

PATHFINDERS

Defence Indigenous Development Program

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pilot initiative between the Departments of Defence, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and Northern Territory Education and Training aimed at Indigenous peoples from remote areas has been hailed a huge success.

The Defence Indigenous Development Program (DIDP) is designed to provide young indigenous adults with the education, training, life skills and confidence – and, as a result, the opportunities – to secure and sustain continuous employment, and to be role models within their communities.

Those chosen to participate in the pilot course undertook basic military recruit training and specialised NORFORCE patrolman training, as well as a Certificate II in Rural Operations, which included learning about land care, construction and welding, as well as health and wellbeing, and literacy and numeracy.

All participants were paid for their attendance and received free healthcare, accommodation, meals and uniforms.

During the seven-month pilot, participants attended residential components at Darwin's Larrakeyah Barracks and the Katherine Campus of Charles Darwin University, with students rotating through periods of about four weeks training followed by a week's break at home in their communities.

For Private Jeremiah Nuggett from Binjari Community near Katherine and a member of Armham Squadron, NORFORCE, for more than six years, the separation

from family was by far the hardest part of the course.

But he stuck it out and, of the 20 who started in April last year, Jeremiah was very proud to be among the 10 who graduated on 16 December.

"This course was a good thing – a lot of learning," Private Nuggett said.

"It was pretty hard what we had to go through, but I had mates to help me get through it.

"That was important.

"I didn't know half these guys before, but as we went through the course I got to know them a bit better and a couple of them are now best mates. And that friendship will last."

He said that, thanks to the skills he learnt on the course, he had a job with Parks and Wildlife lined up after graduation.

"This course was a good thing for me – make me a role model for my community, especially for the kids.

"That was important to me because there's a lot of trouble in the community. But there's a few young fellows who want to follow what I did – they keep asking me about it and to get them forms to join up.

"I encourage them. I tell them it's good fun – hard work, but good fun."

The DIDP soldiers graduated with a Certificate II in Rural Operations (land care, construction and general education streams) and a Certificate in General Education for Adults, focusing on English language (for some participants, English being a second or, in some cases, third

