



Cultural Camps

Insights from an evaluation of VACCA's Cultural Camps – school holiday camps supporting Aboriginal young people to strengthen identity, connection and cultural pride.

INTRODUCTION

What are Cultural Camps?

VACCA's Cultural Camps are 2–3 day camps that bring Aboriginal young people (aged 10–18) together during the school holidays to connect with culture, community and Country in a safe and supportive environment. Run across different regions of Victoria, the camps include cultural learning, storytelling, time on Country, and hands-on activities led by Elders, community leaders and VACCA staff. They strengthen young people's Aboriginal identity, relationships and wellbeing while creating space for fun and learning.

Why was this evaluation done?

In 2019, VACCA evaluated its Cultural Camps to better understand their impact on Aboriginal young people's wellbeing, identity and cultural knowledge. The evaluation also aimed to strengthen the program by capturing what was working well and what could be improved.

While each camp is different, they often include:

Storytelling with Elders and respected Community members

Cultural walks, bush tucker cooking, boomerang making, and fishing

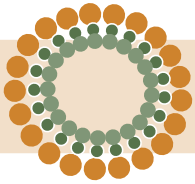
Wood burning, weaving and sewing

Painting with ochre and natural materials

Aboriginal dance and smoking ceremonies

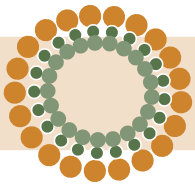
WHAT DID THE EVALUATION FIND?

The evaluation found strong evidence that Cultural Camps support Aboriginal young people to deepen their cultural knowledge, strengthen their identities, and build lasting connections with Community — while also highlighting some delivery challenges.



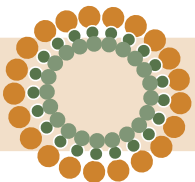
Camps build cultural identity and pride

After camp, young people felt more connected to their culture and proud of being Aboriginal.



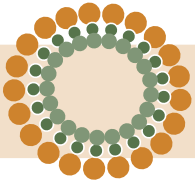
Connection to culture and community grew

Participants learned more about Aboriginal stories, practices, and Country — and deepened their connection to both culture and community.



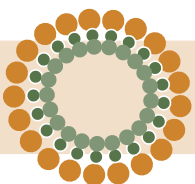
Confidence and self-esteem improved

Young people gained confidence, built relationships, and felt a stronger connection to others.



Strong support from Elders and cultural leaders are essential

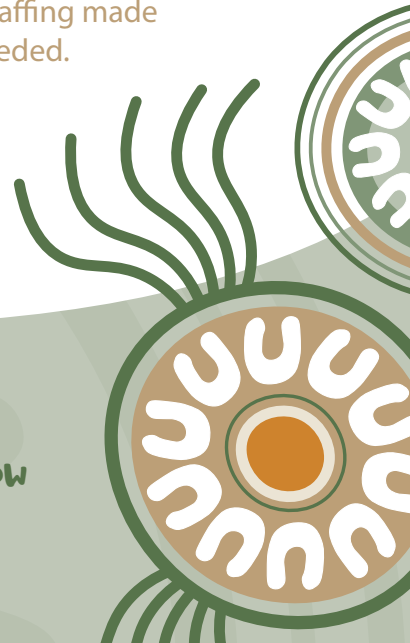
All groups described the camps as culturally safe, healing, and empowering — but called for more time on Country and deeper cultural practice.



Planning and delivery challenges affected consistency

Short funding cycles, tight planning timeframes, and dedicated staffing made it hard to run camps smoothly. More dedicated staff support is needed.

“You learn a lot... that you wouldn’t learn anywhere else... nowhere else teaches this stuff... it’s good for us to get to know who we are ... then you can grow as a person.” — Young person



What young people told us about their experiences

74

YOUNG PEOPLE
completed questionnaires:

100%

reported stronger
connection to community

97%

stronger connection to culture

93%

stronger cultural identity

93%

greater pride in their
cultural identity

93%

greater cultural knowledge

77%

greater confidence in
cultural knowledge



WHAT ARE THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS?

For VACCA management and delivery teams

- **Advocate** for funding to appoint dedicated staff to coordinate camps across regions, with Aboriginal staff leading cultural planning and shaping delivery.
- **Schedule** camps well in advance, with at least three months' lead time and shared planning resources (e.g. venue and Elder contact lists).
- **Secure** resources to extend camps to a minimum of two nights and three days, allowing more time for learning, healing, and connection.
- **Deepen** cultural leadership by mentoring Aboriginal staff and running camps on relevant Country, guided by Elders and local knowledge.
- **Consider** including children under 10 to build earlier cultural connection and identity.
- **Engage** young people through age-appropriate planning tools, small-group activities, and post-camp follow up support.
- **Strengthen** team capability through trauma-informed and de-escalation training.
- **Build** partnerships with other Aboriginal organisations to share cultural knowledge and strengthen networks.

For government and funding partners

- **Provide** long-term, secure funding to support Cultural Camps in alignment with VACCA's Strategic Goals.
- **Ensure** adequate resourcing for staffing and culturally safe delivery of camps across regions.

Find out more 

For questions or more information,
contact us: redteam@vacca.org

About this Evaluation

This evaluation was led by VACCA's Research and Evidence Development team and funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, under the Aboriginal Children and Families Innovation and Learning Fund. It was co-designed with program staff and young people, and used a mixed-methods approach. This included surveys with 74 camp participants, interviews and focus groups with Elders, young people and staff, as well as program records and documentation.

About VACCA

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) is a statewide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation servicing children, young people, families, and community.