

Ganbina a shining light for indigenous accountability

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Ganbina tutor Lesley O'Shannessy with students Yilanii, 11, left, and Nakiah, 10, at the Shepparton project. Picture: Stuart McEvoy

One of the few indigenous organisations that does provide best-practice analysis and accountability of its programs is school-to-work transition scheme Ganbina, in Shepparton, Victoria.

The outfit, set up in 1997, is designed to help improve school and further education completion rates and “real” job prospects among about 6000 indigenous people in the Goulburn Valley.

According to Ganbina chief executive Anthony Cavenagh, the program works well because it was designed from the beginning to be a 40-year, two-generation - approach: that is, to create aspirational excellence within the community it serves. “It’s not intended to go on and on forever,” he said.

It also uses no government funding, relying instead on corporate sponsorship for its activities on an annual budget of \$1.4 million, which since 2004 has seen about 1000 people through the school-to-work transition.

A detailed review delivered in March by PwC's indigenous consulting arm found Ganbina was succeeding in "empower(ing) indigenous communities to achieve true social and economic equality with other Australians within the next two generations".

Sara Hudson, of the Centre for Independent Studies, said Ganbina's three-yearly review was one of the few in her assessment of 1082 programs nationwide that underwent a convincing, methodologically sound evaluation.

"Theirs stood out as really trying to show outcomes," said Ms Hudson, whose report found the \$5.9 billion indigenous affairs sector generally was characterised by lack of accountability.

"Not seeking government funding is a choice for us, it provides us with an ability to be innovative; our motto is 'agents of change' and we are developing these kids into being agents of change," Mr Cavenagh said.

"We understand that it's our partners' money, people are investing their money in Ganbina, so there's a lot of heart and soul involved but we understand that when you go to community you need to have rigorous evaluation."

He said 97 per cent of Ganbina's annual budget was funded by corporate philanthropy, with the added benefit of establishing a direct link between early education, Aboriginal youngsters progressing through to university and them having the option of corporate careers.

In Shepparton yesterday a small group of upper primary students gathered for an hour-long tutoring session run by Ganbina and focused on four strands: remedial maths, English, time-telling and cultural yarnning — "essentially storytelling these kids about their culture, different indigenous communities and so on".

"We're dealing with a lot of kids who are starting a long way back, who might be one or three years behind the standard and they carry it through (unless addressed)," Mr Cavenagh said. "But we've got one kid who's said he'd rather do this than go to footy practice, and there's no bigger recommendation than that."