

1 Football club, 2 pharmacists

& hundreds of opportunities for
Indigenous kids

Brisbane-based pharmacist Cathie Reid hasn't always been an AFL fan. As a child she admits she supported the Kangaroos because her best friend did, and if she wore her scarf to Waverley Park she'd get free chocolate. 'I was more passionate about the chocolate than the game,' she confesses.

But when the 2011 Telstra Business Woman of the Year went to Lockhart River in 2014 with a Bond University Leadership program, she saw how important football was in the community, and how **sport can act as a mechanism or catalyst for change regardless of cultural background.** 'Sport engages all boys and the passion at Lockhart River with those kids is the same as the passion our kids have,' she said relating the similarities of local kids with her own son Sam, 'and I knew that once you form a connection through one mechanism, it allows you to build other connections.' What Cathie knew was that sport was the connector to good health.

Health is Cathie's business and her passion – she is co-owner of Epic Pharmacy with her husband Stuart Giles – and the visit to Lockhart River gave her the opportunity to see first hand the disparities in health for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Confronted by the living standards and lack of opportunities of those in the community to those afforded to people in the city, Cathie immediately felt the need to make an effort and to make a difference.

It was a pivotal moment on many levels for Cathie as she shared the time with another strong female leader Lois Peeler, the Executive Director of Worawa Aboriginal Girls College in Healesville. Lois – one of original Sapphires the award-winning film is based on – was also attending the program for the Alliance of Girls Schools. Together the women formed a bond, and over time acts they performed in partnership would eventually lead to what is the current and future Hawthorn Indigenous Program (HIP).

Cathie explains the Mayor of Lockhart River is a huge fan of Cyril Rioli, and after the visit the group wanted to give him a guernsey signed by the star player. Cathie and Stuart - both donors to the Hawks Foundation - coordinated the gift. Soon after Lois asked Cathie for an introduction to Hawthorn with the goal of forming a connection with the local Healesville team, the Eastern Eagles.

Cathie had long since thrown away the Kangaroo scarf to join Sam and Stuart in the most fashionable she could find brown and gold. For his part Stuart had long ago shattered his Essendon loving parents by declaring at the age of five in the midst of Hawthorn's sensational 70's premiership run that he was going to join the remainder of the kids in the street and barrack for the Hawks. However it was the turn of events that followed Cathie's visit to Lockhart River that created a stronger bond with both Hawthorn and Indigenous Australia than either of them could have imagined.

Epic Good and the HIP

Following up on Lois's initial request for assistance with the Eagles led to the discovery Hawthorn had a substantial, but unfunded, desire to upgrade their existing indigenous program. After months of consultation between the couple and the club, Cathie and Stuart are now the main corporate donation partner of the Hawthorn Indigenous Program via their Epic Good Foundation.

Epic Good's support has assisted development of the Hawthorn Indigenous Program with the aim of further supporting Australia's Indigenous communities through mentorship, lifestyle and participation programs, while also providing financial support and employment opportunities through the vehicle of Australian Rules Football.

The Club aims to achieve this outcome by:

- Employing a new Indigenous Programs Officer – initially one day per week at Waverley Park;
- Employing a new Indigenous Officer – AFL Trainee shared resource with AFL Victoria;
- Providing funding and support to the Eastern Eagles under 18 Indigenous football team;
- Growing and leveraging a current affiliation with Big River Hawks under 18 football team from Katherine;



Photo credit: AFL Media

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- Facilitating a leadership and cultural awareness camp in Melbourne for the Big River Hawks under 18 football team from Katherine;
- Facilitating an annual Community Camp with specific Indigenous activity in Tasmania;
- Providing Indigenous cultural awareness training for all administration staff, 1st and 2nd year players;
- Officially supporting the "Racism. It Stops With Me" campaign;
- Facilitating an Indigenous Auskick Centre visit from Northern Territory to Melbourne;
- Undertaking a community visit to Katherine with a Hawthorn Football Club Indigenous player – minimum one per year;

- Providing Hawthorn Football Club star player and AFL Indigenous All-Stars Captain, Shaun Burgoyne as an Indigenous Ambassador.

According to Stuart Fox, CEO of Hawthorn Football Club, the support that Epic Good offers makes an enormous difference to the HIP, claiming,

'This new partnership with Stuart and Cathie will enable the club to extend the reach, breadth and growth of our Indigenous Programs.'

A five year funding commitment in this space also allows the programs to continue to develop, evolve and grow in this time so we can help affect real change.'

The impact of the HIP is far reaching, beyond potential players from the Northern Territory, but also local players as well. Fox adds, 'We would hope that local players in both the Northern Territory and Melbourne respect the work the club are doing in their communities. Football is a great vehicle to drive cultural and social change.'

The program aims to build leadership while promoting cultural awareness, school attendance and healthy lifestyle choices to all who are involved. Our hope would be that these programs provide an inspiration to young players and students in the Northern Territory to strive for their goals and aspirations. We would also hope that players Australia-wide see Hawthorn as a Destination club; where the very best people aspire to join our pursuit of excellence, unity and success.'

Fox is grateful for the partnership with Epic Pharmacy because it has allowed the Club to take their work in Indigenous communities to the next level, while also creating sustainable change. 'We now have two Indigenous positions within the club, a first for Hawthorn. Most AFL clubs work in the Indigenous space, however we are very proud to highlight that we are first to have a donation partnership (rather than sponsorship) over a five-year period. Stuart and Cathie have merged their two passions, Hawthorn Football Club and Indigenous communities, and for that we are very thankful.'

On the field and in the community Indigenous players have responsibility and accountability as role models and leaders. Ambassador Shaun Burgoyne says, 'I am looking forward to the mentoring role within the program, through which I'll be able to help develop indigenous leaders within each community we visit.'

While Cyril Rioli who's autographed guernsey triggered this bigger vision says, 'I am really excited with the opportunity to strengthen our current program and commitment to the Katherine region where we already have established a strong footprint.'

The role and importance of philanthropy

Fox defines philanthropy as about making a difference. A difference that both Cathie and Stuart demonstrate through their decisions and generous financial commitments. It's clear-cut for Cathie, who explains the motivation behind the couple's philanthropy, 'We are very fortunate in our business careers. There is a burning obligation to pay that forward in a variety of ways. We view philanthropy the same way we view our business activities. It's about our passion for what we do, what we love. We can add value above and beyond just financial value. We want to deliver more than just a cheque.'

The cheques do help though, and without Epic Good underwriting the program HIP would not exist in the format it does.

It's the health benefits rather than the game that drive belief in the program though as Cathie says, 'The link between physical activity and health is well known. And one of the greatest gaps between remote communities and urban life is health outcomes and we can do a far better job as a country in closing the gap on diabetes etc. One way to improve is via education and if you can encourage kids to stay in school and then perhaps encourage kids to go into health work – hopefully this translates into higher education opportunities and health based vocations.'

Cathie went on to note, 'We have our first two Epic Pharmacy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pharmacy Assistant Trainees employed at our Kempsey and Port Macquarie hospital locations and are looking forward to greatly expanding this aspect of our core business. We also aim to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the pharmacy workforce and thereby assisting pharmacies to better meet the needs of their local communities.'

Philanthropy is a core family philosophy as Stuart adds, 'We always try to link our life experiences to our philanthropy. We understand how blessed and lucky we are with our own children's health and well-being. We have always taken this starting point to place ourselves in the footsteps of others who may be facing greater challenges at the same points in their lives and find ways we can assist.'

The pair are not only creating opportunities for young Indigenous players, but they are leading the way for their own children Sam and Sascha to recognise and develop a sense of social responsibility, leadership and the importance of giving back to the community. Sascha is already part of the United Nations Girl Up program empowering young girls around the world. And for his part, Sam and his teammates from the Wests Juniors Bulldogs Club in Brisbane were part of the AFL program where players donated their boots to kids in remote communities in 2014. 'This act alone gave the boys a sense of brotherhood – a connection with the boys they sent their boots to', Cathie says proudly.

Epic Good also means support from the stands as well, as Stuart hopes to be cheering for the Eaglehawks during their games, and even going to Darwin to see the Big River Hawks later in the year.

Cathie and Stuart are an epic-duo who have already made an impact with their philanthropy elsewhere but recognise that there is always more that can be done. Cathie says with a sense of hope and positivity, 'This is a ball that we are very happy to help start rolling, we are already in discussions with other parties and we hope that will generate more partners for the HIP and even greater opportunities going forward.'

'We believe the HIP works together with a number of our own objectives in terms of making a meaningful contribution to Indigenous well-being.'



Image source: AFL Media