

An innovative WA-based charity is bringing health and wellness programs to Indigenous children.

BY CHRISTINE LONG

# A fair go at fitness

**P**erth health and education teacher Ricki Cocliff is the recipient of the 2014 Arthur Hamilton Award for Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education for his work with the unique charity Fair Game WA.

The Bullsbrook College teacher, who grew up in Newman, in regional Western Australia, has turned his passion for health, fitness and education to developing programs aimed at ensuring that all children, no matter where they live, have equal access to a healthy lifestyle.

The award recognises the hundreds of volunteer hours he has put in over evenings, weekends and school holidays in remote Indigenous communities and among culturally and linguistically diverse groups in metropolitan Perth.

In 2010 Cocliff was instrumental in developing Fair Game WA, which gathers and donates recycled sports equipment and uses it to deliver fitness, health and wellness programs to Aboriginal communities.

The charity was the brainchild of its chairman, doctor and fitness instructor John van Bockxmeer. Cocliff, his wife Natalie Swan, and Fiona Stretch and Matt Scanlon became its founding committee members, helping to give the idea wings.

"In the remote Indigenous communities in the north-west, sport is a big outlet for children," says Cocliff. Involving them in

## BRIEFLY



**A Perth teacher has been recognised for his work in developing fitness, health and wellness programs for Indigenous children.**

**Working with the charity Fair Game WA, Ricki Cocliff helps to collect and donate sporting equipment to communities throughout the state.**

**Cocliff has produced a health promotion manual with lesson plans suitable for educators, lay people and volunteers.**

active movement games and health education activities is an effective way of building their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as nurturing their culture.

To date, Fair Game WA has delivered more than 8,000 items of recycled sports equipment while travelling more than 20,000km to deliver programs in 41 remote, regional and metropolitan communities.

The charity targets under-resourced communities such as Wiluna in the Central Goldfields; Mowanjumb, Kupungarri and Imintji along the Gibb River Road; and in Fitzroy Crossing and Derby. In remote communities, teachers go home during the holidays, so Fair Game fills the gap in services with unique holiday programs.

### Aboriginal yoga

Key to Fair Game's impact has been Cocliff's work, in conjunction with Scanlon, an Ashdale Secondary College teacher, in developing the Game On! program.

Cocliff has produced a 100-page manual with lesson plans that can be delivered by lay people, volunteers and Fair Gamers to children aged 5-15 years. It has lessons in movement and active challenge games, plus a picture flip-book drawing on local Aboriginal languages to create Australia's first Aboriginal yoga program.

"It's called Wellness Walkabout and it's tailored around the story of an Indigenous boy who goes walkabout," says Cocliff. "On each page there are yoga poses tailored around specific animals, landscapes and objects from the different regions of the north-west Kimberley.

"When you talk to a lot of Aboriginal elders, they want to instil pride back into their kids. By linking that into our programs, it helps with that sense of Aboriginal culture and passing it on to the younger children so it doesn't get lost," says Cocliff.

The manual's health promotion lessons include Healthy Hands, Healthy Feet and Healthy Smile.



... kids were coming to school without appropriate footwear for certain activities...





"The lessons teach kids about hand and foot hygiene through sports and fitness activities. It helps tackle the effects of lifestyle-related illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, and it's about educating the kids so they can pass that on and up-skill the community as a whole," says Cocliff.

To support the process, Fair Game has distributed 900 'healthy community' backpacks containing soap, stickers and hand hygiene information.

Another of its early initiatives was to form shoe libraries.

"A lot of the Indigenous kids were coming to school without appropriate footwear for certain activities, or they might not have had shoes for an excursion to the city and travelling on a plane," says Cocliff. "We came up with

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the concept of creating shoe libraries in the schools and we donated runners and football boots for the kids to borrow."

### Training volunteers

As Fair Game has evolved, it has recognised the importance of training others to deliver its programs. Cocliff has helped train about 60 volunteers so far, including one of three Bullsbrook High students who accompanied the team on a trip to Wiluna last year as part of a cultural immersion exercise.

He is also passionate about training youth leaders within Fair Game's target communities. "That's our biggest focus and our mission going forward," he says.

The charity, which expects to extend its reach this year by

launching its first program in Victoria, promotes a collaborative approach where like-minded not-for-profit organisations pool resources and see collective benefits from their work.

"There are lots of people out there who have the same intentions, but unfortunately there's an element of fragmentation within the sector in Australia," says Cocliff.

While the charity has plenty of achievements to celebrate, it's the interactions with kids in the communities he finds most satisfying.

"Going back into a community and seeing familiar faces is just so rewarding for anyone who is passionate about Aboriginal education," says Cocliff. ●

**Christine Long is a freelance writer.**