University community engagement: a story of a unique partnership between the ‘Banatjarl Wumin’s Group’ and Flinders University NT Katherine campus

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‘Building supportive communities by being outwardly engaged, with strong links to our stakeholders and serving the communities in which we operate’ is key strategy 1 outlined in the Flinders University four-year strategic planning 2010–2014.

This presentation will expose how the FNT Katherine campus fulfilled this key performance indicator.

At the Remote Health Experience (RHE) of the year one NT Medical Program, the students were invited to a talk presented by some women from the ‘Banatjarl Wumin’s Group’. This women’s group is composed of Jawoyn women who have positions as Elders in the local community, who have the knowledge of bush medicines and essentially who have an aspiration to educate and pass on their knowledge before it is too late. The women built a garden in a healing place that will be opened to the public in late October; they intend to produce commercial bush medicine and bush tucker products from this garden, as well as creating a sustainable resource for future generations. To the medical students participating in the RHE, they explained the importance of understanding Aboriginal spirituality and the importance of working with the local healers. They invited the students to visit their garden and participate in healing ceremonies. This was the start of the new partnership for the Katherine campus. A second group of year two Flinders students were invited to help in the planting and weeding of the garden during their Regional Community Week in Katherine. They better understood how spirituality is intertwined with everything happening in the life of an Aboriginal person, and that a patient holistic approach is the sensible way to address the health issues faced by the Australian Aboriginal populations.
This presentation will address the following key aspects of a successful partnership:

- work with the community to build a stronger, more integrated and supportive community.

- enhance collaboration and coordination between partners

- demonstrate the commitment of the university to participation and involvement in the educational, cultural and social life of the community

- improve the quality of teaching and learning by educating students as responsible and reflective professionals who are able to act critically, morally and responsibly in a variety of contexts.

It is expected that the medical workforce educated in the NT through the Flinders NT Medical Program will have a unique opportunity to experience two-ways learning, starting with the application of mutual respect and based on reciprocity and relationships.