Stronger Smarter Leadership
to create high expectations, excellence oriented school cultures.

“...if we believe in young children, we give them licence to believe in themselves. And when young children believe they can be stronger and smarter, that brightens the future in very honourable ways.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Stronger Smarter Institute National Summit 2012
Share Our Vision

Stronger Smarter communities enabling all people
to honour and affirm positive identities and cultures,
whilst thriving in contemporary societies

Understand Our Philosophy

The Stronger Smarter philosophy honours a positive sense of cultural identity, and
acknowledges and embraces positive community leadership, enabling innovative and
dynamic approaches and processes that are anchored by high expectations relationships.

High expectations relationships honour the humanity of others, and in so doing, acknowledge
one’s strengths, capacity and human right to emancipatory opportunity.
The Stronger Smarter Institute

The Stronger Smarter Institute is committed to changing the tide of low expectations in Indigenous education in Australia. The Institute works with school and community leaders in pursuit of high expectations and high performance school cultures. Many schools across the country have made significant inroads and laid solid foundations in the creation of Stronger Smarter inclusive, strength based school cultures.

Transformation through Leadership

There exists in Australia, as does in other parts of the world, an urgent need for quality leadership in schools. Nowhere is this more imperative than within marginalised and resource-poor communities. Within the education system many children struggle against a culture of low expectations and stifled perceptions of who they are. Their self-esteem, achievements and ambitions can be, and so often are, deeply corroded.

Attaining excellence in learning for all children may require significant school community transformation, which is essentially about shifting and renewing school cultures.

Our approach is founded on belief and experience that any group of people usually already holds the collective knowledge and wisdom to successfully meet the complex challenges they face. Successful use of this knowledge and wisdom requires deep listening, reflection, collective sense-making and decision-making processes. Engoori offers such a set of collaborative leadership processes.

Grounded in strength of identity and the positivism of success, people are able to uncover and own habitual patterns that enable or disable them from meeting particular challenges and other ways of thinking, seeing, talking and doing can be practiced and embedded.

The transformational leadership experiences created by the Institute’s programs have contributed to school and community leaders working alongside each other for improved Indigenous student attendance, positive numeracy and literacy outcomes, and increased engagement of Indigenous children and their families in learning that really matters.

Ultimately it is the Institute’s vision that the Stronger Smarter philosophy of high-expectations, excellence-oriented school cultures will be embedded throughout self-sustaining networks, creating a balance between individuality and social connectedness, so that Australian schools are places where all children ‘dream the great dreams’, and classrooms are designed to collude only with a stronger, smarter student identity.

“Stronger Smarter for me was unlike any other professional learning. All other programs I’ve been to concentrate on specific academic teachings. The Stronger Smarter program taught me not only skills that help in the school context but the philosophical underpinnings are incredible!!!

Everyone that leaves is not just a better teacher, Principal etc., but a better person”

Program Participant, 2012
Participants have described the program as intense, stimulating, challenging and full of humour and personal involvement.

“On a deeply profound level it made me evaluate myself, my identity as an individual and how I brought that to my perceived role as a principal and a person.” Program Participant, 2012

“I realise more that these strategies and philosophies are not only relative to Indigenous communities, but quite global.” Group School Assistant Principal, 2010

“It reinforced that though there are long-term, complex issues that seem to continually evolve and develop, my part within them is important, and I understand that I am a part within the global change to these issues... that through changes within myself I can contribute to building solutions to the whole.” Principal, 2011

“This has been a very thought provoking workshop and has given me the motivation to get back out and take the next step. The friendships and networks I have developed are invaluable!” Program Participant, 2011

“Brilliant and inspiring. Instilled a sense of hope and possibility.” Program Participant 2010
Stronger Smarter Leadership Program

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program aims to challenge and support school and community leaders in their pursuit of educational excellence for all students by providing learning opportunities to enhance their leadership capacity, challenge their assumptions and contribute to the critical mass of leaders creating positive changes in education.

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program equips school leaders to have challenging conversations with staff and actively engages the school community so that the whole school community has high expectations, relationships and promotes positive identities and excellence in schools.

Structure
Participants are provided with a safe and supportive environment in which to explore these fundamental strategies. The program is an action research model, with a series of workshops and meetings throughout the year and includes:

- Face to face workshops facilitated by the Stronger Smarter team
- Personal challenges in which participants’ explore their own beliefs and behaviours and specific leadership challenges to work on between each workshop session and
- Opportunities for participants to document and share their learning with others as participants are invited to join the well established Stronger Smarter network.

Approaches to Learning
The facilitation and learning approaches are based on adult learning principles including:

- Drawing on participants’ existing knowledge and experiences;
- Offering new learning frameworks and processes through which participants reflect on experiences;
- Multi-model delivery - visual, auditory and kinesthetic; and
- Structuring the learning over a significant period of time so that new learning can be integrated.

“A key indicator for the program’s success is principals and other leaders ‘taking the message back to schools’; participants demonstrating leadership in a number of areas of school life. Evidence suggests that participants took the message back to schools, and had the hard conversations that led to changes in staff attitudes and beliefs. It was anticipated that changes in conversations, and staff having greater expectations of Indigenous students would in turn lead to students having greater expectations of themselves, and higher levels of self esteem. The majority of respondents indicated that they felt that there had been positive changes to students’ self image, and gave moving examples of this. Respondents were also able to demonstrate that there had been significant positive changes to student engagement in all aspects of the school.”

Stronger Smarter Team

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program honours difference and diversity. This is reflected in the composition of the facilitation team. The team has both male and female, Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, some with teaching backgrounds and others with other workplace and community experiences. All are experienced in the Stronger Smarter approach to co-facilitation and share a strong commitment to ensuring successful life outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Dr Chris Sarra is the founder and Executive Chair of the Stronger Smarter Institute. Chris grew up in Bundaberg in Queensland and is the youngest of ten children. He experienced firsthand many of the issues faced by Indigenous students throughout their schooling. Encouraged and supported by some teachers and mentors, Chris successfully completed a Diploma of Teaching, a Bachelor of Education and Master of Education and a PhD in Psychology with Murdoch University. His published thesis is titled Strong and Smart - Towards a Pedagogy for Emancipation Education for First Peoples.

In the late 1990s Chris took on the challenges of Indigenous education as Principal of Cherbourg State School in South East Queensland. Under Chris’ leadership the school became nationally acclaimed for its pursuit of the Stronger Smarter philosophy, which significantly improved the educational, and life outcomes of its students.

Paul Bridge is a Kija man from Halls Creek, in Western Australia’s Kimberley region. He has worked in a range of educational contexts and levels from teacher to Area Director and District Director. Paul has a passion for working holistically to transform school cultures and influence communities to embrace change. Paul was awarded the Western Australia Aboriginal Education and Training Council Award (2012) in recognition for his exemplary leadership in Aboriginal education. He shares his experience at forums and on committees, boards and initiatives at a national level. Paul started his Stronger Smarter journey in 2006 and is currently principal at Derby District High School in Western Australia.

Sharon Grose has worked in a broad range of educational contexts; her career highlights include classroom teaching; student support roles; school, regional and statewide leadership and management positions and coordinating the Institute’s Stronger Smarter Leadership Program. She has qualifications in teaching, mediation and conflict resolution and a Masters of Arts in Indigenous Social Policy from the University of Technology, Sydney. Sharon is a skilled and experienced mediator, negotiator and facilitator of adult learning.

“We must be determined that our classrooms are sacred spaces in which our children can dream about being anything they want.” Dr Chris Sarra, Stronger Smarter Institute
**Michal Purcell** is an original member of the Institute and its Senior Community Relations Officer. Descended from the Butchella people of Fraser Island and the first people of Ambrem Island in Vanuatu, she grew up in Childers, South East Queensland. Michal worked at Cherbourg State School with Chris Sarra as principal. She heard from Elders stories of when Cherbourg was a mission and Aboriginal children rarely attended school beyond Year 4. She witnessed the changes in the community when they began to feel strong again in their identity and ability to succeed. Michal is committed to supporting people’s learning about themselves and others.

**Toby Adams** is a Kullilli man, born in Dalby, Queensland. He is an accomplished facilitator and public speaker. He has experience in facilitating the Youth 2020 Summit, Australian Youth Forum consultations, the National Youth Roundtable and speaking at cultural events and conferences including the Garma Festival and Dreaming Festival. He has a strong background in Indigenous employment & training, marketing and community development.

**Dan Walker** lives and works in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Dan has been using the Stronger Smarter ethos and processes through his school leadership and teaching positions in both town and remote settings.

He is passionate about the power of developing school cultures that challenge and connect people to have high expectations for Aboriginal students and he has first hand experience of how to create a strength based approach to school transformation.

Dan is a skilled facilitator and motivated leader and he is currently the Kimberley’s Stronger Smarter Leadership Consultant; working collaboratively with Kimberley schools to further embed the Stronger Smarter philosophy and processes and supporting the region’s continued development of high expectations, excellence oriented school cultures.

**Scott Gorringe** is a Mithaka man from far western Queensland. Scott has lived most of his life in remote and rural communities. Following his Masters of Rural Systems Management at University of Queensland, a scholarship with the University of British Columbia afforded Scott the opportunity to live with and learn from Canada’s First Nation peoples. Scott has established mentoring programs for Education Queensland, worked with a Native Title Service Provider and facilitated leadership programs at the Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation. He blends his experience, traditional knowledge and education to facilitate learning about ourselves and relating to others.

**David Spillman** has lived and worked in remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities in leadership and teaching positions. He has a Bachelor of Human Movement Studies and Masters of Medical Science from University of Queensland, as well as a Graduate Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics from Queensland University of Technology and is currently studying for a PhD. With Scott Gorringe he has undertaken projects for Indigenous community renewal and governance, and leadership and community engagement in the non-Government sector. Exploring how we can connect with our deep humanity to create success fascinates him.