

## ASSETS

Project Title	Aboriginal Summer Schools for Excellence in Science and Technology (ASSETS): The first step and ASSETS2008
Project Team	Dr Alan Barnes, Dr Julie Clark, Associate Professor Jim Davies, Mr Will Morony (SiMERR SA) with Ian Maynard and Rob Ball (consultant to SiMERR SA), Anthony Bennett, Rosemary Ryan (DECS), Peter Buckskin (University of SA), teachers from Australian Science and Mathematics School, staff of Flinders University, Wiltja and Marion City Council.
Period	December 05 – August 06 (Phase 1); September 06 – January 08 (ASSETS08; Phase 2)
Funding Agency	SiMERR
Organisational Base	SiMERR SA

### Description

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For some 10 years the University of South Australian ran an annual 10-day summer school in the area of science, mathematics and ICT for Australian Indigenous high school students. The program targets high achieving Indigenous students and seeks to encourage their move into tertiary study. It has a strong educational focus, but also includes cultural and career elements. Aboriginal staff acted as pastoral and curriculum coordinators. ASSETS had strong education system support, i.e., SA DECS, and strong corporate support from IBM and QANTAS.

The aims for ASSETS are to:

- Provide a unique academic and culturally enriching experience for Indigenous children;
- Help support cohorts of Indigenous children to succeed at high school and university;
- Celebrate excellence of potential and performance of Indigenous children; and
- Positively impact on Indigenous students' access to careers in the sciences.

Following a feasibility study to determine if and how the program might be run as a national initiative (Phase 1), it was decided to be re-establish ASSETS in January 2008. ASSETS was designed for students with aptitude and interest in science, ICT and mathematics who were moving into Year 11 programs with significant emphasis in these areas.

A merit selection process was used to identify the participants. The target of 30 Year 10 Indigenous students, from around Australia, was not met, with ultimately 23 students identified to attend. The 2008 Aboriginal Summer School for Excellence in Technology and Science was held at the Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS) in Adelaide, SA from January 7th- 17th.

The program for ASSETS had strong academic and cultural components. The academic program featured collaborative, project-based learning that involves interaction with experts in the fields of Forensic Science, Electronics, Water Ecology and Health Sciences. The cultural program involved interaction with elders and role models that encouraged personal growth and development of leadership capabilities as Indigenous young people.

### Participants

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19 Indigenous students

### Findings

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As well as being a positive and engaging experience for the students involved, this project was envisaged as a pilot and 'proof of concept'. In this context the key findings are that:

- The academic program developed provides a model that is feasible, worthwhile for the students and effective in engaging them; a number of refinements have been identified for future reference.
- Engaging the Wiltja Program to provide cultural, social, housing and care functions was effective and met all

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- requirements for duty of care with minimal extra effort for those coordinating ASSETS08.
- Communications with schools in relation to recruiting potential students is challenging; further strategies that capitalise on the partnership with Dare to Lead have been identified.
- Efforts to maintain ongoing contact and, potentially, mentoring of the students through the wider SiMERR community have not been successful.
- A budget of \$100,000 to \$140,000 is required to mount a successful and sustainable ASSETS program for 30 students; this would enable issues in promotion and recruitment to be addressed, and for effective continuing support for the students as they complete their high schooling.

## Outcomes

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- Program workbooks: Book 1 — Program Schedules, 46 pages; Book 2 — Academic Program Content, 74 pages.
- DVD of the students' presentations of their projects.
- An information and promotional website <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/assets/index.htm>
- A Prospectus and other material for use in efforts to secure further funding for the continuation of ASSETS.
- There is also a complete collection of the administrative and organisational material required for this complex undertaking (includes advertising and promotional material, letters to parents, schools etc.; parental release forms etc).

## Impact

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The funds required to conduct an annual ASSETS program is substantial. Securing ongoing funding of this magnitude is the challenging first step in establishing ASSETS 21C (i.e., the ASSETS program for the 21st century; this is the name now being used to describe the project). SiMERR SA personnel have formed strategic alliances with Dare to Lead and the Royal Institution in Australia to pursue this funding from a combination of corporate and government sources. These efforts are currently ongoing, with a notional target of the first school in ASSETS 21C being held in July 2009.

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