

Research summary

An evaluation of the Black Rhinos junior basketball program:
Supporting African-Australian children to thrive in school and community settings



Overview of program

The Black Rhinos junior basketball program was a joint collaboration between Afri-Aus Care and RMIT, funded by a 2022 VicHealth Impact Research Grant. The intention was to co-design and implement a sports-based youth development program to increase school engagement for African-Australian children and their families in south-east Melbourne.

The program was co-designed with community members, particularly parents of students who would benefit from the program. The co-design process resulted in a holistic approach including in-school support, after school mentoring, physical activity and nutrition. Importantly, the program was grounded in UBUNTU, An African philosophy of belonging and identity.

What came out of the co-design process

Co-designed principles for the program included:

- Mental and physical health education
- Life skills development
- Promoting a cohesive, safe and inclusive community
- Developing linkages with the wider community
- Leadership

What we learned about the co-design process

Be respectful when collaborating with a respected and representative community agency

Use a culturally responsive framework (e.g. UBUNTU, an African philosophy of belonging and identity)

Identify the correct people to involve in co-design (e.g. mothers)

What happened?

The evaluation found that there were significant positive outcomes for students, but also for their families, the school community, and the youth mentors.

Strengthened relationships were facilitated by youth mentors, who created supportive and positive relationships at multiple levels, including:

- Youth mentors and students from primary school and lower secondary school
- Youth mentors and teachers/school community
- Youth mentors and the student's families
- Students, their families and the wider school environment.

Enhanced engagement in learning

- Engagement in learning and academic performance increased
- Development of leadership skills in students
- Goal-setting a focus of the mentor-student relationship

UBUNTU creates belonging

- Youth mentors embedded the underpinning program philosophy
- Peer relationships improved with increased sense of cultural pride and identity
- Families felt more connected to each other and to the school environment
- Community programs strengthened bonds with other African-Australians, including intergenerationally



What we learned about implementing the program

The multi-model aspect of the program allowed for:

- supports in school and after school
- included students and parents
- basketball, nutrition and curriculum support

The in-classroom mentorship model provided holistic support across the program dimensions

Mentor selection and retention is critical

An all-of-school approach to communication enhances program results



A holistic intervention requires adequate resources:

- Funding
- Intentional partnerships
- Prioritisation of program goals within school settings



For the full report see:
<https://www.rmit.edu.au/news/all-news/2024/sep/black-rhinos>