

INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Role Models and Leaders Australia (RMLA) Girls Academy
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The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Legislative Council
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney, New South Wales 2000

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By email: statedevelopment@parliament.nsw.gov.au



Role Models & Leaders Australia (RMLA) Girls Academy Submission

“Economic development in Aboriginal Communities” Discussion Paper

Dear Director

Role Models & Leaders Australia (RMLA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Legislative Council’s Standing Committee discussion paper “Economic Development in Aboriginal Communities.”

This submission provides a response to Question 7 of the Discussion Paper and further information on the nature of Role Models & Leaders Australia’s Girls Academy model.

Question 7

- *What actions can the NSW Government take to deliver programs that target Aboriginal girls and young women in schools and in vocational education and training?*
- *Is there a role for the mentoring of young Aboriginal women by female Aboriginal elders, and if so, how could the government develop and support these relationships?*

This submission will outline the work of Role Models & Leaders Australia Girls Academies across Western Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory and detail our proven capacity to effectively deliver engagement and mentoring programs to Aboriginal girls and young women in schools. Furthermore, this submission will detail the commitment of the Australian Government through Prime Minister & Cabinet (PM&C) to fund RMLA Girls Academy program expansion in New South Wales.

The submission will conclude with a set of recommendations in response to Question 7 of the Discussion Paper.

1. Background

Role Models and Leaders Australia (RMLA) is the leading provider of school-based programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls in Australia. The Girls Academy is an initiative of RMLA. RMLA was founded in 2004 and is a not-for-profit charitable organisation that develops and empowers Aboriginal girls through leadership training, mentoring, sport and extra-curricular education programs.

The Girls Academy was born out of a need to address the inequality in investment of educational support programs for Indigenous Girls (See Appendix 1). RMLA has established 12 Girls Academies in 16 locations throughout WA, NT and NSW, with a current enrolment of approximately 1000 Indigenous girls.

The provision of expansion funding by the Australian Government in June 2016 will see Girls Academies in approximately 30 school locations around the country with approximately 2,500 enrolled Indigenous high school girls. Currently there is only one Academy in NSW at Coonamble but there are plans to expand to over 1,000 students enrolled in NSW by 2017.

2. Overview Of The Academy Program

The key objective of the Girls Academy program is to focus on increasing school attendance and retention rates, and levels of attainment for young “at risk” Indigenous female students in Year 7 through to Year 12.

Specifically, the Girls Academy program seeks to improve Indigenous girls:

- Enrolments;
- Attendance;
- Engagement in schooling;
- Literacy and Numeracy;
- Retention to Year 12;
- Completion of Year 12;
- Graduation;
- Cultural understandings;
- Health and Wellbeing; and
- Transition to post school training and employment pathways.

RMLA believes Aboriginal women play a pivotal role in Australian Aboriginal families and communities, yet their needs are often overlooked. Our goal is to create an environment within schools where the girls receive the support and programs needed to help them realise their full potential.

Our mission put simply is to: “Develop a Girl: Change a Community.”

The Girls Academies are set up within a high school and each Academy has a minimum of two staff. At each Academy, there is a dedicated room in the school that is a space where the girls can go before and after school and in their breaks. All Indigenous girls are eligible to enrol in the Academy - no girl is denied enrolment. Some Academies also provide programs for girls in Years 5 and 6 in primary school. Typically the Girls Academy room is brightly furnished and welcoming, providing fresh healthy food and drinks, a chart to indicate rate of school attendance, a beauty corner, a ping pong table or other games and activities. Some Academies provide a shower, laundry facilities and a change table for the girls’ babies if appropriate to the needs of the girls. The Academy staff take on a ‘big sister’ or ‘auntie’ role and know each girl and her needs. On a daily basis, the Academy staff are involved in:

- Checking school attendance and picking up girls to get them to school or checking in with those not at school.
- Mentoring the girls on any personal, social or school issues.
- Organising activities for the girls including incentive activities for those with a high level of school attendance.
- Providing empowerment programs including in health, nutrition, self care and management, cultural heritage.
- Providing assistance with homework or schoolwork.
- Preparing girls for post school including assistance in obtaining birth certificates, bank accounts as well as a pathway forward.

With a **focus on attendance, retention and achievement**, the Girls Academy program supports the partner schools to:

- Build healthy attitudes to learning by using sport as a motivator and tool for engagement.

- Provide Indigenous role models to act as guides and mentors to the girls.
- Build strong partnership with the parent and Aboriginal community to build bridges between the school and wider community.
- Improve Indigenous literacy and numeracy levels.

The program also supports those Indigenous students who may not be “as sporty” as others by offering a rich and broad program that supports each individual student. This includes personal and health development, lifeskills development and other support programs.

The Girls Academies are based on the following components:

- **Mentoring and Role Modelling** to individual students by Academy Program Managers and Development Officers who provide on site support and guidance, and act as positive role models to the girls.
- **Work Placement and Work Readiness** for students in Years 10-12 coordinated by the school’s VET Coordinators, with Role Models and Leaders Australia providing business networks and links to secure the best fit work placements and traineeships for the individual needs of the students.
- **Sports and Extracurricular Activities** including training, coaching and involvement in competitions arranged by the Academy as incentives for the girls to regularly attend school, graduate, and to seek employment and further education opportunities. Extra-curricular programs are also provided to develop the cultural, health, nutrition and wellbeing outcomes of the girls.
- **Leadership, Teamwork and Vision** development opportunities to improve the girls’ skills, sense of belonging and commitment, and capacity to explore the future in a positive way.

Appendix 2 provides information on current Academy locations, Key Program Elements, Performance Measures and Accountability.

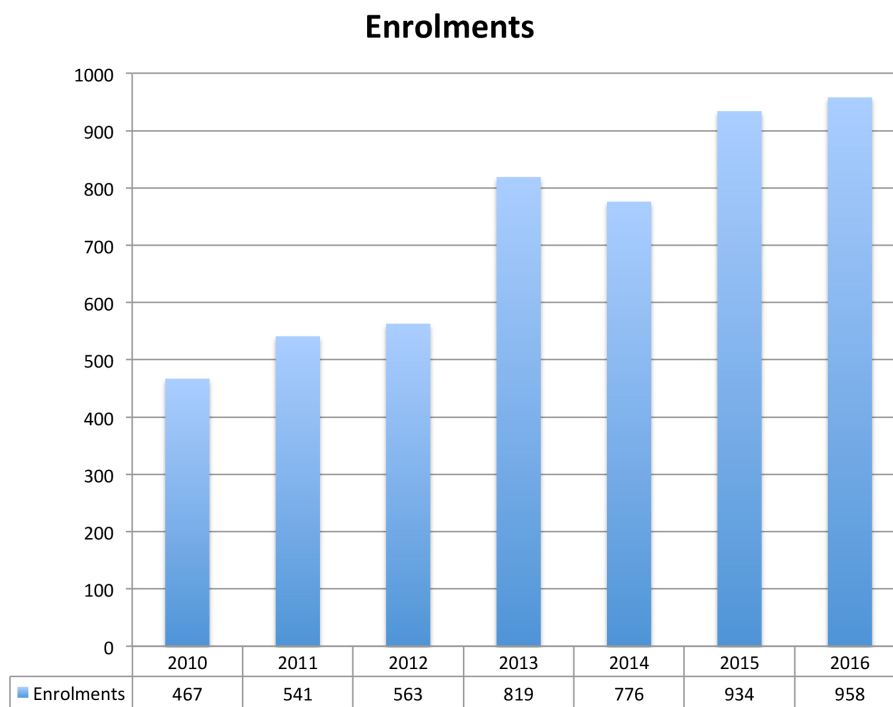
3. Girls Academy Impact

The success of Girls Academy is evident in our enrolment, attendance and graduation results. These results do not preclude the most “at risk” and “most vulnerable” students who are part of the Academy program. The Girls Academy has had a major impact on enrolments, attendance and Year 12 graduation as outlined in the tables below.

Enrolments

Table 1 outlines the growth in academy enrolment since 2010. During this period of time enrolments have doubled. Between 2010-2016 over 5,000 Indigenous girls have participated in the program.

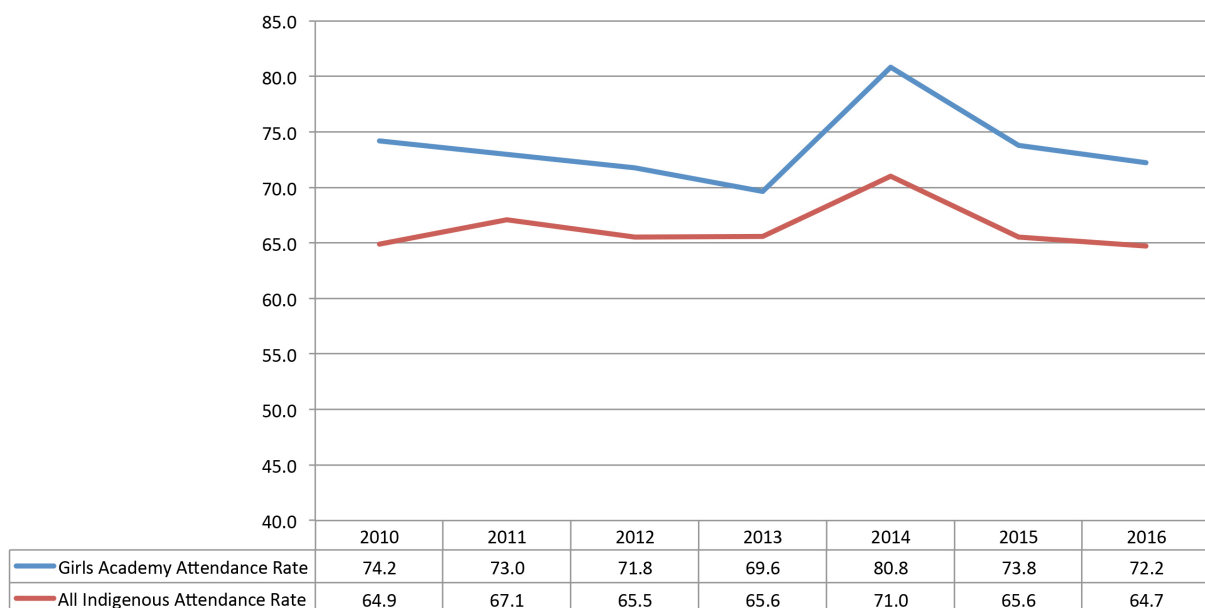
Table 1: Enrolments at Girls Academies



Attendance

Table 2 shows the significant impact of the program on school attendance. Since 2010, the Girls Academy Attendance Rate has been between 4% and 10% higher than the All Indigenous Attendance Rate in partner schools. Importantly, this data includes the most “at risk” girls in each school.

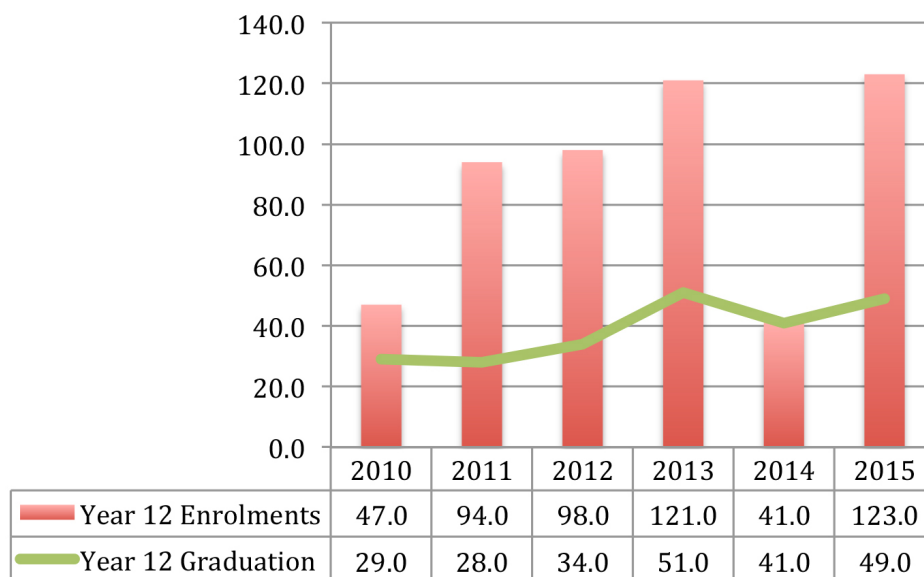
Table 2: School Attendance Rates for Girls Academies



Year 12 Enrolments and Graduation

Completion of Year 12 remains a key goal of the Girls Academy. Table 3 shows the increase in Year 12 enrolments and graduation since 2010. Between 2010-2015 Year 12 enrolments increased 162% and graduation by 69%. (*Note: The figures for 2014 were impacted by the change in school starting age in WA and the resultant half cohort.)

Table 3: Year 12 Enrolments and Graduation Rates for Girls Academies



Further data highlights that:

- In 2014, 91% of Girls Academy Year 12 participants completed Year 12, gained their Year 12 Certificate or gained employment before completing Year 12.
- In 2015, 93% of Girls Academy participants completed Year 12, gained their Year 12 Certificate or gained employment before completing Year 12.

4. Program Costings

The cost of program provision is based on Australian Government funding and cost estimates. The current cost of program provision for an Academy of 65 Indigenous girls is estimated at \$432,000pa. This includes salaries, program operational expenses, Academy Room provision, administration and equipment. Seventy eight percent of funds are spent “on the ground” to support salaries and program delivery.

The RMLA Girls Academies funding model is based on:

- 1/3 from the Australian Government’s PM&C Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS);
- 1/3 from Schools or State/Territory Governments/Education Departments; and
- 1/3 raised from corporate sponsors.

5. Commitment from PM&C to Fund Program Expansion in NSW

The Australian Government has provided funding to RMLA to cater for a further 1500 Indigenous girls in our Girls Academies by December 2017. This funding has been secured. Our goal is to have 2,500 Indigenous girls as part of our Girls Academy model by December 2017.

In NSW our funding provides for an initial engagement of 250 Indigenous girls in the latter half of 2016 and a further 650 in 2017. In total we are looking to provide a Girls Academy program to approximately 1000 Indigenous girls in NSW.

The Australian Government has provided 1/3 funding at \$2,208 per student p.a. We are seeking a further 1/3 from participating schools or Governments, and 1/3 from corporate sponsors and local communities. Seeking funding from each school is difficult and time consuming due to the multiple imposts schools have for funding. Funding from a central NSW Government budget would streamline expansion of RMLA into NSW.

RMLA will work with the NSW Department of Education and the Australian Government's Prime Minister & Cabinet (PM&C) as part of the identification of possible sites for the establishment of a Girls Academy and achievement of the expansion target.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Girls Academy program has worked successfully since 2004 to increase school attendance, engagement and graduation rates for Aboriginal girls in the schools in which we have operated. Programs have worked successfully in both urban and rural/remote locations.

The Australian Government has continued to support program provision across Australia to December 2017 and has committed to fund significant expansion in NSW, WA and Queensland. It is the aim of RMLA to provide Girls Academy programs to approximately 1,000 Aboriginal secondary school girls in New South Wales by 31 December 2017.

To ensure provision of this critical service for Aboriginal girls, RMLA Girls Academies requires one third funding from the NSW Government, equivalent to \$2,125,200 prior to the end 2017. Leaving funding of the Girls Academy to individual schools is inequitable and places significant financial burden on schools seeking to establish a program. The one third funding for this proven program should be guaranteed by the NSW Government and allocated directly from the core Government budget. Working to resolve the inequity of services for Aboriginal girls must be prioritised by NSW.

Investing in the expansion of RMLA Girls Academies in NSW provides a significant longer-term savings to the community. Supporting schools to establish programs targeting the needs of Aboriginal girls will reduce the burden on juvenile justice, health and policing, and enhance economic and community outcomes. This was highlighted in the Clontarf Foundation submission and it stands to reason that similar outcomes will be achieved for girls.

Recommendations for NSW Government to support Aboriginal girls:

1. The NSW Government support and fund the expansion of RMLA Girls Academies across NSW to overcome the current gender imbalance in program provision in schools.
2. The NSW Government confirms the 1/3 funding of \$2,125,200 from the central NSW Government budget to support the expansion of RMLA Girls Academies across NSW in a way that ensures the program is effective and is able to meet the needs of Aboriginal girls.

Role Models & Leaders Australia are committed to providing the highest quality programs that address the needs of young Aboriginal girls in NSW. We appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee on the Discussion Paper and would be happy to provide further information on request. Should you require further information please do not hesitate to contact the CEO and/or Program Director.

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