

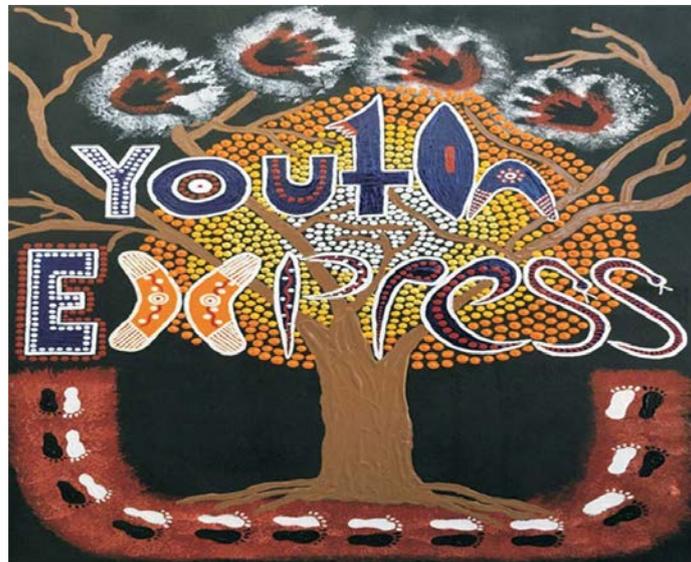


Grant Activity Review

Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC)

Youth Express Associated Incorporated (trading as KauKan)

Report date: 7 February 2020



Date of site visit	4 December 2019
Stakeholders interviewed	Julie Eldridge, CEO Tania Bunk, VTEC Coordinator / Industry Liaison Officer Teresa Hughes, VTEC Support Officer Natalie Lewin, Office Manager
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We acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of our land and its waters. The Grant Agreement Review Team wishes to pay its respects to Elders, past and present, and to the youth, for the future. We extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reading this report.

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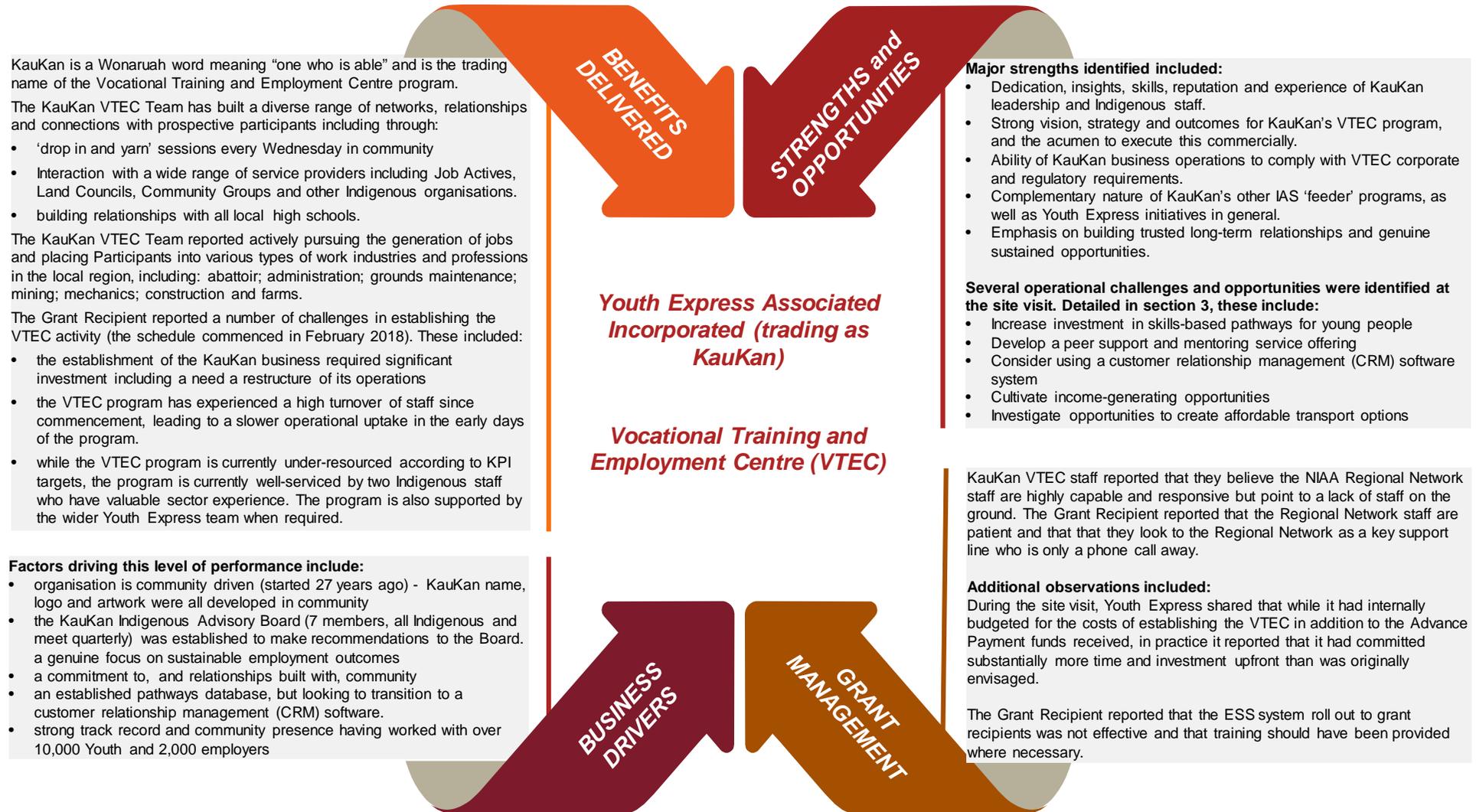
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Report summary: Youth Express Association Incorporated (trading as KauKan)

Figure 1: Grant Activity Review: Key Findings



Context and background

About the Grant Recipient

Youth Express Association Incorporated ('Youth Express') was established in June 1994 (under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1984*) to provide young people with community-based support and exposure to job pathways and skills outside of school.

Youth Express runs various programs which support vulnerable young people across the Hunter Valley and Central Macquarie regions, with a particular focus on personal and skills development, social and peer support, school attendance and retention, as well as connecting young people with further education and employers in the area.

The organisation has deductible gift recipient (DGR) status, and runs various funded, sponsored and revenue-generating activities, including:

- Steam Shack: a mobile resource unit which promotes Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM) pathways through virtual reality and gaming-based activities
- Career Development: eight of twenty-two local schools have participated in various programs including Career Quest, which is an interactive, 'speed-dating' event
- SWITCH mentoring: engaging with high school students in years nine and ten, who are at risk of disengaging from school
- Learn To Work: youth ambassador sponsorship program, through which local businesses receive practical assistance and agree to take on students for work placements or work experience.

Youth Express currently receives Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funding for three programs:

- Partners for Successful Aboriginal Young People (PSAY Hunter)
- Cessnock Communities in Schools;
- Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC) services (the subject of this report).

Prior to becoming a VTEC, Youth Express was a partnership broker and work placement organisation. The inception of Youth Express' KauKan (Wonaruah word meaning "one who is able") and KauKan JobTrack businesses around February 2018 was an important step in establishing foundations required for the VTEC program. Ensuring control of KauKan was in the hands of an Indigenous Management Committee was the first step in creating an environment which was welcoming to Indigenous young people.

The CEO of Youth Express was formerly with the Maitland Chamber of Commerce, and the organisation enjoys strong connections with local businesses across the Hunter Valley region, especially small businesses. As a Maitland-based small business staffed by thirteen (8.5 full-time equivalent, 3 full-time Indigenous), Youth Express reported experiencing many of the same employment-related challenges as the two thousand local employers and organisations it interacts with. All of the Youth Express team is involved in attending local business chamber events and invested in building deep community-wide relationships for the long term.

Table 1: Grant recipient characteristics

Grant recipient	
Funding recipient name	Youth Express Association Incorporated (trading as KauKan)
ABN	51 410 124 724 (KauKan)
Governance type	Incorporated Body (NSW incorporated association number: Y1987727)
Indigenous/non-Indigenous organisation	Non-Indigenous organisation (Youth Express) with an Indigenous controlled business (KauKan)

Table 2: Grant recipient current funding summary¹

Youth Express Association Incorporated (trading as KauKan)	
Current IAS funding under this Grant Activity Review	
VTEC – Youth Express – Hunter (Jobs, Land and Economy, 78528552)	Total committed funding \$1,105,000 (GST excl)¹ 2017-18 \$160,299.81 2018-19 \$390,062.86 2019-20 \$391,131.53 2020-21 \$163,505.80
Other current IAS funding	
Partners for Successful Aboriginal Young People (Children and Schooling, 4-5VPGEZN)	Total funding \$620,400.00 (GST excl) 2017-18 \$103,400 2018-19 \$206,800 2019-20 \$206,800 2020-21 \$103,400
Cessnock Communities in School Project (Children and Schooling, 4-5VPGET7)	Total funding \$210,000 (GST excl) 2017-18 \$35,000 2018-19 \$70,000 2019-20 \$70,000 2020-21 \$35,000
IAS funding as a % of total income (2018 calendar year)	~50% ²
Other government funding (Commonwealth, State or Territory, Local) (2018 calendar year)	N/A
Other funding (non-government) (2018 calendar year)	Youth Express generates income from various fee for service or sponsorship programs including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Support Services (including Career Quests, Work Inspirations programs, Work Preparation workshops) • Employment related services • SWITCH mentoring • Learn To Work (business partnership). According to its Annual Information Statement 2018 ³ , Youth Express' funding from goods or services (6.02%), donations and bequests (4.93%), investments (1.15%) and from miscellaneous other sources (1.89%) – combined totalled approximately \$179,000.
Total income (2018 calendar year)	Youth Express Association Incorporated reported total revenue of \$1,280,402 for the year ending 31 December 2018.
Total expenditure (2018 calendar year)	Youth Express Association Incorporated reported total expenses of \$1,308,508 for the year ending 31 December 2018.

¹ Funding committed for Indigenous-specific employment funding can differ significantly from actual expenditure. Committed funding is informed by the number of employment placements providers' propose they can achieve. Providers may not claim the maximum number of contracted placements and associated outcome payments, as it is a demand-driven activity, paid in arrears on achievement of employment outcomes.

² As the VTEC program payments are based on outcomes, amounts in this table do not reflect actual payments to Youth Express.

³ Source: Youth Express Association Incorporated Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2018, provided by Youth Express in soft copy on 27/11/2019. Also available at <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/b68cec72ea3e86371d06e598da12c26e#financials-documents>

About the region⁴

Youth Express Association Incorporated (trading as KauKan) delivers its VTEC activity within the Maitland Indigenous Area (IARE) which forms part of the NSW Central and North Coast Indigenous Region (IREG).

Maitland has an Indigenous population of 4,090, representing 5% of its total population. 771 (19%) are 15-24 years, and 980 (24%) are 25-44.

A total of 1,571 Indigenous people in Maitland are attending an educational institution. 484 (31%) are enrolled in Secondary school, and 204 (13%) are enrolled in Technical/Further or University/Tertiary education.

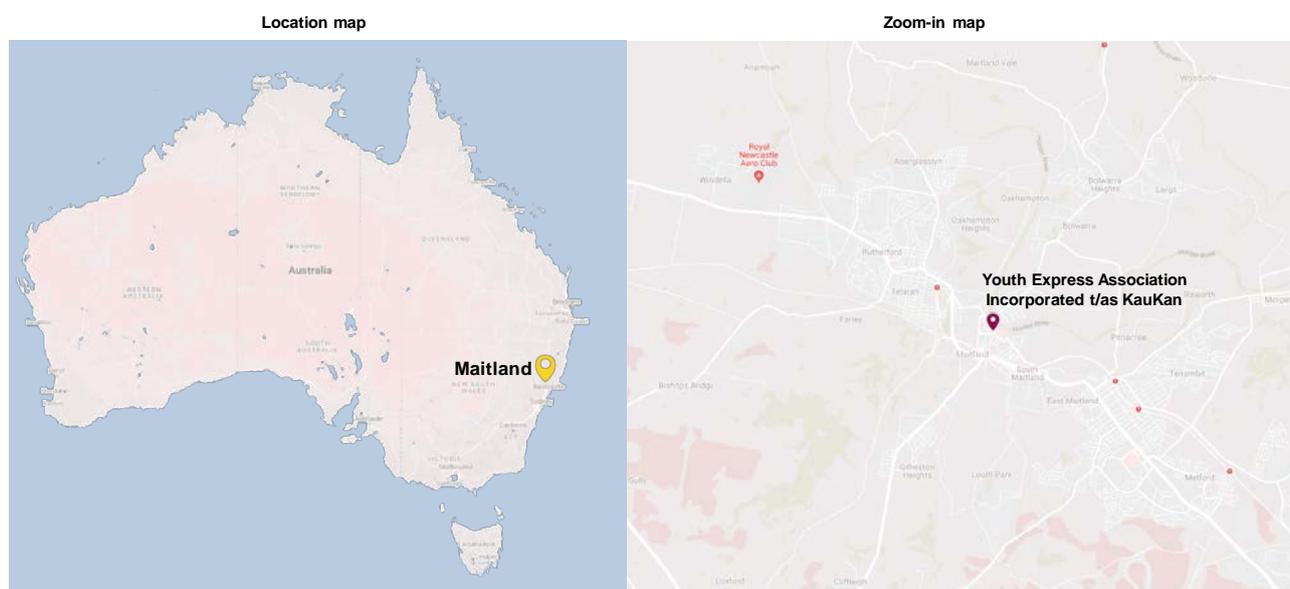
The proportion of Indigenous children in the NSW Central and North Coast Indigenous Region that meet the national mean standard for each National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) domain is significantly lower than non-Indigenous children across all year levels tested (i.e. Years 3, 5, 7, and 9). At least 48.3% Indigenous children in Year 9 meet the national mean standard for each NAPLAN domain, in comparison to at least 73.5% of non-Indigenous children in Year 9.

The Indigenous labour force in Maitland consists of 1,531 people. This comprises 2% of the total Indigenous labour force of New South Wales which is 77,143 Indigenous workers. The Indigenous unemployment rate in Maitland is 16.1% which is higher than the state-wide Indigenous unemployment rate, 15.3%.

Maitland has an Indigenous Relative Socioeconomic Outcomes index (IRSEO) of 28. The IRSEO is an Indigenous specific measure of socioeconomic outcomes. The IRSEO reflects relative advantage or disadvantage at the Indigenous Area level, where a score of 1 represents the most advantaged area and a score of 100 represents the most disadvantaged area. Therefore, Maitland is relatively advantaged compared to other Indigenous communities in Australia.

Youth Express Association Incorporated (trading as KauKan) is located at Bulwer Street, Maitland, New South Wales (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Location of the grant recipient



The current grant funded activity

Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Program Overview

Employment is critical to the health and prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For all Australians, employment offers social and economic benefits that flow to individuals, families, communities and the economy as a whole. The IAS supports Indigenous employment by delivering a series of targeted,

⁴ Key Indigenous-specific data relating to this section has been compiled based on the 2016 Census and PM&C's Spatial Analyst tool. It must be noted that Indigenous-specific data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is under-reported. There are two main explanations for this. The first is non-response to the 'Indigenous status' question and the resulting net under-count. The second is issue is that the census form is not completed for all persons in Australia at the time of the Census.

Indigenous-specific employment programs that are designed to address gaps in mainstream services across Australia, including Vocation, Training and Employment Centres (VTECs).

VTECs provide a range of support for Indigenous job seekers to build capabilities, secure a guaranteed job for 26 weeks, and achieve long term employment outcomes. VTECs operate with the support and involvement of local Indigenous communities, and are aligned to the values and needs of both Indigenous communities and employers.

Table 3: Activity funding history – committed funds⁵

Youth Express Association Incorporated (trading as KauKan)	
Program, Sub-program	Jobs, Land and Economy, Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC)
VTEC – Youth Express - Hunter 78528552: 1 February 2018 – 30 November 2020	Total committed funding \$1,105,000 (GST excl)⁵ 2017-18 \$160,299.81 2018-19 \$390,062.86 2019-20 \$391,131.53 2020-21 \$163,505.80
Activity Funding as a % of total income (2018 calendar year)	~30% ⁶

Key deliverables/requirements under the agreement

Youth Express Association Incorporated trading as KauKan receives IAS funding to provide Job Activities to Participants being placed in employment with employers as a Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC). The Objective of a VTEC is to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers (including school leaver) into sustainable employment.

The Grants are provided under the Indigenous Advancement – Jobs, Land and Economy Program with the project contributing to following Programme outcomes:

- Adults into work
- Foster viable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses
- Generate economic and social benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from land and sea use and native title rights, particularly in remote areas.

Youth Express must deliver activities including Job Activities, Training Activities and General Activities.

Job activities

In delivering the activity, Youth Express must as part of job activities:

- broker partnerships for the purposes of delivering an employer led employment model including partnerships with employers, community organisations, agencies, employment services providers, services organisation, registered training organisations
- establish relationships with key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander organisation and local communities
- facilitate employment opportunities for participants
- obtain written evidence of a job offer
- work with employers who are offering job guarantees for the VTEC employment model to understand their employment and training needs
- work with employers to source additional job guarantees
- assess and ensure each participant is suitable for specified jobs
- address participants' non-vocational and vocational barriers to taking up specified jobs

⁵ Funding committed for Indigenous-specific employment funding can differ significantly from actual expenditure. Committed funding is informed by the number of employment placements providers' propose they can achieve. Providers may not claim the maximum number of contracted placements and associated outcome payments, as it is a demand-driven activity, paid in arrears on achievement of employment outcomes.

⁶ As the VTEC program payments are based on outcomes, amounts in this table do not reflect actual payments to Youth Express.

- employ strategies to ensure successful job retention rates such as verifying that employer's workplaces are culturally competent and supportive
- work collaboratively with other VTEC providers and providers of the Employment Parity Initiative

Youth Express must:

- ensure that each participant is employed by an employer under an industry award.
- deliver or facilitate the delivery of VTEC job information sessions to potential participants including:
 - working conditions of specified jobs
 - skills, knowledge and requirements including any drug, alcohol or health requirements
 - benefits of working in the particular industry
 - challenges of working in the particular industry
- determine each potential participant's suitability for the specified job
- use its best endeavours to place participants in employment that will be ongoing after the activities period
- provide each participant with post placement support.

Training activities

Youth Express must provide access to suitable work readiness and work-related training and mentoring to each participant. This is provided in conjunction with Job Active and other service providers.

Work readiness training may include (but is not limited to) assisting the participant to get a drivers licence and matching a participant with a fitness program to meet the needs of the Employer's medical and fitness work requirements

Youth Express must ensure that each participant is awarded the relevant qualification or statement of attainment on successful completion of training.

General Activities

Youth Express must:

- provide evidence of strategies to promote community and cultural connection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities
- provider evidence of collaboration with relevant organisations and community members including referral networks
- promote the project to a wide audience
- Participate in VTEC forums

Grant payments

Job Outcome Payments are provided to Youth Express under the IAS schedule as individual participants complete the 4 week, 13 week and 26 week milestones within the VTEC project as outlined in Table 4

Table 4: Employment Outcome Payment Schedule

Job Activity Outcome Payment category	Outcome Payment Type	Key Pre-Requisite Requirement for Payment	Outcome Payment amount (GST inclusive)	Evidence Required (example)
Type 1: Commencement and pre-employment training for <i>Stream B</i> and <i>Stream C</i> participants or “Fully Eligible Participants” under CDP or DES	4 week job outcome	4 weeks continuous employment	\$2,200	Written evidence of a job offer from the participating employer
Type 2: Employment of <i>Stream B</i> jobactive participants or “Fully Eligible Participants” under CDP or DES	13 week job outcome	13 weeks continuous employment	\$3,300	An employer declaration 13 week Job Outcome must be provided
Type 3: Employment of <i>Stream C</i> jobactive participants or “Fully Eligible Participants” under CDP or DES			\$3,850	
Type 4: Employment of <i>Stream B</i> jobactive participants or “Fully Eligible Participants” under CDP or DES			\$9,350	
Type 5: Employment of <i>Stream C</i> jobactive participants or “Fully Eligible Participants” under CDP or DES	26 week job outcome	26 weeks continuous employment	\$10,450	An employer declaration 26 week Job Outcome must be provided
Type 6 Tier 1: (capped at first 14 participants): Employment of <i>Stream A</i> jobactive participants or who are not registered under jobactive, CDP or DES			\$6,050	
Type 7 Tier 2 (applies to <i>Stream A</i> employment after the 14 Tier 1 (cap) participant outcomes are achieved)			\$2,750	



01 Benefits delivered

This section documents the discussions in relation to benefits achieved through IAS grant funding. This section is intentionally qualitative in nature. Appendix C provides performance data in line with grant reporting requirements.

About the current activity

The Grant Recipient reported being in the unique position of already running two IAS funded ‘feeder’ programs (PSAY Hunter, and Cessnock Communities in Schools) when first approached to become a VTEC. Although VTEC was a new line of business for Youth Express, activities across their IAS funded programs are seen as highly complementary. In addition, it was reported that Youth Express’ strong governance, operations and responsiveness were key determinants in granting them VTEC status.

Youth Express has a demonstrated track record as a Local Community Partnership Provider and Partnership Broker, having received funding for this activity since 2005. Now as a VTEC provider, its KauKan business sought to establish rigorous standards and structures to ensure quality organisational practices and procedures to underpin its service delivery as a VTEC. Further to this, KauKan’s Strategy for 2018 – 2020 brings to the fore its target outcomes and performance obligations (performance measures) under the IAS grant by stating clear accountabilities and success indicators for the VTEC Team and Manager.

Youth Express received an Advance Payment (as stipulated in project schedule) to assist with start-up costs for establishing the VTEC. Significant investment was also required to undertake a restructure to set up the KauKan business. Youth Express allocates staff to its programs on a cost recovery basis, and it was reported that the VTEC program is close to breaking even in the new year.

Under strong Indigenous governance, KauKan Youth Express has developed and publicised its vision that **“Aboriginal people have attributes and skills needed to actively compete for opportunities and maintain quality employment”** and aims to bring together and support Indigenous Participants, Industry, Community, Aboriginal organisations and Government. KauKan also has its own Reconciliation Statement and Indigenous Respect Meeting Protocol.

KauKan follows a defined engagement work flow to ensure clear expectations when recruiting and onboarding potential Participants and Employers, and thereafter during a work placement. This structured process also acts to support KauKan in gathering and recording information necessary to meet its contracted obligations and secure Outcome Payments.

The KauKan VTEC Team has built and nurtured a diverse range of networks, relationships and connections with prospective participants including through:

- ‘drop in and yarn’ sessions every Wednesday at Karuah Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC)
- Interactions with a wide range of service providers including Job Actives, Land Councils, Community Groups and other Indigenous organisations where there is employment assistance required.
- building relationships with every high school in the area.

The KauKan VTEC Team reported actively pursuing the generation of jobs and placing Participants into various types of work industries and professions in the local region, including:

- abattoir,
- administration,
- grounds maintenance,
- mining,
- mechanics,
- construction, and
- farms.

The Review Team spent the duration of the site visit with Youth Express' CEO, Office Manager and KauKan's two VTEC staff and the NIAA Agreement Manager. During the visit, the Review Team also had the opportunity to meet with other Youth Express staff (not involved in delivery of the VTEC program) in the Youth Express conference room, which is fully equipped with smart board, computers and internet access and used for on-site meetings, training and education activities.

Figure 3: Employed in trades



KauKan VTEC program focuses on Indigenous young people and operates alongside other employment services such as jobactive. VTEC programs play a role in increasing economic activity (through generating jobs as well as referrals to training providers) and cultural activity (through holistic approaches and building Indigenous cultural knowledge). For Youth Express, the IAS VTEC funding represents a significant source of revenue, and brings with it great opportunity to strengthen Indigenous employment outcomes in the Hunter region, whilst also creating a going concern which in itself generates jobs and contributes to embedding deeper service delivery links across the Hunter region.

At the site visit the Grant Recipient reported a number of challenges in establishing the VTEC activity. These included:

- the establishment of the KauKan business required significant investment including a need a restructure of its operations
- the VTEC program has experienced a high turnover of staff since commencement, leading to a slower operational uptake in the early days of the program.
- while the VTEC program is currently under-resourced according to performance measure targets, the program is currently well-served by two Indigenous staff who have valuable sector experience (in human resources, employment and social services from organisations such as Mission Australia) as well as a deep understanding and ability to connect with local Indigenous youth, Indigenous communities, business leaders and business owners. The program is also supported by the wider Youth Express team when required.

Exploration of benefits

During the site visit, a number of benefits were discussed and observed in relation to the KauKan VTEC. These benefits include:

Building relationships is a priority

The organisation is grassroots driven (started 27 years ago), and the VTEC's KauKan name, logo and artwork were all developed in community. This is reflected in the approach the organisation takes to work - noting that KauKan works with the employer, employee and their family. They also build the relationship first, then work up to the VTEC program so that it is a flexible engagement. The philosophy of KauKan is that they 'do what they say they will do'.

KauKan experienced resistance from the community initially, and invested large amounts of time and effort in addressing rumours and turning around sentiments across the community. In particular, KauKan shares its information and success stories through business chamber meetings, industry presentations, school information sessions, Aboriginal interagency meetings and NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

(AECG) meetings. They also have a range of professional promotional materials and packs for potential employers and participants, and publicise good news stories on their website as well as via social media.

The VTEC Team focuses on building strong and trusted relationships with employers, as well as with Participants. One of KauKan's strategies for sustaining employment is to ease Participants into a role, starting at a few hours a week, which allows for Participants to adjust while also building confidence of the Employer. Employers also benefit from KauKan's willingness to support its Participants in a practical way in the workplace, including addressing behavioural or performance issues in a culturally sensitive way, and providing culturally-appropriate mentoring, which often continues beyond the twenty-six weeks as stipulated in the grant.

KauKan is benefitting from its efforts and success in making inroads into local Indigenous community networks. It receives unsolicited requests via email and word of mouth from service organisations (for instance, disability support providers such as Ability Options, and Aboriginal prisoner support providers such as BlackRock) and potential employers (for instance, tourism operators) from across the Greater Newcastle region who are interested in engaging or participating in its services. The geographical scope of KauKan's activities to date has spanned an extensive area including Forster, Taree, Karuah, Dungog, Cessnock, Singleton, Broke, and out to Merriwa.

A focus on local presence and perspective

KauKan delivers a comprehensive program suite through a holistic approach across the organisation and a 'whatever it takes' mantra. Despite being a youth-focused organisation, KauKan reported providing coverage of the wide continuum within community - from preschool programs to fifty-year-old people looking for work.

KauKan's fostering of relationships with employers is critical to its success helping it to uncover untapped employment opportunities and spread the word about KauKan's services and build goodwill amongst the community. Staff of Youth Express are encouraged to participate in NAIDOC week to maintain its local community ties and profile.

Activities of KauKan VTEC are carried out across a large geographical area, being up to Forster / Tuncurry, Broke, Merriwa and Dungog.

According to the CEO of Youth Express (and KauKan Board member), there is a significant need to shine a 'glamorous' light to promote and highlight the career and lifestyle benefits of being a tradesperson, especially in regional areas.

Responsive to community need

The KauKan VTEC Team focuses on listening to and responding to the personal development, career and further education aspirations and interests of its Participants and prospective Participants including:

- arranging a visit and information session from Defence Forces representative
- arranging driving lessons at Karuah LALC, including support to get to driving tests
- teaching strategies to handle conflict resolution at Worimi LALC
- assistance in securing TAFE placement to complete year ten
- promoting Aboriginal Art competitions.

Expanding on a sound core business model

KauKan VTEC's initial progress was slower than anticipated. The Grant Recipient reported that it has undergone a recent restructure.

KauKan's strong leadership and governance capabilities which it seeks to model as core values of professionalism, integrity and dedication in order to flow throughout the organisation, its daily management, operations, facilities and commercial dealings.

Overall, the Youth Express organisation anticipates that it will break even in the new year. Its projects are staffed on a cost recovery basis, not to make profit for the organisation – they try to run on a funding model of 50% grants and 50% service delivery (income generated through program activity).

Figure 4: Building relationships



Performance summary and history

Activity reporting includes job outcome data provided regularly through the Employment Services System (ESS).

Youth Express' employment outcomes for the period up to 30 November 2019 is summarised in Table 5. Summary level data only has been provided.

Table 5: Employment outcomes for the period 30 November 2019

Funding Approved (GST excl.)	Actual Expenditure (GST excl.)	Job Contracted	# Employment Commencements	# Employment 26 Week Achieved
\$1,105,000	\$248,882	123	44	31

Youth Express is contracted to support 123 individuals. As of 30 November 2019, Youth Express had reported it had achieved 44 employment commencements and 31 26 week outcomes. This number of employment commencements and achievement of 26 week outcomes have been achieved during the first two thirds of the contract timeframe which appears to suggest the VTEC activity is currently tracking below the full target of 123 by 30 November 2020. As payments under this project are outcome driven, there is no requirement for Youth Express to achieve the full target.



02 Business drivers

This section documents the discussions about the business drivers that may influence the Grant Recipient's performance.

Quality and adequacy of governance, operational and decision-making structures to achieve outcomes

Table 6: Business drivers of performance

Business Driver	Description	Comment
<p>Governance arrangements</p> 	<p>Youth Express is an incorporated association.</p> <p>KauKan reports to the KauKan Board, which is made up of seven Indigenous members (including an Elder and Land Council representative) with a range of business, education, community and cultural experience, plus the Youth Express CEO. The KauKan Board meets quarterly.</p> <p>In turn the KauKan Board reports to the Youth Express Association Incorporated Executive Board and provides advice, consultancy and leadership in managing Indigenous programs at Youth Express.</p>	
<p>Business operations</p> 	<p>The Grant Recipient reported that KauKan experiences challenges in attracting and retaining good quality, young Indigenous staff as they get head hunted.</p> <p>KauKan publicises and follows a defined engagement process which supports consistency and structure in onboarding potential participants and employers, and in supporting both parties during the employment period. The VTEC has developed clear templates such as a Participant Training and Support Plan.</p> <p>The VTEC has a focus on sustainable employment, not just 'gap-fillers', and this approach yields a mutual benefit for participants, employers and the VTEC itself.</p> <p>KauKan's complementary work across its IAS funded programs serves to strengthen its impact and reach.</p> <p>KauKan reported diligently maintaining workplace policies, procedures and practices including Work Health and Safety.</p> <p>The VTEC currently uses an established database but is looking to transition to a customer relationship software (CRM) program.</p>	
<p>Community engagement and collaboration</p> 	<p>The Grant Recipient has a commitment to investing in relationships built with community to ensure longevity within communities - this is seen as legacy work. The staff have a philosophy of doing 'whatever it takes', such as providing transport.</p> <p>Work is driven by word of mouth, particularly in the LALC networks, which is a fruitful source of referrals – for potential participants as well as employers, and 'feeder' programs. This is enhanced by its participation in community based programs and events such as NAIDOC.</p> <p>The Grant Recipient is constantly seeking to extend its reach and has currently worked with over 10,000 youth and interacts with 2,000 employers.</p>	
<p>Other (Includes: challenges/pressures/demand for the service, and service delivery arrangements)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	



03 Strengths and opportunities

This section highlights the particular strengths of this grant activity as well as opportunities the Grant Recipient can choose to implement.

Summary of key strengths identified

Major strengths identified included:

- Dedication, insights, skills, reputation and experience of KauKan leadership and Indigenous staff.
- Strong vision, strategy and outcomes for KauKan's VTEC program, and the acumen to execute this commercially.
- Ability of KauKan business operations to comply with VTEC corporate and regulatory requirements.
- Complementary nature of KauKan's other IAS 'feeder' programs, as well as Youth Express initiatives in general.
- Emphasis on building trusted long-term relationships and genuine sustained opportunities.

Opportunities to strengthen outcomes

A number of opportunities for improvement were discussed during the Review Meeting, these are set out below:

Raise the bar on investment in young people

The Youth Express CEO maintains there is generally under-recognition and inadequate resourcing of investment in young people, particularly in employability skills training and skills-based pathways rather than academic pathways. Often the effort and funds are directed towards placing young people in employment, rather than actually preparing them for employment.

Suggested Strategy: KauKan should continue to raise awareness and lobby for multi-pronged youth investment through its business and community networks.

Develop a peer support and mentoring service offering

KauKan staff reported seeing an intrinsic need and value in continuing to mentor VTEC Participants beyond the 26 weeks stipulated requirement, as demonstrated by its ongoing relationship with Participants placed at a local abattoir.

Peer to peer networks are also being established within workforces of those who have been with Youth Express.

Both of these initiatives could be packaged up and marketed as commercial offerings for KauKan.

Suggested Strategy: KauKan should investigate potential for developing commercial fee-for-service mentoring and peer support services.

Use a customer relationship management (CRM) software system

Youth Express currently uses a contacts database, mainly to capture its 10,000 client and employer contact details and record simple case notes. At the site visit, the benefits of supporting technology (such as a CRM) for a business such as Youth Express were discussed. Implementing a CRM system is an identified priority for the CEO, as this would enhance business operations, enable more efficient and streamlined documentation and marketing practices, and provide Youth Express with key insights into its relationships and opportunities to strengthen its footprint.

Suggested Strategy: KauKan should examine the merits of utilising a CRM and investigate options that are a close fit for its operating model.

Cultivate income-generating opportunities

Youth Express already counts a number of successful and diversified fee-for-service programs amongst its offerings, including sponsorships (such as “Learn to Work”), fee-for-session (such as “SWITCH Mentoring”) and gamification (such as “Career Quest” – points program). In addition, its DGR status is extremely valuable in encouraging donations, industry partnerships and philanthropic investment.

Through its reputation, Youth Express has already attracted notable government funding and community sponsorship, including for innovative initiatives such as the “Steam Shack”, and needs-based programs such as “Links To Learning”.

It was also noted that the KauKan Board brings opportunities to Youth Express, such as a Wollombi Tourism venture which is in the early stages of planning but looking ahead at opportunities in construction and hospitality.

Suggested Strategy: KauKan should continue to explore feasible opportunities to grow its Indigenous-focused services, in pursuit of its overarching vision and values.

Investigate opportunities to create affordable transport options

At the site visit, the Grant Recipient reported that transport is one of the biggest challenges in achieving VTEC employment outcomes. Especially in regional areas of Australia, the lack of transport can be a crippling and isolating barrier for individuals, affecting social interactions, health and employment prospects. Often there is limited availability of public or community transport options, and costs of using local transport can be inflated and unaffordable.

The opportunity exists to explore tackling this systemic issue at a community or regional level, such as through engaging with local transport providers, government, local councils, local Aboriginal Land Councils, local health and community services, local business chambers and other social support enterprises in the Hunter region.

Suggested Strategy: KauKan should continue to raise awareness of transport as a key factor affecting employment, and seek collaboration and ideas from its business and community contacts.



04 Grant management

This section documents observations regarding overall management of the grant against contracted requirements.

Engagement and collaboration

KauKan VTEC staff reported that they believe the NIAA Regional Network staff are highly capable and responsive but point to a lack of staff on the ground. The Grant Recipient reported that the Regional Network staff are patient and that they look to the Regional Network as a key support line who is only a phone call away.

During the site visit, Youth Express shared that while it had internally budgeted for the costs of establishing the VTEC in addition to the Advance Payment funds received, in practice it reported that it had committed substantially more time and investment upfront than was originally envisaged.

Reporting

The KauKan VTEC Team reported some initial difficulties in obtaining payslips from employers, which have since been ironed out through clear upfront communications and setting of expectations with employers.

KauKan noted that VTEC Outcome Payments for school leavers are low compared to the significant time and resources needed to maintain steady monitoring throughout.

KauKan is proud of its achievements and active in promoting its good news stories, which it uses to promote the activity within the community. KauKan and Youth Express maintain an informative website and also posts on Facebook. Local NIAA staff are verbally kept apprised of KauKan's success stories.

Youth Express staff reported issues with accessing the Australian Government's ESS portal, which is now the main 'self-service' tool to be used by IAS Grant Recipients (Indigenous-specific employment programs only) for reporting, submitting invoices, eligibility assessments, and managing all aspects of the VTEC grant.

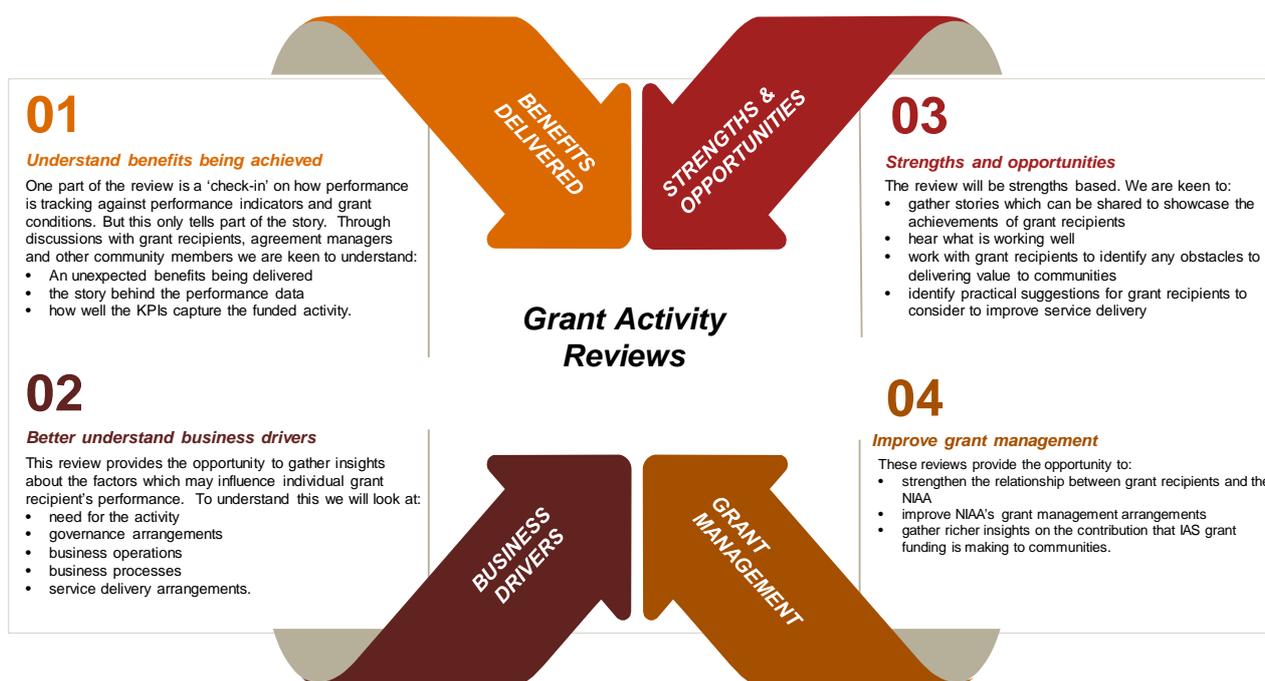
Feedback from Youth Express Associated Incorporated (trading as KauKan)

This section is an opportunity to comment about any aspect of the review such as the process and whether it was useful to your organisation.

Appendix A: About Grant Activity Reviews

One of the key aims of the Grant Activity Review (GAR) process is improving Grant Recipient capability, service delivery and business operations where required. For this reason, the reviews are conducted using a strengths-based approach, focussing on the strengths of the Grant Recipients and recipient communities. The GARs are very different from audits and avoid using a compliance and fault-finding approach. A summary of the key purpose of the GAR is set out in Figure 5.

Figure 5: The purpose of the Grant Activity Review



GARs are conducted in collaboration and partnership with a third-party Indigenous reviewing organisation, Regional Network Staff, Agreement Managers, a NIAA GAR team member and Grant Recipients. A high-level summary of the methodology for the reviews is set out in Figure 6.

Figure 6: GAR – high-level methodology

