

## Lessons learnt from participation in a large Indigenous community event

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Good morning everyone. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are on today and pay my respects to Elders past, present and future. My name is Jason May and today I will be presenting on the lessons learnt from the participation of the Aboriginal Environmental Health Promotion Working Group in a large Indigenous community event, being the New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout 2016.

Firstly, some background about me. I am a 31-year-old Wiradjuri man, with my mob from Wellington NSW. In this photo Wellington is identified with the black star. It's about 50km east of Dubbo.

I am married with three beautiful young children.

I live on the Central Coast of NSW. The Central Coast is identified with the black star and is half way between Sydney and Newcastle in NSW. I have been working for the Central Coast Local Health District Public Health Unit for seven years, firstly as a trainee Environmental Health Officer and now as a graduate Environmental Health Officer. This presentation will address the working group's ideas on how to get involved in a large community event, including how to effectively work in conjunction with other organisations. I will give some background on the working group and the Koori Knockout, and talk about the activities we performed. I will also mention how the activities we performed worked and/or did not work and the lessons we learnt from tailoring environmental health promotion activities to a large community event.

The working group formed in June 2016 after a NSW Health Aboriginal Environmental Health Officer Network meeting, where it was identified there was a need to implement environmental health education activities at grassroots level, with the aim to reduce environmentally contracted diseases. Before the formation of the working group, there was little coordination between Public Health Units when delivering environmental health education activities. As a result, one of the aims of the working group is to develop a standardised process that supports the effective and efficient delivery of environmental health messages at community events, and in particular, Aboriginal community events. The working group saw the Koori Knockout as a great opportunity to develop and trial standardised environmental health activities. The Koori Knockout also presented a great opportunity to collaborate with other health organisations and engage with a large percentage of the NSW Indigenous community. The working group consisted of members from the NSW Aboriginal Environmental Health Unit and trainees of the NSW Health Aboriginal Environmental Health Officer Training Program who had past experience in working at community events.

The Koori Knockout is a rugby league event which is held on the Labour Day long weekend, which is the first weekend of October each year. It is commonly referred to as a modern-day corroboree for Aboriginal people in NSW, as it's a chance for the 'mob' to get together in a positive setting. The Knockout starts on the Friday, with the kids' and women's game, and runs until Monday, when the final of the men's tournament is held. The first Koori Knockout was held in 1971 with eight teams participating and has now grown to around 130 teams competing across under 12, 15, 17, women's and men's teams. The Koori Knockout is one of the biggest Indigenous gatherings in Australia, attracting tens of thousands of people. The

location of the event can change regularly, due to the winning team hosting the next year's tournament. The Redfern All Blacks were the hosts of the 2016 Koori Knockout which was held at Leichhardt Oval, Lilyfield NSW.

Although all members of the working group had experience in presenting environmental health activities at community events, none of the members had participated in a community event of this size, so there were some initial challenges faced. One of the first challenges we came across was time restraints. The working group only had two to three months to identify and make contact with the organising committee, apply for a tent space, develop appropriate environmental health activities and arrange a workforce to carry out the activities.

The working group was unsure of where to start and who to contact first. As there were a large number of organisations involved initially, identifying and contacting the correct organising committee was a challenge. Another challenge for the working group was, as mentioned, the fact that the Koori Knockout changes location regularly due to the winning team hosting the next year's tournament, so it was a new event to the area and for a lot of organisations involved, including us. After some investigative work, which included plenty of phone calls and emails, we were able to get hold of the appropriate people. Once we had made contact with the appropriate people, they were included in the meeting which discussed planning for the health expo section of the Koori Knockout. The meeting also included site visits, which we found very beneficial as it gave the working group an idea of which activities would best suit the site and amenities available. Being involved in the meetings also helped a lot because we were able to get in touch with the Wellington Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) who were generous enough to lend us tent space.

From there, now having been involved in some meetings and site visits, the working group were able to start planning the activities we would like to present. The working group delivered two environmental health activities which were targeted at children. These two activities were the Mister Germ Hand Hygiene activity and Waste Management Education activity. The Mister Germ Hand Hygiene activity consisted of children participating in an interactive activity in which they applied glow-in-the-dark hand gel to their hands to replicate germs and then place their hands under a UV light to demonstrate how we cannot see germs. We then showed the children the correct hand washing techniques which will help remove germs. Members of the working group also dressed up in the mascot outfits of Mister Germ and the Germinator so children could meet and interact with them.

The Waste Management Education activity was an interactive activity in which children placed plastic toy items which resemble rubbish and little bean bag type toys with a picture of rubbish on them, into the correct wooden bins on the table. It provided children with education around the different uses of the general, recycling and green waste bins. The children participating received a gift once they had participated in both activities.

The working group made some adjustments to the environmental health awareness activities based on feedback from previous events so they would be more suited to the Koori Knockout. The availability of resources and funding were also factors in the modification of the activities. One of the adjustments made was a portable hand washing station that was rented for the Mister Germ activity, which made washing the participants' hands much easier. Once the working group had developed the environmental health

awareness activities, we were able to work out the number of workers that would be needed during the Knockout. An expression of interest seeking volunteers to participate at the Koori Knockout was also sent out among the NSW Health Public Health network.

Now that we had been able to liaise with the Knockout committee, negotiate the use of a tent, modify our environmental health awareness activities and arranged the workforce, it was time for the event. We set our tent up early on the Friday morning next to the Wellington AMS section within the mini health expo. Throughout the long weekend, the mini health expo had a constant flow of adults and children viewing and taking part in all the activities on show. The Mister Germ and Waste Management activities were well received by all the community members. We saw this by the involvement of the kids and adults and also in the fact that they would usually return with another friend or family member. Members of the working group dressed in the Mister Germ and Germinator costumes interacted with the community, which attracted more interest to the tent as well.

The working group had designed an evaluation form but was unfortunately unable to conduct the evaluation during the Knockout. The evaluation form was hoped to be completed by children, with the aim of finding out if kids under 10 understood the hand hygiene messages delivered through the Mister Germ Hand Hygiene activity. As you can see here, the evaluation template was fairly simple. We wanted to ask the children seven questions: had they been to the stall, did they understand how germs are transferred, do they understand how to get rid of germs, what they thought of Mister germ and Gerry the germ head, where they viewed their hands, and their age and sex. Once the dust had settled after the Knockout, we held a debrief to discuss the outcomes of our involvement. During the debrief, we started from the beginning, looking at our initial involvement with the organising committee through to the environmental health activities performed.

The debrief was beneficial as it identified a number of lessons learnt from our involvement in the Koori Knockout. Firstly, early interaction with the event committee and tent organisers is paramount to establishing good communication among the organisations. As mentioned, there were some initial difficulties around engaging with the appropriate people, which made planning and organising the environmental health activities difficult. For future events, making sure there is early, constant and concise communication with all organisations, which ensures the needs of the working group are known and understood, could result in better positioning of the tent, resulting in greater participation from the community. With better positioning of the tent, the activities could have also been carried out more effectively. The Mister Germ Hand Hygiene activity required used water to be disposed of and then refilled with fresh water. The positioning of the tent made this difficult and time consuming, as there was a fair distance between where we needed to dispose of the water and refill the water. The Mister Germ activity also required electricity, for the UV lamp. There was no onsite electricity so a generator was supplied for everyone to use. The working group had to dangerously join two, quite long, extension cords reaching between the tent and generator, along the grass, which could have been avoided by repositioning the tent. Also, by repositioning the tent, the synergy of the surrounding activities could have been improved. As the working group's activities were focused on waste management and hand hygiene, placing the activities next to similar activities or tents which required hand washing facilities would have helped promote the messages the group were hoping to get across.

Although the implementation of the Mister Germ and Waste Management activities was successful, as shown by community members revisiting the stall and bringing others with them, there were areas of the activities which the debrief identified could be improved for future events. One area is participation handouts and gifts. When modifying the project proposal for future events having a greater understanding of the audience will be important when developing participation gifts. Even though the activities were targeted at children 10 years and younger, there was interaction with a very broad range of ages, from kids to adults. We had a lot of promotional slap bands and stickers as the participation gifts. It was noticed that the 'no germs on me' and did 'ya wash your hands' stickers were not as well received by the older children as were the slap bands. We also missed the opportunity to promote our messages to the adults, as we did not design any appropriate gifts. Altering the participation gifts to be more environmentally friendly was also a discussion point from the debrief. Fruit has been suggested as a participation gift, as it would reduce landfill and also tie in with the promotional messages of washing your hands before eating food and correctly disposing of rubbish.

Storage was also a factor which restricted the types of resources and participation gifts we could supply. The only storage facility available was located at the Ministry of Health office in North Sydney, as there was no storage available on site for us to use. The storage at the Ministry of Health was not an adequate amount in relation to the size of the event, which we believe possibly hindered the effectiveness of the activities. As the resources and gifts were not able to be kept on site, there was also some difficulty in the transportation each day, which required a group member to drive to the Ministry of Health, pick up the equipment and then drive to the Knockout at Lilyfield, which is 11km's from the Ministry of Health, through heavy traffic. Another difficulty was the limited parking at the Knockout. This picture shows Leichhardt Oval, which is the main oval with a grandstand and its surroundings. The grass area along the water's edge and the little strip of road in the red square, is where the mini health expo was held, and the parking area for stall and tent holders. As you can see, overall there is not a lot of parking for an event which held ten's of thousands of participants and spectators. Touching back on communication, next time having early and more detailed communication with the Koori Knockout organising committee would help prepare the working group for the parking and transporting requirements. Early communication could also result in the Knockout committee understanding the needs of storage and parking for the working group's activities.

One final outcome which the working group is working on is developing a calendar of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community days and events throughout New South Wales. The calendar of events will give the working group the opportunity to promote environmental health promotion activities to a much broader audience. As the working group had learnt from the Koori Knockout, early communication with the organising committees is extremely important to developing quality activities. Along with the already developed project proposals, the calendar will give the working group the opportunity to be proactive by planning for upcoming events and making early contact with the organising committees. The calendar will be a live document to accommodate new events and changes to existing events.

In conclusion, some of the lessons learnt by the working group primarily revolved around early interaction and preparation, and early, constant and concise communication. Having early and

joint communication with all the organisations involved is very important in establishing partnerships, sharing information and coordinating the arrangement of the health stalls. For future events, the working group will try to establish greater communication earlier in the planning phases in the hope of avoiding similar issues around stall location, stall synergy, activities performed, delivery of the activities, storage and parking. Developing a project proposal early, which is tailored to the target audience and environment of the event, is important. It is also important to have a solid project proposal developed when contacting event committees, as this is your sales pitch to be involved in their event. The working group enjoyed participating in the Koori Knockout and overall believe their involvement was successful.

I would like to thank Hopi Yip, Robert Barnett, Taylor Smith and Trent Auld for their involvement in the Aboriginal Environmental Health Promotion Working Group and for their contributions to this presentation, and also Wellington AMS for their generosity at the Koori Knockout.

Thank you, any questions?

#### **For more information**

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#### **Glossary**

AMS Aboriginal Medical Service