

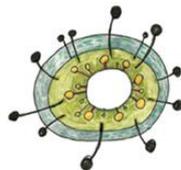
Nalderun Aboriginal Services

Evaluation Snapshot

March 2018



Leanganook Yarn



LEANGANOOK
yarn

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Acknowledgement of Country

The authors of this report acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and pay their respects to the Elders of this Country - past, present and future. We acknowledge that they are the holders and keepers of the traditions, knowledge and culture which underpins the work outlined in this report.

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1. Introduction

This report¹ presents the key findings of the Evaluation of **Nalderun Aboriginal Services** ('Nalderun'). Nalderun is an Aboriginal-led collective that operates holistic education, health and cultural services in Castlemaine and surrounds in Central Victoria, Australia. The Evaluation was undertaken by Leanganook Yarn² in February and March 2018 and considers Nalderun's work over the 2015-2017 period.

1.1 Evaluation Methodology

The Evaluation used a combined participatory and independent approach.³ An initial planning workshop was held, in which the evaluators assisted Nalderun to outline their Theory of Change, key evaluation questions, and methods of data collection. Documents were analysed and data was collected through semi-structured individual and group interviews. A total of 51 people were interviewed.⁴ The data was then analysed, outcomes were drawn out and recommendations developed.⁵

1.2 What is Nalderun?

Nalderun is a collective of the local Aboriginal community, other Australian⁶ volunteers and partner organisations. They meet as the Nalderun Group – Nalderun is a Dja Dja Wurrung word meaning 'all together'. Nalderun's vision is **'to walk together towards a future where local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to country and culture, and are strong, proud and empowered'**. To achieve this vision, Nalderun delivers holistic services to the local community. It provides health, education and advocacy services in support of Aboriginal children, young people and families, and delivers cultural awareness to the broader community.



Nalderun is led by two Aboriginal Elders and an Aboriginal Coordinator. Its work is Aboriginal designed and led; centered on Aboriginal children and young people; and takes a 'walking together' approach, inclusive of other Australians in the Mount Alexander Shire. Nalderun began as a collection of voluntary services, activities and events conducted by members of the Aboriginal community and volunteers. In 2010, Nalderun Aboriginal Services became the umbrella structure for these mostly voluntary activities. In 2014, the name 'Nalderun' was adopted, and the group received its first significant funding from the

¹ This is a snapshot of the findings of the Evaluation. For more detail see the full evaluation report.

² Leanganook Yarn is a small consultancy that undertakes program design, evaluation, facilitation and participation. For more information please visit www.leanganookyarn.com

³ A key finding was that the quantitative data required to underpin the qualitative outcomes either does not illustrate the outcomes effectively, or simply does not exist in a meaningful form.

⁴ Interviews were conducted with Aboriginal children & teenagers, young adults (17), Aboriginal parents (9), Elders (4), leaders, key stakeholders, committee and governance members, and volunteers, representatives of key stakeholder organisations (18), and Aboriginal stakeholders from outside of the Mount Alexander Shire (3).

⁵ A full description of the evaluation approach and methodology was captured in the Evaluation Plan. This outlines additional participatory methods used. The full evaluation report also outlines the stakeholders interviewed.

⁶ We are using the term 'other – Australians' to refer to non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or Non-Indigenous people

Federal Government via the Parental and Community Engagement (PACE) Program. Other funding followed, but it is the passion of Nalderun's people that has allowed its work to blossom. Nalderun's strength is drawn from this history.

2. What Nalderun Does

Nalderun works with three main cohorts: Aboriginal children and young people; the Aboriginal community; and the broader Australian community. Nalderun carries out a variety of activities/strategies to assist these groups. These are outlined below.

2.1 Aboriginal Children and Young People

Conducting Cultural Education directly with Aboriginal Children and Young People through:

- **The Meeting Place:** Aboriginal children are taken out of regular school once a fortnight to learn about Country and Culture through curriculum
- **Koorie Family Homework Centre:** a weekly homework club for Aboriginal students, inclusive of parents/guardians. Students and parents/guardians work with tutors and mentors towards academic goals.
- **Men's/Women's Business:** events that take young Koorie and non Koorie men and women into the bush for shared experiences, and to learn Indigenous culture from Elders.

Supporting Aboriginal Children and Teenagers in the mainstream education system through:

- **Nalderun Cross Curricular Team:** assists and advocates for the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into local schools and pre-schools. This includes writing, presenting and teaching / training mainstream teachers in Koorie curriculum. Meets four times a year. Representatives from each school are invited to attend.
- **Koorie Bus:** a daily bus service that takes Aboriginal students to and from school. In the spirit of Reconciliation, the bus is also available for non-Indigenous students who need the service.
- **Aboriginal Support Worker at Castlemaine Secondary College:** provides formal and informal one-on-one mentoring, emotional, cultural and academic support to Koorie students.
- **Literacy and Numeracy teacher:** Fully qualified teachers provide academic support to Koorie students and any other child who needs it.

2.2 The Aboriginal Community

Supporting and enabling Aboriginal people to be 'deadly and thriving' through:

- **Mentoring Program:** assists local Koorie people to gain employment and training.
- **Murnong Mamas:** a Koorie social enterprise offering Indigenous catering services
- **Bush Tucker Course:** teaches people how to plant, grow and cook Indigenous foods

Advising and supporting service providers to become more culturally aware and better support the Aboriginal community through:

- **Cross-cultural training** and secondary consultation;
- **Strategic partnerships** approach.

2.3 Broader Community

Enabling the broader Australian community to understand and embrace Aboriginal culture by engaging with service providers and community organisations. This includes:

- **Mount Alexander Shire Round Table:** a forum for engagement and responsibility with representatives of key organisations in the Shire, co-facilitated by Uncle Rick Nelson and the Mayor of Mount Alexander Shire Council. Meets four times a year.
- **Nalderun Upper Loddon Events Committee:** a committee of stakeholders that coordinates events such as Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, Sorry Day and Mabo Day. It also coordinates Welcomes to and Acknowledgements of Country and arranges Indigenous representation at local events (eg Australia Day and the Castlemaine State Festival) and supports Nalderun staff.
- **Cultural Awareness Training and Heritage / Site-Awareness:** Nalderun runs training for other Australians who would like to understand the Koorie Community and connect to Country.
- **Men's/ Women's Business:** taking Koorie and other Australian men and women into the bush for shared experiences and to learn about Indigenous culture.
- **Leanganook Indigenous Landcare Group:** a program that returns land to its original condition, with a focus on culturally significant sites in the area.

3. Findings: Outcomes

Between 2015 and 2017, Nalderun Aboriginal Services delivered significant social, educational, cultural and health outcomes to the people of the Mount Alexander Shire⁷. This has been done with minimal financial resources (a budget of approximately \$135,000 annually). The work of Nalderun is highly valued and respected by both the local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community. Stakeholders outside the Shire look to Nalderun as a model of excellence in collaboration, engagement, support and education, and seek out their mentoring, expertise and programs. The evaluation has identified outcomes about Nalderun's work, and these are grouped under each major cohort.

3.1 Aboriginal Children and Young People

Aboriginal children and young people are engaged and are achieving at school

Local Aboriginal students are happier, more engaged and better supported at school, with improved educational outcomes and post-school pathways. Some Aboriginal students are achieving excellence at school. Other Aboriginal students, at high-risk of school drop-out or involvement in the justice system, are engaging with school in a positive way. Without the strong advocacy, mentoring and support provided by Nalderun, this would not be the case.

Educators report that engagement and behaviour of Aboriginal students at school is significantly improved, and that, through the influence of Nalderun activities, there is an improved culture of respect from other Australian students towards Aboriginal students. *"I can think of some individuals who*

⁷ The effort of Nalderun has been going for longer including the delivery of services for over 7 years and other projects before this.

wouldn't still be at school but they are thanks to the work of Nalderun." Secondary teacher, other Australian.

Aboriginal student attendance rates have improved over 2016 and 2017. At the beginning of 2016, the average attendance rate for Indigenous students was 73%. During 2016, a Nalderun staff member began working with students at Castlemaine Secondary School more frequently, and by the end of the year, the average attendance rate for the 17 case managed students had increased to 84%. In 2016, 70% of Nalderun-assisted students had a school attendance rate above 80%, and 52% of students averaged 85% attendance or above.

In 2017, things improved further. **The attendance rates of Nalderun-assisted students increased: 76.4% of students had a school attendance rate of 80% or above, and 64.7% of students averaged 85% attendance or above.**

This percentage includes some of the most vulnerable students who Nalderun and local Elders have been supporting for seven years. As one secondary teacher interviewed stated: "The work done with some of our most disadvantaged and dysfunctional students is so significant. I can't believe some of them are still here (at high school)."

These achievements can be compared to National Closing the Gap initiatives and outcomes in relation to school attendance, where rural and remote areas are recognised as having lower attendance rates than their city-based counterparts. According to the 2017 Closing the Gap Report, in 2017 the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2%, compared with 93.0% for non-Indigenous students, and attendance rates of Aboriginal students nationally have remained static, despite Closing the Gap Initiatives⁸.

Closing the Gap also aims to see more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students successfully complete their schooling. In Castlemaine seven Aboriginal students started VCE and VCAL in 2017, four in Year 12 and three in Year 11. All four students who started Year 12 successfully completed their schooling, with one being offered a substantial scholarship for her VCE academic outcomes. The other three successfully completed Year 11 VCAL.

Proud to be Aboriginal and grounded in cultural understanding

The evaluation data showed that Aboriginal children are learning about and feeling proud of their culture, stories, traditions and history – they are becoming 'expert' at something others increasingly want to know about. In some cases, children are learning more about their culture than their parents ever did. A common expression among respondents was 'the kids have blossomed'. Aboriginal children are attending ceremonies and cultural events, and are strongly engaged, relishing the opportunity to represent their culture to the wider Australian community. "If we didn't have it [Nalderun] I'd be sad. I'd do nothing. ... It's important because you get to hang out with your own culture and history... It's good to be together as a community." Aboriginal child, participant at the Meeting Place.

⁸ Closing the Gap Report 2017, Chapter 3 - Education: <https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/education>

Aboriginal children and young people step up to leadership

Both children and adults are being invited to and are stepping up to leadership positions in mainstream settings. For example, Winters Flat Primary School now has Indigenous leaders in Year 6, and last year Castlemaine Secondary College had an Aboriginal school captain and another Aboriginal student in a key leadership position. These opportunities are leading to improved engagement with learning, and the development of trusting relationships with key adults.

Aboriginal parents are also having opportunities to experience and express pride in their children's behaviour, leadership and learning.

Mainstream educators learn how to engage

The Nalderun people are supporting mainstream educators to enhance their understanding of the needs of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal teachers have been mentoring non-Aboriginal teachers. This is highly valued by those who have had access to these opportunities. 'We are so lucky to have such skilled Aboriginal educators,' and 'They are so welcoming, open-hearted and generous' were two comments made by a non-Indigenous respondent.

3.2 The Aboriginal Community

Aboriginal people have increased pride, confidence, connection and wellbeing

As a result of the work of Nalderun the local Aboriginal community has **increased pride, confidence, identity, visibility and access to leadership opportunities**. 'Increased pride' was the most commonly expressed significant outcome by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents. Aboriginal community members also have an **increased sense of safety, connection, community and belonging**. With this comes increased confidence: Aboriginal people are proud to have something positive to offer, and proud of their history and stories. The evaluation found that the number of people outwardly identifying as Aboriginal has increased due to this growing sense of safety and pride. This connection to identity and community, and the mentoring role provided by Nalderun, are significant protective factors for otherwise highly at-risk children and young people who feel that 'someone has their back' and that they are not alone. "It is so important to know that we are not alone", Aboriginal parent.

A uniquely Aboriginal mentoring model

A highly effective '**Aunty and Uncle**' model of mentoring was found to be operating across all the programs and services provided by Nalderun. This approach keeps an eye out for, informally supports and stewards people through life. This could be understood as being similar to a Key Worker role in a social work context.

There is a high degree of 'holding,' mentoring and advocacy for individuals, particularly at times of transition, for example from primary to secondary school, or from school leaving to training / education / employment. The Nalderun leadership are pivotal 'go to' people and are keeping an eye out for a number of at-risk young people in holistic ways.

The Homework Club, the Meeting Place and the support worker's office at Castlemaine Secondary College are points where workers 'check in', meeting to discuss the well-being of Aboriginal young people. The Aunties and Uncles play a significant role in facilitating opportunities and nurturing people's confidence, connections and well-being. These key adults are highly valued as role models within the

Aboriginal community, particularly for children and young people. They are modelling hard work, commitment and collaboration.

Aboriginal people achieve in education and employment

Over twelve Aboriginal people have gained employment through the pathways, advocacy and mentoring services provided by Nalderun. Aboriginal traineeships were successfully negotiated by Nalderun staff with key organisations in the Shire, including at a local bank and hospital, and all traineeships were successfully completed. One trainee won a Youth Award for her work.

Murnong Mamas is seen as a positive and successful project for multiple reasons. It enables Aboriginal culture to be shared more broadly; it allows Aboriginal women to make an income from their knowledge and activities; it grows the confidence and skills of the women involved; and it instils pride in the women, through the interest of the non-Indigenous community in their work. As one Nalderun Committee Member said, “There is a lot more going on than catering”.

Strengthening connection within the Aboriginal community

Nalderun staff are respected and valued, and people working within the local service provision sector look to Nalderun as an example of successful cross-cultural practice. Nalderun teaching, cross-cultural training and support is highly valued by other Aboriginal service providers. The evaluation found that in the past, the Aboriginal community had many factions, but that Nalderun’s activities and approach, and its fostering of shared pride, are bringing the community together. This has increased the social capital within the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal service providers operating outside of the Shire universally reported how impressed they were with the culturally inclusive and welcoming ethos demonstrated by the leaders of Nalderun, an ethos which honours protocol but gently challenges recent trends towards lateral violence. “They used to be in separate pockets but now there is a sense of all being part of the one community.” Aboriginal support worker, Bendigo. Nalderun is building internal social cohesion and capital within the Aboriginal community.

Mainstream service providers are supported to ‘Close the Gap’

Mainstream welfare organisations and service providers have benefitted from and appreciate the cultural awareness training provided by Nalderun. Nalderun’s advice and coaching helps staff in these organisations to understand Aboriginal protocols and cultural practices, and thus, to improve their engagement with Aboriginal people. Nalderun, almost for free, is providing mainstream institutions with support to achieve their Closing the Gap obligations. “They are working across all the determinants that have been identified as being crucial in closing the gap. Things are looking pretty good here, unlike in many other places.” Non-Indigenous Nalderun Group member.

3.3 The Broader Community

Our Aboriginal culture is being proudly shared with and embraced by other Australians

Nalderun’s work is having a “powerful educational impact on the community and creating respect within the Shire” Other-Australian volunteer. Aboriginal themes now take a prominent and sometimes central place in many of the broader Australian events in Castlemaine. In 2017, for example, the Castlemaine State Festival had a strong and central Aboriginal theme, with Aboriginal people involved at multiple

levels of the festival, and Uncle Rick Nelson played a central part in the Mount Alexander Shire Australia Day Ceremony, carrying out a smoking ceremony for all new citizens.

Evidence shows that the broader Australian community who are engaging with Nalderun's events and activities feel moved by, proud of and grateful for the work of Nalderun's leadership. This work is considered by Other Australians to be **“critical to the health of our whole community”** Other Australian volunteer and committee member.

Some Other Australian respondents expressed a fear of not 'getting it right' in the past and, therefore, not engaging with Aboriginal practice at all. Nalderun staff and leaders were widely credited for their generous style of operating, and for being open-hearted in their teaching of cross-cultural protocols. Their willingness to share their knowledge of Aboriginal culture is highly valued by the Other Australian community.

Nalderun's cultural awareness training is in high demand, both from organisations inside and outside the Mount Alexander Shire.

4. Findings: The Organisation

Nalderun is a strong program and organisation. While some may consider Nalderun as 'just' a collection of small projects, it is clear that **Nalderun has a strong cultural practice of holding and focusing effort, whether that effort be funded or not, whether it be supported by the mainstream or not. It is this impressive drive and culture, drawn from Nalderun's past, which will sustain it into the future.**

The evaluation considered the strengths and weaknesses of Nalderun against a number of organisational components. These components are:

1. The approach;
2. Governance and group;
3. Aboriginal staff, leaders and volunteers;
4. Other Australian volunteers;
5. Funding and
6. Partnerships.

As well as these, the Evaluation also considered the sustainability of Nalderun and its activities. This section outlines the findings made under each of these organisational components.

4.1 The Approach

The evaluation found that Nalderun's approach is strength-based and child-centred; holistic and Aboriginal-led; and takes a collaborative and inclusive approach to partnerships.

Strength-based and child-centred

The needs of individual Aboriginal children sit firmly at the centre of Nalderun's work. Nalderun takes a strengths-based approach: rather than a deficit model, which sees children as having a series of problems that need to be 'fixed', Nalderun believes that each child is full of promise. In order for this promise to be tapped, they must be surrounded by a supportive network. Riding the Koorie Bus to school; attending The Meeting Place; receiving tutoring at the Koorie Family Homework Centre; being mentored by an

Aboriginal Support Worker; seeing their own culture reflected in the curriculum thanks to the work of the Nalderun Cross Curricular Team; participating in cultural events and feeling proud to be Koorie. All these individual elements add up into a greater whole, creating a positive, nurturing environment in which Aboriginal children can reach their full potential.

“Their work is youth focused, grass roots. It moves from being tokenistic to being really significant. Like anything early intervention, it saves a lot of heartache down the track.” Agency stakeholder.

Holistic and Aboriginal-led

Nalderun undertakes skilled, wraparound and culturally strong community development. Nalderun’s suite of initiatives are holistic, and where Aboriginal leaders see an opportunity to advance their broad goals, they take it. This is an iterative process: as relationships are built, opportunities present and are embraced, and the virtuous cycle continues. Nalderun leaders are constantly available for at-risk Aboriginal children and adults, and respond to their needs.

This holistic approach is an Aboriginal way of working. “They use a holistic approach: respecting intellectual property and their knowledge. They draw in lots of unheard voices. They are educating people the whole time.” Non-Indigenous parent of Aboriginal children.

While positive, this holistic approach means that non-Aboriginal people working with Nalderun may not see or understand the cultural practices at play. “What is visible of Nalderun’s work is only a very small part of the story of what people gain from it. What would be the alternative? Who would be there to fill the gap? Who would speak? It’s not a top down solution, it’s bottom up.” Non-Indigenous parent of Aboriginal children.

Further, at Nalderun, the divide between the professional and the personal is not solid. Aboriginal people approach this work as a personal journey and expect of others a deep commitment from the heart. This holistic way of working is not easily understood by the broader community, where the professional/personal divide is starker.

Although the Nalderun Group is inclusive, it remains an Aboriginal-led model. The Aboriginal Elders give direction and operate like an executive, with final decision-making power. This is an Aboriginal way of working and leading.

Collaborative and inclusive approach to partnerships

Nalderun leaders have spent years developing deep relationships and strategic partnerships with people and organisations. In the words of one respondent, “they have had 500 cups of tea”. In Castlemaine and its surrounding towns, solid relationships of commitment and trust have been built. Partnership development is a key strength of Nalderun’s work, and as a result, there is an enormous amount of goodwill, openness to learning and in-kind support from individuals and partners. A lot has been achieved through these successful partnerships, and Castlemaine is a small country town that is deeply committed to Reconciliation and Closing the Gap.

This collaborative approach may be best understood by the non-Indigenous community as ‘collaborative practice’ or ‘Collective Impact’. This is a cutting-edge approach to service provision that a number of government and non-government service providers are currently adopting (for example, Communities

for Children, Nationwide and Go Goldfields, Maryborough). It intentionally breaks down silos, aligning the efforts of multiple stakeholders to deliver ‘wraparound’ and holistic services to the client.

Aboriginal culture is holistic and already operates collaboratively: ‘collaborative practice’ has long been the status quo. Thus, there is an opportunity for the partners involved to learn from Nalderun, in order to make their practices more collaborative and holistic.

The Partnerships are outlined below.

4.2 Governance and Group

There are a number of forums or entities that can be considered as governing Nalderun. These include the Aboriginal Elders; the Indigenous Round Table; the Nalderun Education Group and the Nalderun Upper Loddon Committee. There is confusion as to what forum undertakes what function, and there is duplication. Nalderun has a strongly defined boundary around its Aboriginal-led model but, while this model is respected by stakeholders, a number of them do not understand how it functions.

Nalderun has grown over time, slowly inspiring more people and organisations to join. There are many committed people who are regular attendees at meetings and are proactive enablers around specific tasks and partnerships. Nalderun has become a significant organisation and there is an increasing demand for its services. However, this growth comes with its own set of challenges.

Although stakeholder confusion could be cross-cultural, Nalderun would benefit from rethinking its structure. The governance and organisational structure needs to be consolidated to reflect the growth of the organisation, and to provide a solid leadership base from which to work.

4.3 Aboriginal Staff, Leaders and Volunteers

The Nalderun Elders and leaders are highly respected and valued. In 2017, Uncle Rick Nelson’s father, Uncle Brien Nelson, was placed on the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll. Uncle Rick continues his father’s work and belief in Reconciliation. Also in 2017, the Coordinator of Nalderun, Kathryn Coff, received a Victorian Indigenous Fellowship as an Emerging Leader Award. Aunty Julie McHale was awarded 2016 Citizen of the Year for Mount Alexander Shire for her work. Aunty Kerri Douglas is a graduate of the Loddon Murray Community Leadership Program and was selected to present the keynote address at the 2018 Mount Alexander Shire Australia Day Awards.

“To have the key Elders there, that shows the strength of listening to the Elders. They are holding the thing strongly and people are asking them what they know... There is a lot of modelling of respectful practice and protocol and reciprocity of the relationship across clans – how we can all be open to and help each other. That is so important.” Aboriginal support worker outside of Mount Alexander Shire.

The Nalderun staff and Elders are hugely passionate, hard-working and committed, and work well beyond the hours they are paid for. “They put in ten times more than they get paid for, and always go the extra mile.” Non-Indigenous volunteer.

The flip side of this passion and commitment is that Nalderun is highly dependent on a few key people, and there is a high risk of burnout due to stress. Key workers, both paid and unpaid, are working on complex and culturally sensitive issues, and are responsible for the wellbeing of some highly at risk

young people. “There is a phenomenal workload. It’s not nine to five, it is 24 /7. They suffer a lot of lateral violence. We need to support the staff to put some protective measures around themselves. It’s a really tricky role. They live and breathe it. It’s their life and lifestyle. It’s not just a job.” Non-Indigenous Nalderun Group member. The evaluation also questions if an expectation of always saying ‘yes’ and the provision of free services has been established.

In addition to the sheer volume of the work, the types of work undertaken carry a high risk of burnout, and workers sometimes experience lateral violence from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. They are dealing with serious issues in high-risk contexts, including involvement with non-Indigenous young people, for whom it is felt there are no other supports. There are high expectations on the key workers from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, which is sometimes ‘way too much.’

This risk of burnout is exacerbated by uncertain funding and an unstable hosting environment. Key Nalderun workers are having to constantly apply for small amounts of funding, and are under threat of eviction, both of which contribute to a stressful working environment.

4.4 Other Australian Volunteers

Nalderun’s work is supported by a significant number of proactive non-Indigenous volunteers. The volunteers play a critical role, assisting with relationship building, strategic partnerships and facilitating in-kind support. **Some of these people commit significant hours to Nalderun work.** Aboriginal Elders recognise and appreciate this commitment: as one stated in reference to a volunteer, “(she) goes above the call of her job to support us”. Such volunteers advocate for Nalderun and its services within their own spheres, and spend significant time at the office assisting with tasks.

4.5 Funding

In the 2017-2018 financial year Nalderun received a total of **\$131,000 in funding**. This was made up of \$21,000 from Mount Alexander Shire Council; \$100,000 from Indigenous Advance Strategy; and \$10,000 from Murray Primary Health Network. Nalderun also received in-kind support from the Mount Alexander Shire Council, the Education Department through Castlemaine Secondary College, with a pro bono lease of Yapeen Primary School for the Meeting Place. As well as financial and in-kind support, both Aboriginal people and Other Australians have contributed a huge amount of volunteer hours to Nalderun work. Given the scale and scope of Nalderun’s services, this funding and in-kind support is small, ad hoc and insecure. Furthermore, funding is heavily focused on service delivery, as opposed to sustaining the operations of the organisation. Nalderun is contributing to positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, and for members of the Aboriginal and broader Australian community, but its efforts go well beyond these tight funding parameters. This crucial work is threatened by the insecure funding environment in which it operates.

A consistent message from all stakeholders was that Nalderun needs more secure funding, in order to be sustainable and provide services for the long-term.

“No-one likes funding operational activities, only things that are visible, that you can cut a ribbon on. They’re sitting in a tough, rigid funding context where they have to try and fit their activities to the available funding, rather than the funding fitting them. It’s so frustrating. Nalderun get such great

feedback from a federal level down. **What is happening here, the level of collaboration and getting stuff done is really unique and highly valued.** And yet they still have to go to the local supermarket and buy art supplies out of their own pocket to keep things going.” Leader from a Partner organisation.

4.6 Partnerships

Nalderun has a significant number of partners which fall into three categories: Key Partners, Partners and Other Organisations. Findings regarding the relationship of Nalderun with these groups are outlined below.

Key Partners

Mount Alexander Shire Council. The Council supports Nalderun in a variety of ways. It facilitates the Indigenous Round Table; it provides over \$21,000 per year for projects including funding Elders’ attendance at events and a teacher for the Homework Centre; it provides the Ray Bradfield Rooms as a venue for the Homework Centre; it provides free use of a Council vehicle for the Koorie Bus service; and it gives Nalderun free access to Council meeting rooms and use of the Market Building during Reconciliation Week. An officer from the Shire also attends Nalderun Group meetings.

Castlemaine and District Community Health (CDCH) auspiced Nalderun in 2011. In 2015, when the Federal Government’s Indigenous Advance Strategy began funding Nalderun, the Nalderun staff became employees of CDCH. As a host and partner organisation, it is felt that CDCH more recently has not been able to support Nalderun with the appropriate policy, leadership and practical assistance that it needs. Some believe that the Aboriginal-led model of Nalderun, is compromised. Although CDCH is part of the Nalderun Group, it does not usually attend Group meetings. **“CDCH needs to do things differently. Both the Board and the EO need to get on board and understand the work of Nalderun.”** Leader, key stakeholder organisation.

Castlemaine Secondary College (CSC) is an active member of the Nalderun Group. Since 2013, CSC has provided free and exclusive use of the Yapeen School site for the Meeting Place. However, CSC does not want to retain the Yapeen School property, and this ‘lease’ is only available for another six months, causing further uncertainty about the future of this program.

In 2016, the Nalderun Coordinator was engaged two days a week by CSC. She was based at the school and engaged to work with highly disruptive students, some of them Aboriginal, for one year. After this one year period, she continued to work through Nalderun’s own limited budget, and now provides this service through Nalderun with no increased budget. Due to the organisation’s central focus on school retention and engagement of at-risk Aboriginal children and young people, the Nalderun Coordinator continues this work. Nalderun is also committed to supporting at-risk non-Indigenous young people.

Nalderun provides support for students transitioning from primary to secondary school, and from secondary school to further education, training and employment. Nalderun staff and Elders provide cross-cultural curricula, training, advice, consultation and Indigenous teachings to the school at no cost.

Recently, the CSC Board has begun developing a policy on Aboriginal engagement and the relationship between CSC and Nalderun, in order to clarify and strengthen the partnership.

However, other than the provision of access to the Yapeen School site, the Education Department currently provides no financial support to Nalderun. Nalderun is clearly providing significant support to the Education Department in the achievement of their Closing the Gap targets, but it is doing so for free.

Partners

The Murray Primary Health Network financially supports the cook at the Meeting Place and the Healthy Eating Program, a long-term arrangement.

The Department of Education provides Murnong Mummas with free access to the **Continuing Education** kitchen for as long as they need it. Aunty Kerri Douglas, a Koorie Education Support Officer with the Department also chairs Nalderun Upper Loddon Group.

Castlemaine Community House participates in the Nalderun Group and is currently exploring the possibility of becoming the Nalderun host agency⁹.

Anglicare Victoria – St Lukes has been a significant partner and member on the Nalderun group for the past 7 years. The current representative's (6 years) key role is working alongside and supporting the Nalderun workers and community. This commitment is ongoing. For the past 4 years Anglicare Victoria have employed the Nalderun workers (independently of the Nalderun group) to provide On Country and Cultural Awareness Training on Dja Dja Wurrung Country on the Mount Alexander Shire.

Winters Flat Primary School is the primary school of choice for the majority of Aboriginal families in the Shire, and, as one Aboriginal parent stated, the children “do really well there”. The School works closely with Nalderun: there are two Indigenous teachers, Indigenous teachings are integrated throughout the curriculum, and there is a Koorie leaders program. The latter became so popular that it now includes non-Indigenous students as cultural leaders.

People Pictures is a media company which writes, produces, directs and edits films on a voluntary basis which build relationships and convey insights into the services and activities of Nalderun to share with a range of other services.

Weenthunga Health Network is a network of Victorians in all health roles who want to make a difference in Indigenous health. In Bendigo this is led by Aunty Steff Armstrong who provides valuable support to Nalderun.

Middleton Prison - Justice Department - Aunty Julie works at the Prison and inmates look after the upkeep of the Meeting Place.

ANTaR - Reconciliation Victoria - local ANTaR group, led by Vic Say has been supporting the Aboriginal Community for many years. ANTaR raised funds for the Reconciliation Stone, unveiled during Reconciliation Week 2017, and supports the Homework Club and other activities of Nalderun.

⁹ There are also other hosting options.

Other Organisations

Nalderun also has relationships with: Victoria Police, Castlemaine Hospital, TAFE, LaTrobe University, Castlemaine Circus, award-winning local artists and various organisations that provide employment pathways for Aboriginal young people.

Conclusion

In summary, Nalderun and its Aboriginal leaders are providing significant services and support to partner organisations. Nalderun receives some financial and in-kind support, and some of these partner organisations are actively participating in the Nalderun Group, displaying a commitment to the goals of Reconciliation and Closing the Gap.

However, at present this is not a fair exchange. Large government and non-government institutions with significant financial resources should not be relying on underpaid Aboriginal people and projects to deliver the Closing the Gap outcomes, outcomes that the Victorian and National Governments have committed to.

If key partners truly value the work of Nalderun, they must take more responsibility for its survival. Increased and reliable financial support would allow Nalderun to be sustainable, and enable it to continue providing holistic services to Aboriginal children, young people, and members of the wider community.

5. Analysis and Conclusion

5.1 The Cross-Cultural Challenge

Nalderun and its Partners are situated in a broader Australian context and are part of the national journey towards reconciliation. The discourse around reconciliation, which has been taking place between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians over many years, is today underpinned by two key drivers: the National Apology, and the Government's commitment to Reconciliation and Closing the Gap.

Firstly, in 2008 the broader Australian community apologised to Indigenous Australians. As the National Apology stated:

“We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.”¹⁰

Secondly, on behalf of the Australian people, our Governments have committed to Reconciliation and to the ‘Closing the Gap’ targets, which aim to:

- Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation (by 2031)
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (by 2018)
- 95 percent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education (by 2025) - renewed target
- Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018)
- Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy achievements within a decade (by 2018)
- Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020)
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018).

Firstly, it must be recognised that Nalderun is working towards the achievement of these Closing the Gap goals in the Shire. As is evidenced above, Nalderun is directly assisting the Shire institutions responsible and accountable for the attainment of these goals. Partners and funders must acknowledge that Nalderun is delivering services within their organisations that enable them to achieve their Closing the Gap obligations. At present, this service provision is being delivered for limited financial investment from the Partners.

¹⁰ From the transcript of ‘Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples’, Parliament of Australia, 13 February 2008. <https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-Indigenous-peoples>

If Partners continue to provide limited support, Nalderun's crucial work is at risk. Strong high-level advocacy is needed, in order to create agreed and sustained value and support for the work of Nalderun in schools and the community, for the benefit of both Aboriginal and Other Australian children, families and the community.

Secondly, it is critical to acknowledge that this is a cross-cultural journey where Other Australians need to learn from Aboriginal people, but that at present, Nalderun's way of working is not fully appreciated or supported by Partners. The evaluation has shown that Partners do not fully understand the circular, layered way that Aboriginal people work. Nalderun, which is led by Aboriginal people, epitomises this way of working. It is not one thing but many, operating in multiple sectors in multiple ways, filling the gaps left by mainstream service providers. While this is its strength, it also makes it difficult to define. Most Australian organisations operate in funding and organisational silos – they do one thing. Nalderun, on the other hand, does many things and does not fit easily into one box, be that 'education' or 'health' or 'social services'. While Partners are committed to improved outcomes for Indigenous people, they still operate in silos, and comments made by respondents illustrate the confusion surrounding Nalderun's holistic model:

“What is the entity of Nalderun? It is essentially a collection of funding agreements, but there is really no enabling structure that helps it stand on its own two legs.” Non-Indigenous member of the Round Table.

“No one knows where Nalderun starts and finishes.” Non-Indigenous teacher.

“A lot of the work they do, people wouldn't know it was Nalderun's work.” Nalderun committee member.

“Supporting Nalderun is not our core business.” Non-Aboriginal Partner

Partners want to pin down the organisational model of Nalderun, but this is challenging, as it is not clear-cut. Nalderun is run by protocol-based Aboriginal leadership and notions of cultural permission, which, for non-Indigenous people, are difficult to understand. This way of working, operating under its own protocols, can come across as chaotic or messy to outsiders. Furthermore, Aboriginal leadership development is often hidden and multi-layered rather than overt. Giving over 'control,' sharing the load and handing on the leadership baton are sensitive cultural issues, and not easily understood by Other Australian Partners. While there is a need to clarify Nalderun's organisational model, there is also a need for Other Australian partners to be open to new ways of working, and to remember that this is a cross-cultural journey which means learning and occupying a space of not knowing the 'other's' culture. Part of the journey towards Reconciliation involves acknowledging, learning from and incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing and being. If change is to happen, Other Australian Partners must not insist on operating within strict 'Western' paradigms, but be willing to embrace Indigenous modes of working, even if that is challenging and uncomfortable.

5.2 The Issue of Sustainability

The sustainability of Nalderun sits in tension. On the one hand, Nalderun is sustainable, but on the other, it is highly vulnerable.

Nalderun is blossoming today as a result of years of effort, commitment and the building of deep relationships. It has successfully sown a seed for change, which is and will continue to bear fruit for the long-term. Because a significant portion of Nalderun's work is carried out by unpaid volunteers, who care passionately about the well-being of Aboriginal people, its activities will be sustained.

On the other hand, Nalderun's essential services to the Aboriginal and Other Australian community are vulnerable. The sustainability of the services and of the outcomes that have been achieved are at risk in a number of ways:

- There is a high risk of burnout. Nalderun members and Partners are concerned about the extremely high workload carried by a few key individuals. Concerns were consistently expressed about the sustainability of this way of working.
- Funding is insufficient, ad hoc and insecure.
- The hosting situation is untenable and this is destabilising for the key workers.
- The organisational structure is not clear, and, as a result, there is a lack of strong governance/management to assist in addressing issues of sustainability.

These challenges are not insurmountable. There is an immense amount of goodwill and support within the community for Nalderun's work, and a clear and obvious need for the essential services it provides. In the final section of the Evaluation Snapshot, recommendations are made for how to bring about change.

6. Recommendations

Recognising that Nalderun is a collective effort, these recommendations are directed at the key stakeholders of Nalderun. This includes the Aboriginal Elders and staff; Partners and Funders; and other Australian volunteers.

1. Partners and Funders need to **invest in Nalderun for the long-term, leveraging financial and in-kind support** that is consistent and acknowledges the holistic nature of the work.
2. Partners and Funders to **work together to find ways to support the operational foundation of Nalderun.**
3. Nalderun and its Partners **need to place the Nalderun project with a Partner who is committed and willing to auspice or host Nalderun.** This Host needs to display commitment to the Nalderun vision and goals. The Host needs to be willing to learn and walk alongside the Aboriginal community in this cross-cultural journey.
4. The key stakeholders of Nalderun (including the Elders; Funders and Partners; and other Australian volunteers) need to **prioritise spending time on building the organisational sustainability of Nalderun.** This includes:
 - Funding (see Recommendation 1)
 - Partners (see Recommendation 2)
 - Host (see Recommendation 3)
 - Strategic Planning (see Recommendation 6)
5. **The decision-making structure of Nalderun to be clarified and consolidated.** The components of the organisation need to be articulated, and conceptually separated from the forums where Nalderun is influencing and bringing about change.
6. Nalderun to be more strategic and **undertake less activities to achieve more strategic impact** and ease worker stress.
7. **Clearly describe and communicate the Nalderun model, approach, strengths and achievements** to the community, partners, funders and others stakeholders in aligned sectors.