

From Maningrida to Manhattan

Four years after launch of the Commonwealth's 'Emergency Response' to combat child abuse in the Northern Territory, several officers deployed to assist under AFP Operation Pleach are now mentoring Indigenous athletes under Robert de Castella's Indigenous Marathon Project.

The core duties of AFP members under Operation Pleach have remained steady since their arrival, but the scope of their work has widened significantly. Several members recently mentored young Indigenous athletes under the Indigenous Marathon Project. The ultimate vision of the project is to have an Indigenous distance running athlete compete in the 2016 Olympic Games.

Managed by former long distance runner and Australian of the Year, Robert de Castella, the Indigenous Marathon Project began with four Indigenous athletes training for the New York Marathon. Their goal was achieved in November last year and a documentary on the project, *Running to America*, will air mid 2011. But the work of AFP mentors continues.

Commander Operation Pleach Superintendent Andrew Warton and Indigenous athlete, 22-year-old Juan Darwin, are central to this story—a story that has culminated in far reaching community policing benefits in the Territory.

In late 2009, Superintendent Warton and Northern Territory Police members attached to the Northern Territory Emergency Response team were asked to identify potential Indigenous athletes willing to train and attempt to run the New York Marathon.

From early police assistance to the project, the initial role quickly grew as police in remote Indigenous communities and towns gave up their own time to mentor the athletes. Northern Territory Police

and AFP more broadly committed support to the project.

Superintendent Warton has been the voluntary Assistant Team Manager and mentor to Juan Darwin from Maningrida in Arnhem Land since that time. And the policing benefits, he believes, have been many.

"Policing remote Australian communities is an extremely challenging endeavour for which there are two basic approaches—try to do it all yourself as police, or engage the community and work together," he said.

"As the year progressed, there were visible signs that Juan's extended family and community were quite comfortable with the regular police



and the Top End in-between

interaction and knew that the police were on his side towards New York.”

With the overall training regime managed by coach John Bell, the role of the police mentors was to provide training and general support to the athletes. In the case of Superintendent Warton, it was to complete the New York Marathon with Juan and three other Indigenous athletes; Caleb Hart and Charlie Maher from Alice Springs, and Joseph Davies from Kununurra.

Seconded to the Northern Territory Police in his role as Operation Commander, Superintendent Warton has been responsible for the management of up to 66 AFP personnel deployed to remote Indigenous communities in

operational roles, and to the joint Northern Territory Police and AFP Child Abuse Taskforce.

With the New York Marathon goal attained, the AFP and Northern Territory Police involvement with the project continues. Robert de Castella’s vision of seeing an Indigenous Australian long distance athlete on the 2016 Australian Olympic team is the next step. The AFP’s support over time will be crucial in making this happen.

“The police have enabled us to keep in touch with our runners throughout the Northern Territory and have been invaluable in assisting with travel in and out of the communities, helping organise training runs and events, and also being such positive role models

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01: Superintendent Andy Warton at the crossroads between Maningrida and Oenpelli in remote Arnhem Land. **02:** Federal Agent Warton, Juan Darwin, son Tysel, wife Shannon and Robert de Castella in Maningrida. **03:** Marathon runners make their way across the Brooklyn Bridge in New York.



Juan Darwin—more than a surname

He'd never run more than five kilometres in his life, yet last year Juan Darwin packed up his belongings in the community of Maningrida in eastern Arnhem Land to take up further training opportunities in Darwin.

Superintendent Warton said he was impressed by Juan's commitment to training for the New York Marathon.

"This of itself showed a high degree of commitment to achieving his goal while his wife and young child remained his main concern."

Throughout the journey Juan encountered a number of extended family issues, and in discussing family and tradition, exposed Superintendent Warton to privileged cultural information never usually spoken about in certain circles.

The journey that began in remote Australia took participants to the streets of New York and involved a 12 month commitment to regular training camps around Australia, including one week at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra.

"Before departing for Darwin, Andy and I were doing team work, pool sessions and stuff like that. Normally we'd go for runs at The Darwin Runners and Walkers Club. I'd be home and Andy would come and pick me up after work and we'd go for a run," Juan said.

Maningrida can only be accessed via a Northern Land Council permit and is not



accessible by road during the wet season. At least 10 different languages are spoken in the area where Juan is the captain of the local Baru football team and a volunteer football umpire.

Running in New York was only one hurdle to overcome along the way. Having never travelled overseas before, Juan needed an Australian passport. Quite a challenge, especially when he did not have photo identification. It was established that 'Darwin' was not Juan's actual surname, just the name by which he was always known.

It took nearly four months to satisfy all the requirements for Juan's passport, and the day of collection was a celebrated milestone. It is not a common document to have in remote Maningrida.

Juan is continuing his running and was recently responsible for coordinating a fun run in his home community.

"My uncle's proud, my mum's proud, my nanna's proud," Juan said.

"When he grows up, me and my son, we'll go for runs. And train. And I'll tell him stories."

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04 (this page): Marathon runner Juan Darwin. **05 (opposite):** From left, Superintendent Andy Warton, Juan Darwin, Joseph Davies, Charlie Maher, Caleb Hart and Indigenous Marathon Project Manager Rob de Castella. **06:** Juan Darwin and Superintendent Andy Warton in front of the Northern Territory Police Airwing plane. The aircraft was essential during the project to reach remote communities. **07:** Superintendent Andy Warton and Juan Darwin at the Darwin Runners and Walkers Club.

to these young men, their families and their communities,” said Mr de Castella.

Superintendent Warton said the experience has led to many benefits, from the strengthening of police and Indigenous youth relationships, to the realisation of mentoring as a way of improving relationships not just between police and youth, but as a management skill applicable to his own team.

As the project unfolded, some parallels between the project mentoring role and the role of a manager for the AFP began to emerge.

“It has become clear to me that the key qualities of a mentor are as applicable in the AFP workplace as they are with Juan in remote Maningrida,” Superintendent Warton said.

“First, helping someone achieve a long term and difficult goal brings a great sense of satisfaction. Secondly, as a mentor, acquiring a new perspective outside the policing box, makes for a better all round manager. While mentoring builds strong individuals, it also helps build stronger organisations.”

“Whether or not Juan and his fellow athletes run again, this has been a positive lesson in life for all, and as a mentor, it has been an absolute privilege to be involved.”

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08: Juan Darwin and Joseph Davies at an Australian Institute of Sport gymnasium. 09: Juan Darwin (front), Joseph Davies (middle) and Rueben Brown (back) train in central Australia.



05



07



08



06



09

Time to make their mark

Juan Darwin: 4h50m. Superintendent Warton: 4h53m.

With world champion Rob de Castella waiting for them at the finish line, they had successfully achieved their goal.

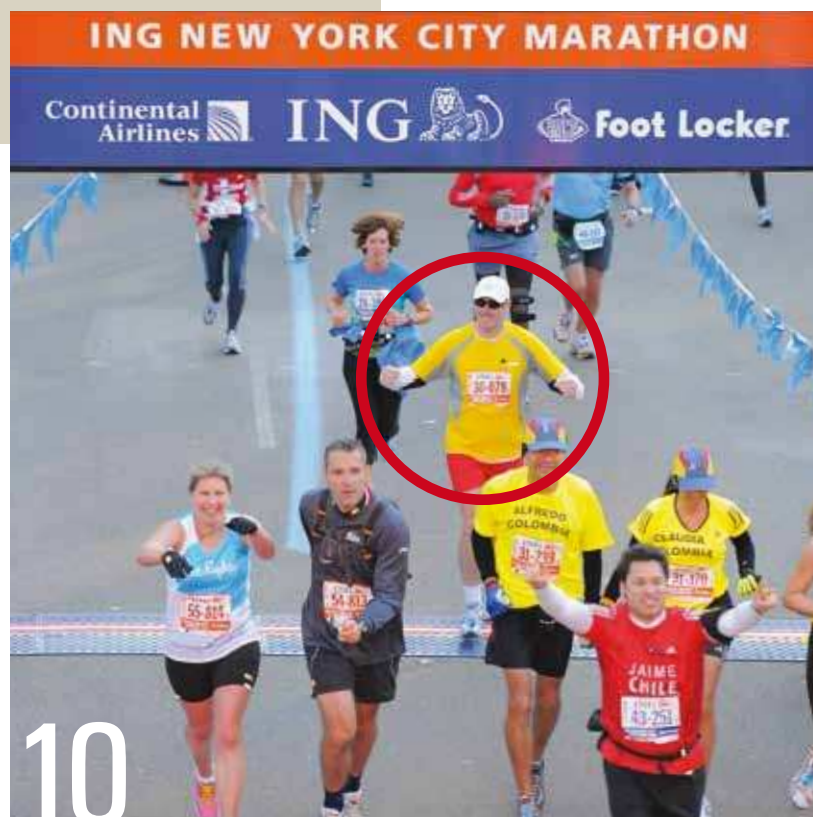
After nearly 12 months of training and other preparation, Indigenous athletes Juan Darwin, Caleb Hart, Charlie Maher and Joseph Davies had flown to New York accompanied by Rob de Castella, coach John Bell and two police mentors and reached the finish line.

Race day saw a 4am start at the hotel in central New York. They began with an interview for an Australian television station and a one hour bus ride to join 45,000 others at the start line.

The 42.195km run took the participants through the five boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island.

With over two million onlookers and 1000 rock musicians and entertainers along the way, the adrenalin rush of the first 20 kilometres soon disappeared and the hard work began.

A documentary on the Indigenous Marathon Project, *Running to America*, will air in mid 2011. For more information on the initiative and the plans ahead, please visit www.themarathonproject.com.au



10: It took Superintendent Andy Warton (circled) 4h53m to finish the New York marathon.