establishment of an Aboriginal women-led arts and crafts social enterprise at the Women's Shed. The aim of this project is to capitalise on growing tourism opportunities by utilising the artistic talents of community members, especially women and girls. Significant gains were made in this endeavour in 2016. The project kicked off with a social enterprise exposure tour to Alice Springs, designed in partnership with [Enterprise Learning Projects \(ELP\)](#). Through their exposure to other Aboriginal initiatives in Alice Springs, this tour supported a diverse group of Aboriginal women from Oodnadatta to build their understanding of enterprise options and stimulate their thinking about what is possible in Oodnadatta.

Following this, the project continued working with the women in Oodnadatta via tailored participatory workshops, providing opportunities for the women to recognise their own skills and talents, identify social enterprise opportunities, determine interest in further exploring these potential opportunities and create basic plans to explore these ideas further. The project has provided a safe, fun and supportive environment for the Aboriginal women to come together, with the guidance of experts, to dream and explore the possibilities of new livelihoods for themselves and their community. The Aboriginal women have expressed an interest in exploring the feasibility of a range of potential opportunities in more depth alongside the expertise of a partner such as ELP. This initiative has been undertaken in partnership between the AVP and ELP and will continue to be developed in 2017.

The social enterprise project journey to date has been enabled by funding from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal-ANZ and the SA Department of State Development. It has been a successful partnership between the community, government, corporate and not-for-profit sectors – exemplifying the collaborative partnerships required to achieve the world's [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

**“WE NEED PEOPLE WITH
US ON THE JOURNEY; WE
CAN MAKE THE DREAM A
REALITY.”**

MARILYN AH CHEE,
OODNADATTA COMMUNITY MEMBER



Evidence, advocacy and increased visibility

The AVP provides evidence and advocacy material to the Australian Government to generate support for an ongoing Aboriginal youth volunteering program, demonstrating that, if adapted appropriately, it could be scaled up and effective in other Aboriginal communities. **The AVP is the only Australian Government program funded in the region that focuses on both improved literacy rates as well as school attendance;** other similar programs are focused solely on school attendance. In 2016, the Australian Government contributed 75 per cent of the AVP's total annual funding.

In parallel, the AVP has also been recognised as an avenue towards achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals – encouraging citizen participation, utilising volunteers as a cross-cutting means of implementation and ensuring collaborative partnerships. For more information, see <http://forum-ids.org/news/volunteering-and-the-un-sustainability-development-goals/>



Photo: Oodnadatta Aboriginal women, AVP volunteers and staff on the social enterprise tour in Alice Springs - exploring the possibilities for Oodnadatta.



Photo: Volunteer, Charles Rolls, working with Oodnadatta Elders during the program



Designed by Tahnee Edwards

