



dEadly mOb

Using ICT to create online opportunities for Indigenous young people

Deadly Mob creates online opportunities for Indigenous young people anywhere in Australia. Based at the Gap Youth Centre in Alice Springs, it encourages an online community of Indigenous young people to actively express their views, hopes, activities and talent online.

Using strong role models and mentors, it helps young people participate in community development, and connect with each other and with the wider world.

Actively engaging Indigenous young people

Deadly Mob is building and embedding online systems to empower people and give them a voice. Facilitators help young people develop ICT skills so they can then take part in their own way, with the online community's support and moderation. Over the next two years Deadly Mob plans to continue to engage young people in content creation projects that build skills, networks, and social capital.

The website (www.deadlymob.org) is the major gateway to many resources that Indigenous young people can use for work, recreation and networking. There is a work placement search engine, and other resources such as the mentors' page, an online newsletter, Youth Out Bush community webpages and Deadly Mail.

Deadly Mob generates a sense of community in a number of ways.

- It recognises that young people need to look to strong Indigenous role models as their identity develops.
- It is associated with the strong positive connotations and meanings of 'deadly mob' ('deadly' is an Indigenous term for 'excellent') already achieved through the Deadly Awards, the Deadly Sounds radio show, and *Deadly Vibe* magazine.
- Deadly Mail lets people separated by long distances communicate. It uses visual and audio tools to communicate in an environment where English is not the first language, and text-based material is isolating and a barrier, using humour and an informal style.
- Having a base at the Gap Youth Centre Indigenous Corporation, which positions the community within a youth organisation under an Aboriginal Board, gives Deadly Mob the freedom to work from a not so institutional vantage point.



The local Indigenous community and key Indigenous organisations support Deadly Mob's efforts to provide a public forum for young people to tell their stories and those of the people they admire. This counters negative media images and reports.

The Deadly Mob project began in the late 1990s. The poor retention rate for Indigenous secondary school students, along with the experience of work placement programs, suggested that if students were to make the successful transition to work, they would need support networks, higher hopes and expectations, and strong modelling of the kinds of behaviours and skills required in the workplace.

The Alice Springs Workplace Learning Community recognised that even though Indigenous organisations were committed to providing support and opportunities for students, and organisations generally were committed to employing Indigenous young people, very few Indigenous students were taking advantage of these opportunities.

The Learning Community noted research pointing to the success of mentor programs overseas such as the Four Winds, a North American Indian online mentoring program (<http://earthrunner.com/4winds/>). It formed an Indigenous subcommittee to oversee preparation of a funding application for the project (see box).

The most helpful things in building the community have been identified as:

- support from the local community partnership (ASWLC)
- success with naming, branding
- having Deadly Mail as a key connector
- developing programs with a mix of virtual and face-to-face methods

- the use of marketing techniques which appeal to the target audience
- employing staff who are visionary, passionate and have a community development focus
- cooperation from a network of people involved in areas such as education, media and the arts.

Benefits

Deadly Mob acknowledges the role and importance of country, family, traditional law, culture, communication and relationships within Indigenous communities and encourages these values to drive the online community.

It focuses on positive aspects of Indigenous life, culture and people, empowers Indigenous people to interact with and contribute to the site. When members sign up for Deadly Mail they are given an immediate sense of being part of something positive, thus building trust, identification and engagement.

Members of Deadly Mob report that it engages Indigenous people in the task of helping young people make the transition from school to work, and they hold it in high esteem as a demonstration of Indigenous people actively supporting their own.

Rather than seeing Deadly Mob as attempting to develop a centralised power base, members see it as an accessible group of systems that allow remote participation, local emphasis, and local ownership and goals to be achieved.

Deadly Mob draws on the resources and goodwill of Indigenous organisations and other employers along with community groups and agencies to help young people get connected to career, employment and life opportunities, wherever they happen to be.



Deadly Mob is also evidence of the development of bridging and linking social capital, but developing bonding social capital has been understandably a more prominent objective. There has been and should continue to be considerable promotional activity that has a bonding objective, but with spillovers of community bridging and linking social capital.

Barriers

The key barrier faced to date has been the lack of a consistent funding base. This has limited development and poses particular obstacles in relation to technical support, website maintenance and development, ICT awareness, mentoring and content creation services to first time users, online client liaison, and overall coordination, marketing and administration.

The time and effort involved in applying for funding can also be a barrier. As previous funding has been for short-term pilot projects, the need to apply continually for funding slows down Deadly Mob's work and achievements. In addition, the scope of Deadly Mob also raises issues around the identification of appropriate funding agencies and for governments in deciding how to treat funding requests holistically.

Issues arise around which departments at state/territory or Commonwealth level should accept prime responsibility for ongoing support.

The Internet Café receives no funding for operations management. Program development, promotion and delivery have posed real problems because community demand has surpassed the café's ability to deliver. This has eroded some trust in the Gap Youth Centre and impedes its intention to service less privileged clients town camps.



How the project was funded

The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) under the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy provided stage 1 development funding for the Deadly Mob project.

ECEF also funded stage 2 development for the website. The Central Land Council, ATSIC, Central Australia Aboriginal Music Association, and Imparja also provided support in 2001.

In 2002, Telstra funded the development of dEadly Mail, while DEST funded continuation of dEadly mOb Career Mentoring and creation of downloadable online resources. Networking the Nation provided initial funding for the dEadly mOb Internet Café. FACS funded in 2003 the dEadly mOb Youth Out Bush Tour to promote the website and internet resources and inform Central Australian community youth of the dEadly mOb Internet Café. FACS Mentor Marketplace funding in 2004–05 for content creation will provide further support for the online community. Funding partners are being sought to implement the full vision for the website and its embedded programs over the next five years.



Key lessons

- ICT can be an important tool to reinforce and promote a cultural identity and heritage.
- It is important to ensure that funding for coordination is built into any funding model as it is very difficult to get support for management or coordination costs; project funding is strongly tied to direct service delivery and specific outcomes.
- Complementary face-to-face programs enrich online communications because relationships and trust have already been established and the tasks are personalised.
- Through the linking of the activities of youth to the activities of elders on the community websites, Deadly Mob can make a significant contribution to intergenerational understanding.

References

Deadly Mob www.deadlymob.org

Gap Youth Centre Corporation www.gyc.org.au

COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

More information

In these case studies, communities, nonprofit organisations and groups share their experiences and lessons they have learnt using ICT: enhancing capability and service delivery; supporting and building communities, networks and connections; and overcoming barriers and challenges.

Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004–2006 emphasises the need to ensure that all Australians can participate in the benefits of the information economy.

Key strategies in 2004–06 will be to strengthen collaboration and capabilities in nonprofit organisations, facilitate the creative use of ICT for building stronger communities and social cohesion, and develop networks, capabilities and tools to enable participation by people who are facing economic, geographic or social barriers.

For more information visit the DCITA website www.dcita.gov.au or email community.connectivity@dcita.gov.au.

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