

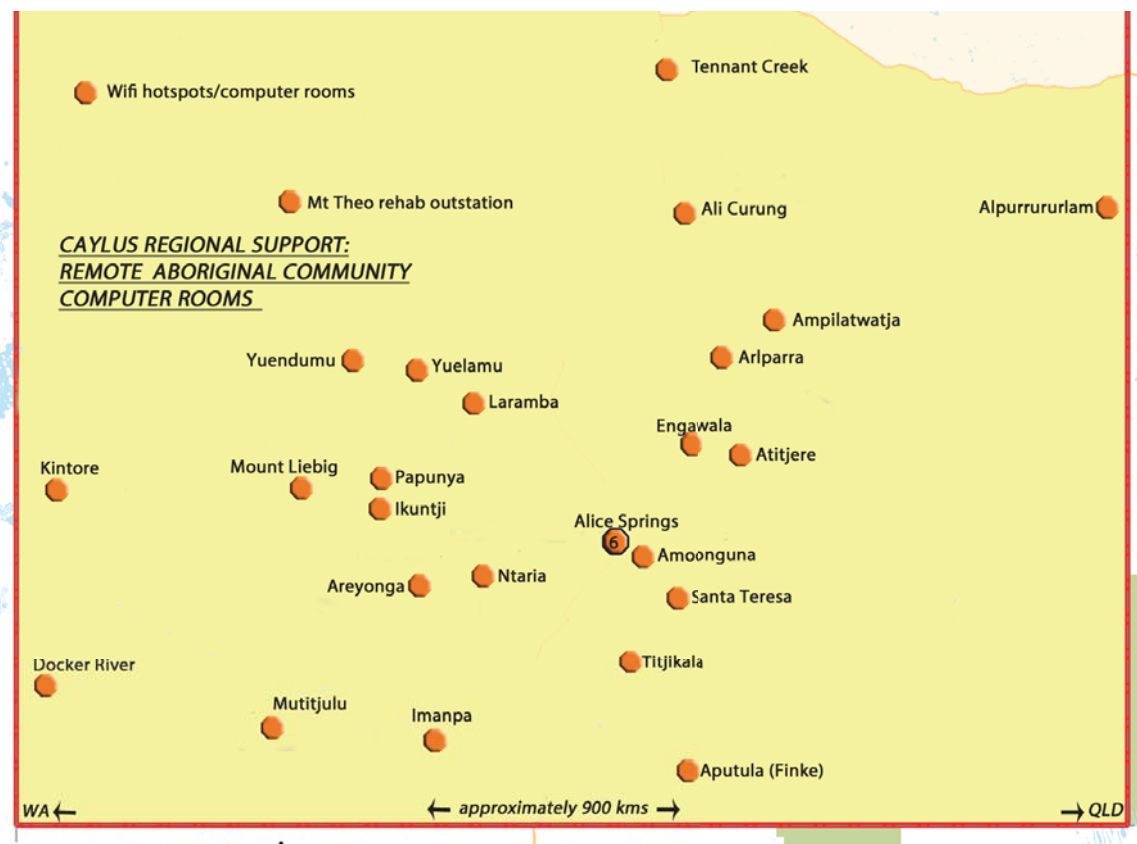


Tuesday, August 7, 2018

CAYLUS submission to Regional Telecommunications Review 2018

Since 2008 CAYLUS has been working in partnership with community stakeholders, southern NT Regional Councils, NT Libraries, youth programs, wifi hotspot, internet and router service providers, and philanthropic organisations to establish wifi hot spots and computer rooms in remote Aboriginal communities in our service region. Access to free wifi internet and computers has provided opportunities for remote community people to develop the digital survival skills needed to negotiate the largely on-line world of accessing goods and service provision. Computer rooms and access to on-line resources also provide crucial opportunities to pursue self-directed learning, especially in the post-primary school years or as an adult learner.

There are difficulties that are unique to remote Aboriginal communities with equitable digital access, and accessing services on-line – not everyone has money, access and skills required to use digital media and navigate complex webpages such as MyGov. It is increasingly the case that there are no options other than on-line access available, contributing substantially to exacerbating digital and other disadvantage.



This recent pictorial report that is linked to the CAYLUS web page provides more detailed information on computer rooms and connectivity across the southern NT region.

<https://caylus.org.au/s/CAYLUS-wifi-computer-rooms.pdf>

3. What data-intensive activities are occurring in regional, rural and remote Australia. What digital technologies are needed for these?

Data-intensive activities:

Accessing goods and services unavailable in remote communities is a data intensive activity. There are approximately 10,000 people in the remote Aboriginal communities in the CAYLUS region (see map above) who need internet access to essential services such as MyGov, Centrelink, banking, health services, etc. Websites and portals for these and other agencies assume that the availability of reliable internet and functional English language skills is similar to that in cities and regional centres. This is not the case in our region, where access to connectivity, data and to digital equipment is very limited and very patchy in quality.

The primary method people use to access the internet in remote Central Australian Aboriginal communities is a smartphone (the cheapest and most accessible option). These devices are most often shared among families and groups of people of all ages. In communities that have mobile phone connectivity, prepaid phone credit – the most expensive way of purchasing data – is the primary access method, as it does not require signing up to a contract or having an email address. Smartphones are the cheapest and most accessible way for remote communities to access on-line resources, but a high price is paid for that convenience.

Another data intensive activity is accessing information and undertaking self-directed learning, especially via multi-media platforms such as YouTube. Multimedia is an effective means of communication in remote Aboriginal communities as it reduces dependence on English language and text based information.

Data intensive activities also include keeping contact with often very dispersed family networks without the need for expensive, dangerous, and difficult to access remote transport.

Access to digital technologies and internet services enables engagement, education and employment. There are very few jobs available for people with no digital skills. A 2015 evaluation of the Jaru Pirrjidi program run by Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation provided evidence that participation in the Jaru program was a stronger indicator for gaining employment than formal training (see extract from report below). Jaru Pirrjidi's program of self-directed computer learning provided young people with the opportunity to develop multi-media and other digital skills. It also boosted the young people's confidence.

For general information about the Jaru program see <http://wydac.org.au/home/youth-services/>

Table 10.2: Current employment status by graduation from the Jaru program

Jaru program status	Employed		Not employed	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Graduated from the jaru program	33	91.7	6	46.1
Didn't graduate from the jaru program	3	8.3	7	53.9
Total	36	100%	13	100%

N=49

The analysis of data from the retrospective cohort suggests that graduation from the Jaru program is more strongly associated with employment than is participation in formal training. This association holds even though many of those in the cohort completed their involvement with the Jaru program several years ago.

It is important to consider why the Jaru program achieves such strong results. The 'Jaru – Level Two Activities' section of this report gives details of the way the program assists young people to understand and accept concepts of responsibility that extend beyond those to family. This is a key element to readiness for work and is likely to pre-dispose graduates to successful employment. The Jaru program also includes active assistance into employment.

For complete report see:

<http://wydac.org.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/An-evaluation-of-the-Warlpiri-Youth-Development-Aboriginal-Corporation-Youth-Development-Program.pdf>

Professional Development opportunities for remote community people are enabled and supported by access to digital technologies.



Digital technologies needed:

- 1) Public access computer rooms in remote Aboriginal communities supported by staff with IT skills are needed.**

CAYLUS has set up remote Aboriginal community computer rooms in more than 20 remote communities and a number of Alice Springs town camps. These are mostly embedded in youth programs so there is supervision and staff with IT skills available to support users. These facilities enable people to access digital resources that would otherwise be either unavailable or prohibitively expensive on mobile platforms.

See CAYLUS website for more information on CAYLUS computer rooms
<https://caylus.org.au/computerrooms/>

Access to technology alone is not sufficient. Many remote community people also need help and support for development of digital skills. Help with accessing on-line essential services is currently provided in an ad-hoc way by clinic staff, store staff, teachers, council staff, youth workers, anyone who can help. This tends to take considerable slabs of time from people's core work, and prevents the workers from getting on with doing the jobs they are employed to do. If funded, IT support staff for remote community users would improve access to services and educate people about IT. These positions could be embedded in the youth programs, or other suitable local agencies.

The CAYLUS Youth Programs Social Return On Investment "Investing in the Future" indicates that access to computers improves the return on investment by the community through improvements to both digital and general literacy in the two of the communities evaluated that have computer rooms (Ntaria and Yuendumu). The appendices in the report give detailed information on the value of these programs and how these were calculated.

Download report here: <https://www.nousgroup.com/forecasting-return-investment-youth-programs/>

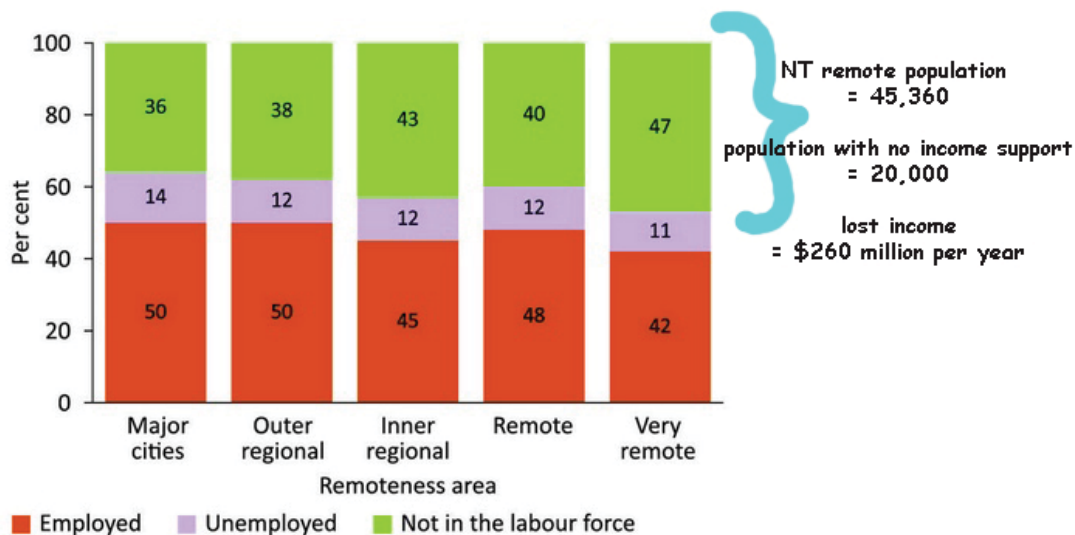
2) Free filtered and community controlled wifi hot spots

All but one or two remote Aboriginal communities in the region have wifi hotspots. These are content filtered, and have hours of operation that are set by the community. This enables a sense of community ownership of the wifi hotspot, and is essential for public safety. The content filtering gives communities the ability to turn off access to social media sites where a fight may be escalating, and enables dispute resolution to be managed at the local community level.

1. What can be done to improve access to and uptake of telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities?

As outlined, free access to computer rooms and filtered wifi would improve access. This is particularly an issue because approximately 50% of remote community Aboriginal people between 16-64 have no income at all, making a user-pay system impractical. This poverty makes those with no income dependent on already stretched family and community resources and further entrenches and exacerbates digital and other disadvantage. The data below was gathered by the ABS in 2012-13.

Figure 2.07-3 Labour force status of Indigenous persons aged 15–64 years, by remoteness, 2012–13



<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4705.0>

Source: ABS and AIHW analysis of 2012–13 AATSIHS

With the levels of systemic poverty in remote Aboriginal communities apparently worsening, there is a high risk of digital, health, education, and other disadvantage becoming a more entrenched part of remote community life, and that gaps in opportunity and life expectancy will widen rather than close.

Something as simple as access to a power source to keep a smartphone charged cannot be assumed when it is likely that no-one in the household has any money to buy power cards, and it's a four hour wait to speak to Centrelink (not at all uncommon). To mitigate the risks:

- Provision of cost-free stable and reliable content-filtered wifi internet with generous daily data limits, the capacity for community input into hours of operation, and community control of access to social media and other problematic sites.
- Support for remote community computer rooms, including funding so that supervision and assistance can be provided in community, and computer equipment can be maintained and repaired. As part of our youth program development activities, CAYLUS has provided and maintained remote community computer rooms and equipment with the support and assistance of remote community youth workers.
- Continue provision of community phone boxes. These are disappearing from remote communities and Alice Springs town camps, so there is no alternative to bearing the costs of mobile phones and prepaid mobile phone connectivity.

Are there practical examples of how communications services can improve the well-being of people in remote Indigenous communities?

- Free content filtered wifi hotspots in remote communities, with the capacity for community input into management, hours of operation etc. These enable self-directed learning, local dispute management, facilitation of creative activity, and value adding to remote community youth and other programs. See links to Jaru Pirrijidi program report and CAYLUS website for more information on practical grassroots strategies for improving the wellbeing of remote Aboriginal community people.

- Access to computer rooms with support and supervision. See links to Jaru Pirrjidi program report and CAYLUS website for more information on practical grassroots strategies for improving the wellbeing of remote Aboriginal community people.
- Community and personal safety. People will often post on social media if they are feeling bad about themselves or a situation, enabling positive support to be expressed by friends and family. Some trolling too, though if the troll is identifiable, this can be managed at the local level.
- Accessing information about health issues, particularly mental health and information about LGBTIQ groups.