

Table 27: GMEP Student enrolments November 2010	88
Table 28 Distribution of GMEP student grades, Term 3, 2011	92
Image 3: Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Governor General	93
Image 4: Letter from Her Excellency	93
Table 29: Strategic Plan 2012-2014	97
Table 30: Gumala Mirnuwarni Student Numbers Term 1 2013	102
Table 31: GMEP Attendance Rates Term 1, 2013	102
Table 32: Wickham Maths & Science Centre for Excellence Program 2013	104
Table 33: 2014 GMEP Term One Student Numbers	107
Table 34: Perth Camp Itinerary	112
Table 35: Enrolment and Attendance at Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Program, 2006	128
Table 36: Enrolments at Karratha and Roebourne 14 <sup>th</sup> August 2006	132
Table 37: Roebourne Primary School Attendance 2004-2006	132
Table 38: Attendance % - Primary Year Levels Roebourne Primary School 2004-2006	133
Table 39: Secondary Attendance Rates Roebourne School 2004-2006	133
Table 40: Attendance % - Secondary Year Levels Roebourne School	133
Table 41: GMEP Students by Year Level, 2009	139
Image 5: Graham Farmer in the locker room	165

# Glossary

<b>ABSTUDY</b>	Program to provide financial assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
<b>ADF</b>	Australian Defence Force
<b>AIEW</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker
<b>ASSPA</b>	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness
<b>ATAL</b>	Engineering company in the Pibara
<b>ATAR</b>	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
<b>ATAS</b>	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>DEETYA</b>	Department of Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs
<b>DEEWR</b>	Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
<b>DEST</b>	Department of Education, Science and Training
<b>DET</b>	Department of Education and Training
<b>DETYA</b>	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>ECU</b>	Edith Cowan University
<b>EDWA</b>	Education Department of Western Australia
<b>FTD</b>	Follow the Dream
<b>FTD/PFS</b>	Follow the Dream/ Partnerships for Success
<b>CDEP</b>	Community Development Employment Project
<b>GMPEP</b>	Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Program
<b>HoLA</b>	Head of Learning Area
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>KSHS</b>	Karratha Senior High School
<b>MCG</b>	Melbourne Cricket Ground
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NAPLAN</b>	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
<b>NAIDOC</b>	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
<b>NWSJV</b>	North West Shelf Joint Venture
<b>OLNA</b>	Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
<b>PFS</b>	Partnerships for Success
<b>PSPI</b>	Parent School Partnership Initiative
<b>RASLC</b>	Roebourne After School Learning Centre
<b>SBT</b>	School Based Traineeship

<b>SC</b>	Steering Committee
<b>SAIS</b>	Student Achievement Information System
<b>SCGH</b>	Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital
<b>SCM</b>	Steering Committee minutes
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>TEE</b>	Tertiary Entrance Examination
<b>UWA</b>	University of Western Australia
<b>VEGAS</b>	Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme
<b>WA</b>	Western Australia
<b>WALNA</b>	Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
<b>WAMSE</b>	Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education
<b>WMSCE</b>	Wickham Maths and Science Centre of Excellence
<b>2307014</b>	Date Format DDMMYY

---

# Preface

In the early 1990s, the great footballer Graham (Polly) Farmer was asked by Stephen Hawke if he could write his biography. Polly agreed on one condition: that a foundation be established to create opportunities for Aboriginal students. Stephen Hawke enlisted the support of The Hon. Fred Chaney and Dr Ron Edwards, colleagues of his father, Bob Hawke, the former Prime Minister and with what appears to have been effortless skill, they set up the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation and began realizing Polly Farmer's vision. They brought together a team of people who demonstrated great goodwill and exceptional talent in formulating a program that outshone all previous projects for improving Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. Initially intended for sporting achievement, the project quickly morphed into a strategy for educational achievement. Based in Roebourne and Karratha, the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project has expanded to many sites across the country under the banner Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success.

The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project entailed cooperation among education providers at State and Commonwealth levels, private industry sponsors, community members and organisations. The individuals in these organisations helped to facilitate a strategy that was exceptionally successful in graduating Aboriginal students from high school at a time and in a place where completion of Year 12 had been rare. Through their participation in the program, students gained the skills and knowledge to complete high school, graduate and go on to higher education, training and employment. They gained a knowledge of the wider world – the opportunities that came through attendance at university, the expectations of employers and the capabilities to perform competently in interviews, public speaking and the world of work through industry participation in the program. But not only this: the strategies employed in the project strengthened students' affiliation with their cultural background at the same time as their educational outcomes improved.

It was not a simple program. It operated out of school hours and involved commitment by the students, their parents, the education providers, the private industry sponsors and, of course, the Polly Farmer Foundation.

When it had been operating for six years and was about to expand to new sites, I was asked by the Department of Education to conduct a study of their approach to its operation and this quickly entailed a broader examination of the Foundation's strategy. There was a level of independence that enabled coordinators to take advantage of learning opportunities that are not open to other students. Sponsorship by the large resource companies in the Pilbara – Rio Tinto, Woodside and its partners and originally, Dampier Salt – extended beyond the provision of funds to coaching students in job interviews, expectations in the workplace, training opportunities and turning an alien world into the familiar.

The presence of the companies in the project was inspiring for the students and empowering for the coordinators.

The cooperation among the partners, guided by the staff of the foundation, sets the project apart from other school interventions. It operates in a space where a degree of independence allows the use of strategies that foster support, encouragement and challenge—and ultimately success—for the students .

The Foundation and the educational support it provides to Aboriginal students is a fitting tribute to Polly Farmer. His desire to see them succeed is being realized through the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project and the many versions of it across Australia.

Professor Gary Partington  
Edith Cowan Institute for Education Research  
School of Education  
Edith Cowan University



---

# Chapter 1 Beginnings

Aboriginal people have lived in the Pilbara area for millennia. Today, there are 31 language groups in the region, a reflection of the desirable environment in which a rich diversity of groups could co-exist throughout history.

Until the 1960s, there were few Europeans in the region and most of these were involved in the pastoral industry following the establishment of Roebourne in 1866. Then the discovery of massive iron ore deposits resulted in the creation of several new towns. Dampier was built in 1965 to house workers building the infrastructure of the mines and Karratha was created in 1968 to service the massive iron ore mines in the nearby landscape. Another nearby town, Wickham, was established in 1970, also to service the mines. Today, the non-Aboriginal population considerably outnumbers the Aboriginal population.

Despite the influx of non-Aboriginal people, there is still a significant number of Aboriginal people in the region for whom education is a vital need. Until recently, however, the success of Aboriginal students in schools in the district has been very limited. Educational success does not come easy to them. Their school experiences, achievements and subsequent careers have been woefully compromised compared with non-Aboriginal students. While considerable strides have been made in recent years, there are very few instances of groups of Aboriginal students demonstrating similar outcomes from schooling as their non-Aboriginal peers. Until the 1990s, it was unusual for them to complete secondary school. An even smaller percentage continued with education beyond school and the typical outcome was entry to low level unskilled jobs or unemployment.

By 1996, the retention rate for all students from Year 8 to Year 12 was 58.2%. The rate for girls was different from boys and the rate for metropolitan was different from country. But the biggest difference was for Aboriginal students, most of whom had left school well before they got to Year 12. Table 1 below shows the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

**Table 1: Apparent Retention Rates 1996, Government students Year 8 to year 12 by location, gender and Aboriginality.**

Student category	1996
Metropolitan female	71.1
Country female	48.6
Metropolitan male	58.9
Country male	39.9
Aboriginal female	16.8
Aboriginal male	14.9
All students	58.2
All Aboriginal students	15.8

(Education Department of Western Australia (1999) *Annual Report 1998-1999*. p.114)

As can be seen, only about one in six Aboriginal students remained at school to Year 12 compared with about three out of five non-Aboriginal students. It is no surprise that, as well as not staying at school as long, Aboriginal students' performance at school was also well below that of other students. In 1996, 75.9% of all students achieved at or above the Western Australian benchmark in reading. Only 32.7% Aboriginal students performed at or above this benchmark (Education Department of Western Australia 1999, p.122). The reasons were diverse but in particular students received the same curriculum as all students despite their considerable cultural and social differences. Mark Simpson noted the effect of this:

A lot of teachers didn't have high expectations for some of their Aboriginal students and yet many of these kids were capable of way more than those expectations, they just needed the support to get there. They saw Aboriginal students as not being potentially successful. The Aboriginal students started to struggle, attendance was an issue but also they just started to struggle because the teachers focussed on the non-Aboriginal kids to some extent, because they were the ones that they were able to communicate well with, so it was important to try and create a mechanism where we could actually get the support, or get the teachers linked with the students and get the teachers expecting more of the students, but also getting feedback to the teachers about what was going on in the students' lives because so much happens out in the community.... In particular because of the dysfunction in some of the communities that's having a real impact on their education (Mark Simpson, interview 140214<sup>1</sup>).

It might be expected, given the lower performance levels of Aboriginal students, that they would be more likely to participate in vocational education and training programs rather than academic programs. Given the low retention rates, of course, this would still reduce the numbers participating. However, in the Pilbara district in 1996, there were only four Year 11 Aboriginal students participating in this stream. They appear to be still there the following year – in Year 12 – when four Aboriginal students were counted. In contrast, the figure for all Year 11 Pilbara students in 1996 was seven, and in 1997 among year 12s it was 24. So another another 17 non-Aboriginal students joined the stream but no more Aboriginal students. However, the situation was actually better in the Pilbara than in any other district: the total number of Year 11 Aboriginal students in VET in 1996 was 11. At the same time, the total enrolment for the whole state was only 265 (Education Department of Western Australia, 1999 p.38).

Educational outcomes were reflected by employment statistics. Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP - Community projects funded by government grants to provide Aboriginal people with employment) accounted for 26% of all Indigenous employment but were most common in rural areas where they accounted for 53% of Indigenous employment. Unemployment rates among Aboriginal people in rural areas were lower than in metropolitan areas because of CDEP: Only 54% of rural Aboriginal people were participating in the workforce (either employed or looking for a job) compared with 62% in the city. Two years before, in 1994, 50% of Aboriginal people had been unemployed long term compared with 36% of all people (Australian Social Trends 1996).

---

1 Date format used: DDMMYY

With growing efforts by successive State and federal governments school retention and outcomes had improved – in the early 1980s, only about one in 20 Aboriginal students completed high school. Programs did exist to provide tutoring to enable students to succeed at school. These programs were applied with a broad brush so there was no differentiation between high achieving and low achieving students. They were directed at improved education for all Aboriginal students rather than any specific group. Funds were made available for motivational activities, development of trade skills and rewards for attendance as well as for improving learning. The focus, however, was always on bringing the average performance to parity with non-Aboriginal students. Those who already demonstrated the capacity to match the non-Aboriginal students received little support.

### **Graham (Polly) Farmer**

Karratha Senior High School opened in 1972 and by the mid-90s only two Aboriginal students had completed secondary school despite this being a community of well over 1000 Aboriginal people. This state of affairs may have continued beyond the turn of the century but for the dream of one man and the support of many others. Graham (Polly) Farmer, who is the patron of the Graham Farmer Foundation, spent his early life in Sister Kate's children's orphanage where he gained a sound education. When he was in high school he came to the notice of East Perth Football Club's talent scouts and in 1953 commenced playing with them. He was a brilliant footballer who won two Sandover medals as the best and fairest Western Australian Football League player and was retrospectively awarded a third medal, earlier awarded to East Fremantle's Jack Clarke, who had won on a countback. He played in six premiership teams at East Perth, Geelong and West Perth, was awarded ten best and fairest medals, was a member of the AFL's team of the century and was one of the original 12 players inducted into the AFL's Hall of Fame. He was awarded an MBE for services to Australian football. He subsequently played for Geelong and West Perth, playing in a total of 356 games. He also represented Western Australia in 31 games and Victoria in five games. His coaching career commenced in 1968 when he was playing for West Perth and later Geelong and East Perth. He retired from playing in 1971 and from coaching in 1977.

Farmer attributed his success to two things: his upbringing at Sister Kate's, and his success at Football. He said,

Look at me. What was I? I was in Sister Kate's home. Part Aboriginal, where was I going? Without football I was a nobody. (NT News, 26/2/2005).

However, he also acknowledged that his education at Sister Kate's laid the foundation for later life. He said, "If it had not been for Sister Kate's, I would have had an ice block's hope in hell of ever leading a normal life. I owe her and all her dedicated helpers everything – for giving me the chance to make something of myself. I was one of the lucky ones."

It was this perception that drove his desire to see other young Aboriginal people get assistance to achieve, but, based on his experience in sport, he considered that there should be the same pathway for all. As Ron Edwards, one of the founders of the

Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation Inc., reported:

At the beginning Fred and I spoke about what might be important to him and he told us the following story about equal standards. He said, well it is like this: “When I lined up on the MCG to kick a goal, they didn’t pull the goal posts apart to make it easier to kick a goal; so if you want to see an Aboriginal person get to the MCG or to get a degree from university, the standards have to be the same for everyone – black and white.” (Ron Edwards, <http://pff.com.au/about/background/dr-ron-edwards/>).

Fred Chaney was instrumental in bringing this about:

The Foundation began when Bob Hawke’s son Stephen visited me in 1994 while he was trying to negotiate with Graham “Polly” Farmer to write his biography<sup>2</sup>. Polly had made it a condition of agreeing to write his biography that Steve set up a foundation to help young Aboriginal people, so in football terms Steve effectively handballed that obligation on to me.

Ron Edwards joined me right from the start, and upon reflection our response to set up a Foundation was very modest in the face of what was going on at the time. Despite that, we were determined to find ways to do exactly what Graham Farmer wanted to assist young Aboriginal people to succeed. We were very aware there were a lot of issues and problems. ([pff.com.au/about/background/hon-fred-chaney-aol/](http://pff.com.au/about/background/hon-fred-chaney-aol/)).

Ron Edwards noted that the pathway to success for the new foundation was enhanced by having Polly as the figurehead. He stated,

From an historical point of view, football was the first area where white people have respected Aboriginal people. As Polly was not political, it was easy. We weren’t asking people to sign up to any issues about land rights, or native title or Aboriginal health, you simply said do you want to support the Polly Farmer Foundation, because he wants to do something for his people.

The real question was what does a small foundation do? We were just a voluntary organisation, made up of a small number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, which started by raising a small amount of money and handing out awards and small amounts of financial assistance. We found our present role thanks to John Cunningham’s relationship with Rio Tinto. (Ron Edwards, <http://pff.com.au/about/background/dr-ron-edwards/>).

This small group gathered a dedicated team of people who collaborated to achieve success. One person to come on board was John Cunningham, who had occupied a senior position at Conzinc Rio Tinto until his retirement in 1988. He was approached by Fred Chaney to join the organisation:

Fred came to me and said, “Listen, would you be interested in getting involved in an Aboriginal organisation which we’re thinking of starting up?” So I said yes, I’d take it on for a couple of years, and so that happened. One of my first involvements in the Foundation was to assist in the launch of Steve Hawke’s book before a crowd of about 500 people at Subiaco Oval. Others involved at this early stage were Ronald Wilson, a High Court judge, Narelle Thorne (with the ABC at the time) and John Nicholas (from Arthur Andersen accounting firm) (John Cunningham interview 280114).

The key personnel in the Graham (Polly) Foundation (PFF) organization are listed in Table 2.

---

2 Hawke, S. (1994). *Polly Farmer: a biography*. South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

**Table 2: Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation Inc. Board**

Patrons	Committee and Executive
Graham “Polly” Farmer	Sir Ronald Wilson (Chairperson)
Ernie Dingo	Hon Fred Chaney
Sir Donald Trescowthick	Graham Farmer
Dennis McInerney	Ron Edwards
Ray Turner	Larry Kickett
	John Nicholas
	Tamara Hunter
	May O’Brien
	Greg Durham
	Leon Van Erp
	John Cunningham (Executive Officer)

(PFF draft proposal, 1996)

Soon after, the foundation decided to award prizes of \$500 to the top three Aboriginal students in the tertiary entrance examinations. They approached the Education Department who, because the information was not readily available in those days, conducted a search of their database (for a fee of \$200) only to report that there were no Aboriginal students achieving a TEE that year. John Cunningham reported,

This was a huge shock to us but it focussed our minds as to what we needed to do. Until then we had thought that sport was the area in which we would probably be more involved, but education was to become our major focus from then on (John Cunningham interview 280114).

In September 1996, John went to Melbourne for the grand final and stayed on for a week to investigate fund raising and how a charitable foundation operated. He approached a friend, the managing director of Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia. John described the meeting:

“Well listen, have you talked to Hamersley Iron (a subsidiary of Rio Tinto)?” I said, “No, I haven’t talked to Hamersley Iron.” He said, “Well, you know the people there, why don’t you get ... and John, I’ll write to them, tell them you’ll be talking to them.” So that sort of opened the door with Hamersley Iron, and we’d had the shock of that TEE sort of stuff, well, education, this is serious, you know? What are we going to do?

And so we then got involved with Hamersley which was more than them just providing money, the model that we slowly developed over the next few years was because of working with industry (John Cunningham interview 280114).

The connection with Hamersley Iron proved fortuitous. At the time, the company was developing an interest in employing Aboriginal people in skilled trades rather than merely as labourers. Throughout this period, there has been growing discussion of the situation of Aboriginal people with respect to the economic development and this was pertinent to the Pilbara region (Hunter, 1996; Taylor & Scambary, 2006). John Cunningham reported the consequence of this: