



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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THE RESEARCH DIRECTOR
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DEAR COMMITTEE MEMBERS,

WE THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO EMPLOYMENT CREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN QUEENSLAND.

OUR ORGANISATION IS A NOT FOR PROFIT ORGANISATION WHICH IDENTIFIES NEED AND DEVELOPS A LOCAL RESPONSE IN THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ACROSS THE NORTHERN SUBURBS OF BRISBANE. IT IS IN THIS CAPACITY THAT WE HAVE CHOSEN TO RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING THREE QUESTIONS RELATING TO INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT.

KURBINGUI HAS A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH STATE GOVERNMENT'S SKILLING QUEENSLANDERS FOR WORK STRATEGY AND HAS BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN A STEADY 60% OUTCOME RATE (JOB PLACEMENTS) FOR OUR PARTICIPANTS. WE HAVE ALSO RECENTLY BEEN ACCEPTED ONTO DEWRS EMPLOYMENT PANEL, WHICH NOW ALSO ALLOWS US TO DELIVER A RANGE OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES THAT WILL COMPLIMENT OUR STATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING.

IT IS WITH THIS EXPERIENCE AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE THAT WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES.

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MANAGER FOR KURBINGUI MANAGEMENT TEAM



Responses to Issues Paper No 1.

Indigenous Employment Programs

13. Do the current Queensland Government employment programs help develop individuals with the skills that employers need?

Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEEDI) implements the Work Placement program which is a part of the existing Skilling Queenslanders for Work strategy. This program provides our Indigenous job seekers with an opportunity to experience a real workplace that has real consequences.

DEEDI provides information annually on skill shortages and unemployment figures by region. This information is valuable when we are developing targeted training to meet skill deficits in our region.

Our experience is that the Work Placement Program works brilliantly well for Indigenous people as it is based on practical and visual learning tasks complimented by an accredited training component that is realistic and achievable. This combination provides participants with the confidence to engage in further education and formal job search activities.

The work placement program is offered in our agency as part of a progressive pathway to employment.

The first step is literacy assessment with subsequent learning sessions to improve reading and basic mathematics. These participants are then offered a place on future work placement programs. The promise of paid employment (work placement program) is a motivating factor to engage in literacy which is not always popular.

We focus on improving the following employability skills:-

Employability skill	Contributes to:
Communication	productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers
Teamwork	productive working relationships and outcomes
Problem-solving	productive outcomes
Initiative and enterprise	innovative outcomes
Planning and organising	long-term and short-term strategic planning
Self-management	employee satisfaction and growth
Learning	ongoing improvement/expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
Technology	effective execution of tasks

Benefits of Work Placement Program for participants:-

- Job seekers are paid a trainees award rate to be employed in skills training and individual support that identifies a pathway to sustainable employment.
- A range of learning styles incorporated into hands on skills training.

- Income whilst training. This is the motivator for Indigenous jobseekers to engage with the program. It provides participants with a sense of contributing whilst learning.
- Individual support to identify barriers that impede their learning and participation.
- Experience of a real workplace where their contribution is valued. Some Indigenous people have only been employed on CDEP projects and not experienced the realities of private employment or the competition of gaining a job.
- Understanding employer expectations.
- Improved literacy and knowledge of resources available for family support.

Suggestions

- A mentoring or ‘buddy’ system is implemented for those regions where the Work Placement program is being implemented for the first time. Link up with Indigenous agencies that already provide employment programs to mentor and demonstrate practices that have been tried and produce results.
- Literacy component is essential to achieve an outcome.
- Payment of award is based on age and education. Whereas participants on the job in work placement programs no matter what age are all doing the same level of work. Young participants are not motivated to participate as they can earn more at McDonalds.
- More inspiration for Indigenous participants to broaden their thinking around the scope of work possibilities available and how achievable they are.
- DEEDI could do more to link providers of work placement programs to the business sector. Providers of this WP program are usually community organizations with little experience in the corporate arena.
- Qualified and experienced staff is required to run these programs and they need to be paid accordingly to ensure continuity and that skill levels are maintained.
- More positive role modeling of Indigenous workers in their workplaces of choice and interest.

Conclusion

DEEDI has a useful and effective suite of programs that are targeted appropriately. Our interest is with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers who often have little or no experience in the workforce and low confidence levels when it comes to competing for a job.

Interestingly, Indigenous mature age job seekers have often only worked in the CDEP scheme and took the view that this is all that was available to them. This group, present with low literacy levels, poor self esteem, limited work skills and poor knowledge of how or where to look for work. These participants are not trusting of government initiatives or training opportunities as their learning history has not been productive or life changing to date. So accessing a community agency is an easier step and less complicated than the requirements of government employment services.

Indigenous young women are another target group of note, as their needs are often complex and enmeshed in family care. Our experience is that many Indigenous women are parenting at a young age and not entering the workforce until much later, when they are moved by Centrelink requirements to take steps to gain work. This is a crisis time in their lives and they need support to identify training and employment opportunities available to them.

Young people often present with limited literacy skills and no idea of the areas of work available to them. Because of their low confidence levels they will apply for labouring and entry level positions and overlook areas such as retail/selling and hospitality because they require a high level of self esteem.

The suggestions outlined above require a range of responses, although most could be included in the work placement program through mutually agreed changes to guidelines (a more flexible approach for high needs target groups), improving the role of the support worker and coordinator by funding it to an appropriate level where the worker has the required skill and knowledge to deal with these complex needs. There are very high expectations of staff in this program to have a range of professional skills including teaching, case management, personal support and trade based qualifications.

14. What role do employers have in developing and enhancing the skills of their employees?

An astute employer will invest in their employees to ensure maximum productivity. In lean times employers are more able to attract more highly skilled workers for less cost. This situation impacts on the more disadvantaged job seekers which includes Indigenous Australians.

Therefore, the following suggestions may influence employers to hire Indigenous job seekers.

- Incentive schemes designed specifically for Indigenous job seekers to experience a range of work situations.
- Cadetships to be more accessible, achievable and include some incentives for the employer.
- Improved financial support for Indigenous traineeships.
- An obligatory training incentive scheme would teach employers the values of creating a learning culture in their business.
- Recognition (promotion and advertising) for employers who take on Indigenous employees/trainees.
- Employers need to have consistent assessment and training processes in their workplace to ensure that workers are continually learning and progressing in their business.

- Implement a mentoring program. Pairing newer, less experienced employees with more experienced employees. Mentors can serve as a sounding board for younger employees, and can provide job coaching, advice on career development, and introductions to other professionals in the industry. Mentors often help their charges to see the "bigger picture" when it comes to their working life. And, at the same time, mentors themselves can gain valuable insight from their protégés and become better managers.
- Cultural awareness training in the workplace for both management and staff where Indigenous workers are employed.

Training is often considered as optional by employers and as an expense to the company not an investment.

Measurable training could provide the employer with increased productivity due to higher skill levels in their workplace.

Suggestions for employers

- Employers support Indigenous workers by ensuring they have access to resources needed to accomplish their learning.
- Communicate to all employees the specific training needs and targeted results required.
- Reimburse tuition costs. Help employees finance their education is a tangible way to demonstrate a company's commitment to fostering a workforce full of skilled and talented people. Adding tuition reimbursement to your benefits package also makes your company a much more desirable place to work, and can help you attract top talent.
- Provide a detailed orientation to new employees and the future leadership needs of the company or business so that employees share the same vision and they are inspired to contribute to the development of the business. Induction sessions related to company expectations and policies is important for Indigenous employees so that they understand the framework of their employment.
- Engage with cultural awareness programs specifically designed for their workplace.
- Consider the value of Indigenous mentors to improve the personal capacity of indigenous workers.

Conclusion

Employers who want to attract and retain valuable people on staff need to actively participate in their employees' growth and development. It's rewarding for employees to expand their knowledge base and take on new challenges, as it makes coming to work about more than just a weekly wage.

Generally, employers are not interested in the promotion of cultural awareness in the workplace as it is time consuming and they can't see the value in it for them. Therefore, financial incentives for cultural training awareness may improve interest and highlight the usefulness of mentoring programs.

15. Are these government programs working? If not, how can the government improve these programs or better achieve these programs.

Suggestions

- Linking community agencies and leaders in business to explore mutual opportunities.
- Learning opportunities for Indigenous people are often entwined or offered with multi cultural learning opportunities. This is not acceptable as there are different social barriers and needs.
- Both Federal and State governments working together to achieve best outcomes for Indigenous job seekers. Currently, the government funding guidelines and related reporting systems and eligibility criteria, including the plethora of employment services and the rules governing their activities is a minefield of information for Indigenous community agencies and secondly for our participants to comprehend. We often find that employment services staff have a poor understanding of State Government employment programs and they are focused on achieving participant outcomes that provide financial dividends for their agency.
- Understandably, reporting requirements are necessary for the receipt of public funds and this is necessary to inform the progress and outcomes of the programs being delivered. But this task becomes complicated when both State and Federal reporting is required for similar programs and sometimes the same job seeker who needs to access both programs. 'Double dipping' is the term applied by government departments but for community agencies it is called 'achieving an outcome'. It means one more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person has entered the workforce with improved skills, self esteem and he will role model this to all of his family members.

- The work of community agencies be recognized and valued as the front line for development of needs based programs. Regional unemployment indicators and skill deficits are not the only aspects to be considered. The Indigenous job seeker requires family support, literacy, personal development and skills training before entering the workforce. State and Federal governments could share these responsibilities through complimentary literacy and employment programs.
- Tender processes are competitive and based on the capacity of the organization to deliver the program and often the quality of the program is overlooked. A more balanced approach with mentoring for community organizations rather than punitive approach of removing funding is required so that Indigenous agencies would feel trusted and responsible for contributing to economic development.
- Another aspect of competitive program delivery is that the current system allows for multi financed businesses/ organizations to identify high need areas across Australia and move in on that area to implement programs that have been evaluated as successful. What happened to local responses to local needs? Perhaps these organizations could be financially supported to mentor local organizations to implement the program rather than take over which is difficult when entering new regions, especially with Indigenous communities who have issues of trust with any intervention.