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Cuba's 'Yes I Can' literacy program for Australian Aboriginal communities

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Aboriginal leaders of the 'Literacy for Life' program held an all-day seminar in Sydney today (28 February) to discuss the expansion of the Cuban-based adult literacy technique into four more rural and remote communities, over 2015-2016.

The program has already run successful pilots, with four small graduations in the rural towns of Wilcannia, Enngonia and Bourke. The new projects will also focus on communities in the far west of the state of New South Wales, including Brewarrina and Walgett.

What began as a university-run pilot program through an Aboriginal health network is now coordinated through the Literacy for Life Foundation (<http://www.lflf.org.au/>), a body set up with support from Aboriginal groups, companies, universities and government.

The Australian version of Yo Si Puedo (Yes I Can) makes use of English language audio-visual material developed for the Caribbean, adding local materials developed by Cuban advisers and local Aboriginal trainers.

Cuban Ambassador to Australia Jose Manuel Galego told the group his country was prepared to support a large scale expansion of the program. 'All political groups have expressed support for 'Yes I Can', so why has it not been more widely adopted?', he asked.

Lilian Lucas, coordinator at Bourke, said some people had been very reluctant to attend a class at the local school, 'they just felt ashamed'; so classes had been held at the local Lands

Council. Mary Edwards, coordinator at Enngonia, told the seminar community control of the program and its adaptation to local conditions led to it becoming well accepted.

Executive Director of the Foundation, Jack Beetson, told the seminar the impact of the program on remote communities had been profound, with benefits in health, alcoholism and police relations. 'This is a game changer', he said.

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