



# Follow the Dream Program

## Program Profile

- New South Wales, Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia
- Metropolitan, regional and rural
- Cross-sectoral
- Years 7 to 12

## Program Summary

The Follow the Dream program began as the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation’s first education project, Gumala Mirnuwarni (Coming Together to Learn), in Karratha, Western Australia, in 1997. After two decades, it has been successfully replicated across Australia in 33 communities in New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

‘The Follow the Dream program has a case management approach. The program provides intensive mentoring, tuition support and also a lot of work around career development and pathways for students when they finish school and go on to university or to further education and training or employment. The program is delivered at a school-based learning centre four afternoons a week and the bulk of the students attend every afternoon. There are up to seven or eight school-based, or program graduate tutors every afternoon that can help students to extend their work, catch up on work, complete assignments and prepare for exams, and that’s a really successful aspect of the program.’

*Nicola Angell – Follow the Dream Coordinator, Swan View Senior High School*

The Follow the Dream program provides after-school tuition, individual mentoring support and case management in cooperation with schools. The program enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students who apply and are selected to participate in the program to complete Year 12, enter tertiary studies or undertake other post-school training or employment. These students are encouraged to go on to university, TAFE, apprenticeships and traineeships and employment. Projects are individually funded through private industry and by State Governments in some States and Territories.

Each program is facilitated by a Follow the Dream Coordinator with support from tutors. The program aims to offer a flexible approach, with several successful models being implemented in schools. In some schools there is a designated whole-of-school program, whilst in others the program is offered through ‘clustered outreach arrangements’, supporting secondary students from a number of schools in a designated local area.

One such example is Mount Lawley Senior High School in Western Australia. Mount Lawley Senior High School’s Outreach program has established an extremely successful model where students from across Perth are able to connect with other like-minded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The program at this school offers university visits, career planning and cultural camps that provide opportunities for students to articulate and refine their individual aspirations, and to develop relationships with students across schools. Furthermore, these opportunities encourage students to develop a sense of pride in their culture.

The Outreach program focuses on individualised support. The Follow the Dream Coordinator visits students at the schools where they are mentored, and spends time with them mapping out their goals. The Follow the Dream Coordinator also works with school leaders to develop a plan to support each student and arranges weekly tuition within the student’s own school to meet their individual needs.





Follow the Dream tutor Tenae Rivers helps students prepare for an exam.

Across all schools and locations, the Follow the Dream program puts an emphasis on expanding the ambitions and opportunities of this cohort of students by providing them with a deep understanding of the range of post-Year 12 education options available to them, with the support of a range of corporate partners.

## Outcomes

The Follow the Dream program has an underlying goal of students completing high school and developing post-Year 12 aspirations, such as further study or training and relevant employment pathways. The program has a substantial success rate, with 96 per cent of Year 12 students enrolled in the Follow the Dream program finishing high school. Over the two decades that the program has operated, almost 1200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have completed Year 12 with the support of the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation. Many have gone on to university, TAFE or apprenticeships and are now employed in positions such as lab technicians, cultural heritage officers, diesel mechanics, teachers, lawyers and actors, successes which support the program's sustainability.

.....  
 'What students say that they most value are the practical experiences; the chance to explore beyond the world of school, to visit workplaces, go to the university for a workshop, to go to the capital city in their state for some new experiences.'  
 .....

*Cate Sims – Chief Executive Officer, Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation*  
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## Industry Links

The Follow the Dream program leverages significant partnerships developed with corporate and industry partners. Along with a 20-year relationship with Rio Tinto, the program has alliances with BHP's Olympic Dam in South Australia, Western Australia Iron Ore and Mt Arthur Coal in New South Wales.

In many instances, companies provide on-site mentoring, opportunities for site visits and employment experiences. Local Follow the Dream





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Coordinators organise incursions and excursions with program partners. For example, BHP engineers met students at Newman Senior High School in Western Australia to present descriptions of electrical and construction projects being undertaken at the Newman mine site. The speakers talked about their personal journeys, education and any other work experiences in Australia and overseas to provide a real-life link to industry.

implemented in Western Australia. The program’s success has been attributed to its determined primary purpose of providing positive post-school pathways and its focus on providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the cultural capital that enables them to complete Year 12 successfully and enter meaningful employment, traineeships/apprenticeships, university and other tertiary studies.

‘Generations of young Indigenous people have gone through the program, with some graduates’ children now participating. The partnership with the [Follow the Dream program] is one of many that form part of Rio Tinto’s education strategy to provide positive pathways of employment for Indigenous people across the state.’

Linda Dawson – General Manager, Communities and Communications, Rio Tinto  
 Source: Rio Tinto Media (2017), Rio Tinto celebrates 20-year partnership with The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation



Follow the Dream’s emphasis on expanding ambitions and opportunities ensures students finish the program with increased self-confidence.

Follow the Dream is one of the most significant secondary school retention programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students ever to be



## Why the Follow the Dream Program Works

Recent research indicates that the following key themes consistently underpin successful delivery of vocational learning and vocational education and training (VET), including career education, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- **Context:** ‘Nuanced, contextual factors will influence individual or group learning undertaken by Indigenous young people (Cuervo et al., 2015; Rigney, 2011).’
- **Flexibility:** ‘... recognition that a rigid or singular mode of education, by definition, cannot meet the needs of diverse learners (Anderson, 2009b; Bottrell, Te Riele & Plows, 2014; Te Riele, 2014).’
- **Two-way learning and community engagement:** ‘... happens in the context of an evolving relationship and structured partnership between Indigenous and school communities that supports Indigenous young people to grow their learning aspirations and stay connected to school or training.’
- **Aspiration, self-esteem and belonging:** ‘To “dream big” was seen as an essential component in a young person’s ability to have vocational ambitions and to achieve them (Mission Australia, 2014).’
- **Real-world job pathways:** ‘In assessing what motivates Indigenous young people to study, a direct link to real employment, that is, getting a job, figured much more highly than reasons connected to a plan for career or further study (Fordham & Schwab, 2007).’

Applying these themes to an understanding of the design, delivery and operation of vocational learning and VET provides insight into “what works” and “what doesn’t work” for this cohort of students.

*Source: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA), National Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Student Transitions Project report*

## Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Links

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* from AITSL outline what teachers should know and be able to do. As part of the Follow the Dream program teachers are delivering vocational learning, VET or career education that aligns with the following standards:

Know students and how they learn

- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and nonIndigenous Australians
- 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process

*Source: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2011), Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*

## Contacts

If you want to know more about this program or think that it might benefit your community, please access the following links:

### The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation

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### My School

**W:** [www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)

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