

kani rrala A language-based literacy pilot project

Alison Stone – Educator, Project Manager
Rosalie Martin & Courtney Dunbabin – Speech Pathologists
August 2016



kani rrala is an innovative project which directly brought systematic and evidence-based, language-literacy support to three Aboriginal youths with severe impairments in these skills. The youths were disengaging from and failing to progress at school. *kani rrala* engaged speech pathologists to deliver two, forty five minute sessions per week to each boy for six months – a total of forty hours of intervention each from January 2016 through June 2016. The boys engaged – in fact they loved attending the sessions. They made strong gains in the target skills – reading, writing, vocabulary and interaction using language. They were also noted to make gains in confidence, to share their feelings and to undergo attitudinal shifts which opened their hopes and dreams to new possibilities.

Two main recommendations have arisen from *kani rrala*:

1. That the program be continued with these three boys for another 18 months – this would provide them with support to continue through critical milestones in their schooling and entry to the workforce.
2. That the program be undertaken with a wider cohort of students and their supporters – *kani rrala* showed that it had efficacy for teaching targeted communication skills to individual students, but that it also had power for effective parent engagement.

Background:

In 2010 the *Strengthening Connections* initiative was commenced in Tasmania through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) Parent and Community Engagement Strategy (PACE). Since 2010, *Strengthening Connections* has successfully rolled-out various iterations to groups of Aboriginal parents of school-age and pre-school age children. Its objects were to bring information and skills to Aboriginal families with which to strengthen their connections to their local schools and school communities.

From the outset of *Strengthening Connections*, one of the particular requests of those parents who came to be the consistently-involved participants, was for their children's language and literacy to be assessed and specifically supported. This group of parents were motivated to attend the *Strengthening Connections* activities to gain skills to assist their children, but were simultaneously aware that their children were experiencing significant learning challenges at school. They clearly stated that they felt that their children had been 'let down' by the school system, feeling that the children's learning challenges had not been adequately responded to at the level of individual need and individual difference.

The scope of *Strengthening Connections* did not allow for individual language and literacy assessment of the children. But it was noted that this is what the parents repeatedly requested, from the first focus group, and throughout participation in the *Strengthening Connections* sessions. Thus, having listened to parents, a particular submission was made to Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (previously DEEWR) requesting permission to broaden the scope of *Strengthening Connections* in accordance with the parents' wishes, as a pilot project.

kani rrala was born.

kani rrala is palawa kani for 'strong talk'. It intentionally acknowledges the language and interaction bases of literacy and engagement.



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Introduction:

Literacy skill is based upon language skill. At root, a literacy disorder of any type is a language disorder (Snowling and Hume, 2011). That language disorder may be present at the levels of narrative, sentence structure and vocabulary, or it may be present at the level of individual phonemes (ibid). Any combination of these language challenges is also possible. To effectively support literacy, the language-based building blocks of literacy must be developed in conjunction with the social communication capacities which make engagement possible (Snow, 2016). When a student can engage with learning tasks in a socially-nurturing context, he can grow love of learning, independence in learning, and identity as a successful learner (ibid).

Students, whose learning experiences have been negative and have led to disengagement and/or low achievement, *can* be supported to progress and build identities as successful learners. In language and literacy learning – upon which much opportunity directly depends – respectful, skilful direct-teaching from a knowledge-base of the developmental sequences of language and phonological processing is essential (Johnson & Watson, 2005). This knowledge must be woven together with knowledge of the individual processing capacities of a student, as well as how those capacities will meet the complexity of the English language and its written code. Moreover, the configuration of the factors within individuals' social contexts which either support or detract from learning, must also be understood and managed. Management of all of these variables makes student-engagement possible in ways which inspire learning, motivation, progress and experience of aspiration.

Speech pathologists are communication professionals with expertise in language, phonological processing, social communication and the full range of their developmental drivers (Snow, 2009; Snow, 2016). Further, they are expert in direct-teaching, and in the task-analysis of the complex constellations of factors within learning which can be challenged by impaired development. It is for these reasons that *kani rrala* engaged speech pathologists.

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Aims:

kani rrala aimed to provide a bridge by which disadvantages of the past might be met. And by which pathways might be opened, through interaction, language and literacy, toward greater equity in the lives of the three participating young people and their families. *kani rrala* aimed to teach skills and provide relationship experiences, which could contribute to just restoration of the accrued trauma and disadvantage experienced by Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Intention:

The intention of *kani rrala* was to provide expert processes to build spoken language, phonological processing, social-communication and written language within three language-literacy impaired, adolescent boys and to involve their natural network of supporters while doing so.

Objectives:

The objectives of *kani rrala* were to document the progress and challenges of the participants as they undertook treatment for language-literacy-social skills; and to identify and document the key strategies which engaged and motivated the boys and their supporters, and the key outcomes.

Significance:

This project was significant because it acknowledged, dignified, and granted the long-held insights and requests of the parents and guardians of the participating youths. It directly provided the boys, and thereby their supporters, with expert, language-literacy skill-building by which to stimulate change and equity, in ways which were relationally-based, highly enjoyable and non-stigmatising.

kani rrala was also significant because its model of funding permitted new learnings about the application of an individual-centric funding model to education. Funding models which use expert practitioners to directly address the specific learning needs of individual learners and their families are familiar within allied-health, but are little-used in education (Snow, 2016). The direct benefit brought to the boys and the ongoing changes stimulated by these benefits, provide opportunity to view and evaluate this model from within a fresh context. It is a model which might be effectively used with other young people.

kani rrala was significant because it demonstrated the accuracy of the informal evaluation of the youths' learning needs, by their families. The complexity of these needs, revealed through assessment, validated the families' felt-need for expert support. The language-literacy challenges of the children were more complex than could be adequately addressed through application of simple, generic supports. They required application of specifically-honed expertise. Ideally this expertise would have been delivered to the boys consistently throughout their schooling, but it was not. *kani rrala* provided opportunity to begin to redress this.

Finally, *kani rrala* was significant because it demonstrated practical fulfillment of the theoretically-held understanding that, using evidence-based methods, it is never too late to engage hope and effectively build functional skills which better serve individuals in their personal goals and participation, and society in its growth toward equity and inclusion.

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Who was Involved:

Alison Stone, Aboriginal Educator, had managed the *Strengthening Connections* project since its inception in 2010; and Rosalie Martin and the Speech Pathology Tasmania (SPT) team of speech pathologists had had input into its first and subsequent iterations. In 2014, Alison made approach to Rosalie about creation of an innovative, targeted program by which to deliver support to children of the *Strengthening Connections* families. Alison specifically enquired about the possibility of bringing literacy support to the three young men who went on to become the participants of *kani rrala*. This led to the

design of *kani rrala*, which was structured upon the practices of professional, ethical, efficacious speech pathology intervention for language, literacy and social skills.

Courtney Dunbabin, of Speech Pathology Tasmania, was selected to conduct the assessments and work directly with the young men. Courtney carried out the lion's share of the program, with Rosalie overseeing and consulting with Courtney as the program unfolded. Rosalie also supplied those sessions in which Courtney was on leave.

The three young men, Billy, John and Adam (John and Adam are brothers) participated directly in the program; as did the boys' care-giving parent or guardian, their other supporters, Alison Stone and Mark Watterson, and various other staff at Karadi Aboriginal Corporation. Karadi played a key role as the three young men involved in the project accessed Karadi on a regular basis. Importantly, the young men had a long established relationship with staff at Karadi.

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Initial Assessment Results:

The initial conception of *kani rrala* was to develop the boys' literacy skills. Competent expressive and receptive language skills, and social interaction skills are prerequisites for academic and social success. Thus, thorough language assessment was conducted with each of the boys at the outset of *kani rrala* to gather information on these underpinning skills of literacy. A great deal of classroom and employment performance – speaking, reading, spelling, writing, and oral and written comprehension – is based upon mastery of underlying language skills.

Each of the 12 language skills measured for this project were found to be impaired in each of the boys – and most of the skills were found to be severely impaired.

The boys' full results are documented in [Appendix A](#); and [Appendix B](#) gives information about the measured language skills and their functional importance.

This formal assessment of receptive and expressive language clearly identified that the skill-building work of *kani rrala* would need to commence with a focus on the development of the youths' language and vocabulary skills.

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What Happened During *kani rrala* Sessions?:

Sessions as Crafted by the Speech Pathologists

The initial session in which Courtney and each boy met, was for language assessment. Thorough assessment of the sub-skills of language and literacy is essential to design on-target therapeutic intervention. Courtney understood that the assessment process may be anxiety-provoking for the boys. In usual practice, she met this with welcome, respect, kindness, assurances that the boys could control

the pace and length of the session, and plenty of reinforcement. Alison Stone, who sat in on the assessment, made this unsolicited comment about the assessment process as she witnessed it:

“Courtney was just so beautiful with the boys – she was so kind and treated them with so much respect”.

Intentional use of the social skills which communicate kindness and respect were embedded in every session and in every interaction. Both Courtney and Rosalie are experienced in working with persons with social communication impairments and understand the importance to engagement, of animating, amplifying and regulating their social responding in nuanced response to the learner. They are also both aware of the socially-enabling importance of intentionally responding in such ways that the young person feels liked. To be liked has strong social power. These approaches were further informed at all times by intentional valuing of non-judgment and unconditional positive regard.

The initial intervention sessions with the boys were carried out in a group – developing relationship, and building trust and rapport through card games and board games. Once laughing-connection and enjoyment were established, and time to build the boys’ trust and expectations in the language and vocabulary-building work had been allowed, they were introduced to structured work by which to directly build the sub-skills of literacy.

From the first meeting in the assessment session, the boys were given clear information – in spoken form and simultaneously as drawn images – that they could stop at any time they chose and that they would not be asked to proceed with anything they couldn’t do. They were assured that if the therapists inadvertently asked them to do something which they felt was too difficult, that they could decline, the therapists would apologise, and then either do it for them, show them how to do it, or leave it. The boys were assured that they would never be placed in a position in which they didn’t know how to respond. These were central and open-honest tenets of the program, and were at all times responded to immediately and with respect. This gave the boys assurance and experience of safety.

Structured work began with focus upon phonological awareness – this is the ability to discern and mentally manipulate the sounds of speech. These activities oriented the boys to targeted and goal-focused work. They appeared ready for this and eager to participate in it. It had high face-validity for the boys and appeared to meet their expectation of the program. They really enjoyed these activities – even though these are the very skills that they had never succeeded at in school. The introduction of individualised, structured tasks was always with full therapist support to enable success. The speech pathologists frequently found it necessary to draw from their most-nuanced, task-analysis skill and sensitivity in order to structure tasks so that the boys would experience themselves as successful. The boys all demonstrated willingness to engage, and their trust and hopefulness in the program were tangible.

Over the six month course of the program, the boys worked individually with the speech pathologist for 45 minutes twice per week. Sessions consisted of phonological awareness activities which were individually-nuanced to facilitate and ensure each boy’s certain success and progress. These activities were then integrated with letters and the alphabetic code; with perpetual linking of all of these skills to

expressive language, vocabulary, conversation skills and metacognitive awareness (thinking about thinking). The sequence and presentation of these tasks was determined for each boy according to his mastery of the earlier subskills. Courtney gave high-level attention to individualised selection of targets in dynamic response to each boy's progress. Maintenance of the boys' success, and of their awareness and experience of that success, informed all choices made by Courtney in her selection of goals and process.

After focusing on building language and phonological awareness skills at the beginning of the program, new goals were introduced targeting the boys' reading fluency and ability to decode words. This work harnessed the subskills gained through the phonological awareness work.

Building the language bases of literacy formed the overarching goals of the entire *kani rrala* program as well as the sub-goals of every session and every interaction. The complexity of the specific tasks presented to the boys was continually, dynamically adjusted in order to maintain their engagement, ensure their success, and simultaneously move them along the language-literacy continuum at a pace which was challenging but not overwhelming.

An example of the individualisation of the boys' programs is that in the last few weeks, one student, Billy, was introduced to structured spelling rules, about which he had been enquiring throughout the early sessions. This led to Billy voluntarily beginning work on learning to spell two-syllable words – a new high level of attainment for him, which had intrinsic motivation as he identified that he could indeed understand the systematic patterns within spelling.

Another of the students, John, was eager to study for his learner driver's licence during the course of the program. This goal was incorporated into the sessions, with focus placed on learning the new vocabulary within the learner's book, reading short sentences from the book, and having John explain what the sentences meant. At the completion of the program John tried-out for his learner's licence and passed on his third attempt.

Excursions and outdoor activities which followed the boys' interests were introduced just a few weeks into the program. These occasions furthered the trust within the student-therapist relationship, and provided opportunity to advance the language and vocabulary program by using language across a variety of topics and contexts in which the boys could naturally step-up into leadership roles. For example, Billy took Courtney to a mutton bird rookery and Adam introduced her to the Karadi garden.

These events emerged according to the lads' interests, the security in their relationship with Courtney, and the insights which learning and hope opened for them. The enabling of the boys' ideas and dreams through this spontaneity and shared planning supported growth of their knowledge of the processes of independence and of an empowered mindset. Lack of detailed planning of every session from the outset of the project was not a problem, for this permitted flexibility; it truly empowered the boys' inputs and could not diminish the quality of the intervention, for it is stock-in-trade for the speech pathologist to flexibly hold such a complex of variables and continue to weave in stimuli to support the language-literacy targets at the student's individualised level, in any activity and interaction. [Back to Contents](#)



Sessions as Experienced by the Young Men

The boys' experience of the assessment was observed to be challenging. The two brothers were compliant but it was apparent that it was not enjoyable and they needed breaks in order to complete the testing. Billy, however, had a physical as well as a psychological reaction. It appeared from his body language that he became anxious and distant. Alison felt that it triggered negative memories for him. He complied, but did not engage with enthusiasm and needed many breaks including physically leaving the building. He spent much of the assessment time playing with his phone. He made very little eye contact and could not be drawn-in to small talk. Nevertheless, all boys showed resilience and determination throughout the process as they overcame their fear. It was made clear to them that the therapy sessions would not be at all like the assessment.

In spite of the challenge with the assessment presented to Billy, the experience of it was nevertheless observed to stimulate a positive change in his engagement. Alison commented that

“Courtney was just so... kind and treated them with so much respect. They are not used to being treated with respect like that. Especially not by somebody they don't know”.

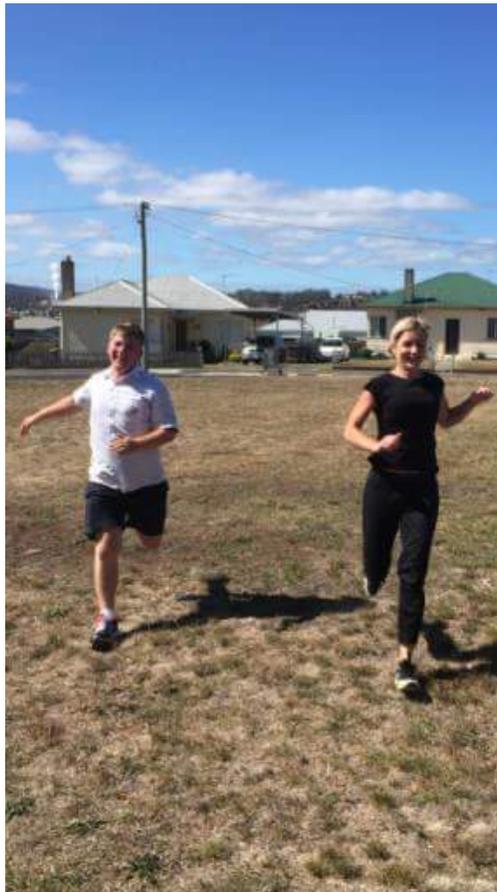
It appears that the quality of this respect and kindness, together with the assurances and encouragement of those with whom he already had trusting relationships – Alison and Mark – stimulated hopefulness in Billy. And this hopefulness permitted him to engage eagerly with the intervention sessions.

In the first therapy session Billy engaged and joined the group activities. He was still distracted by his phone, deferring to it during any lulls. By the second individual session, however, remarkable change was evident in his presentation. He engaged, did not pick up his phone, cooperated with smiles, lots of eye contact, offers of help, initiation of conversation, answering questions, laughing and enjoyment of jokes and banter – and with excellent attention to and enjoyment of the structured learning tasks. Billy appeared, from his behaviour, to show understanding and hope that this work would benefit him.

It was made very clear prior to the boys commencing *kani rrala* that the program was going to be driven by them. That is, they would work at their pace and would have opportunity to direct the learning activities.

The boys' experience of the intervention sessions was of fun, dignity and respect. This was often with hilarity and rowdiness, and always with loads of physical movement. To an outsider, because of the level of fun, activity and engagement, it may have looked as if the boys were just playing or just messing around. But the boys always knew that they were accomplishing intentional work directed at learning tasks. They experienced all of this within relationship which was safe; and they had full control to stop or redirect if tasks became too difficult or created too much vulnerability. They experienced enormous delight when they identified themselves to have improved against the learning goals.

The boys wanted to be in the sessions – and they all attended consistently. [Back to Contents](#)



Sessions as Witnessed by the Supporters

Alison Stone made the following observations about her experience of being in the session with the boys:

“I really do not think that words can capture the magic that took place in every session after the initial first session. Everyday there was a slight change in the boys. They walked a bit taller, they smiled and were excited to start the sessions, and they were excited to be there. Whilst the sessions were intensive anyone walking past that did not know what was going on would find it hard to believe that they were working very hard and learning new ways to learn, and to feel pride and joy about their efforts. The sessions were packed with spontaneous laughter, fun, hard work – but it didn't feel like that for them because it was fun.”

The supporters expressed relief that at last the children were receiving practical intervention that would assist them. This very relief was itself a motivator of engagement, anticipation and hope in both the parents and the boys. One parent was particularly involved and attended many therapy sessions as well as individual consultations in which Courtney explained and demonstrated the activities that she (parent) could continue to do with the boys at home. She was excited that after asking for this opportunity for years, it had come. The guardian of one of the boys, while limited in being able to join in on the project, nevertheless supported it, supported his lad in attending and talked-up its value at home.

Alison also commented:

“Everyone involved, from the adults to the boys, gave one hundred percent of themselves. We all felt heavily invested in what was happening during the sessions. For the boys they had hope for the future. They were not being put in a situation where they demonstrated what they didn't know, rather they showed us what they did know.”

All supporters of the boys commented on how much they also learned from participation in the sessions; and how much better equipped they now were to continue this support outside of sessions.

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Addressing the Objectives

Progress and Outcomes

All of the boys made achievements in subskills of language and literacy which they had never before mastered or been systematically exposed to. And we observed that they knew they were making progress. They continued to willingly attend twice-weekly sessions throughout the summer and without flagging over the six months of the *kani rrala* project.

In addition to the progress in the specifically-targeted skills, observations of personal growth, hope and confidence in the boys were made by their families and their supporters. Some of these observations follow, but are also fully reported in their raw form in [Appendices D – G](#).

These comments reveal the observed direct benefits for the boys:

- He can tell you more sentences instead of just saying one word. For instance, Mark [support worker] was talking to him in the car about how umpiring went on the weekend and instead of just saying “oh it was good” he sort of went in to more detail about who won and that sort of thing.
- His reading has come along.
- At the start of the year he would sometimes hide under the desk at school instead of doing his work, he would refuse to do stuff, really stubborn! You’ve actually been able to do a lot more without him being as stubborn.... as we went along [in the *kani rrala* program] he got less distracted from what was going on around.
- He can actually sound it out and work it out for himself – which makes you feel good that you can actually work it out for yourself.
- I noticed social interaction with people... you know, people out and around town or wherever we go... he’s more confident, he’s able to hold a conversation with people... A lot of people won’t interact with you if you only say a few words, a lot of people don’t know how to interact with people like that; it benefits their interaction really well.
- They’re able to tell me how they feel... otherwise normally it would have been... just one or two words.
- I’ve noticed if they’re writing something they will express how they’re feeling a bit more.
- Signs. I noticed Billy is reading signs on businesses and trucks and things like that a lot more.
- I just notice a general confidence in themselves that they’ve never had – probably feeling good about themselves, that’s probably what it is.
- One of the really major differences is he can communicate stuff that he’s going through emotionally... he can actually talk through how he’s feeling about stuff and talk through potential solutions and that’s really quite a significant change.
- I was quite surprised about the progress in his literacy.
- I’ve noticed that Billy will ask for my help if he needs it. For example, I got a text message asking to be taken to town.
- All of the boys are more outgoing.
- Instigating what we would describe as conversations.
- [Increase in] Billy’s confidence to be able to... to want to try different things, move out of his comfort zone.
- Billy has more confidence to display his sense of humour.
- The boys’ confidence in being able to form appropriate relationships with people they’re working with.
- Billy is learning to self-regulate, especially at school. He is able to remove himself from a situation at school appropriately.
- Billy is going to school quite regularly; he has the courage to go to school.
- They have started to love learning – how could you not love learning! It has purely been around the fact that they have been under-stimulated. It shows them how great life can be.

These comments show how kani rrala had direct impact on parents' and supporters' skills to independently support the young person:

- I learnt more of the sounds and stuff; how it all really works.
- And it was good that you took them right back to the start. Guess I learnt a few more words! There was some I really didn't know. [I'm] trying to say a few different words instead of saying something I know they will understand.
- [His sister] has trouble with reading and writing. I'm telling her strategies at the start – like breaking up words. She's got dyslexia – I'm helping her with her reading at the same time.
- Well I've actually learnt how to pronounce the letters of alphabet in that... what is that way called – phonological awareness – I've learnt that, so it's made me more aware of things.
- And it's made me make sure I'm assisting these boys to add to their sentences and I'm able to say the right things so they can add to... finish off what they're saying.

These comments show the efficacy of engaging professional input:

- Their reading ability has just amazed me, just watching them read here with you is just amazing because you know I did a bit of work here with Adam and John with their reading and I would hardly get anywhere with it and now they're reading books.
- Your interaction with the boys and how comfortable they feel in here. Because it's not a very nice situation for young fellas to come into where they've had to start learning the alphabet and all that again... and I just found that you made it really easy for them.
- There's no judging in here and they knew that.
- No negative things, always looking forward to coming, always onto me if I'm late!
- I heard how good the project was so my expectation was that these boys would be reading by the end of the year – and socially being able to be amongst people, hold conversations. Expectations met above and beyond!

These comments show what the boys have observed about themselves:

- The thing he has said is that he likes the tuition and the support and he feels like he's getting somewhere. He likes that and he thinks he's getting a lot out of it, you know.
- He talks about you and Mark and Karadi as being people that have supported him, he brings that up and he feels valued because of that. Although that's not an academic outcome that's what keeps him engaged.
- They also really look forward to the sessions.
- The boys are happy, they feel such pride. They enjoyed it – they even gave up their holidays!

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Key Strategies for Motivation and Engagement

It is our observation that the key strategies which stimulated the motivation and engagement which was so abundantly evident throughout *kani rrala* were:

- Authentic, individually-given respect and being liked
- Active maintenance of this respect regardless of the responses from the boys – this included making apologies to the boys if they were inadvertently made too vulnerable
- Particular attention in the therapists to animating and regulating their social communication of respect, according to the responses made by the boys
- Knowledgeable structuring of tasks in a learning sequence which ensured the systematic building of skills
- Engagement of therapists with knowledge and ability to:
 - teach the subskills of language, literacy and social tasks to the children and to the adults supporting them
 - structure any task so that the learner is challenged but successful
 - structure any task to be experienced as dignified and worthwhile, no matter how ‘basic’
 - regulate tasks according to dimensions of emotion, physical movement, social relationship and leadership experience
- Bringing humour and enjoyment into every interaction
- The combination of all of these strategies opened hope in the boys – hope for enjoyment, for real learning, for their futures – and it was this hope which engaged them

Challenges

The only challenges reported by the participants and supporters of *kani rrala* were those associated with the initial assessment. Alison Stone commented that:

“If the program did not have the capacity to be flexible in terms of the delivery, we would have lost them on the first day.”

For the speech pathologists, this did not present as a challenge in the same way because it is tried practice to conduct assessments, and positively support people to engage with the assessment process. However, that Alison and one boy in particular, experienced the assessment as a high-potential barrier, it is recommended that the next iteration of *kani rrala* start with a games-based ice breaker.

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Reflections

In reflecting upon the learnings arising from *kani rrala* there are two observations which have made the greatest impression upon the speech pathologists who designed, led and delivered the project.

Engaging Speech Pathologists

The difference which skilled speech pathologists can bring to the work of teaching literacy and preparing young people for further education, employment, and to launch their dreams, is demonstrated by the success of *kani rrala* and the many comments of surprise and delight made by the supporters, at the methods which they saw empower the three participants. The fun that the lads were having, the constant ensuring of a high level of success at all times, the adjustment of tasks to ensure success, the skillful application of task-analysis – always with enjoyment – the speech pathologists taking responsibility if a task had not been enjoyable, and then being willing to apologise and repair – these processes are all part of applied learning theory and social modeling, and are stock-in-trade for speech pathology practice.

That surprise was consistently expressed at seeing these processes work in such enjoyable ways, suggests that such processes have not been routinely seen before by these parents, supporters and education professionals. Even though these supporters have all been part of the journey of guiding the three *kani rrala* boys through school. We would proffer that what the team witnessed in *kani rrala* was the difference between using the *terms* of such learning theory and its actual practical *application* in a targeted program.

If children with disadvantage, whatever that disadvantage might be – disability, poverty, trauma – are to truly make progress, the *application* of learning theory from a kind, empathetic and respectful attitudinal stance, together with knowledge of the content to be taught, are the basics by which to stimulate and support them to do so. Personnel with capacity to deliver these intentional, reflected, and dynamically-assessed ‘basics’, represent the minimum standard of competence for making a difference.

Engaging Parents and Other Supporters

The supporters vigorously reported themselves to have been empowered by the opportunity to watch and participate in the direct sessions with the boys. We saw that they gained even more of the original objectives of the *Strengthening Connections* project when the learnings were delivered in the form in which *kani rrala* delivered them. That is, when they were more intimately involved, when the learning was arising from a strongly affective source – the love of their children. *kani rrala* appeared to be effective in this broader goal of parent engagement because:

- it alleviated parent anxiety by giving parents the support they had been asking for – their own felt-need to have their voices heard, had been met
- it directly taught parents what to do with their child, according to that child’s individual skills-profile

- it did not assume that parents had the knowledge by which to translate group-based, generically-given information into effective process with their individual child
- it allowed parents to see process that worked with their child, in order to copy that approach at home
- it provided opportunity for parents' technique to be supportively coached in ways which dignified all parties
- it harnessed that most affectively-powerful parent learning stimulus – the love of their children

None of this was a surprise to the speech pathologists. Affect always brings greater empowerment. But the learnings stated by the supporters during *kani rrala* suggest that by addressing children's individual learning needs, there is also a positive impact on parent engagement. This is important to understand better - other young people with learning challenges may benefit.

Funding models have not traditionally provided monies to supply input tailored to individual needs. The Response to Intervention* (RTI) framework is one model which supports doing so for the most disadvantaged learners. Not doing so raises other costs to society – reduced employment and thus increased welfare dependency, poorer mental health, poorer physical health, delinquency and its on-costs. Full calculation and consideration of the true costs, across the lifespan and next generation, of failure to meet learning needs, must be undertaken. [Back to Contents](#)

What Next – Recommendations:

On the basis of the overwhelmingly positive response arising from *kani rrala*, the following recommendations are given:

- That the project be extended for another eighteen months for these boys – until the end of 2016 and then on through 2017.
Rationale: Each of the boys is experiencing significant learning momentum and it is expected that another 18 months of input would bring each lad to outcomes considerably further along the language-literacy continuum – including access to independent further education and independent employment.
- That this model of funding which supports individually-nuanced input be trialed again with a wider cohort to specifically gain understanding about its impact on the experience and learnings of the students and of the parents/guardians/supporters.
Rationale: In addition to high-quality direct intervention, *kani rrala* also achieved and enhanced the broader objectives of *Strengthening Connections* because it supported the parents to be involved in, and become skilled to support their children's learning at home. Further systematic evidence about the signs and indicators raised here, needs to be followed up. These signs and indicators point toward power to reduce the cost of human indignity, as well as the cost to the state, in fiscal terms, of having to support persons across their lifetimes because they were not given basic skills in their youth.

*RTI proposes interventions delivered to learners universally; with targeted support or with specialist support as needed.

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Thanks:

This project has been pure privilege and joy. Everyone has learned so much, including the speech pathologist implementers. It is too rare that opportunity is created by which to provide intervention which, from the evidence-bases which inform our work, is understood to be maximally efficacious. This project gave such opportunity. We witnessed enormous changes in the boys and saw how intensive input of task-analysed, directly-taught sub-skills of language and literacy buoyed many other changes.

Our sincere thanks go to:

The lads and their families – the beauty and hope witnessed in the dignity, courage and determination of the *kani rrala* participants inspired and astounded us.

Alison Stone – such an inspirational, tenacious and determined visionary (don’t be fooled by the quiet demeanour, there’s a tiger inside).

The funders – thank you for being willing to take a chance on innovative design – through this, the signs and indicators for change have been shown.

Mark and the other supporters – the hope, encouragement, dedication and humility of every one of the supporters was amazing; such a pleasure to work with.

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Appendix A:

Participant test results:

TESTS USED:

Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – Version 4 (CELF-4)

The CELF-4 is a standardised test of a variety of the language skills that young people require for effective communication with language. The test is composed of a number of subtests that measure different language skills. Performance on each of these subtests is reported as a “standard score”: scores of 7-13 define the “normal range”, with 10 being average. Details about the specific language skills that the subtests measure, are available in Appendix A.

The CELF-4 also groups together the scores of those subtests that measure related language skills in order to calculate “composite scores”; also known as “index scores”. The composite scores are powerful indicators of weakness trends and fundamental areas of weakness that a student may be experiencing. The composite scores are reported slightly differently to the subtest scores: for the composite scores, scores of 85 - 115 define the “normal range”, with 100 being average.

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT4) is a standardised test of children’s receptive vocabularies. This means that it assesses the words that children *know*. Receptive vocabulary is strongly correlated with academic outcomes. In this test the boys did not have to retrieve or say the words, but only point to one picture from an array of four pictures. After listening to the test word, the student then selected the picture that matched that word, if it was known. The PPVT4 scores are reported such that scores of 85 - 115 define the “normal range”, with 100 being average.

Billy’s Results

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTALS – VERSION 4: SUBTEST RESULTS:

Task	Standard Score (10 is average; 7 - 13 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Recalling Sentences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Formulated Sentences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes - Receptive	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes – Expressive	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes – Total	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Definitions	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Sentence Assembly	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Semantic Relationships	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Understanding Spoken Paragraphs	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Number Repetition - Forward	4	2 nd	Moderate-severely Impaired
Number Repetition - Backward	6	9 th	Mildly Impaired
Number Repetition - Total	5	5 th	Moderately Impaired
Familiar Sequences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTALS – VERSION 4: COMPOSITE RESULTS:

Composite	Standard Score (100 is average; 85 – 115 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Core Language	40	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Receptive Language	45	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Expressive Language	47	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Language Content	47	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Language Memory	45	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Working Memory	59	0.3	Severely Impaired

PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST – VERSION 4 (PPVT4)

Task	Standard Score (100 is average; 85 – 115 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Receptive Vocabulary	54	0.1	Severely Impaired

John's Results

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTALS – VERSION 4: SUBTEST RESULTS:

Task	Standard Score (10 is average; 7 - 13 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Recalling Sentences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Formulated Sentences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes - Receptive	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes – Expressive	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes – Total	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Definitions	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Sentence Assembly	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Semantic Relationships	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Understanding Spoken Paragraphs	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Number Repetition - Forward	5	5 th	Moderately Impaired
Number Repetition - Backward	7	16 th	Borderline
Number Repetition - Total	6	9 th	Mildly Impaired
Familiar Sequences	6	9 th	Mildly Impaired

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTALS – VERSION 4: COMPOSITE RESULTS:

Composite	Standard Score (100 is average; 85 – 115 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Core Language	40	<01	Severely Impaired
Receptive Language	45	<01	Severely Impaired
Expressive Language	47	<01	Severely Impaired
Language Content	47	<01	Severely Impaired
Language Memory	45	<01	Severely Impaired
Working Memory	76	5 th	Moderately Impaired

PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST – VERSION 4 (PPVT4)

Task	Standard Score (100 is average; 85 – 115 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Receptive Vocabulary	42	<0.1	Severely Impaired

Adam's Results

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTALS – VERSION 4: SUBTEST RESULTS:

Task	Standard Score (10 is average; 7 - 13 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Recalling Sentences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Formulated Sentences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes - Receptive	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes – Expressive	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Classes – Total	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Word Definitions	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Sentence Assembly	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Semantic Relationships	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Understanding Spoken Paragraphs	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Number Repetition - Forward	2	0.1	Severely Impaired
Number Repetition - Backward	3	1	Severely Impaired
Number Repetition - Total	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Familiar Sequences	1	<0.1	Severely Impaired

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE FUNDAMENTALS – VERSION 4: COMPOSITE RESULTS:

Composite	Standard Score (100 is average; 85 – 115 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Core Language	43	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Receptive Language	48	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Expressive Language	47	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Language Content	50	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Language Memory	45	<0.1	Severely Impaired
Working Memory	50	<0.1	Severely Impaired

PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST – VERSION 4 (PPVT4)

Adam’s results were:

Task	Standard Score (100 is average; 85 – 115 is the normal range)	Percentile Rank	Performance
Receptive Vocabulary	68	2 nd	Severely Impaired

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Appendix B:

Skills assessed by the CELF-4 subtests:

RECALLING SENTENCES:

This subtest examines a student’s ability to immediately recall and repeat spoken language. It reflects a student’s auditory memory skills and skill with grammar.

FORMULATED SENTENCES:

This subtest examines a student’s ability to formulate original sentences, plan and produce sentences that are both meaningful and grammatically correct. This skill is essential for conversation, academic and social interactions and for written language.

WORD CLASSES – RECEPTIVE:

This subtest examines a student’s ability to associate related words automatically and efficiently and to perceive relationships in the meaning of words. These skills are essential for classroom listening, making predictions, creating meaning, making inferences, comprehending humour and reasoning for problem solving. The child is presented with 4 words, and asked which two “go together” best.

WORD CLASSES – EXPRESSIVE:

This subtest examines a student’s ability to use language to express the association between words and to examine how efficiently and adequately the child can explain the dimensions of the relationship between words.

WORD CLASSES – TOTAL:

This subtest examines a student's ability to associate related words automatically and efficiently and to perceive and express relationships in the meaning of words. These skills are essential for classroom listening, making predictions, creating meaning, making inferences, comprehending humour and reasoning for problem solving. The child is presented with 4 words, and asked which two go together best, and why.

WORD DEFINITIONS:

To evaluate a student's ability to analyse words for their meaning features, define words by referring to class relationships and shared meanings, and describe meanings that are unique. These abilities relate to the skills of using words as concepts with broad, generic applications, rather than narrow, concrete and contextually bound meanings. This subtest is a measure of semantics, or meaning, in language. Difficulty with semantics can take many forms, including reduced vocabulary; restricted semantic categories; word retrieval deficits; poor word association skills; and difficulty with figurative language, metaphors, humour and idioms.

UNDERSTANDING SPOKEN PARAGRAPHS:

This subtest examines a student's listening comprehension at the factual and inferential levels. It examines students' ability to remember facts and details presented in paragraphs and to understand causes, effects, outcomes, reasons and relationships resulting from these facts and details. Students who have difficulty in this section of the testing may have problems in making inferences, understanding implied reasoning and problem solving based on the context.

SENTENCE ASSEMBLY:

This subtest assesses a student's ability to use sentence structure (syntax) flexibly for formulating descriptions, questions, responses or conversation. Difficulties in this area can affect speaking, written composition and use of language for persuasion, because there is a lack of variation in the sentence structures used to express intents.

SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS:

This subtest assesses a student's ability to interpret sentences that: (a) make comparisons, (b) identify location or direction, (c) include time relationships, (d) include serial order, or (e) are expressed in passive voice. Difficulty with these comprehension skills will lead to difficulty following directions for classroom directions or workbook assignments.

NUMBER REPETITION:

These subtests examine a student's ability to repeat random number sequences of graduated length forward and backward. This task places a heavy demand upon attention and concentration and auditory/verbal working memory.

FAMILIAR SEQUENCES:

This subtest evaluates a student's ability to manipulate and sequence auditory/verbal information as quickly as possible. This task places a heavy demand upon attention and concentration, processing speed, and auditory/verbal working memory.

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Appendix C:

Descriptions of therapy activities

Phonological awareness instruction: This refers to instruction which develops an individual's ability to identify the sound components of speech as distinct from the meaning contained within that speech. An example of an activity which was used to do this with the three students in the *kani rrala* project is as follows:

Therapist: Say 'farm'

Participant: 'farm'

Therapist: Now say 'farm', but don't say '/f/'.

To successfully do this one must be able to feel and hear that the /f/ is a distinct and individual sound within the word 'farm' and that it can be manipulated independently of the rest of the word. None of the boys were able to do this at the beginning of the program. Experiential instructional activities and practice enabled the development of this skill – and then its use as a foundation upon which to build further skills to manipulate sounds within words. Now the students are able, in similar manner, to separate out all of the sounds within words – an essential skill for being able to spell words and to 'have a go' at spelling them.

Synthetic phonics instruction: This refers to instruction in which the learner is specifically taught to synthesise, or link, the individual sounds (phonemes) of English with letters and/or letter combinations. This synthesised knowledge, as it becomes established, is then the basis to further synthesise (or blend) phonemes together to identify a word – along with the reverse process which is to segment the phonemes away from each other in order to learn to spell a word.

Drills to practice these links were delivered in engaging ways using letter tiles and words.

Decoding of non-words: Decoding non-words which were constructed to follow the rules of English spelling, provided the students with the opportunity to practise using their new skills in synthesising sounds. For example, if presented with a word like 'mot', they could not possibly know it by remembering what it looks like, because they would never have seen it before – but such a word permits opportunity to identify and synthesise the sounds represented by each letter. And these are skills which need to be automatised in order to approach real words that are encountered in print.

Reading fluency intervention: Each session the students would read a book tailored at their level of skill.

Systematic intervention for spelling: Billy was given spelling intervention using a systematic hierarchy of English spelling difficulty.

Punctuation and morphology: Spellings, word derivations and word knowledge based in the language morphology (grammar) were drawn from daily conversation and what words arose from the activities, and taught directly. Similarly, punctuation and the meaning it specifies was directly taught.

Stimulation of metacognition (thinking about thinking): Metacognition refers to awareness and understanding of and insight into one's own thought processes. Enhancing knowledge about thinking can engage further motivation as well as provide tools to self-regulate that engagement. All the students were supported to notice when they made an error, when they self-corrected, when they solved a problem they would previously have found difficult, and to notice their level of calm, or otherwise, as they engaged with the tasks and so on. This was initially given as externally applied feedback which gradually shifted to self-awareness for comment and discussion.

Vocabulary knowledge: The importance of growing new vocabulary and becoming curious about words was emphasised with all participants from the start of the program and in every task and every interaction. This was done through discussion, play and direct teaching.

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Appendix D:

Interview: Parent

Have you noticed any changes in John? And if so, what have you noticed?

He can tell you a bit more of a story now of when you ask him stuff.

He can tell you more sentences instead of just saying one word. For instance, Mark was talking to him in the car about how umpiring went on the weekend and instead of just saying "oh it was good" he sort of went in to more detail about who won and that sort of thing.

His reading has come along. He is reading more without me having to help him read.

What would you say is the most significant change in John?

I think just confidence. Confidence with his speaking and obviously his reading and his writing.

What do you think the boys would say themselves in answer to the question about changes?

They have both been able to read more fluently and actually understanding when you're reading something; because if you're not reading fluently you lose that flow...you don't really get the story if you're having to stop and read word each time.

What has been the best thing about the program?

That you make it fun as well.

Just the encouragement and support.

What were you expectations for the boys participating in the program?

Just hoping for improvement, any improvement was good. It's probably exceeded that. Sometimes it's hard to get them to want to actually do it, and they're actually wanting to be here and they're wanting to learn is a big part of it. Not having oh do I have to...they want to be here.

What were the negative things about the program?

No not really....taken out of school but they're learning more here than when they're at school anyway because they're one-to-one, so I suppose they're out of school for a couple of hours but they're still getting that concentrated hour out of it...you just wouldn't get that at school.

What have you learnt?

Learnt more of the sounds and stuff; how it all really works because I guess.... And it was good that you took them right back to the start. Guess I learnt a few more words! There was some I really didn't know. Trying to say a few different words instead of saying something I know they will understand.

Have you noticed any changes in Adam? And if so, what have you noticed?

He is definitely talking a lot more than what he was.

His concentration has definitely expanded...he's quite a hard one to get to sit still so you've done well; you know I can never to get him to sit still and do anything at home... actually being able to sit down for an hour and doing work, reading and stuff, normally he wants to be on the go doing other things.

He is definitely reading more.

And speech wise...being more descriptive. Probably when he's talking about something he's interested in, like his gardening or something like that, and go into more detail about what he's done. Or when he's been making stuff at school he tells you about what he's made rather than just saying 'good', or whatever you know, you get more out of him.

And after reading his report at the start of the year he would sometimes hide under the desk at school instead of doing his work, he would refuse to do stuff, really stubborn! You've actually been able to do a lot more without being as stubborn....as as we went along he got less distracted from what was going on around.

Sometimes when you used talk to him he would just change the subject instead of trying to talk to you about what you were asking him he would just change the subject or start talking about something else....well that's less that he does that.

What would you say is the most significant change in Adam?

His speech...just longer sentences and stuff.

What would he say about the program?

Probably his reading....would probably recognise more words, don't have to be told what they are...

He can actually sound it out and work it out for himself which makes you feel good that you can actually work it out for yourself.

Other comments:

John is more determined, gives everything a red hot go, mind is set on what he wants to do

Adam is more stubborn, doesn't care, into gardening but not other areas.

Teachers have made comments about how much they have come along – with John less drafts in his writing at school, Adam being able to hold much more of a conversation.

People at Karidy have noticed a big difference in the boys.

Sophie (sister) more intrigued at the start; she has trouble with reading and writing. I'm telling her strategies at start like breaking up words. She's got dyslexia – I'm helping her with her reading at the same time.

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Appendix E:

Interview: Mark Watterson

Have you noticed any changes in the boys? And if so, what have you noticed?

So I've noticed their content of their text messages – especially Billy – has grown heaps with more detail, so I can have a conversation with him. (Billy)

I've noticed just in general conversation with the boys especially when I'm with them on their own, how they're using more words and I'm not having to prompt as much to finish off their sentences or help them finish off their sentence.

I noticed social interaction with people – especially Billy – you know people out and around town or wherever we go he's more confident, he's able to hold a conversation with people.

Mitch and Adam not as much in that sort of situation – but around people they are comfortable with you can notice the change.

I've noticed the confidence just in themselves; just being around other people, I noticed they don't, especially Billy, doesn't hang back as much, they'll join in conversations or start a conversation with someone.

They're able to tell me how they feel – especially Billy. They're able to tell me a little bit more. Say how he's feeling. So last night he sent me a message and said "oh man I'm not feeling too well". And I said oh well what's going on man? And he said I'm feeling a bit down things are happening at home. So that was his whole conversation otherwise normally it would have been "not well", well you know just one or two words.

Their reading ability has just amazed me, just watching them read here with you is just amazing because you know I did a bit of work here with Adam and John with their reading and I would hardly get anywhere with it and now they're reading books.

Signs. I noticed Billy is reading signs on businesses and trucks and things like that a lot more.

I've noticed if they're writing something they will express how they're feeling a bit more.

I just notice a general confidence in themselves that they've never had – probably feeling good about themselves, that's probably what it is.

What would you say is the most significant change in each of them?

Their expression of their language, their sentences.

They are able to interact with people a lot more – instead of just a lot of people won't interact with you if you only say a few words, a lot of people don't know how to interact with people like that, it benefits their interaction really well.

What do you think the boys would say themselves in answer to the question about changes?

Ali asked him this morning how Billy felt this morning – he said I feel really good about what I've done.

The other two boys they might need a couple of little prompts with how they're feeling.

His singing, he's gained confidence in that because he can read things. (Billy)

What were the best things about the program?

Your interaction with the boys and how comfortable they feel in here. Because it's not a very nice situation for young fellas to come into where they've had to start learning the alphabet and all that again...and I just found that you made it really easy for them.

There's no judging in here and they knew that.

No negative things, always looking forward to coming, always onto me if I'm late!

What were your expectations?

I heard how good project was so my expectation was that these boys would be reading by the end of the year – and socially being able to be amongst people, hold conversations. Expectations met above and beyond.

What have you learnt?

Well I've actually learnt how to pronounce the letters of alphabet in that...what is that way called– phonological awareness- I've learnt that so it's made me more aware of things. And it's made me make sure I'm assisting these boys to add to their sentences and I'm able to say the right things so they can add to... finish off what they're saying. So I know what they're talking about instead of having to try and work it out. Or put words into their mouth for them. So I don't have to do that as much anymore.

I took a couple of sessions with them and they helped me and felt really good about that...sounding out words. And you can see it makes them feel good; sitting up straight, chest out, "I'm helping Mark get the word out...or that letter". Sometimes I'd make out I didn't know so that they would say "don't you know man, this is how you say it".

Any other comments?

Oh I just think some of the time when we went out in the field – especially when we went down to the rookery with Billy and you, you know showing him showing the cultural mutton birding, I thought that was amazing to watch him also when Billy went down there again with Duncan...the interactions they had, Billy led the showing a group of other adults also.

Amazed by seeing Billy so confident and feeling good about himself.

He's got the Knowledge there and he was willing to share it with people; probably a year ago he wouldn't.

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Appendix F:

Interview: Duncan Giblin

Have you noticed any changes in Billy? And if so, what have you noticed?

When he's engaged with you he's doing really well. (Billy)

He's progressing quite well with you they seemed quite happy about that. (school and Billy)

I think the biggest thing is his communication...I started working with him bit over a year ago...and his engagement was really quite low...his communication was not very succinct...his ability to respond to questions was quite...he would give really singular responses and now one of the really major differences is Adam can communicate stuff that he's going through emotionally...he can actually talk through how he's feeling about stuff and talk through potential solutions and that's really quite a significant change.

To be honest it was sometimes a bit difficult to understand some of the things he would say because they were quite short and mumbled responses so his engagement is something that's really changed.

He seemed more comfortable with communication, probably because he seemed more confident with it.

I think too just having a little bit more literacy and numeracy... certain things... when we've talked about certain things occupationally....he might end of teaching people agricultural stuff.....whereas I think he felt any kind of occupation around that might have been blocked to him because of not having those....I guess progress with his literacy he feels, sort of identified a bit more confident around looking into that stuff and that's a really big change.

What would you say is the most significant change in Billy?

His communication.

He's just opened up a lot more just in the way that he communicates and engages.

Confidence is definitely there.

We've done stuff around conflict resolution and managing that stuff and I think it's been easier to do that work because he's picked up on his communication skills so he's got a tool where he can then use when he's working out something at home or with his teachers.

I don't know whether it's a change of environment or smaller group nature or singular contact but what it is but it's obviously working.

With Billy when he's done some written stuff, he's obviously come a long way....something he was doing on the computer he used to ask me a lot about or even just hand it to me to fill something out or whatever but he sort of did that more independently but he might just get a bit of clarity on the spelling or something...I was quite surprised about the progress in his literacy.

That can't be understated that working with people on that dealing with those fears of the failure, they get so far behind with their literacy....it feels like such a weight...working through that stuff is really good.

The thing he has said is that he likes the tuition and the support and he feels like he's getting somewhere. He likes that and he thinks he's getting a lot out of it, you know.

He talks about you and Mark and staff from Karadi as being people that have supported him, he brings that up and he feels valued because of that. Although that's not an academic outcome that's what keeps him engaged.

Have you noticed any changes in John and Adam in your interactions with them?

Observationally I would say their communication is improving too, and they also really look forward to the sessions.

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Appendix G:

Interview: Alison Stone

Have you noticed any changes in the boy? And if so, what have you noticed?

For the three boys it's been around confidence socially, being comfortable around new people.

I've noticed that Billy will ask for my help if he needs it. For example, I got a text message asking to be taken to town.

All of the boys are more outgoing.

Instigating what we would describe as conversations.

Billy's confidence has increased particularly in unfamiliar environments and situations. He is now keen to try different things, move out of his comfort zone.

Billy has more confidence to display his sense of humour.

The boy's confidence in being able to form appropriate relationships with people they're working with.

I am currently applying for Billy and his grandad to work together to increase Billy's skills in music; part of this will be Billy interviewing his grandad; I will send him some questions and he will have to type in his grandad's responses.

Billy's texts are becoming more comprehensive. Now he is wanting to take a risk. Now he can write up to 15 words in a text.

Billy is learning to self-regulate, especially at school. He is able to remove himself from a situation at school appropriately.

Billy is going to school quite regularly; he has the courage to go to school.

I've noticed Adam will tell John off if he is not doing something!

I can compare when they came down to visit me at Uni – Adam's ability to sit and wait patiently has improved a lot, as well as his attention span. Same for Billy as well. The first time they came to visit, Adam was climbing on top of the table or crawling under it. The last time he came to visit he got up after about 1 hour – we were all talking – and went to stand over near a shelf behind Mark. Noticed he had had enough and took himself outside and sat in a beanbag.

I have noticed a shift in the way John holds himself and his confidence.

What would you say is the most significant change?

Obvious socially and emotionally and to have such a strong bond.

They have started to love learning – how could you not love learning! It has purely been around the fact that they have been under-stimulated. It shows them how great life can be.

What were the best things about the program?

The boys are happy, they feel such pride. They enjoyed it – they even gave up their holidays!

Not judging the boys.

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