

CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN YOUTH LINK-UP  
SERVICE

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# Papunya Computer Room



CAYLUS Project Brief

## Papunya Computer Room

PCR was established in 2009 as a response to a Senate Inquiry into Petrol Sniffing. The Inquiry identified a cohort of high-risk young Papunya people (14-25) who had substantially missed out on education due to the rampant substance misuse in the community that had been occurring for more than a decade prior to the regional roll-out of low aromatic Opal fuel. Opal fuel reduced sniffing rates by 94% in remote regions, but could not, by itself, reduce the risks to young people without the complementary measures of effective in-community youth programs and facilities.

CAYLUS' strategy for addressing substance misuse is to work with local communities and other organizations to provide engaging alternative activities for the most at-risk groups of young people in remote communities. Papunya Computer Room was set up as a free community access IT centre, and it is used by a broad variety of age-groups in Papunya and community visitors. It is open 5 days per week, morning and afternoon. We have recently upgraded the facility to ADSL2, giving us fast and cheap internet. We do not charge users as we do not want to put any obstacles in the path of people, plus we do not want the volunteers who run the room to have to deal with the complexity of a fee paying service.

PCR is largely supported by CAYLUS. The project lacks core funding, is staffed by volunteers, and uses donated equipment and small grants from philanthropic and other organizations to keep operating. Organisations that have assisted with equipping, staffing and developing the PCR are IOOF, NT Libraries, St Kilda Youth Services (SKYS), Youth Challenge Australia (YCA), Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV), Linkz Volunteer Agency, and a series of one-off small grants from philanthropic organizations including Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, the Collier Foundation and the Dot Com Mob.

All computers at PCR (with the exception of the XO's – the \$100 laptop seen in the cover photo) are donated Apple Macs. Early users of the PCR expressed a strong preference for Macs when both PC's and Macs were available at the PCR. Access to content-filtered wireless internet is provided free for all computers in the PCR.

PCR provides the capacity for self-directed learning, and for young people to pursue their interests in creative activity such as making and recording music. In many ways, the capacity to support self-directed learning is one of the PCR's greatest strengths, in that people are there because they want to be, and can explore new skills and improve computer and literacy skills at their own pace, untied to external agendas and performance criteria.

“In our research we noticed that although many young people may be walking away from compulsory schooling and training, they are not rejecting *learning*. Instead, and importantly, our observations and interactions with young people indicate that when alternative learning opportunities are provided, youth are participating and successful outcomes are being attained. Our research shows that through engagement in locally-based, personally meaningful projects, youth are forming the

understandings, skills and competencies they require to enter young adulthood as bilingual, bicultural beings—drawing on the language and culture transmitted by their elders, but also transforming it.<sup>14</sup>

Young Aboriginal boys and men (12-25) have been identified as the highest risk group in the country for substance misuse, self-harm and suicide, and for being both victims and perpetrators of family violence, so it is encouraging to see that the majority group of PCR users are young men in this high risk age group. A group of young men in Papunya have now developed considerable skill with programs such as Garage Band, and are well-placed to work with local organisation Kulintja Palya to record, distribute and promote their music to a regional and national audience.



*Ryon, local Papunya Garage Band expert at PCR*

In early 2012, A Kungka (women and girls) only room was set up next to the main computer room as an alternative to the main computer room, which had become identified as primarily a men's space. The main computer room has 8 desktop computers, headphones for each computer, and a usb keyboard. The Kungka room has four desktop computers, a kungka room music keyboard, 10 XO (One lap-top per child) computers for the little kids to play with, magazines, a couch, and a baby play area. The Kungka room is opened up when women can't get access to a computer

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<sup>14</sup> "Learning spaces : youth, literacy and new media in remote Indigenous Australia" 2012 by Inge Kral and Robert G. Schwab

in the main room, and when there is a female volunteer worker available to supervise.

A recent report identified that the main uses of the computer room are recreational – making and watching music, taking pictures and manipulating the images through apps such as Photo Booth, and social networking. Some older people used the Computer Room for activities such as internet banking and checking their Basics Card balances.

Patterns of PCR usage change on a reasonably regular basis, and at the moment are particularly influenced by the rise in personal ownership of devices such as smartphones and tablets. All the PCR software has been upgraded recently, so all the PCR computers now have the capacity to sync with personal devices. The current volunteers also reported that visitors to Papunya are the ones who tend to use the computers for more complex tasks such as sorting out their tax on-line, and internet banking. Over Papunya Sports Weekend, a lot of community visitors were at PCR doing internet banking so they could get the fuel money together to go home again.

### **Where to from here?**

The program is inexpensive to run, costing about \$25k per year (not counting CAYLUS staff time). CAYLUS is committed to keeping the doors open, and will continue for as long as we can source the resources to do so. So far, donations have been sufficient, but we are exploring the potential to make the room self sufficient.

We are entering into discussions with SKYS (mentioned above – a Registered Training Provider) to see if we can generate sufficient income from delivery of accredited courses to pay the ongoing costs of the PCR. SKYS are experienced at this flexible learning delivery.<sup>2</sup> If we could source funding for a qualified worker, this potential business model would be able to be tested. If we cannot locate funding, we will see if we can interest a volunteer in committing to a six month placement, which would involve undertaking the required training to do assessments against learning outcomes (which CAYLUS would pay for) in the hope we could demonstrate the potential of this model of supporting learning in remote locations.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.skys.org.au/skys/2faze.html>